

# CHOICE THEORY

The term *choice theory* is the work of William Glasser, MD, author of the book so named, and is the culmination of some 50 years of theory and practice in psychology and counselling.

## **Characteristics :**

Choice theory posits behaviours we choose are central to our existence. Our behaviour (choices) is driven by five genetically driven needs: survival, love and belonging, freedom, fun, and power. Survival needs include:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- breathing
- personal safety
- security and sex, having children

and four fundamental psychological needs:

- Belonging/connecting/love
- Power/significance/competence
- Freedom/autonomy
- Fun/learning

Choice theory suggests the existence of a "Quality World". Glasser's idea of a "Quality World" restates the Jungian idea of archetypes but Glasser never acknowledged this. Nonetheless, Glasser's "Quality World" and what Jung would call healthy archetypes are indistinguishable.

Our "Quality World" images are our role models of an individual's "perfect" world of parents, relations, possessions, beliefs, etc. How each person's "Quality World" is somewhat unusual, even in the same family of origin, is taken for granted.

Starting from birth and continuing throughout our lives, each person places significant role models, significant possessions and significant systems of belief (religion, cultural values, and icons, etc.) into a mostly unconscious framework Glasser called our "Quality World". Glasser mostly ignores the issues of negative role models and stereotypes in choice theory.

Glasser also posits a "Comparing Place" where we compare-contrast our perception of people, places, and things immediately in front of us against our ideal images (archetypes) of these in our Quality World framework. Our subconscious pushes us towards calibrating—as best we can—our real world experience with our Quality World (archetypes).

Behavior ("Total Behavior" in Glasser's terms) is made up of these four components: acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology. Glasser suggests we have considerable control or choice over the first two of these; yet, little ability to directly choose the latter two as they are more deeply sub- and unconscious. These four components remain closely intertwined, the choices we make in our thinking and acting greatly affect our feeling and physiology.

A big conclusion for Glasser, one he repeats often, is the source of much personal unhappiness is failing or failed relationships with people important to us: spouses, parents, children, friends and colleagues.

The symptoms of unhappiness are widely variable and are often seen as mental illness. Glasser believed that "pleasure" and "happiness" are related but are far from synonymous. Sex, for example, is a "pleasure" but may well be divorced from a "satisfactory relationship" which is a precondition for lasting "happiness" in life. Hence the intense focus on the improvement of relationships in counseling with choice theory—the "new reality therapy". Those familiar with both are likely to prefer choice theory, the more modern formulation.

Choice theory posits most mental illness is, in fact, an expression of unhappiness. Glasser champions how we are able to learn and choose alternate behaviors resulting in greater personal satisfaction. Reality therapy is the choice theory-based counseling process focused on helping clients to learn to make those self-optimizing choices.

## **Ten axioms of choice**

1. The only person whose behavior we can control is our own.
2. All we can give another person is information.
3. All long-lasting psychological problems are relationship problems.
4. The problem relationship is always part of our present life.
5. What happened in the past has everything to do with what we are today, but we can only satisfy our basic needs right now and plan to continue satisfying them in the future.
6. We can only satisfy our needs by satisfying the pictures in our Quality World.
7. All we do is behave.
8. All behavior is Total Behavior and is made up of four components: acting, thinking, feeling and physiology
9. All Total Behavior is chosen, but we only have direct control over the acting and thinking components. We can only control our feeling and physiology indirectly through how we choose to act and think.
10. All Total Behavior is designated by verbs and named by the part that is the most recognizable.

William Glasser's choice theory begins: behavior is not separate from choice; we all choose how to behave at any time. Second, we cannot control anyone's behavior but our own. Glasser also believed in the vitality of classroom meetings for the purpose of improving communication and solving real classroom problems. In the classroom, it is important for teachers to "help students envision a quality existence in school and plan the choices that lead to it

Glasser was no supporter of Summerhill. Most Quality Schools he supervised had very conventional curriculum topics. The main innovation was a deeper, humanistic approach to group process between teacher, student and learning.

### **Critiques:**

Glasser's theories and teachings have not gone without criticism. In a book review,[3] W. Clay Jackson writes, "Dr. Glasser postulates that everything contained in the DSM-IV-TR is a result of an individual's brain creatively

expressing its unhappiness. ... Dr. Glasser demonizes the entire profession as charlatans who have been brainwashed by their predecessors or who simply misrepresent many of the psychiatric illnesses to patients as having a biological basis. ... Despite claiming to have an appendix full of references demonstrating there is no evidence medications have a role in curing mental illness, the book simply relies on a core group of anti-establishment authors. ... However, what is noticeably absent from the book is a set of randomized clinical trials demonstrating the success of his teachings.

## **Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory states that individuals use rational calculations to make rational choices and achieve outcomes that are aligned with their own personal objectives. These results are also associated with an individual's best, self-interests. Using rational choice theory is expected to result in outcomes that provide people with the greatest benefit and satisfaction given the choices they have available.

## **Understanding Rational Choice Theory**

Many mainstream economic assumptions and theories are based on rational choice theory. Rational choice theory is often discussed and associated with the concepts of rational actors, the rationality assumption, self-interest, and the invisible hand.

Rational choice theory is based on the assumption of involvement from rational actors which are the individuals in an economy making rational choices based on rational calculations and rationally available information. Rational actors form the basis of rational choice theory and are what make rational choice theory effective. Rational choice theory assumes that individuals are rational actors using rational information to try to actively maximize their advantage in any situation and therefore consistently trying to minimize their losses.

Using rational actors as a basis for rational choice theory, this theory manifests the rationality assumption. Economists may use the rationality assumption as part of broader studies seeking to understand certain behaviors of society as a whole. The rationality assumption assumes that all individuals under consideration are expected to be rational actors making rational choices based

on rational choice theory to achieve the very best results for themselves and their own self-interests.

## **Keypoints**

- Rational choice theory states that individuals rely on rational calculations to make rational choices that result in outcomes aligned with their own best interests.
- Rational choice theory is often associated with the concepts of rational actors, the rationality assumption, self-interest, and the invisible hand.
- Many economists believe that the factors associated with rational choice theory are beneficial to the economy as a whole.
- Rational choice theory is often dominate across behavioral economics but there are many economists who also study irrational choices.

## **Self-Interest and the Invisible Hand**

Adam Smith was one of the first economists to develop the ideas of rational choice theory through his studies of self-interest and the invisible hand theory. Smith discusses the invisible hand theory in his book “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,” published in 1776.

The invisible hand theory is first built on the actions of self-interest. The invisible hand theory and later developments in the rational choice theory both refute negative misconceptions that may be associated with self-interest. Instead, these concepts suggest that rational actors acting with their own self-interests in mind can actually create benefits for the economy at large.

The invisible hand theory is based on self-interest, rationality, and the rational choice theory. The invisible hand theory states that individuals driven by self-interest and rationality will make decisions that lead to positive benefits for the whole economy. Therefore, economists who believe in the invisible hand theory lobby for less government intervention and more free-market exchange opportunities.

## **Arguments against Rational Choice Theory**

There are many economists who do not believe in the rational choice theory and are not proponents of the invisible hand theory. Dissenters have pointed out that individuals do not always make rational utility-maximizing decisions.

Therefore, across the field of behavioral economics economists can study both the processes and results of rational and irrational decision making.

Nobel laureate Herbert Simon proposed the theory of bounded rationality, which says that people are not always able to obtain all the information they would need to make the best possible decision. Moreover, economist Richard Thaler's idea of mental accounting shows how people behave irrationally by placing greater value on some dollars than others, even though all dollars have the same value. They might drive to another store to save \$10 on a \$20 purchase but they would not drive to another store to save \$10 on a \$1,000 purchase.