

A Peek Behind the Curtain
of Public Safety Theatre

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(Cont. on Reverse)

The California Department of Corrections recently tacked an extraneous "R" onto its initialism and began claiming this new "CDC-R" was suddenly in the business of "rehabilitation". To serve their "R" pretence, California prisons started feigning interest in the prisoners it was preparing to release, eagerly pushing a smorgasbord of cognitive-behavioral brainwashing schemes while exercising the system's well-developed coercion muscles to force its parole-seeking captives into "programs" which inevitably either:

- A) Cultivate pervasive self-loathing;
- B) Create prolific liars; or, often enough,
- C) Condemn the unfortunate prisoner-participants to both pathetic fates at the same time.

This short post could never suffice as a proper indictment of those shameful forces we call "parole hearings," but for now let's just pretend the bullshit the prison system shovels into the public discourse (try not to gag, please), and from that perspective we may discover an easy opportunity that parole boards routinely squander for gaining real insight into the character of the individuals they choose to release every day... if only they contained even a single gram of sincerity in their mission.

Simply put, if prisons genuinely cared about the moral quality of the people they send back into our communities, they would forego the hollow spectacle of grilling prospective parolees about what "groups" they've attended ~~and~~ how they intend to apply all that newly acquired therapy-speak in their lives outside, and focus instead on the many observable, relevant behaviors in prisoners' actual, everyday interactions with their fellow inmates. I propose that the most valuable information may come from just observing how much space an inmate routinely appropriates or dominates, both physical and psychic. This thought came to me recently when I watched a man (one who's up for parole consideration himself in a few weeks) talking on the middle of three closely spaced telephones, his body reclined so that his head was directly blocking phone #3 while his legs stretched out into the space for phone #1. This is normal for him, and he acts put out when he has to make room for anyone wishing to use one of the other phones. He usually moves begrudgingly and just a little bit, forcing others to stand awkwardly to one side while he continues taking up as much physical space as he can. I realized that this type of blatant physical encroachment probably reveals far more about a prospective parolee's mentality than the many hours of "pro-social programming" that prisoners ~~essentially~~ ^{now} have to memorize and perform for the 2 or 3 dim-witted bureaucrats they must impress under the current parole scheme.

Beyond physical space invasions, the domination of psychic space also highly relevant in trying to determine a pre-release prisoner's true character. In lower level California prisons, flagrant

bullying and violence are less common, so if I were gauging an inmate's suitability for release, I think I'd be quite interested in any evidence of deeply ingrained indifference to others. Think of things like people coming into a quiet area and turning on a TV or radio with no headphones, or playing a guitar, all with total disregard for how their noise affects those who were already engaged in low-volume discussions, reading, studying, phone calls, prayer, etc. Think of inmates having near-yelling "conversations" just a few feet from a sleeping person's head, simply because they truly believe that when they're awake, everyone else should be awake too. Think of prisoners who insist on squawking into their new tablet telephones in the middle of a small cell, disrespectfully subjecting five others to their private (and often abusive) inanities.

~~What~~ ^{psychic domination} isn't just the imposing of one's noise on others, of course. It can be many other things, like the common practice of one or two inmates plunging five others into daytime darkness because he'd rather cover up the only window in the room rather than adjust his own T.V. ~~screen~~ or put up his own private curtain to prevent glare on his screen. In any case, the prisoners who do these things, whether unconsciously or with an unmistakable air of menace, are people we probably cannot expect to be very "pro-social" outside of prison either, and inside these intimately surveilled dungeons where every move and word is recorded, all this behavior is on camera and readily reviewable for prison staff. If parole boards truly gave a damn about the potential dangerousness (or positive sociability) of the people they release, they'd utilize the resources already at their greasy fingertips to observe the daily transgressions of common decency that really show how a prospective parolee is likely to act in society. Instead, they continue to rely on each inmate's calculated accumulation of attaboy certificates that demonstrate nothing but a lemming-like capacity for spending endless hours ^{in the fraudulent box-} ~~checking~~ ~~checking~~ regurgitation factories that prisons label "rehabilitation programs".

In reality, the cynical circle jerks we call parole hearings are just puppet shows where a couple of powerful ignoramuses (Ignorami? Ignoramae? Members of the Ignoramaraati??) self-righteously demean a prisoner's "insight" and spew out a stream of cheaply institutionalized pop-psychology buzzwords like "cognitive distortion", "self-awareness", "entitlement", "criminal thinking", etc. There's not a grain of candor in the process. The panel of pompous pricks then penalizes the inmates who've not adequately memorized their scripts or who aren't devious enough to play along with the insincere charade, while rewarding the actual psychopaths who prove to be the best actors and who are most fluent in the language of therapeutic self-flagellation.

It's a helluva system, folks... the authoritarian bureaucrat's wet-dream vision of "rehabilitation".