

Book Review

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Genetics and Criminal Behavior. Edited by David Wasserman and Robert Wachbroit. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 348. \$64.95 (hardcover), \$22.95 (softcover).

Having agreed to review a book entitled *Genetics and Criminal Behavior*, I was disconcerted to learn that the 12 contributing authors were all professors of philosophy, rather than behavioral geneticists or social scientists. The book's chapters are some of the papers originally commissioned for an interdisciplinary conference on this topic, funded in 1992 by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Raucous critics contended that the conference would support racist views and repressive programs of crime control, leading NIH first to terminate their support and then—after a scolding by its parent, the Public Health Service—to reinstate it.

The book consists of two parts, "Conceptual and Methodological Issues" and "Assigning Blame and Imposing Punishment." Part 2 seems like legitimate grist for the philosopher's mill; if there are individual differences in propensity for crime and violence and if these differences are related, in part, to genetic differences between people, what effect would or should that have on how we assign blame and punishment for criminal behavior? It is interesting that the six philosophers addressing this broad issue found little on which they could agree.

Part 1, on the other hand, finds six different philosophers addressing such questions as whether it is possible to have a science of behavior or of criminal behavior, whether twin and adoption studies can tell us anything dependable or useful about the relationship between genetic and behavioral differ-

ences, and whether molecular genetics will—in this new century, at least—have anything reliable to say about human behavior, since it has made so little progress in explaining the behavior of the roundworm. Their conclusions are quite pessimistic. Perhaps the fairest way to convey these conclusions would be to quote from the introductory chapter by the editors. One author (Kenneth Taylor) points out that the biological significance of a criminal act depends upon the circumstances in which the behavior takes place and concludes (mysteriously) that "a great deal of research in cognitive science needs to be done before research in genetics becomes relevant" (p. 15). Another author (Ian Hacking) argues that "the basic issue is not so much the relationship between a social classification scheme and a biological one, but rather the more complex relationship between *four* classification schemes: common or ordinary, legal, psychiatric, and biological" (p. 15). In the end, he questions the relevance of the biological category to the public's interest in crime. Alan Gibbard "finds some reason to be skeptical about whether genetic differences can account for much of the variation in criminal behavior *between* individuals" (p. 16). Hacking and Elliot Sober "demonstrate that heritability is not the same thing as inheritance: a trait with high heritability need not be a trait that is inherited" (p. 14).

I did not find *Genetics and Criminal Behavior* to be a useful investment of my time.

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