

**THE POSITIVE SCHOOL OF
CRIMINOLOGY: THREE LECTURES
GIVEN AT THE UNIVERSITY. GIVEN AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES, ITALY
ON APRIL 22, 23 AND 24, 1901**

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The Positive School of Criminology: Three Lectures given at the University. Given at the University of Naples, Italy on April 22, 23 and 24, 1901 by Enrico Ferri

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The Positive School of Criminology

THREE LECTURES

*Given at the University of Naples, Italy
on April 22, 23 and 24, 1901*

By ENRICO FERRI

Translated by ERNEST UNTERMANN



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THE POSITIVE SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY

I.

MY FRIENDS:

When, in the turmoil of my daily occupation, I received an invitation, several months ago, from several hundred students of this famous university, to give them a brief summary, in short special lectures, of the principal and fundamental conclusions of criminal sociology, I gladly accepted, because this invitation fell in with two ideals of mine. These two ideals are stirring my heart and are the secret of my life. In the first place, this invitation chimed with the ideal of my personal life, namely, to diffuse and propagate among my brothers the scientific ideas, which my brain has accumulated, not through any merit of mine, but thanks to the lucky prize inherited from my mother in the lottery of life. And the second ideal which this invitation called up before my mind's vision was this: The ideal of young peo-

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ple of Italy, united in morals and intellectual pursuits, feeling in their social lives the glow of a great aim. It would matter little whether this aim would agree with my own ideas or be opposed to them, so long as it should be an ideal which would lift the aspirations of the young people out of the fatal grasp of egoistic interests. Of course, we positivists know very well, that the material requirements of life shape and determine also the moral and intellectual aims of human consciousness. But positive science declares the following to be the indispensable requirement for the regeneration of human ideals: Without an ideal, neither an individual nor a collectivity can live, without it humanity is dead or dying. For it is the fire of an ideal which renders the life of each one of us possible, useful and fertile. And only by its help can each one of us, in the more or less short course of his or her existence, leave behind traces for the benefit of fellow-beings. The invitation extended to me proves that the students of Naples believe in the inspiring existence of such an ideal of science, and are anxious to learn more about ideas, with which the entire world of the present day is occupied, and whose life-giving breath enters

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even through the windows of the dry court-rooms, when their doors are closed against it.

Let us now speak of this new science, which has become known in Italy by the name of the Positive School of Criminology. This science, the same as every other phenomenon of scientific evolution, cannot be shortsightedly or conceitedly attributed to the arbitrary initiative of this or that thinker, this or that scientist. We must rather regard it as a natural product, a necessary phenomenon, in the development of that sad and somber department of science which deals with the disease of crime. It is this plague of crime which forms such a gloomy and painful contrast with the splendor of present-day civilization. The 19th century has won a great victory over mortality and infectious diseases by means of the masterful progress of physiology and natural science. But while contagious diseases have gradually diminished, we see on the other hand that moral diseases are growing more numerous in our so-called civilization. While typhoid fever, smallpox, cholera and diphtheria retreated before the remedies which enlightened science applied by means of the experimental method, removing

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their concrete causes, we see on the other hand that insanity, suicide and crime, that painful trinity, are growing apace. And this makes it very evident that the science which is principally, if not exclusively, engaged in studying these phenomena of social disease, should feel the necessity of finding a more exact diagnosis of these moral diseases of society, in order to arrive at some effective and more humane remedy, which should more victoriously combat this somber trinity of insanity, suicide and crime.

The science of positive criminology arose in the last quarter of the 19th century, as a result of this strange contrast, which would be inexplicable, if we could not discover historical and scientific reasons for its existence. And it is indeed a strange contrast that Italy should have arrived at a perfect theoretical development of a classical school of criminology, while there persists, on the other hand, the disgraceful condition that criminality assumes dimensions never before observed in this country, so that the science of criminology cannot stem the tide of crime in high and low circles. It is for this reason, that the positive school of criminology arises out of the very nature of things, the same as

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every other line of science. It is based on the conditions of our daily life. It would indeed be concerted on our part to claim that we, who are the originators of this new science and its new conclusions, deserve alone the credit for its existence. The brain of the scientist is rather a sort of electrical accumulator, which feels and assimilates the vibrations and heart-beats of life, its splendor and its shame, and derives therefrom the conviction that it must of necessity provide for definite social wants. And on the other hand, it would be an evidence of intellectual shortsightedness on the part of the positivist man of science, if he did not recognize the historical accomplishments, which his predecessors on the field of science have left behind as indelible traces of their struggle against the unknown in that brilliant and irksome domain. For this reason, the adherents of the positive school of criminology feel the most sincere reverence for the classic school of criminology. And I am glad today, in accepting the invitation of the students of Naples, to say, that this is another reason why their invitation was welcome to me. It is now 16 years since I gave in this same hall a lecture on positive criminology, which was then