

Book Reviews

Bad Psychology: How Forensic Psychology Left Science Behind* **Robert A. Forde**

London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018

ISBN: 978-1-78592-230-5, 304 pages, paperback, £9.99

I attended an interdisciplinary meeting a few years ago where a packed audience discussed criminal justice responses to juvenile offenders. At one point during the proceedings, a long-established and well-respected judge leaned across the table and said to me ‘I remember when it was just you and me’. I knew what she meant because, as little as 30 years ago, there were few psychologists, academics, community workers or youth workers involved in justice matters, either juvenile or adult; there was the judge and the Probation Officer, and sometimes parents and grandparents.

Fast-forward 30 years and the ‘field’, both of criminal justice processes and of commentary, has become very crowded. We now have various experts giving definitive (but often contradictory) explanations about what works in addressing criminal behaviour, reducing recidivism and protecting the public. One group of professionals who have gained considerable stature and influence is forensic psychologists, whose impact has gone beyond their own discipline and is largely determining how crime and criminality are viewed, understood and responded to by both psychologists and Probation Officers.

In his book *Bad Psychology: How Forensic Psychology Left Science Behind*, Robert Forde systematically challenges some of the principal orthodoxies about crime and criminality which are advanced by prominent elements within forensic psychology. He methodically, and critically, reviews the scientific support for each element of the forensic psychologist’s task: risk

* Reviewed by Margaret Griffin, Assistant Principal Probation Officer, The Probation Service (email: mmgriffin@probation.ie).

assessment, case formulation, intervention, evaluation and communication, devoting a chapter to each.

For the purposes of this review, I am going to concentrate primarily on what Forde says about risk assessments and interventions, principally because these areas of work are most relevant to probation practice.

Forde argues that many of the risk assessment tools used in forensic psychology and probation practice do not measure what they purport to measure; he makes the point that 'risk' is a statistical judgement about a group of people, not a personality characteristic (p. 65) and that applying statistical predictors based on groups to individuals is inherently flawed (p. 73). He further states that actuarial risk assessment tools achieve the best predictive accuracy in risk assessment, and contends that introducing clinical or professional judgement into the equation diminishes the accuracy of the assessment because it introduces bias. Forde bemoans what he refers to as the fixation on risk assessment, claiming that it has 'aspired to the level of accuracy desired by politicians and policymakers, rather than to a level consistent with the evidence about what is actually possible' (p. 267).

It is perhaps in describing how forensic psychologists intervene to reduce the risks of reoffending that Forde is most forceful. He reserves most of his scorn for cognitive behavioural programmes (CBPs), which, he says, are not supported by the scientific evidence. These programmes are based on the premise that it is possible to change people's behaviour by changing their attitudes and beliefs. Forde has a number of fundamental difficulties with this assertion; he refers to the work of Sir Frederick Bartlett on schemata, the structures in the brain that underlie attitudes and beliefs, which are not directly observable or reportable, but which influence how we interpret our world, and consequently our behaviour. He also likens the efforts of CBPs to change people's behaviour by changing their attitudes and beliefs to brainwashing and the 'thought reform' techniques adopted by communist China to 're-educate' Westerners (p. 115). These 'thought reform' programmes were, of course, ineffective and any perceived changes in attitudes and beliefs dissipated as soon as people left China.

Forde is very critical of the 'one size fits all' approach in which psychologists use a professional override to consider clients suitable for programmes they would not otherwise be recommended to attend. He believes that some people are inappropriately detained in custody to complete treatment programmes when there is no evidence to suggest

that the programmes reduce risk, and that others are released from prison, having completed the requisite number of programmes, without any proven reduction in risk.

One of the most damning assertions that Forde makes is that ineffective CBPs are being maintained by individual and commercial considerations – what he refers to as the ‘offender behaviour’ industry – and that both clients and the public are badly served as a result. He says that many of the programmes have not been properly evaluated, and those that have indicate little or no treatment effect.

Forde argues that prison psychologists in the UK (and Probation Officers too, although he does not set the same professional standard for probation!) are not aware of the current up-to-date research, and that their practice is seriously faulty as a result.

One of the interesting secondary themes in the book is the treatment meted out to people who question the commonly accepted orthodoxy of what is effective in assessing and reducing risk in forensic psychology and, by extension, probation practice. Forde describes the tendency to ‘shoot the messenger’ rather than engage in constructive and challenging professional debate. This is a serious concern. Closing down discussion is like declaring with certainty that ‘we know what works; now let’s get on with it’. While this view does emanate from some quarters, it is certainly not one that I share. I believe that the route into crime involves complex processes at individual, family, community and societal levels; surely, effectively supporting desistance from offending also requires interventions at those levels.

One aspect of the dominant paradigm in forensic psychology and probation practice that I have struggled with in recent decades is the propensity to locate most of the causes of criminality within the individual, family and community domains. Structural issues of poverty, marginalisation and state neglect do not feature in what has become the dominant analysis or lexicon. This imbalance will not be addressed until we can at least create safe spaces to have the professional and constructive debates and discussions that are so badly needed at this time.

While Robert Forde’s book is not the last word in forensic psychology, nor is it intended to be, it certainly deserves to be read. Those of us working in the criminal justice arena, whether as psychologists, social workers, Probation Officers or academics, owe it to the people we service to create safe and constructive spaces for the discussions and debates to be held.

Why Punish? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Punishment*

Rob Canton

Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017

ISBN: 978-1-137-44902-3, 242 pages, paperback, €37.99

Why as a society do we feel the need to ‘punish’, and what has shaped our beliefs? What do we mean by punishment? All too often, we hear public comments about those who have offended such as *lock them up ... throw away the key, prisons are like hotels, and bring back capital punishment*. Comments such as these can appear to come from a desire to see retribution rather than rehabilitation.

Rob Canton’s most recent book provides an in-depth exploration of themes such as retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation and desistance, incapacitation and risk, and restorative justice before offering a critical analysis of the limits and perils of punishment. It encompasses a wide-ranging discussion of the purposes, meanings and justifications of punishment for crime and the extent to which punishment does, could or should live up to what it claims to achieve. At a time when probation practitioners and those working within criminal justice are often faced with questions about ‘soft justice’ or ‘tough justice’, this book prompts important questions and reflections about what ‘better’ punishment might look like.

Canton examines ‘the sociological inquiry’ (Chapter 2) and considers the influences from anthropology, psychology and other social sciences, exploring how societies, historical and contemporary, respond to ‘wrongdoing’ and the origins of punishment. He challenges the reader to question rhetorically this age-old, complex debate in society: ‘punishment is justifiable because only through punishment can harm perpetrated against the victim be properly acknowledged, the wrongdoing adequately vindicated’, and ‘by one mechanism or another [punishment] reduces crime’.

Canton inspires the reader to reflect on the extensive arguments in relation to punishment, utilising a number of perspectives, including sociological, political, philosophical and ethical, to consider if indeed there is justification for punishment. As importantly, we are asked to consider if it achieves the desired outcomes. These perspectives are clearly outlined by Canton in a manner that stimulates critical thought and ensures that the reader comprehends the narrative.

* Reviewed by Kate Tyrrell, Area Manager, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (email: kate.tyrrell@pbni.gsi.gov.uk).

Why Punish? is an excellent read for students of philosophy, criminology, crime and deviance, or indeed professionals who work in the wider criminal justice arena, including the judiciary. However, disciplines such as sociology and social policy and the decision-makers in government would also benefit from this book, to enable critical analysis of the purpose and role of punishment and the impact on society, victims and perpetrators of crime.

Ultimately, Canton challenges the reader to deliberate on outcomes for all those affected by punishment and the cost of it, ethically and morally. He challenges us, as a society, to consider *why ought we to punish* rather than *why we punish*. His book provides various insights through a number of theoretical perspectives that are easy to understand and follow for both students and practitioners, either new to this arena or experienced.

Canton challenges the reader in Chapter 10 'to really think about types of punishment and outcomes'. I found myself reviewing current approaches to managing offenders and where we sit ethically, in relation to balancing 'Human Rights legislation' with 'protecting the public from harm'.

I am proud to be part of an organisation that is consistently exploring a balanced approach to 'punishment' and seeking innovative interventions, such as Enhanced Combination Orders as an alternative to short-term custodial sentences, and problem-solving approaches such as PBNi's new approach to managing domestic abuse and the facilitation of service user forums. These approaches are designed to counteract what Canton refers to as the 'otherwise limited capacity of punishment to achieve its objectives'. Canton also emphasises the importance of consistency in the application of punishment in the wider context.

As someone who has worked in the criminal justice field for over 20 years and a former student of social sciences, I found that the hypothesis proposed in Canton's book unfolded in succinct chapters that were easy to follow. The book achieves its objectives and motivates the reader to contemplate critically the function of punishment and the moral and ethical principles that reinforce various cultural approaches to the abstract that is 'punishment'.

The reader is encouraged to consider alternative options for punishment, and how it can be made more effective and achieve the desired outcomes for society, victims and offenders, which encompass a moral compass. Canton also explores the political challenges for the policy-makers.

Canton states that ‘a great deal of writing on the philosophy of punishment is too detached from the realities of policy sentencing and implementation’. This is reflective of a wider challenge faced by practitioners in the field of justice, in attempting to balance the conflicting dynamics of care and control. Rehabilitation programmes incorporating education and restoration must be mindful of that challenge. The public and media require evidence that offenders are paying their debt to society in addition to engaging in prosocial, reintegrative activities.

Canton believes that, alongside the innate human characteristic to punish, is the urge to ‘reconcile or seek forgiveness’. This reflects my own experience of working in ‘restorative justice’. Canton highlights the perspective that can empower both the injured party and the defendant and is a positive example of what better punishment looks like ‘for all parties’.

Canton notes that ‘victims rarely feel their experiences vindicated in a courtroom’, which is reflective of the adversarial system in our society, a theme that is also explored in his 2013 article on ‘The point of probation: on effectiveness, human rights and the virtues of obliquity’¹ and is expanded here. Canton refers to the shortcomings of formal systems that fail to respond adequately to victim issues and the consequences of this for all parties.

Canton draws attention to the importance of remorse in the prevention of reoffending and explains that remorse is not always immediately achievable but rather can be a process towards accepting responsibility and gaining insight into the offence and empathy.

The Human Rights Act has two key principles. Firstly, the rule of law: rights are subject to a limited amount of interference from the state in defined circumstances that benefit society as a whole and not one individual. Secondly, proportionality decrees that individual rights should be exercised in a way that is proportional to the needs of society. Canton captures the essence of this in Chapter 6. He also encourages consideration of the wider impact of punishment on communities, families and children.

This book highlights the fact that legislation and criminal justice policies are not driven by any specific ideology but rather are underpinned by an eclecticism of disciplines. Canton’s introduction to

¹ ‘The point of probation: on effectiveness, human rights and the virtues of obliquity’, *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, vol. 13, pp. 577–593.

the philosophy of punishment uses an analytical lens to reflect the range of approaches to punishment that prevail in numerous cultures both historically and contemporarily. The reader is challenged to consider the aim of 'punishment' and deliberate on whether it meets the objectives of a modern society.

I enjoyed this book; I found it to be an interesting and motivating read, which will evoke necessary reflection whether you are involved in the criminal justice domain, or interested in philosophy, or if the concept of a balanced, ethical society is important to you. You will be compelled to contemplate retribution, prevention and rehabilitation, with much to dwell on.

Canton reinforces the real importance of reflection with regard to 'why we punish', considering what this should look like, and questioning if it is always fit for purpose. As a society, are we achieving the intended outcomes from our current penal system?

Rehabilitation Work: Supporting Desistance and Recovery*

Hannah Graham

Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016

ISBN: 978-1-138-49945-4, 226 pages, paperback, £36.99

Hannah Graham's book is a unique and important addition to the study of rehabilitation and desistance theory. It provides an empirical examination of the interface between processes of desistance from crime and substance misuse and the implications for rehabilitation work, from a practitioner's perspective. It uses research from Australia to discuss the culture and conditions practitioners inhabit and examines why significant numbers of practitioners are leaving the field of alcohol and drugs or are on long-term leave. It provides valuable insights into how practitioners manage complex working environments, including organisational structures and culture, and how this impacts on the day-to-day rehabilitation work in criminal justice settings.

Given that criminal justice agencies across these islands are working in an environment of continuing organisational change and budget constraints, this book provides an important insight into the reality faced by many practitioners working at the coalface. Hannah Graham asks two fundamental questions: What are the perspectives, experiences and

* Reviewed by Fergal McMahan, Probation Officer, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (email: Fergal.McMahan@pbni.gsi.gov.uk).

culture of practitioners working in the field? How do these shape rehabilitative processes in working with people, with complex needs, to support their desistance and recovery? In short: How do the culture and conditions of those working on the front line impact the delivery of rehabilitation and the promotion of desistance?

Chapters 1 to 4 provide the rationale for this book, and critically review the international literature of desistance and recovery work. The publication highlights the adoption and dominance of the medical model in recovery and desistance work. This is contextualised by exploring the de-institutionalisation process which occurred post-Second World War in Western Europe and North America. The philosophical, social, economic and political context of this process is explained. The legacy of these dynamics is explored as it is recognised that they have produced the current macro-theoretical perspectives, namely risk, desistance and recovery paradigms, from which the Risk–Need–Responsivity and Good Lives models have emerged.

Chapter 3 provides a critique of tools and models of ‘evidence-based practices’. This analysis considers whether these are desistance- or recovery-oriented models. It reflects on the duality and interconnectedness of professional intervention and informal care *outside and beyond* the scope of formal intervention. The chapter concludes by recognising the value of both, and describes how one approach relies on the other.

Chapter 4 promotes an understanding of the use of critical realism as an analytical strategy in understanding and reflecting on the dynamics associated with desistance and recovery and people involved in those processes. The latter half of this chapter defines and clarifies language and concepts used in the rest of the book.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the research with criminal justice and recovery workers, beginning with an analysis of demographics and dynamics of those working with substance misuse in Tasmania. There is also reference to other jurisdictions. The role of professional ideology, rehabilitation models and theories, and values is explored, with some consideration of the associated dynamics at play – for example, institutional and sectoral dynamics and demands. The themes and issues that emerge include professional dominance, sectoral politics, and the differences between clinical and non-clinical practitioners and government and non-government workers.

Chapter 7 begins with an exploration of collaboration in working with people with complex needs and provides examples of good practice. It

identifies tensions in this process, as would be expected from the challenges of collaborative working, and identifies the strengths and benefits of shared working. The chapter concludes by advocating for closer and more strategic collaborative working as a way forward.

Chapter 8 provides a theoretical analysis of Chapters 5–7 and employs the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, a twentieth-century philosopher and sociologist, as a framework to think about the work at hand. Issues explored are the stigmatisation of the work and workforce, the precariousness of the profession, professional identity (crisis) and the meaning of professionalism.

Chapter 9 consolidates the key themes and findings of the book; it calls for further research into how exactly the helping process works. Apart from emphasising the need for a coalition of committed helpers to defend and promote the helping professions, this book identifies the need for further research in jurisdictions outside the UK and USA, and underlines how the findings in this work are transferable to other neoliberal societies globally, especially when contextualised within the reality of increasing substance misuse.

Dr Graham combines professional social care discourse and research, practitioner interviews and workforce data to produce a joined-up understanding of the dynamics at work in the process of recovery within criminal justice practice.

Her work is informed, reflective and thought-provoking, and, I would argue, essential reading for the conscientious professional seeking to understand and develop best practice in these fields. It will also benefit those interested in advancing effective social care practice, and underlines the continued relevance of social work in criminal justice practice.

In addition, any student of criminal justice and/or recovery work will find this work valuable because of the author's exhaustive exploration of the relevant theories (particularly their philosophical and political context), and how these have contributed to the development of instruments used to assess, intervene and help the service user.

For me, the key to this book's relevance is its examination of the interplay between desistance and recovery discourse and practice, and the gaps between what is supposed to happen and what actually happens in *real-time* interventions.

The book's presentation, structure and style are clear and accessible, making reading it an enjoyable experience. As an attempt to advance

knowledge and practice in the relevant fields of enquiry as opposed to being an extended report on research, this book has clearly succeeded. As the author admits in her introduction, one (ironic) consequence of the process of producing the book was that it became not only a study of practitioners working with people with complex needs, but also a vehicle to understand the practitioners as people with complex needs, deserving of support, while they do difficult, challenging, often crisis-driven change work. This in itself should encourage those working in probation and criminal justice organisations to read this work, and think about its relevance to their own agency culture and the environment in which they work.

The practitioner and the policy-maker alike will find this work useful as a vehicle to understand and contextualise the interplay between crime and drug misuse, and the professional voice and role in intervening to promote effective helping methods and the philosophy underpinning this work. Graham skilfully highlights the familiar themes of the importance of good collaboration and communication between workers in the field, and identifies the challenges inherent in the helping professions' sphere of influence at a time when the developed world appears to devalue helping people who have not had the best chance in life.