**Chapter 1—Essay Questions**

1. What are the general characteristics of criminological theories? In your essay on this question address at least the following: What are the major questions about crime that criminological theories attempt to answer? How do these questions relate to the way in which criminological theories are classified? How do the questions differ from the kind of questions to which social and political philosophies of crime control are addressed?

2. Identify and explain the major criteria for evaluating the adequacy of criminological theories.

3. Dr. Jane Smith has developed a psychological theory that explains crime in terms of a mental disorder she calls “antisocial tendency.” She prepares a questionnaire to test this theory, which includes an “antisocial tendency scale” (ATS). Items on the ATS include questions like “How many times in the past year have you shoplifted items from a store?” and “How many times in the past year have you used illegal drugs?” The ATS is administered to a large sample of people in the general population as well as a large sample of inmates in the state prison. Dr. Smith finds in this study that inmates score significantly higher on the ATS than people in the general population. She concludes that an important discovery has been made, namely, that a mental disorder, “antisocial tendency,” is in fact an important cause of criminal behavior. The theory has been empirically validated.

Evaluate the theory and the research on which Dr. Smith bases her conclusion on the criteria of testability and tautology.

4. How do we judge whether one explanation for crime is preferable to another? Identify and discuss criteria for evaluating criminological theories. Which do you consider to be most important, and why?

5. Discuss the central questions toward which criminological theories are directed.

6. “Every policy to prevent or reduce crime implies a criminological theory.” Discuss. Consider the implications of your answer for theory testing.

7. Discuss the major problems that inhibit theory testing.

8. In the text, Akers and Sellers discuss different ways of classifying criminological theories. Identify two of these classification schemes, and discuss their usefulness in organizing criminological data.

9. Suppose that a theory proposes that growing up in deteriorated, inner-city neighborhoods produces hopelessness and despair, which lead to crime. Suppose further that, in a test of the theory, researchers find that, compared with residents of middle-class suburban neighborhoods, a higher proportion of residents of deteriorated, inner-city neighborhoods commit crime. However, the researchers also find that many people who grow up in deteriorated, inner-city neighborhoods remain law-abiding and some even establish highly successful legitimate careers. Would we be correct in concluding that the theory has no empirical validity, or should we conclude that the theory has strong validity? Why or why not? What conclusion about empirical validity is most reasonable given these findings?

10. To what extent does one’s political, social, religious, or other philosophical leaning influence preferences for different theoretical perspectives or vice versa? Give examples, and refer to any empirical evidence that may be available.

11. Critically examine the assertion that theories of crime and delinquency should be classified and evaluated mainly according to their philosophical or political assumptions as liberal, conservative, or radical. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this assertion and why? Is there evidence that criminologists are influenced in supporting or opposing a theory based on their own political or philosophical leanings?