The Contribution Of Classical Criminology To Our Understanding Of Crime And Deviance

This essay will provide a discussion on the contributions of classical criminology to help in giving an understanding on the different crimes in society. It will give a brief description on what the classical school of criminology is and the founders of the classical school of criminology as-well as focusing on two main theorists called Bentham and Beccaria. The essay will talk about the different theories and how they can be applied in society in order to prevent crimes. It will also go on to cover theories like, rational theory and how it could be applied in making constructive punishments for crime.

The classical school of criminology is a very important theory in the structure of criminal behaviour. Theorist have tried to find solutions to the different crimes and deviance. The Classical school of Criminology was introduced by Cesar Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham. Beccaria and Bentham are known as critical thinkers in the classical thinking and known as the “founding fathers” regarding the classical school of criminology. Beccaria believed that if people had freewill, they would be able to make choices from that freewill. Beccaria believed that it was better to prevent crimes than punishing (Beccaria, pg.103). He believed that a different set of laws needed to be put into place in order to ensure that punishments were fair and accurate and that they matched up with the crimes that were committed. He grasped the idea of the need of a government and a criminal justice system if there was going to be a civil society. As he didn’t think that the criminal justice system was suitable in society. He felt that the 'barbarous' punishments in that time needed to be improved. He talked about how many of the laws that where put in place were just 'a mere tool of the passions of some or have arisen from an accidental and temporary need' (Beccaria, pg.8). Beccaria noticed how the laws that were created was too powerful, and he emphasized on how important it was to create laws for the 'greatest happiness shared by the greatest number” and this meant that the laws that were developed, would benefit the entire community. Beccaria got the idea of the criminal laws being formed with a more reasonable thought for the sake of preventing crimes in society. Beccaria believed that their needed to be a reliable sureness that the crime happened and how It happened, how fast the punishment was given as-well as how severe the crime was. Beccaria believed that when giving penalties and sentences to people, they should be equivalent to the crime committed and not more than what is mandatory. Beccaria believed that in order for a punishment to be more effective in order to prevent more future crimes, the punishment should be certain and prompt.

Even though Jeremy and Beccaria didn’t agree to death penalties, Bentham believed that if a crime was strong enough such as a murder case, a death penalty should be given. Bentham believed that punishment required some justification as it involved pain and suffering (Bentham 1789, pg. 45). Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill focused on utilitarianism a theory aimed to be used when making any ethical decision’s. It is based on a person’s human natural instinct to seek pleasure in order to avoid pain. Jeremy believed that in order for the right thing to be done, it could potential come from a bad motive. Jeremy believed firmly in how powerful and valuable the prison with the idea of the ‘panopticon’ circular prison is (Newburn 2007, pg.118). He believed that if the prisoners didn’t know that they were being watched over or not, it would make them have a better behaviour and if they behaved better, then the prison would have a

more effective way in enforcing good behaviour. Bentham didn't succeed in getting approval on building the prison in England but on the other hand, the Presidio Modelo prison built in Cuba was designed exactly following and using Bentham ideas but it was later closed down due to the riots and hunger strikes. "By happiness is intended pleasure" (Utilitarianism 1861, pg. 10) Mill criticised Bentham for focussing his theory on pleasure alone and Bentham introduced the theory of "utility" which replaced pleasure with happiness and moved away from mere quantity to the quality of happiness as well. The utility theory focuses on how people's actions should be judged on how much damage it could cause to a person's happiness.

It is believed that the deterrence theory deters people from committing crimes because they are scared of getting caught or re-offending. The deterrence theory should be applied as crimes and people's actions are made out of rational choice's (Akers, 1990, pg. 654). The deterrence theory does not always focus on punishing people but focuses on how to stop people from committing more crimes and how their actions will impact a person's behaviour after. Unlike the deterrence theory, rational choice theory is different from the other criminal theories as it mainly focuses on how crimes are merely an individual's choice. This classical theory was introduced by Clarke and Cornish. Both of them agreed that while people commit crimes, they are not perfectly rational and it makes them completely unreasonable (Clarke and Cornish's 1985). The classical criminology can be argued in some way as not all crimes are made through a rational choice.

In conclusion, the classical school of criminological focuses too much on thinking that all criminals are stable with being able to make decisions by people's free will but in reality, not all individuals are able to make decisions by themselves. For example, if an individual had a physical illness or mental illness, this could potentially change the way in which they think as-well as act. The classical school has proven successful in being able to reduce crime rates as-well as having ways that are able to deterrent people's criminal behaviours and a way to containing people that do not follow the criminal justice system.