

Science and crime

Although forensic science is a mainstay of police work, criminologists may be failing society by not applying the latest scientific findings towards preventing crime itself. According to Jim Giles, writing in *Nature* for 6 March, the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science at University College London is making a new approach to using science in the control of criminal activities. Whereas criminologists seek the social causes of crime, the new generation of crime scientists is trying to find how science can prevent it in the first place. They look upon criminals as ordinary people reacting to a situation which tempts to crime rather than as individuals whose social circumstances have driven them to become deviant.

Certain scientific techniques enable us to foresee how people will react in certain situations. For example, it is established that train drivers and skilled users of closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras can recognise in advance an individual planning to jump in front of a train, by behavioural characteristics. When tested on the London Underground the CCTV system could detect 90 per cent of those predisposed to suicide, with a false alarm rate of only 2 per cent.

Sociologists have long argued that violence is commoner between family members than among unrelated persons, but this idea is contrary to what we should expect from animals sharing a genetic background. The tendency for interfamilial crime may, rather, reflect greater opportunities for attack.

Moreover, the likelihood of genetically unrelated individuals sharing living accommodation killing one another has been shown to be 11 times greater than when they are blood relatives. Stepchildren are at particular risk of being killed by step-parents.

There are other strange correlations capable of being applied scientifically, such as burglary rates falling during cold weather, so links between crime and

weather patterns would be worth investigating. Then again, the rewards of burglary are less than those of shop theft, the latter being easier and quicker to achieve. Criminals may choose to select crimes with high rates of reward and low variability. The scientific study of such findings would bring rewards.

Virtue and vice

In 1846 Robert Smith Surtees, a novelist who also practised as a lawyer, remarked that "More people are flattered into virtue than bullied out of vice." The noun "bully" originally, before the 16th century, signified "sweetheart" and then came to mean "fine fellow". By the 17th century it had lowered its meaning to a tyrannical and cowardly person, coercing others by means of fear, or an overbearing person.

It is salutary to remember that a 19th century proverb runs: "A bully is always a coward." The way to deal with bullies, therefore, must be to face up to them.

A commentary on workplace bullying by two Australian doctors, published in the *BMJ* for 12 April, remarks that many sufferers from depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances, may be casualties of workplace bullying, in the shape of threats to professional status, or to personal standing, brought on by isolation, overwork and loss of mental stability through pressure. Increasing economic competition and tough management methods have produced an atmosphere in which bullying can thrive and be attributed to efficiency considerations. Bullying at work is claimed to have affected up to half the workforce of the United Kingdom at some time in their career and may be a major occupational stressor.

There is growing evidence of bullying among health care employees and junior hospital doctors in the UK. Occupational health doctors and nurses can be a useful source of advice on dealing with a specific problem, but effective communication between general medical practitioners and occupational doctors is lacking. In the UK, 20 per cent of reported cases of bullying are from the education sector, 12 per cent from health care, 10 per cent from social services and 6–8 per cent from the voluntary sector.

Working environments free from bullying must be established in hospitals, medical practices, professional organisations and colleges. How to make students behave in such a way as to avert being bullied is not clear.

One principle seems certain enough. Bullies, it must be remembered, are cowards, bruised in their self-esteem. The way to defeat them is to stand up boldly and face their onslaught, never to let them get away with the notion that they are the lords of creation and therefore to be obeyed obsequiously.

Subduing the arrogant

Over one of the gates of Dartmoor Prison in Princetown runs the inscription "*Parcere subjectis*". This was inscribed when the prison was first used to house French prisoners of war, expressing the sentiment of Virgil, who wrote in his 'Aeneid': "You, Roman, make your task to rule nations by your government, to impose ordered ways upon a state of peace, to spare the vanquished and subdue the arrogant [*parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*]".

This is an excellent exhortation and, although it dates from the first century BC, it has great significance for our own times and we would do well to take it to heart.

There are, however, difficulties in appraising what we mean by arrogance. If you consult a textbook of psychology and look for the words "arrogance" and "arrogant" you are unlikely to find them in the index.

Even more surprising to me has been the discovery that the terms do not appear in James Drever's 'Dictionary of psychology' (1952). Does this mean that arrogance is not an attitude of mind recognised as having any real significance? The word comes to us via 14th century French from the Latin *arrogare*, meaning to lay claim to something.

We define arrogance as the attitude of taking too much upon oneself as a right, as aggressive conceit, presumption or haughtiness. It should not be confused with pride, which in appropriate circumstances may be justifiable, which arrogance can never be.

Whatever the professional psychologists may think of arrogance as a real entity, it is an attitude of mind that violently divides individual humans from their kith and kin. It also blinds its possessor to any idea that originates from anyone else and so renders him (it is rarely her) impermeable to argument and logic. We see it motivating politicians, businessmen, lawyers and sportsmen, in particular. Worst of all, we have in recent years come to realise that in the professions of medicine arrogance may lead to loss of health or even loss of life, since an arrogant man is never wrong and can listen to no one else, even a patient.

I have to admit that, in the course of a career involving several sectors of pharmacy, I have only encountered one individual whom I would classify as arrogant. In an attempt to explain his character defect, I came to the conclusion that I really ought to feel sorry for him, since his arrogance was an effort to overcome a deep-seated inferiority complex. It was a possibility that I could never summon up enough courage to suggest to him and I presume he still has to wrestle with his disability.

