

PHI 169 – CRITICAL REASONING

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QUESTIONING THE IDEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS – OCTOBER 29, 2014

THREE SKILLS

So far you have practiced three critical reasoning skills:

- (1) Argument analysis (i.e. identifying premises and conclusion; identifying missing and irrelevant premises; graphical argument reconstruction; distinguishing between inductive and deceptive arguments; distinguishing between necessary and sufficient conditions)
- (2) Comparison of conflicting arguments
- (3) Asking the right questions

A NEW SKILL

Today you'll familiarize yourself with a fourth skill:

- (4) Awareness of the ideological assumptions underlying an argument

The term **ideology** refers to a set of ideas, beliefs, claims which most people in a society take for granted because they seem self-evident and hard to dispute. Below are some beliefs that many people today in contemporary American society take for granted:

- If you go to college, you'll increase your chances of getting a well-paid job.
- A CEO should be paid more than a janitor.
- Democracy is a good thing.
- Freedom is a good thing.

QUESTIONING THE ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE PRACTICE OF PUNISHMENT

We have examined a few arguments about the death penalty. Recall Beccaria's argument; Mill's argument; and van den Haag's argument. All of them assumed that (A) *if people commit crimes, they should be punished*. They also assumed that (B) *people are responsible for their deeds*. But do assumptions (A) and (B) make any sense? I now want you to question them.

KARL MARX ON PUNISHMENT

"Punishment in general has been defended as a means either of ameliorating or of intimidating. Now what right have you to punish me for the amelioration or intimidation of others? And besides there is history—there is such a thing as statistics—which prove with the most complete evidence that since Cain the world has been neither intimidated nor ameliorated by punishment. Quite the contrary."

Karl Marx, "Capital Punishment", New YorkDaily Tribune, 8 February 1851

A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES OF CRIME

“Criminality has two primary sources: (1) need and deprivation on the part of disadvantaged members of society, and (2) motives of greed and selfishness that are generated and reinforced in competitive capitalistic societies. Thus criminality is economically based—either directly in the case of crimes from need, or indirectly in the case of crimes growing out of motives or psychological states that are encouraged and developed in capitalistic society. In Marx’s own language, such an economic system alienates men from themselves and from each other. It alienates men from themselves by creating motives and needs that are not “truly human.” It alienates men from their fellows by encouraging a kind of competitiveness that forms an obstacle to the development of genuine communities to replace mere social aggregates.

[...]

Within bourgeois society, then, crimes are to be regarded as normal, and not psychopathological, acts. That is, they grow out of need, greed, indifference to others, and sometimes even a sense of indignation—all, alas, perfectly typical human motives.”

Jeffrie Murphy, “Marxism and Retribution”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1973, p. 234.

ABORTION AND CRIME RATES

Economists Levitt and Dubner argued that the drop of US crimes rates in the 90ies was due to the legalization of abortion, following Sup. Ct. decision *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Watch the video below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK6gOeggViw>

“Perhaps the most dramatic effect of legalized abortion, and one that would take years to reveal itself, was its impact on crime.

In the early 1990s, just as the first cohort of children born after *Roe v. Wade* was hitting its late teen years—the years during which young men enter their criminal prime—the rate of crime began to fall. What this cohort was missing, of course, were the children who stood the greatest chance of becoming criminals. And the crime rate continued to fall as an entire generation came of age minus the children whose mothers had not wanted to bring a child into the world. Legalized abortion led to less unwantedness; unwantedness leads to high crime; legalized abortion, therefore, led to less crime.

[...]

It may be more comforting to believe what the newspapers say, that the drop in crime was due to brilliant policing and clever gun control and a surging economy. We have evolved with a tendency to link causality to things we can touch or feel, not to some distant or difficult phenomenon. [...] Most of the time, such a reckoning is correct. But when it comes to cause and effect, there is often a trap in such open-and-shut thinking

Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, 2005.