Editorial

Augusto Balloni[•]

In this issue Roberta Bisi made a commitment to further explore some aspects of the Cogne case which has already been addressed in a previous issue of this Journal. Indeed, the aim of the review of Cogne case psychodiagnostic investigations is to analyse the important role of the algorithm in terms of controlling and predicting human behaviour. With a sufficient quantity of data and the "right" algorithms, we could all become potential suspected offenders.

What would happen if, on the basis of an algorithm, we were reported before having committed a crime? I believe we should understand what our crime is, fight for freedom and save our reputation. Therefore the problem is the following: what would happen if the algorithm failed?

Apart from this worrying aspect, the present and the future of a person could be decided by the processing of huge amounts of data coming from different statistical sources, from the Internet, from social network sites, from mobile phones or from GPS navigators. According to some, these technologies could minimise discretion and prejudices, but they could open the door to some errors and risks of discrimination.

Criminology and the administration of justice should neutralise these risks, especially in the field of the judgment of human actions, even the deviant ones. In this sense, statistical data, apparently neutral and collected without violating any laws, if

included in a running algorithm, could be transformed into a powerful tool of social discrimination. Moreover, algorithm operating procedures are often mysterious, perhaps difficult to understand even among insiders; and especially regarding services provided by algorithms which would be subject to the formal obligation of secrecy, even for commercial and merchant requirements.

The technology of monitoring behaviour is not solely an academic matter because the consequences of programming faults will gain importance particularly in allowing predictions and controls. It is also necessary to determine the characteristics and the methods of the implementation of this new technology, as well as the objectives pursued by this: it is clear that such processes are not inconsiderable.

It must be pointed out that human behaviour is virtually endlessly flexible and that a human being is able to play a wide variety of roles. Indeed, behaviour is based on free choice through a number of signs and rules, and it is motivated by the past and by the future. In this sense, what about the efforts to predict the future behaviour of an individual? If the human being is free to act, paradoxically his behaviour should be unforeseeable. The act of predicting human behaviour only by using an algorithm will lead to the degradation of human conduct, because the algorithm will in fact treat people as objects.

Therefore, it was considered appropriate to open this issue of the Journal with Roberta Bisi's reflection which invites us to enter into a challenging debate, without denying technology's useful benefits. The right approach to regulate the use of such technology could be limited by the fact that control tools are multiplying at a frenetic pace and it will become increasingly difficult to know

[•] President of the Italian Society of Victimology, former full professor of criminology at the University of Bologna.

how they could be wisely and correctly applied, by whom and for what purpose.

Issues arising in criminology, victimology and in the security field are the opportunities, dangers and limits related to new technologies which lead to political, social, ethical and cultural-considerations. These issues need to be taken into account in respect of the power that will inevitably be concentrated in the hands of specialists in the new technologies.

The article of Roberta Bisi has many strengths in order to open up a broader debate on these issues, and it is closely linked with the contents of the other articles published on this issue of the Journal.