editorial

criminology and its uses

The cover of this issue presents a somewhat gruesome photograph of the pickled head of Cesare Lombroso, preserved for all to see in the *Museum of Criminal Anthropology — Cesare Lombroso* in Turin. As many of our readers will know, Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) is the founder of 'a science of the criminal' if not of the science of criminology. Nevertheless, the influence of his *scuola positiva* on the development of a criminological enterprise has been enormous.

For those readers unable to recall the work of Lombroso, a brief review will have to suffice. The changing nineteenth century saw advances in the physical and natural sciences alongside external social and economic developments; within this context Lombroso and his colleagues Ferri and Garofalo departed from the earlier classical emphasis on crimes and the administration of justice, to focus instead upon criminals and the aetiology of criminal behaviour.

Lombroso, an Italian physician with an interest in psychology, psychiatry and the anatomy of the brain, found several reasons for criminality during the late nineteenth century. However the most 'preserved' thesis to the annals of criminological thought was his proposition that the criminal was a biological degenerate, an evolutionary throwback to a previous time. He called this degeneracy atavism, which manifested itself, in certain physical stigmata or characteristics. The stigmata did not cause criminality — the atavism did. The stigmata however were useful in identifying atavists — or 'born criminals', as Enrico Ferri later referred to them (Curran and Renzetti 1994).

The idea of a biological predisposition to crime in certain identifiable individuals has survived; the influence of the positivistic approach in the modern criminological project has been immense. Indeed, if we interpret the principles in their widest sense, positivism has come to dominate such academic thinking about crime, its treatment and control during the twentieth century. Explanations for the causes of crime, may have become more complex, research methodologies more developed and practices more informed by contemporary thought, but broad positivistic principles have continued to influence, within academia, central and local government, criminal justice organisations and agencies as well as popular crime discourse and law and order rhetoric. There have also been trenchant and sustained attacks on such positivist approaches to crime.

Our general intention behind the issue has been to focus upon current debates within contemporary criminology, and to explore the achievements of criminology both past and present. For some, this necessitates a discussion and refinement of the broad principles of the positivist project. For others — including the majority of the contributors to this issue — this means a move away from that basic positivistic logic. It is within this context that we took the decision to place the head of Lombroso on the cover of this issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* and to furnish the ensuing pages with further Lombrosian imagery. Three factors influenced our decision in this respect.

First, many continue to practice criminology within the confines of the positivist project — albeit in more sophisticated ways. For these academics and practitioners, the cover could be interpreted as reflecting the preservation of such thinking throughout the twentieth century. Second, others have been critical of the positivist project, both past and present — indeed many of the contributors to this present issue map a somewhat fragmentary picture of the contours of much criminological thought. In doing so, these contributions raise a number of questions about the positivist enterprise in general and its achievements in particular. For them, the preserved image of Lombroso's head will symbolise the preservation only of external features rather than integral thought. Third, others have expressed a desire to move beyond the boundaries of modern criminological thought and to acknowledge various hitherto neglected avenues for future discussion and analysis. For them, the pickled head suggests a perception of longevity suspended in time. Lombroso's head, then, is a metaphor for criminological debate, which like the metaphor can be understood in a number of ways.

Why do such debates matter? Would such debates be better placed within a more academic journal or periodical? In response, we would argue that one of the specific achievements of *Criminal Justice Matters* over recent years has been to apply criminological thinking to particular thematic issues affecting all aspects of criminal justice policy and practice — whether it is the context and introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 or changes in the prison system or crime and justice in Europe. However, what *Criminal Justice Matters* has done less — if at all — is to explore the debates taking place within the criminological enterprise itself around theory, regarding issues for study, and regarding what it is that is being achieved and why. This issue addresses that gap.

This issue has another significance. It is the last which will see Julia Braggins as our Editor-in-chief. Julia is leaving the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies which she has directed for seven years. During that time she has played a pivotal role in the transformation of *Criminal Justice Matters* into a widely read and well respected magazine. She has co-ordinated the editorial board with intelligence and good humour and has overseen the production of each issue with flair and efficiency. Her professional qualities will be apparent to the many readers of *Criminal Justice Matters*; her personal qualities are much appreciated by those who have worked with her. She will be sorely missed by all members of the editorial board and we would like to thank her for the warmth, kindness and support that she has displayed throughout her time at the Centre. We wish her all the best in the future.

Peter Francis and Mary Eaton

Reference:

Curran D J and Renzetti C M (1994) *Theories of Crime* London: Allyn and Bacon.