

Theory

A precise definition refers to an attempt to change the penal system, typically from one model to another. Ironically, changing back to an earlier model is frequently also characterized as "reform". Criminal justice models are based on the goals of the penal system:

Retribution/Vengeance/Retaliation

This is founded on the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" philosophy, which essentially states that if one person harms another, then an equivalent harm should be done to them. One goal here is to prevent [vigilantism](#), gang or clan warfare, and other actions by those who have an unsatisfied need to "get even" for a crime against them, their family, or their group. It is, however, difficult to determine how to equate different types of "harm". A literal case is where a murderer is punished with the death penalty, the argument being "justice demands a life for a life". One criticism of long term prison sentences and other methods for achieving justice is that such "warehousing" of criminals is rather expensive. Yet another facet of this debate disregards the financial cost for the most part. The argument regarding warehousing rests, in this case, upon the theory that any punishment considered respectful of human rights should not include caging humans for life without chance of release--that even death is morally and ethically a higher road than no-parole prison sentences.

Deterrence

Here the criminal is used as an "example to themselves and others". By subjecting prisoners to harsh conditions, authorities hope to convince them to avoid future criminal behavior and to exemplify for others the rewards for avoiding such behavior; that is, the fear of punishment will win over whatever pleasure the illegal activity might bring. The deterrence model frequently goes far beyond "an eye for an eye", exacting a more severe punishment than would seem to be indicated by the crime. [Torture](#) has been used in the past as a deterrent, as has the public embarrassment and discomfort of [stocks](#), and, in religious communities, [excommunication](#). [Executions](#), particularly gruesome ones (such as hanging or beheading), often for petty offenses, are further

examples of attempts at deterrence. One criticism of the deterrence model is that criminals typically have a rather short-term orientation, and the possibility of long-term consequences is of little importance to them. Also, their quality of life may be so horrific that any treatment within the criminal justice system (which is compatible with human rights law) will only be seen as an improvement over their previous situation.

Salvation

The goal here is for the individual to "find God". Religious study and (frequently) isolation are stressed. While it is felt that an individual who has been "saved" will no longer commit crimes, the purely religious goal of providing as many "souls" as possible for "God" also applies. Note that this model often clashes with secular societies, especially those with a [separation of Church and State](#) philosophy, such as the [United States](#). Also note that torture was used in an attempt to force prisoners to "accept God", in the past, most notably during the [Spanish Inquisition](#).

Reform/Correction

("Reform" here refers to reform of the individual, not to reform of the penal system.) The goal is to "repair" the deficiencies in the individual and return them as productive members of society. Education, work skills, [deferred gratification](#), treating others with respect, and self-discipline are stressed. Younger criminals who have committed fewer and less severe crimes are most likely to be successfully reformed. "Reform schools" and "boot camps" are set up according to this model. One criticism of this model is that criminals are rewarded with training and other items which would not have been available to them had they not committed a crime. However, it must be noted that criminals or potential criminals who do not have access to such educational resources are only acting in their best interests by gaining access to these prisons; if a prison is successful at providing resources to individuals who were unable to get these resources through "acceptable" channels, then perhaps what would be next needed, in the implementation of this model, is *societal* reform.

Removal from society

The goal here is simply to keep criminals away from potential victims, thus reducing the number of crimes they can commit. The criticism of this model is that others increase the number and severity of crimes they commit to make up for the "vacuum" left by the removed criminal. For example, a drug dealer removed from a location will result in an unmet demand for drugs at that locale, and an existing or new drug dealer will then appear, to fill the void. This new drug dealer may have been innocent of any crimes before this opportunity, or may have been guilty of less serious crimes, such as being a look-out for the previous drug dealer.

Reduction in immediate costs

Government and prison officials also have the goal of minimizing short-term costs.

In wealthy societies:

This calls for keeping prisoners "happy" by providing them with things like television and conjugal visits. Inexpensive measures like these prevent prison assaults and riots which in turn allow the number of guards to be minimized. Providing the quickest possible parole and/or release also reduces immediate costs to the prison system (although these may very well increase long term costs to the prison system and society due to [recidivism](#)). The ultimate way to reduce immediate costs is to eliminate prisons entirely and use fines, community service, and other sanctions (like the loss of a driver's license or the right to vote) instead. Executions at first would appear to limit costs, but, in most wealthy societies, the long appeals process for death sentences (and associated legal costs) make them quite expensive. Note that this goal conflicts with most of the other goals for criminal justice systems. For example, if a criminal is treated well and released early, s/he is not likely to be deterred from future crimes.

In poor societies:

Poor societies, which lack the resources to imprison criminals for years, frequently use execution in place of imprisonment, for severe crimes. Less severe crimes, such as theft, might be dealt with by less severe physical means, such as amputation of the hands. When long term

imprisonment is used in such societies, it may be a virtual death sentence, as the lack of food, sanitation, and medical care causes widespread disease and death, in such prisons.

Some of the goals of criminal justice are compatible with one another, while others are in conflict. In the history of prison reform, the harsh treatment, torture, and executions used for deterrence first came under fire as a violation of [human rights](#). The salvation goal, and methods, were later attacked as violations of the individual's [Freedom of Religion](#). This led to further "reforms" aimed principally at reform/correction of the individual, removal from society, and reduction of immediate costs. The perception that such reforms sometimes denied victims justice then led to further changes. The hope, in the future, is that medical diagnosis and treatments might assist future generations of prisoner reformers. For example, if the "thrill-seeking gene" could be suppressed via [RNAi](#) technology, this could lead to less risk-taking behavior (some of it criminal).