

An aerial photograph of a city, likely in the United States, showing a dense residential area with many houses and trees. In the center of the city, there is a large, complex of buildings, possibly a government or institutional facility, with several courtyards and parking lots. The sky is clear and blue.

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Reviews

Book Review

Crime and economics: An introduction

By Kevin Albertson and Chris Fox

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This book opens by suggesting that 'At first glance the reader might wonder what economics can bring to the study of crime'. However, I considered this to be a curious suggestion. Economics has become one of the dominant strands of criminal justice in the late modern era, providing a means through which academia, policy makers and practitioners consider the causes of crime and approaches to criminal justice. At first glance I really wondered why there were not many books that offered the introductory overview provided here by Kevin Albertson, from the Department of Economics, and Chris Fox, Professor in the Department of Sociology, both at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Explanations of crime often focus on economic ways of thinking about and explaining the world. For example, those who take a more individual approach to explaining crime, describe this in terms of rational choice, where individuals tot up the benefits and risks of different courses of action and act in ways that maximise their own personal benefit. Criminal justice interventions such as deterrent sentencing are based on the premise of being able to alter this calculation that potential offenders are perceived to be making. Similarly,

crime prevention measures such as surveillance and target-hardening, which are also designed to increase the risk of detection, are presumed to influence the choices individual make before committing a crime. Many would, of course, question whether individuals make such fine and complex calculations. Those who take a progressive view of the causes of crime also cite economic explanations. In particular, they draw upon issues of economic deprivation, poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

Economic considerations also influence criminal justice policy and practice. Most obviously, recent decades have seen the proliferation of managerial practices imported from the commercial sector, these include target-setting and monitoring, greater fiscal discipline and the use of competition. More recent manifestations of this include the development of payment by results, social impact bonds, contracting out non-core services and the expansion of the commercial market for custodial services. However, economics also penetrates deeper into how prisoners and the treatment of prisoners are managed. There is an increasing focus on instrumental measures or targets as a means to gauge success or failure. Services are developed and evaluated based upon notions such as cost-benefit and quantitative measures of effectiveness.

All of these issues and more are discussed and explored in this book. Albertson and Fox provide an excellent insight and overview into the ways that economics is used and applied in thinking about crime and criminal justice. What emerges from

their discussion is not only the centrality of economics but also its technical limitations. In their expert analysis, economic calculations, evaluations, measures and techniques offer less certainty than is often assumed, and are indeed often complex, controversial and imprecise. They suggest not that economics has the answer to all problems, but it does offers those studying and working in criminal justice a means of better understanding some of the issues.

While the book also discusses some of the limitations of markets and economics generally to explain and inform social policy, it might have covered more fully issues such as, for example, what has been described as 'economic rationality'. This concept has been criticised as being insensitive to the emotional, human and social texture of prison life and as a consequence has been responsible for promoting approaches that reduce legitimacy¹. More widely it has been argued that uncontrolled commercialism and consumerism fragments communities and corrupts social values² and also that it can diminish the quality of life of individuals³. What is also missing from the book is how economics has been more recently adopted as form of resistance to dominant approaches to criminal justice. For example, the Justice Reinvestment movement has sought to use economic techniques such as crime mapping to expose social inequality and use arguments such as cost-benefit analysis and fiscal restraint to campaign for reduced use of prisons⁴.

In *Crime and economics*, Albertson and Fox have provided a

1. Liebling, A. (2011) *The cost to prison legitimacy of cuts in Prison Service Journal* No.198 p.3-11.

2. Sandel, M. (2012) *What money can't buy: The moral limits of markets* London: Allen Lane.

3. Sennett, R. (2006) *The culture of new capitalism* New Haven: Yale University Press, see also Dorling, D. (2010) *Injustice: Why social inequality persists* Bristol: Polity Press.

4. Allen, R. and Stern, V. (eds) (2007) *Justice Reinvestment: A new approach to crime and justice* London: International Centre for Prison Studies.

clear and helpful introduction to some critical issues that permeate thinking about crime and criminal justice practice. The book promotes an enhanced and more critical appreciation of the techniques and ideas used. On that basis alone, it deserves a place on the shelves of academics, practitioners and policy makers. However, the use of economics and the practice of economic rationality should be treated with care and placed in a wider context where the emotional, human and social nature of crime and criminal justice is placed at the fore.

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Book Review

Crime and punishment in contemporary Greece: International comparative perspectives

Edited by Leonidas Cheliotis and Sappho Xenakis

Publisher: Peter Lang (2011)

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(paperback)

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The economic collapse, social and political turmoil in Greece have been prominent in the news

over recent years. These catastrophes are in marked contrast to the idyllic image of Greece as the cradle of modern Western civilisation, the birthplace of the Olympic ideal and the destination of choice for British holiday makers. In this book, Leonidas Cheliotis of Queen Mary, University of London and Sappho Xenakis of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy in Athens, casts aside such superficial representations and provide a volume of impressive depth.

The authors describe their aim as being to address the absence of Greece from international comparative studies of crime and punishment by providing a systematic introduction to these issues from a Greek perspective. The book is divided into three sections. The first is entitled *Experiencing crime* and addresses issues including fear of crime, the role of the media, and the relationship between immigration and crime, and youth crime. The second section explores *Topical crime issues* including corruption, drugs, organised crime, honour crimes and sex crimes. The third section on *Reactions to crime* examines the impact of the European Union, the development

of surveillance, policing, sentencing and prisons.

The most impressive and innovative aspect of this book is the way that each topic is discussed by an academic of Greek origin or currently working in Greece, and then followed by a commentary by a respected academic drawing upon international comparisons. This approach helps to draw out key issues and provides a wider perspective. Over the course of the book, this allows the emergence of an appreciation of the way that a local social system, in this case the Greek criminal justice system, is formed through an interaction between global trends and local customs and tradition. The way that these forces intersect, interact and conflict is critical to understanding the nature of globalisation in any particular setting. The strategy adopted in this book is particularly effective in drawing this out.

There is no question that this book is a landmark achievement providing an in depth introduction to crime and punishment in Greek society, but also in providing a living example of globalisation in action.

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