

Contemporary Comment

Some Futures for Criminology

Australia is to criminology what Costa Rica is to biodiversity. In many respects, we are 'where the action is'. With apologies to the late Chairman Mao, a hundred flowers are blooming, including some tall poppies, about which more later. Australia can be proud of its charismatic mega-vertebrates, but I'll stop this metaphor forthwith lest someone asks me to identify the raptors among us, not to mention the parasites.

Perhaps it may be more appropriate to refer to Australian criminology as a 'Broad Church'. We have our evangelists, our dogmatists, our proselytisers, our demonologists; but I hope we have few if any practitioners of what might be described as 'Voodoo criminology'. We have our pragmatists, our fundamentalists, our scientists, our policy persons, our social critics.

And I think that in general, a mix is good, as long as there is a degree of balance, an appropriate division of labour, and as long as the common property of each school or faction is *quality*. I must also insist on truth in labelling. As David Brereton reminds us, ideologising masked as research can reflect adversely on the entire enterprise of criminology. I would also argue for the absolute minimisation of dogmatism. Perhaps not a total purge, as it is nice to remind oneself from time to time just how reasonable one is by comparison. But I contend that our science and our policy will both be served best by a degree of scepticism and open-mindedness.

But what of the future?

The following paragraphs are not intended to tell people what they should, or should not, be doing. Nor do they represent some grand design. Nor are they by any means exclusive. Rather, they are designed to identify what are some interesting and emerging issues from my own perspective, a perspective very much conditioned by a decade of conducting applied research in a public sector policy environment. I include a few thoughts which are poorly developed, but designed to provoke.

First, some basic principles, then some ideas for research.

1. *Be sceptical, without being cynical.* Ask difficult questions, but do so in a constructive manner. Here's an anecdote about how I may have failed in such an endeavour. I once attended a presentation by a person who contended that violence against women was exclusively a problem of patriarchy. Let me state at the outset that violence against women is abhorrent, and I do not believe that money is the root of all evil, because patriarchy must fit in there somewhere. Anyhow, at the conclusion of her presentation, I asked a question along the following lines: From what we can discern, violence against women appears to be an especially acute problem in Aboriginal communities. Does this mean that the elimination of patriarchy from Aboriginal culture will ensure the safety of Aboriginal women? What I am suggesting is that we as criminologists should not contribute to the general tendency to oversimplify. And when one of our own engages in oversimplification, we should remind them that the real world is not so simple.

2. *Don't reject ideas merely because of their source or their messenger.* Market-based regulatory instruments were rejected out of hand simply because they were championed by economists, who were courtiers of the Reagan and Thatcher regimes. Only recently have environmentalists begun to recognise that economic instruments can deliver greener outcomes than many conventional regulatory strategies.

Nor should we reject ideas because they appear embedded in a repulsive context. There may be more to Louis Farrakhan than the racism, sexism and anti-Semitism that we perceive through the American media. It should be possible to condemn Farrakhan for that racism, sexism and anti-Semitism, but appropriate his ideas about personal responsibility, self reliance, and self respect. His urging to purge drugs from the community, to ensure that one's children do their homework and attend school regularly, and to respect one's spouse, are eminently laudable. On the other hand, there is a risk that Farrakhan's abhorrent negativism is an essential ingredient of his product. That is, his invocation of external enemies may be essential for the resonance of his message to his target audience of African American males. Take away the wrapping, and you no longer have a package. Indeed, take away the wrapping and his message is quite similar to that of white conservatives.

3. *Bring fault back in.* Corrupt police and white collar robber-barons are not the only blameworthy people in Australia. Those of us trained in the social sciences tend naturally to embrace social explanations, thereby ignoring moral agency. Taken to an extreme, this provides a convenient vocabulary of extenuation for offenders. Some of Dave Indermaur's (1995) recent work on perpetrators of violent property crime is illustrative. It has become too convenient to transfer blame to White Australia, bad parenting, lack of a job, or the evils of capitalism.
4. *Attribute a degree of responsibility to the victim,* where appropriate; at the very least, do not overlook the association of victim characteristics with vulnerability. Victim blaming enjoys a status in our professional demonology which is commensurate with the status of paedophilia in the general community. This I regard as unfortunate, as a better understanding of risk and its distribution does not necessarily devalue the individual victim or class of victims in question. Arguably such understanding is the foundation for prevention. I recall the abuse which Chris Devery once suffered for having dared suggest that the risk of domestic homicide was not evenly distributed across Australian society, and may be explained in part by socio-economic status.
5. *Evaluate.* I would also like to reaffirm my commitment to the principle of evaluation, and to my strongly held (and long espoused) view that public programs be subject to rigorous evaluation. The basis for this position is twofold. First, public programs cost money. And money for public programs is becoming increasingly scarce. Best, then, that we spend it where it works. Second, we must always bear in mind that, despite one's best intentions, things can and occasionally do go wrong. Ironic reversals abound in public policy, and in criminal justice (Grabosky 1996). As professionals, we owe it to society to be alert for any harmful consequences which policies may produce.

Let me now suggest a few questions which I expect will occupy many of us into the new millennium.

The perennial problem of young males

We will continue to be concerned with the behaviour of males between the ages of 15 and 30 — what they do in general and what they do to women in particular. This is an issue which has concerned societies for the past millennium, and longer. With youth unemployment likely to remain a chronic problem in western industrial societies, this will remain one of the central concerns of criminal justice.

Telecommunications and crime

There are, in addition, a number of emerging trends which have criminological implications. Look, for example, at technology. The telecommunications revolution which we are currently experiencing will touch upon many aspects of our life and culture. This revolution will also present unprecedented opportunities for those who would exploit these technologies for illicit purposes. Among the subjects which invite analysis by criminologists are:

- telemarketing fraud;
- theft of telecommunications services ('phreaking', cellular cloning and related practices);
- offensive or threatening communications;
- electronic money laundering;
- theft of intellectual property (electronic piracy);
- electronic vandalism (sometimes referred to as 'hacking' or 'cracking'); and
- the use of advanced telecommunications systems in furtherance of criminal conspiracies.

Running through this set of topics are some fascinating issues, including the boundaries between the public interest and individual privacy; the fact that cyberspace transcends geographically-defined jurisdictions; and applications of the law of theft, possession, and intent. It would be interesting to address each of the above types of crime, and speculate on the degree to which a solution might depend upon law enforcement, administrative regulation, self-regulation, or some degree of third party involvement, including commercial solutions. These are currently contested areas of policy, in Australia and abroad. They are nothing, if not relevant.

Australia's engagement with Asia

One of the more exciting developments in the past decade has been Australia's growing engagement with Asia. This too provides both challenges and opportunities. What forms of crime and criminal organisation occur elsewhere in the region? How do they impact here? To what extent are they being imported? To what extent do they impact upon Australians doing business abroad? What can be done about it? I recently encountered a distinguished jurist from a nation in our region, a gentleman who was brilliant, urbane and extremely knowledgeable. He suggested that if Australia were serious about containing Asian organised crime, we should adopt *Asian* methods for the containment of organised crime. He mentioned preventive detention as one such countermeasure.

Deregulation, personal freedom and crime

It is worth noting that some of the boldest deregulatory initiatives are those which have been undertaken by labor governments— in New Zealand and Australia. Whether this course is necessary to remain competitive in the global economy is an important question. But in any event, there would appear to be an inevitable tension between deregulation and

crime control. In the realm of corporate crime, deregulation of the financial system facilitated the excesses of the 1980s (Sykes 1994). This should come as no surprise. The enhancement of freedom brings with it opportunities for and risks of abuse. This inevitable tension is by no means limited to financial crime. Fewer restrictions (both temporal and spatial) on the sale of alcohol have been accompanied by increases in alcohol related violence. The de-institutionalisation of the mentally ill have increased their risks of victimisation, and their opportunities to offend. Fewer restrictions on the sale of secondhand goods make it easier to fence stolen property.

The 'shrinking state'

Throughout most of the industrialised world, the size and scope of government appear to have subsided from its highwater mark. Whether or not this trend is reversible in the fullness of time, one must recognise that, at least for the time being, the state is 'shrinking'. Paradoxically, demands upon and expectations of government appear stronger than ever. In recent years, these demands may well have exceeded the ability of governments to deliver. In consequence, governments are looking outside the public sector for new or partial solutions (Grabosky 1995a). Among the new administrative technologies which are being employed to harness resources outside of the public sector in furtherance of public policy are the out-sourcing of investigations. This raises profound questions of quality control and accountability, which public authorities are just beginning to address. Identifying and controlling downside risks which accompany new forms of governance will remain a challenging task.

New methods of criminal investigation

Recent years have seen Australian law enforcement agencies employ more aggressive investigative methods, including covert facilitation or 'sting' type operations. Used with great success to date by the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service, they would seem likely to be accorded greater use in future. The use of such methods poses significant problems of accountability, as well as raising significant ethical and legal questions; the 1995 High Court decision in *Ridgeway* is illustrative. These invite criminological analysis.

Conclusion

The enticing topics noted above are hardly exhaustive of the issues deserving of our attention. Suffice it to say that there is more than enough work to occupy our discipline for the foreseeable future. Let me conclude with two observations:

First, what of our profession as a social phenomenon? In the past few years one senses an increasing inclination from within our ranks to cut down our tall poppies. This would appear to be based not on any lack of rigour or other shortcomings on the part of the poppies themselves, but rather, grounded in ideological differences or envy on the part of their detractors. I would argue that this ill serves our profession. If we are going to cut somebody down, let's do it on the basis of their shortcomings, not their strengths.

We should celebrate our tall poppies, help them to grow, and encourage younger ones to grow too. Let us celebrate our colleagues' achievements. Let us not ignore the genuine shortcomings of others. For just as all of Australian criminology can benefit from the achievements of our best, so too can we all be discredited by those who let us down.

Finally, a word about the apparent 'gulf' between theoretical and applied criminology. As one who has personally been engaged in both pursuits over the past decade, to me this gulf is a mirage. I have done some fairly abstract work in institutional design (Grabosky

1995a), which I found to be readily adaptable for presentation to law enforcement audiences (Grabosky 1995b). Work that appears on undergraduate reading lists also finds its way (albeit with some modifications) into policy forums. It would appear that the 'gulf' in question is really a construct which is mobilised to enhance the professional self-esteem on the part of academics and bureaucrats alternatively. All part of the tendency to think in terms of black and white, which we should strive to overcome.

Anyhow, the future of criminology, in Australia and globally, appears interesting and challenging. We can all look forward to it.

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List of cases

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