

1-1-1982

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2 Miss. C. L. Rev. 447 (1980-1982)

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BOOK REVIEW

The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal. Francis A. Allen.*
New York: Yale University Press, 1981, Pp. 132. \$15.00

*Reviewed by Robert G. Gillespie***

Professor Allen in *The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal* has made a searching and scholarly contribution to the science of penal theory. This study comes at a time when, as the author states "[T]he fretful attention being given to the American crime problem has persisted longer and reached higher levels of intensity than some comparable periods in the past."

The rehabilitative ideal is a term used by Professor Allen to describe "[T]he notion that a primary purpose of penal policy is to expect (sic) changes in the characters, attitudes, and behavior of convicted offenders, so as to strengthen the social defense against unwanted behavior, but also to contribute to the welfare and satisfaction of offenders." The rehabilitative ideal, rooted deeply in Western culture, has dominated penal policy in the twentieth century. It presupposes the perfectibility of humans and is workable only in a society confident of its ideals, its purposes, and its institutions. It has found expression in legislation creating juvenile courts, the indeterminate sentence, systems of probation and parole, therapeutic programs in prisons, juvenile institutions, and mental hospitals.

The recent decline of support for the rehabilitative ideal resulted from many factors including new notions of criminology and penal theory that the author discusses in some detail. Professor Allen finds a deepseated skepticism about the capacity of traditional institutions to achieve beneficial direction to human behavior.

The book is in part a critique of the rehabilitative ideal. Among its weaknesses of the ideal in administration is the vagueness and ambiguity in its basic suppositions. Its debasement has been advanced by a vocabulary having a marked tendency

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toward euphemism and obfuscation. Professor Allen believes that in the decades ahead penal rehabilitationism is likely to be peripheral rather than central to the administration of criminal justice. Great reforms in prison conditions "have been accomplished largely by persons whose humanitarian impulses were gained with rehabilitative aspirations." Professor Allen poses the question of who will perform the function and provide the impetus toward humane treatment of prisoners when rehabilitative personnel are eliminated or drastically reduced in number. The rehabilitative ideal will continue to influence the administration of criminal justice. There will be a role for rehabilitative efforts so long as we are concerned with avoiding the avoidable deterioration of human beings in penal institutions. There is a need for more knowledge concerning the efficiency of efforts to accomplish the goals of the rehabilitative ideal.

Rarely does one read a book that contains so much substance in so few words. It is not possible to encapsulate in a brief review the many questions of serious social significance contained in this book.

It should be read, actually studied, by all persons engaged in any phase of criminal justice, especially those concerned with sentencing and administering correctional institutions. Moreover, this readable book says a lot about our contemporary society that should be of interest to every literate American.