Early and Classical
Criminological Theories

My object all sublime I shall achieve in time—To let the punishment fit the crime.
—Gilbert and Sullivan, The Mikado

The increasing popularity of the idea that much if not most crime and delinquency reflect innate and intractable predispositions has more to do, I think, with the larger social and economic trends in America in the last quarter of the twentieth century than it does with the meager and contradictory empirical evidence invoked to support it.
—Elliott Currie (1985)

In Chapter 1, theory was discussed as referring to a plausible explanation of reality, a reasonable and informed guess as to why things are as they appear. Theorizing represents a leap of faith, an élan vital (vital force) with which to shed light on the darkness of reality. The term theory is derived from the Greek theoros, to observe and reflect on the meaning of an event. Representatives from the city-states of Ancient Greece were sent by rival city-states to observe celebrations in honor of the gods. They were asked to attempt to separate themselves from their personal views and try to conceive of what the gods wished. Without incisive theories, a field or discipline becomes a hopeless catalog of random and seemingly unrelated facts. However, theories are not laws or facts, although this is sometimes forgotten by those who become convinced of the correctness of a particular theory that they have come to espouse. Thus, as powerful and persuasive as they may be, Freudian and Marxist theories, for example, are just that: theories—general or systemic models of how human personalities or societies function.

Theory

Theory in criminology refers to efforts to explain or understand crime causation. It is often viewed as an attempt to justify and excuse crime or as being wholly inadequate in guiding practical, existing social policy. On the contrary, explaining why or how things happen should not be confused with justifying or defending them. If we ignore this obvious fact, we risk killing the messenger bearing bad (although possibly important) news. The uninitiated find review and critique of these theories a futile exercise in self-flagellation in which criminologists parade their dirty laundry in bitter debates between warring camps of theorists. High hopes are raised for the discovery of a key to explaining all crime and criminality, although no such breakthroughs have occurred in the parent social sciences themselves—sociology, psychology, political science, and economics—and many of the same competing schools do battle in these fields. Those who are uncomfortable with such a theoretical morass might best be advised to study chemistry or biology or auto mechanics—fields in which the theoretical and empirical turf is tidier; the subject matter of the social sciences is infinitely more complex and not likely to yield to a general and universally accepted theory in the near future.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

5.1 Review the role of theory in criminology.
5.2 Describe how demonological theory is applied to control crime.
5.3 Identify the role of free will and rationality in explaining crime in classical theory.
5.4 Discuss how neoclassical theories emerged from classical theories.
5.5 Describe the use of statistical, geographic, and cartographic data in early criminological theories.
5.6 Explain the influence of economic theory on early criminological theories.
5.7 Identify the connection between early criminological theories and crime policy.
In the meantime, what of the demands of applied theorists and practitioners for explanations with which to guide immediate policy? Some have abandoned pure theory as fruitless in providing guidelines for existing policy needs, yet they then propose therapies, treatments, and policies that surprisingly are based on one or the other of the pure theories they have rejected. In reality, criminology as an interdisciplinary field requires both pure and applied theory. The search for a basic, underlying cause is important in itself for the mature development of the discipline; obviously, applied theories need not and cannot wait until ultimate laws are discovered before attempting to advocate existing policy programs. Many fields of learning use workable applied theory without having resolved the issue of ultimate causal theory.

Criminology in Context 5.1 discusses the sociological classic *The Body Ritual of the Nacirema*. Read the feature and then, when reading the theory chapters, ask not only whether these theories explain the behavior of criminals but also whether they explain the behavior of Nacirema undergraduates. Many Nacirema reject having their picture taken, but if you would like to see one, locate a “rorrim” and look into it.

Table 5.1 presents an outline of the major theoretical approaches in criminology. The last type, sociological theory, is subdivided and described in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8. This division of criminological theories into types or schools of thought is primarily for purposes of convenient presentation because, in fact, some theorists demonstrate evolution in their views and may in fact exhibit theoretical conceptions that meld different types or schools of thought. The primary theoretical approaches in criminology (as shown in Table 5.1) are the demonological, classical (neoclassical), ecological (geographic), economic, positivistic (biological and psychological), and sociological (the many subtypes of which will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8). Discussion will begin with the demonological or supernatural approach to explaining crime causation, which is

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<th>THEORETICAL SCHOOL</th>
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<td>Economic</td>
<td>Capitalism, social class inequality, and economic conditions cause crime</td>
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<td>Mental deficiency</td>
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<td>Somatotypes—mesomorphs</td>
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<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Unconscious repression of sexual instincts</td>
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<td>Criminal personality, extroversion, inadequate behavioral conditioning, IQ</td>
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<td>Sociological</td>
<td>Anomie, subcultural learning, and elite dominance cause crime</td>
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*See Tables 7.1 and 8.1 for greater detail regarding sociological theory in criminology.*
Chapter 5: Early and Classical Criminological Theories

Demonological Theory

Demonological theory or supernatural explanations of criminality dominated thinking from early history well into the 18th century; modern remnants still survive (see Huff, 1990). In a system of knowledge in which theological explanations of reality were predominant, the criminal was viewed as a sinner who was possessed by demons or damned by otherworldly forces. Humankind was viewed as at the mercy of the supernatural: fates, ghosts, furies, or spirits. Felonies (mortal sins) were viewed as manifestations of basically evil human nature reflecting either allegiance to the “Prince of Darkness” or an expression of divine wrath. The Salem witch trials in Puritan New England and the Spanish Inquisition serve as examples of the torture, hanging, burning at the stake, and other grim executions awaiting heretics, witches, and criminals. Such a worldview perceived the violator’s actions as deterministically controlled by forces beyond the individual’s mastery. In the Book of Genesis (22:1–12), Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, although he was later released from this injunction. Appeasement of God or the gods—a world beyond human cognition and interpretable only by the clergy, the shaman, and other emissaries to the supernatural—was supported by a traditional worldview that looked to the wisdom of the past rather than attempt a rational interpretation of the present for guidance (see V. Fox, 1976, pp. 7–12).

In the Middle Ages in Europe, feudal lords established various means of determining guilt and innocence. God could indicate who was guilty or not by giving victory to the innocent in a trial by battle. Later, trial by ordeal was instituted in which the accused was exposed to dangerous tests, and if the person survived, he or she had been protected by God. Women accused of witchcraft were tied up and thrown in the water. If they floated rather than sank, and thus survived, they were innocent. Running the gauntlet and walking on fire were similar tests.

Application of the theological approach to crime control is not confined to the past but can be illustrated in the modern era by the ecclesiarchy (state–church fusion) in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini, in which criminals or opponents of the state were summarily subjected to torture, death, or the “wrath of Allah.”

The primary challenges to theological approaches to explaining reality were philosophical arguments that sought worldly, rational, secular explanations for human fate. The reasons for crime and criminality were to be found not in the supernatural but in the natural world. Table 5.2 provides a chronology of major developments in criminological theory.

Classical Theory

Classical theory in criminology refers to an approach that emphasizes free will and rationality on the part of the criminal actor.

Prior to the formulation and acceptance of classical theory, the administration of criminal justice in Europe was cruel, uncertain, and unpredictable. In England alone in the early 19th century, there were more than 100 crimes punishable by the death penalty (Heath, 1963). Penal policy was designed to control the “dangerous classes,” the mass of propertyless peasants, workers, and unemployed. Emerging liberal philosophies espoused by such writers as Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau advocated the natural rights of man and reason as a guide to regulating human conduct. This Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries questioned the power of the clergy and aristocracy and gave birth to the American and French Revolutions.
Criminology in Context 5.1

THE NACIREMA UNDERGRADUATE AS CRIMINAL: A CRIMINOLOGICAL “WHY DO IT?”

Anthropologist Horace Miner first brought the strange customs of the Nacirema to public attention over half a century ago. He prefaced his description of this tribe by explaining that anthropologists are trained in avoiding ethnocentric bias so that they are able to present objectively and without shock such extreme, exotic customs as exhibited by the Nacirema. In his classic The Body Ritual of the Nacirema, Miner (1956) describes a group whose land, Asu, lies between the Canadian Cree, the Carib of the Antilles, and the Yaqui Indians of Mexico. Miner indicates, Little is known of the origin, although tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a cultural hero Notgnihsaw, who is otherwise known for two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the spirit of truth resided. (p. 503)

If you have not figured it out by now, Nacirema is American spelled backward, and Notgnihsaw is Washington. The entire piece is a clever pun that pokes fun at American culture as it might be viewed by someone who is wholly unfamiliar with the real reasons for certain American customs and beliefs. After a brief presentation of Miner’s Nacirema, Hagan and Benekos (2000) update it, examining Nacirema undergraduates, and invite you to apply the theories you are about to explore to analyze not criminals but Nacirema undergraduates who are deviant or not performing as expected.

Theories of Nacirema Undergraduate Deviance

The ability of criminological theory to explain criminal or deviant behavior awaits theoretical developments in sociology, psychology, and the other social sciences that adequately explain normal behavior. Let us pretend for a moment that, instead of attempting to explain criminal behavior in society, we could apply these same theories to aberrant behavior by undergraduates in Nacirema colleges and universities. Although space does not permit detailed coverage, a cursory visit should suffice.

What explains the poorly performing Nacirema undergraduate whose parents could purchase a new rac every year for the price they pay for their child to listen to a folk? Despite the high prices, some students attend few classes, sleep, daydream, perform at terrible levels, and even eventually are asked to leave. Early theories might suggest that such students were possessed by demons; later ones pursued more secular explanations. Some Nacirema undergraduates cheat on examinations or steal ideas from others for papers that they claim are their own work. Classical theories of criminology would explain that such deviants are rational and that the penalties for such behavior (flunking or expulsion) do not exceed the rewards (passing or graduating without doing the work).

Other theories would suggest that the students' social background or lower social class adversely affects them and explains their poor performance, and positivistic theories seek explanation in biological and psychological shortcomings. Are poor or deviant students atavistic “throwbacks to the ape,” born deviants whose biological inheritance dooms their chances of conformity and success?

Most likely, the problem is not biological at all but psychological. Do they possess innate, unchangeable personalities? Are they unconsciously repressing their sexual instincts? Or are they victims of extroversion, inadequate behavioral conditioning (namely anti-intellectualism), or low IQs? A long-neglected explanation may be found in the work of the then-25-year-old genius, and future president of the University of Chicago, Robert Maynard Hutchins. In his work Zuckercandl! (1966), he discusses the theories of the all-but-forgotten philosopher Alexander Zuckercandl, who, instead of trying to explain how people should behave, developed explanations for how people (in this case, students) do behave. Zuckercandl’s genius was to reverse Freudian theory. The latter enjoined us to “become conscious of our unconscious.” Zuckercandl indicates, “We must become unconscious of our conscious,” a motto to which many undergraduates might relate.

Modern sociological theories of crime view society and social groups as far more likely explanations of human (student) misconduct than those that have been mentioned. Edwin Sutherland’s theory of differential association explains that individuals learn to become “poor students” due to an excess of contacts that advocate not taking seriously academic work, and, as a result, students are predisposed to regard intellectual activity in a negative manner (Sutherland & Cressey, 1960). If students have had such negative views for a long time (e.g., have an anti-intellectual background) and do not prefer or find meaningful academic pursuits, then such persons will tend to perform poorly. Nacirema society preaches that all members of the tribe should be able to become successful (own many gadgets) if they perform well as undergraduates, thus obtaining high-ranking tribal positions such as shamans, talkers, and listeners.

Robert Merton (1949/1957, 1968), in his theory of anomie and modes of personality adaptation, explains that such high tribal positions and rewards are preached as available to all Nacirema if they pursue the legitimate means of being successful in college. Anomie (normlessness) ensues when a gap exists between the goal of success (high position and rewards) and adequate means for its achievement (undergraduate academic success). Although most students demonstrate “conformist” personalities in that
they accept this goal, and adequate means exist for them to be successful in college, others find that they lack the adequate means to be successful. These students can become “innovators” and lie, cheat, and steal to graduate. Others are “retreatists.” They reject the goal of success and spend their time rejecting the means (going to classes and getting good grades) as well. Alcohol and drugs may replace books as a primary orientation. “Ritualistic” students show up for class but forget the purpose of doing so—getting good grades. They daydream and sleep in class and assume somehow they will learn what they consider irrelevant academic information through a process of osmosis. Finally, the “rebel” may use legitimate or illegitimate means to challenge the values and goals presented by the college.

**Student as Renosirp**

Another dimension of this analogy is that some students also display behaviors that incorporate norms that are characteristic of offenders in captivity. Rather than identifying with sforp, some Nacirema students cultivate anti-intellectual attitudes and values that enforce a code of silence and impose sanctions on those who violate what is described as the “renosirp rules.” Similar to inmate codes such as “Don’t talk to the screws,” “Don’t trust the guards,” and “Don’t snitch” (Sykes, 1958), Nacirema undergraduates affect disinterest and scholarly views. The student code may include the following: “Don’t be smart, don’t ask questions, don’t answer questions, do your own time, and be cool.” For example, one report found that 90% of college students say they would not take someone in for cheating; that is, “don’t snitch” (Kleiner & Lord, 1999, p. 57). As prisoners do their time by developing a prisoner subculture, students also develop a subculture that fosters their identity and legitimizes their roles as nonacademics and provides rationalizations for their deviant behaviors. Kleiner and Lord (1999) report that “plagiarism, copying, and similar deceits devalue learning, but that “the pressure to succeed…can drive students to consider extreme measures” (p. 57). This suggests the “innovation” that Merton (1949/1957, 1968) typologized as an adaptive mode to blocked means.

As prisoners do their own time, reject the rejecters, and try to avoid the guards, students also demonstrate behaviors that avoid socialization to college norms and values, that is, “collegization.” The students as criminals distance themselves from sforp by sitting in the back of the classroom, by avoiding note taking, by not participating in discussion, and generally by adhering to the renosirp norms: “Don’t get involved, don’t ask questions, don’t show emotion” (i.e., interest). Instead of engaging in intellectual growth and scholarship, these students have precipitated a co-optation of college values with an importation of working-class street values. Historically, college has reflected a middle-class orientation, and students assimilated appropriate norms and values. With the increasing number of high school graduates who would not have gone to college in the past, now entering such institutions, a critical mass of students has facilitated a subculture that deflects socialization and assimilation of middle-class values and establishes norms to support alternative student behaviors (W. Miller, 1958).

One might ask, “Why don’t all students behave in this manner?” Here again, criminological theory would say they would if they dared, but their attachments to parental units and sforp, belief in the academic model, commitment to accomplishing normative goals, and involvement in classes and intellectual exercises “bond” (Hirschi, 1969) them to conformity. In contrast, those students who enter college as a default often manifest ritualistic behaviors (Merton, 1949/1957, 1968) and lack commitment, involvement, beliefs, or attachments to ensure their bond to the scholarly community. In fact, as noted earlier, as a critical mass of nonscholar undergraduates is attained, the culture of the college becomes transformed. As with penal institutions, the question is often asked, “Who rules the joint?”

Criminological theory offers one approach to explaining this curious paradox in which students resist or reject pro-intellectual elements of college while drifting toward deviant norms that demonstrate the student as criminal. Theories of subculture, strain, social control, and differential association provide useful concepts in understanding how “normal” Nacirema students become “criminals” in academe.

For Further Thought

1. What are some recent cases of actual campus crime among Nacirema college students? Using your university police department’s website, search “campus crime.”

2. This chapter explores many early theories that represent the historical legacy of the field. Although many of the early theories have been discredited, their examination is warranted not only from the standpoint of gaining a sense of continuity of the discipline but also because many expressions of these theories are resurrected in new forms in modern thinking. Sometimes these theories are accepted or rejected on the basis of ideology rather than on the basis of empirical evidence (Blankenship & Brown, 1993).

Crime in Relation to Punishment: Cesare Beccaria

Italian Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794)—actually Cesare Bonesana, the Marquis of Beccaria—was, along with British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the principal advocate of the classical school of criminological theory. Beccaria’s (1963) essay On Crimes and Punishments, originally published in 1764, had a profound impact on continental European as well as on Anglo-American jurisprudence. Beccaria was only 26 years of age when he wrote his treatise. His essential point is expressed in the concluding paragraph of this work:

From what has thus far been demonstrated, one may deduce a general theorem of considerable utility, though hardly conformable with custom, the usual legislator of nations; it is this: In order for punishment not to be, in every instance, an act of violence of one or of many against a private citizen, it must be essentially public, prompt,
necessary, the least possible in the given circumstances, proportionate to the crimes, dictated by the laws. (p. 99)

Beccaria was appalled by the arbitrary nature of the European judicial and penal systems of his time, which were unpredictably harsh, exacted confessions by means of torture, and were completely subject to the whims of authorities. Because potential criminals had no way of anticipating the nature of the criminal law and its accompanying penalty if violated, punishment had little deterrent value. Beccaria was primarily interested in reforming the cruel, unnecessary, and unpredictable nature of punishment, feeling that it made little sense to punish lawbreakers with unjust laws (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 2002). Beccaria was responsible for the abolition of torture as a legitimate means of exacting confessions. “Let the punishment fit the crime” is a succinct summation of Beccaria’s argument.

Beccaria’s work was radical for its time, and, fearing repercussions, he published it anonymously. Even though he defended himself in the introduction to the book, claiming that he was not a revolutionary or an unbeliever, the book was condemned by the Catholic Church in 1777 for its rationalistic ideas (Vold et al., 2002). It was placed on the Church’s Index of Forbidden Books for more than 200 years. Beccaria proposed the following principles for the proper operation of the criminal justice system:

- Laws should be made by legislatures, and they should be specific.
- The role of judges is only to determine guilt and to follow strictly to the letter of the law in determining punishment. Judges should not interpret the laws.
- The seriousness of crime should be determined by the harm it inflicts on society and be based on the pleasure/pain principle.
- Punishment should be based on the seriousness of the crime and its ability to deter.
- Punishment should not exceed that which is necessary for deterrence.
- Excessive severity in punishment often increases crime that is then committed in order to avoid punishment.

Although not all criminological theories are still used today, the historical value they provide is still applicable today. Recognizing this concept, the Oral History of Criminology Project is an ongoing effort to preserve the accounts of prominent scholars and their role in shaping the evolution of the field. Through the use of taped interviews, an enduring record—an oral history—is established of how personal, social, historical, and professional influences intersected to give rise to criminology’s landmark ideas and initiatives.

The Oral History of Criminology Project intends to conduct, and make available, interviews on a continuing basis. The generous participation of major figures in criminology—and of the scholars who volunteer to prepare for and conduct these interviews—promises to yield an invaluable living account of criminology and its impacts. Their intention is for the interviews to be used not only for research purposes but also in the classroom. The interviews offer students the opportunity to hear criminology from a scholar’s own voice—including the voices of those who have since passed away.

In these oral history interviews, scholars are asked to reflect on the development of their careers, on their most significant writings, and on the developments in the field in general. The goal is to provide autobiographical context beyond what is captured in published texts, in order to explore the story behind their careers and contributions to research and practice. The oral history project can be accessed at http://oralhistoryofcriminology.org/about_the_project. One can sample interviews with a number of authors who are listed alphabetically, including Frank Hagan.
Punishment should be sure, swift, and certain.

Capital punishment should be abolished as should the use of torture in order to gain confessions.

Laws should be structured so as to prevent crime in the first place. It is better to prevent crimes than to punish them.

All should be treated equally before the law (Beccaria, 1764/1963).

Hedonism and Crime: Jeremy Bentham

Beccaria’s British contemporary, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), borrowed from Beccaria the notion that laws should provide “the greatest happiness shared by the greatest number” (Beccaria, 1764/1963, p. 8). Bentham graduated from Oxford University at the age of 12. In his will, the eccentric Bentham gave all of his original book manuscripts to the University College of London on one condition: The administrators had to embalm his body and put it on display for all to see. Such a wooden and glass box with a sitting, fully clothed Bentham is on display to this day. He saw the purpose of punishment to be deterrence rather than vengeance and, similar to Beccaria, was more interested in the certainty of punishment than in its severity.

Bentham has been called an advocate of “utilitarian hedonism” or “felicific calculus” or “penal pharmacy.” Utilitarianism is a practical philosophical view that claims “we should always act so as to produce the greatest possible ratio of good to evil for all concerned” (Barry, 1983, p. 106). One of Bentham's best-known contributions to criminology was his invention of the “panopticon” (from the Greek, meaning “all seeing”; Bentham, 1823). The panopticon, or “inspection house,” was envisioned as a circular prison with a glass roof, featuring a central grand tower from which inspectors could observe all cells located around the perimeter. Although prisons incorporating this design were built in both England and the United States, the plans were later found impractical and were modified (F. E. Hagan, 1996).

The classical theorists viewed individuals as acting as a result of free will and as being motivated by hedonism. The latter refers to a pleasure principle, the assumption that the main purpose of life is to maximize pleasure while minimizing pain. Individuals are viewed as entirely rational in this decision-making process in which they will attempt to increase the experience of pleasure, even from illicit desires, until the anticipated pain to be derived from a particular activity appears to outweigh the expected enjoyment. In a work titled Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil, Jack Katz’s (1988) research based on interviews with career criminals supports Beccaria’s notion of the pleasure or thrill of evil outweighing the fear of punishment. Image, danger, glamour, and the excitement of crime overshadow any desire for a successful life in straight society. In assessing Katz’s theory, Bill McCarthy (1995) noted that such thrill-related property crime is influenced by age, gender, and strain associated with inadequate economic opportunities.

Critique of Classical Theory

The classical school and the writing of Beccaria in particular were to lay the cornerstone of modern Western criminal law as it became formulated from 1770 to 1812. The characteristics of Western criminal law—politicality, uniformity, specificity, and described penal sanctions—are
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in essence called for in Beccaria’s essay. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man (cited in J. E. Jacoby, 2004), which was passed by the revolutionary National Assembly of France in 1789, included the statement, “The law ought to impose no other penalties but such as are absolutely and evidently necessary; and no one ought to be punished, but in virtue of a law promulgated before the offense, and legally applied” (p. 215). The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment, was also a Beccarian legacy.

Some recent analysis suggests that the importance of Beccaria’s works may have been exaggerated and that he was actually less important than other social reformers of the 18th century such as Voltaire and Bentham (Newman & Marongiu, 1990). Beirne (1991) claims that Beccaria’s famous treatise Dei Delitti e Delle Pene (On Crimes and Punishments) was the application to crime policy not of rationality and humanism but of the Scottish-inspired “science of man,” which emphasized utilitarianism and determinism. Beirne felt that Beccaria was less of an advocate of free will than has been supposed and that his writings exhibited much determinism.

The revolutionary and liberating impact of the ascendancy of classical theory in reforming Western jurisprudence is now taken for granted, but without the fundamental changes classical theory introduced, the remaining criticisms and subsequent modifications would not have been possible. However, classical theory contained the seeds of its own demise. Although Justitia, the blind goddess of justice, carefully weighing the evidence irrespective of the violator, is an appealing symbol, classical theory by its very insistence on equality of punishment proposes inequality: Should minors or the insane be treated in the same manner as others? Should repeat offenders be accorded the same sanctions as first offenders for an equivalent act? Thomas and Hepburn (1983) state,

Contemporary criminologists tend to assign little importance to [classical theory’s] concepts and ideas. Perhaps the two major reasons are that it focuses our attention on criminal law rather than criminal behavior and that it is based on a speculative set of philosophical premises rather than a sound theory that could be verified or refuted by the collection of systematic empirical evidence. (p. 137)

Application of the pure classical theory would rob judges of discretionary power and seems to rest on a simplistic assumption of the ability to exactly measure individual conceptions of pain and pleasure. Recent revivals in the United States of determinate sentencing and mandatory punishments for specific offenses are remnants of classical theory. Although theoretically appealing because of the essential cookbook application of graduated punishment reflecting the seriousness of crime, implementation becomes problematic for reasons already described: The quantification of such acts and their perpetrators defies such a simplistic scheme (Hagan & Tontodonato, 2004).

Neoclassical Theory

Neoclassical theory basically admits environmental, psychological, and other mitigating circumstances as modifying conditions to classic doctrine. The beginnings of this approach can be found in the later writings of Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) and in those of his students, Ferri and Garofalo, to be discussed shortly. Beginning in the late 1960s, particularly in the writings of economist Gary Becker (1968), James Q. Wilson (1983a, 1983b), and Ernest Van den Haag (1966), a resurgence in neoclassical doctrine can be noted. Becker advocated a cost-benefit analysis of crime, reminiscent of hedonistic doctrine. Becker argued that individuals freely choose crime...
based on their estimate of their likelihood of being caught. Disappointed with criminology’s overconcern with the search for basic causes of crime, Wilson (1975) proposed a policy analysis approach, applied research that is less concerned with finding causes and more concerned with what works. These writers sparked an interest in the abandonment of treatment and rehabilitation and a return to the classical punishment model. Often ignored by devotees of such theories are the very limited categories of crime such theorists, in fact, address. Wilson (1975), for instance, quite clearly indicates that this call for incapacitation of offenders (criminals in jail can no longer victimize) is applicable to what we have described as conventional property offenders or common burglars and thieves. Although a more practical, policy-oriented approach is needed, what is disturbing in such theories is the relatively conservative ignorance of criminogenic, social structural conditions, as well as an often cavalier disregard for theoretical approaches to crime causation. Neoclassicists argue that less theory and more action are needed but at times ignore the fact that the basic theoretical underpinnings of their own theories are rooted in assumptions of 18th-century hedonism, utilitarianism, and free will. On balance, however, they make a key point: that one need not have a basic explanation of cause to meet pressing policy needs that cannot wait for a final explanation.

**Rational Choice Theory**

In another neoclassical theory, Cornish and Clarke’s (1986) rational choice theory proposes that offenders weigh the opportunities, costs, and benefits of particular crimes. The argument by rational choice theorists is not that individuals are purely rational in their decision making but rather that they do consider the costs and benefits. A number of factors may constrain choice, such as social factors, individual traits, and attitudes toward crime. Rational choice theorists also argue for a crime-specific approach to crime; that is, the circumstances involved in the typical burglary may differ from robbery or domestic assault. Offender characteristics are seen as combining with offense types in shaping offender choices. Rational choice theorists admit that much behavior is only partly rational but that most offenders know quite well what they are doing. The criminal justice system must make crime less rewarding by increasing the certainty and severity of punishment. Crime is viewed as a matter of situational choice, a combination of costs, benefits, and opportunities associated with a particular crime. Increasing prevention or decreasing the opportunity to commit crime is viewed as an important means of deterring crime. Situational crime control could include target hardening (securing of entries, doors, and locks), access control, entry screening, surveillance, better lighting, property identification, and other means of reducing criminal opportunity.

Research support has been mixed for rational choice theory. Consideration is given for the cost and benefit of crime, but many criminals do not carefully plan their crimes. Changing such opportunity structures (e.g., creating defensible space and target hardening) may discourage potential offenders. Analyses of offenders’ motivations, however, have shown that many act impulsively and fail to fully consider negative possibilities (Piliavin, Gartner, Thornton, & Matsueda, 1986; Tunnell, 1991). Crime File 5.1 presents an application of rational choice theory to controlling gang violence in Los Angeles. Recent work examining “near repeat” burglary suggests that some offending may in fact be at least in part rational. A near repeat burglary occurs when a target is burglarized initially, but then a nearby property is burglarized afterward (Johnson et al., 2007). The second burglary would be considered a near repeat burglary. The initial target may not be burglarized because the owners took precautions after the event; thus, the target has been “hardened.” The offender choosing a nearby target rather than the one that has been hardened indicates some level of rationality.

**Deterrence Theory**

Other expressions of neoclassical theory can be found in the deterrence literature. Themes such as “just deserts,” “three strikes and you’re out,” and mandatory sentencing policies all reflect the assumption that the criminal is a rational actor and will be deterred by more severe and certain
Chapter 5: Early and Classical Criminological Theories

Crime File 5.1

“DESIGNING OUT” GANG HOMICIDES AND STREET ASSAULTS: SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION

One of the leading theories of criminal opportunity is situational crime prevention. Developed by criminologist Ronald V. Clarke, the theory is based on the assumption that crime can be reduced by pinpointing and blocking the forces that facilitate would-be offenders’ criminal acts. Would-be offenders, the theory proposes, make rational choices in planning their criminal acts. For example, gangs may choose a particular street on which to commit a crime because they rationally determine that the way the street is situated provides them with ready access and exit, thereby creating an opportunity to more easily elude arrest.

Applying the model to gangs, the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) assumed that gangs did in fact make a rational choice about whether to engage in a particular act of criminal violence and whether to do so in a particular neighborhood setting. Evidence to support the theory has come from studies of residential burglary, shoplifting, and other crimes, but OCDS (discussed shortly) was an initial attempt to apply situational crime prevention to gang violence.

Issues and Findings

Discussed in This Brief. The use of a deceptively simple tactic, traffic barriers, to block automobile access to streets as a way of reducing gang violence. The tactic was used in a crime-plagued area of Los Angeles that had experienced the city's highest level of drive-by shootings, gang homicides, and street assaults. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-sponsored evaluation of Operation Cul de Sac (OCDS), as the program was called, examined whether the tactic could reduce gang crime.

Key Issues. OCDS was based on the theory of situational crime prevention, which postulates that crime occurs partly as the result of opportunity and can be reduced by first identifying and then blocking these opportunities rather than attempting to eliminate root causes. The LAPD noted that in the OCDS target area, gang crime clustered on the periphery of neighborhoods linked to major roadways; police set up traffic barriers as a way to block the opportunities for crime the roadways created. The evaluation sought to determine whether these street closures could help to “design out” gang crime.

Key Findings. In its 2 years of operation, 1990 and 1991, OCDS appeared to reduce violent crime.

• The number of homicides and street assaults fell significantly in both years and rose after the program ended.
• Property crime decreased substantially during the first year of the program, but it also decreased in the comparison area where there was no OCDS, indicating that some factors other than the traffic barriers were responsible for the reduction in the OCDS site.
• In the second year of the program, property crime rose, suggesting the street closures affected only violent crime.
• Crime was not displaced to other areas. Violent crime fell, not only in the OCDS area, but also in contiguous areas. This may be because the areas of potential displacement are the turf of rival gangs. As such, they would be off-limits to gangs that might want to enter new territory when the traffic barriers reduced their opportunities to commit crime on their own turf.
• Traffic barriers can be used as part of an approach to maximize neighborhood residents’ defensible space by increasing their span of control. Zones configured with the barriers heighten the visibility of suspect activities. They can be particularly effective when combined with “natural guardians”—people who serve as informal sources of surveillance and social control.
• Although these findings indicate traffic barriers may work to reduce violent crime, it should be kept in mind that the experiment was conducted at only one site. Replications of OCDS and further evaluations are needed to fully test the effectiveness of the tactic.

Target Audience. Police chiefs, sheriffs, urban designers and planners, crime prevention organizers.

For Further Thought

1. Use a search engine such as Google Scholar to locate recent developments on “designing out” crime.

Criminology in Context 5.3

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR PUNISHMENT

The punishment of criminals has at least four justifications: retribution, deterrence (including incapacitation), rehabilitation, and protection and upholding the solidarity of society (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974).

**Retribution**

Retribution is the societal counterpart of individual revenge. When criminal laws were formulated, the state assumed responsibility for punishing offenders and forbade victimized parties from taking the law into their own hands. Criminals had to pay their debt to society, not to the harmed party. Beginning as early as *lex talionis*, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” criminals have been viewed as having to suffer in some way for justice to be served. Retribution is a moral motive for punishment, not simply a utilitarian one. Nazi hunters who are still searching for war criminals decades after World War II, when asked, “What good does it do?” reply, “It does justice.” So public sentiment and outrage are the guideposts for enforcement, rather than any direct effect on future crime commission.

**Deterrence**

Deterrence refers to the belief that perceived punishment will serve as a warning and inhibit individuals (specific deterrence) and groups (general deterrence) from involvement in criminal activity. Based on the classical school of criminology and the writings of Cesare Beccaria (discussed earlier), the deterrence model assumes that if the pain (clear, swift, and certain punishment) outweighs any pleasure to be derived from the criminal act, then crime will be prevented. Incapacitation, the prevention of crime by keeping criminals behind bars for longer periods, is an additional example of specific deterrence. In a revival of classical criminology, large and impressive bodies of literature have begun to accumulate on the issue of specific incapacitation. Although inconclusive at this point, the research suggests the potentially positive impact of selective incapacitation of career criminals on lowering crime rates (S. H. Clarke, 1974; Greenberg, 1975).

**Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation, which has been the watchword in the United States in the post–World War II period, assumes that the purpose of punishing criminals is to reform or resocialize them to conventional, law-abiding values. Even name changes indicate this philosophical shift: The field of penology is now called corrections, and prisons are correctional facilities. Nevertheless, there appears to be more talk about rehabilitation than programs to facilitate it. Martinson (1974), in “What Works?—Questions and Answers About Prison Reform,” examined a large number of correctional programs and their claims of success in rehabilitation as well as their recidivism (repeating of crime) rates; he felt there was little evidence that any significant programs in corrections had an important impact on reducing recidivism. Only later (“Martinson Attacks His Own Earlier Work,” 1978; Martinson, 1979) did he retract this devastating critique by admitting that he may have suffered from “methodological fanaticism,” in which substance was overlooked in the name of method, and that some of the programs did have positive outcomes. With estimates of recidivism and reincarceration rates as high as 65% (Greenberg, 1975), there seemed to be a decline in liberal optimism about the success of the rehabilitation model (Bayer, 1981). However, in defense of rehabilitation, some feel that it has never been given a decent chance. Badillo and Haynes (1972) indicate that in the early 1970s, only about 5% of correctional budgets was used for rehabilitation programs and that rehabilitation was often more a matter of talk than action (see Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). Glaser (1994) identifies a variety of programs that use penalties, fines, community services, restitution, and intermediate punishments that do indeed work. In examining “what works” in crime prevention, a large number of programs have been identified as either working or promising (Sherman et al., 1997).

**Protection**

Protection and the upholding of social solidarity as a goal of punishment reflect Durkheim’s (1950) point made in Chapter 1—that a society reaffirms its values in reacting to and punishing wrongdoers. In this justification, the purpose of punishment is not to obtain revenge or deter or change the criminal; rather, it is an attempt to protect society from criminals and, in so doing, to reinforce group solidarity.

**For Further Thought**

1. Search the concept of punishment and report on practices and their justification in various countries. Hint: search the term Sharia.
punishment. The just-deserts concept assumes that individuals must pay for their wrongdoing and that they deserve or “have it (the punishment) coming.” Reflected in the biblical lex talionis (law of the talons), an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, proper retribution is to be exacted for the wrongdoing. Deterrence policy assumes rationality on the part of the actor, wherein specific deterrence serves to discourage a particular individual from repeating a crime and general deterrence targets others. Legislation such as “three strikes and you’re out,” in which third-time offenders receive very severe punishment, has been found not to work because juries are often reluctant to convict a third-time offender and judges oppose such limitations on their discretion.

Criminology in Context 5.3 discusses the various justifications for punishment. The deterrence argument best represents the classical and neoclassical explanations. These arguments are also applicable to the death penalty debate.

LEARNING CHECK 5.1

Answer the following questions to check your learning thus far. Answers can be found on page 475.

1. Fill in the Blank: If you argue that people commit crime because they are possessed by the devil, you are using a _____ theory of crime.
2. True or False? Beccaria argued that the seriousness of a crime is determined by the harm it causes society.
3. Fill in the Blank: According to hedonism, we are motivated to act based on our desire to seek _____.
4. True or False? Rational choice theory proposes that people do not weigh the costs and benefits of their actions before engaging in them.

Ecological Theory

Whereas some would point to Cesare Beccaria and his writing as the beginning point of criminology, his primary interest was not so much the analysis of crime and criminals as the reform of criminal law and punishment. Others point to the writings of Cesare Lombroso, to be discussed shortly, and view the century between the works of the two Cesares as a criminological Dark Age. On the contrary, the writings and research of A. M. Guerry (1802–1866) of France and Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874) of Belgium qualify them as the fathers of modern criminology (Gibbons, 1982; Vold et al., 2002). Thomas and Hepburn (1983) best reflect this writer’s view:

It is hard to understand why so many criminologists persist in their apparent conviction that scientific criminology was not to be found until Lombroso. . . Nevertheless, the wealth of scientific analyses published by those we can classify as members of the statistical [ecological] school are commonly ignored while the often absurd and poorly executed work of Lombroso is considered to be the first true criminological analysis. (p. 138)

Another explanation for the popularity and widespread acceptance of the Lombrosians and the relative obscurity of the early ecological theorists might be the fact that the latter were not translated into English until much later (Thomas & Hepburn, 1983).

The ecological school of criminological theory is also referred to as the statistical, geographic, or cartographic school. Ecology is that branch of biology that deals with the interrelationships between organisms and their environment. Human ecology deals with the interrelationship
between human organisms and the physical environment. This school was called statistical because it was the first to attempt to apply official data and statistics to the problem of explaining criminality. The labels geographical and cartographic have been assigned because writers in this group tended to rely on maps and aerial data in their investigations.

**Using Crime Statistics: Andre M. Guerry and Adolphe Quetelet**

Sometime after 1825, Andre M. Guerry (1833) published what many regard as the first book in scientific criminology, *An Essay on Moral Statistics* (Vold, 1979, p. 167). Guerry was more cartographic in his approach, relying exclusively on shaded areas of maps to describe and analyze variations in French official crime statistics. Because he employed these sections of maps and used them as his principal units of analysis, he is often viewed as the founder of the ecological or cartographic school of criminology (Thomas & Hepburn, 1983). Comparing poverty with crime, Guerry found that the wealthier areas of France had higher property crime. Urban, industrial, northern regions had more property crime than rural, southern regions (Courtright & Mutchnick, 1999). He concluded that the higher rates were due to greater opportunity. Thus, burglary and theft occurred where more goods were available. Violent and personal crimes were higher in rural areas and southern regions. These rates were consistent annually.

Guerry was also credited with being a pioneer in comparative crime statistics in comparing English and French rates. Schafer (1969) indicated that Guerry was the first to use “moral statistics” in that he applied cartographic methods to the state of morals in terms of crime (Courtright & Mutchnick, 1999, p. 3). Another adherent of this school was Henry Mayhew (1862), who, in his *London Labour and the London Poor*, made extensive use of official statistics and aerial maps.

Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet was the first to take advantage of the criminal statistics that were beginning to become available in the 1820s (Beirne, 1987; Radzinowicz & King, 1977). He was the first scientific criminologist, employing an approach to his subject matter that was very similar to that of modern criminologists, and is the father of modern sociological and psychological statistics (Mannheim, 1965; Schafer, 1969; Thomas & Hepburn, 1983). Challenging the classical school’s view that individuals exercise free will in deciding their actions, Quetelet insisted on the impact of group factors and characteristics. In his *Treatise on Man and the Development of His Faculties* (1842/1969), written in 1835 and translated into English in 1842, Quetelet noted that there was a remarkable consistency with which crimes appeared annually and varied with respect to age, sex, economic conditions, and other sociological variables. This consistency in group behavior, in crime rates, and the like speaks against crime being solely a matter of individual choice. He argues,

> We can count in advance how many individuals will soil their hands with the blood of their fellows, how many will be swindlers, how many prisoners, almost as we can number in advance the births and deaths that will take place. . . . Society carries within itself, in some sense, the seeds of all the crimes which are going to be committed, together with the facilities necessary for their development. (pp. 299–308)

He described this constancy of crime as the annual “budget” of crime, which must be paid by society with remarkable consistency. In a sense, the stage and script are provided by society, and only the faces playing the individual characters change.

In his *Research on the Propensity for Crime at Different Ages* (1831/1984), Quetelet viewed age as the greatest predictor of crime, with crime peaking at age 25. Courtright and Mutchnick (1999) point out that, in examining poverty, relative economic inequality was the critical variable. According to Quetelet, crime increases when an individual “passes in an abrupt way from a state of ease to misery and to insufficiency in satisfying all the needs which he has created” (p. 67). Schafer (1969) even claims that, due to his extensive use of crime statistics and statistical predictions, Quetelet was recognized by some as the father of statistics.

Some of Quetelet’s findings included the propensity for crime among younger adults and males and the tendency of crimes against persons to increase in summer and property crimes.
to predominate in winter. In what is called his thermic law of crime, he claimed that crimes against persons increase in equatorial climates, and property crimes are most prevalent in colder climates (cited in V. Fox, 1976). Social conditions such as heterogeneity of population tended to be associated with increased crime, as did poverty, although the latter not in the manner usually supposed. Noting that some of the poorest provinces of France also had very low crime rates, Quetelet (1842/1969) anticipated the concept of relative deprivation by suggesting not absolute poverty but a gap between status and expectation as a variable in crime causation.

Critique of Ecological Theory

The work of Guerry and Quetelet was done nearly half a century before the writings of Lombroso, to be discussed shortly, who is often viewed ("the Lombrosian myth") as the father of criminology (Lindesmith & Levin, 1937). Lombroso's (1911a) principal work, L’Uomo Delinquente (The Criminal Man), first published in 1876, emphasized the notion of "born criminality." Rather than representing progress in criminological investigation, the dominance of the early positivists such as Lombroso may have set the field on a half-century (plus) journey guided by arcane and ultimately useless concepts. The superordination of the early positivists may have represented an ideological coup d’état in which medical concepts and psychologism (a reduction of analysis solely to the individual level) temporarily impeded the early mainstream sociological efforts of the ecologists. Pointing the finger at the individual, rather than social conditions, as had Guerry and Quetelet, was intellectually acceptable to the wealthy, who preferred to view criminality as an individual failing of the dangerous classes rather than as a societal shortcoming (Lindesmith & Levin, 1937; Radzinowicz, 1966; Vold et al., 2002).

On this point, Radzinowicz (1966) states,

This way of looking at crime [the ecological school's approach] as the product of society was hardly likely to be welcome, however, at a time when a major concern was to hold down the “dangerous classes”... who had so miserable a share in the accumulating wealth of the industrial revolution that they might at any time break out in revolt in France...

It served the interests and relieved the conscience of those at the top to look upon the dangerous classes as an independent category, detached from the prevailing social conditions... a race apart, morally depraved and vicious. (pp. 38–39)

The social statisticians with their emphasis on social facts, statistics, the use of official data, and external social factors were perhaps ahead of their time. Shortcomings in their analysis, such as lack of full awareness of the inadequacies of official statistics and appropriate use of statistics themselves, are excusable given their pioneering efforts and the state of knowledge of the time. The ecological school represented a critical transition from the philosophical and purely theoretical approach of Beccaria to the more scientific criminological approaches of the 20th century.

Other Geographical Theories

The ancient origin of human interest in astrology and the assumed effect of astrological bodies on human behavior represent just one of many attempts to predict human emotion and activity on the basis of outside physical forces: the moon, the weather, climate, and the like.
word *lunatic*, from the Latin word *luna*, or moon, indicates the belief that human minds can be affected by phases of the moon. This is illustrated by legends and myths such as those about *les lupins* (werewolves) in French folklore. These creatures supposedly appeared on moonlit nights (D. Cohen, 1979) and were dramatically presented in fiction in the opening lines of the popular 1943 Universal Pictures film *The Wolf Man*:

> Even a man who is pure in heart  
> And says his prayers by night  
> *Can become a wolf when the wolfsbane blooms*  
> And the moon is full and bright.  

Daniel Cohen (1979) cites studies of mental hospital records that claim more admissions of mental patients during new and full moons, as well as a study by a suicide prevention center and one by a coroner’s office, both indicating more successful attempts at suicides around the full-moon period. The most frequently cited study of this type is Lieber and Sherin’s (1972) research on lunar cycles and homicides. They note that synodic cycles (phases of the moon) influence physical variables such as gravitation and atmospheric pressure that, in turn, influence human behavior. For instance, tidal periodicity is greatest during the new and full moon because of stronger gravitational influences. Assuming such forces may also affect human behavior, Lieber and Sherin analyzed homicide statistics for Dade County (Miami), Florida, and Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio, and found a statistically significant difference at full and new moon periods for the Dade County figures and a high, but not statistically significant, relationship for Cuyahoga County. Indicating that a lunar influence may exist, they explain that the differences could be due to the fact that Florida is closer to the equator and would be more influenced by the gravitational pull of the moon. Other analyses of these same correlations, however, fail to support their hypothesis (Nettler, 1982; Pokorny & Jachimczyk, 1974). Most such studies do not show a relationship, and, although more replications are needed, criminological interest in this line of investigation has waned. Criminologists interested in geographical and ecological impacts on criminality have focused their attention instead on the social as well as artificial environment. The Chicago school of sociology and its contribution to U.S. criminology is detailed in Chapter 7 as an illustration of such an approach.

In examining a related line of inquiry, V. Fox (1976) tells us that Quetelet’s thermic law of crime was actually borrowed from Montesquieu, who claimed that criminality increases as one nears the equator and drunkenness increases in proximity to the poles. Examination of official statistics both internationally and within the United States, France, Great Britain, and Canada seems to generally support this hypothesis (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). Although statistical analysis of official crime reports such as the UCR indicates that rapes and other violent crimes are more prevalent in warmer months and that property crimes such as shoplifting are heaviest in December (holiday season), these increases are more likely due to cultural rather than climatic effects (Cheatwood, 1988; LeBeau, 1988). Brantingham and Brantingham (1984), in analyzing spatial patterns in crime, indicate that different crime patterns are associated with different demographic, economic, and social profiles. Homicide and assault are associated with high proportions of minority population, with poverty and low income, with low-status jobs and low education, and with income inequality. Robbery is highest in large, dense cities that rely on public transit and have high levels of pedestrian traffic. Burglary and theft rates are highest in cities with growing populations, with growing suburbs, and with low density. (p. 296)

In the last year that it collected monthly data, 2008, the FBI found that July and August were the top months for violent crime, including murder (cited in “Does Crime Spike,” 2010). The
Wall Street Journal reviewed NYPD data for 2007 and 2008 and found that September was the highest for index crimes and February the lowest (Gardiner, 2010). June, July, and September were the highest for homicide. James Alan Fox’s study of Columbus, Ohio, found that violent crime was highest when the temperature reached the mid-80s but dropped when the mercury climbed past 90 degrees Fahrenheit (Gardiner, 2010).

The findings that link high levels of pollution with crime do fit into the growing knowledge that, in the long run, many chemicals can cause nerve damage and behavioral changes. For example, scientists have known for years that mercury causes brain damage: the 19th-century “mad hatters” stammered, twitched, and trembled from inhaling mercury vapors in London hat factories. Today, many factories use masks and protective hoods to shield workers from the worst effects of chemicals (Londer, 1987). Others have shown that exposure to lead is linked to delinquency and crime (Wright et al., 2008).

Although increased social interaction during warmer months in part explains increased violent crime, the most pronounced effect appears during heat waves, which might suggest that heat itself promotes aggression (Gladwell, 1990). C. R. Block and Block (1988) found that the rate of violent crime in the Uniform Crime Reports showed a stronger seasonal variation than that in the National Crime Victimization Survey. This may be because such incidents are less private and more likely to come to police attention in warmer months. E. G. Cohn (1990) found that assaults, burglary, collective violence, and rape increased along with a temperature up to about 85 degrees Fahrenheit. The relationship with homicide was uncertain, and there was no relationship between temperature and robbery, larceny, or motor vehicle theft.

While recognizing that climate itself is not a major factor but rather a precipitating or mitigating circumstance in deviant behavior, Lab and Hirschel (1988a, 1988b) emphasize studying the impact of the actual weather rather than seasonal or monthly data. After examining precipitation, humidity, temperature, and barometric pressure, they indicate that “not a single text or journal article substantiates the lack of a relationship between weather and crime” (1988a, p. 282). They conclude that the potential for weather conditions playing a part in criminal activity is related to the perspective of routine activities (LeBeau & Langworthy, 1986), in which criminal behavior is viewed as part of normal, everyday behavior. These social-ecological impacts on criminal behavior are discussed and critiqued in greater scope in the discussion of the Chicago school in Chapter 7.

In a meta-analysis of heat and violence, researchers found that hotter temperatures produced an increase in conflict. Global warming may spell problems in the future for increased violence. In war-torn Africa, every added degree of temperature increases conflict by 11% to 14%. For the United States, every increase of 5.4 degrees finds violent crime increasing by 2% to 4% (Hsiang, Burke, & Miguel, 2014). This was found to be the case when examining 60 primary studies involving 45 different conflicts since 10,000 BC.

**Economic Theory**

The three thinkers who would have a critical impact on the shaping of social ideas, as well as criminological inquiry, in the 20th century did not even specifically address the issue of crime. Their ideas, however, would influence criminological theorists in a profound manner. The first figure was Karl Marx (1818–1883), whose *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1868/1967), the former coauthored with Friedrich Engels, emphasized the economic basis of societal conflict and would give birth to the economic school of criminology. The second was Charles Darwin (1809–1882), whose *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) contained theories of evolution, natural selection, and survival of the fittest that would heavily inspire the biological positivists, to be discussed shortly. The third was Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), whose many volumes dealing with unconscious sexual motivation would influence not only psychiatry but also the psychological positivists. These themes of economics, biology, and sex underlie a large number of the criminological theories to be discussed.
Class, Crime, and Capitalism: Karl Marx

Karl Marx, the inspirational figure behind the economic theory of crime, was an economic determinist. He insisted that the economic substructure determines the nature of all other institutions and social relationships in society. In his view, the emergence of capitalism produces economic inequality in which the proletariat (workers) is exploited by the bourgeoisie (owners or capitalist class). This exploitation creates poverty and also is at the root of other social problems. Because Marx did not specifically address the issue of crime, Marxist criminologists draw on his economic and philosophic writings and apply them to the crime issue.

Marx viewed the history of all existing societies as one of class struggle. Influenced by the writings of the German philosopher Hegel, Marx described this conflict as a dialectical process in which theses (existing ideas or institutions) spawn their opposites, or antitheses, until a final synthesis (new idea or social order) emerges. Thus, for Marx, capitalism (thesis) breeds its own destruction by giving birth to a proletarian revolution (antithesis) and finally a new world order of socialism (synthesis). Because Marx applied Hegel’s theory to the material world, this is often described as Marx’s theory of dialectical materialism. For Marx, the resolution of social problems such as crime would be achieved through the creation of a socialist society characterized by communal ownership of the means of production and an equal distribution of the fruits of labor.

Criminal Law and Class: Willem Bonger

The foremost early Marxist criminologist was the Dutch philosopher Willem Bonger (1876–1940), whose most noted work was Criminality and Economic Conditions (1916/1969). Bonger viewed the criminal law as primarily protecting the interests of the propertied class. In contrast to precapitalist societies, which he claimed were characterized by consensus and altruism, capitalist societies emphasized egoism (selfishness). Capitalism was viewed as precipitating crime by creating unequal access to the necessities of life as well as by viewing success in economic competition as a sign of status (Turk, 1969b). Bonger’s work provides a very detailed review of a large number of works of the era that examined the impact of economic conditions on crime, a persistent theme since early times. In referring to the early Marxist orientation, Schafer (1969) indicates,

Napoleone Colajanni, Enrico Ferri and Willem Bonger and a number of others in the last 150 years represented the same “new” trends that our radicals seem to claim as their invention. The classical authors presented these proposals in a scholarly fashion quite often superior to that of our modern radicals; in fact almost nothing is said today in this line that was not already written in criminology a century ago. (p. 76)

Greenberg (1981) points out that a large number of early Marxist thinkers did not seriously consider the crime issue, viewing it with typical “Marxian contempt for the lumpen proletariat the beggars, pimps and criminals” in capitalist society (p. 11). Many writers with a distinctive Marxian or economic view of criminality are cited in the Bonger (1916/1969) work, although as Greenberg correctly indicates, Bonger is often mistakenly viewed as the only early Marxist criminologist.
According to Turk (1969b, pp. 7–12), some of the basic claims made by Bonger regarding criminality included the following:

- Notions of what constitutes crime vary among societies and reflect existing notions of morality.
- Criminal law serves the interest of the ruling class in capitalist systems and is enforced by force rather than by consensus.
- Hedonism (pleasure seeking) is natural among people, but capitalism encourages egoism (selfish individualism) to an extreme and to the disadvantage of the society and the poor.
- All groups are prone to crime in capitalist society, but seldom are the crimes of the wealthy punished.
- Poverty resulting from capitalism encourages crime. The unequal distribution of rewards and encouragement of egoistic material accumulation encourage crime.
- Most crimes (other than those due to mental problems) would be eliminated in a socialist system in which the goods and wealth of a society would be equally distributed.

The writings of the early Marxist criminologists were more historical, analytic-inductive, and descriptive than empirical. The early Marxist theorists had the luxury of making theoretical predictions without empirical referents at the time. Marx and Bonger predicted the hypothetical benefits of a socialist state, comparing these with the evils of early capitalism, which were a grim reality. Shortcomings of socialism could not be observed. Modern radical and Marxist criminologists no longer have this luxury, as will be shown later in discussing the conflict and radical schools of criminology.

**LEARNING CHECK 5.2**

Answer the following questions to check your learning thus far. Answers can be found on page 475.

1. **Fill in the Blank**: The ______ school of criminological theory argues that how the person engages in the environment is important in understanding crime.

2. **True or False?** According to the thermic law of crime, crime is highest in places without equatorial climates.

3. Which of the following is NOT true about Willem Bonger’s views on crime?
   a. Capitalism precipitates crime by creating unequal access to life’s necessities.
   b. Capitalism encourages egoism, which disadvantage the rich.
   c. Capitalism creates poverty, which leads to crime.
   d. Crime would largely go away in socialist systems, where goods and wealth are equally distributed.

**The Theory–Policy Connection**

Crime policies, various programs and activities aimed at controlling crime, do not occur in a vacuum but are guided by contemporary theory. Explanations of the cause of criminal behavior (theory) set the context of efforts to deal with crime and criminal behavior (policy). Often, the reaction to discussions of theory is, “So what?” Of what use are these theories? Even those who oppose theories as impractical are themselves espousing theories in their day-to-day operations. Table 5.3 outlines this theory and policy connection.
Applying Theory 5.1

You may have heard about a female serial killer named Aileen Wuornos—or you may have seen the movie *Monster* in which the actress Charlize Theron portrays her. On October 9, 2002, she was executed for the killings of six men in Florida that spanned about a year. The bodies that were discovered had been shot. Aileen claimed that the men had tried to rape her while she was working as a prostitute. She also, however, claimed that she killed the men during robberies because she did not want to leave witnesses. Although the exact reasons for Aileen’s killings are unknown, criminological theories can help us understand why she killed these men. To do so, a description of her background and experiences is warranted.

Aileen Wuornos was born on February 29, 1956. Her parents did not raise her, as her father was in prison when she was born and Diane, her mother, left her when she was not even 1 year old to be raised by her maternal grandparents. Aileen’s childhood started rough, as was her life even before birth. Diane was severely beaten when she was 1 to 2 weeks pregnant with Aileen, and she smoked “less than a pack of cigarettes a day” (p. 98) while pregnant. Aileen was born breech and she was described as being a fretful, unhappy, colicky baby.

This beginning proved to be fortuitous in that before splitting up, her biological father, Leo, used to beat her mother and would force her to stay at home with the shades drawn. Leo was an alcoholic who did poorly in school and engaged in crime himself. Life did not get much better for Aileen once her grandparents took over. She suffered severe abuse at the hands of her grandfather, Lauri. Lauri was an alcoholic who was known to have a frightening temper. She experienced beatings by him with leather straps in which she had to lie face down without any clothes on and spread-eagled. Perhaps most notably, Lauri drowned a kitten who had been living in the attic and made Aileen watch.

Aileen was certainly influenced by her turbulent childhood. At age 11, she began to engage in prostitution, providing sexual favors for cigarettes or change to neighborhood boys. They in turn would call her names like “cigarette pig,” “slut,” and “whore.” By all accounts, she did not really have any friends and had a viciously bad temper. Those around her noted that she was preoccupied with money and wanted to be rich, despite her having very bad grades in school and low verbal and performance IQs, as well as routinely running away from home. She began to use drugs and drink alcohol, and at age 14, she became pregnant. Her grandparents sent her away during her pregnancy, and she gave birth at a home for unwed mothers. Her child was given up for adoption. After returning home, she dropped out of school. At the age of 15, she was effectively homeless, sleeping in the woods or abandoned cars. Aileen drifted around the country in her late teens and early 20s. She engaged in low-level offending, used drugs, and drank and continued prostituting herself. She met Tyria Moore, with whom she had a 4.5-year relationship. It was during this time that she killed her victims.

**Question:** Theory helps us understand why individuals commit crime. In this way, a criminological theory should be able to be applied to criminals like Aileen Wuornos. Using the above scenario, choose one theory presented in this chapter and explain how that theory would explain why she killed. When applying theory, consider the following:

1. **What types of crimes does the theory explain?** You would only want to select a theory that can explain violent crime for the case of Aileen Wuornos.
2. **To whom does the theory apply?** If theory only explains crimes by youth, it would not be appropriate for explaining why Aileen Wuornos committed crime.
3. **According to the theory, what are the main causes of crime?** That is, what are the theory’s propositions? Once you have identified these propositions, you must see how they apply (or not) to your case. In this instance, the propositions must be something applicable to Aileen Wuornos.
4. **Explain how the theory can be used by using its propositions and how the causes of crime apply to the case of Aileen Wuornos.**

You can use these same steps to explain crime causation through other case studies. We will, however, be using the case of Aileen Wuornos in several chapters, so do not forget to come back to this case!

Turn to page 137 to see an example answer to Applying Theory.


Chapter 5: Early and Classical Criminological Theories

Demonological theory involved unpredictable, cruel, and inconsistent criminal justice policy. The writings of Beccaria, Bentham, and the classical school brought about a revolution in criminal justice policy and became the basis of judicial policy in the Western world. Beccaria’s insistence that the criminal is rational, operates out of free will, and is responsible for deciding his or her fate is a basic assumption of Western criminal law. Law and punishment are viewed as most effective if they are sure, swift, and certain; graduated according to the seriousness of the offense; and the least necessary in the given circumstance. Neoclassical theory refined and further articulated these assumptions, which was reflected in mandatory sentencing policies and attempts to develop stricter deterrence policy. Neoclassical theory supported policies such as target hardening, creating defensible spaces, and deterrence. Policies such as “just deserts,” “three strikes and you’re out,” and mandatory sentences all assumed a rational actor as criminal. Ecological theories posed a challenge to classical theories, viewing the latter as simplistic and solely concerned with the individual. It asked for theories and policies that would take into account higher or lower crime rates depending on differing social and physical environments. Similarly, early economic theories targeted differential crime rates due to poverty and inequality. Both ecological and economic theory proposed policies to fight crime by improving social and physical environments that may be criminogenic.

Policy efforts are guided by theoretical as well as methodological findings. Whereas theory addresses issues such as why and how crime takes place, method involves itself with providing accurate facts regarding crime and criminal behavior and attempts to address how accurate these

<table>
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<tr>
<th>THEORY</th>
<th>KEY NOTIONS OF CRIME CAUSATION</th>
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<td>Demonological</td>
<td>Supernatural forces (demons) determine criminality.</td>
<td>Torture, exorcism, brutality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical/neoclassical</td>
<td>Criminals are rational actors and responsible for their actions (free will).</td>
<td>The keystone of our criminal justice system, which assumes individual responsibility for one's actions. Let the punishment fit the crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Group characteristics and social and physical environment affect crime.</td>
<td>Improvement of physical and social environment will decrease crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Capitalism and inequality cause crime.</td>
<td>Reduction of inequality and poverty will reduce crime.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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Crime & the Media 5.1

ECOLOGICAL THEORY

You may be familiar with the HBO hit series The Wire, created by David Simon, which aired from 2002 to 2008 (and if you are not, then you have missed out!). In this show, the lives of youth who live in impoverished Baltimore and its “ravished landscape” (Moskos, 2013, p. xiii) are depicted along with the police responsible for investigating the drug networks present in the city. The city is shown gritty and real—it is almost a character in itself. At the heart of the show is how people are affected by their circumstances, particularly where they live. It depicts how the war on drugs has affected urban America. In this way, The Wire shows how a person’s environment shapes his or her behavior, just as ecological theories emphasize how geography influences crime.
Efforts to explain crime and criminal wrongdoing may direct themselves to examining deviant behavior of the individual as well as social disorganization of the society. In investigating the former, the patient is the individual wrongdoer and the question asked is why this person deviates from society. In the latter, the patient is the society and the question asked is why some societies have so much more crime than others.

Summary

A theory is a plausible explanation of a given reality. The major theoretical approaches in criminology are the demonological, classical, ecological, economic, positivistic (biological and psychological), and sociological approaches.

The earliest theories of crime causation were demonological in nature, seeking supernatural explanations for criminality. The criminal was viewed as possessed, sinful, or evil. The classical school of criminological theory, which developed in the 18th century, was reflected in the writings of Beccaria, Bentham, and later Garofalo and Ferri. Seeking rational explanations, classical theorists viewed the criminal as exercising free will, as motivated by hedonism (pleasure seeking), and as carefully weighing potential pleasure versus pain to be derived from an activity. Attacking the cruel and unpredictable penal methods of the time, classical theory inspired the reform of Western criminal law. Neoclassical theory admits extenuating circumstances (insanity, age, and the like) to the equal treatment for equivalent-offense notions of the classical school.

Ecological theory (sometimes called statistical, geographic, or cartographic) is concerned with the impact of groups and social and environmental influences on criminality. The earliest writers, Guerry and Quetelet, could be regarded as the fathers of modern criminology in that they employed statistics and scientific analysis in the investigation of their theories. Quetelet’s thermic law hypothesized that violent crimes predominate in warmer climates, and property crimes increase in colder zones. Because he and Guerry extensively employed maps in their analyses, they are sometimes called the cartographic school. The work of this school was interrupted and for a time forgotten as a result of the popularity of the Darwin-inspired biological positivism of Lombroso (discussed in the next chapter). Other geographic theories relating to moon cycles, climate, weather, and the like have attracted considerable interest, but research verification has been inconclusive.

Three major thinkers who have inspired much criminological theory have been Marx (economics), Darwin (evolution), and Freud (unconscious sexual motivation). Early economic theories, based on Marx’s writings, view the economic system of capitalism as creating inequalities that in turn produce crime. Socialism is viewed as the solution to the crime problem. Bonger, a Marxist criminologist, suggests that egoism (selfishness), developed as a result of capitalism, causes criminality.

The four justifications for punishment are retribution, deterrence (including incapacitation), rehabilitation, and protection and maintenance of social solidarity.

Key Concepts

REVIEW KEY TERMS WITH EFLASHCARDS $SAGE edge edge.sagepub.com/hagan10e

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Review Questions

TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHAPTER CONTENT.
TAKE THE PRACTICE QUIZ edge.sagepub.com/hagan10e

1. What are some of the basic concepts of the classical school of criminological theory? What is your opinion of the pros and cons of this theory?

2. What are some primary ideas of the Marxist approach to criminology?

3. What are some basic findings of Quetelet and Guerry and their ecological approach to criminology?

4. Who were the Nacirema? Do you think that their behavior is bizarre? Why or why not?

5. What are some of the major points raised by economic theory in explaining crime?

6. What was the rational choice theory of crime causation? What implications does this theory have for explaining crime?

7. Are there any parallels between demonological theories of crime and current society?

8. What is neoclassical theory, and of what relevance is it to modern concepts of corrections?

9. What is the current status of geographic theories in criminology?

Web Sources

Criminal Justice Online
http://www.hitechcj.com

Theoretical Criminology
http://crime-study.blogspot.com

Web Exercises

Using this chapter’s web sources, explore the field of criminology.

1. What kinds of details are available on the Criminal Justice Online site?

2. Perform an online search for “neoclassical criminological theory.” Hint: you may wish to use terms or concepts from that section in the chapter.

Example of Applying Theory

You may argue that Aileen Wuornos committed her crimes because of hedonism. According to Bentham, people choose actions that maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This theory applies to anyone capable of making rational calculations and pleasure and pain. Crime is caused accordingly, by choice to engage in crime because it brings the greatest amount of pleasure while minimizing pain. For Aileen, then, if applying hedonism to the murders she committed, her actions were caused by her desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This explanation is plausible in that she robbed the men (thus getting money and/or valuables) and killed them (thus preventing them from identifying her and minimizing the chances she could be caught). If you take Aileen’s word, she also minimized the pain of being raped by fighting back (maximizing pleasure or benefit, while minimizing pain).
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