Recent Developments in Criminological Theory: Toward Disciplinary Diversity and Theoretical Integration

Stuart Henry and Scott A. Lukas (eds)
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This rather weighty tome is marketed on the publisher’s website as comprising ‘recent and cutting-edge articles from leading criminological theorists’ mined from journal articles published since 1998 and distributed over ten categories that represent the historical genres or ‘schools’ of criminological theory, namely: classical and rational choice; biological and biosocial; psychological; social learning and neutralization; social control; social ecology, subcultural, and cultural; anomie and strain; conflict and radical; feminist and gender; critical and postmodern theories. Alongside these ten main sections are an original introduction written by the editors, a conclusion section devoted to the project of interdisciplinary integration for criminology as a subject discipline represented by an article from the academic journal *The Criminologist* by D. Wayne Osgood, and a Name Index.

That the concluding chapter is in actuality a stand-alone article in its own right reprinted in its entirety from a peer-reviewed academic journal provides a hint as to the composition of this book: apart from the introduction, every contribution to this edited volume is a previously published article, selected and sorted according to the evaluations of the two editors. This volume is the second in the series of the International Library of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Penology which, as in the first series, is devoted to identifying and bringing together in one collection the ‘most significant’ journal essays in contemporary criminology, criminal justice and penology and making them available in one convenient volume. As the series editors Gerald Mars and David Nelken note in the preface, ‘Each volume is edited by a recognized authority who has selected twenty or so of the best journal essays in the field of their special competence and provided an informative introduction giving a summary of the field and the relevance of the essays chosen. The original pagination is retained for ease of reference’ (p. xi), this last feature proving useful indeed, though having two sets of page numbers can at times be a bit confusing, though not prohibitively so.

The introduction by Henry and Lukas is very interesting and highly informative in its own right, providing a useful and concise description of the main ‘schools’ or generic categories of criminological research since its inception, and summarizing the main theses...
contained in the chosen articles and how these develop – or in some cases, resurrect – ideas, themes or questions associated with the original criminological theories. For example, recent advances in research on genetics and human behaviour in the wake of the mapping of the human genome, and research on maternal smoking in pregnancy, clearly raise significant questions about the new potential for revisions to two of the earliest as well as most maligned theories of crime and their reliance on at least partially discredited understandings of human biology and environmental factors, and two such articles are represented here. The ambiguity and instability of what is meant by ‘rational’ in rational choice theories also comes in for an overhaul in light of post-structuralist and postmodern deconstructions of the subject and models of (scientific) rationality, as does its viability as a ‘theory’ of crime as opposed to a decision-making model. Similarly, what has previously been the rather positivistic approach offered by psychological theories of crime are augmented by contributions that take into greater consideration the influence of environmental, social and situational factors and how these can change longitudinally to alter subjective understanding of meaning and agency over the life course, becoming much more qualitative in flavour.

From my perspective, the most interesting and potentially groundbreaking contributions relate to the revisiting of radical and feminist criminology, again two areas of criminological theory which have particularly suffered in recent years regarding their perceived capacity to generate new ideas or relevant research questions in a post-modern age. Recent scholarly disaffection with what some have called the ‘risk-crazed’ obsession of crime policy should be comforted by the resurgence of a needs-based judicial model reproduced from critical and radical theories. In the wake of the war on terror and its manifold excesses with respect to serious consequences in the criminal justice system, crime prevention strategies and human rights, it is heartening, to say the least, to see feminists seek to answer the question of what a feminist theory of state crime would look like, a question which has been continually posed in the past as an implicit way of deriding the potential for feminism to contribute anything new to criminological theory in a global age of ‘backlash’.

The main justification offered by the series editors is that there is a need for such a collection, representing the ‘best’ of recent contributions to criminological theory, due to the growing complexity of the discipline as a consequence of a greater incorporation of myriad theoretical frameworks imported from other disciplines and the increase in specialization resulting in a proliferation of new academic journals, both of which make it more difficult to keep up with overall developments across the board. While there is a strong case to support this argument, and while it is certainly useful and interesting to read a volume of such works presented in such a format, it is worth noting that the selection has been restricted to only two contributions per area, to say nothing of the fact that they are taken from academic journals as opposed to books or other organs. It is also worth noting that the cost will be prohibitive to students, who along with their lecturers would also benefit from having such a text, particularly as a core text for upper-level criminological theory courses. It is with respect to teaching such a core criminological theory course at master’s degree level that I purchased this book. Though
I have found it useful and think it would prove to be so for my colleagues also teaching on the course and for the students, I am immediately presented with the problem of copyright issues relating to the digitization of more than a small amount of material from the book (the provision of course materials in digital format also being a recent development in teaching and learning). It may be that one way around this is to request that our university library subscribe to as many of the journals cited in this book as possible but, in a climate in which there are significant pressures to cut costs, this may not be feasible. In the absence of a more affordable paperback edition, perhaps the publishers might consider producing an ebook version of this volume in order to deal with the issue of copyright and student availability via university libraries.