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HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN CRIMINOLOGY

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INTRODUCTON

In the past two decades, the field of criminology has changed dramatically. Mainstream criminology, which focused primarily on the etiology of behavior taken for granted as criminal, has been successively challenged by a number of different sociological theories and perspectives. These challenges have come from the labeling or interactionist perspective, various pluralistic conflict theories, and a number of radical, critical, or Marxist approaches. Although there are many differences among these theoretical developments, they share a common set of humanistic concerns. All of these perspectives attempt to combine a theoretical explanation of crime and social control with a practical concern for human liberation and social justice. All of these perspectives are concerned, in one way or another, with the way in which the social structuring of crime and social control affects the human rights, survival, and material well-being of people.

These humanistic concerns have become more important over time. So much so, that the American Society of Criminology devoted two sessions to the topic of "Humanistic Perspectives in Criminology" at its annual meeting in 1983. This special issue is an outgrowth of these two sessions.

The first two papers focus particularly on the vexing definitional and conceptual issues in humanistic approaches to the study of crime. With the remainder of the papers the focus shifts to the relationship between the theory and the practice of humanistic criminology in modern societies as the authors explore the possibilities for the development of humanistic social structures and policies that would enhance human freedom, social justice, and individual dignity.

In the lead article, Clayton Hartjen outlines the characteristics and prospects for a new criminology--a humanistic criminology as opposed to the taken-for-granted correctional orientation of the conventional positivistic criminology, which attempts to explain the causes of crime in order to find ways to prevent or reduce crime. Understanding the human phenomenon of crime, he points out, has always been a secondary or marginal concern of conventional criminology. Hartjen's essay addresses these three issues: (1) the distinctive features of a humanistic criminology, (2) the possibilities for accomplishing such an enterprise, and (3) the shape of an academic curriculum of criminology oriented to humanistic concerns.

In the second article, Ron Kramer argues that the traditional definition of crime is too narrow and unnecessarily constrictive of criminological work and that it must be replaced by several definitions more in accord with the objectives of a humanistic criminology. He begins by contending that the traditional debate over the definition of crime has not been grounded within the context of the more fundamental images of crime that actually guide criminological work. He then attempts to clarify these underlying images (paradigms), displaying the value questions and domain assumptions contained within them. Finally, Kramer offers first order and second order definitions of crime which he feels are more suitable to the task of humanistic criminology.

As Larry Tifft and Lois Stevenson note in the next paper, anarchist perspectives have been perceived as beyond the scope of acceptable criminological thought. But these perspectives have much to contribute, especially to humanistic criminology. Peter Kropotkin was a well-known anarchist theorist who wrote extensively on criminological issues. In this article, Tifft and Stevenson attempt to share their belief that Kropotkin's needs-based and feelings-based sociology provides an insightful and provocative orientation both for criminological synthesis, inquiry, and research, and for taking action to alter and transcend the criminogenic social arrangements of our world.

David Simon's essay explores the structural conditions in American society that foster elite deviance, what C. Wright Mills called the "higher immorality" among the most wealthy and powerful members of America's corporate, political, and military elite. In analyzing the role of alienated persons and organizational inauthenticity in modern bureaucratic societies, Simon holds out the prospect for the development of a truly radical humanist sociology that transcends the question of whether the behavior is illegal or not.

In the next paper T. R. Young offers a wide-ranging critique of existing orientations and policies concerning crime in the United States. He examines deficiencies in studying forms of crime, studying systems of justice, and in offering kinds of theories. He concludes that bad theory makes bad policy. Young then attempts to locate the distorted study of crime and justice as well as the growth of unscientific theory in the political economy of advanced monopoly capitalism. Finally, he suggests five transformations of contemporary criminology as a way to create a humanistic criminology adequate to the policy needs of a society beset by a wide variety of activity harmful to the human enterprise.

In his article, Harold Pepinsky demonstrates how humanistic criminology can stretch the sociological imagination of the field and contribute practical, humanistic suggestions for reducing crime in our society. Pepinsky begins with an elegant statement of what humanistic criminology means to him. He then proceeds to argue that human opportunity, variety, and freedom (including freedom from crime) can be the result of social control and social engineering, properly modeled. Pepinsky distinguishes between repressive social control and liberating social control. Drawing on the work of Smith and Beccaria, he details a provocative model of liberating social control which would reduce crime. Pepinsky argues that criminology can and should become a force for human tolerance in our world through such theoretical and practical work.

In the concluding article, Erdwin H. Pfuhl critically looks at the immense obstacles that oppose the implementation of a truly humanistic criminology in the everyday operations of crime control agencies. The criminological enterprise he contends is becoming progressively more dehumanized as "justice" becomes defined as a "series of bureaucratic procedures." With the tremendous growth in surveillance and control in the name of national security and the increasing subordination of human needs to organizational considerations, the human factor becomes lost sight of as "people issues" are sacrificed for the sake of social control and the needs of the state. Indeed, Pfuhl argues, the entire criminological enterprise--both mainstream academic criminology (which fails to grapple with the subjective worlds people experience) and crime control agencies--has lost touch with those it was intended to understand and serve.