

A red wireframe perspective drawing of a hallway, receding into the distance, set against a dark, textured background.

THIRD EDITION

# CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

A  
PSYCHOSOCIAL  
APPROACH

CURT R. BARTOL

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## *A Psychosocial Approach*

THIRD EDITION

CURT R. BARTOL

*Castleton State College*



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# Preface

This is a textbook about criminal behavior from a psychological perspective. Classical and contemporary research and theory on the psychology of crime are reviewed as comprehensively and accurately as possible, with particular emphasis on repetitive, serious offending. Increasingly, psychological research on crime is focusing on cognitive aspects. Specifically, psychologists are directing more attention toward offenders' perceptions, beliefs, reasoning, and attitudes and the processes that contribute to their versions of the world. Therefore, the new challenge of psychological criminology is the systematic integration and organization of the complex interaction of cognitive, motivational, and affective processes. This discernible shift is reflected throughout the pages of this text.

Discouragingly, the many texts on criminology continue to misunderstand or fail to integrate the psychological perspective adequately or accurately. Authors continue to regard "psychology" from a classical Freudian viewpoint, often combined with a vague biological-genetic "trait" or dispositional focus. Occasionally, "learning" is described but often in an overly simplistic and dated fashion. This state of affairs is troubling because psychology is the "core discipline" in the understanding of criminal *behavior*.

This certainly does *not* mean that sociology, political science, or other disciplines have little to contribute toward the understanding of crime. The

repetitive message throughout this text is that the study of crime must be *interdisciplinary*, with the various disciplines examining different levels of events. Therefore, adequate theory, sound research, and effective application require solid knowledge about the many *levels* of events that influence the person's life course, running from the individual, to the family, peers, schools, neighborhood, community, and the society as a whole. This text concentrates on the individual level of explanation, but with full recognition and respect for the powerful and dynamic interplay of ecological, social, economic, and political factors.

Several major changes have been made from the previous two editions. The effects of crime on *victims* have been given more emphasis throughout the text. The text also concentrates more on recent research examining the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitative strategies on criminal behavior. Chapter 12, "Correctional Psychology," reflects this shift in focus and describes the growing research activity on the classification, diagnosis, prediction, treatment, and coping of inmates. A previous chapter on female crime has been deleted in favor of integrating material on women throughout the text. Chapter 9, "Sexual Offenses," has been completely rewritten to reflect substantial changes in the field since the last edition. If there is one area of criminal behavior where psychologists have jumped to the forefront in the past decade, it is in the understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of the sexual offender. An important section on family violence has been added to Chapter 8, "Criminal Homicide and Assault." Chapter 5, "Juvenile Delinquency," has been revised extensively to reflect recent shifts in that field.

The section on "arson" in Chapter 10, "Property Crimes and Crimes Against the Public Order," has been extensively revised and updated. New research and theory has also been added to the sections on burglary and shoplifting in that chapter. New material has been added to Chapter 11, "Drugs and Crime," including new sections on PCPs and crack.

As in the second edition, this text's organization runs from broad, theoretical positions on criminal behavior to specific criminal offenses. Biological positions are presented in the early chapters, while environmental, learning, and cognitive viewpoints come later. The material continues to be heavily referenced so that interested readers can document and decide for themselves the validity of the research conducted and the statements made. As a result of increases in international research and commentary on the psychological factors on criminal behavior, the text also has acquired a more international flavor.

The major goal is that students of criminal behavior will, as a result of reading this text, avoid oversimplified, prejudicial, dogmatic answers to the complex issues involved in crime. If, after studying the text with an open mind, the reader puts it down seeking additional information, and if the reader has developed an avid interest in discovering better answers, then this text will have fulfilled its purpose.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This material in this text has been tested in the classroom for over ten years. During these years, many students have made comments and suggestions for improvement. To them, I am very grateful. I would also like to thank the reviewers, Edward Ryan of Mansfield University and William E. Thornton of Loyola University, who have made suggestions during the text's continuing development. I would also like to express my appreciation to the staff members of Prentice Hall who have helped in making it all possible. Special thanks are due to production editor Katy Leclercq who orchestrated the many technical aspects of this text with ease and much competence.

Curt R. Bartol

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Crime intrigues people. Sometimes it attracts us, sometimes it repels us, occasionally it does both at once. It can amuse, as when we hear about capers and practical jokes that presumably do not harm anyone. It can frighten, if we believe that what happened to one victim might happen to us. Crime can also anger, as when a beloved community member is brutally killed. Violent crime in particular draws attention; consider the rampant excitement and fear in a neighborhood or small town when news of a local murder hits the street.

While interest in crime has always been high, understanding why it occurs and what to do about it has always been a problem. Public officials, politicians, “experts,” and streetcorner philosophers continue to offer simple and incomplete solutions for obliterating crime: police patrols, closed-circuit TV, street lights, sturdy locks, judo classes, stiff penalties, speedy imprisonment, or capital punishment. Academe invariably offers abstract interpretations and suggestions, which often have little practical value. As in most areas of human behavior, there is no shortage of experts, but there are few effective solutions.

Our inability to prevent crime is partly due to our problems understanding criminal behavior, a complex phenomenon. Because crime is complex, explanations of crime require complicated, involved answers. Psycho-

logical research indicates that most people have limited tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. People apparently want simple, straightforward answers, no matter how complex the issue. Parents become impatient when psychologists answer questions about child rearing by saying, "It depends"—on the situation, on the parents' reactions to it, on any number of possible variables. This preference for simplicity helps to explain the popularity of do-it-yourself, 100-easy-ways-to-a-better-life books.

This text presents criminal behavior as a vastly complex, poorly understood phenomenon. Readers looking for simple solutions will either have to reorient their thinking, set the text aside, or read it in dismay. There is no all-encompassing psychological explanation for crime, any more than there is a sociological, anthropological, psychiatric, economic, or historic one. In fact, it is unlikely that psychology or any other discipline can formulate basic "truths" about crime without help from other disciplines and areas of research. Unfortunately, much interdisciplinary disinterest (and some animosity) exists among the social science disciplines that study crime. Yet, criminology needs all the help it can get to explain and control criminal behavior. An integration of the data, theory, and general viewpoints of each discipline is crucial.

To review accurately and adequately the plethora of studies and theories from each relevant discipline is far beyond the scope of this text, however. Our focus is the psychological perspective, although other viewpoints also will be described. To date, psychology has been neither fairly represented nor adequately integrated in criminological literature, partly because until recently few psychologists have been interested in studying crime. Research in forensic psychology, a specialty concerned with the many psychological aspects of the judicial process, has increased dramatically over the past two decades, signalling a late-blooming interest in the study of crime itself.

The primary aim of this text is to assess the impact of this recent psychological research, compare it with traditional approaches, and offer a theoretical framework for the study of crime. We cannot begin to do this without first calling attention to philosophical questions that underlie any study of human behavior.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE**

A society's social, political, and economic structures are based on fundamental premises about human beings, their inherent tendencies, abilities, weaknesses, and preferences (Nelson, 1975). Eisenberg (1972) notes that theories of education, political science, economics, and criminology, as well as the policies of a government, are based on implicit assumptions about the nature of humankind. Where crime is at issue, a society which believes that humans are by nature aggressive and violent will have different meth-

ods of social control than a society which believes they are by nature peaceful, loving, and friendly. A society committed to an innate violence viewpoint may be forced to accept the position that little can be done to change this biological destiny. In that case, the solution to crime is not to re-educate or train criminals, improve opportunities, or reduce poverty, but rather to make criminal behavior less appealing to the perpetrator. Harsh criminal penalties, target hardening, and a de-emphasis on the individual rights of the criminal reflect this viewpoint, although it would be misleading to suggest that everyone who advocates being tough on criminals subscribes to the innate violence theory.

If we shift our focus away from society as a whole and toward the researchers and theorists who may directly influence social policies, perspectives about human nature become even more relevant. If researchers and theorists believe that humans are fundamentally animal in needs, urges, motives, and overall behavior, they will explain crime very differently from those who believe that humans are different in kind from animals. If they believe that human activity is usually *controlled* or determined by the social environment or driven by internal dispositions (personality), their explanations and solutions will be very different from those of others who believe that humans are self-determined and act primarily on the basis of free will.

Perspectives on human nature not only dictate explanations of crime but also may act as self-fulfilling prophecies. The belief that humans are innately untrustworthy, self-centered, or violent may promote behavior and interactions that support this belief. In other words, if we do not trust people, we may unknowingly set up situations of distrust whereby others not only act distrustfully but also distrust us in turn. By example and by provocation, we actually generate the behavior we condemn.

Thus, a researcher's perspective on human nature not only influences his or her explanations of crime but also may become self-fulfilling. It may strongly affect the research questions asked, the design of the research, the way it is conducted, and the interpretation of the data. Theoretical perspective even influences what research literature will be read. Totally objective research, which presumes the unbiased eye of the scientist and nonsubjective empirical questioning, is extremely difficult to conduct. The dispassionate approach expected of all scientists and researchers may be contaminated by their preconceptions and theoretical notions. This is especially true for social scientists because, in essence, they are studying themselves—an enterprise that lends itself to high levels of subjectivity.

For the foregoing reasons it is important to examine some divergent premises about human nature before delving into explanations of criminal behavior. We do not assert which positions are correct and incorrect, only that different viewpoints color explanations and conclusions about crime.

The two most important philosophical issues about crime and human nature are: (1) the extent to which humans differ from subhumans or

animals, especially the primates; and (2) the locus of responsibility for human actions and conduct. The first issue raises the question, "Are we different in *degree* from animals or different in *kind*?" The second issue raises the two-pronged question, "To what extent should individuals be held responsible for their criminal conduct, and to what extent is behavior determined by a combination of internal and external factors?" In the following pages we will explore these questions in more detail, beginning with differences between humans and subhumans. We are indebted to the American philosopher Mortimer J. Adler, who expounded on this issue in his 1967 book, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, for influencing much of the following material.

### **Difference in Kind versus Difference in Degree**

A large segment of the psychological and psychiatric research on criminal behavior is dominated by the belief that human beings are basically animals, controlled by a myriad of biological urges, drives, and needs. Further, many scientists believe that if we observe and study the animal kingdom, especially the primates, we will understand why people act violently. Some theorists and writers call human beings the "predator ape," the "killer ape," or the "king of the jungle." They contend that humans are creatures without natural weapons, but whose brain development has propelled them to produce technological weaponry far outstripping any internal propensities for reducing aggression.

The writings of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) have had an extensive impact on this view of contemporary humans. Darwin's main thesis was that humans are fundamentally animals, developed from a common biological ancestry along with all animals and other living things. Long before Darwin, many philosophers and scholars considered humans to be animals—and not very good ones at that. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), for example, reduced humans to the status of animals governed by force and fraud (Bock, 1980). Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) emphasized that humans are basically mean-spirited, brutish animals (Bock, 1980).

Darwin's distinctive influence on contemporary thinkers was his contention that humans should be placed on a *single* continuum along with all the *brute* animals. Other philosophers, scientists, and scholars before Darwin had placed humans on a continuum, but it was one representing *rational* animals. Brute animals and other living things were placed on different continua. Aristotle, for example, constructed multiple continua representing rational animals, brute animals, and plants. Darwin, however, legitimized the difference in degree perspective by placing humans along a single continuum of all living things.

The Darwinian perspective is important today because many social scientists, especially psychologists, believe that careful study of this single continuum will enable us to understand human nature, why we do what we

do, and therefore, why some of us are criminals. Investigations of anthropoid apes, mice, rats, and pigeons will help us discover basic natural laws of behavior. This position is illustrated in the work of the sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson, including *Sociobiology* (1976) and *On Human Nature* (1978). The Darwinian position also contends that criminal behavior, especially when it is aggressive and violent, reflects the vestiges of the primordial jungle.

Darwin believed that life evolved in continuous ascent by degrees from its lowest to highest forms. All diverse types of life, including those now extinct, have been connected by this developmental sequence. Thus, humankind differs only in gradients or *degrees* from the animal kingdom.

Contemporary post-Darwinian positions agree with Darwin's tenets but add another component: Humans differ in kind *superficially* from other animals. That is, intellectually humans *appear* to differ in kind from all animals in the known universe. Humans can certainly do a lot more than other animals, because our brain is far more organically complex than the brains of subhumans. But the post-Darwinians explain this by introducing the concept of *critical threshold*. At a certain point in the evolutionary development of the human brain, it crossed a critical threshold of complexity, beyond which its intellectual functions expanded dramatically. Still, humans are basically animal in origin, influenced and controlled by the same biochemical and physical forces and motives inherent in all creatures. Even though we appear to differ in kind, even though we can perform complex intellectual activities, we still differ in degree from our infrahuman brethren. Most contemporary psychological, biological, and psychiatric theories of criminal behavior, and many sociological ones, are built on this foundation. As Eysenck (1983, p. 51) asserts: "Little improvement is likely until it is realized that humans are biosocial animals, linked with the animal kingdom through millions of years of evolution . . ."

The second perspective on human nature, that humans differ in kind from subhumans, is becoming more popular. Respected neurobiologists and pioneer brain researchers like Sir John Eccles (Eccles & Robinson, 1984), Roger Sperry (1983), and Wilder Penfield (1975) have concluded that humans differ radically in kind from all other animals in our known universe. Along with many other theorists, they believe that we must introduce a new power or force to account for human thought and consciousness. The concept of the physical, organic brain, operating as the sole determinant of human consciousness and cognitive functioning according to the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology, is simply not enough. The terms *cognitive functioning* or *cognition* refer to the internal mediation processes that take place within the brain (or mind). The difference-in-kind orientation agrees that the organic brain is a *necessary* condition for human thought, but does not accept it as a *sufficient* condition. We *do* need the intact, healthy brain to think, but we also need to introduce something else to explain human thought completely.

How do these two perspectives on human nature influence the study of criminal behavior? The difference-in-degrees position explains criminal behavior as a reflection of natural laws within the animal kingdom, laws that can be discovered through carefully designed research conducted either in animal habitats or in the laboratory, where irrelevant variables can be controlled. Most researchers who assume this generalizability from animals to humans also embrace the critical threshold position. A difference-in-kind orientation argues that comparing humans to animals, either implicitly or explicitly, does not advance our understanding of crime, because humans are radically different from inhumans in one or more important ways. They differ in their ability to think about the future, remember the past in the absence of external stimuli, and consider alternatives for each action.

Conceptual thinking is the core of the difference-in-kind approach. More specifically, human thought, because of concepts that are integrated and organized within the mind, enables us to transcend the immediate environment. These internal concepts extend us not only to objects and events in the remote past and remote future but also to things and events that are not time-bound at all, such as those we find in our daydreams and fantasies. Conceptual thinking produces, among other things, tools, an abstract language, and a culture that can be transmitted from generation to generation.

Animal or perceptual thinking, by contrast, is confined to the perceptual present. Animals can learn, experience, generalize, discriminate, solve problems through trial and error, and even show signs of "insight," but much of the research evidence to date suggests that they cannot think about objects or events that are not perceptually present. Perceptual thinking operates in the presence of appropriate sensory stimuli, never in their absence. The relevant stimuli must be both present and perceived. Although humans also have perceptual thinking, it is not quite the same since it is invariably influenced by conceptual thinking.

According to the difference-in-kind perspective, we will understand crime better if we study and build theories based on the human qualities that are radically different from subhuman features. Regarded this way, criminal behavior becomes a *uniquely human attribute generated solely by the conceptual thinking of the human being*. To suggest that nature or our biological ancestry may be to blame—even partially—for the way we are is to distract our attention from a more viable explanation of behavior.

### Determinism versus Free Will

The second crucial perspective on human nature, more complex than the first, focuses on *causes* of behavior; it is most often referred to as the *determinism* debate. For our purposes, *determinism* will refer to the *nature* and



*location* of the *causes* of behavior. In other words, what factors cause (determine) behavior, and where are they located? Are they within ourselves? Are they biological factors or drives over which we have little or no control? What causes criminal behavior? Is it the social environment of parents, peers, institutions, and organizations or the biological environment of urges and needs? If both, which is more important? Do mental processes cause criminal behavior?

The foregoing questions may remind you of the nature versus nurture debate, which considers whether our genetic, biological makeup (nature) or our environment (nurture) has the greater influence on us. Questions about determinism are similar, but determinism is a broader concept that takes into account both the immediate neurophysiological factors (rather than simply genetics), and the influences of the immediate environment (rather than simply past experiences). The nature-nurture issue is more oriented toward past events and prior genetic influences provided at conception, birth, and during early development. In evaluating determinism, we are concerned not only with the possible influences of the past on criminal behavior, but also with the present circumstances that influence that behavior. Moreover, determinism is future-related as well.

To say that determinism is an important topic when we discuss crime is to understate. If behavior, including criminal behavior, follows the rules and principles of a lawful, orderly universe, careful study will eventually reveal these principles. This means that we should in time be able to predict, modify, and control criminal behavior. If, on the other hand, human behavior does *not* follow the rules of the physical universe, we will be forced to revise our thinking and look for new explanations of why criminal behavior occurs. Moreover, if the causes of behavior exist primarily within the individual (internal determinism), we are correct in trying to change the behavior of individual criminals. If, on the other hand, the causes of behavior exist primarily within the social environment (external determinism), we should change society to better fit the needs of all individuals. *Internal determinism* is the belief that we are driven by powerful instinctual drives or biological needs; *external determinism* is the belief that we are little more than complicated robots, responding reflexively or automatically to environmental stimuli. Both internal determinism (also called *dispositional psychology*) and external determinism (also called *situational psychology*) reflect a passive view of humankind. Human beings are not seen as active, responsible agents but as helpless, powerless reactors (Chein, 1962).

Many gradients of determinism are recognized in contemporary psychology, but for the present we will discuss two categories: *Hard* and *soft* determinism. *Hard* determinism is the belief that *all* behavior—whether animal or human—is caused (or determined) by forces or events that follow the laws of the universe. Everything we do has a cause, and often we are not aware of it. Causes may exist within the environment (external