

# BOOK REVIEW

ROBERT ROBERTSON\*

**Rob White and Santina Perrone, *Crime and Social Control*,  
(2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Oxford University Press, 2005) 394 pp**

There have been many texts written to extend the general discourse on the state, crime and social control. Few have held the Australian context as their focus. Rob White and Santina Perrone have produced a most consumable volume on the state, violence and social control in this (academically) neglected corner of the Western world. They set out to provide an overview of the various state and federal interventions in the daily lives of Australian citizens that fall under the wide rubric of 'crime control'. As the authors point out, it has not been possible to give a detailed account of the jurisdictional differences across Australian borders within a fairly brief text, but their aim of giving an overview of the machinery of state intervention and the theories of social control that underpin them have been well realised.

Although there is little to fault the content of this book, its usefulness in the classroom situation could arguably have been enhanced by the provision of more headings/subheadings, more examples/case studies, and the use of graphical representations of some of the basic statistics that are presented. There are a sufficient number of relevant tables of statistical data, for instance, but the portrayal of some of that data in graphical form would have enhanced the variety of presentation formats.

The 'boxes' that are used to highlight various points throughout the text are well done, but these could perhaps have been extended to include a small number of case studies, particularly in the chapters on Police Discretion and Differential Policing (Chapter 2), Incarceration and Prisonisation (Chapter 7) and Victims of Crime (Chapter 10). Space, of course, was an obvious consideration here, but some case studies would have been useful.

The 'Issues for Consideration' section that concludes each chapter, however, cannot be faulted. This is an excellent inclusion, giving the authors the opportunity to insert the most contemporary questions possible for each facet of the crime control apparatus that is examined. These 'issues' sections raise the most pertinent of questions, providing the opportunity for clear critical analysis of the theory, the mechanisms and the practice of state control.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a clear overview of police roles and the policing techniques found across Australia, and elucidates the dichotomous nature of discretion in the

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policing role, showing the problems in differential policing that arise out of the varying interpretations of discretion in the practice arena. These first two chapters highlight the complexity and the contradictions inherent in the policing role, and question whether we are expecting too much of this agent of the social control apparatus.

Chapter 3 highlights the complexity of the law in this country, with its variety of courts and their different jurisdictions, the overlaps in those jurisdictions, and the questions of which laws and which courts fit which forms of disagreement that our large variety of laws try to address. It also gives a good summary of the legal profession in Australia, demystifying the relationships between the variety of legal professions and roles that many Australians have only a passing knowledge of. For the layman, this is a very clear introduction to the law in Australia. (No doubt that was what White and Perrone intended).

Chapter 4 starts with a good summary of the theory of the law as it operates in Australia. It then covers the vital issue of the inequitable access to justice in the Australian context, and details the (small) variety of alternative justice mechanisms that are available to citizens. In the latter case, some quantification of the use of these various alternative justice structures would have been useful, since it would have exposed the reality that the rhetoric of alternatives is not substantially backed with dollars, personnel and extensive availability.

Chapter 5 looks at both the processes and the evolution of judicial decisions and sentencing in the Australian context, and it is (again) a concise introduction to the ways that law is applied in this country. There is sufficient theoretical explanation of the processes of the determination of guilt and punishment, but this is a chapter where some of the appropriately basic statistics provided could have been presented in graphical form.

Chapter 6 provides an overview of punishment and penalty in the Australian context, giving a good coverage of the basic political and sociological issues. The 'issues for consideration' section in this chapter is excellent, introducing wider social issues that arise out of our punishment practices and questioning the effectiveness of punishment.

Chapter 7, 'Incarceration and Prisonisation', deals adequately with theories of dangerousness and violent behaviour, but could have provided more depth of discussion on these issues. The coverage of strip searches of family members who visit prisoners is informative, but there is little mention of the practice and effects of the strip searching of prison inmates. Nevertheless, the chapter gives a fair overview of the wide sociological and psychological effects of incarceration.

Chapter 8, on Community Corrections in Australia, gives a good basic introduction to the nature and practice of corrections in the 'community' setting. It covers the question of alternatives to incarceration, mentioning restorative justice in particular. However, although restorative justice theory is quickly outlined, the authors have perhaps lost an opportunity to highlight the *lack* of restorative justice practice in Australian community corrections. A simple quantification of the extent to which restorative justice principles have been adopted in practice in the local arena would show the serious lack of commitment to real alternatives that dominates the Australian community corrections scene. Similarly, although pre-release (from prison), reintegration programs, Integrated

Offender Management and ‘throughcare’ principles are briefly explained, there was another opportunity missed here to highlight (however briefly) the lack of funding that governments throughout Australia put behind such initiatives. The question of the rhetoric of reintegration versus the practice could have been more clearly addressed.

Chapter 9 looks at crime prevention, again giving a clear introduction to the conceptualisations of ‘community’ and ‘crime prevention’. The key definitions associated with this attempt to reduce the incidence of crime are simply explained, and the ‘issues’ section at the chapter’s conclusion raises some very good questions about the displacement of crime and criminal activity that sometimes accompanies these efforts of crime prevention.

The final chapter (Chapter 10) addresses the issues of victims. Victims’ needs, their participation in the justice system, their rights, Victim Offender Mediation, victims and the re-entry process – these issues are all quite clearly outlined. Again, though, the authors have chosen not to quantify the extent of victim participation in these various facets of the justice system, and an opportunity is therefore lost to highlight the lack of funding for victim programs (compared, say, to funding for prison security). Although the potential opportunities for victim issues to be redressed is outlined, the extent of the redress available, in practice, is not assessed.

Small shortcomings aside, have White and Perrone achieved their stated objectives with this text? Yes, they have. They have clearly raised questions about social control, the intervention of the state in the lives of citizens, and the complex nature of the coercive regulatory mechanisms employed by the state in the name of justice and social order in Australia. They have succeeded in highlighting, in many ways, that criminal justice and social justice are inseparable concepts.

It is not surprising, of course, that ‘*Crime and Social Control*’ turns out to be an excellent companion volume to Rob White’s earlier effort (with Fiona Haines), ‘*Crime and Criminology*’ (both volumes have been regularly and recently updated). The latter gives the philosophical and criminological base necessary for an analysis of crime and social control, whilst the former shows how those theoretical conceptualisations play out in practice in the Australian arena.

**Useful resource for:** Teachers and students in basic Criminology or Corrections subjects.