
Revisiting Lombroso: Unpacking The Born Criminal Theory

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Abstract

Many people consider the Italian criminologist and physician Cesare Lombroso to be a trailblazer in the discipline. Lombroso is best known for his theory of the "born criminal," which held that certain physical characteristics, specifically biological factors, could be responsible for criminal behaviour. He proposed that traits like large jaws, prominent cheekbones, and facial asymmetry—all of which he thought were atavistic remnants of earlier, primitive human ancestors—could be used to identify criminals. The field of criminal anthropology, which focuses on the psychological and physical components of crime, was founded on Lombroso's empirical research, which was carried out by examining prisoners. Lombroso's work had a major impact on the early development of criminological theory, even though his deterministic theories and disregard for social and environmental factors have largely led to his theories being dismissed in contemporary criminology. Even though more sophisticated methods in the field have supplanted his particular theories, his contributions stimulated additional research into the biological, psychological, and social factors that influence criminal behaviour.

Keyword: *Born Criminal, Atavistic Remnants, Criminal Anthropology, Deterministic Theories, Criminological Theory, Biological Factors*

Introduction:

The Italian school of positivist criminology was founded by Cesare Lombroso, who maintained that physical characteristics and flaws could be used to identify a criminal mind, which was inherited. Franz Joseph Gall's phrenological theories served as inspiration for Lombroso, even though he was unaware of Gregor Johann Mendel's work on heredity. Charles Darwin and Francis Galton had an impact on Lombroso's criminology research.

He is best known for his revolutionary and contentious theory that biological explanations, or more specifically, the identification of physical traits that distinguished criminals from non-criminals, could explain crime. Since it tried to apply scientific techniques—namely, empirical observation—to criminal research, Lombroso's work was groundbreaking. His "born criminal" theory suggested that facial features, skull shape, and asymmetry of the body could be used to determine individuals who were biologically inclined to commit crimes.

The groundwork for criminal anthropology, a subdivision of criminology that explores the relationship between criminality and human biology, was laid by Lombroso's most significant book, *L'Uomo Delinquente* ("The Criminal Man"), which was released in 1876. His study set the stage for more studies on the determinants of crime, even though his theories have been extensively refuted and condemned as deterministic and discounting social factors. Lombroso's work in criminology remains significant today, not because his theories are accurate but because he attempted to use an empirical and scientific approach to understand crime and criminality.

Research Objectives:

1. To Identify Biological Causes of Criminal Behavior
2. To Link Criminality to Physical Traits
3. To Develop a Typology of Criminals
4. To Establish Criminal Anthropology as a Scientific Discipline

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

- **Enrico Ferri:**, A Supporter of the positivist school of criminology, agreed with Lombroso. Ferri, however, emphasized the importance of political, social, and economic elements in influencing crime. He maintained that since criminals were driven by their circumstances rather than consciously choosing to commit crimes, they should not be held morally responsible.
- Because of his mention in well-known works of the era, historian **Daniel Pick** contends that Lombroso functions "as a curious footnote to late-nineteenth-century literary studies."
- According to **Émile Zola's** *The Beast Within*, Jacques has a forward-jutting jaw on the bottom. It is particularly highlighted in the book's conclusion when his drive to kill takes control.
- In **Joseph Conrad's** *The Secret Agent*, Karl Yundt, an anarchist, makes a speech criticizing Lombroso.
- In **Bram Stoker's Dracula**, Count Dracula is said to have a physical look that Lombroso would characterize as criminal, and in Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, the deputy prosecutor utilizes Lombroso's beliefs to accuse Maslova of being a congenital criminal.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CAUSATION OF CRIME:

The sociological school of criminology seeks to determine the social context of criminal behavior in order to determine the cause of crime. An important finding on the behavior patterns of groups within a society was discovered by Adolphe Quetelet. He discovered that different behaviors among these groups occur consistently and predictably. According to renowned sociological criminologist Gabriel Tarde, biological and physical characteristics only have a causal effect on criminal behavior; the social environment has the greatest influence.

According to sociological criminologists, a society's crime rate is directly influenced by social elements such as population density, political ideology, economics, religion, mobility, culture, and job status. Marxism provides an explanation for crime, for example, by linking it to the criminogenic traits of a capitalist society. This viewpoint holds that people commit crimes as a result of the effect of capitalism-promoted principles like ownership, materialism, and greed. The Differential Association hypothesis, a micro-level learning hypothesis concerning criminal behavior, was introduced by American sociologist Edwin Sutherland in 1947. Sutherland attempted to explain the several processes by which an individual becomes a criminal by relying on the numerous social factors—such as age, sex, wealth, culture, religion, social standing, etc.—and their impact on crime. The reasonable school of criminology, which advocates using humane approaches to treat offenders, is the sociological school of criminology. It suggests that criminals should be corrected through persuasive methods as opposed to punitive measures.

OTHER THEORIES:

- According to the theory of structural functionalism, criminal activity serves society by bringing together disparate groups of people in a community. This is due to the fact that deviation serves to reinforce cultural norms and values by drawing lines between what behavior is acceptable and undesirable.
- According to the Social Strain Theory, a person's motives, dedication to cultural values, and ideas about how to accomplish those goals may all be used to classify criminal behavior. Ritualistic behavior, inventiveness, rebellion, retreatism, and conformance are the main categories of social deviance. According to this view, people can pursue socially acceptable beliefs and objectives while acting in ways that are deviant.
- Deviant behavior, according to social conflict theory, results from material imbalance between various socio-political groups, which can be distinguished by characteristics like gender, religion, race, class, and so on. According to this viewpoint, people frequently act against societal standards in order to vent their frustrations

- On the other hand, the Multiple Factor Theory considers that a wide range of elements that cannot be boiled down to generalizations contribute to crime when describing its causes. The main tenet of this theory is that since crimes are committed as a result of a confluence of several conditions or variables, it is impossible to develop a single explanation of criminal behavior.

LOMBROSO'S BORN CRIMINAL THEORY: NATURE vs NURTURE IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR:

The Atavist Born Criminal:

Lombroso's theory was based on the notion of the "born criminal." Lombroso thought that certain physical traits could be used to identify criminals, who were biologically inclined to commit crimes. He proposed that atavism, a state in which some people are evolutionary remnants of a more primitive, barbaric stage of humanity, is the cause of crime. He maintained that the physical and behavioral characteristics of these people were more archaic than those of the majority. Lombroso asserted that criminals could be identified using these physical indicators. **Physical traits of born criminals:** Lombroso identified several physical features as 'signs of atavism, such as:

- Asymmetry of the face
- Prominent jaws or cheekbones
- Large ears
- A sloping forehead
- A pronounced brow ridge
- Thick lips

Lombroso believed these traits were inherited and indicated a regression to earlier stages of human evolution.

1. **Anthropology of Criminal activity:**

Lombroso is frequently given credit for establishing criminal anthropology, a subfield of criminology that examines the connection between criminals' physical traits and their actions. Studying the physical characteristics and anatomical distinctions between criminals and non-criminals, in his opinion, could provide light on the biological causes of criminal behavior. In an attempt to predict and deter criminal behavior, he integrated techniques from psychiatry, medicine, and anthropology to methodically observe and document the mental and physical characteristics of offenders.

2. **Criminal Types (Criminal Typology):**

Lombroso divided criminals into various groups according to their traits and the reasons behind their illegal actions. Among his typologies were:

1. ***Born criminals***: People with atavistic physical characteristics who were predisposed to crime by nature.
2. ***Occasional criminals***: People who commit crimes as a result of opportunities, temptations, or social circumstances rather than a biological predisposition. These people may be rehabilitable in certain situations and may not have any innate criminal tendencies.
3. ***Insane***: People whose criminal behavior was brought on by mental illness or psychological disorders are known as insane criminals. Lombroso made a distinction between criminality brought on by psychological disorders and that which resulted from biological predispositions.
4. ***Criminals of passion***: People who commit crimes in an emotional outburst or due to passion, such as in cases of jealousy, revenge, or anger.

Stigma around crime:

Lombroso proposed that certain physical characteristics, which he called criminal stigmata, could be used to identify criminals. These stigmata were outward signs or traits that set criminals apart from law-abiding citizens. In Lombroso's research, inmates were measured and observed to find common physical characteristics like:

- Unbalanced faces
- Abnormalities in the structure of the brain and skull
- particular body measurements (e.g., short legs or long arms)

These stigmata, according to Lombroso, were indicators of atavism and could be used to spot possible criminals before they committed any crimes.

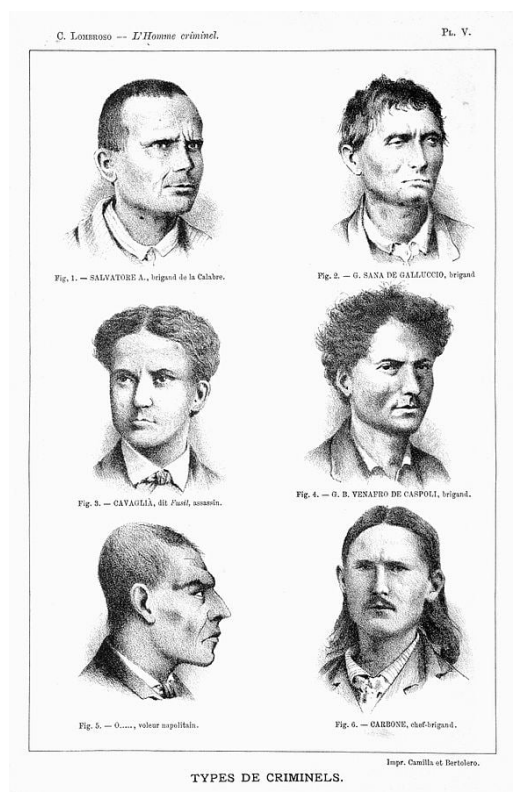
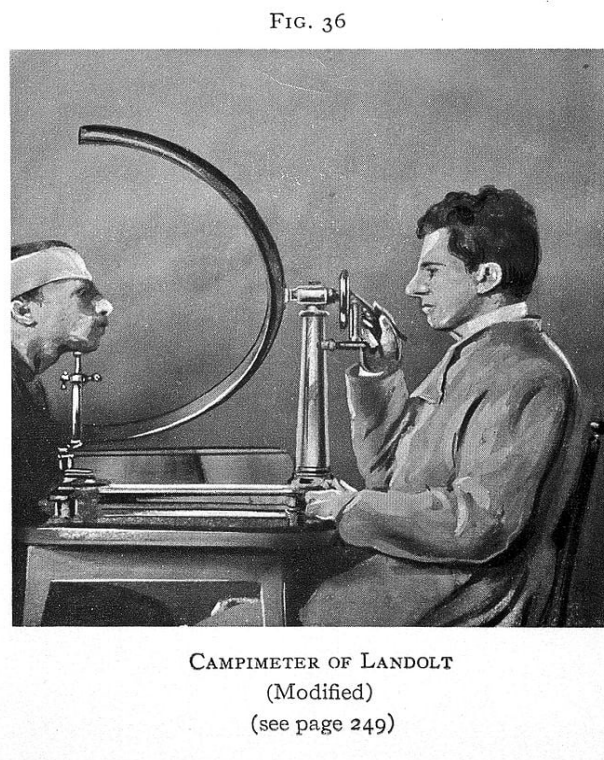
3. Criminal Behavior Determinism:

According to Lombroso's theory of determinism, biological variables, such as inherited characteristics, play a major role in determining criminal behavior. He disagreed with the notion that moral responsibility or free will existed in human beings. Rather, he thought that people who were born with particular mental and physical traits were more likely to commit crimes. Although this viewpoint was groundbreaking at the time, it has since come under fire for failing to take into account psychological, social, and environmental aspects.

The Influence of Darwinism

Lombroso was influenced by the **Darwinian theory of evolution**, which suggested that human beings evolved over time from simpler organisms. Lombroso adopted and adapted this idea, proposing that criminality was the result of an evolutionary regression or atavism, where certain individuals reverted to earlier stages of human development.

He saw criminals as evolutionary throwbacks, and believed their physical characteristics reflected a less evolved state of humanity. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which proposed that species change over time through natural selection and that some traits are inherited from one generation to the next, had a big impact on Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso's theories regarding criminal behavior were significantly influenced by this evolutionary theory, especially the notion that humans descended from simpler organisms

Fig 1**Fig. 2**

(Fig 1: illustrating the many kinds of criminals *L'Homme Criminel* Lombroso, Cesar, printed text, published: 188)

(Fig 2: *Criminal Man* in printed literature Cesare Lombroso Published: 1911)

Important Aspects of Darwinism's Influence on Lombroso:

Evolutionary Regression and Atavism: In order to explain criminal behavior, Lombroso expanded on Darwin's theory of evolution. He put forth the idea of atavism, which held that criminals were evolutionary remnants of a past, less advanced phase of human evolution. Put another way, Lombroso claimed that criminals were people who displayed characteristics more "primitive" or "savage," akin to earlier phases of human evolution. These individuals shared physical and biological traits with our ancient ancestors, according to Lombroso.

According to Lombroso, atavism was the belief that certain people could be "reverted" to these characteristics, which had vanished during human evolution, and that this would cause them to commit crimes.

Physical Indicators of Evolutionary Regression: According to Lombroso, criminals exhibited unique physical traits that were both a reflection of their biological make-up and the result of evolutionary regression, much like animals do when they display particular physical traits tailored to their surroundings. It was believed that these physical characteristics—such as large jaws, sloping foreheads, facial asymmetry, and other "primitive" features—reflected the criminal's primitive nature. According to Lombroso, these traits were evolutionary leftovers that resembled traits from less evolved species or earlier phases of human evolution.

FEMALE CRIMINALS:

Cesare Lombroso's theory of atavism, which held that criminals were evolutionary outcasts with archaic physical and psychological characteristics, shaped his opinions on female offenders. According to him, female criminals lacked feminine traits like tenderness and nurturing and instead displayed masculine traits like larger jaws and a more muscular build. According to Lombroso, these women were biologically predisposed to crime and lacked the innate maternal instincts.

He divided female offenders into:

1. Women with a biological propensity for crime are known as born criminals.
2. Women who have committed crimes on occasion as a result of outside influences like opportunity or poverty are known as occasional criminals.
3. Women who committed crimes motivated by strong emotional outbursts, such as jealousy or retaliation, are known as criminals of passion.

MERITS	DEMERITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lombroso gave criminology the credibility of science for the first instance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lombroso 's are not credible & lacks precision and fails to account for facial deformity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to Lombroso's research, prisoners have lower IQs, which may indicate that they are less developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 40% of the offenders Lombroso examined exhibited atavistic traits, suggesting that not all of them do.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> His writings did cast doubt on the notion that criminals are only bad people or that they made the decision to commit crimes. was a precursor to the concept of offender profiling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labeling those with atavistic traits will become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Numerous characteristics that are considered atavistic are really typical of persons of African heritage, according to scientific racism.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lombroso saw prisons as criminal universities that increased crime—quite insightful considering the recidivism rates of today. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This theory holds that criminals are unable to change their fate because there is no control group, the characteristics of criminals cannot be compared to those of non-criminals.

According to Lombroso, sexuality was the foundation of female deviance, making prostitution the most common crime committed by women. Lombroso noted that compared to male crime, female delinquency was a less prevalent occurrence, which was contrary to the alleged inferiority of women. He clarified, though, that if one considered female prostitution to be the norm for female criminality, then both male and female criminality can be perceived as being equally pervasive in society. According to Lombroso, a woman's unique biological propensity led her to become a prostitute more so than poverty or any other societal

MERITS & DEMERITS OF LOMBROSO'S THEORY:

CRITICISM ON LOMBROSO'S THEORY:

- **Ethical and Social Issues:** Lombroso's approach promoted negative preconceptions and legitimized discrimination against people who had particular physical characteristics by causing stigmatization based on appearance. In addition to supporting eugenics-based measures meant to stop "undesirable" people from procreating, his theories helped to leave a legacy of prejudice against marginalized communities
- **Absence of Empirical Support:** Lombroso's conclusions have not been confirmed by further study, and current genetics and psychology studies have not found a clear-cut connection between criminal behavior and physical appearance. Indeed, developments in behavioral science indicate that a range of variables, including as genetics, social environment, and individual experiences, impact behavior.
- **Absence of Scientific Rigour:** By today's standards, Lombroso's research techniques lacked scientific rigour. In order to compare criminals and non-criminals in a more trustworthy manner, he did not include control groups in his research. His observations frequently lacked enough proof to back up his generalizations regarding the biological underpinnings of criminal behavior.
- **Ignorance of Environmental Factors:** Lombroso's emphasis on biological determinism disregarded the role that social, economic, and environmental factors have in influencing behavior. Contemporary criminology acknowledges that complicated

connections between environmental factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, and peer pressure, and biological predispositions frequently lead to criminal behavior.

- **Transition to Theories of Sociology and Psychology:** A more comprehensive knowledge of criminal behavior resulted from the introduction of psychological ideas, such as Sigmund Freud's work on the unconscious mind, and sociological views of crime, such as Emile Durkheim's theories on social integration and anomie. These theories contest Lombroso's deterministic viewpoint by arguing that a mix of societal institutions, economic factors, and individual psychology might affect crime.

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON THEORY:

- Lombroso's views established the foundation for the scientific study of crime, commonly known as biological criminology or criminal anthropology, despite the numerous critiques of his work. Future studies that would continue to investigate the role of psychology, neurology, and genetics in criminal behavior were made possible by Lombroso's endeavor to investigate crime from a scientific standpoint.

By pushing others to use scientific techniques to examine criminality, his work also assisted in changing the field of criminology from one that was solely philosophical and moral to one that looked for factual explanations for crime. Even if Lombroso's biological determinism is no longer relevant in contemporary criminology, his impact may still be seen in the continued investigation of the psychological and biological elements that may influence criminal behavior.

- Criminology now acknowledges the complexity of criminal behavior and tackles it from a multidisciplinary standpoint that incorporates genetics, psychology, neuroscience, and sociology. Though they emphasize how these biological elements interact with social and environmental effects, modern theories admit that biology may play a role in predisposing individuals to specific behaviors.

For example, biosocial criminology acknowledges the importance of contextual variables including family dynamics, education, and socioeconomic position while also examining how genetic and neurological elements may affect behavior. While accepting that individual behavior is influenced by a mix of internal and external circumstances, this approach rejects the idea of a fixed biological determinism and relies on Lombroso's theories.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, Cesare Lombroso's criminological theory that criminality is innately present and is detectable by physical attributes made a lasting contribution to the initial evolution of criminological thinking. Even though his theories were revolutionary during the period, current research has tended to discredit the assumption that criminality and physical attributes are correlated. Nowadays, Lombroso's theory is criticized as being too deterministic and oversimplified, not considering the multiple complex social, psychological, and environmental influences leading to criminal behavior at both an individual and a social level. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Lombroso's theory is no longer universally accepted today in its initial presentation, it still constitutes an important page in the history of criminology.

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