

Behavioral sciences and forensic criminology in the Accusatory System

Libertad Merchan-Rojas

Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. (2017), *The psychology of criminal conduct*. New York: Routledge

In 1994, the book *Psychology of criminal behavior* was published for the first time, written by Don Andrews and James Bonta, well-known researchers and authorities in the study of criminal behavior. This work's topic initially surged as the result of a compilation of texts and notes that the authors had written down for an advanced course in criminal behavior for the undergraduate program at Carleton University, in Ottawa, Canada (Olver & Stockdale, 2017). The drafting of the text begun in 1993 and a year later the first edition was published. Since then, six editions have been printed, and the last one in 2007 was published much later after Don Andrews' death, in October 2010.

Psychology of criminal behavior has been a transcendental text for the placing of psychology and the empirical evidence as pillars in the study of criminal behavior throughout the years and in diverse latitudes. In its latest edition (2017), the book has 15 chapters organized in four large sections, each one revised and updated based on the most recent findings in the scientific psychological research in criminal behavior, as well as the main contributions to the general theory of personality, social cognitive learning, and the risk/need/response model proposed by the authors during their academic trajectory.

The first section, titled "Historical context and basic knowledge of criminal behavior," consists of three chapters that introduce and describe the main concepts underlying criminal behavior and the criminological theories on criminal behavior, presenting a critique on the way predominant criminological focuses ignored psychological and biological contexts as well as the immediate social context in criminal behavior, but the 2017 edition, after overcoming this discussion and succeeding in its objective, and in an informative manner, the authors present a brief outlook of the different criminological theories that explain criminal behavior, to arrive at the general theory of personality and

the social cognitive learning theory, which are the bases for their risk/need/response model, and the nucleus of the text's main issues.

Chapter two of this first section is an innovating and pertinent contribution as it presents an overall description of the research statistics and methodology, which are useful and necessary to understand the results of existing studies in criminal behavior. Through this approach the text offers readers the foundation to establish adequate criteria and make better decisions as to the task of selecting what may be considered valid scientific evidence (because of its methodological rigor and statistics), and data that ought to be rejected. All in all, this chapter provides the lenses through which to view and critically assess the every time wider and more diverse information there is on criminal behavior; therefore, a careful reading of this chapter is essential.

On the other hand, the second section titled "The main factors of risk/need/response in criminal behavior" shows one of its largest contributions: the proposal of the eight factors related to risk/need/response which, through the reviews of meta-analyses on different populations and delinquent types, support its productive value and acceptance among the scientific community. In this part of the text, the authors introduce a special chapter where they propose the biological and neuro-psychological bases for criminal behavior, but without excluding the new approaches in this robust and rigorous research.

In addition to this, the third section, "Applications" proposes the general and specific means for the implementation of the risk/need/response model in the delinquents' evaluation and treatment. Therein, the authors describe the importance each principle has in addition to the empirical evidence backing it up, and the way through which the model ought to be considered and applied. This is a master section where, throughout its six chapters, the authors take up once more the theoretical and empirical evidence as addressed in the text and use it as their proposal to apply the model

* Psychologist Universidad el Bosque; Psychology Doctorate from Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM); Colombian representative for the Asociación Iberoamericana de Psicología [Ibero American Association of Psychology]. Libertad147@hotmail.com

in the delinquents' evaluation, classification, intervention, reintegration and supervision within practical contexts, besides its contribution to setting up valid, reliable and pragmatic measuring instruments.

Finally, section four, "Summary and conclusions" synthesizes the most relevant aspects worked on, and establishes a relation between what for the authors is fundamental in the study and treatment of criminal behavior and its relapse. Also, in addition to pointing out the pending challenges in this area of research, it offers some reflection on the urgency of implementing prevention and rehabilitation programs with an ethical, human and efficient focus.

It is worthwhile mentioning that, although there is no Spanish version of the book, *Psychology of criminal behavior* is, doubtlessly, an indispensable text for all those students, researchers, academicians and professionals interested in understanding, evaluating and treating delinquent behavior and its relapse. It is a compendium of important scientific

findings of the last decades on criminal behavior that offers a solid and fundamental theoretical basis which, at the same time, becomes a fascinating toolbox to face every-day practice in the treatment and evaluation of delinquency and its relapse.

Lastly, in the preface of the book, Bonta mentions that this edition (2017) aims to be less complex and more accessible in order to reach a broad audience and convey the idea that it is possible to make offenders more prosocial people, in addition to emphasizing that an evidence-based criminal justice policy can lead to safer communities. With this impressive and forceful work, Bonta and Andrews achieve their mission: to make a basic text of consultation and updating for all those interested in the research, understanding and practice of the psychology of criminal behavior, as well as to encourage the implementation of policies and programs of prevention and intervention based on empirical evidence to generate more effective practices.