

BOOK REVIEW

The Oxford Handbook of Criminology. Maguire, M., Morgan, R., Reiner, R., (eds) Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994.

To review twenty-five chapters in themselves detailed reviews of a substantive area in criminology covering 1,259 pages and 400,000 words is a major task. Nevertheless, a less directed browse will reveal a gold mine of up to date criminological theory, method and empirical data. This book is a godsend to teachers of criminology and deviance. It will define undergraduate and postgraduate criminology courses in Britain for some time to come, and, if revised and updated as the editors intend, will come to dominate as a course text for the foreseeable future.

If there is a weakness in the *Handbook*, then it is lack of a clear outline of theoretical perspectives in criminology and the sociology of deviance. The editors implicitly justify this by suggesting that the disciplinary area of criminology has (arguably) been, and increasingly is, based on a plurality of theoretical traditions and positions. The *Handbook*, correctly in my view, rejects the notion of discrete theoretical traditions, arguing that criminologists have drawn and do draw pragmatically on a wide range of theoretical perspectives to interpret their data. The editors invoke Garland's excellent chapter on the development of criminology in Britain to support their claim, although Garland seems to be addressing a quite different issue, namely the historical tension between and convergence of a pragmatic, policy-oriented, managerial criminology with criminology as a causal explanatory science. This theoretical pluralism however, may not help students organise their thoughts and I suggest that the *Handbook* be used in conjunction with Downes and Rock's (1988) *Understanding Deviance*. The very usefulness and comprehensiveness of the *Handbook* will undoubtedly have the effect of pushing courses still informed by 'sociology of deviance' into the arms of a more narrowly defined 'criminology'.

But there is much to celebrate within the text. As expected its overall core is the study of crime and system responses to crime. The sheer coverage of these issues means that the book fills a gap by providing a single comprehensive text-

book for teachers, students and practitioners, that also has enough depth to increase the efficiency and reduce the costs of criminology courses previously relying on the need to cite many separate references.

Whatever substantive area of the discipline the reader is interested in, he or she should start at the relevant chapter, and there will be found some aspect of a 'state-of-the-art map of criminological analysis, research, and debate in Britain today' (p1). Each chapter reviews theory, method and empirical evidence in the area of interest, and more often than not offers ideas to push the discipline forward. There are chapters on specific issues and overviews of theoretical developments. The organisation and structure of the book locates the different chapters under four broad areas: theory and history; causes and varieties of crime; crime control and criminal justice; social dimensions of crime, justice, and victimisation. Substantive issues within specific subject areas structure the book and it is assumed by the editors that readers have some familiarity with theoretical paradigms prior to tackling these.

Each individual chapter demonstrates a consistently high quality of theoretical and empirical synthesis, and are most clearly written. All are original, specially commissioned, and some are of exceptional quality. Garland's chapter sets the tone in tracing the historical tension and eventual convergence between the search for scientific truth and the search for useful knowledge in state sponsorship, which came to form the discipline in Britain in the middle of the 20th Century. These developments towards a 'science-for-government', were interrupted by conflict and internal dispute within the discipline wedded to social and institutional forces and contingencies. The 1960's and 1970's saw a momentary autonomy from government but this was short lived. This revisionist history of the discipline is persuasive, and perhaps dispels any lingering hope or idealism that the discipline might be put to different purposes. Young's chapter updates his earlier typology of theoretical paradigms organised around the key theme of 'aetiological crisis'. We cannot influence or reduce crime and victimisation unless the causes of crime are readdressed, and theory must be sharp-

ened by its sense of locality, specificity and political context. Young's 'Left Realism' needs to spell out its research agenda in a clearer and more extensive way, and demonstrate what a 'local democratic multi-agency approach' would look like in practice. Rock's piece is good on how criminology defines its objects of inquiry and how this changes according to the generational and institutional concerns of criminologists. Although Rock's statement that 'criminology is a masculine discipline' (p147) is undoubtedly true, he continues to underestimate the disproportionate influence of substantive work in feminist criminology. Indeed, Heidensohn's review of feminist approaches in her chapter concludes with the intriguing and increasingly influential advice that we have to ask different questions. Not what makes women's crime rates so low, but why are men's so high? This agenda for a new focus on men and crime from a feminist perspective will find many adherents.

For this reviewer, some of the chapters were useful rather than inspiring (Emsley, Pearson), but the reader's evaluation is bound to be influenced by his or her interests or specialism. Downes and Morgan's section on the 'politics of law and order' was nuanced and interesting. Levi on 'violent crime' was excellent, as was South's bibliography on drug related crime. Hobbs as always, is enjoyable to read. Smith's 'Race, Crime and Criminal Justice' chapter was rigorous and comprehensive. In fact readers, whether students or not, who require an up to date, rigorous, comprehensive and synthetic introduction to theory, method and empirical data in substantive areas of criminology, will almost certainly find something in the *Handbook*. Of course, there are gaps such as the absence of comparative perspectives, and a lack of representation of feminist contributors. On the whole, however, the editors have achieved what they set out to do in an exemplary fashion. The verdict of my undergraduate students who have begun to use the book is 'excellent'.

References

Downes and Rocks (1988) *Understanding Deviance*. Clarendon

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