

Book Review

Philip Priestley and Maurice Vanstone (2010). *Offenders or Citizens? Readings in Rehabilitation*. Devon: Willan

Who are we? How are we defined? Who does the defining? Criminologists have long argued that notions of ‘self’ are malleable constructs shaped by our placements and involvement within the community. People who offend or, more precisely, those who get caught, have often been defined by the level of moral outrage imputed on them by society. Can someone labelled an ‘offender’ convince society that he/she has changed, is rehabilitated and has the right to be a citizen? ‘Offenders or Citizens?’ examines the polar points between which societal attitudes oscillate, stressing that rehabilitation is an idea with integrated theory and practice and thus distances itself from the notion of the rehabilitative ideal. The authors argue convincingly, from a number of unique vantage points, that our Criminal Justice System must find humane ways of enabling individual and structural deliverance.

This ‘reader’ is an outstanding compendium of ninety-eight essays on the subject matter of rehabilitation. It is highly accessible in that most of the texts are just two or three pages in length. There is an impressive assortment of contributions which include those of academics drawn from across the social sciences, social care perspectives provided by practitioners from within the Criminal Justice System, and important statements from popular culture. This is a truly excellent ‘reader’, providing a well balanced à la carte menu on this subject.

What amazed me were the little gems that instantly grabbed my attention. In my view, as an unashamed Elvis fan, ‘In the Ghetto’ rates as one of his most poignant hits. Interestingly, the song written by Mac Davis, was originally entitled ‘The Vicious Circle.’ The lyrics stand alone, an indictment which should cause us to bow our heads in shame and compel us to find a way to change the ghetto and, in so doing, break the vicious circle. I was stopped in my tracks when I saw the name C.S. Lewis, the philosopher and theologian. His discourse highlights the tensions between punishment and rehabilitation. Whilst the entry points to the Criminal Justice System are clear, exits are less clear. Texts from Robert Martinson, John McVicar and Jimmy Boyle hold up a mirror which may cause us to reflect on the price paid by some of our writers. Priestley and Vanstone have worked hard to produce a progressive social commentary on rehabilitation; they accept and qualify their work by explaining that their choices are not exhaustive or complete. However, my view is that they have chosen well, providing readers with a stimulating treatise and reference points which objectify the Anglo-American experience.

This ‘reader’ is arranged with a clear beginning, where Priestley and Vanstone provide a helpful introduction that sets the scene. ‘Offenders or Citizens?’ highlights the need to revive rehabilitation as a means of dealing with people humanely. It promotes approaches that de-label people, encouraging Probation services that empower and provide hope. People who

commit crimes are citizens, who progressively have had their citizenship undermined with devastating consequences for society.

Each section in the book is carefully introduced by the authors and provides a helpful prequel to the key themes.

Section one – provides the historical backdrop identifying where some of our notions of rehabilitation have come from. These texts provide material for debate on the very purpose of the Criminal Justice System and the tensions between the philosophies of punishment and rehabilitation. For example, the text entitled ‘The blind worship of punishment’ (p35) helps us to understand how and why social policy has found itself in such a muddle. Whilst Enrico Ferri warns about the ineffectiveness of punishment, the positivist notions which he advocated, and which have become the fulcrum within the Criminal Justice Systems of Anglo-American experience have arguably worked against the idea of rehabilitation. Edward W. Cox’s pragmatic contribution on ‘Recognizance’ highlights the risks associated with ‘trust’, which some cynics might argue is an oxymoron in the Criminal Justice context, but without which the system would grind to a halt. Section one is stimulating because it uncovers the ‘soil’ of some of the key debates that have influenced our ideas of punishment, incarceration and rehabilitation.

Section two – amplifies the debates concerning punishment and rehabilitation, and how the Criminal Justice pendulum has seemingly swung between these two polar positions. It charts the emergence of the Justice model and its philosophical origins. The political context is also examined, as are the responses to the misunderstood ‘Martinson’ notion of ‘nothing works’. Also highlighted within this section is the work undertaken to maintain the idea of rehabilitation within the Criminal Justice System, through the agency of Probation. A vast array of views are explored including humanitarianism, punishment in modern society, task-centred casework, Human Social Functioning, the non-treatment paradigm, therapeutic communities, group work and restorative justice.

Section three – charts the potential direction for the future of theory and practice in applying ideas of humane rehabilitation. It posits how these more optimistic views of the human condition could permeate the Criminal Justice System and sentencing policy. Shadd Maruna (p20) highlights the flaws within the Positivist school and the need to gravitate towards paradigms that individuate and enable an understanding of the ‘whole person’. Such approaches help us to understand the significance of entry and re-entry points into society, and the need for ethical rehabilitative practices. This ‘reader’ is helpful in that it captures the main philosophical, criminological and social policy influences that have shaped the Anglo-American Criminal Justice Systems. The hope is that these notions can have a positive influence on how we think about and practice rehabilitation.

I found it a helpful and enjoyable read. Probation practitioners will find it encouraging; students in Social Work, Probation Studies and allied disciplines of Criminology will also find it helpful. This ‘reader’s’ aim was to stimulate and furnish debate about how, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, society could offer effective rehabilitation opportunities to those who had offended. I feel that this is a timely work, as there is now a new Practice Framework within the Probation service (England and Wales), which will cut red tape, bureaucracy and provide greater freedoms to apply discretion and innovative practices. Probation may have an opportunity to shape and give new meaning to anti-oppressive practice, an application that seems in keeping with a maturing democracy and is congruent

with the timbre of this book, which challenges how we label our citizens and, therefore, ourselves. 'Offenders or Citizens?' is an excellent book which I would wholeheartedly recommend.

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