

Ideologies and crime:
Political ideas and the dynamics of crime control

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This paper assembles some theoretical resources for a project that investigates the ways in which thinking about politics has since the 1970s been bound up with thinking and action around crime. Such investigation is hampered by a dominant (neo-liberal) narrative of governance that tends to reduce crime policy to a 'contest' between tactics and technique. In contrast, we establish a political framework for theorizing crime and its control. This framework calls for close interpretive analysis of the ways in which disputes about the crime question are always in part contests between different political ideologies and the meaning and significance of their defining concepts. By revisiting penal developments of recent several decades with these questions in mind, one can get closer to the heart of what is at stake when crime is being discussed and acquire a better sense of why crime and its control are legitimately the subject of politics.

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The death of ideologies would be the most sterile of lucidities; for a social group without ideology and utopia would be without a plan, without distance from itself, without a self-representation. It would be a society without a global project, consigned to a history fragmented into events which are all equal and insignificant.¹

Introduction

How are crime control practices influenced by political ideologies and contests between them? What kinds of ideological conflict – and mutation – take place around the criminal question? Can ideologies be re-shaped – even brought down – by crime?

There are good reasons for expecting these questions to have been at the forefront of the social analysis of responses to crime over recent decades. Since the 1970s crime and its control have assumed a prominent place both in everyday routines and consciousness and in political debate and public policy agendas, especially but by no means only in the US and UK. The ensuing changes in security governance have been the subject of a great deal of

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descriptive attention. Certain things have been established as dominant features of the crime control landscape: the decline of rehabilitation, the return of the prison to the forefront of control strategies in various countries, the commercialization of policing and justice, the rising influence of the victim, novel practices to regulate the 'anti-social' and combat terrorism. A hotter penal climate has emerged – one that is permeated by social fears and anxieties; structured by new discourses of risk and public protection; more emotive, volatile, scandal-ridden and open to 'populist' influences. Government officials and penal bureaucrats have lost power and influence. New actors, voices and modes of expertise have entered the fray – mass media, social media, social movements, bloggers and pollsters. Previously silenced social groups – women, children, ethnic minorities – have made demands for recognition with varying effect. Emergent and potentially transformative practices – e.g., restorative justice, justice reinvestment and specialist courts – now vie for attention and resources. While crime has slipped down the agenda of public concern and political attention in recent years, these features of the wider crime question remain embedded in the landscape.

This 'volatile and contradictory'² landscape of security governance has also been the subject of explanatory work. The above changes have been situated in – and explained by – the social and cultural transformations associated with 'late modernity'³ and considered to be an effect of the advent of neo-liberal rule⁴ or a constitutive part of the neo-liberal project.⁵ Others have explained divergent responses to crime among advanced western democracies with reference to the contrast between liberal and coordinated market economies and adversarial and consensual political systems – and the incentives structures that these systems create.⁶ The relationship between political cultures, access to political institutions and the control and punishment of crime has also featured in the work of the few political scientists who have studied the topic.⁷ Jonathan Simon has influentially analysed the way in which crime has become a resource for rulers and opportunity for governing – something that has, in Simon's view, seen crime reshape both American government and social institutions such as the workplace, school and family.⁸ Tonry has interpreted the excesses of punishment in the US and England & Wales as the effect of myopic, tactical choices made by elected politicians and – like many others in the sociology of punishment – has highlighted and promoted what he views as the moderating effects of penal bureaucracies kept at some distance from the overt political fray.⁹

These frameworks have contributed a great deal to our understanding of the 'heating up'¹⁰ of crime control and its effects. They have done so however in ways that make restricted and predictable reference to the interplay between political ideologies and crime and without posing – still less answering – the questions raised at the outset of this paper. They have analysed responses to crime in ways that either assume that the contest over the meaning and significance of political concepts plays little part in shaping crime control practices or that the regulation of crime now takes place in a post-ideological world. We elaborate upon – and begin to challenge – that presumption in the next section. This

task is however prefatory to the main purpose of this paper which is to assemble some theoretical resources for a project that investigates those - ideological - aspects of the crime question which dominant narratives of governance have tended to leave under-developed. We want to investigate the ways in which thinking about politics – and the contest between ideologies that politics inescapably involves - has since the 1970s been bound up with thinking and action around crime.¹¹

What though does this entail above and beyond the already fairly frequent references that criminologists make to the ‘politicization’ of crime control or the baleful influence of unchecked ‘populism’? In brief, it calls for closer interpretive analysis and reconstruction of the ways in which disputes about the crime question (what is it? who is responsible for it? how should one respond to it?) are always in part contests between different political ideologies and the meaning, significance and purchase of their core and adjacent concepts.¹² This requires a sustained and detailed effort to answer two sets of questions: first, what do modern and emergent political ideologies have to say about crime and how have they respectively tried to shape the ways in which crime has been apprehended and responded to over the last several decades? What kinds of order or orders have they each sought to realize? Second, how have the content and fortunes of different ideologies been affected by the salience of crime as a social and governmental problem? How conceptually equipped have they been to adapt/respond to multiple demands for order? What realignments have taken place as a result of the engagement of these ideologies with crime? Is it possible to detect the formation and articulation of ideologies of crime control?

Our guiding claim is that by revisiting the penal developments and debates of the last several decades with these issues to do with the meanings of governance in mind, one can get closer to the heart of what is at stake when crime is being acted upon. In so doing, we can shed new light on how disputes over crime and its control are inescapably entangled with wider questions about the power and limits of authority, the allocation of social goods and the terms of collective co-existence.

Beyond tactics and technique: Denaturalising neo-liberal orthodoxy

An enquiry organized around the investigation of ideologies of crime control, such as we propose here, immediately confronts an objection flowing from the claim that is implicit in most extant explanations of crime control – namely, that relevant social and political actors appear to ‘go on’ without much in the way of explicit reference to ideological disputes and that our analysis of contemporary penal politics can therefore do the same. Our response is that the ‘post-ideological’ features of political life are best interpreted as symptoms of the dominance and morphing into orthodoxy of one particular ideology. In other words, claims about the advent of post-ideological politics tend to obscure (or advance) the ascendancy of

neo-liberal rule and its transition into a set of common-sense nostrums about the 'imperative' to produce and sustain a constrained, market-friendly form of democratic politics,¹³ in which the space of political contestation has been radically closed down. We need to start then, by setting out the contours of this dominant narrative of (crime) governance.

The key claims of this narrative are as follows: Politics is no longer a clash of big ideas. Capitalism has won and the market has triumphed as the best means by which to produce and distribute goods. The reach and ambition of government has consequently been restrained. Politics is not animated by ideological dispute but has become primarily a contest about how to manage a market economy. This, the argument runs, has impacted upon both political leaders and those who elect them. For the former, politics has become a tactical game about the acquisition and retention of power wherein office holding becomes part of a permanent political campaign. To this end, political parties routinely employ pollsters, marketers and focus groups in a bid to adapt their offer so as to assemble and preserve the coalitions of support needed to govern. This is necessary because of the altered relation of citizens to politics. Electors no longer for the most part act on party loyalty and ideological allegiance – still less join political parties, or feel obligated to vote in elections. Voting has become a matter of periodically choosing between political brands, not giving practical voice to class interests and commitments. The result is a political world marked by disenchantment and distrust (politicians are all the same and in it for themselves) and indifference and inattention (what they do doesn't matter) interspersed with periodic bouts of outrage and anger.¹⁴ We are experiencing what Peter Mair calls 'the hollowing out of western democracy':¹⁵ politics no longer appears as a battle of ideas regarding how best to solve societal problems, allocate primary goods or determine the conditions of co-existence.

This account of modern politics is also often accompanied by the claim that it's a good thing that politics is rid of the clash of fixed ideological positions. On this view, ideologies are depicted as rigid systems of thought 'which have no bearing on human or political experience',¹⁶ and get in the way of effective problem-solving – so good riddance to them. By contrast, to be post-ideological is to be grounded, pragmatic, open to the flow of events, willing to travel wherever the evidence leads - as opposed to narrow, blinkered and doctrinaire. The eclipse of ideology thus creates room for forms of governing that focus on addressing and solving practical problems. But, the argument runs, there remain dangers attached to democratic politics that need to be addressed.¹⁷ As Alasdair Roberts has recently argued, proponents of stable, efficient, market-supportive government claim that 'conventional methods of democratic governance . . . produce policies that are short-sighted, unstable or designed to satisfy the selfish concerns of powerful voting blocs, well-organized special interests, and the bureaucracy itself'.¹⁸ It is hence desirable for certain basic government functions to be removed from the arena of partisan politics and relocated in 'de-politicized', 'autonomous' sites of expert decision-making. In recent decades the

devolution of interest-rate setting to independent central banks has been at the forefront of this movement to transform governance. It rests on the claim that if the full benefits of the demise of ideological conflict are to be reaped, then the political process needs in key areas of public life to be subject to what Roberts calls the 'logic of discipline'.

These claims about the condition and limits of politics have analogues in debates about the governance of crime. The main contention about the latter is that post-ideological politics has given rise to a narrow consensus about crime and its control among those who govern or aspire to do so. Over the last several decades, the argument runs, parties of the 'Right' and (in turn) the 'Left' have coalesced around a 'law and order' agenda dominated by expressions of hostility and toughness towards offenders and the visible display of empathy for victims. The rise to prominence of policies organized around protection has typically been done in the name of the law-abiding public, often at the expense of 'out-of-touch' criminal justice professionals and penal bureaucrats. This narrowing of the space within which it is permissible to speak and possible to act is a consequence of the fact that crime has become a domain of political risk management – a topic through which electoral coalitions are built, sustained and if care is not taken lost, a battleground in the struggle to shore up governmental legitimacy.

It has, in addition, been suggested that the vocabulary of crime has occupied territory left empty following the decline of ideological politics. Crime has become the preoccupation of a world no longer enchanted and animated by political vision(s), and 'security' provides the organizing political fantasy of societies who have otherwise abandoned belief in utopias.¹⁹ Jonathan Simon's depiction of forms of crime governance that appear to function beyond existing political categories – and generate outcomes that both liberals and conservatives find troubling – serves powerfully to illustrate this.²⁰ The Left, he claims, will be appalled by 'the hardening of inequality', the Right by the subversion of 'responsible independence',²¹ and 'neither contemporary liberal nor conservative principles extol the kind of penal state and gated civil society we are building by governing through crime'.²² The overall effect of these transformations in governance has been to subsume crime with a register of what might be called *tactical evaluation* – a field of public policy where what is done comes to be determined by the project of building and sustaining the conditions of rule.

This has generated its own normative counter-project. The claim here is that the prominence of positioning, symbolic display and coalition-building has rendered politics a recurring obstacle to generating stable, effective outcomes in crime control – whether measured in terms of public safety or individual liberty. It has placed crime policy at the mercy of short-term expediency, 'populist' outrage and ill-informed politicians acting in the name of a woefully ignorant public.²³ The politics of crime has, in short, become dangerously dominated by emotive, mass-mediated 'heat'. Given this background, the required task is to create institutional spaces which 'insulate' policy-making from direct

political competition (and their attendant incentive structures) and allow dispassionate expertise a greater role in addressing crime problems. One variant of this argument – advanced by, among others, Philip Pettit²⁴ and Nicola Lacey²⁵ – makes the case for creating in the penal field bodies that are equivalent in their constitution and remit to independent central banks. Another version – found in the evidence-based policy movement – seeks to build institutions which can produce, corral and scrutinize knowledge about ‘what works’ and to use that knowledge to inform public debate and design crime prevention policy and practice.²⁶ The models for such institutions are typically found in the field of medicine.²⁷ In either case, however, the stated purpose is broadly the same – to challenge the tactical evaluation of how to think about and act on crime and augment or replace it with remote expertise able to focus on hard-headed ways in discovering ‘what works’ and implementing rational crime reduction policy. The aim is to ‘cool’ things down, to ‘depoliticize’ the criminal question, to subject crime to a regime of *technocratic evaluation*.

This is not the place for a thorough assessment of these claims.²⁸ But certain points are worth making here. Firstly, we can note what appears to be a potentially unstable mix of two polarized modes of (crime) governance – a polarization between speaking for the people and attending to evidence, between posturing and problem-solving, between – in Roberts’ terms – the demands of popular sovereignty and the logic of discipline.²⁹ Secondly, we can observe that these two polarized stances share a belief in crime governance dominated by expertise. What sets them apart is the mode of expertise, and cadre of experts, that they seek to privilege: special advisors, pollsters, PR gurus and market researchers in aid of tactical politics; bureaucrats, professionals and scientific evaluators for those committed to the discipline of technocratic governance. Thirdly, it is important to attend that what gets squeezed in this depiction of governing caught between the poles of (apparently) post-ideological politics and (supposedly) de-politicized expertise. On the surface, this account signifies a contest between two modes of rule and their attendant instrumental rationalities – ‘tactical evaluation’ and ‘technocratic evaluation’. But this polarization obscures what these competing frameworks share in common: namely, a conception of crime as a field of governance that has been – and should be – denuded of ideological partisanship and dispute.

Redeeming ideologies: Towards a political mode of evaluation

The enquiry we have in mind sets out to challenge both the empirical and normative elements of this claim. In respect of the former, our contention is that crime policy cannot be stripped of ideological thinking, for reasons we elaborate below. To attempt to do so is to misrecognize what is at stake when we think about and act upon crime and to misunderstand the relation of crime to politics. Nor, moreover, do we think that ridding crime of ideology offers a path to a better politics of crime: we need a fuller understanding of why crime generates political ‘heat’ and how the fears and fantasies that crime generates

are best handled – not a politics that seeks to ‘cool’ governance down by means of spurious strategies of depoliticization.³⁰ Our empirical ambitions to recover and clarify the ideological dimensions that appear to have been effaced from the practice of crime control are thus pursued with an ultimate normative intent: to revive the idea that ideological politics is the appropriate arena for contesting and determining answers to the criminal question. As David Runciman has recently argued, ‘in the end, only politics can rescue you from bad politics.’³¹

How then to proceed? We want to press a principled objection to the idea that ideology has no bearing on crime control, using as our point of departure Michael Freeden’s morphological analysis of ideologies. Freeden’s work sits within an extended and rich social scientific debate about the concept of ideology and ideology critique. This debate has turned on whether one operates with a ‘neutral’ or ‘critical’ conception of ideology – ideology as a cluster of beliefs or ideology as meaning in the service of domination.³² It has been enriched by contributions from, among others, Mannheim and Geertz in the former case and Gramsci and Althusser in the latter.³³ Freeden’s path through this theoretical thicket starts from the insistence that ideology is best approached as a ‘ubiquitous and permanent’ feature of thinking about politics.³⁴ For Freeden, ideologies refer to:

Those patterns of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding.³⁵

Ideologies, on this view, are a form of ‘thought-behaviour’ that shape how individuals and groups respond to and act in the world and which thereby seek to shape public policy – largely by engaging in competition over the control of political language.³⁶ Accordingly, there is something profoundly impossible in the idea that it is possible to inhabit the world outside of political categories, to rid thought and action of its position inside ideological formations of one kind or another. For Freeden, there is no such thing as post-ideological politics, or a pragmatic or any other kind. Pragmatism, hard-headed problem-solving, evidence-based policy – these are all, Freeden argues, ‘points of view’ which ‘conceal principled positions often unintelligible to their promoters’.³⁷ He continues: ‘the over-used pragmatist injunction to judge something “on its merits” implies preposterously that self-evident merits simply leap out of concrete cases for all to see, rather than that they are read into those cases by the so-called pragmatists themselves’.³⁸ In a more recent essay, he makes it emphatically clear that ridding social life of ideology is nonsensical and that the claim that this can or should be done is itself an ideological position – typically a conservative one:

There is scant evidence to suggest that whenever human beings think, talk or write about politics they refrain from making selective value-judgements – consciously or unintentionally – about the nature, ends, and desirability of the political arrangements that concern them or that they encounter. The ‘end of ideology’ is often associated with the type of conservative

thinking that voices great scepticism about the role of ideas, contrasting them with a 'pragmatic', matter-of-fact, concrete interpretation of social conduct as spontaneously unstructured, instrumental and contingent. Its adherents refuse to recognize that such a perspective has its own ideological features, rejecting planning, political introspection and future-oriented social visions.³⁹

We take Freedman's argument to suggest – if we move into the field of crime control – that a fuller understanding of how social actors think, talk, write and act in relation to crime and its regulation requires paying careful attention to the ideological positions from within which such activities take place, towards which they contribute, and whose view of social and political arrangements they aim to promulgate and advance. In a critical vein, this means refusing to accept that responses to crime have been or can be reduced to a world of tactical positioning or electoral strategizing. It means treating instrumental effectiveness as but one way of addressing the crime question – a mode of thought-behaviour that projects its own typically undefended political vision of 'the right way to organize authority in a society'.⁴⁰ In a constructive spirit, it requires that we contest tactical and technocratic approaches to the criminal question with what we term a *political mode of evaluation* – one that seeks to attend closely to the ideological claims and disputes that implicitly or expressly shape public responses to crime. It is this mode of evaluation that guides our enquiry.

A political evaluation of crime control recognizes that thought-behaviour towards crime is necessarily entangled with the concepts of modern political thought – order, authority, legitimacy, justice, democracy, citizenship, freedom, rights, obligation and so on. The practical business of deciding what to do about crime necessarily means having a stance on the meaning, significance and relation between these concepts – even if that stance is in many cases taken for granted – we know what order is and why it matters and our policies will deliver it! To evaluate crime control politically is to question such presumptions, to tease out the embedded values that are in play when crime is constructed and acted upon and thereby to make clear what (else) is at issue when the question of crime and what to do about it is being debated. This project can proceed by revisiting the debates found across several current sites of crime control. One might examine the meanings of liberty and security that are in play in current controversies about how to combat terrorism. One can investigate why and how the idea of legitimacy (and its correlates such as public confidence and trust) has once again come to the fore in recent policy and practice debates in prisons and policing. One could ask, similarly, why the concept of authority appears to have lost traction recently as a structuring idea in discussions of crime and order – an observation which did not appear to apply as recently as the 1980s when, in the British context, Mrs Thatcher or Lord Hailsham had few inhibitions about invoking it.⁴¹ One could enquire as to the competing conceptions of the value and scope of democracy that shape debates about police governance, or examine the ways in which crime control has become a key site for political and vernacular contests about rights, or explore the way in which the concept of citizenship is deployed by actors contesting the practice of border control and immigration

detention. In respect of each of these sites, and various others, a political evaluation of crime control seeks to extend understanding of the competing meanings, significance and priority of the concepts in play. This task requires bringing the study of crime governance into much closer dialogue with analyses of relevant concepts found in political theory.

Political concepts do not, however, stand or operate in isolation and their meanings in use cannot be determined solely or mainly by analytical clarification. Freedden argues that concepts assume meaning and significance within ideologies.⁴² For Freedden a political ideology functions as 'a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions and values that 1) exhibit a recurring pattern, 2) are held by significant groups, 3) compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy and 4) do so with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community'.⁴³ As such, ideologies are organizing clusters of political concepts – they arrange concepts in particular ways (in a process akin, Freedden argues, to arranging items of furniture in a room) and thereby 'decontest' their meaning. The 'morphological' study of any given ideology consists of 'identifying, describing and analysing the building blocks that constitute it and the relationships among them'.⁴⁴ Ideologies, he continues, are composed of 'core', 'adjacent' and 'peripheral' concepts. Core concepts have a long-term durability and presence in all known cases of an ideology and play a role in holding that ideology together – liberty and progress for liberalism, tradition for conservatism, equality in the case of socialism. Adjacent concepts are not necessarily ever-present but nonetheless are crucial in fleshing out the core and giving more concrete expression to it – democracy as a way of protecting liberty for liberalism, the state as a delivery vehicle for equality in socialism. Ideologies possess 'peripheral' concepts in two senses. Peripheral concepts can be marginal and ephemeral to an ideology – empire, elitism, nationalism and localism and pertinent examples within liberalism. They may, as such, either come and go, or under certain conditions travel towards the core. The second sense of peripheral signals the point at which an ideology intersects with action and confronts social practices and externalities – migration, climate change, or crime; issues that the ideology has to decode, absorb or reject. Peripheral concepts are generally context-bound and open to being interpreted through core concepts; but they can, Freedden argues, induce 'partial readjustments of the adjacent and core architecture'.⁴⁵

In what ways, though, does a political evaluation of crime control have to attend to ideologies thus understood? Such evaluation recognizes, first of all, that the question of crime and how to respond to it is inescapably shaped by ideological thinking – by contests within and between political ideologies. Relevant actors always implicitly or expressly come at any given crime control issue from a position on the ideological map and will deploy that ideology – and its particular take on the meaning and arrangement of relevant concepts – to determine the appropriate thought-behaviour towards the issue at stake. Studying ideology does not mean parcelling social, professional and political actors, and a 'messy' political world, into neat-and-tidy boxes. Rather, it entails detailed analysis of how ideological

argumentation (and change) plays out in respect of particular crime control practices. Sometimes competing ideologies may clearly and overtly help constitute the relevant battle lines – the place and limits of markets in policing and punishment has been a prominent recent case in point. In respect of other practices there are less clear cut ideological responses to the question at hand. Take restorative justice, for example. This has been read in ways that appeal to a conservative concept of responsibility and community, to a neo-liberal concern with governmental innovation, to the republican virtue of civic participation and to a libertarian or populist anti-statism. It also appeals to those feminists who aspire to remake justice systems via an ‘ethic of care’ or in ways which give voice to victims/survivors.⁴⁶ In respect of restorative justice, liberals are typically the critical outliers – worried about what they believe is the neglect of its core and adjacent concepts of individual rights and due process. These competing ideologies also differ markedly in their visions of how restorative justice may or may not form part of a project of transformational change.

Finally, a political mode of evaluation registers and works with the fact that almost all thinking about crime is a form of what Freedman in his more recent work calls ‘political thinking’.⁴⁷ Not all thinking, in Freedman’s view, is political thinking – nor does all thinking about crime fall into this category. But ‘it is a fact that people think politically and that such thinking is normal and part of the human condition’.⁴⁸ According to Freedman, the practice of political thinking displays one or more of the following features: it seeks to determine the locus of decision-making for a given society; it distributes the significance of aims and goods and ranks collective priorities in terms of their ‘ethical or ideological attractiveness, or their urgency’;⁴⁹ it centres on the mobilization or withholding of support; it makes arguments for how to handle conflict and ensure cooperation and social stability; it relates to the wielding or controlling of power, and it projects futures and constructs plans in and for society.

It does not take much knowledge or reflection to see that crime and its control is both a key site of, and a policy field dominated by, political thinking. One could take any area of crime – robbery, fraud, cybercrime, money laundering, people trafficking etc. – and any crime prevention policy – hot spots policing, probation, situational crime prevention, incapacitation, re-entry, justice reinvestment and so on – and detail how understanding of each offence and appraisal of each policy is shot through with considerations about who takes decisions at what level of governance; about deciding priorities and distributing burdens; about ensuring public support for action; about how crime threats and responses to them pertain to social stability; about how and whether to deploy police or penal power and how to hold such power to account; and about competing visions of how to reduce or eradicate this or that crime problem or make justice more effective, liberty-protecting or participative. Making these points helps to put some substantive flesh on the claim – too often made rhetorically – that crime is political. It also gives some further pointers as to what questions are at issue when one sets out to evaluate crime control as a political phenomenon. Doing so means specifying the ways in which these dimensions of the

thought-practice of politics are at issue in respect of the governance of crime in general and anti-crime measures in particular. It also means paying close attention to the kinds of ideological thinking about politics that are mobilized around crime along each vector of political thinking.⁵⁰

These elements of a political mode of evaluation can combine to inform enquiry across a number of domains. The first is a re-appraisal of neo-liberalism treated *as an ideology*, not as ruling doxa about governance. Here one needs to ask: what do neo-liberals (or, more accurately, economic libertarians) believe? What role has crime and punishment played in the ascendancy of neo-liberalism? Does it operate with a coherent and sustainable concept of order? But it also means interrogating certain orthodoxies about 'neo-liberal penalty' and reassessing certain standard criminological claims about neo-liberal hegemony. What have been its penal effects – are they to be found in the advent of a penal state, or must we look elsewhere? Why have advocates of competing ideological positions found creative inspiration in neo-liberal ideas? Which aspects of the crime control field have been brought under neo-liberalism's willed control and which have not?

A second domain of investigation reappraises the three major political ideologies that have vied for power and influence in modern societies: conservatism, liberalism and socialism/social democracy. In respect of the former our framework asks: What are conservative values and virtues – and what does a conservative position on crime and its control look like?⁵¹ What have been the effects of conservative ideas on recent penal development? Has conservatism been a dominant force (supplying the emotional energy behind developments such as mass incarceration) or a residual, defensive posture (a restraint upon penal excess)? Has it been a fellow-traveller with neo-liberalism or one of its critics? Why has conservatism, properly so-called, faltered in recent decades – at least outside its redoubts in sections of American media and politics – despite the political centrality of one of its core concepts, namely order? How can this puzzle be explained? We also need to pose similar questions of liberalism. Liberalism is the hegemonic ideology of the modern era – supplying much of the conceptual architecture we use to think about government, justice and law. But the 'heating-up' of the crime problem has appeared to leave political liberals with little to say that has affective political appeal, or speaking a language – such as just deserts – that has, arguably, been hijacked by other political forces. So has liberalism been the chief victim among modern ideologies of the rise of punitiveness, penal excess and preoccupations with surveillance and security? Has the rise of order as an issue placed liberalism on the back-foot? What conceptual resources does it have at its disposal that can speak in logically and culturally compelling ways to the crime question (and why has it not done so to greater effect)? Has the salience of crime and security accentuated liberalism's fearful sensibilities – those concerned to shore-up values such as due process and the rule of law?⁵² Or are contemporary preoccupations with monitoring and accountability in police and justice systems signs of the vitality of liberal ideals? Can we interpret the recent interest in human rights, procedural justice and legitimacy as efforts

from within liberalism to develop constructive answers to the crime question? Finally here we need to address social democracy. The dominance of rehabilitation/‘penal welfarism’ in the middle decades of the twentieth century went hand-in-hand with the political ascendancy of social democracy. So how do we explain the declining influence of these political/criminological ideas? Why, by the 1970s, had they become exhausted? Why was social democracy unable to account for, and respond to, the rise of crime from the 1950s to the 1990s? Have the declining fortunes of socialism/social democracy, at least in most English-speaking countries, been in part the product of its failure to make order part of its conceptual furniture? Has crime reordered, and in some degree subverted, social democracy as an ideology? Is social democracy today a lost cause – what Ulrich Beck calls a ‘zombie category’? Or is it possible to imagine the creation of new social democratic agendas around crime and its control?

A third domain of enquiry investigates a range of ‘thin’ ideologies that have made incursions into the field of crime control.⁵³ Such ideologies have arguably occupied the space vacated by the waning influence of the ‘thick’, catch-all political ideologies that dominated twentieth century politics. We may start here by examining populism (rule by the people) and technocracy (rule by experts). Both of these ideological formations are increasingly prominent in contemporary politics, not only in the UK but across Europe. These ideas have also been pressed, as mentioned, in the crime control field - witness ‘penal populism’ on the one hand and the ‘evidence-based policy movement’ on the other. So how are we to explain the rise and co-existence of these ‘ideologies’? What is the relationship between them? What claims do they make, and what effects have they had, on crime and justice? Is the future of crime likely to be determined by the outcome of contests between them?

By contrast, an adequate account of crime governance also needs to explore a set of ideological standpoints that in various ways project alternative crime control futures. Here, we need to take note of the ways in which, even as the more traditional egalitarian discourses of socialism and social democracy appear to have lost some of their force and appeal, a more diverse and perhaps more contemporary range of positions have arisen that also seek to place questions of equalities and identities close to the core of the crime control terrain – in respect of gender, race, sexuality and other vectors of social difference. What effects have these ideological positions (such as the several forms or ‘waves’ of feminism, critical race, post-colonial and queer theory) had on the development of criminal policy? Has their capacity to open up new languages of victimhood and public protection been part of their political appeal? To take only one key example, there should by now be rather little scope for doubt that feminism has already significantly reshaped the crime control priorities of western countries. How then are the previously existing elements in place on the landscape of ideologies reconfigured, challenged or rendered obsolete by their encounters with it? And what are the generative capacities of feminism to give rise to quite new understandings of order, justice, security, harm and so on?

Latterly it similarly becomes increasingly clear that one also needs to attend to the questions (and visions) raised by environmentalism and cosmopolitanism: in what ways have these ideological formations interrogated and unsettled established notions of (criminal) harm and the boundaries within which we conceive of criminal justice, and with what effects? What alternative conceptions and futures of crime control do they open up for the future, even if their role in the major centres of public debate and decision has been relatively peripheral up to now? Which of these positions – perhaps hitherto mainly concentrated within the fairly small circles of specific social movements and their associated intellectual and cultural products – may yet turn out to become part of much more widespread social sensibilities? Considered in these ways the contemporary field of discourses on crime looks anything but non-ideological, even if there are important ways in which it is in some important respects ‘post’ some of the more readily recognizable ideological formations that dominated political life in the twentieth century.

Recovery and reappraisal in the analysis of crime governance

At various points in its recent history attempts have been made within criminology to relocate the study of crime and its control on a broad political canvas. Jock Young’s essay on how the study of crime necessarily implicates us in thinking about wider questions of social and political order is a powerful and influential case in point: it even generated an American textbook which sought to reconfigure the practice of criminological theorizing around Young’s categories.⁵⁴ Stan Cohen once similarly remarked that the study of crime was inseparable from the study of liberalism.⁵⁵ He was also a powerful exponent over a long career of the idea that ‘crime is politics’⁵⁶ and cannot be reduced to questions of utilitarian calculus. As Cohen put it:

Any topic of interest in the social sciences has a peculiarly amorphous quality. It looks distinct, tangible, separate – empirically or conceptually – but the closer you examine it, the more it merges into its surrounding space. So it is with crime control. A matter of restricted scope, the subject of the parochial discipline of criminology, starts dissolving into much wider issues: political ideologies, the crisis in welfare liberalism, the nature of professional power, conceptions of human nature.⁵⁷

What we believe that Freeden’s work on ideology and politics provides is some conceptual resources for translating these sporadic efforts to generate a ‘political criminology’⁵⁸ into a research programme that can subject crime control to a fully political evaluation. This programme means bringing the social analysis of crime control into closer dialogue with political theory so as to create a lens through which to revisit and reinterpret the practices of crime governance that have emerged since the 1970s. The content and effects of these practices have become wearily familiar to anyone who pays even cursory attention to contemporary criminology. Yet this familiarity masks the fact that we still lack a sustained

effort to understand crime control via an analysis of the political *concepts* that are at stake, as an inescapable site of *ideological formation and conflict*, and as a field of policy and practice constituted through *political thinking*. There is, in short, a significant task of political recovery and reinterpretation to be performed. It is a task that is not only valuable for its own sake – to further understanding of the rise of crime as a prime site of governance and its social effects. The careful and prior work of ideological clarification is also a precondition for any project which seeks to make good the pathologies of contemporary security governance – a necessary building block for what we have elsewhere termed ‘a better politics of crime’.⁵⁹ As Freeden reminds us: ‘Good evaluation and the prescription of valuable solutions are conditional on good observation and, no less, good interpretation’.⁶⁰

So what does this entail? How is such enquiry best undertaken, using what materials? In overall terms, it calls for the close analysis of ideological formations with a view to recovering and reappraising the main claims of each of them on issues pertinent to the criminal question, the ways in which they have influenced political responses to crime in recent decades, and the manner in which issues of crime and its control have impinged on different ideologies and shaped their recent fortunes and future prospects. Such analysis is guided by a number of methodological injunctions.

We must start by seeking to excavate ideologies and their crime-relevant claims *from the inside*. In the first instance, the analysis of ideologies has to suspend ideological judgement – its purpose is to reveal and decode, not to praise or dismiss, ideological formations. It consequently needs to commence with sympathetic readings that ask of respective ideologies: ‘*What has to hold* in order for this utterance to make sense/be true/be right for its producers and consumers?’.⁶¹ In other words, ‘We have to understand the assumptions contained in an ideology prior to appraising them’ (ibid.). In this regard the political evaluation of crime governance can usefully proceed in the manner of Quentin Skinner’s ‘historical hermeneutics’. With respect to the range of protagonists who assemble around crime control arenas and contests, it seeks to ascertain ‘what people are saying’ and ‘what they are doing in saying it’.⁶² By beginning here, with the patient task of description and reconstruction, we can advance understanding of crime control in ways not accomplished by two common tendencies in the literature on penal politics: one that deploys relevant terms – notably liberal and conservative – as if their meaning were somehow self-evident and their social and political effects well established;⁶³ another which treats ideologies as objects to be assailed and critiqued from the outside. Recent sociological and criminological analysis of the global dissemination and hegemony of neo-liberalism has been a marked case in point of this latter tendency.⁶⁴ Moreover, when such claims about neo-liberal doxa are challenged, this is typically done by reference to the institutional properties of different contexts of reception⁶⁵ not via close analysis of what neo-liberalism *means* in those contexts.

The political evaluation of crime control must also take heed of Freedman's injunction to study 'the ordinary and normal manifestations of concrete political thought in any given society, its patterns, its subtleties, its languages, and the processes it permeates'.⁶⁶ Ideologies are not simply the product of 'founding' authors and 'canonical' texts – important as these sources can sometimes be. Rather, ideologies are the result of *group activity* and are *group products* that are collectively produced and consumed. They cut across elite, professional and vernacular thinking. Ideologies are also action-guiding products. They make rational, rhetorical and emotional claims designed to 'speak to' the hopes and fears of specific audiences - thereby mobilizing support for particular visions of how societies should be ordered. As such, they have a complex relationship to organized political parties – including those parties that may bear their name. Ideologies can be produced within and outside parties, and can be used to advance or to challenge their projects and appeal. The analysis of crime control needs to keep an 'eye and ear' on this breadth of ideological production.⁶⁷ It has to be alive to the fact that ideological claims pertinent to crime are made by political parties, parliamentarians, policy-makers, think-tanks, campaign groups, editorialists and commentators, the police, criminal justice agencies, security companies, as well as by criminologists and political theorists. These actors are differently situated and resourced players in practices of naming crime and framing responses to it. The political evaluation of crime governance has to treat them as such and decode the meaning of their 'texts' accordingly. It thus has to attend closely to the production, circulation and reception of a wide array of verbal utterances, written tracts and visual imagery and display.

The third task of such evaluation is to combine descriptive reconstruction of ideological thinking with analysis that is contextual and appraisive. In this regard, Skinner emphasises that apprehending people's intentions – coming, that is, to an understanding of the meaning of what they said and what they meant by saying it – necessarily requires us to 'trace the relations between a given utterance' and the context into which it is entered.⁶⁸ 'The social context', Skinner maintains, 'figures as the ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally recognisable meanings it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate'.⁶⁹ This relationship between actor and context further underlines the significance of ideas in general – and ideologies in particular – in political analysis. For, as Colin Hay has argued, the way in which actors orientate themselves to, and operate within, contexts depends crucially on their *interpretation* of those contexts – on the descriptive and normative assessments they make of them.⁷⁰ 'Access to contexts is', as Hay puts it, 'mediated discursively',⁷¹ and to the extent that ideas/ideologies are the point of mediation between actor and context they exercise 'an independent role in the causation of political outcomes'.⁷² Given this, Hay argues, we require:

a political analysis rather more attuned and sensitive to ideational, perceptual and discursive factors. More specifically, it suggests the need to consider the dominant paradigms and frames of reference through which actors come to understand the contexts in which they

must act and, above all, the mechanisms and processes by which such paradigms emerge, become challenged and are ultimately replaced.⁷³

This contextual appraisal, we have argued, requires that we approach the study of crime governance in ways that attend to how relevant actors interpret the political and institutional settings they find themselves operating in (their possibilities, relations, the limits they place upon action); to the competing meanings-in-use of relevant political concepts – justice, order, liberty, authority, obligation, legitimacy, rights and so on; and to the interconnections between crime-related demands, rationalities and programmes and the wider space of ideological positions and contestation. It encourages us to understand the governance of crime as ‘something akin to a political contest based on competing and contingent narratives’.⁷⁴ Part of that appraisal also has to do with tracing the changing fate and fortunes of competing ideologies as they have engaged with the crime question since the 1970s and as questions of crime control have posed different kinds of challenges to them. As mentioned, questions of crime and order have been tied up with the rise of neo-liberalism, the faltering dominance of conservatism, the defensive postures of modern liberalism, and the recent travails of social democracy. The criminal question has been a rich resource for a range of xenophobic populist assaults on established systems of rule and ‘out-of-touch’ rulers. It has been a battleground for the emergence of feminism, identity politics and environmentalism as oppositional social and political movements. We have made no attempt here to expand in detail upon the content of any of these positions. Neither have we suggested any kind of comprehensive list. If the map of ideologies that currently bear upon questions of crime, harm, punishment and control across the world is a shifting and unstable one, this seems to us all the more reason to encourage a sustained activity oriented towards hermeneutic readings of their relations and trajectories.

Crime forms a resonant site of conflict in today’s world. Even in the seemingly anti-political public culture of the rich countries of the consumerist West, the alignments and divisions provoked by questions of crime and punishment are highly indicative as clues to the nature of our fears, attachments and aspirations. Elsewhere, the claim that crime control has been absorbed into a post-ideological blur seems scarcely credible. For countries emerging from dictatorship or civil conflict visions of ordering and strategies for defining and preventing harm stand close to the core of what is at stake in naming and claiming the future. In many parts of the world visions of crime and control are pivotal in the struggles between (residual?) nationalist sentiments and (emergent?) cosmopolitan visions, or between tradition and modernity, theism and secularism, and so on. In each of these respects, for reasons we have tried to articulate, our understanding of why crime matters, and what is at stake when it is debated and governed, would be hugely enriched by paying much closer attention to its entanglement with ideological conflict.

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Notes

¹ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 241.

² O'Malley, 'Volatile and Contradictory Punishment'.

³ Garland, *The Culture of Control*.

⁴ Ericson, *Crime in an Insecure World*.

⁵ Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*.

⁶ Lacey, *The Prisoners' Dilemma*.

⁷ Miller, *The Perils of Federalism*; see also Barker, *The Politics of Imprisonment*; Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*.

⁸ Simon, *Governing through Crime*.

⁹ Tonry, 'Determinants of Penal Policies'.

¹⁰ Loader and Sparks, *Public Criminology?*

¹¹ This paper is the latest iteration of a long-term project concerned with different dimensions of the relationship between crime control and democratic politics. The first strand of work on this project culminated in our book *Public Criminology?*. The chapter aims to build a theoretical and methodological platform for the next stage of our research which we anticipate will result in a monograph with the working title of *Crime Control and Political Ideologies*.

¹² Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*.

¹³ Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, ch. 1.

¹⁴ Runciman, *Politics*.

¹⁵ Mair, *Ruling the Void*.

¹⁶ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 18.

¹⁷ On the fraught relationship that neo-liberals have with democracy, see Biebricher, *Neoliberalism and Democracy*.

¹⁸ Roberts, *The Logic of Discipline*, 4.

¹⁹ Ramsay *The Insecurity State*, ch. 10; see also Boutellier, *The Safety Utopia*.

²⁰ Simon, *Governing through Crime*.

²¹ Simon, *Governing through Crime*, 10.

²² Simon, *Governing through Crime*, 16.

²³ Roberts et al., *Penal Populism and Public Opinion*.

²⁴ Pettitt, 'Is Criminal Justice Politically Feasible?'.

²⁵ Lacey, *The Prisoners' Dilemma*.

²⁶ e.g., Neyroud and Weisburd, *Police Science: Towards a New Paradigm*.

²⁷ Sherman, 'Evidence and Liberty'.

²⁸ cf. Loader, 'Is it NICE?'; Loader and Sparks *Public Criminology?*, ch. 4.

²⁹ Roberts, *The Logic of Discipline*.

³⁰ Roberts, *The Logic of Discipline* ch. 8.

³¹ Runciman, *Politics*, 67.

³² Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 52-67.

³³ see Eagleton, *Ideology*; Freeden, *Ideology*.

³⁴ Freeden 2013a: 2).

³⁵ Freeden 1996: 3; see also 2013a: 1)

³⁶ Freeden, *Ideology*, 55.

³⁷ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 18.

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- ³⁸ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 18.
- ³⁹ Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', 7.
- ⁴⁰ Roberts, *The Logic of Discipline*, 136.
- ⁴¹ cf. Windlesham, *Politics, Punishment and Populism*.
- ⁴² Freeden, 'Thinking Politically and Thinking about Politics', 211.
- ⁴³ Freeden, *Ideology*, 32.
- ⁴⁴ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 48.
- ⁴⁵ Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', 9. Efforts to 'apply' Freeden's work to particular domains of public policy have, surprisingly, been rather few and far between – though see Matthijs, *Ideas and Economic Crises in Britain from Attlee to Blair*, and Freeden's early essay, 'The Stranger at the Feast'. It may be that future work along these lines will have to pay careful attention to 'peripheral' concepts, as the hinge between an ideology's core commitments and its advocates' attempts to 'speak to' particular policy questions.
- ⁴⁶ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*.
- ⁴⁷ Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking*.
- ⁴⁸ Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking*, 2.
- ⁴⁹ Freeden, 'Editorial', 2
- ⁵⁰ Freeden, 'Editorial'.
- ⁵¹ One will struggle in vain to find a fair-minded answer to this latter question in contemporary criminology – by which we mean an account of conservatism that is recognisable to a conservative (though see, Wright and DeLisi, *Conservative Criminology*). Given that conservatism has a morphological structure that 'lends itself' to having resonant things to say about crime and punishment, and that it has been such an emotionally powerful force in the crime politics of recent decades, this is a serious omission.
- ⁵² Shklar, 'Liberalism of Fear'.
- ⁵³ Freeden uses the designation 'thin' to refer to ideologies of restricted morphology that are unable or not designed to address the full range of political questions that societies have to resolve. Freeden, *Ideology*, 98-100.
- ⁵⁴ Young, 'Thinking Seriously about Crime'; Einstadter and Henry, *Criminological Theory*.
- ⁵⁵ Cohen, *Against Criminology*, 136.
- ⁵⁶ Cohen, 'Crime and Politics'.
- ⁵⁷ Cohen, *Visions of Social Control*, 197.
- ⁵⁸ Scheingold, 'Constructing the New Political Criminology'; see also Carlen, *Jigsaw*.
- ⁵⁹ Loader and Sparks, *Public Criminology?*, ch. 5.
- ⁶⁰ Freeden, *Ideology*, 126.
- ⁶¹ Freeden *Ideology*, 71; emphasis in original.
- ⁶² Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 82.
- ⁶³ e.g., Tonry, 'Remodeling American Sentencing'.
- ⁶⁴ Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor and Prisons of Poverty*; Bell, *Criminal Justice and Neoliberalism*.
- ⁶⁵ Lacey, 'Why Globalisation doesn't spell Convergence'.
- ⁶⁶ Freeden, 'Thinking Politically and Thinking about Politics', 197.
- ⁶⁷ Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', 2.
- ⁶⁸ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 87.
- ⁶⁹ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 87.

⁷⁰ Hay, *Political Analysis*, 209-15.

⁷¹ Hay, *Political Analysis*, 211.

⁷² Hay, *Political Analysis*, 210.

⁷³ Hay, *Political Analysis*, 214.

⁷⁴ Bevir, *A Theory of Governance*, 27.