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Paul Rock. Victims, Policy Making and Criminological Theory: Selected Essays

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This book is one of five published so far under the series title 'Pioneers in Contemporary Criminology'. Few, I suppose, would dispute this claim in relation to Paul Rock. This book is a record of his significant contribution to criminology, and victimology in particular, over a career which spans well over forty years. It consists of sixteen previously published journal articles covering a period from 1968 to 2008. These have been chosen by Professor Rock himself and he also provides an introduction explaining why these essays were chosen along with his own reflections on his career and academic development. This introduction is as fascinating and stimulating in its own right as the respective journal articles. It is interesting to note how, as he embarked upon his own criminological career, it was still a fledgling subject in the U.K. and his own development overlapped with future luminaries who become instrumental in establishing the subject as a more established discipline [some notable examples include David Downes, Francis Heidensohn {nee Doherty} and Stanley Cohen]. Moreover Professor Rock charts his own primary influences in the – mainly American – schools of sociological phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and, what was then the emerging and subsequently enduring concept in deviance studies, 'labelling theory'; his key contribution lay in applying these ideas in a predominantly, but not exclusively, British context. One example which demonstrates the full extent of Paul Rock's influence is the recently published text in honour of his contribution to criminology [Downes et al 2010].

As the title above indicates one of the most prominent areas in which Paul Rock has made a most significant contribution is in the study of victims. Among the most notable developments over the last few decades has been the emergence of the victim as a dominant feature of the criminal justice landscape: the criminal justice system has become increasingly victim centred in terms of promoting 'rights' and supporting victim services; there have been – and no doubt will continue to be – debates on hearing the victim's voice in the criminal justice process as well as the emergence of victimology as a recognised feature of criminological study. Paul Rock has been the major pioneer in documenting, analysing, problematising this phenomena since the 1970s.

This review can give only a flavour the complex and nuanced arguments advanced by Paul Rock in a series of chapters on victims. For example, there are two two chapters comparing the development of victim services in the U.K. and Canada and Australia respectively, which shed light on way the treatment of victims can focus either on 'needs' [therapeutic support] or 'rights' { legal obligations} and on how this can depend on who shapes legal services. Elsewhere, he shows how typologies of victimhood are created within the adversarial legal system; how the physicality of an English court shapes the experience for the victim which can have implications for the way they are viewed], and how one of the most vilified groups in society - the homeless - are often overlooked as the most victimised. Throughout, there is a rich vein of humanity which informs an epistemological approach encompassing victims' experiences as it does underpinning theoretical analysis.

The scope of this book is not exclusively confined to victims as there other pieces which encompass policy and criminological theory. For instance, one Chapter II IS entitled, 'Sociology and the Stereotype of the Police' and offers a brief meta- analysis of sociological studies of the police and

'beat officers' in particular. Rock makes the challenging assertion that just as sociological analysis of the policing tends to focus on the capacity for viewing suspects in a one dimensional way, so sociologists offer one dimensional accounts of the police and ignore other aspects of their work. He proposes instead a model of policing which owes less to apprehending criminals than to 'compliance-based' enforcement. He explores a wider dimension of policing which both requires and demonstrates social integration and co operation as opposed to overt authority. This essay was first published in 1995 but still makes fascinating reading in light of the emergence of community and neighbourhood policing over recent years.

One possible criticism which may be levelled at this collection is that the essays, however interesting and engaging they are, none the less, date back over forty years. They are, in effect dated – arguably fine for the time they were written but lacking in relevance today. There are a number of responses to this criticism but perhaps the most potent one is provided by Paul Rock himself in his Chapter, 'Chronocentrism and British Criminology'. He identifies ,inter alia, social and cultural pressures in criminological pedagogy to favour the 'new' and 'current thinking over the 'old' and 'historical. In effect he shows how research more than fifteen years old is often discounted. The threat here, as Paul Rock notes, is the possible loss of accumulative knowledge.

As a means of demonstrating his ideas Professor Rock not only encourages drawing upon the history of ideas but actually adopting a historical perspective. Several of the other chapters offer a specific historical analysis of judicial and legal processes which can shed light on current practice. For example he looks at the 1879 Act which created the Directorate of Public Prosecutions and how this was used to curtail private prosecutions and control the role of the victim. It is suggested that this became controlling influence has been a characteristic feature of subsequent victim –focused legislation.

On a practical note the price may be prohibitively expensive for the casual reader and some of these articles may be accessible via journal archives. However, for those who wish to gain an in-depth knowledge of the application of social constructionist ideas within the area, primarily, of victimology this book would be highly recommended

Reference

Downes .D.,Hobbs, D. and Newburn, T.[eds] [2010] The Eternal Recurrence of Crime and Control: Essays in Honour of Paul Rock. Oxford: Clarendon Press

