

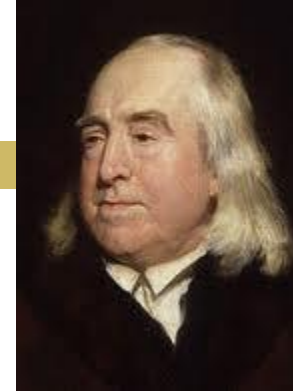
Lecture 4: Opportunity and situational theories

SOCIOL 3410: Criminology

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Classic Utilitarianism



- Bentham

- The end of law is happiness
- Individuals choices: pleasure and happiness vs. pain or unhappiness

- Beccaria

- Punish to set an example
- Limit of punishment: deterrence
- Offender assumptions

Rational Choice Theory

- The rational choice critique of other theories



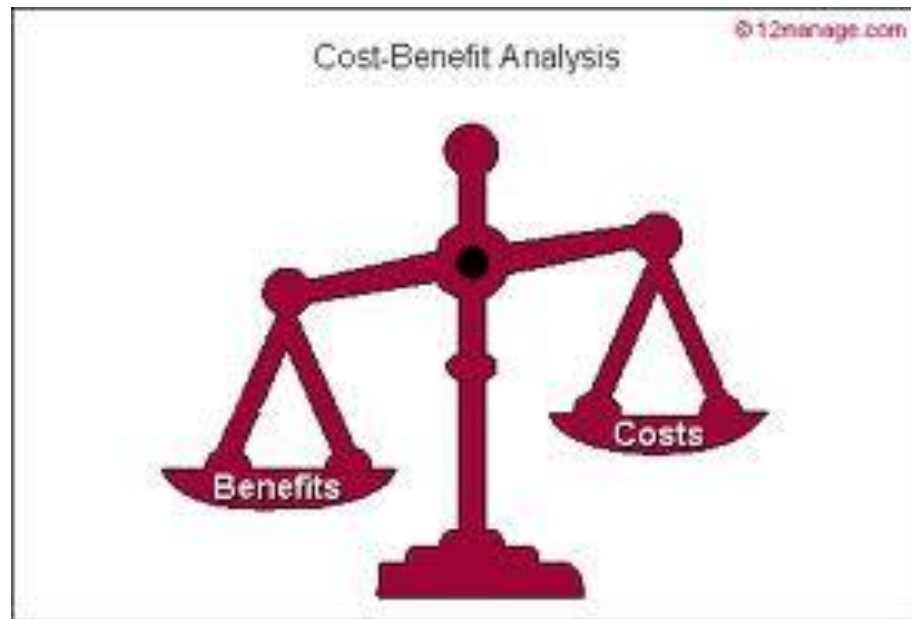
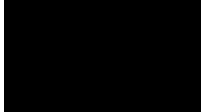
Crime and Criminality

- Crime vs. criminality
- So what conditions promote a crime?



Rational Choice Theory

- Main premise: crimes are deliberate acts, committed with the intention of benefiting the offender
- Central issues



The Rational in Rational Choice

- Reynolds: crime pays - rational choice & punishment
- Clarke and Cornish's reasoned offender
 - Bounded rationality
- McCarthy
 - Stable preferences
- Policy implications: situational crime prevention
- Policy implications: “get tough” strategies



Deterrence

- Major premise: People want to avoid unpleasant experiences, so if we make punishment more unpleasant, fewer crimes will be committed
- Can't deny some deterrent effect of CJ system (Nagin)
- Assumptions and problems (Nagin)

Deterrence

- General vs. specific deterrence
 - ▣ Policy implications of difference
- Another dimension to general and specific deterrence: avoiding punishment (Warr & Stafford)
 - ▣ Direct punishment
 - ▣ Indirect punishment
 - ▣ Direct avoidance of punishment
 - ▣ Indirect avoidance of punishment

Deterrence

- Potential costs
 - ▣ Legal costs
 - ▣ Non-legal costs
- Potential benefits
- Resetting (Pogarsky & Piquero)
- Updating information, or Bayesian decision-making (Matsueda et al.)



Deterrence and police

- Patrol experiments
 - ▣ Evidence
 - ▣ Explanations
- Crackdowns
 - ▣ Drunk drivers
 - ▣ Initial deterrence decay (Sherman)
- Domestic violence



Deterrence and burglary and robbery

- ❑ Burglary
- ❑ Robbery
- ❑ Incorporating rewards (Decker et al.)
- ❑ Rand Inmate Survey and fatalism (Wilson & Abrahamse)



Deterrence and punishment/ incarceration

- Certainty, swiftness, and severity are key components to deterrence, but...
 - ▣ How certain is getting caught?
 - ▣ How swift is a punishment handed down?
 - ▣ How severe are penalties?
- Scared Straight
- Death penalty



Criticisms

- Just how rational is rational choice?
- Decisions shaped by so many other background factors
- No standards to judge rationality



Situational Theories: Building on RC

- Routine Activities
- Broken Windows
- Phenomenology

Routine activities



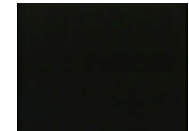
- Critique of other theories
- Main premise
 - ▣ Opportunity is a necessary condition for any crime to be committed, while criminality is largely evenly distributed across society (Felson & Cohen)
 - ▣ Opportunities drive crime rates
- The chemistry of crime
- Every day activity and routines
- Displacement



Policy implications: situational crime prevention

□ Clarke

- ▣ Increase effort needed to commit crime
- ▣ Increase risks of attempting crime
- ▣ Reduce rewards of crimes



□ Felson

- ▣ Natural strategies
- ▣ Organized strategies
- ▣ Mechanical strategies

□ Goldstein: problem-oriented policing

□ Criticisms



Broken Windows (Wilson, Kelling, and Coles)

- Analogy of the broken window applied to neighborhoods
- Causal chain
- Policy implications
- Evidence
- Criticisms
- Formal and informal social control



Phenomenology (Katz)

- Another theory that focuses on the “foreground” of crime, but not necessary rational
- Main premise: what makes crime attractive is that it is pleasurable
- Evidence
 - ▣ Shoplifting and sneaky thrills
 - ▣ Gangs and street elites
 - ▣ Robbery and hard men
- Criticisms (Zimring)

