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Six: Punishment

Inexpensive & Efficient Alternatives to Prison

Currently, imprisonment is one of the most widely used forms of punishment for convicted criminals. That in mind, I have attempted to conceive of some alternative solutions, as many oppose this form of punishment, with many arguments against both its effectiveness as a punishment, and its economic efficiency. Some criminals spend such a great length of time detached from society, that they become accustomed, and sometimes even satisfied with the lifestyle behind bars. Infrequently (though slightly more so, after long-term imprisonment) some criminals even re-commit crimes as a means of rejoining the subsection of society in which they have become comfortable.

One alternative to pure imprisonment is the use of internment camps. This form of punishment is significantly more financially efficient, and if implemented properly, may even be close to self-sufficient. Using convicted criminals as a form of free labor is both productive and helpful to the rest of society. Those convicted of lesser crimes may even be able to participate in rehabilitation programs while working in a camp, for the opportunity to reduce the length of their sentence. One problem with this alternative, however, is the moral justifications of such establishments. Strong systems would have to be established to keep the working conditions humane and safe, and enforcement of such standards will not be an easy or straightforward objective to attain.

Another option is exile. Revocation of citizenship, and expulsion from the country. While some may certainly learn their lesson this way, this solution is fairly permanent and not without obvious issues. Sure, we could efficiently load an airplane full of straight-jacketed criminals, and cart them en masse to wherever we desire. But where would we exile them to? It's not as if we have a second Australia on which we can dump everyone who does not follow our society's currently accepted rules.

By far the most reasonable solution, rehabilitation programs for those who commit non-serious crimes (primarily excluding those who commit Mala In Se crimes) have a lot of promise. Well-structured programs are inherently designed to correct social behaviors, making them arguably the most effective way of dealing punishment. A good rehabilitation program might have features such as daily mentors, with which offenders work to develop a useful, practical skill. Upon completion of such a program, "graduates" could then choose to rejoin the program as a mentor, or under the correct conditions, rejoin society as a productive participant. "Teach a man to fish..." as it were. This does not provide a solution for more severe crimes, however.

One solution which primarily focuses on severe punishment for severe crimes might be to donate the offender to the cause of scientific advancement. There is still much to be learned in our understanding of social deviance. Criminal psychologists face quite a conundrum: they don't fully understand what physiological differences cause a person to, for example, climb to the top of a bell tower and shoot a bunch of other people. The offenders of such mass shootings blow their own brains out more often than not. Our current best guess at this behavior is that the criminal understands that their violent act forfeits any chance they have at a regular, comfortable life, or that they simply aren't able to cope with the terrible act they have committed. We don't know for sure, however, and when the subject causes permanent damage to the only part of them which might help us understand the psychology behind such decisions, analysts are left with assumptions and little else. Though this solution may not be a humane one, it most certainly could assist with our still-developing understanding of the mind.