

An Introduction to Criminological Theory **(3rd edition)**

By Roger Hopkins Burke

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When the first edition of *An Introduction to Criminology Theory* was published in 2001, readers were offered a fresh way of thinking about criminological theory; one which steered clear from the chronological framework typically adopted in most theory textbooks, and which instead used models of criminal behaviour to illustrate commonalities and differences between various theories and their implications for crime causation and prevention. This innovative approach was extremely well-received by students and academics alike clamouring for something less impenetrable than the standard fare.

The third edition provides a welcome revision to its two predecessors whilst staying true to its original approach and structure. This new edition is significantly larger and devotes more attention to more recent developments in theory and to the application of theory to contemporary criminological discourse. There are also updates where appropriate to chapters found in previous editions, which gives the book a more comprehensive and contemporary feel than many of its competitors.

As with the previous editions, the latest version categorises theories under four broad models of criminal behaviour: the rational actor, predestined actor, and victimised actor models, and a fourth model containing more integrated ways of thinking about crime and criminal behaviour. Within Part One, we are introduced to theories aligned to the principles of the rational actor model and this gives us insights into not only classical criminology and its foundations but more recent variations of the rational actor tradition that emerged with the rise of the 'new right' in the US and UK. Part Two then turns our attention to theories that adhere to the positivist standpoint associated with the predestined actor model – namely biological, psychological and sociological perspectives. Importantly, and unlike some other leading theory texts, each strand of positivism is given its own chapter, and we are also offered a separate chapter on the way in which female criminality is viewed under the predestined actor model.

In Part Three Hopkins Burke takes us through the more radical theories associated with the victimised actor model and in so doing illustrates how and why the ideas of labelling, conflict, critical and feminist theorists came to influence criminological thinking at the expense of more conventional approaches. As is the case throughout the book, the origins, underlying principles and implications of each theory are all thoroughly examined in a manner that allows readers to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and a commendable level of objectivity is maintained throughout the discussion of different perspectives. Part Four then takes us through the more integrated approaches where ideas from more than one theory have been used in an effort to develop more complete explanations of criminal behaviour. This covers a diverse range of themes including socio-biological, environmental, social control and

left realist theories, and in each instance we are shown the way in which these theories are rooted in the models of criminal behaviour outlined previously.

The latest edition contains a new section – Part Five – which examines the theoretical explanations that have emerged within the context of the fragmentation of modernity. This is an important addition because it brings readers up to speed with contemporary developments in criminological theorizing: students can often be inclined to see the relevance of theory in a historical sense only, but by including chapters on crime and postmodernity, cultural criminology, the risk society and radical moral communitarianism, Hopkins Burke makes explicit why theory is so relevant to contemporary criminology. In helping students to make this connection, this new edition is to be highly commended.

While there is much to admire about the book, it is not without its faults. The links between established theories and contemporary criminological issues are clear in some contexts but not others, though in part this is an inevitable outcome of the need to be selective in the coverage of issues within Part Five. Perhaps more significantly, the discussion can appear a little dense in places for the first-year undergraduate audience who will often, though not exclusively, be taking theory modules. The style of writing is accessible and impressively engaging, but arguably one or two additional features such as chapter summaries or case studies would have complemented the text without putting off readers at a higher level of study.

All in all though, this is an excellent text that, for me, surpasses its competitors in terms of its coverage of theory, depth of analysis and structure of discussion. *An Introduction to Criminology Theory* has been the recommended textbook on many a Theories of Crime module and I have no doubt that this new and improved edition will continue to inspire criminology students throughout the UK and beyond.