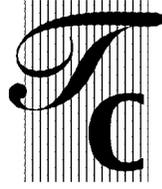


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The commonplace and the catastrophic:

Interpretations of crime in late modernity

Review essay on M. Marcus Felson, *Crime and Everyday Life*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 1998 and William J. Bennett, John J. DiIulio, Jr and John P. Walters, *Body Count: Moral Poverty . . . and How to Win America's War Against Crime and Drugs*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

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Criminological theory has adapted in interesting ways to the structural conditions of late modernity—conditions in which high crime rates are a normal social fact and the limited effectiveness of criminal justice is widely acknowledged. The most fundamental aspect of this development has been the shift in the discipline's focus away from theories of social deprivation (or relative deprivation) toward explanations couched in terms of social control and its deficits. 'Control' is the defining term of the new problematic—social control, self-control, situational control—and criminologies that are otherwise quite opposed nowadays share this common problem-space. We can see this quite clearly if we consider 'the new criminologies of everyday life' and their contradictory counterpart, the 'criminology of the other.'¹

The appearance of a new, revised edition of Marcus Felson's text *Crime and Everyday Life* (originally published in 1994) together with Bennett et al.'s recent call to arms in the war against crime, drugs and 'moral poverty,' offer an opportunity to consider these polarized and antithetical criminologies in a little more detail. The second edition of Felson's book is particularly apposite for these purposes because Felson has expanded his

account to merge routine activity theory with the themes and insights of the other criminologies of everyday life, most notably situational crime prevention, lifestyle analysis, and rational choice theory. If there is a text that exemplifies this new genre, then this is undoubtedly it. In what follows, I propose to devote most of my discussion to Felson's text, which I take to be the more significant and intellectually challenging of the books under review. *Body Count*, with its non-stop hyperbole, tendentious reasoning and war-zone rhetoric, is much less compelling in intellectual terms, but it has a political importance that derives from the prominence of its authors,² and it represents a very different response to the same conditions that produced the new criminologies of everyday life.

The acknowledged background to both books is the emergence, since the 1960s, of comparatively high levels of crime and violence as stable features of the social structure and culture of late modernity—levels that remain high despite the significant declines of recent years. Felson's response to this is adaptive, pragmatic and focused upon social structure: we need to understand the ways in which our daily activities produce criminal opportunities and we need to invent routine precautions that will minimize these. Bennett et al., in contrast, identify an immoral culture as the 'root cause' of the 'crime epidemic' and call for a concerted moralizing effort, a renewal of religious faith, and drastic enhancements of penal and welfare controls. In rhetorical, political, and criminological terms these two positions could not be more different. One presents a 'criminology of the self,' refusing to draw lines between offenders and the rest of us, characterizing criminals as rational individuals who respond to temptations and controls in much the same way as anyone else. The other revives the ancient 'criminology of the other,' of the threatening outcast—here renamed the 'superpredator'—who is deeply marked by moral deprivation and a profound lack of empathy and impulse control. One criminology dedramatizes crime, allays disproportionate fears, and promotes routine preventative action. The other demonizes the criminal, arouses popular fears and hostilities, and strives to enlist support for drastic measures of control. But both share a common situation (as responses to the pervasive crime problem and the limits of the criminal justice state), both share the new emphasis upon the enhancement of control (situational controls in one case, social and moral controls in other), and both represent significant shifts away from the liberal and conservative positions that characterized criminal justice discussions until quite recently.

Felson's criminology emphasizes the ways in which criminal opportunities are structured by, and arise out of, the recurring transactions and routines that characterize daily life. In his account, the 'chemistry of crime' can be reduced to the interaction of three vital elements—a likely offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian against the offense (p. 53). The ways in which these elements are made to coincide in time and space are a function of our social arrangements and everyday routines. The commute to work; our leisure-time activities; the flow of customers through

a shopping mall; the daily passage of teenagers as they go to and from school or home; the rapid circulation of goods and cash—these are the patterned activities that make crime a built-in feature of our social organization.

In this account, offenders are no different from other individuals. Crime ‘is very human’ and ‘ordinary people’ do ‘ordinary crimes’ (p. 11). Offenders typically display no special motivation and no abnormal or deviant disposition: they merely respond, with the standard-issue degree of rationality, to the mix of temptations and controls involved in specific situations. The key variable in explaining crime rates is therefore the extent to which the basic arrangements of social life do or do not facilitate crime events by regularly placing individuals in criminogenic situations. To borrow the language of economics, crime is a supply-side phenomenon—a consequence of the production and delivery of opportunities to commit offenses. The massive increase in crime and violence that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s—in the USA and elsewhere—was a direct consequence of post-war changes in the social ecology and recurring routines of everyday life. The new levels of mobility made possible by the automobile, the new temptations offered by masses of consumer goods, the diminishing presence of guardians as dense urban neighborhoods gave way to sprawling suburbs and married women moved into the workplace—these are the changes that brought about modern crime rates. And, to bring the story up to date, Felson’s second edition adds that it has been the development of technology and defensive measures (such as the use of electronic transfers instead of cash) and the growth of situational crime prevention (place managers, improved surveillance arrangements, etc.) that lie behind the recent successes in the effort to contain and reduce criminal events.

What would the sociology of knowledge say about this kind of text and the theoretical position that it develops? How are we to understand its emergence in the space and time of criminological discourse? I will argue that, whatever the strength of its truth claims—some of which are quite forceful—the criminology of everyday life should be understood as an adaptation to a social field in which high rates of crime have become a normal social fact. This is true in two respects. First of all, this style of analysis emerged in the wake of a dramatic historical transformation that made the relation between social ecology and crime rates stand out in bold relief. The production of criminal opportunities by routine activities could, in principle, have been identified on the basis of comparative study between different social areas (and, indeed, the social disorganization theory of the Chicago School did something of this kind). But it was the tremendous increase in crime levels, occurring between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, that made the importance of routine activities stand out in stark relief. Second, as I will argue at greater length later, both the substance and the form of Felson’s routine activity theory express an adaptation to a society in which high rates of crime have become part of the normal scheme of things. This adaptation is apparent in the theory’s explanatory claims and practical prescriptions, but it is also, and perhaps most tellingly,

revealed in the rhetorical style that it adopts—a style that Marcus Felson develops in its purest form.

I can best bring out these characteristics of routine activity by subjecting Felson's work to two kinds of comparison. The first and most extended of these will be a stylistic comparison with the work of David Matza (1964, 1969), which dates from a different historical period (prior to the crime boom) and espouses a very different relation to crime and deviance, but which adopts a style of inquiry that is actually very close to that of Felson. The second, briefer comparison will be with Bennett et al.'s *Body Count*—a criminological work that stems from the same period and reacts to the same predicament, but which is instructively different in style and substance.

The use of David Matza to think about Felson may seem a surprising choice. Matza's work does not feature at all in Felson's text or bibliography, and whatever memories and associations David Matza's name might trigger in the criminological consciousness—drift, existential mood, culture, identity—the concerns of routine activity and crime prevention are not prominent among them. Moreover, Matza writes in a different criminological context, where the object of study is the offender and his relation to the law (and then beyond that, to the culture) while Felson's concern is with crime events, criminogenic situations and ways in which social and economic life routinely supply criminal opportunities to those who choose to use them. But despite the unlikely nature of the pairing, I believe that Matza's work can throw light on Felson and his genre, revealing what it is that Felson is (and is not) doing, and highlighting how much has changed in the 30 years that lie between Matza's classic texts and the appearance of Felson's new approach.

Once the connection is made, one finds a whole series of themes and arguments that link Matza's work quite closely with that of Felson, so much so that Matza can be reinvented as an unacknowledged (and unwitting) forerunner. Both writers focus upon what Matza calls 'the mundane delinquent,' who is neither 'compulsive' nor 'committed' but instead a normal character who, on occasion, chooses to break the law. In both writers we find pathology replaced by pathos and differentiation replaced by a more nuanced and all-embracing account of normalcy. There is, in each, an emphasis upon the situational character of crime and delinquency, and upon the specific inducements and controls of the particular locale or mode of interaction. Both writers stress the generalized nature of deviance. Both point to the interdependencies that link 'mainstream' and 'deviant' culture, or legal and illegal activities, and both enjoy revealing the irony involved where our most cherished arrangements—freedom, mobility, affluence—give rise to the most unwanted results in the shape of crime and delinquency.

Matza and Felson share other traits too—a scepticism about correctionalism, a classical emphasis upon choice, a sense of the subtleties of the relationship between action and moral belief—but the most important continuity that links these two writers, and the most revealing, is their

shared commitment to *naturalism* as a philosophy of science and a mode of inquiry. What is meant here by ‘naturalism?’ Matza (1969: 5) defines naturalism as the commitment ‘to remain true to the nature of the phenomenon under study or scrutiny.’ It is a style of inquiry that prefers naturalistic observation to more abstracted modes of knowing—a philosophy that, however paradoxically, ‘stands against all forms of philosophical generalization.’ As Matza puts it, ‘its loyalty is to the world with whatever measure of variety or universality happens to adhere’ (1969: 5). Naturalism’s ‘preference for concrete detail,’ its ‘appreciation of density and variability,’ its ‘dislike of the formal, the abstract, the artificial’ (1969: 9) make this a decidedly ‘anti-philosophical philosophy’ (1969: 8). And, as Matza comments with evident approval, ‘the fidelity of naturalism to the empirical world has created a certain stress on the mundane, the matter-of-fact—even the vulgar’ (1969: 8).

It seems to me that Felson’s work falls squarely within this tradition. His theoretical claims and his investigative method insist upon attention to detail and naturalistic description. Density and variability are key elements of his account of criminal events and criminological categories. In his account, ‘all crime is local’ (p. 75) and no two situations are ever altogether alike. His dislike of abstraction is registered on virtually every page, with his insistence upon being ‘down to earth’ (p. xii), on developing an analysis that does not ‘move towards the clouds,’ treating crime as a ‘tangible phenomenon’ (p. xii) and avoiding what he calls ‘vague terms’ such as ‘social disorganization, anomie or social strain’ (p. 27) in favor of ‘precise and tangible concepts.’ Even theoretical arguments with the immediacy of Wilson and Kelling’s ‘broken windows’ or Skogan’s ‘spiral of decline’ are to be accepted only ‘so long as we do not let them draw us back into a sea of vagueness’ (p. 133). As for more general theories, Felson is simply allergic to them. His slogan is, ‘don’t get fancy’ (p. 167) and his advice to students (credited to his colleague and fellow naturalist Ron Clarke) is ‘do not worry about academic theories. Just go out and gather facts about crime from nature herself’ (p. 166).

So Felson is writing in the naturalist mode, and that, as I will argue, has a certain social significance today. In contrast to David Matza’s *poetic* naturalism—which was written in elegant prose, rich with intellectual allusion, and motivated by an existentialist concern to restore meaning to deviant conduct and celebrate the human freedom that deviance entailed—Felson offers what I would describe as a *prosaic* naturalism. He adopts an authorial style reminiscent of the Italian neo-realist cinema and films like De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief*, or perhaps the black and white, kitchen-sink naturalism of Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*—both of which portray crime and deviance with the same ordinariness and pathos that Felson invokes. Without drawing attention to itself, Felson’s style of writing and his recurring rhetorical tropes perfectly mimic his substantive view of the world. His style is avowedly matter-of-fact, workaday, mundane, down to earth—indeed it is *artfully* so. Many of Felson’s observations are so droll and

humdrum as to be highly amusing. One suspects that behind the dead-pan delivery there lurks a broad indulgent smile, taking pleasure in the banal details of the human barnyard. On every page he stresses the quotidian ordinariness of it all. Time and time again he emphasizes that crime is less dramatic than people think; that offenders are mundane individuals, more to be pitied than feared; that despite our cultural stereotypes, the real world of crime lacks all charm, or daring, or any sustaining narrative interest. A few examples will illustrate what I mean.

On murder: ‘Sherlock Holmes would have no interest whatsoever in most of the 22,076 murders reported in the US for 1994’ (p. 3). Murder should be regarded ‘not as a crime but as an outcome’ (p. 3). ‘Most murders are the result of a stupid little quarrel’ (p. 3). ‘Murder has two central features: a lethal weapon too close and a hospital too far’ (p. 4).

On violent crime: ‘Even violent crime is largely minor’ (p. 5).

On the consequences of offending: ‘Offenders . . . suffer more from the consequences of their own lifestyles than from the actions of public officials’ (p. 10).

On crime and criminals: The criminal is typically ‘a drunken fool’ (p. 14); organized crime is ‘not very businesslike’ (p. 17); ‘a common fight is rather a bore’ (p. 64); juvenile gangs are ‘very boring’ (p. 17).

On the complexity of criminal causation: ‘Opportunity makes the thief’ (pp. 38, 48); ‘People blunder into fights’ (p. 66); ‘Reducing the rewards [that offenders seek] is akin to eliminating the root causes of crime’ (p. 180). And my personal favorite—borrowed by Felson from his brother Richard and concealing goodness knows what childhood memories—‘Big people hit little people’ (p. 57).

The text is traced through with lovingly detailed descriptions of the most mundane preventative practices—the simpler the better. He tells us that ‘to learn how to design out crime, it is best to get specific’ (p. 153) and that, of course, is precisely what he does. He deliberates about how high a fence should be in the back and on the side of a house, and, since the answer depends on the size of the surrounding garden, he discusses this as well. (*Answer:* ‘A garden space of about 10 feet in the front, if not too bushy’ turns out to be about right. It ‘keeps people away from the fence, guiding them to the gate for legitimate business’ (pp. 153–4).) He reports that he and a colleague were able to predict annual burglary rates from the weight of the lightest television set in the Sears catalog each year (p. 61)—a scientific project that is so delightfully and appealingly mundane that it could stand as an emblem of Felson’s whole approach. (I have heard Professor Felson recount how he constructed a detailed ‘steal-ability index’ by going through the Sears catalog, item by item and calculating the price-to-weight ratio for each of the commodities.)

The *heroes* of Felson’s account also share these same qualities of

undemonstrative insight and robust common sense. He delights in stories about shopkeepers and security staff who come up with simple but ingenious methods of preventing crime—such as the ‘clever merchant who learned to alternate the directions of hangers on the [garment] rack, so they locked when grabbed,’ or the security staff who solved the problem of unauthorized persons in hospital wards by locking a door and removing its handle (p. 150).

Felson repeatedly celebrates this practical knowledge and inventiveness, this small-scale ingenuity and practical wisdom. It is a human trait close to his heart in the way that the subject’s irrepressible capacity to choose was at the centre of Matza’s project. So, too, is the character type of the can-do practitioner, whose engagement with the world is somehow more vivid than that of the philosophizing professor. As for Felson’s relation to the offender, this has the quality of a rather weary tolerance and a mildly expressed disdain. Offenders are low-skilled, low-energy, casually parasitic. They do not show much daring or initiative, do not put in much effort, and they typically depend upon the carelessness of victims who offer them easy opportunities. This is a naturalism that—unlike Matza’s—avoids all trace of the outlaw romance.

I have emphasized Felson’s discursive style and implied evaluations because they have a function in his work, which is to say they form part of his effort to get us to think about crime in a particular way. The deliberate (or perhaps merely fortuitous) use of a prosaic rhetorical style—a style that echoes and reinforces the theory’s substantive claims—is a striking feature of Felson’s work. In its substantive arguments, the routine activity approach claims that crime opportunities and crime events occur ‘in the nature of things.’ Far from being shocking aberrations or even unusual disruptions of the normal course of events, criminal incidents are widespread, constantly occurring, unsurprising features of the social landscape. They are written into the scheme of things, as concomitants of the personal freedoms, affluence and non-authoritarian arrangements that characterize liberal democracies at the end of the 20th century. His presentational style says precisely the same thing. The message is that crime is nothing to get excited about. It is a fact of life. Get used to it. What we must do is understand crime in dispassionate terms, quite removed from the drama and political posturing that so often distort its nature. It is a feature of our way of life and we must work hard to prevent it as and when we can. (The exhortation to work at crime prevention is evidently an important part of this story, because it is the one point at which Felson’s prose displays the slightest hint of passion. Murder, violence, drug-gangs, armed robbers, opportunistic sex offenders—none of these enrage him at all, but critics who point to displacement as a reason to doubt the effectiveness of crime prevention are singled out for moral outrage. ‘It is’ he says, ‘a disgrace to use “displacement” as an excuse to hold back creativity in preventing crime’ (p. 142). We might interpret this mild but uncharacteristic outburst

as Felson springing to the defense of his practitioner-heroes in response to criticism from the abstract know-nothing theorists of the academy.)

In the recent past, crime was always a sign or a symptom, indicative of social dislocation or personal maladjustment. Now crime is what it is and nothing more. It is a reality. A normal social fact. It is to be engaged in its own terms, for its own sake, and not as a metaphor or mediator for something else. The problem of crime is cause for neither idealism nor despair. As Felson puts it: 'Criminology in the past has swung between utopianism and hopelessness. I am arguing for something different: a non-utopian optimism' (p. 164). It calls for matter-of-fact interventions and routine precautions. We need to build it into our habits and routines in the same undemonstrative way that preventative medicine has us wash our hands, brush our teeth, and clean the bathroom.

Frank Tannenbaum coined the phrase 'the dramatization of evil' to describe how we, as society, react to offending. Marcus Felson's project is the dedramatization of crime. His goal is naturalistic understanding, as a basis for calm, routinized counter-measures. And if the book's style and substance epitomize the criminology of everyday life, so too do its practical proposals, which reproduce all the standard prescriptions of that genre (see generally Garland, 1996). The usual preference for situational adjustment over social engineering is clearly stated here: 'do not try to improve human character. You are certain to fail . . . Try to block crime in a practical, natural, and simple way, at low social and economic cost' (p. 166). So, too, is the irrelevance of the criminal justice state to the control of much criminal offending: we need to 'put criminal justice into smaller perspective' (p. 7). Crime control ought to become a generalized, dedifferentiated activity, built into the routines and consciousness of all citizens: 'the best policy is to regard most strangers and even neighbors with a moderate dose of benign suspicion' (p. 43). Above all, it should no longer be monopolized by the state with its misguided political agendas and its lack of local knowledge:

Crime prevention strategies have been foolish and ineffective. Leadership fell into the hands of naive ideologies, first liberal and then conservative. The first proposed to reduce crime by trying to make government good to people, assuming they would be good in return. The pendulum then moved toward the equally naive position that a government bad to people will get them to be good in return . . . The issue is not how good or bad government is to people but whether public places are designed and organized to allow people to control their own environments informally.

(p. 145)

The book's explanations and practical proposals are often persuasive, and amount to a forceful restatement of social structure's role in the distribution of crime. But they will surely not pass uncriticized into the criminological canon. Felson's rather monomaniacal focus on 'supply-side' issues of opportunity and control has the effect of silencing questions of motivation which have been a central focus for much criminological research and

which are especially important where offense-behavior appears unusually cruel or inhumane. Those who believe that cultural norms play an independent role in shaping conduct and that these norms have changed with the coming of late modernity will be dismayed by Felson's resolute avoidance of such questions—'the most important method is not teaching or building character, but rather keeping young people under some degree of supervision' (p. 24). 'The United States is not psychologically or culturally more violent than other countries: its citizens just deliver worse injuries' (p. 34)—and by his implicit assumption that a generalized propensity to criminal conduct is something of a constant in human history. Radicals will object that the theory represents an uncritical accommodation to the social structures of late modernity (render them a little less criminogenic, otherwise they're fine), that it too readily separates out questions of crime from questions of social justice, and that it fails to point to the dangers of commodification and maldistribution of security that are liable to accompany a crime prevention strategy that depends so much upon private initiative rather than state provision.

But my concern here is not with the book's criminological value. The claim I am making here is a claim in the sociology of knowledge. I am arguing that Felson's work—and by extension that of the whole genre I have termed the criminologies of everyday life—can be understood as responses to, and the product of, a particular kind of social organization: one in which high rates of crime have become a normal social fact. The social structure of late modernity 'delivers' crime opportunities in a regular, recurring, widespread manner, and does so in a way that is qualitatively different from the social structure of the first two-thirds of the 20th century. In that earlier period, criminological inquiry assumed that crime was an aberrational phenomenon, an interruption to the normal course of events, and sought to understand what was wrong with the individuals responsible. In the late 20th century it is harder to think of crime in this way. Our knowledge of crime's generality makes it clear that there may be nothing special about offenders, and nothing unusual about the occurrence of criminal events.³ Criminology's concern with the question of individual differentiation (or group differentiation) thus begins to give way to a concern with the structural generation of the mass of criminal events.

My claim, then, is that Felson's work is itself socially structured, or at least located within a social field that has structured its possibility and its reception. It is a criminology made possible, desirable, and relevant by identifiable features of late modern social organization. Felson's argument is that today's social structures routinely produce crime events, or at least 'supply opportunities' and 'produce chances' for crime—which, with the addition of a 'likely offender' result in actual offenses. I want to make a related claim which is that these same social structures also supply the opportunity and produce the chances for a new form of *criminology*—and Marcus Felson (for whatever biographical, institutional, and intellectual reasons) has turned out to be the 'likely offender' who has exploited that

opportunity. Not that this 'just happened.' Despite his anti-theoretical posture, Felson did not 'go out and gather facts about crime from nature herself' (p. 166). That part of Felson's naturalism is bogus and self-contradictory, as are all philosophical positions that claim to be 'anti-philosophical.' Felson, together with others such as Ron Clarke, has clearly embarked upon a theoretical revolution that would shift criminology's object of study from the criminal individual or disorganized group to the criminal event and the criminogenic situation. My point is not to deny them credit for this intellectual undertaking, merely to point to the social conditions that facilitated it. This, after all, is quite a fitting application of Felson's theory to its own intellectual production. If 'opportunity makes the thief' why would it not also make the theorist?

In case this account seems too reductive, or apports credit too much to structure and too little to individual human action, I will end with a comparison that allows me to refine my argument and perhaps avoid being misunderstood. Texts, discourses, forms of knowledge—all types of intellectual production—are related to a social field, but this field is by no means singular, and the relation is by no means determinative. Structures like the university, the academic discipline, one's intellectual network, even one's own daily activities (as a researcher, a consultant, a professor, a practitioner) operate in the space between a writer (or group of writers) and the social field, and exert an influence upon what gets written. Not all criminology is consonant with, or relevant to, the character of contemporary social life. There is a huge inertia built into academic production which ensures that theoretical traditions continue long after they cease to connect to 'the real world.' I have focused here upon the criminologies of everyday life because I believe that they do connect to the present in an interesting and revealing way, but I want to stress that they are by no means the only possible criminological response to late modernity. To illustrate this point let me conclude by mentioning Bennett et al. as a very different response to the predicament of high rates of crime and low levels of criminal justice effectiveness.

If one needed to highlight Felson's approach by way of a contrast, no text could be more appropriate than *Body Count* by Bennett, DiIulio and Walters. If Felson's style is cool, unflustered and understated, Bennett et al.'s is hot and bothered to the point of melodrama. Already on the book's cover we are warned about the 'far darker reality' that lies behind the recent fall in US crime rates, that 'the carnage is going to get worse' and 'the body count is going to get a lot higher.' Rather than see recent trends as an encouraging success story about routine crime prevention, we are told that these trends are merely 'the calm before a storm'—a storm 'so dangerous as to make all that has gone before pale in comparison.' America is currently in the grip of a crime 'epidemic'—a 'plague of violent crime' that threatens to undermine its democratic institutions (p. 16) and bring about a general social collapse or else a 'terrible counterreaction' of authoritarianism. 'Previous civilizations have been overthrown from with-

out: our present dissolution is from within . . . the hour is growing late . . . Many among us have heard the chimes at midnight' (p. 17). These dire warnings of imminent catastrophe and the collapse of civilization as we know it continue throughout the book. America is described as 'a ticking crime bomb' (p. 21) and offenders—juvenile offenders—are characterized as 'superpredators' with 'fewer moral restraints than any such group in American history.' So much for the mundane delinquent and the dedramatization of crime. And where Felson abjures cultural and psychological analysis or any concern with the individual's internal processes, Bennett et al. diagnose the problem entirely in these terms, arguing that 'moral poverty' is the 'true root cause' of the crime problem (p. 14), and that 'lack of impulse control and lack of empathy' (p. 57) are the 'twin character scars' created by the immoral culture of the underclass.

Desperate times call forth desperate solutions, and Bennett et al. press the need to reverse 'the near-collapse of our character-forming institutions' by a vigorous revival of family life, religious faith, and generalized moral standards, backed up by the compulsion of a larger prison system, welfare policies that emphasize work and do not 'subsidize women to have children out of wedlock' (p. 202) and the compulsory use of adoptions and orphanages 'where parents cannot care for their children's basic material, psychological, medical and moral needs' (p. 204). Bennett et al. do not pause to question the social and economic arrangements that so regularly limit the ability of 'underclass' parents to meet 'the material and medical needs' of their children, and the only kind of 'redistribution' that they will envision is 'not of wealth but of basic standards and a vivid sense of civic and personal responsibility' (p. 194). Like Felson, they take these structural arrangements for granted, protesting only about their criminogenic ones. Like Felson, too, their prescriptions reach beyond the criminal justice state and look to civil society to provide solutions. According to these authors 'the government is failing to carry out its first and most basic responsibility: to provide for the security of its citizens' (pp. 15–16) and they appeal 'to all responsible citizens' to join in the effort to control crime. But where Felson would put citizens to work on the earthly and practical tasks of adjusting situational controls, Bennett et al. look to a spiritual revival, 'a widespread renewal of religious faith and the strengthening of religious institutions' (p. 208). How this might be practically achieved, or even made the subject of policy reflection, is never actually specified by the authors. Perhaps the apocalyptic urgency of the book's language is intended to sweep the reader past that rather prosaic consideration.

Clearly then, there is more than one response to the normality of high crime rates and the failure of criminal justice. In these two texts we see depicted both the calm, adaptive, defensive tactics of everyday crime prevention and the hysterical call to all-out war and moral jihad. Both are direct responses to the widespread presence of crime in our midst—one of them written with ironic detachment, adapted to the way we live and the

costs we have to bear: the other determined to identify the culprits, change the way they think, or else lock more and more of them away. Both are responses to the tremendous social changes that have emerged since the 1960s—one going with the grain, adapting to the new conditions; the other desperately demanding a counter-revolution against the ‘culture of permissiveness’ (Bennett et al., 1996: 199) and the restoration of traditional moral codes and forms of authority. Two narratives of late modernity. Two very different ways to think about crime and its control. Taken together, they make the schizoid character of recent crime policy seem a little less unintelligible.

Notes

1. For a discussion of these terms, see Garland (1996, 1997).
2. Bennett was Director and Walters a Deputy Director of President Bush’s Office of National Drug Control, and DiIulio is a professor at Princeton and Director of the Brookings Institution Center for Public Management. All three are very prominent voices in conservative policy-making circles in the USA and regularly featured in the national press and television.
3. For a discussion of the evidence of the widespread prevalence of criminal conduct, see Gabor (1994).

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