

Rational Choice Theory-Chapter Four

The Development of Rational Choice

Rational choice theorists believe that all criminal behavior no matter how destructive is a matter of thought and decision making.

- Development of Classical Criminology
 - Development began in 18th century Enlightenment period by social philosophers like *Jeremy Bentham*
 - Utilitarian Calculus states that people act after weighing costs/benefits and deciding that the action will ultimately benefit them
 - Punishment's Four Objectives
 1. To prevent all criminal offenses
 2. When it cannot prevent a crime, to convince the offender to commit a less serious crime
 3. To ensure that a criminal uses no more force than is necessary
 4. To prevent crime as cheaply as possible
- Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) Social philosopher
 - People must be motivated by a fear of punishment
 - a. People choose all behavior including criminal behavior
 - b. Their choices are designed to bring them pleasure and reduce pain
 - c. Criminal choices can be controlled by fear of punishment
 - d. *The more severe, certain, and swift the punishment, the greater its ability to control criminal behavior*
 - **Marginal Deterrence:** Punishment should be equal to that of the crime to keep criminals from committing more serious crimes
- Classical Criminology
 - Why is Beccaria vital as a discipline? 200 years as central theorist
 - What are the basic tenants of classic criminology? People are self-centered, egotistical
 - People have the choice to commit crime to solve problems
 - Crime is attractive if seen through a cost-benefit analysis
 - People choose not to commit crime when the punishment is greater than the reward
 - Effective crime deterrent must be swift, certain, and severe
- Contemporary Choice Theory Emerges
 - Rehabilitation methods won't deter crime unless they actually help criminals
 - What are sneaky thrills? Katz's "Seduction of Crime" explains that there are immediate benefits to criminality that are situational inducements that directly draw offenders in
 - Tough on crimes=increase in incarceration?
 - **Assumes that human behavior is both willful and determined**

The Concepts of Rational Choice

- Why Crime?
 - Helps achieve a sense of control or mastery over their environment
 - Boosts self-esteem by attacking enemies or weak
 - Satisfy a desire for revenge or retaliation

Rational Choice Theory-Chapter Four

- Becomes less attractive as people mature and begin to appreciate the dangers of using crime to solve problems
- **Choosing Crime**
 - **Reasoning criminals** evaluate potential punishment and value of committing the crime; behavior is systematic and selective
 - Reasons to forgo crime
 1. High chance of being caught and punished
 2. Fear of consequences
 3. Risk of loss of respect, tainting reputation, possibility of guilt or shame
 4. Risk of apprehension outweighs the profit/pleasure of crime
- **Offense and Offender**
 - **Offense-Specific**-offenders will react selectively to the characteristics of an individual crime
 - **Offender-Specific**-criminals must decide if they have the prerequisites to commit the crime
 1. Possess the necessary skills to commit the crime
 2. Their immediate need for money or valuables
 3. Whether alternatives exist as a solution to their problems
 4. Availability of resources to commit the crime
 - Crime is an event; criminality is a personal trait
- **Structuring Criminality**
 - Economic opportunity-people have an opportunity to make more money as criminals than as what society deems "successful citizens"
 - Learning and Experience-Career criminals learn limitations of their powers; may stop criminal activity when the risk becomes greater than potential profit
 - Criminal Techniques-Criminals develop organization and planning skills that help avoid detection
 - Peep Game-scoping out the crime scene
- **Structuring Crime**
 - Choosing the Type of Crime-Can depend on market conditions or situational factors
 - Market Conditions Ex: Robbing elderly at beginning of the month when social security checks are cashed
 - Situational Factors Ex: Increase in robbery/decrease in burglary with an increase in crack users
 - Choosing the Time & Place-
 - Time: Burglars work 9-11am when people are at work/school, or Sunday morning during church time
 - Place: Most often in home territory, if movement occurs-it happens inward towards cities
 - Selecting the Target-
 - People with Dirty Hands less likely to call police
 - People with nosey neighbors/high police control are avoided
 - Targets can be chosen to send a message
 1. Market-Related violations emerge from trade partners or rivals
 2. Status-Based violations occur when character has been challenged
 3. Personalistic violations when beliefs have been jeopardized

Rational Choice Theory-Chapter Four

Is Crime Rational?

- Theft Rational?
 - Booster? Wearing loose clothes to steal more
 - Permeable neighborhoods? More ways into a neighborhood and easy getaway
- Drug Use Rational?
 - Being addicted?
- Violence rational?
 - 4 goals of violence? Control, retribution, deterrence, reputation

Eliminating Crime

What are 3 things that could sway potential criminals away from crime? Poor choice, not worth the effort, brings pain that is not forgotten

- Comish and Clarke suggest 3 strategies to reduce crime:
 1. Increase the effort needed to commit crime
 2. Increase the risks of committing crime
- Reduce the rewards for committing crime?
 - Reduce the value to potential criminal
- Situational Crime Prevention?
 - Diffusion, discouragement, displacement, extinction, encouragement
- Reduction through Surveillance

General Deterrence

- Perception & Deterrence
- Certainty of Punishment and Deterrence
- Severity of Punishment and Deterrence
- Capital Punishment Deter Murder?
 - Speed of Punishment & Deterrence
 - Analyzing General Deterrence
- Domestic Violence Studies