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## **TOWARDS A UTOPIAN CRIMINOLOGY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter identifies the commitment to the development of practical projects concerned with improving or reforming society by eradicating (or at least reducing) crime as a key theme running throughout the history of criminology. This is despite the sometimes formal claims amongst criminologists to value-neutrality and the objective social ‘scientific’ nature of the discipline. At the heart of criminology, it is argued, lies an implicit vision of ‘the good society’. However, within a contemporary climate at best discouraging radical reimaginings of the social order and, at worst, warning of their inherent dangerousness, such visions have typically been repressed. The result has been an emphasis on ‘tinkering at the edges’ or ‘piecemeal reforms’, which leave underlying broader structural inequalities in which issues of crime and justice are located, intact. Despite increasing calls (from both social scientists in general, and criminologists in particular) for the development of an ‘emancipatory social science’ (Wright, 2007; 2010) and ‘a better politics of crime and its control... under which a more hopeful and more richly democratic way of approaching questions of crime and justice might be developed’ (Loader and Sparks 2012, p. 14), there has, as yet, been little guidance as to how such improved social sciences are to be realised. It is in response to this absence that the development of a ‘utopian method’ as proposed by Ruth Levitas (2005; 2007a; 2008) is advanced as a means of developing an explicitly normative and speculative

form of criminology. It is argued that, via the three aspects to this method identified by Levitas (*archaeology, architecture and ontology*), the implicit visions of the good society inhering in different criminological theories can not only be rendered explicit, but, crucially, can be subjected to normative evaluation. Moreover, in so doing, it is anticipated, a genuinely ‘utopian criminology’ can be realised.

## CRIMINOLOGY AND THE ‘GOOD SOCIETY’

### **Describing criminology as a ‘utopian’ project**

From its roots, the discipline of criminology can, arguably, be considered an essentially ‘utopian’, project. To describe criminology thus immediately raises questions as to what, precisely, this means. The difficulties of defining the term ‘utopia’ are well-documented (see, for example, Levitas, 1979; 1990; Sargent, 1982a, 1994). ‘Utopia’ invokes ideas of both perfection and impossibilism, reflecting Thomas More’s original introduction of the term as a pun, positing an ambiguity between *eutopia*, (‘good place’) and *outopia*, (‘no place’) (Levitas, 1990, p. 2). The political uses to which the term has been put have served to further muddy the waters of its definition, the adjective ‘utopian’ typically being used to *either* reinforce the desirability of a particular phenomenon *or* denigrate it as impossible, naïve and, at times, inherently dangerous.

Notwithstanding such difficulties, conventionally ‘utopia’ can be considered an outline of an ideal and/or perfectly organised society (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989), currently non-existent (Sargent, 1982a, p. 685), and

considered desirable (Levitas, 1979, p. 22; see also Carey, 1999, p. xi).<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, to say that criminology may be considered an ultimately ‘utopian’ project, is to posit a fundamental commitment within criminology to conceptualising and ultimately seeking to realise the ‘good’ (or at least ‘better’) society.

### **Interpreting the criminological project**

#### *Criminology as ‘science’*

Undoubtedly, many of those working within the field of criminology (and the social sciences more generally) would reject such a characterisation of criminology’s project, maintaining their own formal commitment to value-neutrality and objective social ‘science’ (see Loader and Sparks, 2011a, p. 29-30). Reflecting the discipline’s roots in a positivist project seeking to develop a ‘an exact and scientific method for the study of crime, a technical means of resolving the crime problem’ (Garland, 1985, p. 110) they see the work of criminology (or at least their own work as criminologists) closer to the production of rational, evidence-based knowledge through methods developed from the natural sciences than to the production of normative ideals (Williams, 1984; Loader, 1998; Williams and Arrigo, 2006, p. 11-12).

As Walters notes:

[c]riminology’s origins reveal that it has been an intellectual enterprise largely dominated by a scientific causation state defined crime for the purposes of developing a more efficient crime control apparatus ([2007] 2011, p. 19).

Given that criminology has historically always enjoyed a diverse following, with disciples drawn from a spectrum of disciplines reflecting its status as a 'rendezvous discipline' (Downes, n.d. cited Garland and Sparks, 2000, p. 193), it may be considered unsurprising that there are those who advocate more or less scientific conceptualisations of its project. Consequently, questions may be raised as to whether one can simply identify the discipline of criminology (if, indeed, it can be considered a discipline in the first place),<sup>2</sup> as uniformly committed to a 'utopian' project.

Moreover, as will be discussed in further detail in the course of this chapter, there may clearly be good reasons for the positioning of criminology as an objective, scientific discipline, particularly in the contemporary climate. However, it remains the case that criminology itself can be considered fundamentally committed to imagining (and ultimately, to realising) the 'good society', whether its proponents wish to overtly acknowledge this or not.

#### *Criminology as a reformist project*

The birth of criminology as a distinct field of study is usually associated with the emergence of the so-called 'positivist' school towards the end of the nineteenth century, which saw methods of the physical sciences translated into frameworks for studying crime and criminality (Sylvester, 1975: 232-4; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 48; Garland, 2002). However, its origins are typically located in the earlier concerns of 'classical' thinkers such as Beccaria, Bentham and Howard to limit the arbitrary use of state

power. Central to their project was the development of a formal, objective system of justice, which would treat everybody equally and thereby preserve the social order (see Jeffery, 1959, p. 4; White and Haines, 2000, Chapter 2; Garland, 2002). Reflecting this, criminology has traditionally combined a theoretical interest in crime and its control with a practical project concerned to develop policies to address crime and/or harm (see, for example, Jeffery, 1959, p.7; Sylvester, 1975; Garland, 1985; 2002; Loader and Sparks, 2011a).

Indeed, a number of commentators have highlighted a key theme running throughout criminology since its inception has been a commitment to the development of practical projects concerned with improving or reforming society by eradicating (or at least reducing) crime (see Loader, 1998, p. 198-9; White and Haines, 2000, p. 127; Loader and Sparks, 2011a, p. 6). For example, White and Haines note that underlying criminology's project is always the question: '[w]hat kind of society do we want and why?' (2000, p. 217), which 'implies that, in doing what we do, there is, or ought to be, a vision of an ideal world towards which we can direct our efforts' (ibid.).

### **Identifying criminological utopias**

The articulation of this utopian impulse is perhaps most readily discernible amongst exponents of critical or radical criminology (see Walton, 1998). Reflecting the impulse within criminology more generally to couple a theoretical interest in crime with a practical project concerned with reducing or, ideally, eradicating it, critical criminology is perhaps most overtly

associated with a normative commitment to realising the ‘good society’ (see, for example, Barton et al., [2007] 2011, p. 210-11). Specifically, a number of proponents have identified the means for eradicating crime with the introduction of a radical social order: typically the replacement of capitalism with socialism (for example, Taylor et al., 1975a; Pearce, 1976; Quinney, 1977). In so doing, they also identify the project of criminology as presenting a form of radical praxis through which criminologists can ‘find ways of changing the world whilst investigating it’ (Taylor et al., 1975b, p. 24).

Whilst perhaps less overt in its commitment to a particular vision of an alternative ‘good’ or ‘better’ society towards which we should strive, a similar utopian impulse is, nonetheless, observable within all strands of criminology. At its most basic level, criminology has historically shared an intimate relationship with the criminal justice system, assuming the problem of crime and its effective solution, as the proper focus of its research.

Implicit within this positioning, however, lies a particular interpretation of crime, not simply as an infraction of criminal law, but as a specific form of social problem in need of attention (Garland, 1985, p. 127; Garland and Sparks, 2000, p. 194). Assuming a generally consensual social order, reflected in the conception of crime as a violation of social mores (see Chambliss, 1976), the focus within criminology has historically been to explain why individuals deviate from (or, more recently, conform to) this order.

Accordingly, the various divergent and often competing accounts as to the causes of crime which have contoured the history of criminology, have arguably informed concomitant projects concerned with addressing the problem of crime (see Loader and Sparks, 2011a, Introduction).

Consequently, the particular ‘solutions’ to crime offered have typically reflected the causes of crime identified by criminological theories.

For example, where the early positivist school of criminology identified crime as resulting from pathological ‘criminal types’ distinct from the ‘normal’ population, the solution to the crime problem was sought in either treatment or, where this proved impossible, containment of criminals to ensure public protection (see Garland, 1985; White and Haines, 2000, p. 36-55). However, as more sociological aetiologies of crime gained popularity during the latter half of the twentieth century, the view of criminal behaviour ‘shifted easily from being pathological to being simply “dysfunctional”’ (Sylvester, 1975, p. 236). With it, the focus for remedying crime also shifted from individual ‘treatments’ to broader social and political welfare reforms (Garland and Sparks, 2000, p. 195). More recently, the emergence of rational choice, routine activity, and situational crime prevention theories have turned such accounts on their head by focussing on law abidance rather than deviance (see Loader and Sparks, 2011a, p. 101-8 for a discussion of these). Nonetheless, even their project arguably remains motivated by a desire to understand crime and deviance in order to design more effective measures to prevent and reduce it.

Therefore, underlying all such criminological theorising arguably remains an implicit view of a consensual social order with crime understood in one of two ways: either as reflecting a deviation from the social order, to be explained and, ultimately, repaired or extinguished; or as presenting an obstacle to that social order to be understood and, subsequently, prevented as far as possible (see Garland, 1985, p. 127). Thus, at the heart of criminology, it is maintained, can be found an implicit commitment to envisioning ‘the good society’, albeit differently articulated and envisioned according to the accounts of crime postulated by different criminological theories.

From this perspective, denials of the utopian impulse within criminology, and emphasis on its objective, social scientific nature may be seen as indicative of the contemporary academic culture and broader social climate in which criminological knowledge is produced, rather than the nature of the discipline itself. As Loader and Sparks argue:

[A]ny discussion about the criminal question encodes in miniature a set of claims about the nature of the good society, and any attempt to answer it – however apparently ‘dry’, technical, or limited in scope – carries and projects a possible world, a desirable state of affairs that a political or criminological author wishes to recover, preserve, or usher into existence (2011a, p. 123).

The resistance to the characterisation of criminology as an essentially normative, political and utopian project evident among some contemporary

criminologists should therefore be located within a contemporary climate which at best discourages, and at worst actively represses it (see Young, 1992, p. 436; Boutellier, 2004, p. 7).

## CRIMINOLOGY IN DYSTOPIAN TIMES

In the contemporary climate there may clearly be good reasons for seeking a positioning of criminology as an objective, scientific discipline. These include: social and political factors discouraging overt normativity within the social sciences; institutional and funding dictates that influence what is researched by criminologists and how (see Bottoms, 1987; Loader, 1998; Walters, [2007] 2011); a decline of grand narratives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; and accompanying fear of totalising visions for social reform (see Young, 2011, Chapter 9). Within such a climate, even the term 'utopia' has increasingly come to be regarded with suspicion (Boutellier, 2004, p. 7).

The root of suspicion may, to some extent, be located in a particular definition which has equated 'utopia' with the design and implementation of a blueprint for realising a proposed good society (see Davis, 1981, p. 13-14; Levitas, 1990, p. 1; Kumar, 1991, p. 19; Jacoby, 2005), reflecting, perhaps, ambiguity as to whether Thomas More's original *Utopia* was intended as a serious proposal for the instantiation of the 'good society' (Sargent, 1975, p. 90; Carey, 1999, p. 38-9).

It is this definition and critique of the idea of utopia as a subjective blueprint concerned with the imposition of the good society (in contrast with rational, scientific means of social improvement) that has found particular currency in the social sciences with the philosophy of Karl Popper. For Popper, utopia is inherently dangerous, necessarily leading to totalitarianism (see Popper, 1986; see also Freeman, 1975; Sargent, 1982b; Sargisson, 2007). He denies that decisions about ultimate ends or ideal societies can be reached by '*purely* rational or scientific means' (Popper, 1986, p. 6), arguing they necessarily reflect particular subjective judgements as to what is good or desirable. Consequently, the proponent of any given picture of the good society must 'win over, or else crush, his [*sic*] Utopianist competitors who do not share his own Utopian aims' (ibid.). Popper (1986) thus contrasts the inherently 'violent' holistic utopia with rational, scientific, piecemeal social reform (see also Freeman, 1975; Gray, 2008).

This perception of utopia as the construction of a blueprint and imposition of particular vision of the good society has been highly influential (Sargent 1982b; Sargisson, 2007, p. 29). It is reflected by a number of definitions equating 'utopia' not simply with impossibilism, but more explicitly with the dangers of holistic social planning. Increasingly perceived as synonymous with totalitarianism (Freeman, 1975) and bolstered by the advent of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes of the twentieth century (see Sargent, 1982b; Sargisson, 2007; Levitas, 2007a), 'utopia' is seen to 'carry within it its own potential for crushing or limiting human life' (Carey, 1999, p. xi). Consequently, it has assumed that utopia is something to be feared:

that the good place is *necessarily* no place because it necessitates the use of force to bring it into being.

Within such a climate, radical reimaginings of the social order have been, at best, discouraged as hopelessly idealistic and, at worst, actively repressed as inherently dangerous and totalitarian (Boutellier, 2004, p. 7-8). By contrast, positivistic 'science' and 'abstract empiricism' (Young, 2011) has been pronounced the refuge for social research, and the guardian of society against the implementation of tyrannical dystopian ideals in the name of social improvement and perfection. As a result, there has been increasing detachment within social sciences in general, and criminology in particular, from the fundamental normative and political questions that lie at the heart of these disciplines.

The consequence of such a climate has been an emphasis amongst social scientists on the development of 'piecemeal reforms', which serve to disconnect social problems from the location in larger social structural systems and leave the underlying structural inequalities precipitating these problems unaddressed (Barton et al. [2007] 2011, p.2). This is arguably reflected in the growth of administrative criminology and 'crime science', concerned with 'tinkering at the edges' of society and 'managing' the problem of crime, rather than advancing holistic, wholesale social reform (Walters, [2007] 2011, p. 21; see also Boutellier, 2004, Chapter 1).

A result of this emphasis on discrete, abstracted social improvements has, arguably, been the increasing detachment of the discipline of criminology from larger, normative questions and political debate regarding social justice. Instead, criminology is increasingly cast as a distinct field of study, detached from other areas of social science (see Garland, 2002; Williams and Arrigo, 2006; Loader and Sparks, 2011a, Chapter 1).

The danger of this detachment of criminology from broader social concerns and more joined-up thinking in concert with other social sciences, is that, by failing to engage in normative and political debate about the social order as a whole, criminology necessarily reverts to becoming an adjunct of the criminal justice system (see Walters, [2007] 2011), providing as Garland terms it, a 'scientific alibi' for exercises of state power and control (1992, p. 404-5). By repressing its utopianism and abstracting the problem of crime from its broader social and political location, criminology cannot hope to understand its causes and hence eradicate or at least significantly reduce crime. Rather, it is faced with a crime problem that will not dissipate, and a concomitant growth of pessimistic criminologies focussed purely on 'correctionalism', containing the crime problem, and improving the criminal justice system (see Williams, 1984, p. 101-2; Walton, 1998, p. 9).

#### TOWARDS A UTOPIAN CRIMINOLOGY

It is in reaction to this contemporary state of affairs that calls for a revived, explicitly utopian criminology have developed amongst some criminologists (see, for example, Lippens, 1995; Loader, 1998; Loader and Sparks, 2011a;

2011b; 2012). Lamenting the loss of the ‘criminological imagination’ (Williams, 1984; Barton et al., [2007] 2011; Young, 2011) whilst also demanding the revival of a more normative, ‘utopian’ criminology (Loader, 1998; Zedner, 2007; 2011; Loader and Sparks, 2011a; 2011b; 2012), the public role of criminology in engaging in transformative politics is emerging high on the criminological agenda. Central to such petitions is a rejection of self-referential, technical criminology focussing on crime as a discrete social problem, abstracted from its location in broader social and political structures, and an appeal to a more holistic, ‘joined-up’ engagement with crime and the wider social order (see Young, 2011; Loader and Sparks, 2012).

Reflecting this, for example, Loader and Sparks (drawing on both Locke and Swift and White’s (2008) use of the term) introduce the idea of the criminologist as ‘democratic under-labourer’ whose role it is to challenge the existing social arrangements and received wisdom about crime:

The task here is to sketch and present what Rawls (2001) calls ‘realistic utopias’ – proposals for remaking and re-imagining the institutional arrangements for fostering security and delivering justice that connect with, and seek to creatively reconstruct, the meanings of current social practices and beliefs in ways that take us beyond the mental and institutional structures of the present (Loader and Sparks, 2011a, p. 131).

However, despite increasing calls amongst social scientists for the development of an 'emancipatory social science' (Wright, 2007; 2010) and 'more hopeful and richly democratic way of approaching questions of crime and justice' (Loader and Sparks, 2012, p. 14), questions arise as to how such an emancipatory social science in general, and a more hopeful criminology in particular, might be developed. Some tentative suggestions are provided by Loader and Sparks, who call for a renewed dialogue between criminology and political theory. They emphasise

a need to locate criminologists and criminology within public contests to 'name' the crime problem and fashion solutions to it; to grasp the implied or express models of motivation, intervention and change that have characterised and continue to animate different varieties of criminological thinking (Loader and Sparks, 2012, p. 18).

Through so doing, they anticipate the possibility

to offer a diagnosis and critique of the visions of order and governance embedded in actually existing practices of crime control (to establish, as it were, a *political* frame of evaluation) and to sketch viable democratic egalitarian alternatives which can help unfreeze the present and guide the making and imagining of alternative futures' (ibid., p. 25).

However, such suggestions are, as yet, somewhat underdeveloped requiring further elaboration and refinement to really offer a means of reviving a discipline which has often discouraged or repressed such articulations. It is particularly difficult when, living under the shadow of failed utopian

experiments and the suspicion of the danger of totalitarianism which comes with grand narratives of social reform, there has been a tendency for social sciences to retreat into the negative realm of criticism or ‘professional pessimism’ (Zedner, 2011, p. 273) without an accompanying positive realm of reconstruction (Loader, 1998, p. 204; Zedner, 2007, p. 269-70; see also Loader and Sparks, 2012, p. 13-14).

Simply calling for a more normative, ‘public criminology’ (Loader and Sparks, 2011a) or ‘criminological imagination’ will not readily banish such scepticism or suspicion, though the outline of central principles informing such a criminology is a necessary and important starting point (see Loader and Sparks, 2012). Neither will it suddenly reform an academic terrain which has been both crafted by and remains embedded within a social and cultural climate which represses explicit claims to social dreaming.

However, the dissatisfaction with contemporary criminology and the demand for a more politically engaged and overtly normative discipline, along with tentative attempts to embody such an approach, at least indicates a desire for something better. Moreover, and more importantly, as such calls gain momentum across the social sciences, they suggest the time is perhaps ripe for fostering an explicitly ‘utopian’ criminology (see Lippens, 1995; see also Young, 2011, p. 224-5).

It is as a means of addressing this problem that the ‘utopian method’ devised by Ruth Levitas is advanced as a means of reawakening the criminological

imagination and of developing an explicitly normative and speculative form of criminology.

## REVIVING THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

### **The emergence of utopia as method**

Levitas first introduced the idea of utopia as method in a critique of contemporary social policy for its propensity to focus on piecemeal reforms to address social problems rather than to consider them holistically within broader social processes (Levitas, 2001). She identified two methods by which social policy might engage with contemporary social problems and seek their solution: the method of extrapolation and the method of utopia. The method of extrapolation, presenting piecemeal reform as the means of solving social problems,

is concerned with what is probable, possible, and possibly desirable, moving in small steps from where we are. It remains rooted in the present, and tends to accept as given the major contours of present society, such as the structures of global capitalism, the dominance of paid work, the inequalities of the market. It is, therefore, always as much (re)capitulation as projection and extrapolation (Levitas, 2001, p. 450).

The method of utopia, by contrast, is more radical. It ‘not only allows but enjoins us to think first about where we want to be, and then about how we might get there – depending of course on who ‘we’ are’ (ibid.).

Underlying most political programmes, Levitas argues, lie ‘implicit models of a good society, implicit utopias’ (2001, p. 458) and, inasmuch as ‘utopias are alternative holistic models of society, they encourage us to think about the interrelationships of social processes’ (ibid., p. 450). By encouraging us to consider society holistically, both in terms of how it is now and how it might be in future, the function of the utopian method in contrast to that of extrapolation, it is argued, lies in fostering ‘joined-up’ thinking about contemporary social problems and the means to their solution. In so doing, it also reveals ‘the limitations of current policy and the framework within which future plans are constructed and constrained’ (ibid., p. 463).

This contrast between extrapolation and utopia as method for approaching social reform resonates with Popper’s distinction between holistic, utopian, social reform and scientific, rational, piecemeal reform. It also echoes the demands of those criminologists calling for a normative, utopian criminology in contrast to a technical, administrative discipline. However, where Popper characterised the holism of utopia as inherently dangerous and to be resisted at all costs, Levitas emphasises its necessity for effecting real social improvement (2001, p. 450).

### **Utopia as method in the contemporary context**

Although Levitas presents the most detailed account of the utopian method to date (see Levitas, 2001; 2005; 2007a; 2007b; 2008)<sup>3</sup>, its proposition as both an approach to thinking about utopia and a tool for analysing contemporary expressions of desire, is situated within a broader movement

towards considering utopia as a method. A more detailed elaboration of the utopian method presented by Levitas (see Levitas, 2007a) was part of a broader collection examining utopia as both method and vision (see Moylan and Baccolini, 2007). Within this volume, the majority of the contributors interpret method either in terms of their own approach to researching utopia, or identify the way in which utopias present a critical reflection on the contemporary social world as it is and as it might be, highlighting the 'method' or function of utopias. Levitas' contribution stands out as an attempt to move beyond the static conception of utopia as a reflection of/on reality (Suvin, 1979, p. 9 cited Varsam, 2003, p. 207), to present the idea of utopia as itself a means for engaging with and examining the contemporary social world.

More recent support for Levitas' use of the idea of utopia as a method is found in the work of Frederic Jameson who highlights the decline of holistic theorising about social improvement following the 'perverse' 'last gasp of a properly Utopian vision' underpinning contemporary neoliberalism and specifically the emphasis on the free-market as the source of the good society (Jameson, 2010, p. 412). Given the totalising tendency of free-market fundamentalism, Jameson argues the construction of radical alternatives became compromised with utopianism restricted to a rejection of free-market globalisation (ibid., p. 412-13). It is within this context that the idea of the utopian method is identified as an imperative means of enabling

a decipherment and a reading of Utopian clues and traces in the landscape of the real; a theorization and interpretation of unconscious Utopian investments in realities large or small, which may in themselves be far from Utopian in their actuality (ibid., p. 415).

Premised on the idea ‘that the most noxious phenomena can serve as the repository and hiding place for all kinds of unsuspecting wish-fulfillments and Utopian gratifications’ (Jameson, 2010, p. 415-16), both Levitas and Jameson consider utopia a method for teasing out fuller pictures of the assumptions and implications underlying particular cultural phenomena in order to subject them to critical reflection and subsequently engage in praxis (ibid., p. 433-4).

### **Understanding the utopian method**

In this way, proposed as a form of ‘speculative sociology’ (Levitas 2005), the utopian method is devised as a means of teasing out and rendering explicit the vision of the good society underlying social theories and political projects. Described as ‘the imaginary reconstitution of society: the construction or constitution of society as it is, as it might be, as it might be hoped for or feared’ (Levitas, 2007a, p. 47), this method is based on the presumption that social theories and political projects are fundamentally committed to normative principles, reflecting an implicit vision of the ‘good society’, whilst recognising that the holistic expression of such visions may be repressed. Hence, it facilitates the construction of holistic utopias in otherwise ‘fragmentary, partial, elusive, episodic’ (ibid., p. 53-4) expressions of desire for the ‘good society’, facilitating their exposure to

critical evaluation. In so doing, the method is also anticipated as a means of moving beyond abstract political theory and allowing a consideration of the practical implications of such abstract ideas in contemporary reality.

Identifying three aspects: *archaeology*, *architecture* and *ontology*, the utopian method provides a framework for considering the values implicit within social theories and political programmes; their implications for both the institutional organisation of society; and assumptions regarding the type of people presumed to inhabit, or necessitated by, such a society.

### *Archaeology*

As an archaeological approach, the utopian method is 'based on a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as a whole something of which only fragments are available' (Levitas, 2007a, p. 61). It 'involves digging around in speeches and policy documents, and piecing together actions, statements and silences into something resembling a coherent whole' (Levitas, 2005). Taking as a starting point the notion that social theories and political programmes are essentially committed to an implicit vision of the good society, the utopian method as archaeology involves unearthing this vision and considering its implications as a holistic expression of a desired alternative to the contemporary social order. It also 'involves filling in some of the bits that are missing, or interpolating those elements about which there is significant silence' (Levitas, 2007a, p. 62) within particular political programmes or social theories.

The use of the utopian method archaeologically is demonstrated through the example of Levitas' own work on both the New Right and on New Labour to reveal the contradictions implicit in those respective political projects (2007a, p. 62). Levitas argues that despite a rhetoric emphasising the minimal state, freedom and responsibility, '[n]eo-liberalism repressed the fact that the so-called free market is a social construct embedded in laws and assumptions about property rights, as well as its needs to enforce social order' (ibid.). Similarly, a 'deconstruction' of New Labour's approach to social exclusion revealed the extent to which its emphasis on the solution to social exclusion as increasing participation in the paid labour market, overlooked the importance of unpaid labour in maintaining the contemporary market, and the potential disastrous consequences of such neglect (ibid., p. 62-3). Despite its commitment to establishing a meritocratic society, Levitas suggests that embedded within this rhetoric is a particular vision of meritocracy according to which 'talent plus work equals merit' (ibid., p. 63). Rather than fostering the social cohesion intended, she argues, this ideology serves to legitimate inequalities between socioeconomic groups as 'deserved' which would 'fuel resentment and conflict' (ibid.)

### *Architecture*

As a form of architecture, the utopian method considers the type of society aspired to and the means by which it can be achieved implicit within a given social theory or programme (Levitas, 2007a, p. 64). This use reflects the perhaps more conventional definition of utopia as a holistic outline of a

society, not currently in existence, but considered (from the standpoint of its advocates, at least), to be desirable (see Levitas, 2005).

Considering the utopian method as architecture, therefore, involves considering the practical institutional implications implied by a particular expression of desire contained within a given political programme or social theory. It calls for consideration of the potential means for realising the good society intended, asking us how society would have to be organised to fulfil the desired society aimed at and calling for a critical consideration of this.

### *Ontology*

In ontological mode, the utopian method concerns ‘the constitution of the selves that inhabit [the good society], and their structures of feeling’ (Levitas, 2005). As ontology, the utopian method examines the type of people presumed or required to occupy a given good society. On further elaboration Levitas explains ‘the ontological mode is concerned precisely with the selves that inhabit utopia, or that utopia needs to allow’ (2008, p. 25).

The ontological aspect of the utopian method highlights the different ontologies that may be implied by different imaginary reconstitutions of society and provides a useful framework for considering the implications of a particular outline of the good society underlying a particular social theory or political programme. This also raises questions regarding the implications

of a particular vision of the good society for individual freedom and, subsequently, the desirability of a given vision of the good society.

### **Joined-up thinking and educating desire**

‘Analytically separable from one another but... also intertwined’ (Levitas, 2008, p. 25), together these three aspects of *archaeology*, *architecture*, and *ontology* reflect an approach to representing holistic accounts of the implicit good society underlying contemporary expressions of desire .

Central to Levitas’ project is the need to rescue ‘utopia’ from its contemporary association with totalitarianism. That all utopias seek the dissolution of all conflict or the imposition of perfection is neither incontestable nor uncontested, with definitions of utopia as either blueprint or necessarily totalitarian called into question (see, for example, Sargent, 1982b; 2003, p. 266; 2006, p. 12-13; Sargisson, 2007, p. 29). Indeed, it is suggested that such associations fundamentally misunderstand the concept of utopia and its relationship to totalitarianism. As Levitas has argued: ‘the problem of totalitarianism is exactly that: a problem of totalitarianism, not one of utopianism’ (2005, p. 3).

A perhaps more common and useful definition (for the purposes of both understanding the discipline of criminology as an essentially utopian project and for subsequently establishing a utopian methodology) identifies utopia with a particular literary genre (see, for example, Davis, 1981; Sargent, 1982a; 1988; 1994; 2003; Kumar, 1987; 1991; Moylan, 2000, Chapter 3).

From this perspective, 'utopia' as a literary form has largely been concerned with the holistic presentation of an alternative social order, typically interpreted as a 'critical commentary on the arrangements of society' (Kumar, 1991, p. 87-8). It thus constitutes 'primarily a vehicle of social and political speculation rather than an exercise of the literary imagination in and for itself' (ibid., p. 24). This is perhaps particularly so in contemporary society where, increasingly, alternative forms of cultural expression offer new ways of expressing 'utopia'.<sup>4</sup>

Pivotal to 'utopia' on this interpretation, is the creation of a space in which 'the education of desire' (Abensour, 1973 cited Thompson, 1976, p. 97) can take place. Through the presentation of alternative forms of society, it is argued, utopias present 'a determinate type of praxis' (Jameson, 1977, p. 6; see also Young, 1992, p. 428):

Utopia... opens the way to revolution, to radical social change, not by the narratives and images it generates but rather by the creative and critical praxis of containing the unfreedom of the present in its imaginary machine, thus producing the possibility, not the actuality, of the desired historical transformation (Moylan, 2000, p. 142).

By enjoining us to think holistically about the underlying principles and practical implications of a given political or theoretical position, the utopian method facilitates the so-called 'education of desire' noted as central to the literary utopia's functioning (see Levitas, 2005; 2007a). This 'is not the same as 'a moral education' towards a given end: it is, rather, to open a way

to aspiration, to “teach desire to desire, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way” (Abensour, 1973 cited Thompson, 1976, p. 97).

Moving beyond an account of such programmes as projects of piecemeal reform, it encourages a broader evaluation of their wider implications, requiring ‘judgment, not simply about the attractiveness of such abstract values as freedom, justice, inclusion, equality, but about how these might actually be played out in institutional form’ (Levitas, 2007a, p. 57).

It is this understanding of ‘utopia’, that can be seen as lying at the heart of contemporary calls to reignite the ‘criminological imagination’ and engage in a more explicitly speculative, speculative criminology. Indeed, central to these calls is a disciplinary ‘humility’ in criminology’s understanding of its relationship to public policy. The view of criminology as having the capacity to ‘control’ or ‘design out’ crime is rejected and the proximity of criminology to state definitions of crime and institutions of power, distanced, such that it

does not give up on the hope of a qualitatively better life, a life of greater fairness and less avoidable suffering. It does, however, abandon a certain kind of modernist hope – the hope that criminological knowledge can engineer outcomes, and political discussion, trump the ill-informed concerns and perspectives of others (Loader and Sparks, 2011a, p. 131).

Arguably, the utopian method can be considered a return to Sargent's definition of utopia as 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail' (Sargent, 1994, p. 9). By teasing out a holistic account of utopia, the utopian method presents an argument for returning a sense of closure to utopia in a context where expressions of desire for the good society are often vague and frequently repressed. At the same time, the development of this method is anticipated as a more productive means for realising the potential of utopia for effecting social improvement and subjecting both contemporary society and its concomitant social theories and political programmes to critical scrutiny. Levitas argues:

The strength of... the utopian method is precisely that it deals with the concrete instantiation of values, enabling a level of real exploration and judgment. Without a certain element of closure, specificity, commitment, and literalism about what would actually be entailed in practice, serious criticism is impossible (2007a, p. 57).

Recognising (and contrasting with) fears of utopia as an inherently totalitarian blueprint, underlying the idea of utopia as method remains an emphasis on reflexivity and provisionality in imagining the good society and the means for achieving it. Despite presenting a means of closure by which a more holistic outline of the good society can be identified, the purposes for doing so are to encourage a critical engagement with, and call to judgment upon, such projects. To cite Brecht, by 'turning the object of which one is to be made aware... from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected'

([1940] 2001, p. 143), we are thus asked to reflect upon political programmes' and social theories' utility and desirability as projects of social improvement. This, in turn, calls for a reflection upon the type of society we desire or fear, and the best means for realising or resisting this.

### **Applying the utopian method to criminology**

Against this backdrop the utopian method is proposed as a potentially useful analytical framework for reinvigorating and rendering explicit the criminological imagination. Recalling, in particular, White and Haines' contention that the criminologist's project is always predicated upon the question: '[w]hat kind of society do we want and why?' (2000, p. 217), by drawing on the three modalities of the utopian method identified by Levitas: *archaeology*, *architecture* and *ontology*, these may be used as an analytical framework for revealing the imaginary good society underpinning different criminological perspectives. By this method, the perspectives are compared and contrasted in terms of their underlying normative projects and subjected to critical analysis.

Reflecting the underlying the assumption that criminology is fundamentally committed to realising the 'good society' (however imagined) outlined at the star of this chapter, the 'utopian method' is thus advanced as a means of exposing these normative assumptions and constructions of society to critique and critical comparison. In so doing, it may provide a method for the 'public criminology' imagined by Loader and Sparks (2011a) or the

means of reawakening the ‘criminological imagination’ posited by Barton et al. ([2007] 2011) and Young (2011).

## TOWARDS A UTOPIAN CRIMINOLOGY

Insofar as the discipline of criminology can be considered committed to the notion of the understanding and, if not eradication, then at least containment and adequate addressing of crime, it can be considered peculiarly apt for analysis via the utopian method. If the discipline as a whole, and the various theoretical perspectives and persuasions by which it is constituted can be considered committed to establishing a crime-free (or crime-reduced) society, are they all ultimately committed to the same fundamental project of change, or do they differ in significant ways, and if so, how and why? By rendering explicit the potentially competing or contrasting visions of the good society implicit within different criminological perspectives, the use of the utopian method also calls us to pass critical judgement on both the desirability and practicability of realising these societies. It asks us to consider the type of society we want to live in, and how best this might be realised. These are, of course, ultimately political, normative questions about the world which cannot be answered through improving our technical abilities of gathering data or analysing results. They enjoin us to pin our colours to the mast, to stake a claim in the type of society we both inhabit at present, and wish to inhabit in future: in short, they both necessitate and demand a reawakening of the ‘criminological imagination’ and an expressly ‘utopian’ criminology. Finally, as this chapter has sought to highlight, as calls for such a reinvigorated form of criminology and social science find

increasing support amongst scholars, the time is ripe for changing the criminological terrain. With the question raised of how this might be achieved in practice, it is suggested the 'utopian method' provides a (if not *the*) possible means for realising criminology's commitment to realising the 'good society' and reawakening its essential, utopian impulse.

## NOTES

[1] Though such a definition raises questions regarding from whose perspective and in what way(s) any outline of this ideal/perfectly organised society is to be considered desirable in order for it to be considered 'utopia'. As a number of commentators have highlighted, an image of heaven from one perspective, may constitute that of hell from another (see, for example, Davis, 1981, p. 13; Levitas, 1990, p. 22; Sargent, 1994, p. 1; Sargisson, 2007, p. 28).

[2] The difficulties of defining criminology as a 'discipline' have been highlighted by Garland (1992, p. 408); Young (1992, p. 425-7); Garland and Sparks (2000, p.190) amongst others.

[3] Despite the different publication dates, Levitas (2007a), an article published in an edited collection entitled *Utopia Method Vision* (Moynan and Baccolini, 2007), was written prior to Levitas' inaugural lecture in 2005.

[4] For specific examples of such various contemporary interpretations of utopia beyond the traditional focus on literary fictions and films, see Alexander (2001); Hand and Sandywell (2002); Levitas and Sargisson (2003); Sargisson and Sargent (2004); Tormey (2005); Cooper (2009); Jameson (2010, p. 416)

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