

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JAMES J. CHRISS, *Social Control: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, vi + 330 p., index.

James Chriss' book *Social Control: An Introduction* is an effective introduction which seeks to reestablish his topic as a viable concept in sociology. He also attempts to show how informal control has diminished in favour of formal control mechanisms. To this end he presents and then dismisses four approaches to social control in favour of a triarchic typology organized into three categories: informal, medical, and legal control. Critiquing the four approaches early in the book allows Chriss to create and focus upon his typology throughout the rest of the volume. He places his work in the larger field of sociology, showing that theories of social control are thoroughly relevant to the discipline despite disagreement among scholars on the particulars. The subtitle implies that this book is a general introduction; however, it is more accurately a presentation of his specific approach, situating his typology within the broader study of social control.

The book is divided into two sections, one focused on understanding social control; the other elaborating several case studies. The former examines the development of social control theories and the historical changes in the concept; the latter builds on the foundations laid in the first section and concentrates on contemporary research and current issues related to social control.

In the first section Chriss examines the historical and theoretical changes in the study of social control. Readers learn about the theoretical building blocks of the topic through the classical work of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. This historical overview traces the evolution of social control theories and demonstrates that the topic has long been a focus of sociology. By illustrating the role of social control within classical theory, the importance of the concept to sociology is underscored. The inclusion of classical theory also allows the author to make a theoretical transition to the modern era. He cites contemporary perspectives to a considerable degree, including works by Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram (52-54) on obedience and Donald Black's theory of terrorism (173).

Using both classical and contemporary theory, Chriss presents a typology of social control, which creates the foundation for the rest of the book. Each of the three types is elaborated and then studied in depth through the use of multiple case studies. Housing segregation (informal control),

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (medical control), and rising imprisonment (legal control), among other cases, are examined. Although he delves into examples drawn from anthropology while creating the typology, the attention is mostly on Western forms of social control. This is most prominent in the case studies. With the exception of terrorism, they are drawn exclusively from North America and the United Kingdom.

Using Donald Black's theory of terrorism, Chriss illustrates the way terrorism has shattered traditional informal control mechanisms and given rise to greater legal control through the use of counterterrorism measures (178). In the post 9/11 world, he shows that formal social control is rampant and continues to require sociological study. But he is critical of this theory as well, pointing out how terrorism has also increased reliance on surveillance (177).

Although early in the book the author's approach does not appear to be critical of older research about social control, the contemporary case studies paint a more complex picture. An example is his critique of community policing, in which he claims such strategies may contribute to a fear of crime in communities (99). Despite the criticism, Chriss manages to allow readers to form their own opinion of the positive or detrimental effects of specific social control mechanisms.

Social Control: An Introduction would be an excellent choice for advanced undergraduate courses in criminology and sociology. The author's writing style coupled with compelling case studies yields the perfect blend of fact and critique which would be useful for creating critical discussions in the university classroom. However, it should be used in conjunction with other texts more broadly exploring alternate theories of social control. In the end, it is not an overarching theoretical introduction to the topic, and this cannot be overlooked in considering it for use as a textbook. Nonetheless, Chriss has opened the door to new research in the area of social control, especially through his typology; and he has succeeded in creating interest in the topic of social control and guiding future research.

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