



# A Theory of Criminal Justice

HYMAN GROSS

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# A Theory of Criminal Justice

*for*  
*E.L.G., B.G., and J.M.G.*

## Preface

When a crime is committed, justice must be done. Though it is easy to create an appearance of justice, mere appearance may turn out to be only an illusion. In this book I try to describe the real thing and examine its main features in detail. I do not invent a conception of criminal justice but discover it in the principles that are generally aimed at by the criminal law in every civilized society of a more or less liberal democratic complexion. Official deviations from these principles are abundant everywhere, but this need not embarrass the theorist so long as he remembers that he is not required to give an account of practices just as they are, any more than he is required to design an ideal jurisprudence for a utopian society. The theorist's job, I think, is to make clear the ideals that generally do guide practice and that make possible the very awareness of deviation. His job is also to show why those ideals are worthy of our acceptance, when indeed they are. The theorist thus provides the practitioner with guidance for sound practice and with a means of answering his critics when (but only when) they are not right.

In attempting to make a contribution along these lines I have found it necessary to deal critically with certain well-

entrenched theoretical positions that seem to me wrong. In doing this I have tried wherever possible to avoid singling out particular authors or citing particular tracts—this in the belief that shoes anyway end up only on the feet they fit, and in the hope that what is controversial in this work may prompt better answers than I provide rather than intramural debates about other authors and their views. Similarly, I devote little time to the pedigree of the ideas I present, though in the entire book there can hardly be a single idea that does not have important antecedents elsewhere. I confess a lack of zeal for intellectual genealogy and offer as a penance a bibliography after the notes at the back of the book. This will allow the reader to rummage as I have through much that provides useful provocation and much that is a source of illumination—often both in a single piece. To avoid unnecessary interruptions, all the notes are collected at the back of the book. Nothing in the notes is necessary to follow the argument in the text, though on a few occasions the notes do provide some elaboration of the text that may ease one or another of the difficulties that linger on at the end of a section.

Two further bits of explanation are in order.

A volume embracing all the concerns of a truly comprehensive theory of criminal justice would extend into two great regions not explored here. It would take up the question of bounds beyond which the law ought not to go in establishing criminal liability for conduct. Discussions in this book of harm and danger do not define those limits, though I should like to think that what is said here could be put to good use in dealing with those other matters. That same all-embracing work would also have to deal with the problems of justice that are created by procedures of law enforcement, including matters of fairness both in and out of court. In the United States these problems have received far more attention as

items of Constitutional law than have the more fundamental questions of criminal justice that are dealt with here. One hopes that, by reflecting on why we bother to enforce the law at all, we shall help to enlighten ourselves about what is and what is not the right way to go about it.

Finally, I must explain why some rather substantial topics are dealt with only superficially, while others are mined in depth. Defenses by way of justification, for example, only have their surfaces scratched even though rich veins lie beneath. Some neglect was made unavoidable by considerations of economy, and those topics that suffered least were those that seemed most important to understand our criminal jurisprudence as a whole and to reform the conceptual groundwork upon which it must stand.

I have profited much from discussion and criticism during the years of writing and rewriting, and find that my accumulated debts to friends and colleagues are far too numerous to be listed here. I should like, however, to acknowledge a general debt to the writing of H. L. A. Hart, since it drew me in a compelling fashion to the subject and then served to refresh even in the most tedious hours of my own work. There are two pieces of extended criticism that I cannot fail to acknowledge here with thanks. John Kleinig was kind enough to provide me with very useful comments on large portions of an earlier draft, and Don E. Scheid similarly commented with great care on the penultimate draft of the manuscript in its entirety. Both of them will of course recognize the many faults for which I alone am responsible and that remain in spite of their diligent efforts.

I am much indebted to Gertrude Schiller for long and faithful service at the typewriter, and to Patricia Rees for her very efficient help in proofreading and typing at the final stages. At Oxford University Press, James Anderson and Bethanie Alhadeff have been most helpful, and the role of



manuscript editor has been performed by Mary Ellen Evans with consummate skill. Finally, I should like to thank the Bear Foundation for support of work that in one form or another found its way into parts of this book.

H. G.

*Cambridge*

*June 1978*

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