



Book Review

John Braithwaite (2022) *Macrocriminology and Freedom*. Canberra: ANU Press

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I admit that I have been sitting with the task of reviewing *Macrocriminology and Freedom* for several months now. My first reaction, when asked by the book review editors of the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* to review it, was to ask for a very generous deadline. My feeling at the time was that just being able to read it all would already be a great achievement. For those wondering why I am saying that, I must break the news to you: *Macrocriminology and Freedom* is really long—814 pages, to be more precise. But besides being really long, it is also a really compelling, dazzling and epic read. I started reading it concerned about the number of pages; I ended up highlighting half of the book and feeling grateful for every single page written. The book will engage you for the bold arguments it makes about crime and freedom, for the extraordinary amount and type of theory and research it threads together, and for the way Braithwaite thinks and writes. It is a life's work, and one feels it—the passion, the blood and tears, the dedication, all of it.

At the core of *Macrocriminology and Freedom* lies a sophisticated theorisation of the relationship between crime and freedom, which originates from republican theory. In other words, *freedom as non-domination* becomes a central organising concept through which to think about crime, crime control, crime prevention, criminalisation, punishment and other important criminological concepts. Braithwaite explains that he is inclined to call this 'the freedom theory of crime' (Braithwaite 2022: xvi). I personally find this characterisation limiting, as Braithwaite's theorisation of freedom reaches far beyond the concept of 'crime'. However, if we have to use a shortcut, I agree that this could be a good way to characterise it. Braithwaite is, after all, as he himself admits it, passionate about the concept of 'crime'—more so than I am. Another way of calling it could be a 'criminological theory of freedom' (Braithwaite 2022: 36).

But how are freedom and crime linked more specifically? Once we define freedom as non-domination and *crime as a form of domination*, the link between the two is established directly; freedom reduces crime, and crime reduces freedom, and what we need is a 'political commitment to less crime and more freedom' (Braithwaite 2022: 148). But what the freedom as non-domination concept implies is that while crime can lead to domination, so, too, can highly problematic forms of crime control, discrimination, and arbitrary and excessive punishment. Consistent with Braithwaite's work with Philip Pettit (1990), the notion of freedom as non-domination provides Braithwaite with a yardstick for deciding what justice is and what is just.

Even though macrocriminology appears in the title of the book and is central to its argument (this might indeed be the most macrocriminological analysis we have ever had in our field!), the level of analysis in the book actually moves with impressive ease from *micro* to *meso* to *macro*. For Braithwaite, reflecting on the United Nations, state politics and global social movements is as important to criminology as is contemplating civil society, markets, schools, families and other social institutions. In



applying the concept of freedom as non-domination to all three levels (micro, meso and macro), Braithwaite makes possible better understandings, conceptualisations and interpretations of the relationships between crime and freedom, inequality and crime, crime and war, crime and justice, and crime and justice across human history and across different contexts and social institutions. The conception of the macro for Braithwaite is not only a matter of embracing an analysis of the ‘large-scale’ but also of the ‘long-term’ and of the ‘everywhere’.

Another central concept in the book is the idea of *anomie*, understood as a widespread uncertainty, disintegration and collapse of the normative order so that people do not understand what the rules of the game are and do not know whose authority they should regard as legitimate. Anomie repeatedly accelerates crime, domination, suicide, violence and war. Nevertheless, through sophisticated analysis and the use of historical examples, Braithwaite also argues that anomie is a complex phenomenon that does not follow a simple linear path but is prone to positive and negative feedback loops and tipping points triggered by unpredictable historical events. A careful reading of history—or what Braithwaite refers to as ‘thinking in time’—allows us to understand better the relationship between anomie, violence and pacification and grasp the role that human actors have in creating but also in reversing *cascades* of crime and violence.

Two additional central concepts (or rather, metaphors) used in the book are Braithwaite’s notions of *cascade* and *tempering*. Those who follow Braithwaite’s work closely will be familiar with these concepts from more recent publications (Braithwaite 2019, 2020; Braithwaite & D’Costa 2018). The metaphor of cascade suggests that crime and domination, along with violence and war, are cascade phenomena. In other words, domination cascades to crime, war cascades to more war, crime cascades to more crime, war cascades to crime and so on. The metaphor of cascade does not need to be only negative. For example, Braithwaite and D’Costa (2018) have argued that nonviolence cascades too, but that while violence cascades fast, nonviolence cascades slowly. Essentially, good things can also cascade, especially if we temper the cascading of bad things, such as power and domination.

This idea of *tempering*, which also figures prominently in *Macrocriminology and Freedom*, is a concept that Braithwaite borrows from the work of Martin Krygier (2017, 2019). Based largely on republicanism, the idea of tempering suggests that all separated institutional powers (such as civil society, the market and the state) should continually grow stronger and, at the same time, continually increase their capacity to temper one another. This idea stands in striking difference to other political paradigms (such as liberalism or socialism), which usually choose to prioritise strengthening one or more institutional power over others. For Braithwaite, *all* institutional powers are of equal importance for our wellbeing and need to be strengthened in their capital, but only under the condition of simultaneously strengthening their tempering power over the others, therefore, ensuring checks and balances.

In addition to these central concepts, which provide the *red thread* of the book, there are other recurring concepts and theories that the readers who are acquainted with Braithwaite’s work will recognise, such as collective efficacy, responsive regulation and restorative justice. Further, the book demonstrates a proficient integration and mutual adjustment of explanatory and normative theories. It is Braithwaite’s conviction that all normative theories that lack explanatory resonance are likely to be empty, utopian and unable to serve policymaking, and all explanatory theories that fail to connect to normative concerns are likely to be blind and even dangerous. The foundational norm that guides the book and upon which all other normative propositions are built is the importance of reducing all dimensions of domination. Braithwaite has always had a profound dislike for disciplinary or methodological narrowness. Nothing for him is worse than the unnecessary limitations social scientists impose on themselves or each other in the search for understanding. A disciplinary and methodological pluralism is, according to Braithwaite (2022: 51), ‘imperative to painting the best canvas we can’.

Even though the book is quite a sober read, Braithwaite’s writing is profoundly hopeful. Using the organic metaphor of *normative rivers*, Braithwaite identifies pathways for guiding our search for freedom as non-domination. The book is also a hopeful account of criminology—a discipline that has often exasperated him (and many others). Braithwaite (2022: xv) says that ‘this book represents a change of mind’. He expresses his affection for the discipline, arguing for its importance for understanding and addressing today’s social challenges. At the same time, he challenges criminology to dare to become more relevant—by making connections we do not usually make, by scaling up and deepening our analyses, and by committing to an activist social science that aims to reduce crime at all levels, power-tempering and transforming institutional arrangements and building more just normative orders that enhance freedom and reduce domination.

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