

Biological and psychological theory of crime criminology essay



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In this paper I am going to discuss a biological and psychological theory of crime and to differentiate between the two perspectives, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each. The purpose of this assignment is to critically assess the strengths and weakness of various criminological theories. Crime is a phenomenon of deviant behavior, representing a high risk to people, and therefore punishable by law. In modern society, crime is considered to be a socially dangerous act, prohibited by law under the threat of punishment. Crime is the most dangerous kind of “ a social pathology” deviating from the norm, deviant behavior. Therefore, the main backbone elements of crime are personality traits of a potential criminal and the social conditions of life.

Biological theory

The first attempts to explain the term “ crime” were of a biological character. Scientists have searched for natural causes due to the tendency of some people to crime. In 1870 an Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso concluded that some people were born with criminal tendencies. In his point of view, criminal types can be identified by their shape of skull. Lombroso did not deny the fact that society could influence on the development of criminal behavior, but believed that most perpetrators are biologically degenerative. Subsequently, the idea of a biological predisposition to crime has been subjected to criticism.

In the second half of the XX century attempts were made to link the criminal tendencies of a certain set of chromosomes in the genetic code. In several studies conducted in prisons, medium security, the result was obtained,

showing that such a deviation was one of hundreds of prisoners, compared with one person per thousand for the general population. However, it soon emerged among researchers surmise that this result is due to small sample sizes. Studies on larger tracts of the population showed that men with abnormal chromosome no more likely to commit violent acts than the usual set. Thus, the biological approach to the explanation of crime has failed.

Lombroso saw in the offender “ characteristics of a primitive prehistoric man and animal” and developed his concept of “ a born criminal” that is the basis for biological theories of crime in criminology.

Lombroso’s concept of “ a born criminal” has a thesis about natural character and eternal existence of crime in human society. According to this concept the type of “ criminal rights” is characterized by certain stigmata (signs or marks, supposedly distinguish it from the type of a person “ impregnable”). The basis of this classification served as his research of about 400 Italian criminals in prisons. Subsequently, through research it was found that the methods applied by Lombroso, were not adequate, and the study group was not representative. Lombroso compared his criminals with a mixed control group consisting of Italian soldiers. Finding in 43% of criminals more than five physical anomalies at each, Lombroso concluded that this confirms his hypothesis of the existence of a congenital criminal type, which is present a genetic shift to earlier forms of animal life. Classification of “ a born criminal” is a significant part of the whole concept of Lombroso, clearly confirming the primitive simplicity and at the same time, anti-humanism of this concept and its political reaction.

In addition, Lombroso studied 79 teenagers at age of 12 years old, placed in a correctional home. They included 40 people who had committed theft, 27 vagrants and 7 of the killers. Its position regarding the causes of juvenile crime based on the results of his study Lombroso expressed in the following conclusion that the moral anomalies, which would create a reference to an adult crime, manifested in children in a much larger scale and with the same symptoms, especially due to hereditary reasons. In this respect, education can do nothing. It cannot change those who were born with perverted instincts.

This statement fully reflects Lombroso's general methodological position about the presence of a special type such as " a criminal person" with the congenital criminal traits and innate propensity to commit crimes. The fact that the study of juvenile delinquency has become an integral part of the work, which was presented Lombroso's main theoretical concept - once again confirms that it applies to juvenile delinquency all the main provisions of the concept. It is important to mention that British researchers have concluded that the differences between criminals and criminals are practically absent, and therefore such a phenomenon as a " criminal type" does not exist.

Psychological theory

Psychological theory of crime, as well as biological one, associates with criminal inclinations of a particular type of personality. In the XX century some psychologists, based on Sigmund Freud's ideas, have suggested that a small percentage of people develop " immoral", or psychopathic personality.

According to Freud, most of our moral values come from the self-restraint, which we are learnt from our early childhood. Due to the special nature of the relationship with parents, some children do not produce the similar self-restraint, and, accordingly, there is the lack of basic sense of morality.

Psychopaths can be described as a closed people finding a big pleasure in violence.

Psychological theory of crime has, in contrast to biological one, the rational core. However, they only can explain some aspects of crime. Although a small minority of criminals do have the personal characteristics that are different from the rest of the population, but such features have not all violators of the law.

It is necessary to mention that Freud thought that any actions of people are rushing out unconscious instincts or inclinations. When the controlling volitional factor is not able to suppress the natural instinct - there is a conflict, spilling into a crime. Other psychological theory states that the commission of crimes is a sign of mental illness or other psychopathological disorders.

Bandura in his social learning theory admits that " Learning would be exceedingly laborious...if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do... from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1977). Kohlberg identified six stages of moral development, which replace one another in a strict sequence and are similar to the cognitive stages of Piaget. He stated

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that concern for others was not based on intrinsic respect or loyalty, but rather was based on “ you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours” mentality (Kohlberg, 1973). The transition from one stage to another occurs as a result of improving cognitive skills and the ability to empathize (empathy). Unlike Piaget, Kohlberg does not bind moral development’s periods of the personality of a certain age. While most people reach for at least the third stage, some for life are morally immature.

To sum up the above-stated information I want to admit that the causes of crime are analyzed by many sciences, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, and even biologists. However, none of the existing theories provide an exhaustive explanation of all types of crime.