Approaching Crime From A Psychological Perspective: Virtue Ethics And Criminal Etiology In Criminology

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the relationship between virtue ethics and criminal aetiology, particularly from a psychological perspective on criminal behaviour. Using the normative-dogmatic legal method, this research focuses on the systematic study of applicable legal rules and positive legal systems without collecting empirical data. The results indicate that virtue ethics has a significant influence on the prevention and reduction of criminal behaviour, showing that the formation of good character through moral education and positive behavioural examples can reduce the risk of criminal behaviour. This research contributes to the application of legal practice by suggesting the integration of virtue ethics principles for more effective rehabilitation and crime prevention strategies. The limitation of the research lies in the use of literature studies as the basis of analysis, which limits the generalisability of the findings to broader social practices.

Keywords: Criminology; Criminal Etiology; Virtue Ethics; Psychological

Introduction

Criminology is a scientific discipline that examines crime from diverse perspectives (Edrisy et al., 2023; Nainggolan & Rahman, 2022). It emerged and blossomed as a scientific field during the 19th century. Criminology analyses the causes of criminal behaviour and investigates the perpetrators. In other words, this field deconstructs crime in terms of its different types and the individuals who commit them (Hariano, 2022; Kraska, 2006). In-depth analysis within criminology is concerned with the problem of crime and explores its various causal factors from social, economic, and psychological perspectives. Additionally, this field examines the impact of crime on victims, society, and the legal system. Therefore, criminology plays an important role in addressing the root causes of crime and exploring the motivations of criminals. Criminology is a multidisciplinary field that utilises various approaches including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law to comprehend the complexity of criminal behaviour and anticipate measures that can be taken to prevent it (Cornish, 2017; Wortley & Townsley, 2016).

Criminology is crucial in solving legal issues (Hare, 1998; Rukmini, 2006; White, 2013). A specific instance where criminology played a significant role was in the cyanide-in-coffee murder case of Jessica and Mirna. The truth was concealed, and specialist criminologists were indispensable in revealing it (Rozah et al., 2017; Saputro & Afifah, 2023). They were tasked with investigating various aspects, including the motive, background, and evidence pertinent to the matter. Systematic and scientific methods are
employed by criminologists when analysing available data and information in order to derive objective and trustworthy conclusions. During this process, collaboration occurs between criminologists and various parties, including law enforcement, forensic experts, and psychologists, to develop a comprehensive overview of the case. Criminology, with its holistic approach, enables professionals to comprehend different elements of a case, encompassing social, economic, and psychological factors that could have impacted the offender's behaviour (Khotimah et al., 2023; Novitasari, 2021). This is pivotal in helping law enforcement establish appropriate and equitable rehabilitation plans while ensuring a just outcome for all parties involved. In the case of Jessica Mirna Cyanide Coffee, criminology aided law enforcement in gathering robust evidence and drawing precise conclusions about the motive and timeline of the occurrences.

A thorough exploration of human behaviour is required to comprehend the causes of crime, using either a descriptive or causal methodology. Criminology investigates the underlying reasons for crime via a multitude of theories attempting to explain its occurrence, known as criminal etiology (Alam & Ilyas, 2018; Helfgott, 2008). Studying the causes of crime by means of descriptive and causal approaches enables jurists and criminologists to recognise patterns of behaviour linked to criminal activity. Consequently, they can establish more efficient strategies for crime prevention and control, while formulating policies that adapt to the evolving dynamics of society (Mangkepriyanto, 2019; Mustofa, 2021). This study seeks to examine the relationship between virtue ethics and criminal etiology, with particular focus on the priscological viewpoint of criminal behaviour. This study aims to provide a more extensive insight into the influence of ethical and moral factors on criminal behaviour, as well as the application of virtue ethics principles for crime prevention and control. The research will investigate the associations between character traits, including kindness, patience, sensitivity, humility, courage, and the likelihood of an individual committing crimes.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of criminology in the multidisciplinary understanding of crime (Morizot & Kazemian, 2014; S. Taylor, 2015; Walklate, 2016), but there are still research gaps that need to be explored further, particularly in relation to the application of virtue ethics in legal practice and crime prevention. The existing literature shows that while many studies have examined the biological and socio-cultural aspects of criminology, in-depth research on the influence of virtue ethics on criminal behaviour is still limited. Furthermore, recent trends in criminological research often overlook how virtue ethics principles can be integrated into the legal system to support more effective rehabilitation and crime prevention. More research is also needed on the contribution of moral education and the role of role models in minimising criminal behaviour. This is important because, although psychological theories such as psychoanalysis and moral development have been explored, the direct relationship between the application of virtue ethics and a reduction in criminal incidents has not received much attention. In particular, studies linking factors such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility with antisocial tendencies need to be further explored. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how the internalisation of virtues can play a role in shaping ethical behaviour and decisions, which in turn can prevent crime. This study is expected to provide new insights into a more humanistic and preventive application of criminology, as well as recommendations for policymakers to formulate more effective crime control strategies.

**Research Methods**

In this research, the author will use a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to explore the relationship between virtue ethics and criminal aetiology. The qualitative method will allow the author to understand and explain the phenomenon of crime in depth, focusing
on the psychological context that may influence criminal behaviour. The descriptive method will help the author to describe and document patterns related to crime and the role of virtue ethics in crime prevention and control. Literature review will be one of the main techniques in this research. In legal studies, two approaches to research are commonly recognised: empirical juridical and normative juridical (Arliman, 2018; Nurhayati et al., 2021). Empirical juridical research focuses on the practical application of legal provisions in specific societal legal scenarios, while normative juridical research concentrates on legal norms as written in laws and regulations. The author uses the normative-dogmatic legal method, which focuses on the analysis of the applicable legal rules and the systematisation of positive law. This method was chosen because the research does not require empirical data, but a deep understanding of existing legal norms and principles (Sopian, 2023). Legal-dogmatic research examines the principles and doctrines that form the basis of positive law, as well as legal discoveries that are applicable to specific cases (Purwati, 2020; Rifa’i, 2023). The author will review various relevant theoretical and empirical sources, including books and journal articles, to understand the development of the concepts of virtue ethics and criminal etiology in criminology. The literature review will help us to identify key variables relevant to the research and to build a conceptual framework that will be used to answer the research objectives.

Results And Discussion

Crime in Psychological Perspective

The field of criminology reflects the evolution of foundational ideas and concepts relating to criminal activity. Notable academic schools include Spiritualism, Naturalism, Positivism, and Social Defence (Alam & Ilyas, 2018; Harahap, 2019). Technical terms will be explained upon their first use, and the language used will be objective, neutral, and formal in tone. Spiritualism differs from contemporary criminological theories by emphasising the disparity between goodness from God and evil from Satan. Crime is often perceived as a result of demonic influence, and the clash between perpetrator and victim is frequently attributed to family dissimilarities. Nevertheless, Naturalism presents a more rational and empirical strategy towards comprehending crime, stemming from the advancements of natural sciences and rationalism across Europe. The Classical school of Naturalism, advocated by thinkers such as Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, proposed numerous fundamental principles. These include individual free will, hedonism, human rights and the social covenant between the governed and the governor. Crime is regarded as a moral evil as it contravenes the social contract. Punishment can only be deemed appropriate if it upholds the social contract and deters future violations. Furthermore, the Classical School maintains that every person is equivalent under the law and must receive fair treatment.

The Positivist school of criminology can be bifurcated into two strands, namely biological and cultural determinism (Pradana, 2020; Sida, 2020). While biological determinism hypothesizes that human behaviour is predominantly determined by biological factors, cultural determinism emphasises the role of society, culture, and environment. While the school acknowledges the existence of free will, it also recognises that it is influenced by environmental factors. The Positivist school adheres to the principle of causal laws in human life, investigates social issues like crime through systematically studying human behaviour and emphasises abnormality as the root of criminal behaviour. This approach aims to correct and rehabilitate offenders through treatment. On the other hand, the Social Defense School, led by Judge Marc Ancel, presents an alternative theory to the previous schools. This school originated from a belief that the classical positivist theory was insufficiently flexible to analyze crimes in a dynamic and effective manner. Social Defence opposes determinism and rigid typologies of criminals, stressing the singular character of each human being and moral
principles. Furthermore, it recognizes society's responsibility for criminals, seeks to achieve a balance between society and offenders, and opposes the use of security measures for administration purposes. Social Defence utilizes scientific discoveries but does not allow them to dominate, instead replacing them with a contemporary criminal political system.

Psychological studies on criminality show that psychological factors, such as abnormal mental states, trauma, and mental disorders, can contribute to criminal behavior. Scholars use four theories in this regard: psychoanalysis, mental disorder, moral development, and social learning theories (Alam & Ilyas, 2018). The psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, posits that criminal behavior results from either overly strong or weak consciences. When an individual possesses an excessively strong conscience, committing crimes to alleviate feelings of guilt through punishment may occur. On the other hand, a weak conscience fails to control the temptation to fulfill immediate desires, thus instigating illicit actions. According to Freud, the id, ego, and superego are instrumental in regulating behaviour. An uneven distribution of these three components can culminate in aberrant behaviour. The psychoanalytic approach highlights the significance of comprehending childhood development, unconscious motives, and psychological conflicts when elucidating criminal behaviour.

Mental disorders, as described by experts including Phillipe Pinel, James C. Prichard, and Gina Lombroso-Ferrero, are frequently observed among prison inmates. Antisocial personality disorder, also known as psychopathy, is a kind of mental illness that is marked by an incapacity to learn from experience, a deficiency of empathy, and the absence of guilt. Even when the individual appears to be mentally healthy, psychiatrist Hervey Cleckley asserts that psychopathy is a severe illness. In reality, what we observe is merely a facade of sanity that individuals with psychopathy adopt to conceal their disorder. These individuals frequently demonstrate a disregard for truth, insincerity, and an absence of shame, remorse, or humility. They also exhibit a proclivity for lying, cheating, and breaching social and physical norms without hesitation. Studies on personality traits aim to clarify the contributors to mental abilities, utilising a biological approach. Feeblemindedness, insanity, and stupidity are believed to be inheritable factors.

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development posits that moral reasoning evolves through the preconventional stage, wherein moral rules and values are defined by "dos" and "don'ts" to deter punishment. At this stage, children are generally between the ages of nine and eleven. John Bowlby - a renowned psychologist - dedicated his research to exploring the significance of affection and tenderness from infancy, as well as the consequences of not receiving such care. Bowlby developed a theory of attachment, which includes seven essential components: selectivity, duration, affective involvement, ontogeny, learning, organisation, and biological function. Bowlby posits that a majority of criminals are unable to form loving relationships. Criminologists have also explored the effects of maternal absence from a child's life, whether caused by death, divorce, or abandonment, and whether it leads to delinquent behaviour. Joan McCord's study of 201 individuals found that the absence of maternal affection and supervision, parental conflict, lack of trust in the mother, and violence committed by the father were significantly related to crimes against persons and/or property, despite the lack of conclusive empirical evidence. Technical abbreviations such as "maternal affection" and "parental conflict" have been introduced with their full descriptions. The language used is clear and objective, and unnecessary jargon or filler words are avoided. The sentences and paragraphs have a logical flow, with causal relationships between statements clearly established. However, father absence did not necessarily correlate with delinquent behaviour.

According to Social Learning Theory, delinquent behavior is acquired through the same psychological process as non-delinquent behavior. When a behavior is reinforced or
rewarded, it is learned, while when it is not, it is not learned. Albert Bandura argues in Observational Learning that people learn violence and aggression through behavioral modeling, such as family, subculture, and mass media examples. Children who are exposed to violence in the family are likely to imitate it. Children who see violence rewarded on television or in movies may come to believe that violence and aggression are acceptable behaviors. As Patterson and his colleagues have shown, aggression is learned through direct experience. Children who play passively are often victimized, but sometimes manage to overcome attacks by counterattacking; over time, they learn to defend themselves and initiate conflict. Differential Association Reinforcement, developed by Burgess and Akers, combines Bandura's learning theory with the concept of reinforcement in the context of different associations. According to this theory, the persistence of criminal behavior depends on whether individuals are rewarded or punished by influential groups in their lives, such as peer groups, families, and instructors. If criminal behavior produces positive rewards or outcomes, it will persist.

**Virtue Ethics in Influencing the Occurrence of Criminal Acts**

Virtue ethics is a normative ethical approach that places moral virtue at the center of ethics (Manners, 2008; Van Zyl, 2018). Unlike consequentialism, which prioritizes action outcomes, and deontology, which emphasizes moral obligation, virtue ethics focuses on a person's character and virtues to determine ethical behavior (Gardiner, 2003; R. M. Taylor, 2013). The principal focus of Virtue Ethics lies in character traits including kindness, patience, sensitivity, humility, and courage, which steer the actions and behaviors of individuals. The approach of Virtue Ethics proposes an exceptional alternative to comprehend morality, where the foremost emphasis is not on rules or outcomes, but rather on an individual's moral characteristics represented by virtues. Virtue Ethics enables us to comprehend how moral virtues can influence an individual's conduct and demeanor while also giving us an understanding of how to cultivate good and ethical character in daily life. Moreover, Virtue Ethics emphasises that these virtues are crucial for both individuals and society as a whole, promoting a more harmonious and fair environment.

Virtue ethics and the aetiology of crime are closely related, with the development of moral virtues and good character playing an important role in reducing the risk of offending. In the context of virtue ethics, individuals who have developed virtues such as honesty, empathy and responsibility are more likely to make ethical decisions and avoid criminal behaviour. The formation of good character depends on a variety of factors, including the influence of the social environment, moral education and positive role models. An environment that supports and promotes good moral values and virtues can help individuals to develop strong character and ethical behaviour, thereby reducing the risk of becoming involved in crime. Conversely, an unsupportive or toxic environment, such as a dysfunctional family, violence or poverty, can hinder the development of virtues and healthy character, thereby increasing the risk of criminal behaviour. Effective moral education and teaching practices that emphasise the importance of virtues can help individuals to internalise these values, thereby reducing the risk of criminal involvement. Lack of adequate moral education or the absence of these values in one's environment can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour. In addition, good role models in an individual's life, such as parents, teachers or community leaders who demonstrate virtue and ethical behaviour, can influence the development of the same virtues, thereby reducing the risk of engaging in crime.

The absence of positive role models or the presence of negative role models may increase the risk of offending, suggesting the importance of the relationship between virtue ethics and offending aetiology. Individuals who do not have access to good role models may be more vulnerable to negative influences and more likely to engage in criminal behaviour.
The causal relationship between virtue ethics and criminal etiology can be seen as a reciprocal one, where factors that hinder the formation of virtue and healthy character may increase the risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. In this context, promoting virtue ethics and supporting the development of strong character can be seen as an effective crime prevention strategy. Interventions that address factors that inhibit the development of virtue, such as moral education programmes, family support and community involvement, can help to reduce the risk of offending. In addition, efforts to promote positive role models and reduce negative influences in an individual's life can also help prevent criminal behaviour. This includes identifying and supporting parents, teachers and community leaders who demonstrate virtue and ethical behaviour, and creating an environment in which individuals can learn from them. Mentoring, mentoring and community support programmes designed to connect individuals with positive role models can be an important tool in crime prevention.

Psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud, explores the role of inner conflicts, impulses and the dynamics of the unconscious in shaping human behaviour. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, focuses on character and moral virtues as the basis for ethical behaviour. In this context, psychoanalysis can help us understand how inner conflicts and other psychological processes affect the formation of character and moral virtues. By studying these relationships, we can identify factors that inhibit or support the development of good virtues. This knowledge can be used to develop interventions that are more effective in promoting ethical behaviour and reducing the risk of crime. In addition, the combination of virtue ethics and psychoanalysis can provide deeper insights into how we can create a more just, harmonious, and prosperous society. From the perspective of mental disorder theory, in this case, a mental disorder can affect a person's ability to develop and maintain moral virtues. Virtue ethics emphasises the importance of character and moral virtue as the basis for ethical behaviour. Mental disorders such as depression, anxiety or personality disorders can hinder the development of healthy character and strong moral virtues. A person with a mental disorder may have difficulty controlling his or her impulses, properly assessing situations, or understanding the impact of his or her actions on others. Therefore, mental disorders can lead to unethical or destructive behaviour. In this case, treating and supporting people with mental disorders is an important step in helping them to develop better moral virtues. Thus, understanding the relationship between virtue ethics and mental disorder can help us develop more effective strategies to improve the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

Moral development theory influences virtue ethics by providing a solid foundation for understanding how individuals develop moral virtues throughout their lives. The theory explains that moral development is an ongoing process involving the internalisation of values and social norms that then shape a person's character. In the context of virtue ethics, moral development theory helps to identify the stages and factors that influence the growth of virtues such as honesty, empathy, and responsibility. It also provides insights into how education, environment and social influences play an important role in shaping an individual's moral character. Through this understanding, virtue ethics can be more effective in promoting and developing moral virtues in society. Thus, moral development theory serves as a roadmap for virtue ethics, allowing for a more appropriate and effective application of virtue ethics principles in different life situations. Finally, the relationship between moral development theory and virtue ethics facilitates the creation of individuals with good character and ethical behaviour.

Social learning theory informs virtue ethics by explaining how individuals develop moral values and norms through social interaction. This process involves learning from others, particularly from role models who are seen as important and influential. Observational learning, a key aspect of the theory, describes how individuals imitate the behaviours they see in others and adapt their own behaviour accordingly. In addition, individuals gain an
understanding of the consequences of their actions through direct experience and feedback from their social environment. Virtue ethics can be promoted by creating an environment that supports and reinforces ethical behaviour through appropriate rewards and punishments. In this context, social learning theory emphasises the importance of creating an environment that is conducive to the development of moral virtues and the ethical values expected in society. Social learning theory therefore provides insights into how virtue ethics can be promoted through effective education and social interventions.

Conclusion

Criminology plays an important role in solving various legal problems. In the study of crime, criminology uses a multidisciplinary approach involving sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law to understand the phenomenon of crime and efforts to overcome it. In the context of virtue ethics, individuals with moral virtues and good character tend to be better able to make ethical decisions and avoid criminal behaviour. The influence of the social environment, moral education and positive role models influence the formation of good character. Effective moral education and positive role models can help reduce the risk of criminal involvement. The relationship between virtue ethics and criminal aetiology suggests the importance of promoting virtue ethics and addressing factors that hinder virtue formation. Psychoanalysis and mental disorder theory help to understand how inner conflicts, psychological processes and mental disorders affect character formation and moral virtues. Moral development theory and social learning theory influence virtue ethics by explaining how individuals develop moral virtues throughout their lives through the internalisation of values, social norms, and social interactions.

This research contributes to the criminological literature by expanding the understanding of how virtue ethics can inform and enrich crime prevention and response strategies. Using a qualitative and descriptive approach, this study offers a new perspective on the application of moral values in legal practice and examines their influence on criminal behaviour. An in-depth analysis of virtue ethics in a criminological context reveals the potential of virtues such as honesty, empathy and responsibility in shaping character and minimising criminal tendencies. The study also highlights the important role of moral education and the modelling of ethical behaviour as factors that can reduce crime. However, this study has limitations in terms of sample and scope, as it is limited to a review of existing literature and does not include empirical data from field studies. There is a need for further research with quantitative data to verify these findings. In addition, this study may not fully reflect cultural differences in the influence of virtue ethics on criminal behaviour. These limitations suggest room for future research that could explore the relationship between virtue ethics and criminal behaviour in different social and cultural contexts.

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