Theoretical Criminology

SECOND EDITION

George B. Vold
Thomas J. Bernard

Oxford University Press
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GEORGE BRYAN VOLD
1895–1967

One of the towering figures in American criminology, George Bryan Vold, was a sociologist by training like Edwin Sutherland, and again like Sutherland, was honored and acclaimed by his colleagues. The son of Norwegian immigrants, he was born on a small farm in South Dakota. He graduated from South Dakota State College in 1921 and went on to earn his masters in science at the University of Chicago and his doctorate at the University of Minnesota, where his remarkable intellect earned him early recognition. He joined the faculty there, becoming a full professor in 1937 and remaining with the university until his retirement in 1964.

Early in his career, Vold turned his attention to criminology and penology, and brilliantly combined field research with intensive theoretical study and teaching. In 1931, he was awarded a SSRC fellowship to study the Massachusetts prison system; from 1934 to 1936, he helped revise the psychopathic personality laws of the State of Minnesota; and he served as consultant to the Minnesota Crime Commission from which work came the *Report of the Minnesota Crime Commission* in 1936. His classic *Prediction Methods and Parole* was published in 1931; his *Survey of Police Training* and his *Man and Society* in 1937. Other honors followed, including the 1966 Edwin Sutherland Award of the American Society of Criminology for his "distinguished contributions to scholarship and criminology".

In Ireland, it is said of such a man:
Ni bheidh a leitheid aris ann.
(You will not see his like again.)

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Foreword to the Second Edition

The publication of the first and until now the only edition of *Theoretical Criminology* by George Vold, in 1958, was an event of extraordinary importance in the history of criminology, a field in which there had been numerous theoretical perspectives. Although basic texts generally devoted short sections to theory, and sometimes longer sections to an explanation of criminal conduct as promulgated or favored by their authors, before Vold there was no single work dedicated to summarizing and elaborating on the theme expressed in his title.

It was Vold's happy fortune to live to see the book widely hailed. It went into eight printings, and for this work, as well as for his other achievements, George Vold was honored by the American Society of Criminology with its Edwin Sutherland Award in 1966.

It can be said that *Theoretical Criminology* quickly became a classic, if that is not a contradiction to which linguistic purists will object. It could not in the short span of two decades obtain the age that marks a classic, but in the sense that it was generally accepted as the best and even the standard work on theories of criminality, as well as a forceful argument for conflict theory (which became so important since Vold's book, and at least in part as a result of it), in this sense the book was indisputably a classic.

But what does one do with a classic? Sometimes it must remain intact, for its significance lies in the manner in which it was written

at a given time, what it said, the influence it had, how it expressed an author's view. No one would rewrite Rousseau's *Social Contract*, or Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishment*, any more than one would tamper with *Hamlet*. In more recent times, *Civilization and Its Discontents* must always remain as Freud wrote it, and those who wish to embellish on his argument, develop it, assail it, offer further evidence or abstract reasons to accept or reject it, will write essays and books of their own, whereas this short work of Freud stands exactly as he wrote it.

There are other classics, however, that have different functions. They are more didactic than argumentative; they summarize the state of an art at a particular moment, rather than make an original contribution to that art. Or, expressed differently, the original contribution is largely in the manner of making the summary. And, as time goes on and there are new developments, such a classic ages, and in aging does not ripen and grow, but becomes anachronistic, more a museum piece than a useful modern tool.

It is in this latter category that many of us in criminology felt that Vold's book fell. So much had happened in theoretical criminology since 1958: new developments in the conflict theory Vold held dear; a resurgence of interest and evidence for biological theory; an admixture of theoretical work on deviance and on crime; studies leading to a theory of the subculture of violence—to name a few strands among many. And then, returning to Vold's book, one finds, despite his magnificent achievement, that there were gaps in his work. There was no discussion of Sellin's theory of culture conflict and crime, despite its appearance in 1938, its wide influence, the knowledge Vold had of it (Sellin's short work on the subject appears in Vold's bibliography), and despite the close relationship of the culture conflict theory with Vold's own conflict orientation. Even more striking, anomie theory is never mentioned in the first edition of Vold, and the name of Robert Merton appears only in a footnote unrelated to the work on anomie, although Merton's famous article had been published in 1938 and, by the time Vold wrote, had already attracted more attention, I dare say, than any single article in the history of criminological theory.

So there were many reasons for wanting to see Vold's great book revised, expanded, updated, with deficiencies in the first edition corrected and with new material on the theoretical thrusts of the last

two decades included. For this purpose, Thomas Bernard was chosen, a young man of wide knowledge, with a remarkable grasp of the theoretical issues and in complete sympathy with the major orientations of Vold himself. The task facing Bernard was awesome. He wanted to keep intact as much as possible of what Vold had written, and yet improve on it where he saw the possibilities, and correct it where it was wrong. And he had to introduce completely new material, consistent with the rest of the book, much as he felt that Vold would have written it had he lived to do so; yet at the same time he wanted it to reflect his own approach to the subject.

It appears to me that Tom Bernard has discharged the tasks before him with remarkable success. The new material captures Vold's essence, the old material was left intact sufficiently to preserve what Vold had written, and yet here and there given the benefit of new studies or of old ones that had been overlooked. This is a book that was crying out for a second edition, and the excellence of this edition is beyond my own expectations. The second edition can take its place on the bookshelf next to the first; more than that, it can take the place of the first edition. Had Vold lived to see the pages that follow (and had he been unable to write them himself), he would have been pleased, very pleased, with the end product.

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