CRIMINOLOGY COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION – DAY TWO

Answer question 1. Then answer TWO questions from 2, 3, or 4.

1. A great deal of modern criminological knowledge rests on self-report data. Why should anyone place confidence in self-report data? Have they proven useful in other fields and what implications, if any, does this have for their use in criminology? What, if anything, would we lose if we discarded self-report data altogether?

2. Some theories of crime suggest persons are pushed by the strains of life into crime. Others suggest that the pulls of friendship, excitement, and opportunities attract persons to crime. Still others would say that persons get involved in crime because they lack constraining ties to family, schools and investments in conventional behavior. Finally, there are those who argue that predispositions to crime are anchored in genetic potentials and the shifting flows of, e.g., hormones, some of which are related to aging. Given the myriad of explanations for crime, discuss the efficacy of various reactions to crime that have been designed to make would-be offenders avoid or discontinue criminal behavior. What works and why? You might think about the severity, timing, and probability of punishment; about broken windows and fixing neighborhoods; about welfare policies; about disrupting networks of criminal activities; about how we have (or might) deal with genetic or other biochemical predispositions to crime (or you might consider other things that come to mind). If you were trying to distill criminological theories down for the benefit of a politician, social reformer, or anyone else, what would tell them about the best way to go about addressing and preventing crime? (Note: You are not required to pick one theory as better than all others; you may instead integrate them as you see fit).

3. What are the factors that make criminal activity more or less violent? How would the different theories in the field answer this question, and does existing evidence support their claims?

4. In the 2004 case U.S. v. Booker, the Supreme Court ruled that federal sentencing guidelines are “advisory” rather than “mandatory.” Some viewed this as the death-knell for determinate sentencing at the federal level. Others believed the ruling would make little difference in the long run because judges must still look to the guidelines to hand out sentences. As a social scientist, what would you say is the best way to empirically demonstrate whether or not the Booker decision ultimately has an impact upon sentencing in federal courts? (Note: Familiarity with the Court’s decision is not required to answer this question). What would a sound study of this issue look like: that is what design would it have and what key variables would you want to measure? Finally, suppose your study found that Booker has no effect. Briefly outline what patterns in sentencing we would see in the future.