

Presenting the BSC Outstanding Achievement Award to Robert Reiner

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The British Society of Criminology's 'Outstanding Achievement Award' may be satisfied in one of two ways:

- By one or more singular outstanding contributions - books, articles, reports, lectures, public activities, etc; or
- In aggregation: i.e. through the production over time of a significant body of work which amounts in total to an outstanding achievement, or a sustained contribution to enhancing the discipline's interests on the national or international stage.

Professor Robert Reiner manifestly not just satisfies both those terms, but exceeds them in every possible way. As a colleague of Robert's for many years, it gives me huge personal pleasure to be able to give this tribute. The bare facts of Robert's career are testament both to his commitment to the field and to his being an eclectic in its true sense - that of an ancient philosopher.

Robert has held posts in Sociology, Criminology and Law; he has taught Criminology in all of its guises at the Universities of Bristol, Brunel (the University of West London), and the London School of Economics (LSE). He has also been the Director of the Mannheim Centre at the LSE and Head of the Department of Law. He was the founder and co-director of the Bristol Centre for Criminal Justice 1987-89, the President of the British Society of Criminology 1993-96, and has held visiting posts at University of California, and at the University of Toronto's Centre for Criminology in 1983 and 1990. Robert is known nationally and internationally and, as I shall demonstrate, loved and venerated wherever he has been.

I should like now to turn to his published works, although I only have access to these up until 2010. The work includes 4 sole authored books, one of which, *The Politics of the Police* is now in its fourth edition; 8 books edited or co-edited, including *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* going into its 5th edition; 63 assorted chapters; 41 major journal articles; and another 95 shorter pieces where Robert has engaged in more widely accessible publications. The statistics of publication alone are breath-taking. But it is not just how much he has written, but of what quality. And here I turn to the views of others better qualified than I am to comment.

Looking at the reviews of the 4th edition of *The Politics of the Police* Andrew Goldsmith (Australia) observed:

“For anyone interested in policing policy and understanding the British police experience, Reiner's book had no match” ... “Reiner remains faithful to his social democratic roots. His analysis insists upon the importance of having a political economy perspective of policing, one that is both sympathetic to the predicament of the socially excluded and economically marginalised and that locates responsibility for policing in the hands of the political system and the society at large.

Martin Innes describes it as “magisterial” ... “it remains probably the single most insightful and influential academic text on British policing”... With the strength of Robert's work lying in the fact that he “fully understands the intimate interconnections between policing and society”. Kevin Haggerty

(Alberta) notes that it is a classic in police studies “since its initial publication in 1985 it is probably the most cited academic book on the police”.

I know Robert will be squirming as I say all this, as he is renowned for his modesty. But it's going to get worse.

The opportunity I have this afternoon to pay tribute to Robert could readily be based on my knowledge of him over the 23 years during which our careers have overlapped. But since this is an award made by our Society of Scholars I didn't want to be alone in this. So what I have to say now is based on what others have said - some of whom are here today and others not. So these are just extracts of the *personal* tributes that Robert's colleagues provided when I told them that I would be making the outstanding achievement award on behalf of the BSC.

Rod Morgan: “I've principally worked with Robert as a co-editor for the Oxford Handbook (since 1992 when we had the idea for the 1st Edition, through to preparation of the 5th Edition today), though we did some research work together prior to that on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 relating to custody in the police station. ... The great thing about working with Robert is the breadth of his theoretical knowledge and reading and his generosity of spirit. The upside of that is that he knows what and who is excellent and consequently makes very wise and incisive suggestions. The downside is that he's quite incapable of delivering bad news. He's the most notorious good cop. It's not a bad failing to have.”

Jennifer Brown having observed, “As well as the obvious inspirational character of Robert's work which is always thoughtful and thought provoking”, went on to talk of his acts of kindness and how they had a dramatic effect on the subsequent course of her career. As she said, “I think being thoughtful and supportive is in Robert's DNA. He is just very nice and does not notice!”

Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning spoke of his intellectual and personal vibrancy: “We first met Robert when he came to spend some time at the Centre of Criminology in Toronto in 1983. There have been several very exciting periods at the Centre over the years and Robert's stay was one of them. We took full advantage of the weather at the time, and the cafés around the University of Toronto, to spend lots of time talking, and arguing, about our respective conceptions of, and understandings of, policing. While we certainly did not always agree our disagreements (and some of them continue to this day) were always stimulating and productive. Robert has a knack of asking difficult questions that compel one to rethink one's ideas, sometimes in quite fundamental ways. Central to our discussions, as we recall them, was the question of the boundaries between police, policing and social control. Boundaries that we struggled to agree upon. What also stands out about these times together, besides their scholarly intensity, was the good fun we had as we discussed ideas.

This was, and remains to us, academia as it should be. A highlight of Robert's visit was a talk he gave at the Centre on police deviance in which he began by pointing out, very perceptively, that when policing scholars think and write about police deviance, they usually seem to forget everything they have ever learned (as criminologists) about deviance generally (for example, that official statistics do not provide anywhere near an accurate measure of its extent and nature and that prosecutions and punishment may not be an effective deterrent). Robert made other visits to the Centre and we have met on numerous other occasions - all of which were framed by the warm glow Robert left us with after his first visit to Toronto.”

Frances Heidensohn: “I've always found Robert the perfect, kind, gentlemanly colleague with whom to work. I've given lectures on his courses, examined his students and contributed chapters under his editorship. Most recently, I've submitted (with Marisa Silvestri) the latest version of a chapter for the Oxford Handbook; he couldn't have been more helpful or more appreciative. An admirable scholar and very nice man.”

Michael Levi: “I was particularly impressed by Robert’s statement that he studied sociology rather than law because he wanted to understand and research about people, but after many years he realised that actually law was more about people than sociology was. A sad inference, but with an element of truth.” And when Mike recalled that Robert had started life studying economics at Cambridge, and was only diverted into Sociology when he realised in his second year that he had no facility with maths, Mike remarked “Robert could have done anything in the social sciences, but he was too nice to become an economist.”

David Downes had many stories to tell but he particularly remembered an event back in 1984 around the time of the much revised Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. “Robert wrote an article in *New Society* entitled “Is Britain becoming a Police State?” arguing against that view, with the revisions to the Bill being highly relevant. But on the radio Paul Foot, no less, said that this article made him realise for the first time what sociology was all about.”

And I would add that the prescience of that article in the light of the recent issues about bail and detention times is compelling.

Maurice Punch said: “Robert richly deserves this award; he is an erudite scholar, highly productive and with an excellent pen; he has been a dedicated and exemplary member of the institutions where he has worked; and is truly one of the ‘greats’ in the policing and criminal justice field.”

Tim Newburn: “There are many of Robert’s attributes that stand out. However, beyond his kindness and his almost unparalleled collegiality, it is the breadth of his learning (always worn lightly) and his extraordinary analytical mind that I’d point to. One brief illustration: many years ago now, having been working on a book together for a couple of years, Trevor Jones and I gave a paper which attempted to summarise some of our central arguments. I think it’s fair to say that we were reasonably happy with the paper but aware, despite much effort, that there was still something important missing. After the presentation, as he unfailingly does, Robert asked a question. Actually it was more a set of reflections with a question tacked on the end. In it he managed both to capture what we were attempting to argue, far better than we had, and also moved the argument on in ways that we had so signally failed to achieve. Robert’s intervention, which proved so crucial to our work, was seemingly effortless and was delivered in typically gentle and generous fashion. He’s been doing similar things for students at all levels, and for colleagues across a range of subjects, for decades. For me, it’s simply one of many debts that I could never hope to repay.”

Niki Lacey put it simply: “I’m sure I won’t be the only one who thinks of him as an absolutely stellar colleague on every level.”

To my mind these tributes speak to Robert’s erudition, to the lightness of his touch in his writing, to his modesty, and to the transformative effect his work and his personal style have had on the intellectual and personal lives of others. He describes himself as a ‘dyed in the wool emotional Menshevik, with a perennial soft-spot for heroes destined for the dustbin of history’. I think of him as ultimate ethical man; someone whose commitment to social justice and fair-mindedness shines through all that he writes and all that he is. But Robert is also the quintessential scholar; one who is an undoubted specialist in his field, and yet who has the capacity to facilitate understanding in others. He is a truly learned person in Criminology and a very worthy recipient of this award.
