

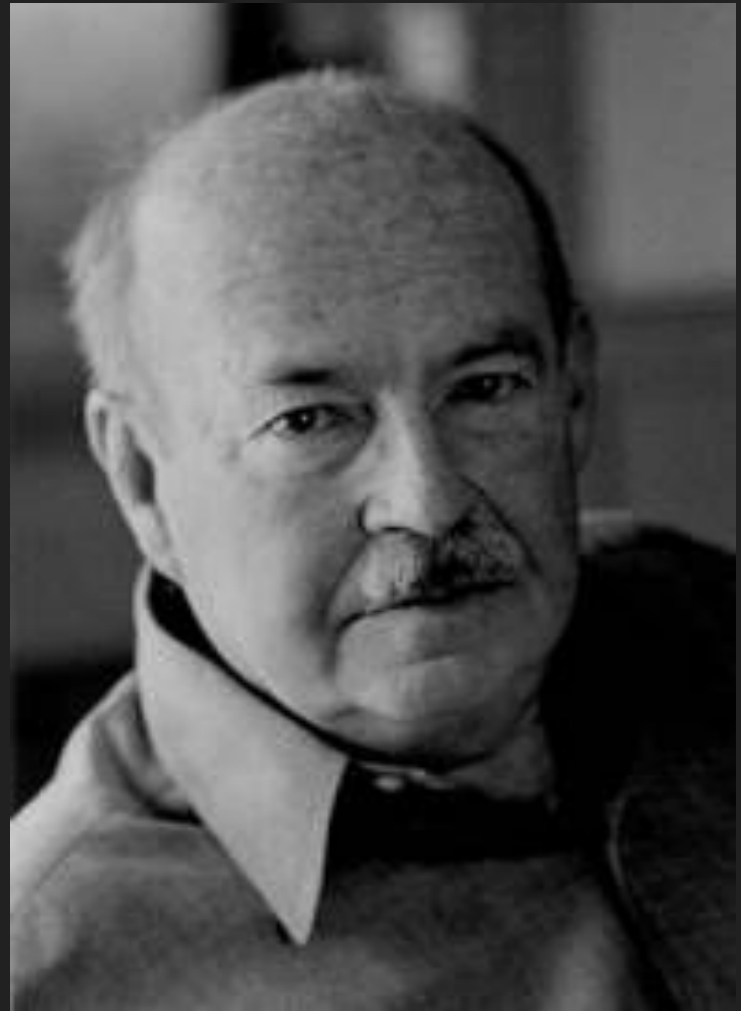
TALCOTT PARSONS

1902-1979

Dr. HUMA HASSAN

TOPIC 4.4- TALCOTT PARSONS

- a. Social system.
- b. Pattern variables.



UPSC CSE MAINS PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- 1. How is social equilibrium maintained into Parsonian framework?**
(2015 / 20 Marks)
- 2. Describe the functional prerequisites of social system as given by Talcott Parsons. Examine in the context of a university as a social system.**
(2016 / 20 Marks)
- 3. Critically analyse Talcott Parsons conception of 'Pattern Variables'.**
(2017 / 10 Marks)

4. How can Parsons's AGIL framework be used to analyse key problems in a society? Discuss.

(2018 / 20 Marks)

5. Analyse the relevance of Pattern variables in the study of social change.

(2020 / 10 Marks)

6. Critically analyse Parsons views on society as a social system.

(2022 / 20 Marks)

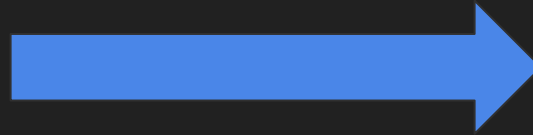
LET'S FIRST KNOW ABOUT LIFE OF TALCOTT PARSONS

Early Life and Education

- Born in Colorado in 1902 to a family that emphasized a modest and disciplined lifestyle.
- His father was a Congregational minister and a faculty member at Colorado College.



- Completed his undergraduate education at Amherst College.

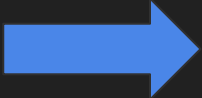


- Further studied at the London School of Economics (LSE) and the University of Heidelberg in Germany, where he **earned his PhD with a focus on the analysis of capitalism in German thought, including the work of Max Weber.**

University of Heidelberg



Academic Career

- Joined Harvard University in 1927 as an instructor in the Department of Economics.
 - Transferred to the newly created Sociology Department in 1930, where he eventually received tenure.
- 
- **Played a key role as a founding member in the establishment of Harvard interdisciplinary Department of Social Relations, combining sociology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology.**



Personal Life:

- Married Helen Walker, whom he had met while studying at the LSE.
- The couple had three children.

Later Years and Death:

- Parsons remained at Harvard until his death in 1979.
- Throughout his career, he continued to be a prominent figure in the academic community, contributing to sociological thought until the end of his life.

Contributions and Achievements:

- Made significant contributions to sociological theory and functionalism.
- Emphasized the structural-functional approach to understanding society.
- **Developed the concept of the "sick role" in his work on the sociology of health and illness.**
- Served as president of the American Sociological Association from 1949 to 1950.
- Received numerous national and international awards and honors during his lifetime.

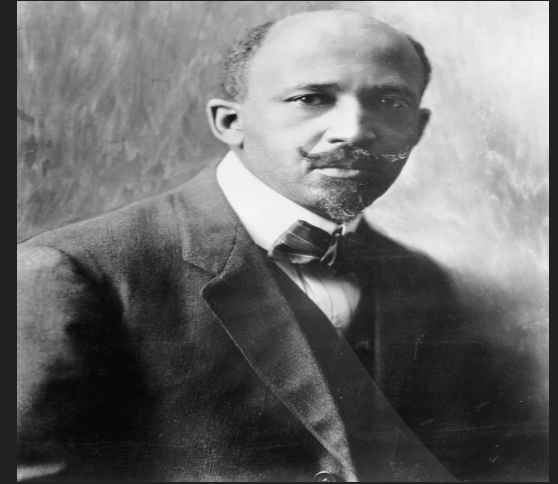
Parsons played a crucial role in shaping American sociology.

The 1930s marked a period of transition, with a predominant focus on micro-level studies and a neglect of the discipline's historical and intellectual foundations.

So, what was going on in 1930s in America?

- In the 1930s, when Parsons returned to the U.S. after completing his PhD at the University of Heidelberg, American sociology was still evolving.

W.E.B Du Bois



- The main focus of sociology during this period was on empirical studies of urban communities, characterized by a rich ethnographic tradition pioneered by **W.E.B. Du Bois** and consolidated by sociologists such as **William Thomas at the University of Chicago.**

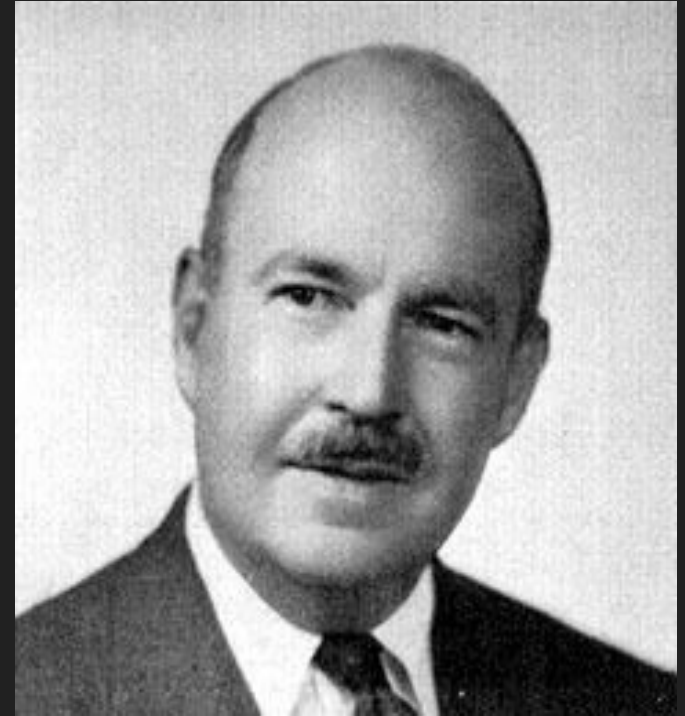
- The Chicago School of Sociology, active from 1915 to 1935, concentrated on the spatial and social organization of specific urban communities.
- The prevailing trend was a reluctance among sociologists to discuss American society as a whole (macro level) and a tendency to avoid generalizing from local studies to the larger society.

The Chronology of the Chicago School

- 1892 Founding as First Sociological Institute worldwide
- Founding fathers: Albion Small and W. I. Thomas
- 1886 Founding of the American Journal of Sociology
- From 1913: Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess
- 1918-1920 „The Polish Peasant in Europe and America“ (Thomas/Zaniecki)
- 1922 The Negro in Chicago (Johnson)
- 1923 Founding of the book series „Sociological Series“ with „The Hobo“ (Anderson)
- Later books: „Family Disorganization“ (Mowrer), „The Gang“ (Trasher), „Suicide“ (Cavan), „The Ghetto“ (Wirth), „The Gold Coast and the Slum“ (Zorbaugh), „The Negro Family in Chicago“ (Frazier), The Taxi-Dance Hall „(Cressy), „Vice in Chicago“ (Reckless), „Hotel Life“ (Hayner)
- 1924-1952: Dominating the American Sociological Association

WHAT DID PARSONS CONTRIBUTE?

- Acts as a bridge to the classical tradition.
- Stimulated peers and successors to enrich contemporary theory.
- Criticized for a highly generalizing grand theory, abstraction, and social conservatism.



Parsons was determined to provide a systematic, abstract, and generalizable theory of social action.

He wanted sociology to be a theoretically informed science whose analytical laws would be applicable to any society, and he saw the development of theory as essential to the growth and maturation of sociology.

HOW DID PARSONS EXPLAINED SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY?

Role of Theory:

- Parsons viewed theory as essential for the growth and maturation of sociology.
- Considered the state of systematic theory as a crucial indicator of the maturity of a science.

Concept of Systematic Theory:

Systematic theory, according to Parsons, involves:

- Generalized conceptual scheme.
- Logical integration of different elements.
- Practical applicability in empirical research.

Function of Theory:

- Theory serves two primary functions:
 - Facilitation of description.
 - Facilitation of analysis.
- Describes theory as a term encompassing generalized conceptualization.

Theoretical System vs. Discrete Theories:

- Parsons distinguishes between a theoretical system and discrete theories.
- A theoretical system is a body of logically interdependent generalized concepts with empirical reference.
- Contrasts with discrete theories that focus on specific generalizations about particular phenomena or classes.

Connection between Description and Analysis:

- Parsons emphasizes the intimate connection between description and analysis in the realm of theory.
- Accurate analysis becomes possible only after essential facts about a phenomenon are systematically and orderly described.

BLENDING THEORY AND DATA

- He was committed to developing a generalizable theory of society that other sociologists would apply in specific societal contexts and use to make sense of the empirical data they gathered.
- In turn, he believed that the empirical puzzles sociologists encountered on the ground would propel him and others to rework and modify their theories to take account of such realities.
- **Therefore, while Parsons rejected an empiricism which “blindly rejects the help of theoretical tools” (1949/1954: 220), he strongly argued for a synthesis between theory and data.**

Who influenced Talcott Parsons

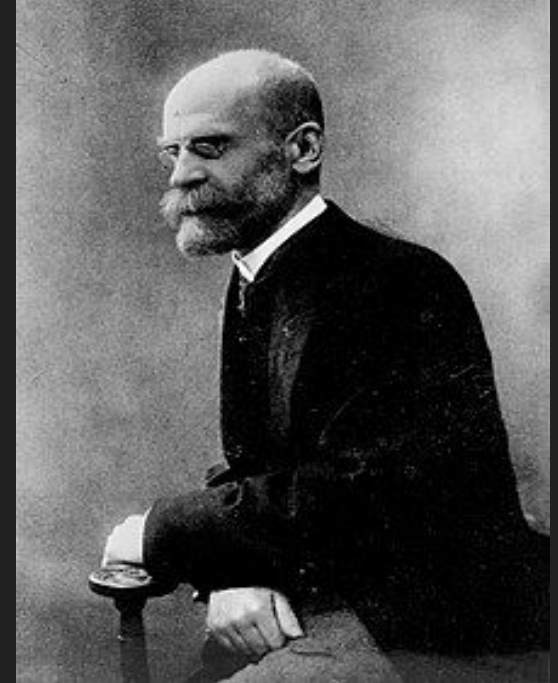
1. Max Weber:

- Max Weber, the German sociologist, was a significant influence on Parsons.
- **Parsons translated Weber's work into English, including "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism."**
- **Parsons drew on Weber's ideas about social action, the sociology of religion, and the concept of the ideal type.**



2.Emile Durkheim:

- Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, also played a crucial role in shaping Parsons's intellectual development.
- **Parsons drew on Durkheim's ideas about social integration, social order, and the importance of social structures.**
- Durkheim's emphasis on the role of institutions and the collective conscience had a lasting impact on Parsons's work.



3. Alfred North Whitehead

- The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead influenced Parsons, particularly in terms of his approach to the philosophy of science.
- **Whitehead's process philosophy and ideas about the nature of reality and change influenced Parsons's theoretical framework.**



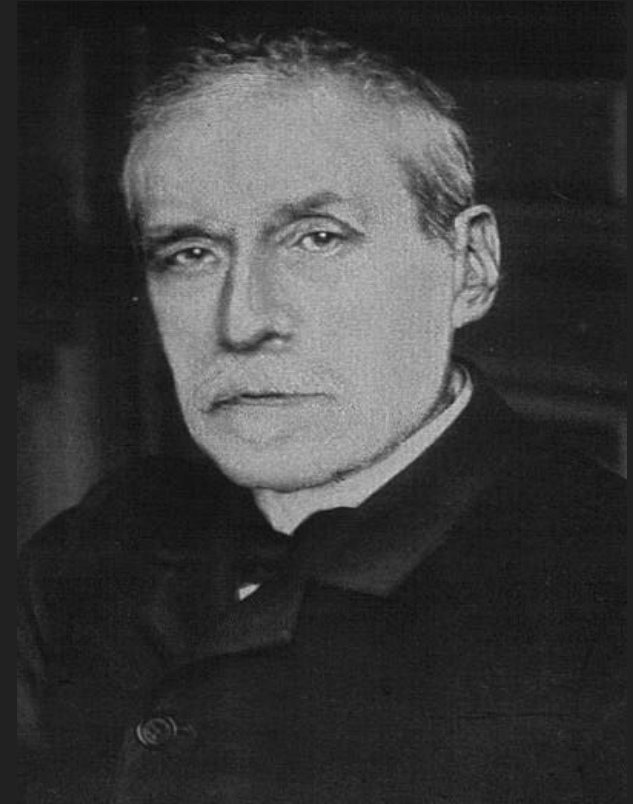
4. George Herbert Mead:

- George Herbert Mead, an American pragmatist philosopher and sociologist, influenced Parsons's understanding of social behavior and the development of his social action theory.
- **Mead's ideas on symbolic interactionism and the role of symbols in shaping human behavior were integrated into Parsons's work.**



5. Émile Boutroux

- Émile Boutroux, a French philosopher, influenced Parsons's approach to the philosophy of science and his understanding of social systems.
- **Boutroux's ideas on holism and the interrelatedness of social phenomena contributed to Parsons's theoretical framework.**



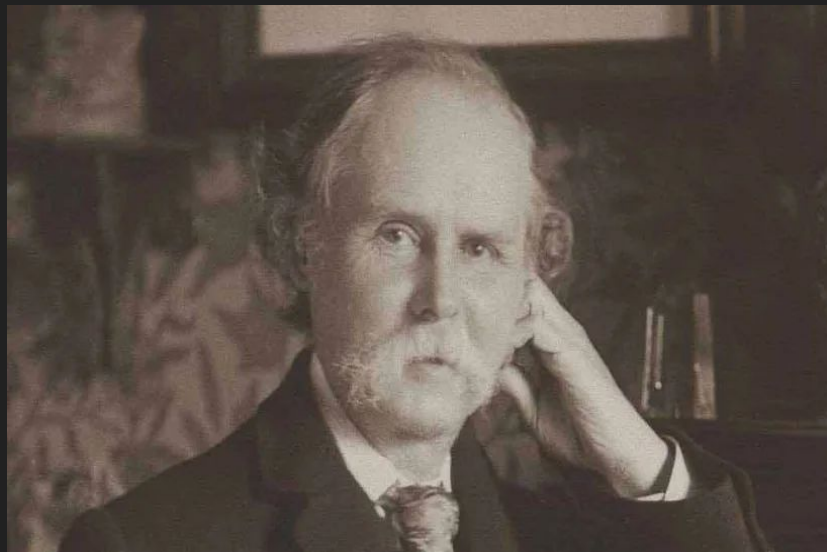
6. Bronisław Malinowski:

The anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski influenced Parsons's ideas about social systems and the **importance of functionalism in understanding the roles and functions of different elements within a society.**



7. Alfred Marshall

- The economist Alfred Marshall influenced Parsons's understanding of economic theory and its relationship to sociology.
- **Parsons incorporated elements of economic theory into his sociological analysis, particularly in his early work.**



TALCOTT PARSONS IS A STRUCTURAL
FUNCTIONALIST

Talcott Parsons structural-functionalism involves

- viewing society as a collection of self-contained social systems,
- analyzing their structures and functions,
- and understanding how these contribute to the maintenance and functioning of society.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS
BY TALCOTT PARSONS

CHARACTERISTICS OF THEORY



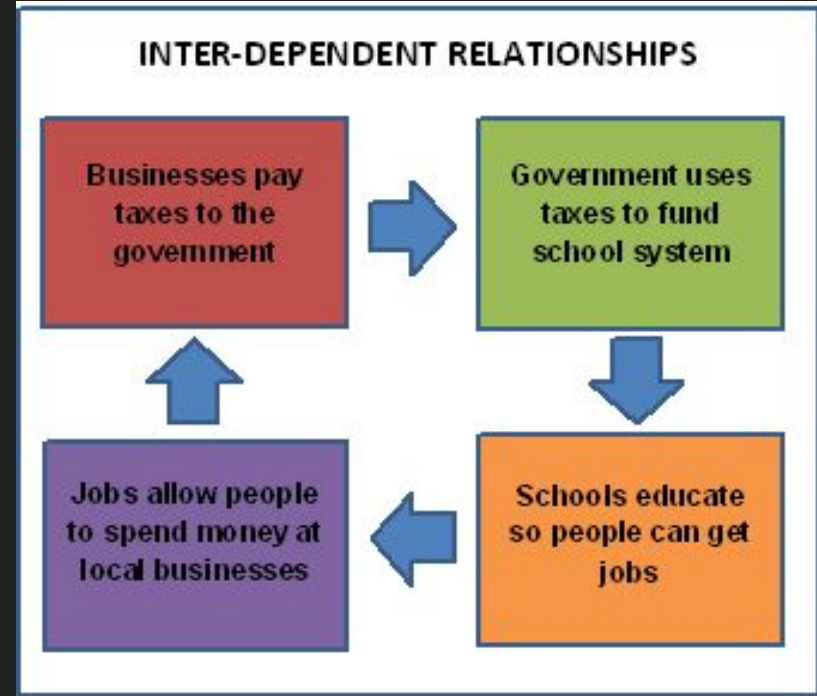
1. Self-Contained Social Systems

- Parsons regarded all social units, whether they be groups, institutions, or entire societies, as self-contained social systems or social action systems.
- This means that each unit can be studied and analyzed independently, with a focus on its internal structures and functions.



2. Structural-Functionalism:

- Similar to Emile Durkheim, Parsons is considered a structural-functionalism.
- This theoretical perspective focuses on analyzing the structure of the social system and its subsystems (such as social institutions and structures).
- The core concern is to understand how these structures contribute to maintaining social order, system equilibrium, and the functioning of society.



STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL SCHOOL

British School

A.R. Radcliffe

Brown, S.F.

Nadel, E.R.

Leach,

R.Firth,

Mayer Fortes,

E.Evans

Pritchard

American School

Parsons,

Merton, R.H.

Lowie, M.

Kluckhohn,

G.P. Mudrock,

French School

Emile

Durkheim

Levis Strauss

3. Four Primary Subsystems of Action

Parsons divided society into four primary subsystems of action:

Economy, Politics, Law, and Culture.

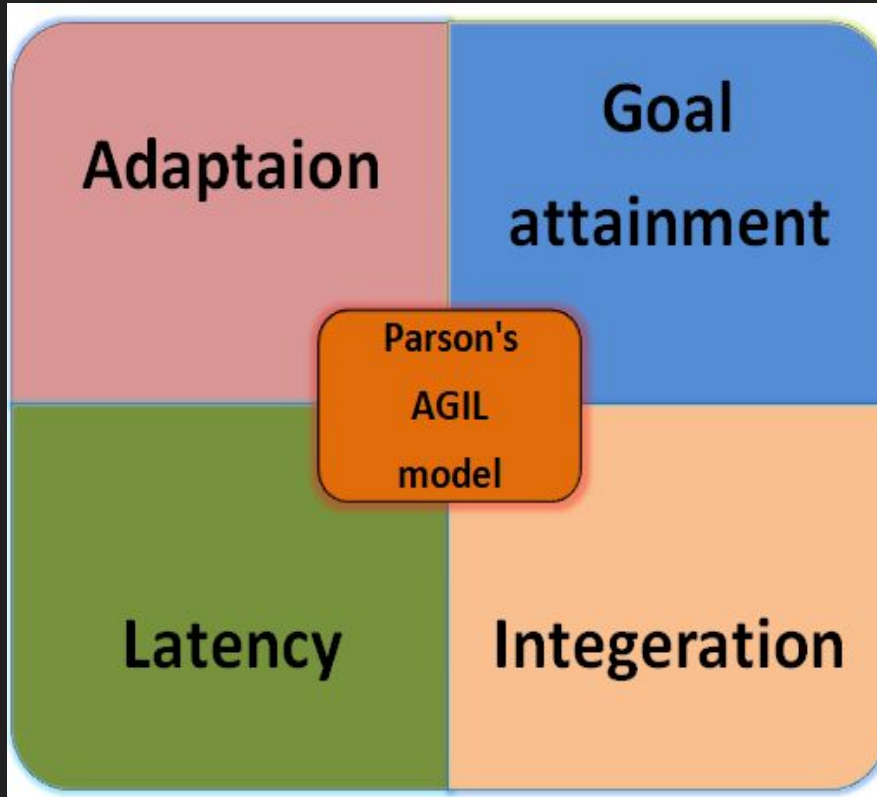


These subsystems form the core institutional structure of modern societies.

Each subsystem serves specific functions, including

- adaptation to the environment,
- goal attainment,
- integration into the societal community, and pattern maintenance or intergenerational transmission of shared values.

4. Core Functions of Social Systems



The **AGIL** paradigm is a sociological scheme created by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1950s. ... It is a systematic depiction of certain societal functions, which every society must meet to be able to maintain stable social life.

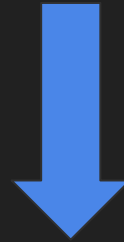
The four core functions of social systems, as outlined by Parsons, are:

- **Adaptation:** Meeting the economic production needs and adapting to the environment.
- **Goal Attainment:** Achieving societal goals, especially in the political system.
- **Integration:** Enforcing collective norms and maintaining societal order through legal systems.
- **Latency or Pattern Maintenance:** Transmitting shared values through socialization, ensuring that societal norms regulate individual behavior effectively.

Function	Subsystem	Media of Exchange
Adaptation	Economy	Money
Goal Attainment	Polity	Power
Integration	Community	Influence
Latent pattern maintenance	Cultural Institutions	Value - commitment

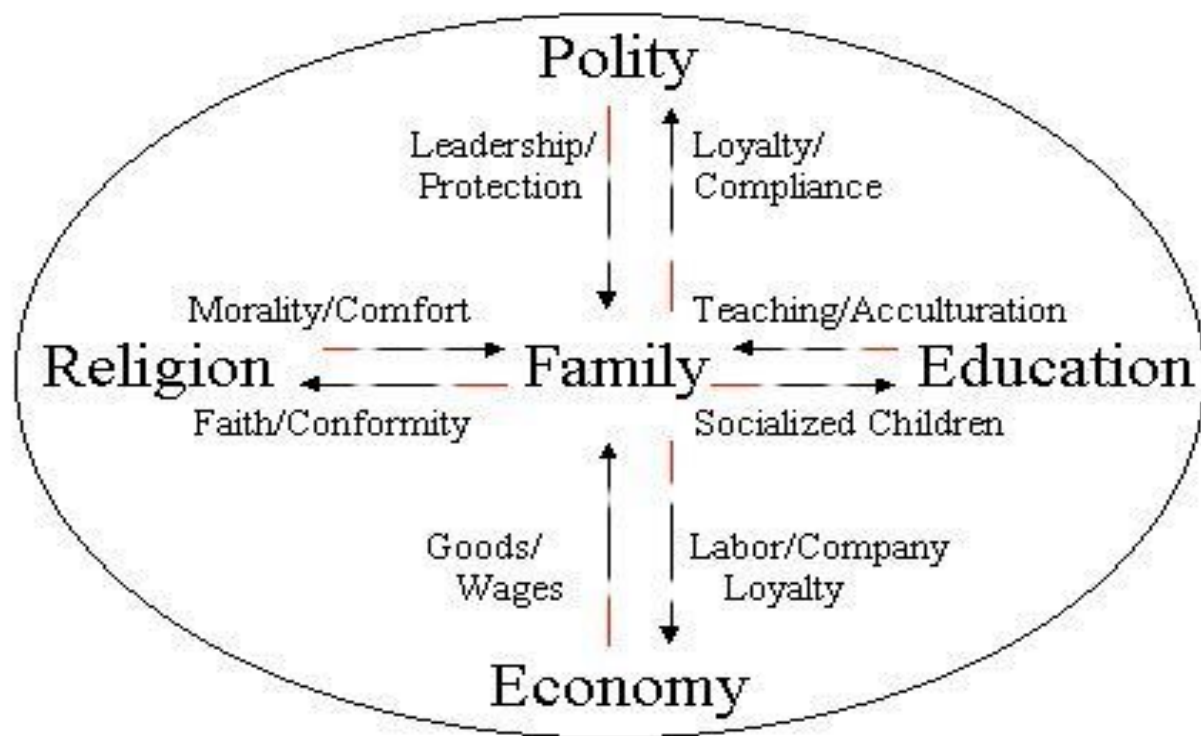
Let's Understand above explanation by Functional Analysis of Education System

In the mid-nineteenth century, high school education was not seen as necessary for the basic functioning of the economy. Socialization into work habits occurred alongside parents.



However, with the changes in the hi-tech economy, college education in science and math has become essential, and internships serve to socialize students into corporate work habits.

Parson's Structural-Functional Model Of Society – Institutional Interaction



SOCIAL ACTION

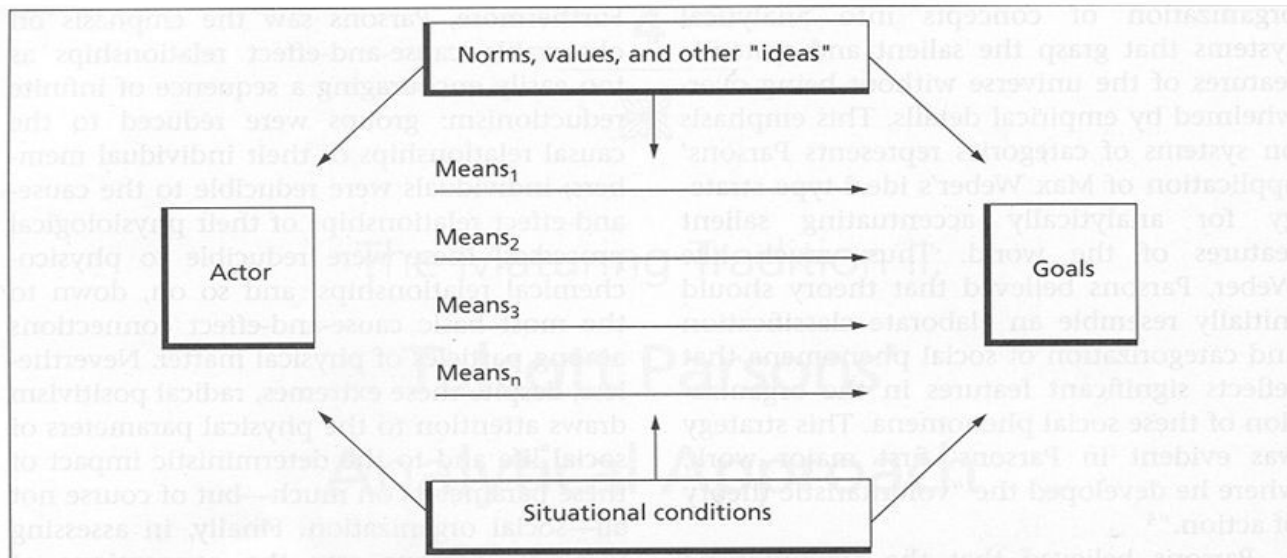


Core to Parsons's theory of action is the construct of the unit act.

A unit act involves several components:

- **Social Actor**: This could be an individual (person), a family, or an occupational group.
- **End (Goal or Objective)**: The specific future state of affairs toward which the action is directed.
- **Concrete Situation**: The context in which the act takes place, including social and physical conditions.
- **Normative Orientation**: The value orientation that regulates the relationship between the social actor, the goal, and the situation.

Talcott Parsons: *The Structure of Social Action*



Voluntaristic Action

- Parsons referred to his theory as a theory of voluntaristic action.
- This means that choices made by social actors are considered voluntary rather than coerced or predetermined.
- Despite the freedom to choose, these choices are always culturally bounded, meaning that social action is constrained by the societal norms and values prevalent in a given socio-historical context.

Culturally Bounded Choices:

- In a societal context, social actors make choices among culturally bounded goals and means.
- **Cultural and structural factors influence the availability of goals and means.**
- The conditions of the situation, such as social class, may limit options, but according to Parsons, social actors have a degree of freedom to choose among various goals and means.

Cultural Constraints on Freedom:

- While individuals may have freedom in making choices, Parsons emphasized that this freedom is culturally bounded.
- **Social action is restrained by the norms and values that dominate a specific cultural and historical context.**
- For example, cultural expectations in the United States may influence occupational choices, even though individuals have a range of options.
- Similarly, the choices made by Muslim women in France are influenced by both French cultural norms and the cultural expectations within Muslim communities.

Examples of Cultural Constraints:

- In the United States, individuals may have freedom in occupational choices, but cultural expectations regarding economic self-reliance and career orientation serve as constraints.
- Similarly, the choices made by Muslim women in France regarding premarital sex and subsequent actions are influenced by both French cultural norms and Muslim cultural expectations.



NORMATIVE REGULATION

- **Parsons emphasizes the significance of normative orientation and cultural values in regulating social action.**
- **He argues against the dominance of utilitarianism and emphasizes the role of culture, defining the study of common-value integration as central to sociology.**

Weber's Influence:

- Parsons builds on Max Weber's emphasis on the importance of culture or values in shaping social action.
- **Weber had concluded in "The Protestant Ethic" that values were becoming less influential in motivating social action in modern society, with instrumental rational action gaining dominance.**

➤ Max Weber was the first sociologist to advocate a social action approach.

Normative Orientation:

- Parsons argues that all social action is systemically contingent on a normative or values orientation.
- Despite Weber's suggestion of the diminishing role of values, Parsons, writing in 1937, emphasizes that social action needs to be regulated by a normative orientation.



Critique of Utilitarianism:

- Parsons contrasts his views with the potential social disorder that could result from the dominance of utilitarian or instrumental ends.
- **He argues that in a purely utilitarian society, there is a "precariousness of order," echoing Durkheim's concern about the instability of purely contractual social ties.**

Discipline on Conduct:

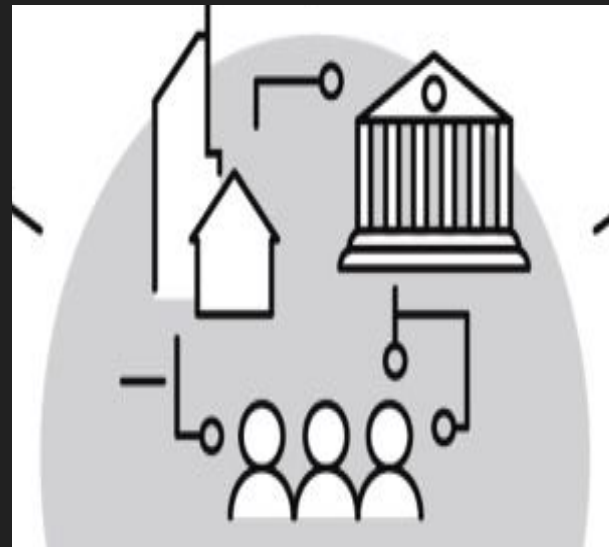
- A consensual value-orientation, according to Parsons, imposes a discipline on conduct.
- It restrains immediate satisfaction of desires, the pursuit of wealth, and power.
- The cultural system, with a common value system manifested in institutional norms, is seen as central to maintaining societal order.

Parsons also gave his definition of Sociology:

- Parsons defines the **study of the cultural system and common-value integration** as the core of sociology.
- He sees **sociology as the science attempting to develop an analytical theory of social action in terms of the property of common-value integration.**

Causal Role of Culture:

- Parsons believes that culture has a causal role, along with social structures, in social action.
- He argues that a common value system is crucial for societal order, emphasizing the importance of shared values in maintaining social cohesion.



**SOCIALIZATION
AND
SOCIETAL INTEGRATION**

- Parsons's perspective explain the interconnectedness of social, cultural, and personality systems, with socialization playing a vital role in transmitting cultural elements and ensuring the alignment of individual motivations with the functional needs of the social system.
- **Integration and social control mechanisms are seen as essential for maintaining societal order.**

Emergence of Social Action

- According to Parsons (1951), social action arises from the interdependence of social, cultural, and personality systems.
- It involves the interaction of multiple social actors whose expectations and behavior are oriented to a situation, relying on a commonly understood system of cultural symbols.

Communication and Symbolic Systems

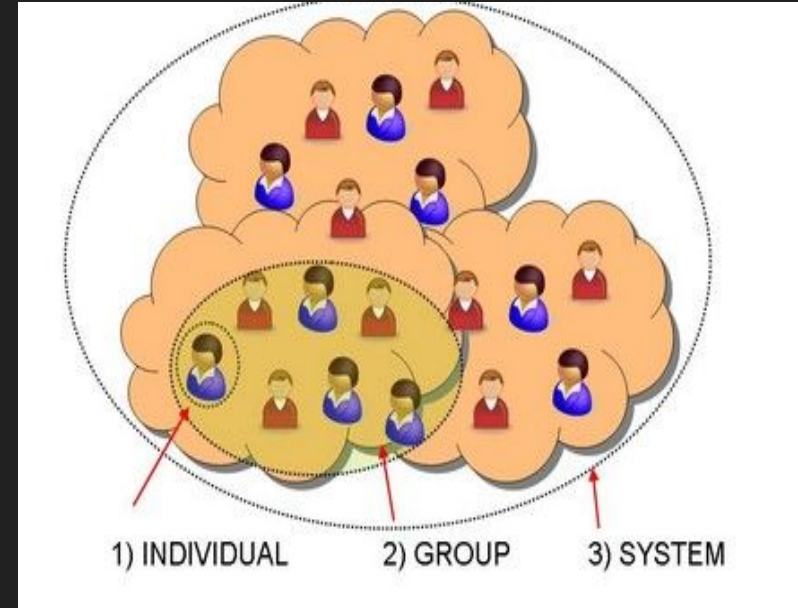
- Parsons highlights the importance of conformity to the conventions of symbolic systems for communication.
- Even basic communication requires adherence to the symbolic system's conventions.

Role of Socialization:

Socialization of the individual personality is crucial for transmitting, learning, and sharing culture, including symbols, meanings, norms, and expectations held in common. Socialization is seen as a core functional requirement of society.

Structure of Social System:

- Parsons emphasizes that the structure of the social system is essentially the structure of the relationships between actors involved in interactive processes.
- Cultural resources need to be assimilated through internalization for a human level of personality to emerge and for a human type of social system to develop.



Example of Economic Function:

- Using the example of the American social system, Parsons argues that the smooth functioning of the economy requires well-trained and goal-directed individuals.
- Socialization is needed to instill good work habits, motivation for achievement, and analytical skills necessary for economic success.



Strain and Tension:

- Misalignment between the social system's requirements and individual desires can lead to strain and tension.
- This misalignment may result in dysfunctional consequences such as high school dropout rates, juvenile crime, and impacts on the socialization of the next generation.



Social Control and Integration:

- To address potential dysfunction, the social system relies on mechanisms of social control or integration.
- Laws mandating school attendance and performance levels are examples of social control mechanisms to regulate deviant behavior and prevent dysfunctional consequences.

Objective of Integration:

- The overall objective is to integrate social, personality-motivational, and cultural elements so that they are brought together in an ordered system.
- This integration is crucial for the smooth functioning and stability of the social system.

Strain Theory was given by Robert Merton.

Robert Merton: Strain Theory

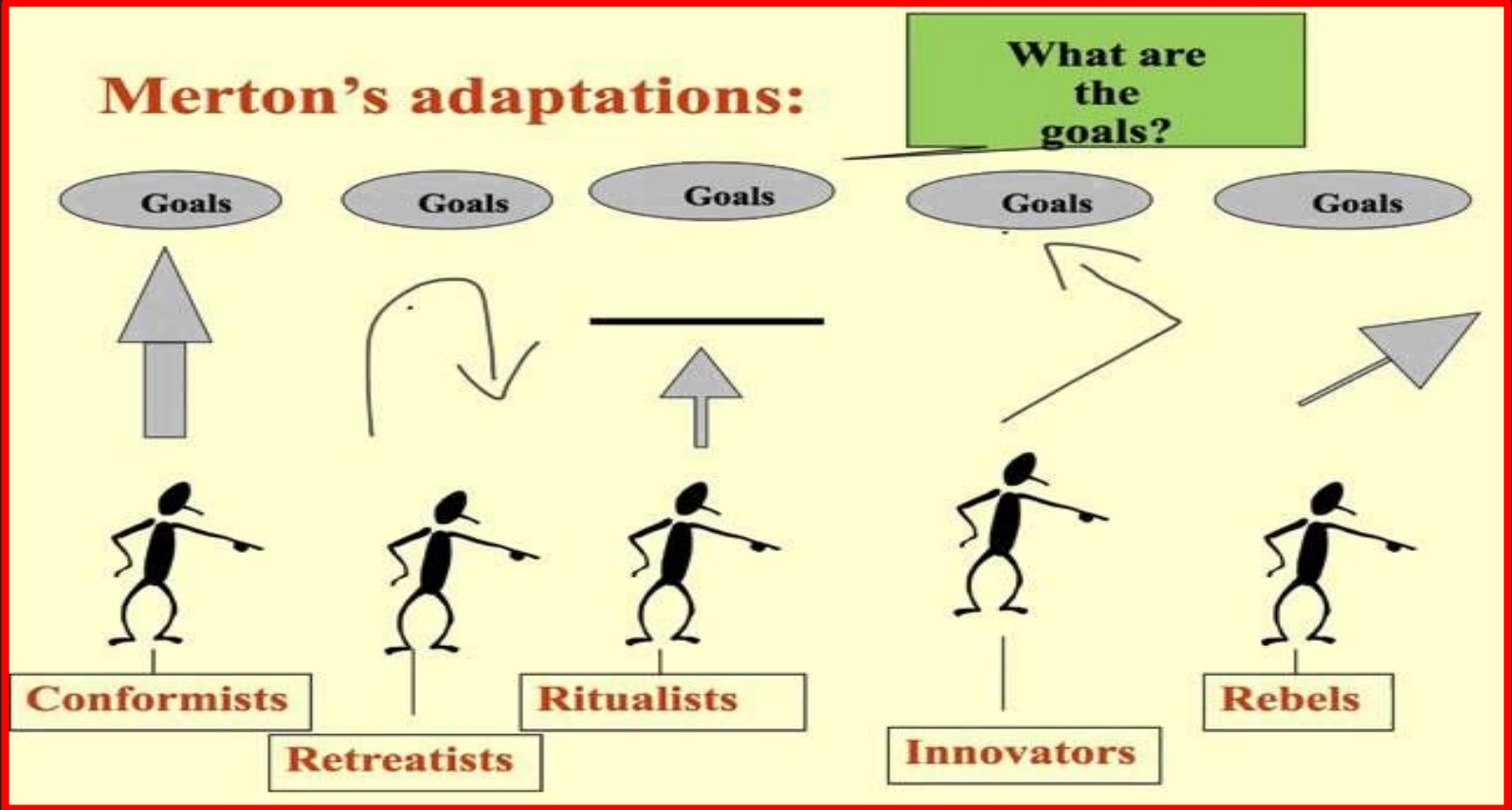
- Merton is a **functionalist**
- Robert Merton argued that crime increased when there was a strain (or gap) between society's success goals (achieving material wealth) and the available opportunities to achieve those goals through legitimate means (having a well-paying job).
- Merton called this imbalance between goals and the ability to achieve them '**anomie**'.

MERTON'S STRAIN THEORY (1938)

In this theory people do crime when they are unable to achieve socially approved goals by legitimate or legal means

For example people might well become frustrated and resort to criminal means of getting what they want, or lash out at others in anger, or find comfort in their failure in drug use

Individuals reaction and their adaptations to act on strains.



Same examples at a company

If I knuckle down and stick at it, I'm bound to get that promotion.



1 CONFORMIST

This job is doing my head in. Still there's bills to be paid...



2 RITUALIST

Let's just go and get totally trashed. Got any weed?



3 RETREATIST

I'm heading right to the top and I don't care how many dead bodies I have to climb over to get there.



4 INNOVATOR

Workers of the world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!



5 REBEL

VALUE CONSENSUS-

Criticism of Talcott Parsons

In 1960s- 1970s

for his emphasis on the necessity of a common value system in society.

Criticism of Common Value System:

- The idea that a common value system is necessary for society is criticized, especially in the context of the 1960s and 1970s when American and Western societies were becoming more aware of multiculturalism and values diversity.
- Critics found the notion of a unified values consensus archaic and insulting.

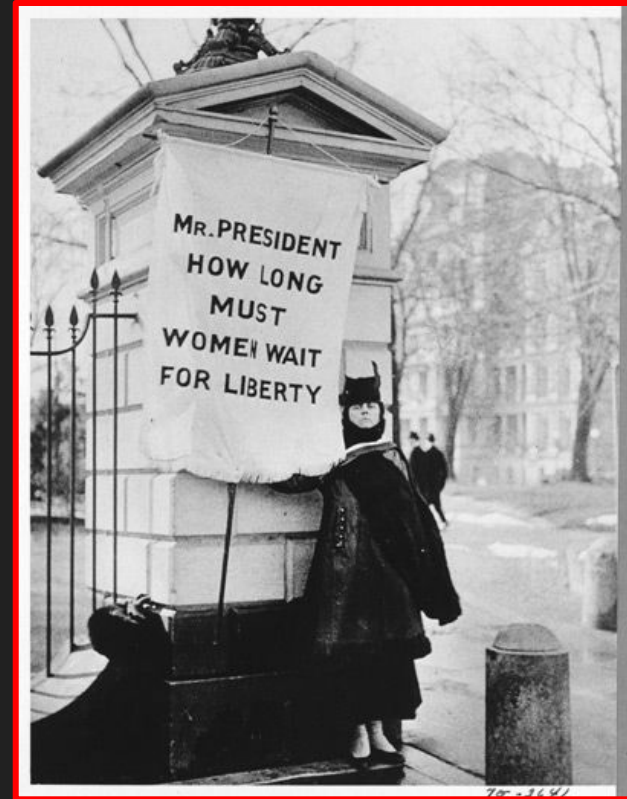


Social Protest Movements:

- During that era, social protest movements, led by grassroots protesters, including college students, rallied against what they perceived as "The Establishment."
- These movements advocated for women's rights, civil rights, and gay rights, challenging existing values and institutional practices, particularly those of the white male Establishment.



- The social protest movements directly challenged the presumed values consensus of the Establishment, questioning the uniformity of values in society.
- They aimed to address social inequality and criticized institutions like the government, military, churches, and universities for their perceived inattentiveness.



A woman protestor in front of white house, residence of USA president

Perception of Social Conservatism

What is conservatism?

- Parsons's theorizing, emphasizing the necessity of a common value system, was viewed as socially conservative.
- Critics questioned how social change could be possible if institutions were required to maintain existing norms.
- The proposed new norms, such as greater equality for women and minority racial groups, were seen as conflicting with the norms already institutionalized.

CONSERVATISM

Conservatism is a political and social ideology that promotes the preservation of traditional institutions, values, and customs, favoring gradual social change.

OVERVIEW

Conservatism places value on the wisdom of past generations and seeks to conserve established norms and practices. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining social order, authority, and a respect for tradition, often advocating for limited government intervention, individual responsibility, and preservation of cultural heritage.

EXAMPLES

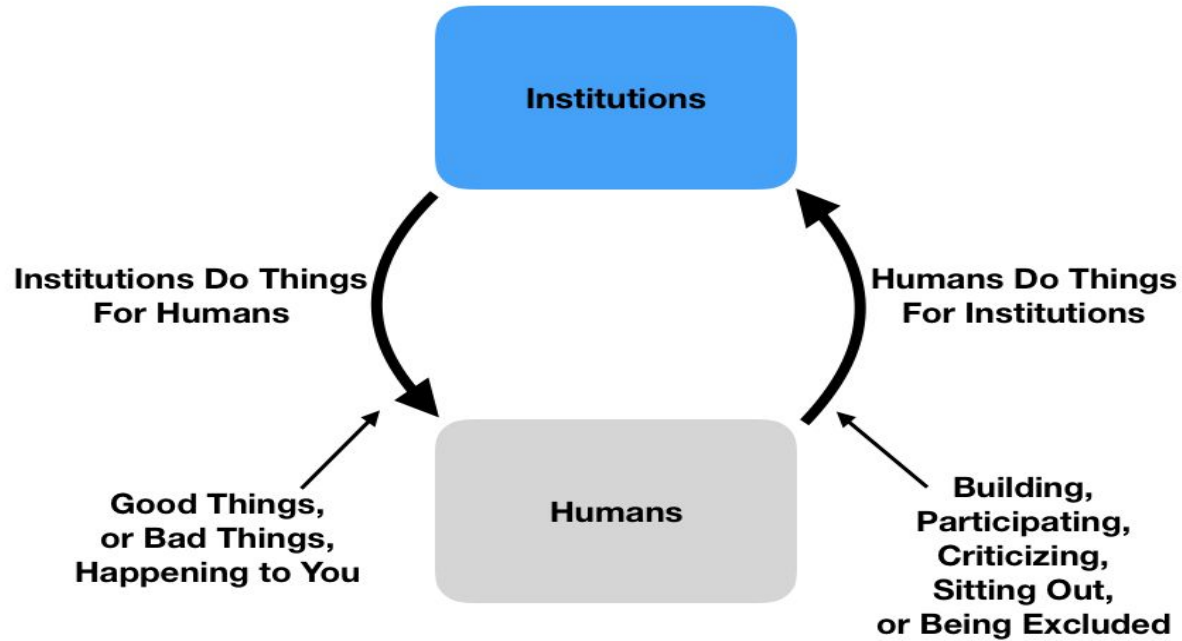
- **Traditional Family Values:** Conservative ideology often emphasizes the traditional family structure as a fundamental unit of society.
- **Limited Government:** Conservatism often advocates for smaller government involvement in the economy.

- **The criticism raised questions about the potential challenges posed by Parsons's framework to social change.**
- **If institutions were seen as needing to maintain existing norms, it raised concerns about the compatibility of proposed new norms that contradicted established institutional values.**

Before reading Parson's response to critiques,

what do you think?

**Are institutions
Important for us?**



Parsons's Answer to critiques-

- **Parsons clarified that his theoretical work aimed at providing a generalized theory of society rather than an analysis of any specific societal context.**
- His abstract intellectual preoccupation with societal theory reinforced the perception that he favored the status quo.
- Additionally, his thesis that religion provides an integrating value system contributed to this perception.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION, CULTURE, AND THE SECULARIZATION OF PROTESTANTISM

These affect social actions.

Religion as a Cultural Determinant

- Following Max Weber's ideas, Parsons argued that religion is a significant cultural determinant of social action.
- He posited that as modern society evolves and becomes more complex in its structure and institutions, religion undergoes a parallel process of differentiation.

Comparison of Asian and Western culture on basis of religion

- Religion is one of the factors why Asians have different values and practices.
- In Judaism and Christianity, men seek to control the environment and be master of the universe. For example, floods and droughts are forces of nature that are caused by the gods to test human capacity to survive.

- It is the opposite in Taoism and Shinto. Generally, these religions consider nature as a great and caring. Taoism teaches that man has to conform and follow the flow of nature.
- In Shinto, spirits known as *kami* live in natural things. Offerings are given and ceremonies are performed for these *kami*.

1. Differentiation in Social Institutions

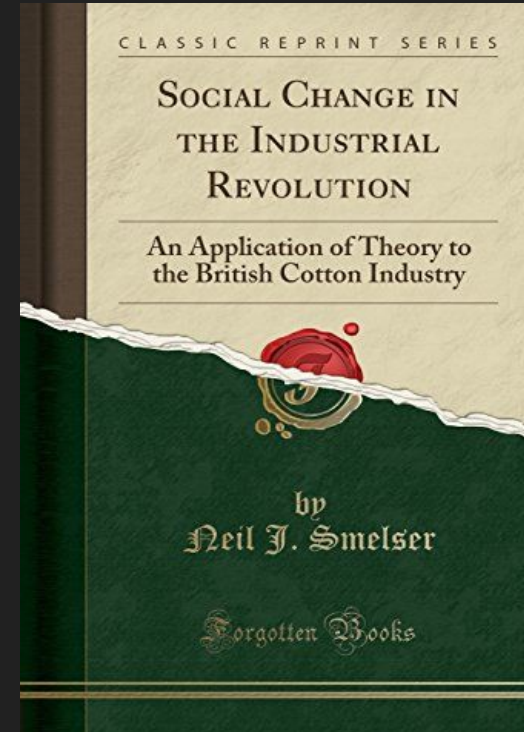
- With industrialization, various social institutions such as the economy, family, religion, and the legal system become more internally differentiated and specialized in the functions they perform.



- This process of differentiation is also known as the division of labor, a concept elaborated by Emile Durkheim.

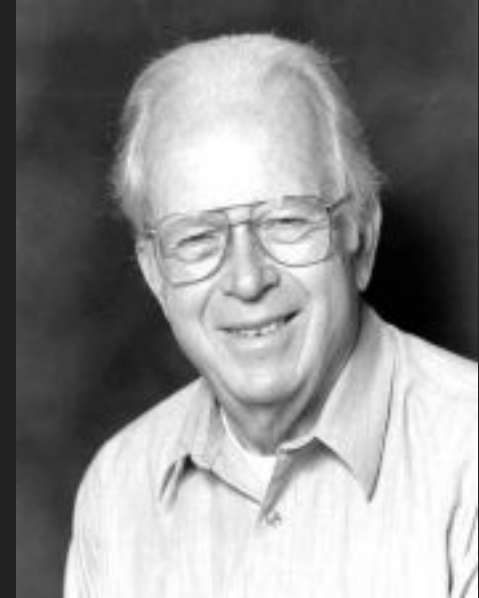
Empirical Demonstration by Neil Smelser:

- Parsons's student and collaborator Neil Smelser empirically demonstrated the impact of the Industrial Revolution on family and social change.
- For example, the shift from domestic hand-loom to cotton factories led to changes in the structure of the economy and family functions.
- Children's labor became differentiated from that of their parents, prompting the emergence of new social organizations to perform functions previously carried out by the family.



Structural Differentiation and Education in Smelser's work-

- Smelser's work illustrated how structural differentiation emerged due to the need to redefine family functions.
- **Functions such as education, previously performed within the family, were moved outside the family, leading to the establishment of schools.**
- **This differentiation extended to the separation of education from religion.**



2. Differentiation of Religion

- Religion is differentiated from other social institutions and develops its own relatively narrow functional specialization, including worship and the transmission of religious doctrine.
- **This process of functional differentiation is considered critical to the evolution and modernization of society.**

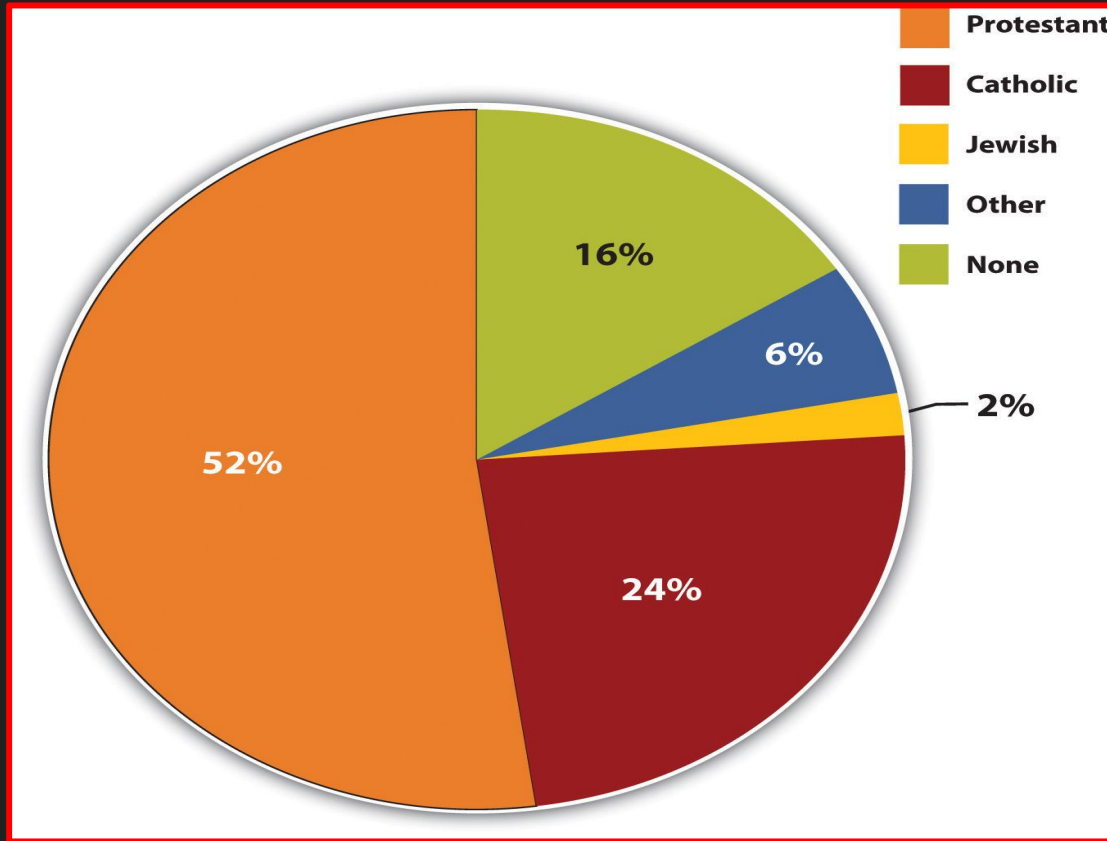
For example, most of modern nation states parade themselves as Secular, means they have differentiated religion as a part of administration.

Secularization and Institutional Differentiation:

- **Parsons and Smelser argue that secularization is marked by increased institutional differentiation in society and a decline in the authority and scope of religious institutions.**
- However, **secularization does not entail the disappearance of religion as a normative or cultural system.**

Role of Religion in Cultural Leverage:

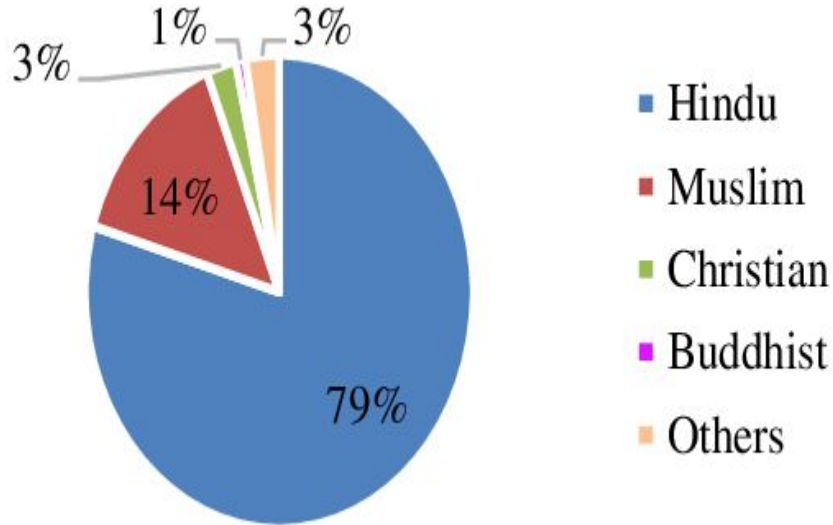
- While the church has a narrower and more specific institutional function in individual lives, Christianity, particularly Protestantism in the American and Western context, continues to exert cultural leverage on society as a whole.
- **Parsons refers to this as the Christianizing of secular society, where the values and norms of religion influence social action across all institutional spheres.**



Religion chart of the US

- Now, if you look there are major public holidays for Christian communities like Halloween, Christmas, new years etc but absence of the same for Muslim and Jews or Hindus...
- Although their constitution says they are Secular country!!!!!!!!

Compare that with Indian System...



Now remember all the holidays you enjoyed during your school and college life and discuss..

Protestantism and Capitalism

- Parsons highlights the historical links between Protestantism and capitalism, a concept discussed by Max Weber.
- In the American and Western context, Protestantism, specifically, serves as a common cultural reference point, providing a value system underlying social action.

Max Weber: How Protestantism led to Capitalism

The Protestant Ethic

- Calvinist led an ascetic lifestyle
- They worked long hours for the glory of God
- They viewed idleness as a sin
- Money saved and invested, not spent

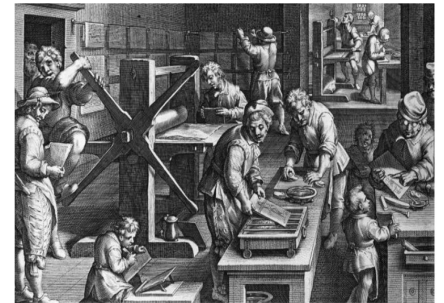


Led to



The Spirit of Capitalism

- Required 'capital' for investment
- Required a hard-working work force
- Values 'productivity' (efficiency of production)



Since major outcome was difference in Value system of Protestant and Catholics... Parsons applied the same to modern world.

**VALUE-ORIENTATIONS IN A TIME OF
GLOBAL SOCIAL CHANGE**

Globalization and Cultural Divisions:

- Parsons foresaw the emergence of what we now call globalization and recognized its cultural divisions.
- **He notes the historic development of something approaching a world society and observes the deep confrontation between Christianity and major religious traditions of the Orient.**



Need for Values in Modern Society

- **Parsons argues that the complex technical and moral problems facing modern society make the need for values even more crucial.**
- He emphasizes the importance of "moral orientations toward the problems of life in this world."



Christianity and Contemporary Problems

- While Parsons acknowledges the significance of values, he cautions that Christianity as a religion may not necessarily provide all the answers to contemporary problems.
-
- **He doesn't present Christianity as a one-size-fits-all solution.**



Adaptation to New Historical Situation:

- Rather than greeting the new historical situation with dismay, Parsons sees it as an opportunity for further adaptation of religion and societal structures.
- He views any relative success in the institutionalization of Christian values not as final but as a starting point for new religious evaluations and adaptations.

Christianity and Tolerance:

- Parsons acknowledges the commitment to great traditions, including Christianity, which historically emphasized the exclusive possession of the truth.
- However, he notes the institutionalization of values such as tolerance and equality of rights for all within Christianity.

Adaptability of Christianity:

- **Parsons argues that, like in the past, Christianity can adapt to changes in the evolving structure of society.**
- He suggests that Christianity can draw on its values of tolerance to embrace the increasing religious and cultural pluralism of society.

WAS PARSONS OPEN TO SOCIETAL CHANGES?

Parsons is open to the adaptive requirements of societal change.

Despite his commitment to great traditions, there is a suggestion that he is less parochial and more receptive to the challenges posed by cultural and religious diversity than some of his critics might acknowledge.

PATTERN VARIABLES

- Parsons's concept of pattern variables provides a flexible and multidimensional framework for analyzing social action.
- By offering a set of dichotomous value-orientations, this schema allows for a more precise and detailed understanding of social processes and facilitates comparative analyses across different societies and social structures.

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND FOR PATTERN VARIABLES

Centrality of Institutionalized Norms and Values:

- **Parsons emphasized the central role of institutionalized norms and values in social action.**
- He argued that various value-orientation patterns exist, and social behavior can be analyzed in terms of these patterns.

What are institutionalised values?

- Institutionalized values are defined here as values that people agree *should* be valued in enacting some *role* or performing in some *group*.
- Consider, for example, the world of the military. Military roles are marked by distinctive social practices including the wearing of uniforms, the assignment of formal rank, the saluting of higher ranks by lower ranks, the obedience given to higher ranks, along with powerful sanctions for failure to follow these norms.



Five Dichotomous Value-Orientations:

- Parsons proposed a set of five dichotomous value-orientations, which serve as contrasting patterns shaping social behavior.
- These value-orientations provide a framework for analyzing and understanding social processes.

Talcott Parsons' concept of pattern variables

Pattern variables A	Pattern variables B
<p>Ascription Status is ascribed; the type of family into which a person is born determines it.</p>	<p>Achievement Status is achieved through a person's own efforts: for example, through hard work.</p>
<p>Diffuseness People enter into relationships with others to satisfy a large range of needs: for example, the relationship between mother and child.</p>	<p>Specificity People enter into relationships with others to satisfy particular needs: for example, the relationship between a customer and shopkeeper</p>

<p>Particularism Individuals act differently towards particular people: for example, they are loyal to their family but not to strangers.</p>	<p>Universalism Individuals act according to universal principles: for example, everyone is equal before the law, so a policewoman would arrest her husband if necessary.</p>
<p>Affectivity Gratification is immediate. People act to gratify their desires as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Effective neutrality Gratification is deferred: for example, saving money to put a deposit on a house in the future.</p>
<p>Collective orientation People put the interests of the social groups to which they belong before their own interests.</p>	<p>Self-orientation People pursue their own interests first, rather than those of the social groups to which they belong.</p>

Applicability to Different Contexts:

- One of the advantages of Parsons's concept is its applicability to various contexts where social action occurs.
- It can be used to characterize entire societies or specific structures within a given society, offering a versatile analytical tool.

Comprehensive and Multidimensional Analysis:

- **Parsons's concept of pattern variables differs from earlier models, such as Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, by incorporating five dimensions instead of just one.**



- This multidimensional approach allows for a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of societies and social structures.

- **The use of five dimensions in Parsons's concept allows for a more precise and detailed analysis of social phenomena.**
- **This approach enables researchers to be attentive to the various ways in which different combinations of normative orientations characterize social processes.**
- **This comparative analysis helps identify variations and similarities in the ways normative orientations shape social behavior.**

Application of Pattern Variables

Occupational System Structure:

- Parsons applied pattern variables to analyze how a society's occupational system is structured.
- The focus is particularly on the medical system and the doctor-patient relationship.



Medical System and Doctor-Patient Relationship:

- **Parsons defined illness as a disturbance in the normal functioning of an individual, and medical practice as a mechanism for coping with the illnesses of society members.**
- He emphasized that health, illness, and medicine are social and systemic phenomena.

Universalistic Criteria:

- The doctor-patient relationship is based on universalistic criteria.
- Unlike particularistic relationships, such as parent-child, the doctor treats the patient using objective and impersonal criteria applicable to all patients.

Specific Functions and Roles:

- The roles and expectations of doctors and patients in the doctor-patient relationship are well-defined and specific.
- The relationship is focused on addressing a specific ailment, and there are clear boundaries defining expectations and behavior.

Professional Expertise and Training

- Doctors possess specific expertise acquired through training and examinations.
- Professional status is achieved through competence, in contrast to family social roles, which are typically ascribed.



Emotional Neutrality:

- Professional roles, including that of a doctor, require emotional neutrality.
- The doctor is expected to treat the patient objectively and scientifically, avoiding emotional engagement.

Collectivity Orientation:

Professional roles, such as that of a doctor, are characterized by a collectivity orientation, where the welfare of the patient is prioritized over the welfare of the professional

Change in the Medical System:



Shift in Doctor-Patient Relationship:

- The traditional doctor-patient relationship has undergone changes, particularly with the increasing technological sophistication of medicine.



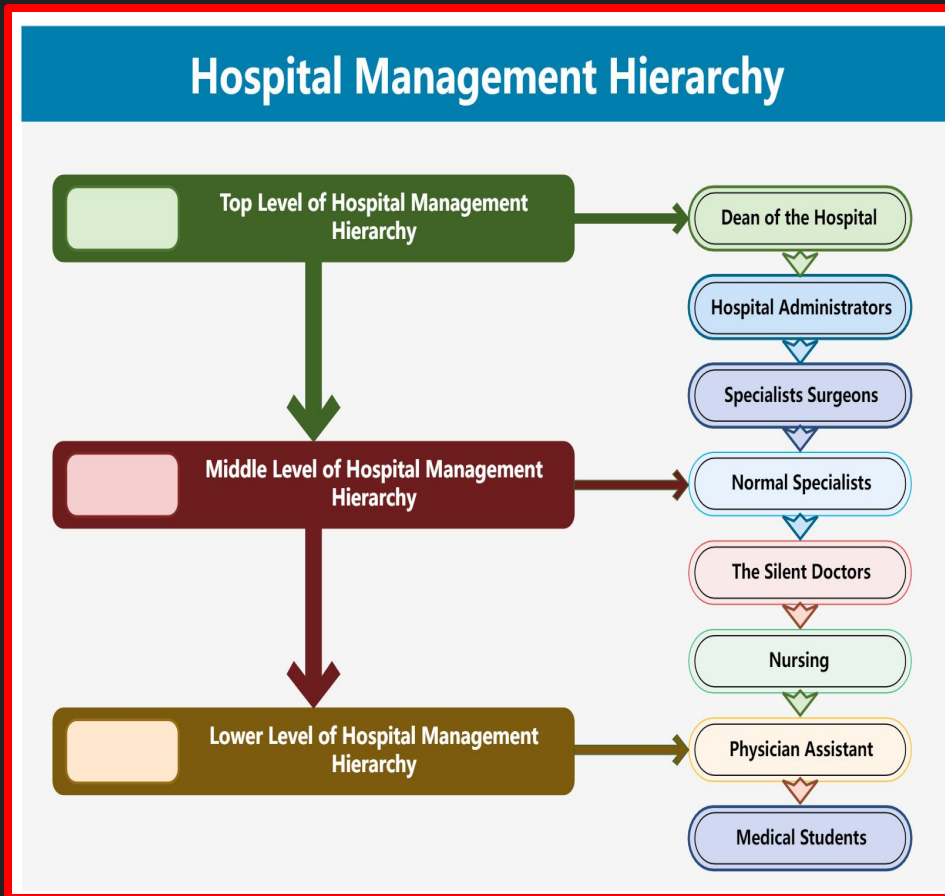
Organizational Shift:

- The rise of health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and bureaucratic organizations has altered the structure of the doctor-patient relationship.
- The relationship has become more business-like and less personal.



Professional Autonomy Challenges:

The economic corporatization has challenged the professional autonomy of doctors, impacting their ability to make independent diagnostic and referral decisions.



Contemporary Concerns:

- Impact on Professional Status: The intertwining of medicine with corporate interests raises concerns about the professional status of the medical profession.
- Questions arise about whether economic considerations influence medical decisions.



Conflict of Interest:

- There is a recognition of potential conflicts of interest between economic considerations and the doctor's responsibility to the patient.
- Guidelines have been issued to remind doctors of their paramount responsibility to patients, despite loyalty to employers.



Functional Adaptation:

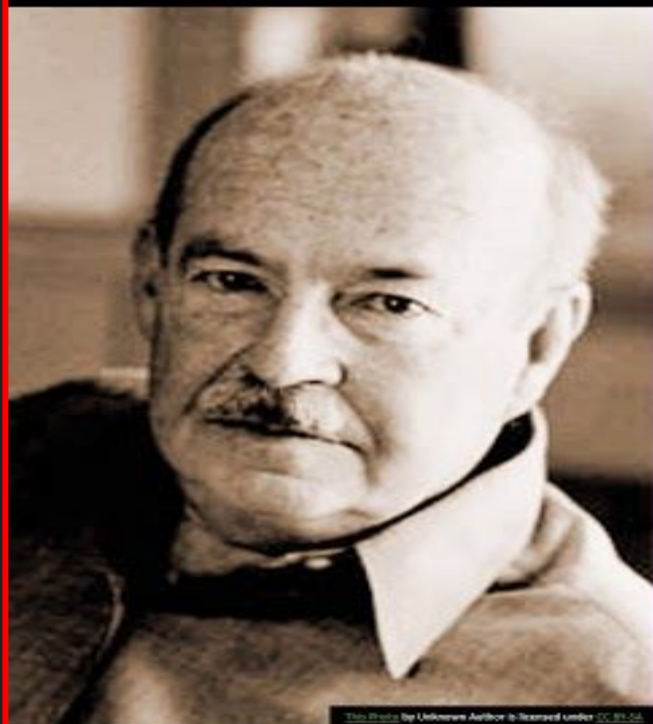
From a functionalist perspective, the corporatization of medicine might be seen as an adaptive response to technological-organizational changes and increased competition in the health-care sector.

Ethical Concerns: There are ethical concerns about the potential impact of economic considerations on medical treatment and emphasizes the importance of maintaining impartiality in doctor-patient relationships.



MODERNIZATION THEORY

- Parsons utilized his pattern variables to conceptualize the characteristics of modern society.
- Modernization theory, as outlined by Parsons, focuses on the societal shifts that occur with democratization, industrialization, urbanization, and the expansion of education, literacy, and mass media.



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Why does Modernization fail?

Talcott Parsons – societies fail to modernize because they have not evolved from traditional to modern societies unless they have moved from:

Particularistic to Universal Standards

Ascribed to Achieved Status

Collective to Individualistic societies

This means they need to reject, religion and embrace science, reject culture and embrace consumerism, reject kinship and embrace hierarchies such as the class system

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARSON'S MODERNIZATION THEORY

Criteria of Achievement over Ascription:

Parsons argues that modern societies, including the U.S., emphasize achievement over aristocratic or monarchic principles. Status is achieved based on individual competence and merit rather than being ascribed at birth.

Universalistic over Particularistic Criteria:

Modern societies are described as pluralistic and diverse. Citizenship is emphasized over narrow affiliations, promoting cosmopolitanism rather than localism.

Specific over Diffuse Criteria:

- Modern societies require individuals to specialize in specific competencies, leading to role specialization in various fields.
- The occupational structure and societal stratification are based on specific qualifications and competencies.

Emotional Neutrality over Affectivity:

- There is a clear separation between the public and private spheres in modern societies.
- The public sphere is characterized by emotional neutrality and impersonal instrumentality, while the private sphere is oriented toward expressivity and emotion.

Self-Orientation over Collectivity Orientation:

- Modern societies prioritize self-orientation. Individuals are expected to make choices based on their desires, allowing for individual self-determination.
- This is in contrast to more traditional societies where family, ethnicity, and religious affiliations may constrain choices.



- Parsons contends that American society, being the most developed and advanced modern society, exemplifies these orientations.
- The U.S. is characterized by generalized value-orientations such as achievement, universalism, specificity, emotional neutrality, and self-orientation.
- **Parsons asserts that the dissociation from older ascriptive inequalities and the institutionalization of an egalitarian pattern are crucial for economic and social progress.**

CRITICISM OF PARSON'S MODERNIZATION THEORY

- However, it's important to note that modernization theory, as propagated by Parsons, has faced criticism for its ethnocentric perspective, particularly for regarding American society as the prototype.
- Critics argue that it overlooks the diverse histories, political cultures, and impacts of colonialism in different countries, leading to a potentially skewed assessment of the modernization process.

Social Stratification and Inequality:

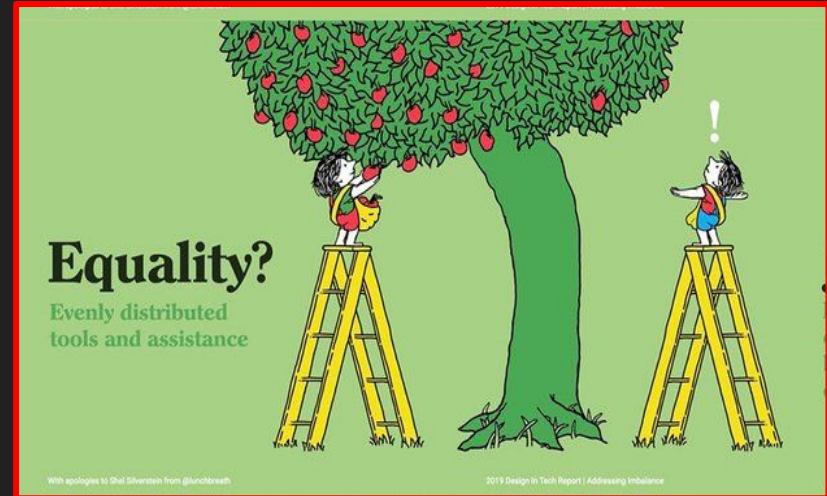
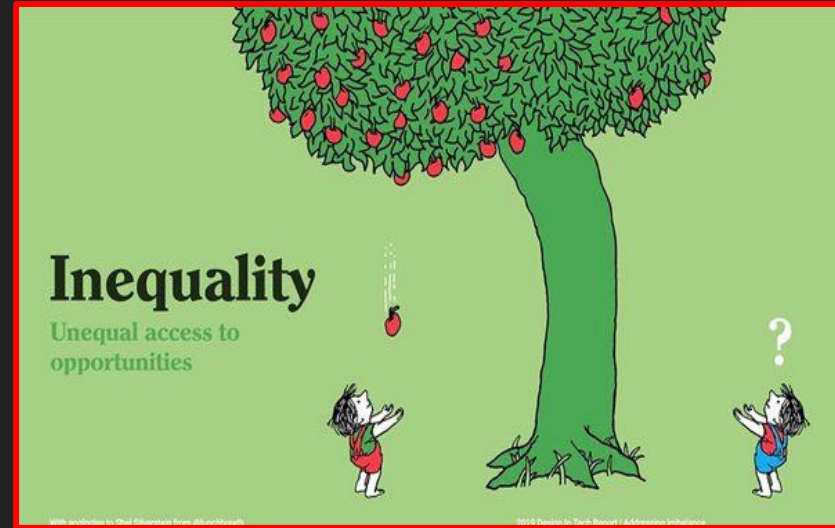
- Parsons' modernization theory faced criticism for overlooking the unevenness of modernization within American society.
- **Ongoing gender and racial inequalities challenged his argument that modernized societies affirmed individual achievement over ascribed status.**

- Despite these criticisms, modernization research, inspired by Parsons's theory, has provided valuable insights into the diverse social processes and variations among countries, including the phenomenon of uneven modernization.

PARSON'S ANSWER TO HIS CRITIQUES

Parsons' Response to Inequalities:

Parsons acknowledged gender and racial sources of societal strain but argued that "equality of opportunity" and the ethos of "accountability" in American society minimized status determination by birth.



Status Differentials:

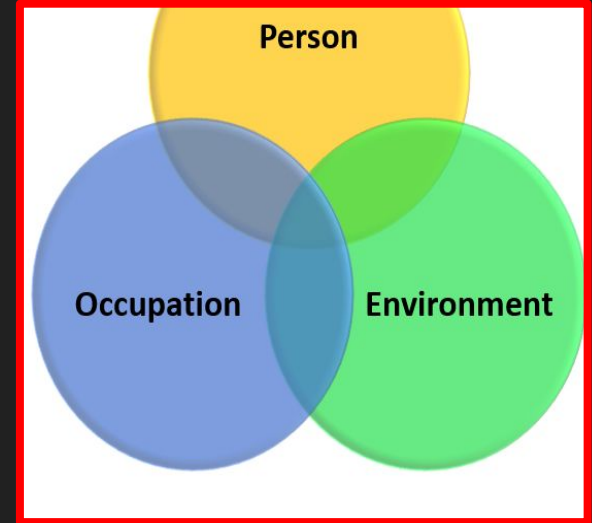
- Parsons asserted that status differentials, based on income and occupational prestige, were functionally necessary to reward individuals for their technical/professional achievements.
- These differentials, he contended, stemmed from individual achievement in the occupational system rather than ascribed privilege.



Functionalist Explanation of Family and Occupation:

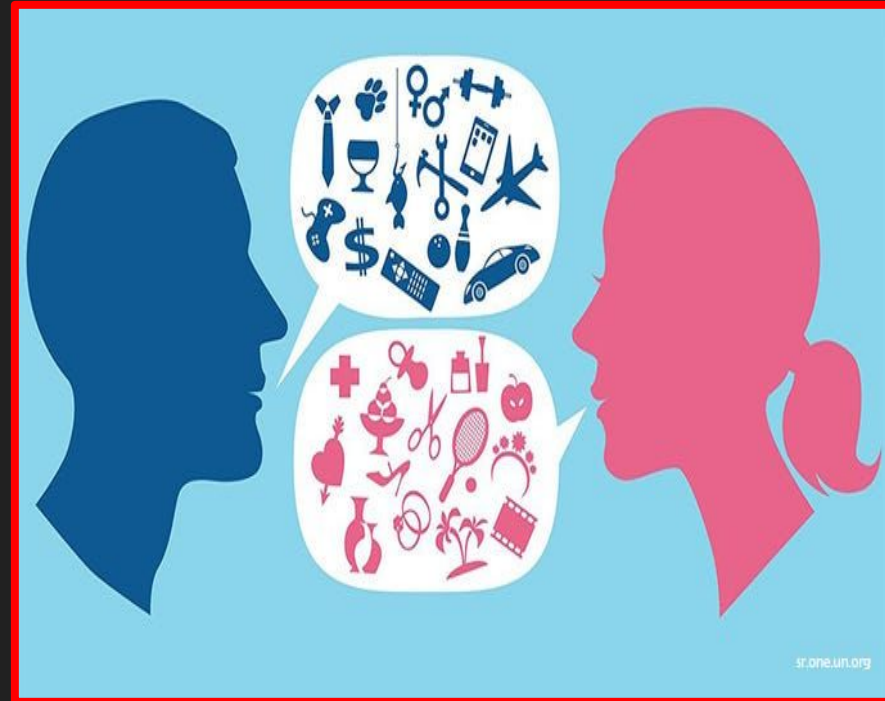
Role of the Occupational System:

- Parsons maintained that the occupational system, crucial for economic adaptation, coexisted with a strong emphasis on family membership.
- Family's cultural/values maintenance was based on emotion, relationship quality, and collective orientation, contrasting with the achievement-oriented occupational system.



Role of Sex Roles:

- Parsons argued for a clear sex-role separation to avoid strain on family solidarity arising from status competition between parents.
- Men competed in the occupational structure, while women occupied home-based roles, preventing invidious comparisons.



Sex – Role theory

- Talcott Parsons (1937) stated that because child rearing is done by mothers, girls have a clear role model.
- They are likely to follow in their mother's footsteps and less likely to turn to crime.
- Heidensohn (1996) states that informal social control discourages women from straying from "decent" behaviour.
- Females are controlled by their given role as mother and wife and as they are bound to the home environment they rarely have the opportunity to leave the home and commit crime



Women's Sex Roles:

- Parsons claimed that women's interests and standards of judgment were directed towards personal adornment, diverting valuation away from occupational achievements.
- Sex-role segregation, he asserted, was crucial for societal equilibrium, maintaining social order by avoiding dysfunctional consequences of status competition between genders.



Critique and Contemporary Implications of this theory:

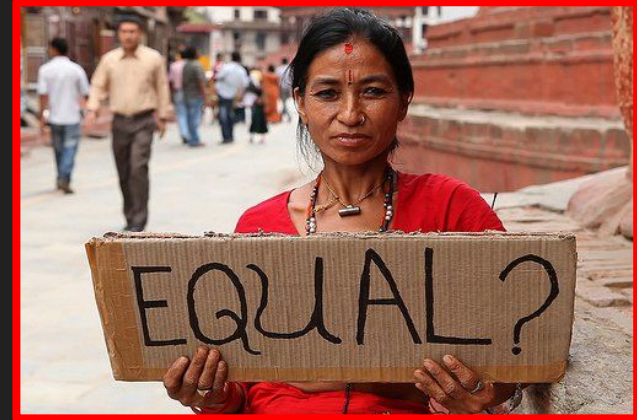
1. Criticism by the Women's Movement:

- Parsons' sex-role theory faced skepticism from the emerging women's movement, challenging gender roles and advocating for women's equality.
- His views were criticized for undermining women's equality efforts and impeding progress in the public sphere.



2. Contemporary Reality:

- Despite societal changes, obstacles to women's full equality persist.
- Increased women's participation in the labor force and blurring sex-role boundaries has led to challenges like sexual harassment, antifeminist backlash, and the burden of managing career and family responsibilities disproportionately falling on women.



HIGH MARKS FETCHING VALUE ADDITIONS

- **Talcott Parsons was the most influential American sociologist of the 20th century and the leading modern exponent of functionalism.**
- For twenty to thirty years after the Second World War, Parsons was the major theoretical figure in America and in the English-speaking area, if not in the world of sociology.
- Being a theorist, he was not in the dominant tradition of American empirical research. As often criticized, as supported, Parsons' work was at the center of debate in sociological theory until the mid 1970's.

- Although Parsons has relatively few followers among sociologists today, he is acknowledged as the greatest spokesman of functionalism and a mastermind in theoretical sociology.
- **It was Parsons who first introduced the works of Durkheim and Max Weber to American readers and who laid the foundation for what was to become the modern "functionalist perspective."**
- As a professor of sociology at Harvard University, he influenced a large number of students through his teachings and writings. Parsons was a prolific Writer, and with his varied writings, he has acquired an important place in the history of sociology.

Intellectual Influence of Weberian Thoughts on Parsons

- Parsons obtained his degree from the London School of Economics in the year 1926 and in the very next year he joined the Heidelberg University at Germany. Weberian influence was very dominant in this area though Weber had died 5 years prior to Parsons joining the Heidelberg University.
- **Parsons was impressed by the efforts of Weber's wife who was taking all the pains to continue the intellectual tradition of her husband by way of convening discussions and debates at her own home.**

- **Parsons who attended such meetings at Weber's house unknowingly came under the influence of Weberian thought. In fact, he obtained his Ph.D. degree from the Heidelberg University and the subject of research was also related to Weber's works.**
- **The topic of his thesis was "Max Weber and Sombart and Their School of Capitalism". Within a few years, Parsons translated Weber's masterpiece namely: "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism", from German to English.**

Parsons' Professional Life

- After receiving his Ph.D. degree from the Heidelberg University, Parsons joined Harvard University as an instructor in the year 1927.
- Harvard gave him the opportunity to study the works of the classical theorist of economics, Alfred Marshall. Within a very short span of time, Parsons came under the influence of the thoughts of Durkheim, Spencer, Pareto and a famous physiologist L.J. Henderson.

- After joining Harvard, Parsons spent the whole of his professional life there till his death in 1979. Parsons' progress as a teacher in Harvard was not an impressive one in the beginning, for he had to work as an ordinary teacher till 1939.
- **His first major volume in his cum right, "The Structure of Social Action" which was published in 1937, fetched him recognition as a theoretical sociologist.**

- Parsons was able to achieve quick professional progress especially after 1939. He became the Chairman of the Department of Sociology in 1944, and in 1946, he became the President of the Department of Social Relations.
- These positions gave him an opportunity to work in the wide circle of social scientists. His reputation spread far and wide when he became the President of the American Sociological Association in 1949.
- Between 1950 and 1960, Parsons brought out his famous books including "The Social System" (1951), "Towards A General Theory of Action" (1951) with Edward Shils, "Economy and Society" (1956) with Smelser, and so on.

Cold War Between Sorokin and Parsons

P.A. Sorokin was the Chairman of the Department of Sociology in the Harvard University, the department which he himself had established, when Parsons joined the department as an ordinary instructor. As long as Sorokin was the chairman of the department of sociology, Parsons could not come to prominence. In fact, Sorokin was a strong critic of Parsons views and there was a kind of cold war between the two. Parsons' favourite student R.K. Merton's comments regarding this so called cold war is worth mentioning here: "Of the very first generation of graduate students coming to Harvard precisely none came to study with Talcott. They could scarcely have done so for the simplest reasons. At about 1931, he had no public identity whatever; as a sociologist... Although we students come to study with the renowned Sorokin, some of us stayed to work with the unknown Parsons". "

Waves of Criticisms about Parsons Views and Thoughts

Parsons' theories and thoughts were subjected to criticism in the circle of slowly emerging radicals in the American sociology especially after 1960s. **"Parsons" "sociological theory [most often labelled 'structural-functionalism' or 'normative functionalism'] was commonly seen as a product of modern, affluent American society, where structural social conflicts had been largely eliminated or were of a transient nature, and where there appeared to be a general social cohesion and shared adherence to democratic values.** Parson' theory came under increasing criticism as the path-war consensus itself showed signs of dissolving, particularly under the impact of the Vietnam war."

Parsons was bitterly criticized as a political traditionalist and his theories were also branded as conservative. **"A number of criticisms have been levelled against Parsons: (1) his is a grand theory with little empirical use; (2) he gives too much importance to values and norms; (3) he does not pay enough attention to social conflict; (4) he is unable to reconcile action theory and system theory, and in effect sees individual action as structurally determined; (5) his functionalism involves teleology".**

Death of the Epoch - Maker in Sociology

As an impressive professor, a famous theoretician, a prolific writer; and a trend-setter Talcott Parsons proved to be an epoch-maker in the realm of sociology. His contribution to the development of sociology has been immense. Even in his seventies, he was actively involved in various educational activities. He died at the age of 77 while he was engaged in furthering his own intellectual activities. In his death America lost one of its topmost sociologists. His death marked the end of an era in sociology which he himself had begun. Merton's words of tribute to Parsons are as follows: "The death of Talcott Parsons marks the end of an era in sociology. When a new era does begin it will surely be fortified by the great tradition of sociological thought which he has left to us.

Main Works of Talcott Parsons

1. The Structure of Social Action (1937)
2. Essays in Sociological Theory (1954)
3. The Social System (1951)
4. Toward a General Theory of Action (1951), with Shils.
5. Working Paper in the Theory of Action (1953), with R. Bales and E. Shils.
6. Family, Socialisation and Interaction Process (1955), with R. Bales, J. Olds, M. Zelditch and R Slater
7. Economy and Society (1956), with N. Smelser:
8. Structure and Process in Modern Societies (1960)
9. Social Structure and Personality (1964)
10. Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives (1966).
11. Sociological Theory and Modern Society (1967)
12. Politics and Social Structure (1969)
13. The System of Modern Societies (1971)
14. The American University (1973), with Gerald M. Platt and Neil J. Smelser.

Critical assessments of Parsons' works have been published in two volumes of essays in his honour by sociologists who were his former students or colleagues:

- (i) "**Stability and Change**" (1971) by Bernard Barber, Alex Inkeles.
- (ii) "Explorations in General Theory in Social Sciences" (1971) by Jan J. Loubser, Rainer C. Baum.

[**Source:** "**The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 9. Page: 171 and** "**Dictionary of Sociology**" (Penguin) by Abercrombie and others]

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF TALCOTT PARSONS TO SOCIOLOGY

(i) Parsons Theory of Social Action

As a theoretician, Parsons' aim was nothing less than to provide **"a conceptual structure for the whole of sociology which would serve also to integrate all the social sciences.** This was to be accomplished by a synthesis between the analysis of individual action and analysis of large-scale social systems. His starting point is the theory of social action, the essential feature of which is the relationship between actors and features of their environment, social and natural, to which they give meaning"

Actor and Situation in the Social Action

- The focus of attention of 'social action theory' is on the action of individual actors or of a group of actors. The behaviour of an individual or a group in a social context is called "social action". Social action has two main aspects: (i) action and (ii) objective situation.
- (i) The "**actor**" refers to the subject of social action, that is, the individual through whom the actions are performed. Anyone who does the social action is called the subject or actor.
- (ii) There is always a context or situation in reference to which the actor performs a social action. Social action cannot take place in a vacuum and there must be some objective situation or context under which social action takes place. The objective situation may be social or non-social. Social situation refers to individuals or groups while non-social environment refers to physical environment. The actor and situation of social action are mutually linked and they are interdependent. The actor, by his behaviour, in turn, is also affected by the situation.

Importance of Function in Social Action

Parsons is of the opinion that the main task of sociology is to describe, explain and analyse social action. Any assembly or congregation of individuals results in social action. Social action is not aimless or purposeless. In any social action, each individual performs a specific function. Social action is also guided by some goal or motivation. Social action is therefore, goal-oriented or motivational.

Types of Action

As Parsons has stated, action can be classified into three types depending upon the nature of motivational orientation.

(i) Cognitive Action: Cognitive action is social action with cognitive orientation. If a social action is dominantly rational role. This orientation refers to the knowledge aspects for, it is dominated by rational considerations.

(ii) Cathetic or Emotional Action: Some social actions are found to be highly emotional. In an emotional social action, reason does not play any role and only emotions dominate. For example, under the influence of motherly love, a woman who does not know swimming may jump into the river to save her child who is drowning. In such social actions, orientation is said to be cathetic or emotional.

(iii) Evaluative Action: Actions that are guided by values or moral standards are said to be "evaluative" in nature. Since values play an important role in society, different people act in different ways depending upon the inspiration of different values. Depending upon the nature of values people's actions are judged to be good or bad, and right or wrong. Such actions are obviously backed by evaluative orientation.

Critical Remarks

The theory of social action profounded by Talcott Parsons is one of the important theories in sociology. Despite its merits, it has been severely criticized by the scholars. According to some, it is not a comprehensive and self-sufficient theoretical orientation for sociologists. It is irreparably individualistic. Further, though individuals may perceive and orient themselves to some goals or purposes, social institutions cannot do that for, no one now subscribes to the existence of the "group mind". Social processes cannot be explained entirely in terms of the intentions, goals, or purposes of the individual people.

Parsons' concept of social system

- Talcott Parsons can undoubtedly be regarded as "the most outstanding exponent of the social system theory. **In his "Structure of Social Action", Parsons focused on unit act but in "The Social System", emphasis shifted from unit act to institutional orders, and the system was the primary unit of analysis.** However, it must be noted at the outset that Parsons' 'social system' is a constructed type, an analytical conceptual framework and not an empirical referent....."
- Parsons takes 'social action' as the building block of the system. He prefers the term 'action' to behaviour because he is interested not in the physical events of behaviour for their own sake but in their patterning.

Parson's sociological theories are largely based upon his conception of social action. Parsons has also given three configurations or systems of social action. Social actions according to him, are guided by the following systems: personality system, cultural system and social system. It can also be said that the scheme of three types of social action [or orientation] "serves as a background for the construction of three analytical systems: the social system, the personality system and the cultural system".

Meaning of System

- **Parsons has discussed the personality, the cultural and the social systems in his treatise "The Social System". It is thus necessary to know what a system is. "A system is any collection of interrelated parts, objects, things or organisms".**
- In the Parsonian language, "In general, a system can be defined as a set of interdependent elements or parts that can be thought of as a whole. In this sense, we can think of a motor car or the human body as a system" As a general approach to understanding a variety of phenomena, systems theory is the study of how systems are organized, how they adapt to changing circumstances, how the interests of subsystems adjust or conflict with those of the whole, and so on.

1. Personality system: Parsons considers **personality** as the aspect of the living individual. Personality system is concerned with the total social actions of an individual. It **must be understood in terms of the cultural and social content of all the learnt things that make up his behavioural system. Personality is autonomous as a distinct subsystem of action. Parsons also claims that the personality system is the primary meeting ground of the cultural system, the behavioural organism, and secondarily, the physical world.** As Abraham has pointed out.

"The main function of the personality system involves learning, developing, and maintaining through the life cycle an adequate level of motivation so that individuals will participate in socially valued and controlled activities. In return, society must also adequately satisfy and reward its members if it is to maintain the level of motivation and of performance." This relationship constitutes socialization, the process by which individuals become social beings. Effective process of socialization is crucial to make the individual's value commitments link primarily with the cultural system. Parsons insists that "in addition to rewarding conformity and punishing deviance, motivation must be furnished at different levels."

2. Cultural System: When the individual system rises to the level of culture, it is known as a cultural system. It is constituted of the normative patterns. It includes cognitive beliefs, values, norms, private moral obligations, expressive symbols which guide the choices made by the individuals. "The main function of the cultural system is the legitimation of the society's normative order: Cultural value patterns provide the most direct link between the social and cultural systems in legitimizing the normative order of the society. They define what is appropriate and what is not, not necessarily in the moral sense but in accordance with the institutionalized order." It could be said that the cultural system is said to be well organized if it actively influences, guides and controls the lives of the individuals.

- **Social System:** The concept of "social system" has been used most explicitly, and self-consciously in modern functionalism". But it was implicit as much in 19th century social thought.
- "A social theory which treats social relations, groups or societies as a set of interrelated parts which function to maintain some boundary or unity of the parts is based explicitly or implicitly on the concept of social system."
- The chief exponent of the 'most modern theory of 'social system' has been Talcott Parsons. Parsons has tried to give a more scientific and a rational explanation to the concept of social system in his books "The Structure of Social Action", and "An Outline of the Social System."

Meaning and Definition of Social System

Parsons uses the term 'social system' to refer to society whether it is the smallest or the largest collectivity. The social system is made up of the relationship of individuals. A simplified version of the definition of Parsons has been given by W.F. Ogburn and it is stated below

- "A social system may be defined as a plurality of individuals interacting with each other according to shared cultural norms and meanings." - **W.F. Ogburn**
- "A social system consists of a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.
- In simple words, the term 'social system' "basically consists of two or more individuals interacting directly or indirectly in a bounded situation"."

Elements or Units of Social System

The social system is constituted by the actions of individuals. It involves participation of an actor in a process of interactive relationships.

(i) The act : Social act or action is a process in the social system that motivates the individual or individuals in the- case of a group. 'The orientation of action has a close relation with the attainment of satisfaction of the actor. The action is not an unexpected response to a particular situation or stimulus. It indicates that the 'actor has a system of expectations relative to his own need-arrangements.

The need-arrangement system of the individual actor has two aspects: (1) the gratificational aspect, and (ii) the orientational aspect. The gratificational aspect refers to what the actor gets out of his interaction and what its costs are to him. The orientational aspect refers to the how he gets it. This participation has two main aspects: (i) the positional aspect and the processional aspect. The positional aspect indicates the location of the actor in the social system which may be called his "status". The processional aspect indicates the functional importance of the actor for the social system which may be called his "role". Both these aspects must be present in what is called a social act.

(ii) The actor: actor is also a significant unit of social system. It is he who holds a status and performs a role. **A social system must have a sufficient proportion of its actors. These actors must be sufficiently motivated to act according to the requirements of its role system. The social system must also be adapted to the minimum needs of the individual actor. The system must secure sufficient participation of its actors also. It means, it must motivate them sufficiently to the performances which are necessary for the social system to develop or to persist.** The act and actor are complementary to each other. The actor has to act according to the roles assigned to him. This he learns through the process of socialization. The social system limits and regulates the needs and also actions of the actor. This, the social system does through social control

- **(iii) The role and status:**The social system involves the participation of actor in a process of interactive relationship. This participation has two aspects: (i) the role aspect, and (ii) the status aspect. Role denotes the functional significance of the actor for the social system. Status denotes the place of the actor in the social system.
- An actor may have a high or low status in a social system and he has a definite role to play. Different roles associated with the same status are properly integrated in the system. The actors are distributed between different roles. This process of distribution has been called by Parsons as "allocation". Proper allocation of roles between actors minimizes problems for the system. The allocation of roles is related to the problem of allocation of facilities. Problem of facilities is actually the problem of power because possession of facilities means to have power-economic or political.

Thus, a social system faces the problems of proper allocation of roles, proper allocation of facilities and rewards and proper allocation of economic and political power. If this allocation is properly done it may preserve itself, otherwise, it may disintegrate.

Mechanism of Social System:

Social system is a system of interdependent action processes. **But the tendencies of the individuals are such that they may alter the established status of the social system.** This may disturb the established interaction process of the system. It is. Therefore, it is essential that some proper mechanisms are applied for maintaining the equilibrium between the various processes of social interaction. **These mechanisms have been classified by Parsons into two categories:**

(i) Mechanisms of socialization, and (ii) Mechanism of social control.

(i) Socialisation: Socialization is a process whereby an individual learns to adjust with the conventional pattern of social behavior. He learns to adjust himself with the social situation conforming to social norms, values, and standards. This process is not confined to the child alone. It goes on throughout life. Some of the principal aspects of socialization are known as rearing, sympathy, identification, imitation, social teaching, suggestion, practice and punishment.

(ii) Social Control: Social control consists of the mechanisms whereby the society moulds its members to conform to the approved pattern of social behaviour. According to Parsons, there are two types of elements, which exist in every system. These are integrative and disintegrative. The function of social control is to eliminate those elements, which cause disintegration and create problems for integration. Besides, in every society, there is a system of rewards for confirmative behaviour and punishments for deviant behaviour. Deviant behavioural tendencies may also constitute one of the principal sources of change in the structure of the social system.

Pattern Variables

"Pattern Variables" is an important concept coined by Talcott Parsons and is closely associated with his theory of social action.

As Parsons says we can analyse actions, social relationships, and whole systems according to what he calls "patter variables" -- or choices between pairs of alternatives. Parsons notes that social interaction has a systematic character and hence he refers to it as a "social system". The concept that bridges social action and social system is that of "pattern variables".

Definition of Pattern Variables

- The term "pattern variables" refers to "the four [sometimes five] basic pattern-alternatives of value orientation for individuals and cultures, according to Parsons."
- Pattern variables represent "Five dichotomies or pairs of variables proposed by Talcott Parsons for the purpose of classifying types of social relationships. Each pattern variable provides two mutually exclusive alternatives, one of which must be chosen by an individual before he can act in a social situation."
- The concept of pattern variables introduced by Talcott Parsons" is an attempt to supply logically exhaustive list of action dilemmas on the highest possible level of abstraction"

According to Parsons, the five pattern variables represent the basic dilemmas a person faces in orienting to another person. As per Parsons' analysis, "cultures are seen as organizing action, and actors are faced with implicit 'choices' in relationships, in terms of four dichotomous alternative modes of orientation to social objects including other actors". In simple words, individuals are faced with some fundamental dilemmas in their interaction and social systems offer a combination of solutions for these dilemmas.

Five Pattern Variables

Five sets of pattern variables as stated by Parsons are as follows:

1. Affectivity versus affective neutrality
2. Diffuseness versus specificity
3. Universalism versus particularism.
4. Ascription versus achievement [also as quality and performance]
5. Self-orientation versus collectivity orientation

1. Affectivity Versus Affective Neutrality: Affectivity versus affective neutrality represents one of the pattern variables proposed by Talcott Parsons. **The word 'affectivity' refers to feelings or emotions whereas "affective neutrality" signifies emotional neutrality or detachment.** This is one of the dilemmas that the actors face. For the individual in a given situation, this is the dilemma of whether to give importance to an impulse or to the values and more distant goals. This is like the opposition between the demands of an impulse or immediate need and the possible benefits of restraint and discipline. Here, the individual has to decide whether he should opt for the immediate gratification of an impulse or need or he should abstain himself from doing it. Example: Eating a meal or watching a chess match compared with work that does not require one's emotional involvement, say, working in a garage. This pattern variable suggests that actors can either engage in a relationship for emotional reasons [affectivity] or in a relationship for instrumental reasons without the involvement of feelings [affectivity neutrality).

2. Diffuseness Versus Specificity: As per this dichotomy, actors in their relationship with others will have to choose in any situation between a totally wide range of activity [diffuseness] or a specific and a structured one [specificity]. 'Diffuseness' implies wide range of satisfying relationships while 'specificity' denotes a narrower range of relationships. In confronting an object [that is, another person], an actor must choose among the various possible ranges in which he will respond to the object.

The dilemma here consists in whether the actor should respond to restricted range of them. Example: Mother- child relationship and family relationships, in general, represent "diffuseness" where relationships are not fixed or defined but spread about all aspects of life. On the other hand, bus conductor issuing tickets to the passenger; or the relationship between the doctor and patient- represent relationships which have only a specified and limited purpose.

3. Particularism Versus Universalism: This represents a "dichotomy in social behaviour, that is concerned with the problem of whether a person in a given situation should be oriented to another person for persons] in terms of generalized standards of behaviour or in terms of the special nature of their relationship to each other".

In simple words, actors have to decide whether to judge a person by general criteria [universalism] or criteria unique to that person [particularism]. **Example,** Mother's relationship with the child. A mother's relationship with her child may sometimes be particularistic but at other times, involve universalistic criteria as when the child's performance is appraised at school.

4. Ascription Versus Achievement: This pattern variable has recently been called as the dichotomy between quality and performance. This pattern variable refers to the dilemma of whether to treat a person according to who he is or in terms of what he is doing, or may be expected to do in the given situation. As per this variable, actors have to decide whether to judge persons by what they do [performance] or by their personal characteristics [quality], **Example:** In most societies, relationships based on inherent qualities [age, sex, caste, etc.] of the individual can be considered ascriptive; while his success in business or a cricket match or in a musical career involves achievement.

5. Self-Orientation Versus Collectivity Orientation: Here the dilemma is between personal interests and group interests in social situations. For the individual in a given situation, this is the dilemma of whether to pursue his own personal interests and goals or sub-orient his private interests to the interests and welfare of a group or other individuals. This dichotomy is described by Parsons as the "dilemma of private values versus collective interests", or "the distribution between private permissiveness and collective obligation". This fifth variable, originally proposed by Parsons, was subsequently dropped as being of a different order from the other four.

Importance of Pattern Variables

According to Parsons, through pattern variables it is possible for us to understand the four dilemmas which the individuals face in orienting their relationship with others. In fact, all relationships between individuals and others can be brought under this scheme. "The first four pattern variables namely, affectivity, diffuseness, particularism and ascription - bring out the broad norms of relationships among friends and close ones and they are primary in nature. By contrast, the second four variables - namely, neutrality; specificity, universalism and achievement [or performance] - bring broad norms of secondary relationships".

It appears that "Parsons" conception of pattern variables was presented by him as deriving from previous characterization of types of society such as Tonnies' distinction between **Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft**. Parsons saw his "pattern variables as providing an exhaustive general statement of the fundamental dilemmas permanently facing all actors and involved in all social organizations."

Functional Prerequisites of Social System

The concept "functional prerequisites" or "functional imperatives" constitutes an essential aspect of functional theory. This concept refers to the basic needs of a society which have to be met if it is to continue to survive as a functioning system. Thus, from a functional perspective, societies survive and function only if certain tasks are accomplished. For example, without reproduction and socialization, there would be no supply of new members. Similarly, a system of social stratification is said to be necessary to ensure that the most able people are recruited to the most important positions, a requirement for an efficient society.

Functional theory looks upon society as a social system which is believed to perform certain functions. Parsons and his followers have given a list which they have called the **"functional prerequisites"** of any social system. They can be grouped under four recurrent functional problems which every social system must solve in its attempt to adapt itself to the basic facts of life. **As mentioned by Parsons, they are: (i) pattern maintenance and tension management, (ii) adaptation, (iii) goal attainment, and (iv) integration.**

Pattern Maintenance and Tension Management

A social system has its own patterns which must be maintained. The units of the system, that is, role-occupants or sub-groups, must learn these patterns and develop an attitude of respect towards them.

Tension management: A human group cannot endure if it fails to meet the individual human needs of its members. The units of any system, i.e., individuals or sub-groups are subject to emotional disturbance and distractions. Man's emotional, spiritual, and cultural requirements are extremely complex. Still they must be met with or "managed" if the units are to be able to carry on effectively. All social systems provide for relaxation from tension by means of activities that allow a person to express his or her inner feelings. For example, dance and the arts do this task. All societies provide special structural arrangements for differences in sex and also for such crucial events as births and deaths. Wherever there is social life, there are structures or patterns of leisure and recreation, crafts, art, and some form of religion expressed in myths or elaborate rituals.

Adaptation

Any social system must be adapted to its social and non-social environment. For a society to survive it must have a technology adequate to provide food, shelter and clothing. The economy of the society meets this need. Every permanent social system has its own division of labor. Because, for the production of goods and services, role differentiation becomes necessary. It is known that no one person can simultaneously perform all the tasks that have to be performed. The system must also provide care for the helpless young and protection against animal and human predators. Many of the structures existing in any society are designed to fulfill these essential functions.

Goal Attainment

Every social system has one of those goals to be attained, through co-operative effort. National security can be cited here as the best example of social goal. Adaptation to the environment, social and non-social, is necessary if goals are to be attained. Further, in accordance with the specific nature of tasks of the system, the human and non-human resources must be mobilized in some effective way. For example, in any social system there must be a proper process for determining which persons will occupy what role at what time and for what purpose. The problem of allocation of members within the social system will be solved by such a process. The rules regulating inheritance, for example, get solved by such a process. The rules regulating inheritance, for example, solve this problem in part,

The allocation of members and the allocation of scarce resources are important for both adaptation and goal attainment. The economy of a society as a sub-system produces goods and services for various purposes. The government in complex societies, mobilizes goods and services for the attainment of specific goals of the total society.

Example: A business firm may have the goal of producing steel. The goal is adaptive for society because steel can be used for many purposes, including the purpose of other business firms. The steel company faces an adaptive problem. It means, it has to adjust to the government and to competing firms and provide itself with the necessary raw materials for its productive goals.

Integration

Since they live in groups, men and women must consider the needs of the group as well as their own needs. They must coordinate and integrate their actions. 'Integration' has to do with the interrelations of units of the social system, that is, individuals and groups. "To some extent, the members of a system must be loyal to one another and to the system as a whole. This is a problem of solidarity and morale". Morale is important for both integration and pattern maintenance. It is closely related to common values. It is the willingness to give oneself to specific undertakings. In routine living, the goals and interests of the whole society are not of much interest to the whole society and are not very much present in the minds of most of its members. That way, the interests of sub-groups are always remembered. But during the period of crisis such as war or revolution the goal and interest of the whole society must always dominate if the society is to survive as an independent group.

In almost every social system, some participants, including whole sub-groups, violate the norms. Since the norms fulfill some social needs, their violations are a threat to the social system. Thus, the need for "social control" arises. It is essential to protect the integrity of the system. "Thus, the elaborate rules provide orderly procedures to determine who will occupy given sites, to control the use of force and fraud, to co-ordinate traffic, to regulate sexual behaviour, to govern the conditions of exchange, and so on".

Since the individual members are often motivated by "self-interests", chances of clashes taking place between them cannot be ruled out. Sometimes, even with best morale we find threats to integration. Hence, there must be a mechanism for restoring solidarity. Such mechanisms are normally operative most of the time. It must be noted that even with the well-institutionalized norms, instances of deviance do take place. The deviations may even become disruptive. Hence, there is the need for a "secondary" mechanism of social control. Example: In the modern state, the whole apparatus of catching and rehabilitating the criminal represents such a kind of secondary mechanism.

THANK YOU