

Criminology and the biotechnological revolution: the rise of the "somatic" subject

Aleš Završnik, LL.D., Young Researcher, Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, Poljanski nasip 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Life sciences, biochemistry, biotechnology, genetics, molecular biology, microbiology, different branches of neuroscience (neurobiology, neurochemistry, neurophysiology, neuropharmacology) have witnessed unprecedented development, caused by the use of information technology: Project Human Genome, which was completed with the identification of approximately 30,000 genes of human DNA and "projects of animal genomes" are coming near their end by the creation of a world genetic "map"; neurosciences, with techniques of brain scanning, are in process of producing a "cognitive map" of brains, while nanotechnology is producing auto-copying machines, conceived on a molecular level etc. Life sciences are changing human (self) understanding and a subject is understood solely on the basis of his somatic (neurological, genetic, hormonal etc) characteristics. The "biotechnological revolution" is transforming the conceptualization of the subject. These changes are reflected in control practices and in the operation of the criminal justice system, i.e., in the theory and practice of "coping" with crime.

Crime prevention strategies rely more and more on the concept of a physically risky individual, criminal responsibility becomes an increasingly relative notion, there is an increase in new forms of criminal sanction, new methods of crime detection and prosecution of criminal offenders, in which "objective" scientific evidence (DNA analysis, brain scanning techniques) replaces verbal evidence, certain groups of delinquents receive special treatment, post-penal tomography and genetic testing are introduced for parolees etc. With the modified conceptualization of the "essence" of subject, the findings of the life sciences are slowly penetrating mechanisms of social control. We are thus witnessing a revival of bio-criminology, an approach which was considered "criminological taboo" after the experience of eugenics in the past century. Is contemporary criminology therefore supposed to turn to a sort of "sociology of medicine"?

Key words: life sciences, neurosciences, genetics, biotechnological revolution, subject, criminal biology, biocriminology, social control

UDC: 343.94: 316.738 + 343.2