

TRANSCENDING THE CONVENTIONAL DEFINITION OF CRIME:  
TOWARD A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CRIMINOLOGY

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Dedicated to the memory of Gil Geis. No one addressed the definitional issues relating to white collar crime more fully and more wisely.

## Abstract

This paper argues against a common resistance to addressing definitional issues relating to crime, on the premise that a failure to address such issues has significant negative consequences. It next takes up the limitations of the conventional definition of crime, with special attention to Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory and the behavioral definition of crime. The tradition of alternatives to conventional definitions of crime is then reviewed. Edwin H. Sutherland's pioneering challenge to the conventional definition of crime provides a point of departure for surveying the ongoing controversies relating to the definition of white collar crime. The author's approach to resolving these challenges calls for viewing white collar crime as a broad, heuristic category and the foundation for a typology encompassing a range of core, cognate, hybrid and marginal types of white collar crime. More recent attention to crimes of the powerful has produced new approaches to defining crime, with "crimes of globalization" (i.e., the crimes of international financial institutions) highlighted in this context. This paper concludes with some observations on conundrums associated with defining crime, and a call for acknowledging the need to rethink the definition of crime in an evolving, globalized twenty-first century.

## ON THE DEFINITION OF CRIME: SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

There is significant resistance among many criminologists to engaging with the definitional issues relating to crime or to specific types of crime. This author has encountered over the years any number of comments on “tedious” and “interminable” definitional discussions. Many criminologists clearly prefer to “get on with the work” of addressing specific theoretical and empirical questions that arise in relation to crime and its control, as opposed to devoting time and intellectual energy on dialogues relating to definitional and conceptual issues. Such impatience is understandable on a certain level, and the downside of becoming “imprisoned” by definitional conundrums to the point where one is hindered from addressing concrete and consequential “real world” issues needs to be acknowledged. But the premise here is that avoidance of core definitional issues has costly consequences in relation to theoretical and empirical progress. All-too-often we end up with criminologists talking past each other or generating a bottomless well of confusion and misunderstanding because the core concept of “crime” is not clearly defined. This all-too-familiar term is invoked to mean quite different things in different specific contexts. Indeed, the failure to attend to the definition of crime has a generic relationship to the broader failure of criminologists all-too-often to address core underlying assumptions that necessarily inform their work on crime and its control. Robert Agnew’s (2011) *Toward a Unified Criminology: Integrating Assumptions about Crime, People, and Society* makes a profoundly important contribution to the field of criminology by exploring core assumptions underlying criminological inquiry and by working through the implications of adopting – explicitly or implicitly – different core assumptions. The project of defining crime itself, then, is best understood within the broader context of addressing this range of core assumptions.

In taking on a topic such as “the definition of crime” one needs to acknowledge the not inconsiderable risk of “re-inventing the wheel,” at least partially. Stuart Henry and Mark Lanier’s (2001) *What is Crime? Controversies over the Nature of Crime and What to Do about It* – published at the outset of the new century – provides its readers with an exceptionally thorough and rich exploration of core issues in relation to the definition of crime. I hope I succeed here in introducing a few novel and useful insights, but this is well-trod terrain.

A comprehensive treatment of the definition of crime issue would have to explore the very origins of the concept of crime itself during the course of human history, and the evolution of the meaning of this concept over time and across different regions and countries (Beirne, 1993; Jones, 1986). It is generally acknowledged that the concept of “sin” has a longer history than that of crime, and that in the earlier stages of human history sin was a more dominant concept (Jacoby, 1983; Pfohl, 1985; Ross, 1907). This is not the place to undertake this more comprehensive historical examination. It can be safely asserted, however, that the term crime has had quite diverse meanings throughout the long history of its use, although some understandings of crime have been dominant and others more marginal. Certainly there is a long and enduring history of invoking the term “crime” without any attempt to define the term. For many people the meaning of the term crime is clearly taken to be obvious, and so obvious that there is no need to define it. For many people, then, U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Potter Stewart’s celebrated observation about pornography (and obscenity) – “I know it when I see it” – applies to crime as well (Slade, 2000: 4). It also seems reasonable to claim that the term crime is most widely equated with conventional criminal offenses, or violations of the criminal law, that are exemplified by the FBI’s “index” crimes: murder; rape; assault; robbery; burglary; auto theft; larceny; and arson. This is surely the type of crime of most concern to the American public, along with drug-related offenses and recent concerns about terrorism, and these offenses account for most of the “mass imprisonment” of the recent era (Abramsky, 2007). The largest proportion of criminological scholarship addressing crime

through the present era encompasses one or more of these types of crime. But it is also indisputably true that there is a long tradition critical of the limitations of a conventional conception of crime (Hall 2012; Henry and Lanier, 2001; Tifft and Sullivan, 1980). Accordingly, the claim is made that much of the focus of mainstream criminologist is seriously skewed.

#### ON THE MEANING OF “CRIME”: SOME BASIC ALTERNATIVES

The broader issue of the meaning of “crime” itself requires further consideration here (see Kauzlarich and Friedrichs 2005). As we noted above, for many people – and not just members of the public, but for many criminologists as well – there is a “taken-for-granted” approach to the meaning of crime: i.e., it is assumed that if one invokes the term one’s audience knows exactly what one is talking about, so there is no need to consume time or space defining the term. But as I have also suggested, it is quite clear that there are multiple different meanings of the term crime. My own practice in criminology and criminal justice classes that I have taught over a period of many years is to poll students, on the very first day of class, to provide a “top of the head” brief definition, in writing, of their understanding of the term “crime” (among other concepts, depending on the course involved). And a selective review of the responses, for the class as a whole, demonstrates that in any class quite different definitions of the term crime will emerge. Surely the most common definition of crime is “legalistic”: i.e., a violation of the criminal law. But it seems to me important in this context to differentiate between actions (or failures to act) as defined in statutes (a statutory definition of crime) from findings in a court of law that a specific alleged action was in fact a violation of the law (an adjudicated definition of crime). An arrest by police officers and an indictment by prosecutors represent intermediary dimensions of a legalistic definition of crime. In this context it is useful to discuss the fact that actions that may appear to be a crime may turn out, on further examination, to be something other than a crime, as defined by the statutory law. But actions taken by criminal justice personnel – be they police

officers, prosecutors, or courts – have demonstrable consequences in relation to “crime,” whether or not they are “factually” correct.

It is often said that all definitions of crime are “political,” insofar as in all developed societies (or societies that have developed beyond the tribal level) a political body of some sort defines crime. It seems useful here, however, to differentiate between definitions of crime that emerge out of a democratic political process (with all due acknowledgment of the skewed political character of modern democracies) and definitions of crime that are imposed by autocratic political regimes. In totalitarian dictatorships, in particular, a “purely” political definition of crime is in effect when actions perceived in any way as threatening to the regime in power are treated as crimes – often, profoundly serious crimes, with deadly consequences for the accused – and these conceptions of crime can be implemented absent any statutory authorization. In one of history’s most notorious cases, Nazi Germany made simply being Jewish a crime warranting the ultimate sanction of death, absent any statutory authorization or judicial process. At least some German criminologists of that time had adopted conceptions of crime and criminality that aligned well with the agenda of the Nazis (Wetzell, 2000). Of course many versions of this purely political conception of crime were applied in Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and in countless other autocratic regimes.

There are other approaches to conceiving of or defining crime. A “moralistic” approach, in this reading, defines serious violations of some moral code as crimes, irrespective of whether or not they are so defined by the state’s criminal law. In the American context no illustrative examples comes more easily to mind than abortion, which is of course defined not simply as a crime but as the profoundly serious crime of homicide by traditional Roman Catholics and adherents of many other religious faiths whose tradition and religious texts or authorities so define abortion. The whole objective of the Pro-Life movement, then, is to bring the formal criminal law back into line with the moral law. One need not here explore the long-standing historical connection of this moralistic approach to defining crime with

the natural law tradition. But one can at least take passing notice of the fact that such widely reviled – and criminally prohibited – practices as slavery were at one time held to be acceptable within a natural law framework. One need hardly belabor the point that religious community moral beliefs have profoundly influenced formal definitions of crime, and most strikingly in relation to so-called victimless crimes – e.g., prostitution; pornography; sodomy; drug offenses; gambling – or public order offenses. The de jure and de facto decriminalization of many of these activities is one of the defining features of contemporary society.

A humanistic definition of crime focuses on demonstrable harm, more often than not coming from powerful elements of society, rather than legal status as the basis for something being designated a crime. This approach, and one recent version of it – the call for a shift from a criminological to a “zemiological” framework – is discussed further on in this paper.

Finally, one should acknowledge a “popularistic” definition of crime, which refers to the most popular and widely diffused ways of viewing crime within a particular culture at some historical point in time. And one should acknowledge, as well, that the term crime may be invoked in a purely “personalistic” way as well, in the sense that people use the term crime subjectively to refer to some form of activity that they believe should be viewed as crime, regardless of its legal or social status.

What does one do, then, if one concedes the validity of the foregoing claim that the term crime is in fact defined in many different ways? My specific recommendation to undergraduate students of crime and criminal justice is that they get into the habit of engaging in a “reflexive exercise” any time they encounter the all-too-familiar term “crime,” and ask themselves what the term refers to within the specific context within which they have encountered it. This seems to me to be far preferable to the all-too-common practice of un-reflexively considering the meaning of the term “crime” as unproblematic or simply adopting a taken-for-granted approach that it is manifestly obvious to what the term refers.

*Defining Crime: The Child’s Perspective.*

An understudied issue in all of this, in my view, is the question of what are the earliest associations very young children make with the term “crime” when they first encounter it. The invocation of “crime” is utterly pervasive in contemporary culture – certainly in contemporary American culture – to the point where even very young children are likely to be exposed to it: on television or on Internet sites; in cartoons and in films; in video games; in passing references by older children and adults, and so forth. For my generation of Americans who were young children in the late 1940s cowboys – the white hat good guys versus the black hat bad guys, Hopalong Cassidy and the Lone Ranger versus rustlers and gunslingers – was a significant early source of images of crime. The “Indians” as represented in the popular culture of that time were principally “bad guys” or criminals, to be feared and to be punished. Of course this is all shameful in terms of what learns subsequently about the real history of the “wild” West: bury my heart at Wounded Knee. But surely for later generations other sources of early exposures to the notion of crime prevailed. I recall my daughter, born in 1979, at about age 3, pointing to a subway poster with a poster with a dog, and the caption “Take a bite out of crime,” which she asked me to read to her, and I have to wonder if her first image of crime was something out of which dogs took a bite. But how our images of crime evolve over time seems worthy of more investigation and reflection.

SUBH: Defining Crime and the Criminological “Mainstream”

As Robert Agnew (2011: 13) notes, little space and time are devoted to considering the definition of crime in mainstream texts and in discussions of crime and criminological phenomenon. Much mainstream criminology clearly adopts a “taken-for-granted” approach to what the term crime (and criminal) refers to, with a strong if not exclusive emphasis upon conventional types of crime. In a parallel vein, for many mainstream criminologists a positivistic approach to the study of conventional types of crime is what criminology is all about, and the whole of what criminology is about. A volume entitled *The Future of Criminology*, edited by Rolf Loeber and Brandon C. Welsh (2012), exemplifies this

pattern. It basically takes the form of a festschrift commemorating the professional career and work of a highly prominent Cambridge University criminologist, David Farrington. He could be said to exemplify the notion of an immensely successful mainstream criminologist. He is a former president of both the British Society of Criminology and the American Society of Criminology, the recipient of many honors, and someone whose name has appeared at or near the top of most cited listings. Farrington has been a key practitioner and promoter of a scientific approach to the study of crime, favoring the use of systematic observation, experimentation, and longitudinal studies, testing of “falsifiable theories that make quantitative predictions” (Farrington 2012: xxi), the study of criminal careers and patterns of co-offending, and the identification of risk factors and effective interventions. In his brief reflection on his career, looking backwards and forwards, Farrington (2012) mentions only shoplifting, stealing, and burglary as specific examples of crimes upon which his work has focused. The thirty-three chapters in the book, many authored by prominent mainstream criminologists, address such topics as the life course, age-crime curves, the biology of crime, criminal careers, adult-onset offending, desistance from crime, preventing delinquency, and the like. Nowhere in this volume do we find any discussion of the meaning of “crime” or “criminal”: it is taken-for-granted that readers understand what these terms refer to (i.e., conventional law-breaking and “street” criminals). There is no acknowledgment of any kind that crime and criminals might exist outside the conventional “framing” of such activity. Nor is there any acknowledgment that “the future of criminology” – the volume is, after all, not entitled the future of scientific criminology, or experimental criminology, or life-course criminology, or developmental criminology – extends beyond the criminological mainstream, and accordingly there is at a minimum an implicit if not explicit dismissal of the notion that any criminological concerns outside of the mainstream criminological framework are part of a legitimate criminological enterprise. The claim is not made here that the work of Farrington and contributors to his festschrift is of no value, and that conventional crime and delinquency and career criminals are of no concern. But the exclusion of a vast range of willfully

harmful endeavors – by states, corporations, and other hugely powerful entities – is immensely limiting for a criminology that aspires to remain relevant in the twenty-first century. This type of institutionalized parochialism – which is quite pervasive within criminology – can be attributed at least partially to the dismissal of definitional and conceptual issues.

This outlook is reflected as well in the Stockholm Criminology Prize and the symposium organized around the prize. The recipient of this prize in 2013 was David Farrington, and over the past seven years that the prize has been awarded it has been strongly biased in favor of positivistic, mainstream criminology, with the accompanying symposium reflecting this bias as well. It is true that the first co-recipient of the prize, John Braithwaite of the Australian National University – a remarkably original, versatile and productive criminologist – cannot be properly classified as a representative of the criminological mainstream, but the other recipient that year, Friedrich Loesel, fits well into this camp. The bias inherent in the Stockholm Criminology Prize to date has generated some criticism and controversy, including from prominent Scandinavian criminologists (Balvig, Christie and Tham, 2008). In the view of these critics, the Stockholm Criminology Prize is largely aligned with an applied criminology which adopts and serves the state's agenda in relation to crime, but largely excludes criminology that is independent of and critical of the state's approach to crime and its control. The meaning or definition of crime has not been a focus of the International Stockholm Criminology symposiums.

SUBH: Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory and the Behavioral Definition of Crime

Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's (1990) "general theory of crime" is – within the American context – the single most widely cited and widely tested criminological theory during the present era (e.g., see Cohn and Farrington 2012; Goode 2008; Madfis 2012). The inference here is that this "general theory" – which implies strongly that what has been observed largely within a contemporary American context can be applied universally and cross-culturally as an explanation of crime (see Aas 2012) – holds that crime (*all* crime) is best explained as a function of low self-control and

poor parenting. Indeed, Gottfredson and Hirschi claim that this explanation applies not just to those types of behavior that are commonly characterized as “crime,” but to the whole range of patterns of deviant conduct (e.g., all forms of substance abuse) as well as proneness to accidents and so forth. The popularity of this theory may well be the attractiveness of adopting a form of explanation with a limited number (as opposed to a multiplicity) of variables, and the availability of standard instruments for “testing” the theory which allow for the generation of findings in a quantifiable form, with the application of impressive multiple regression equations, and so forth. Gottfredson (2011) has recently argued *against* adoption of either a legalistic definition of crime or a disciplinary definition of crime (e.g., economists defining crime in terms of economic activity, sociologists in terms of social norm violation, and so forth), in favor of a behavioral definition of crime, as part of “a large scope of acts people engage in as they individually and then collectively seek to maximize gain and minimize loss” (Gottfredson 2011: 36). In this view, then “Crime is part of a much larger set of behaviours that provide (or appear to provide) momentary benefit for the actor but which are costly in a longer term.” Accordingly, crime has a generic relationship to “accidents, substance abuse, or inappropriate conduct for school, work or interpersonal relations.” It should be obvious that such a definition of crime inherently aligns crime with the behavioral patterns of members of society who are not especially well-educated or bright, who don’t have stable and well-compensated jobs, who are disproportionately poor or economically disadvantaged, and who are socially marginalized in many different respects. If crime is impulsive behavior undertaken for immediate reward (regardless of long-term consequences) it is obviously tautological to explain it as a function of low self-control and poor parenting (Goode 2008; Madfis 2012). This “behavioral” definition of crime skews the study of crime almost exclusively to street crime, even more so than the conventional legalistic definition of crime. I have elsewhere addressed the huge limitations of the “general theory” in relation to understanding white collar crime, including the corporate form of white collar crime (Friedrichs and Schwartz 2008). It is utterly remarkable that

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 191) characterize white collar crime as “rare” and more recently Gottfredson (2011: 39) refers to “the relative rare well-planned organizational crime...”. This is a truly astonishing assertion in light of the vast volume of evidence – in relation to the Savings and Loans frauds, the Enron et al. corporate accounting fraud cases, the Subprime mortgage frauds of the investment banks, the endless wave of high-level insider trading cases and the like – that “well-planned organizational crime” is anything but rare (Barak 2012; Burke, Tomlinson, and Cooper, 2011; Friedrichs, 2010; Reiman and Leighton, 2010). Donald Palmer (2012), a professor of sociology and organizational behavior, argues that organizational wrong-doing is in fact “normal.” In sum, in my judgment, the popularity of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s “general theory of crime” reflects poorly on the field of criminology.

#### SUBH: The Criminological Critique of the Mainstream Conception of Crime

If one recent criminology anthology – Rolf Loeber and Brandon Welsh’s (2012) *The Future of Criminology* – suggests implicitly that there is a broad consensus on what criminology is and how crime is best defined, another recent anthology – Mary Bosworth and Carolyn Hoyle’s (2011) *What is Criminology?* – reflects a very different understanding, that there are in fact vastly different conceptions of what criminology is and ought to be, and accordingly how crime is best defined. The aforementioned contribution to this volume by Michael Gottfredson (2011), as well as other leading lights of mainstream criminology such as Marcus Felson, Larry Sherman and Alfred Blumstein, set forth a dramatically different view of criminology and the nature of crime from that advanced in this volume by such criminologists as David Brown, Chris Cunneen, William Schabas, and Stephan Parmentier, for whom crime is linked to the global financial crisis, postcolonial violations of human rights, and violations of international law. It is implicitly or explicitly stated by the latter group of criminologists that a credible twenty-first century criminology needs to focus on these types of crimes of the powerless, rather than retain the field’s traditional, overwhelming focus on the crimes of the powerful.

At least some criminologists who would be classified as falling within the parameters of the criminological mainstream acknowledge the limitations of the traditional, mainstream criminological way of defining and studying crime. Robert Agnew (2011), in *Toward a Unified Criminology*, specifically engages with the work of a range of critical criminologists and puts forth an “integrated” definition of crime that seeks to find some common ground between mainstream and critical criminological approaches to defining crime. The advantages of this integrated definition of crime, which promotes a broadening of the scope of criminological concerns, are fully addressed by him. John Hagan (2010), in his *Who are the Criminals?*, offers a potent critique of the conventional, mainstream “framing” of the problem of crime, with its highlighting of street crime or conventional crime and its relative inattention to suite crime or high-level white collar crime. Hagan has produced several recent books on genocide and international criminal justice in relation to crimes of states. Both Agnew and Hagan have been recipients of major forms of recognition by the criminological establishment – i.e., presidency of the American Society of Criminology, the Sutherland Award, the Stockholm Criminology Prize – and are highly respected contemporary criminologists. Accordingly, their critiques of the mainstream way of defining of and conceiving of the problem of crime are likely to be especially influential. Joachim Savelsburg (2010) is another prominent criminologist aligned with the mainstream who has argued for criminological attention to human rights violations. It remains to be seen whether a critical mass of mainstream criminologists will heed the call for an expanded scope of criminological concerns.

There is a long-standing tradition of critique of conventional conceptions of crime that have been advanced by self-described radical or critical criminologists (e.g., see DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz, 2012; Tifft and Sullivan 1980; Watts, Besant and Hil 2008). I took my first course in graduate school – in the latter half of the 1960s – with Richard Quinney, and was inevitably much influenced by the approach to defining crime that he put forth in *The Social Reality of Crime* (1970) – i.e., crime as a construct put forth by the powerful to reflect their interests – as well as in the books that followed. The “humanistic”

definition of crime put forth by Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1970) is quite familiar and has been widely cited. The approach to conceiving of crime as “crimes of capital” by Raymond Michalowski (1985), in *Order, Law and Capital*, was an influential contribution. Stuart Henry and Mark Lanier (2001), in an in-depth consideration of the definition of crime, have advanced a “prism of crime” definition (see also Agnew, 2011). Altogether, the radical and critical critiques of the definition of crime promote attention to the crimes of the powerful, and take a form that recognizes that the crimes of the powerful tend to be exponentially more consequential than the crimes of the powerless. For some criminologists, the term “crime” itself is inevitably so limiting and so constrained by its historical meaning that it should be abandoned in favor of “social harm” as the focus of our concern, with criminology itself being replaced by “zemiology,” or the study of harm (see Hillyard, Pantazis, Tombs, and Gordon 2004). In a special issue of *Crime, Law and Social Change* devoted to this social harm theme, co-edited with Martin D. Schwartz (Friedrichs and Schwartz 2007), we identified both reasons to appreciate the “social harm” initiative as well as some reservations about it. A call on the part of Victoria Greenfield and Letizia Paoli (2013), for creating “a framework to assess the harms of crimes,” represents one recent initiative to increase attention to the harm dimension inherent to definitions of crime.

#### SUBH: The Definition of White Collar Crime: Edwin H. Sutherland’s Role

Within American criminology in particular, Edwin H. Sutherland is surely the highest profile figure associated with a challenge to the conventional definition of crime. For some commentators, Sutherland is indeed the most significant criminologist of the twentieth century. His introduction of the concept of “white collar crime” is among his more important contributions. We need not here revisit in any detail Sutherland’s (1945) celebrated exchange with law professor Paul Tappan (1947), who complained that Sutherland’s application of the term white collar crime to a range of activities not specifically declared crimes by legislative criminal law was unwarranted. But the essence of Sutherland’s response to Tappan has remained hugely influential among subsequent students of white

collar crime: the inclusion of violations of civil and administrative law as well as of criminal law could justifiably be encompassed by the term “white collar crime” because the white collar “class” has too much influence over law-making generally and criminal law-making specifically. Accordingly, limiting the definition of white collar crime to actions specifically proscribed by the criminal law excludes a huge amount of obviously immensely harmful activity carried out by the white collar class. In effect, limiting oneself to the activities specifically proscribed by the criminal law in relation to white collar crime plays directly into the hands of corporations and other powerful social actors who have succeeded in preventing the “crime” label from being applied to a wide range of demonstrably harmful activities in which they engage.

For all of the credit Sutherland deserves in relation to introducing the concept of white collar crime to the field of criminology – and, more broadly, to the public discourse on crime – he can also be faulted for having contributed to the long, on-going historical confusion on the appropriate meaning of the term white collar crime. Sutherland simply did not devote enough thought and consideration to the definitional issue at the outset of his work on white collar crime, and accordingly invoked the term in quite different ways with quite different meanings.

SUBH: The Definition of White Collar Crime in the Wake of Sutherland

The late, legendary Gil Geis (1974: 283; 2007), who made countless contributions to the white collar crime literature over a period of more than half a century, and periodically addressed the definitional issue, at one point characterized the definition of white collar crime as “a mess.” Many others have grappled with the definitional issue here as well. My own earliest contribution was published in 1992. In the 1970s and 1980s a series of influential white collar crime books were published that emanated out of a major NIJ grant awarded to Yale University. These books include: Stanton Wheeler, Kenneth Mann, and Austin Sarat (1988) *Sitting in Judgment: The Sentencing of White-Collar Criminals*, David Weisburd, Stanton Wheeler, Elin Waring, and Nancy Bode (1991) *Crimes of the*

*Middle Class: White-Collar Offenders in the Federal Courts*, and David Weisburd, Elin Waring, with Ellen F. Chayet (2001) *White-Collar Crime and Criminal Careers*. These books were produced by well-respected criminological scholars. Their findings have been widely cited in the literature on white collar crime, and this author cited them quite extensively in multiple editions of *Trusted Criminals*. But in the interest of drawing some empirical and quantifiable conclusions about white collar offenders and the control of white collar crime, the Yale studies adopted a conception of white collar crime that is fundamentally problematic. They defined white collar crime in terms of conviction for one of the following eight federal offenses: securities law; antitrust law; bribery; bank embezzlement; mail and wire fraud; tax fraud; false claims and statements; and credit fraud (Geis 2007). This allowed for comparisons with conventional crime offenders, in terms of demographic attributes, sentences, and other variables. But the reality here is that the comparisons made reflect federal classifications of certain types of offenses, and the kinds of offenses federal prosecutors have found it possible to pursue, and are not necessarily fully representative of white collar offenders as generally recognized by those who study such offenses and offenders. High-level corporate offenders – clearly among the most significant white collar offenders – were little represented in the white collar crime sample in the Yale studies. On the other hand, certain types of offenders who would not ordinarily be viewed as exemplifying white collar crime offenders – e.g., welfare fraudsters – were included in the Yale study samples. The outcome allowed Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 192-196) to make the inherently preposterous claim that there was no significant differences between the demographic profile of white collar and conventional offenders. This whole issue links up with the broader trade-offs that have to be made when definitions allowing for operationalization are adopted insofar as such definitions are bound to incorporate some skewed dimensions.

In June, 1996, this author participated in a two day workshop in Morgantown, West Virginia, sponsored by the National White Collar Crime Center, with the title “Definitional Dilemma: Can and

Should There Be a Universal Definition of White Collar Crime?" The resulting proceedings, edited by James Helmkamp, Richard Ball and Kitty Townsend (1996), include papers by thirteen scholars who were able to be present for the workshop as well as several others who were not. It probably remains the single most comprehensive effort to explore the white collar crime definitional issues in depth. At a lunch break during the Morgantown Workshop one of the participants – Jay Albanese – scratched out a provisional definition of white collar crime on a napkin and circulated this napkin around the table for amendments and revisions by other workshop participants. The resulting attempt at a "consensus" definition was the following: "Planned illegal or unethical acts of deception, committed by an individual or organization, *usually* during the course of legitimate occupational activity by persons of high or respectable social status for personal or organizational gain, that violates fiduciary responsibility or public trust." Dated June 21, 1996, Morgantown, West Virginia. The present author, claiming to be on lunch break, passed along the napkin when it came to him and did not attempt to contribute to this endeavor, so takes neither credit nor blame for the resulting definition. It certainly has many elements associated with white collar crime as widely recognized, but is also somewhat cumbersome and has in fact not been adopted as the standard starting point for discussions of white collar crime.

The approach of the present author to the definitional conundrum is laid out in a 1992 article and in multiple editions of *Trusted Criminals* (Friedrichs 1992; 2010). The basic position taken is that whether we like it or not the term white collar crime is now so widely familiar, both in scholarly and in public discourse, and is invoked in so many different ways, that it is an illusion to imagine we could successfully advance a single definition that will become the standard and that will be uniformly adopted. The genie, so to speak, has long escaped the bottle. Accordingly, it makes the most sense to treat the term white collar crime as a broad-based heuristic term, a term that signifies first and foremost the negative message that one is not here addressing conventional crime or street crime, but is rather invoking an umbrella term for a broad range of quite different forms of criminal activity not

encompassed by those terms. And the second stage of this process calls for setting forth a typology that usefully differentiates between the major forms of white collar crime, as well as cognate, hybrid and marginal types of such crime.

#### SUBH: White Collar Crime: Cognate, Hybrid and Marginal Types

Although the term white collar crime has now been long recognized very widely both within the field of criminology and in the broader public realm, it remains the focus of much confusion as well. The invocation of the term “white collar crime” can refer to very different types of activities, from vastly consequential major forms of harm perpetrated by multi-billion dollar corporations to very minor cases of embezzlement or employee theft by low-level blue collar workers. The distinction between corporate crime – that carried out on behalf of corporations – and occupational crime – that undertaken by individuals within the context of a legitimate occupation – is widely accepted within the field of criminology, especially since the publication of the second edition of Clinard and Quinney’s (1973) influential typology of criminal behavior. The present author has argued that much “white collar crime” does not in fact fit neatly into either the corporate crime or the occupational crime box. Accordingly, he has promoted recognition of cognate forms of white collar crime – *governmental crime*, divided between *crimes of states* and *political white collar crime* – and hybrid forms of white collar crime such as *finance crime* (the crimes that occur within the financial sector, perpetrated by investment banks and other such institutions), *technocrime* (a broader term for crimes perpetrated with some form of sophisticated, contemporary technology, with computer crime and cybercrime the most significant varieties. Of course it is widely recognized that not all crime committed with sophisticated technology or computers can be subsumed under the heading of white collar crime). *Enterprise crime* is a term applied to the type of crime that involves some intersection of traditional organized (syndicate) crime and legitimate businesses. *Contrepreneurial crime* is the term applied to the vast range of enterprises that try to appear to be legitimate businesses but are in fact at their core fraudulent. And *avocational*

*crime* is the term applied to crimes that parallel white collar crimes in terms of the demographics of those involved and their motivations, but are carried out in a personal context (.e.g, individual tax evasion or insurance fraud). Again, this brief discussion here is only intended to acknowledge that widely recognized categories of crime do not always clearly encompass all types of criminal activity. The type identified above as “finance crime” has been the focus of a huge amount of recent attention, especially in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007-2009, but I will not here say more about it (e.g., see Friedrichs, 2013). Typologies of crime both clarify important issues relating to crime but by their nature tend to exclude consideration of activities not clearly encompassed by these types. Ultimately a systematic, comparative approach addressing both commonalities and differences between the whole range of activities that can be defined as “crime,” in some form, is a necessary and useful project.

#### *White Collar Crime and Economic Crime*

Some acknowledgment here has to be made of the fact that “economic crime” is the favored term among Europeans who study or investigate what is most commonly referred to as white collar crime in the English-speaking world (e.g., Johansen and Ystehede 2010; Korsell 2001; Larsson 2001). Although this term seeks to link crime to economic activity that occurs with the context of the economy, it unavoidably has ambiguous dimensions (Larsson 2001). This author spent a month in Scandinavia in the summer of 2013 – as Visiting Professor at Stockholm University, with visits to Oslo, Helsinki, Tallinn, St. Petersburg, and Reykjavik, with economic crime presentations or discussions involved in all of these locales. It becomes necessary in this context to constantly “translate” references to white collar crime and white collar crime offenders into the favored European terminology. From an outsider vantage point, this author has two principal reservations about “economic crime” as a preferred term. First, the term itself fails to capture one important core dimension of Sutherland’s “white collar crime” term: i.e., crimes are not simply committed by “those” people – i.e., poor people, minorities, marginal and disenfranchised members of society – but by members of the respectable and economically advantaged

and privileged segments of society. Second, the term “economic crime” also implicitly sends a strong message that such crimes are exclusively economic in character, when it has long been recognized that some of the most significant manifestations of white collar crime – e.g., corporate violence – have huge physical consequences, resulting in death, injury and disease for citizens, consumers, and workers. In and of itself the term “economic crime” suggests that it could be applied to an especially broad range of activities with a core economic dimension, including very low level economic-type offenses committed by poor and powerless members of society. Now in all fairness it has been my understanding from some of the Europeans with whom I have raised these concerns that for them the term “economic crime” has distinctive connotations that exclude conventional forms of crime with an economic dimension. Be that as it may, I am not persuaded that the intrinsic limitations of the term “economic crime” are overcome. It is interesting to me in this context that the editors of the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of White-Collar and Corporate Crime in Europe* have specifically chosen not to use the “economic crime” term in the title of the handbook, although this may well be a choice dictated by a publishing house’s concern with marketing the book most effectively in the English-speaking world – the largest market, surely, for any such volume – where the terms “white-collar” and “corporate” crime are more familiar. The author of the present paper, incidentally, has been invited to provide an “American” commentary on the contributions to this handbook.

#### SUBH: Emerging Conceptions of Crimes of the Powerful: Crimes of Globalization

If criminology as a field has produced a very large body of literature on some types of crime – e.g., homicide; rape; assault; robbery; larceny; burglary; auto theft; substance abuse related offenses; juvenile delinquency, broadly defined – it has almost wholly neglected other types of crime. “Crimes of globalization” is one such neglected type of crime. The author of this paper co-authored an article with his daughter Jessica, published in 2002, on “Crimes of Globalization and the World Bank: A Case Study.” This project evolved out of Jessica Friedrichs’ experience of living among river fishermen in Thailand, in

1999, whose traditional way of life was being destroyed by a World Bank-financed dam. Since David Friedrichs was long interested in the crimes of the powerful he was struck by the fact that the policies and practices of an immensely powerful entity – the World Bank – were causing demonstrable, severe harm to powerless people in a developing country, and this type of “crime” had been wholly neglected by criminologists. Crimes of globalization, then, refers to the crimes of the international financial institutions, not just the World Bank but the International Monetary Fund as well. The harmful activities of these international financial institutions did not fit into any recognized criminological typology “box”: obviously, not those capturing the whole range of conventional types of crimes, but the international financial institutions are neither corporations nor state-entities, in the conventional sense, so their harmful activities also do not fit into the categories of corporate crime and state crime. Can these harmful activities be justifiably characterized as “crime,” however? As Maureen Cain (2010) argues, in her parallel advancement of the term “global crime” for these activities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, this is in fact crime when the harms involved could and should have been foreseen by the international financial institution policy-makers. And there is much evidence to support that claim.

Since the publication of the original article on crimes of globalization in 2002 a number of other criminologists have applied this concept to other cases involving the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, and the present author has co-authored recent book chapters and an encyclopedia entry (Friedrichs and Rothe 2013; Friedrichs and Rothe forthcoming; Rothe and Friedrichs forthcoming), and is working on a book with Dawn L. Rothe on the topic of crimes of globalization. One core argument of this book: In a rapidly changing, globalizing world, some types of crimes – e.g., crimes of globalization – are likely to achieve greater significance and recognition – and other types of crimes – e.g., low-level conventional or street crimes – are likely be less of a problem or challenge for a range of reasons. It remains to be seen whether the claims we make will be adopted by other criminologists.

## SUBH: State-Corporate Crime

Some new ways of thinking about crimes of the powerful have been quite widely adopted. Ronald Kramer and Raymond Michalowski (1990) introduced the concept of state-corporate crime – the cooperative criminal activity of state entities and corporations – more than twenty years ago. By the middle of the first decade of the new century enough work had been published adopting and applying this concept to merit the publication of an anthology on state-corporate crime (Michalowski and Kramer 2006). Steve Tombs (2012) has recently questioned whether the state-corporate crime concept advances the somewhat misleading notion of “states” and “corporations” as relatively autonomous “actors,” as opposed to entities that are systemically intertwined with each other. This is not the place to undertake a systematic engagement with this thesis, but one can simply note here that privileging a hypothetically more sophisticated understanding of “crime” in the realm of the powerful may come at the cost of diminishing a clear focus for an effective collective response to such crime. What is important in all of this is to recognize that in an increasingly complex world the nature and character of “crime” – and our understanding of it – is sure to undergo change.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The criminological mainstream, with a self-identify as a scientific endeavor, is inherently biased in favor of definitions of crime that lend themselves easily to operationalization. But it has been suggested that this bias inevitably privileges attention to the conventional forms of crime that by their very nature lend themselves more readily to operationalization.

There is another “conundrum” that arises in relation to the “meaning of crime” discussion: the on-going tension between “under-criminalization” (i.e., the failure to criminalize demonstrable forms of social harm that should be criminalized) and “over-criminalization” (i.e., extending criminalization to a range of “gray area” activities whether in relation to personal conduct – e.g., substance abuse – or business – e.g., “aggressive” accounting) where the claimed negative consequences of this

criminalization process outweigh any demonstrable benefits (Agnew, 2011; Dillon, 2012). Inevitably, political and cultural beliefs and biases arise in any assessment of under-criminalization and over-criminalization.

Still another conundrum has at least been alluded to in the preceding discussion. Mobilization against crime, and focusing upon criminal wrong-doers, is most easily realized to the extent that crime is defined as the clear-cut violation of criminal law by an individual or a group of individuals. Setting off a bomb in an area where civilian spectators are gathering, killing or severely injuring these spectators, is an obvious example of a type of crime and criminal conduct that can be clearly identified, is not ambiguous in any meaningful sense, and allows for a sharp focus on a perpetrator. But in an increasingly complex, globalized world much of the most consequential type of crime is embedded within complex networks of organizational entities and multiple levels of organizational actors, and public and private sector organizations themselves are intertwined in complex ways as part of interdependent systems. The problem here is that crime, so conceived, does not lend itself easily to being a target of mobilized public action, or to successful criminal prosecution.

A “prospective” criminology in a complex, globalized world looks ahead toward anticipating key emerging developments and changes in this world, and recognizes that the meaning of the core term “crime” itself inevitably evolves with these developments and changes (Aas, 2007). It is an illusion, surely, that the term “crime” can be defined in only one way, and that any such definition would be universally acknowledged and adopted. At the end of the day we have definitions of crime that are more or less useful within a specific context. Accordingly, any invocation of the term “crime” requires some specification of just which definition or meaning of the term is being adopted within the context of this invocation.

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