

THEORETICAL CRIMINOLOGY

T H I R D • E D I T I O N



GEORGE B. VOLD and
THOMAS J. BERNARD

Theoretical Criminology

Third Edition

by the late

George B. Vold

and

Thomas J. Bernard

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Foreword to the Third Edition

In 1958 an event of extraordinary importance in the field of criminology occurred: the publication of a work by George B. Vold, carrying the simple title *Theoretical Criminology*. It was the crowning achievement of a man of distinction, and it did not take long before it gained recognition and acceptance as the leading book in the field concentrating more or less exclusively on the theoretical aspects of the study of crime. It was primarily for this contribution that the American Society of Criminology honored Vold by bestowing on him in 1966 the prestigious Edwin Sutherland Award. A year later Vold died, but his book remained and his reputation survived, soon to become known to an entire generation of criminologists who were children when his major publication first appeared.

George Bryan Vold, son of Norwegian immigrants, was born in South Dakota in 1896, and if indeed, as would seem apparent, his middle name was given for the American politician and orator, there was nothing to indicate in his later career that he would follow in the footsteps of the man for whom he was named. From early manhood, his was a distinguished intellectual career. He received his master's degree in sociology from the University of Chicago in 1924, when that school came close to dominating the discipline, and then went on to broaden his education by doing his doctoral work at the University of Minnesota, receiving his Ph.D. in 1930. A few years later he became full professor at Minnesota, where he spent the remainder of his academic career. He studied the Massachusetts prison system, returned to Minnesota to serve on the state's Crime Com-

mission, wrote important works on parole and police training, and capped his career with the publication of *Theoretical Criminology*.

That it was accepted from its inception as the foremost work in the field is obvious (although traditional textbooks, not concentrating on theory, were better known to more students). It is interesting today to look at the assets of that first edition, which is now (thanks to Tom Bernard) a museum piece. It contained extraordinary early chapters on the origins of criminology, the classical, neoclassical, and positivist schools, and then systematically and convincingly developed a social conflict vision of society that Vold found applicable to crime. His conflict approach was not essentially Marxist in that it was not the class conflict that enabled him to explain crime but the myriad of group belongings and group conflicts inherent in a society.

Although the book was extremely well received and was sold, read, studied, discussed, and debated for many years, two things became increasingly apparent. First, Vold had chosen to omit from his work many modern criminological theories and theorists whose importance he did not recognize or who, he may have felt, deserved no place in the pantheon of architects of criminological theory. Yet without such people the book was incomplete, even if one were to agree with Vold's apparently negative view of their contribution. Second, much had occurred in theoretical criminology since 1958—new theoretical formulations, the discovery of some evidence that the biological predilection theory could not be dismissed quite so cavalierly as many had long believed, and above all a considerable development of conflict theory, by Marxists, neo-Marxists, and anti-Marxists, without whose formulations one could not hope to grasp how a society enmeshed in its own internal conflicts would show evidence of such conflicts through the individual criminal acts of a minority of its residents.

Thus it was time for a revised edition of Vold's work, and for this task a brilliant young man, Thomas J. Bernard, was chosen. A second edition appeared in 1979, and I wrote then that the new material captured Vold's essence and that the old material was left intact, or updated at times, so that what Vold had written was preserved.

Now another edition appears, and, rightly, Thomas Bernard is Vold's collaborator, although the two never met. Bernard has built on Vold, reexamined what each of them had written, synthesized the material, introduced concepts that were only being born when he was doing his first revision, but, above all, I believe that he felt a little more freedom in dealing with the original work than he did the first time around. He was no longer circumscribed; the second edi-

tion had established his place as Vold's logical successor, and the third could be the work that the two of them might have written had they worked together today.

Had Vold lived to see the third edition of this book, he could not have chosen a better collaborator than Tom Bernard, and he would have been pleased, very pleased, with the end product.

*City University of New York and
John Jay College of Criminal Justice*

Edward Sagarin

Acknowledgments

In preparing this edition of *Theoretical Criminology*, I again have had the privilege and pleasure of working with Edward Sagarin. Ed possesses all of the attributes of a superb editor: an astonishingly broad base of knowledge, an unerring eye for detail, and a willingness to spend the time and effort necessary to analyze thoroughly and comment thoughtfully. This book has benefited greatly from Ed's wisdom and experience, and I have benefited as well. For that I wish to express to him my most sincere thanks. To the extent that there are errors or inadequacies here, they undoubtedly exist because I failed to take his advice on some point and insisted on going my own way.

Many thanks are also owed to present and former faculty members of the School of Criminal Justice at the State University of New York at Albany, where I spent three productive years as a doctoral student after preparing the second edition of this book. Much of what is new in the third edition reflects knowledge that my professors managed to beat into my skull only with considerable difficulty. It seems to me that more knowledge got through than they believed at the time. Thanks and appreciation are also due to my colleagues in the Administration of Justice program at The Pennsylvania State University. It is my good fortune to work in a wonderfully congenial atmosphere with a truly fine group of people for whom I have the highest respect. In various direct and indirect ways they have all contributed to the writing of this book.

I would particularly like to thank Myer Guzy for his help in preparing the chapter on Marxist criminology. In addition, I would like

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State College, Pennsylvania
May 1985

T. J. B.

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Theoretical Criminology

Theory and Criminology

Criminology as a field of study has been well documented by a long line of excellent and distinguished textbooks, both European and American, going back many decades.¹ Most of these texts concentrate on presenting facts known about the subject of criminality. For example, they discuss such subjects as the extent and distribution of criminal behaviors in society; the characteristics of criminal law and procedure; the characteristics of criminals; and the history, structure, and functioning of the criminal justice system. The theoretical material presented in these texts is usually somewhat limited. Almost all texts review the major theories about the causes of criminal behavior, and some texts present other theoretical material such as

1. A few of the recent, readily available American textbooks in general criminology may be mentioned: Joseph F. Sheley, *America's "Crime Problem,"* Wadsworth, Belmont, Cal., 1985; Vernon Fox, *Introduction to Criminology*, 2nd ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1985; D. Stanley Eitzen and Doug A. Timmer, *Criminology*, John Wiley, New York, 1984; Don C. Gibbons, *Society, Crime, and Criminal Behavior*, 4th ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1984; Robert L. Bonn, *Criminology*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1984; William B. Sanders, *Criminology*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1983; Martin R. Haskell and Lewis Yablonsky, *Criminology: Crime and Criminality*, 3rd ed., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1983; Charles W. Thomas and John R. Hepburn, *Crime, Criminal Law, and Criminology*, William C. Brown, Dubuque, Iowa, 1983; Larry J. Seigel, *Criminology*, West, St. Paul, 1983; Sue Titus Reid, *Crime and Criminology*, 3rd ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1982; Harry E. Allen, Paul C. Friday, Julian B. Roebuck, and Edward Sagarin, *Crime and Punishment: An Introduction to Criminology*, The Free Press, New York, 1981; Sheila Balkan, Ronald J. Berger, and Janet Schmidt, *Crime and Deviance in America: A Critical Approach*, Wadsworth, Belmont, Cal., 1980; Richard Quinney, *Criminology*, 2nd ed., Little, Brown, Boston, 1979; Donald Glaser, *Crime in Our Changing Society*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1979; Edwin H. Sutherland and Donald R. Cressey, *Criminology*, 10th ed., Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1978; and Gresham M. Sykes, *Criminology*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1978.

sociology of law, philosophy of punishment, or theories of correctional treatment.

As a text in theoretical criminology, this book does not concentrate on presenting the facts known about criminality, although at least some of those facts are presented in the various chapters. Rather, this book concentrates on the theories used to explain those facts. The theories themselves, then, rather than the facts about criminality, are the focus of this book.²

A theory is a part of explanation.³ Basically, an explanation is a sensible relating of some particular phenomenon to the whole field of knowledge. The whole field of knowledge is the background of contemporary culture—the world of information, beliefs, and attitudes that make up the intellectual atmosphere of any people at any particular time or place. Thus, when modern people see a train move along the railroad tracks, they “explain” that phenomenon to themselves in terms of their knowledge of internal combustion engines. Primitive people also had explanations that enabled them to account for such phenomena, but they used primitive concepts such as the power of spirits or demons.

Scientific theories are one kind of explanation. In general, scientific theories make statements about the relationships between two classes of phenomena.⁴ For example, some scientific theories in criminology make statements about the relationship between characteristics of criminal punishments (e.g., certainty and severity) and the volume of criminal behaviors in society. Other scientific theories make statements relating certain biological, psychological, and social characteristics of individuals to the likelihood that they will engage in criminal behaviors. Still other scientific theories make statements relating the characteristics of individuals to the likelihood that they will be defined and processed as criminals by the criminal justice system.

The key characteristic of a scientific theory is that it makes statements that can be disproved.⁵ Explanations that cannot be disproved

2. Some recent criminology texts that focus on theoretical material include Gwynn Nettler, *Explaining Crime*, 3rd ed., McGraw-Hill, New York, 1984; Francis T. Cullen, *Rethinking Crime and Deviance Theory*, Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, N.J., 1984; J. E. Hall-Williams, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Butterworths, London, 1982; William V. Pelfrey, *The Evolution of Criminology*, Anderson, Cincinnati, 1980; Don C. Gibbons, *The Criminological Enterprise: Theories and Perspectives*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1979; and Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young, *The New Criminology*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

3. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1968, pp. 3–5.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

are not scientific. The general process of attempting to disprove a scientific theory involves deriving specific empirical assertions from the theory and comparing those assertions to observations made in the real world; that is, the assertions of the theory are tested against the observed world of the facts. If the observations are inconsistent with the assertions of the theory, then the theory is falsified. If the observations are consistent with the assertions of the theory, then the theory becomes more credible, but it is not proved; there are always alternative theories that might also explain the same observations.

A theory can gain a great deal of credibility if all the reasonable alternative theories are shown to be inconsistent with the observed world of facts. At that point the theory might simply be accepted as true. However, it is always possible that some new facts will be discovered in the future that are inconsistent with the theory, so that a new theory will be required. For example, Newton's laws of physics were accepted as true for 200 years, but they were replaced by Einstein's theory of relativity at the beginning of this century due to the discovery of some new facts.⁶

All theories are consistent with the basic facts of the phenomenon they are trying to explain. For example, all the theories discussed in this book are consistent with the basic facts known about crime. No one is going to take a theory seriously if it makes assertions that are inconsistent with well-known and widely accepted facts. While each theory is consistent with the basic facts, each also implies that there will be many less important facts, ones that are not well known or widely accepted. It is on these relatively minor points that most testing of theories takes place. If the observed facts are inconsistent with these relatively minor points, then the theory itself may be said to be falsified.

These relatively minor points become especially important when there are several theories competing to explain the same set of facts.⁷ Such points can then generate a great deal of theory and research by adherents of the competing theories. An example would be the behavior of identical twins each of whom was raised in a different environment.⁸ Although very few cases of such twins exist, they have been the subject of a great deal of theory and research. The reason

6. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969.

7. Stinchcombe, op. cit., pp. 24-28.

8. See Susan L. Farber, *Identical Twins Raised Apart: A Reanalysis*, Basic Books, New York, 1981.