

## **FUNCTIONALISM.**

Functionalism's origins lie in the wake of Comte, Spencer and Durkheim. Comte aimed to combine philosophy with the scientific and systematic study of social phenomena. He wanted to create a science of society, a scientific approach to study objective facts about the social world and use such findings as the basis for reconstructive society. Comte described this positive scientific approach as '**positivism.**' Spencer is a British sociologist who extensively used the biological analogy to describe human society. His philosophy is centered around the concept of evolution.

Durkheim is often cited as the dominant influence on the development of sociological functionalism for his argument that social institutions exist solely to fulfil specific social needs. Durkheim's functionalism sought to explain social facts, not only by focusing on the cause on which they depended but by showing their function in the establishment of general harmony. He was particularly concerned to show that social institutions normally worked to promote social solidarity. Education, religion and even crime function to reinforce collective sentiments. (Major formative influence on functionalism not really a functionalist because he looks at facts that functionalists don't.)

Malinowsky and Radcliff-Brown were early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists. In their studies of Pacific tribal communities: Trobriand and Andaman islanders, reject the question of origin altogether and concentrate purely on function, i.e. how the part relates to the whole. There is emphasis on societies as integrated systems. Sociological functionalism, developed as a major theoretical perspective in the Chicago school due mainly to the work of Talcott-Parsons. By the 1950's, functionalism was regarded increasingly, not as 'one of many sociological approaches,' but rather, THE approach.

Kingsley Davis claims that functionalism was the method employed by all sociologists, regardless of whether they called themselves functionalists or not. Critics like Goldener, however, have suggested that functionalism is nothing more than the expression of conservative ideology that favors the preservation of privilege. R.K. Merton, a later functionalist has argued, however, that far from embodying a conservative ideology, functionalism can be radical and critical by pointing to the malfunctioning of specific institutions of satisfying the collective needs of a society. The introduction of concepts such as dysfunctions and the positive functions of social conflict in its role in systematic change have tended to weaken the general criticism of functionalism as a theory promoting the status quo.

### **MAIN FEATURES OF FUNCTIONALISM.**

- i) Societies are wholes, systems of inter-related parts. Each part has meanings only in terms of its relation with the whole, performing a specific function within the system. Society is thus a system of independent elements, all of which contribute to the integration and adaptation of the system as a whole.
- ii) All elements which make up the social system are indispensable to the extent that they perform special functions related to the needs of the system as a system. Parsonian functionalism has developed the notion of functional prerequisites of the

social systems which refer broadly to the things that must get done in any society if it is to continue as a going concern, e.g. modes of socialization, language, communication etc...

- iii) Nevertheless, integration of all parts of the system is never perfect. Durkheim's work, for example, stressed that that fragile nature of social solidarity within advanced societies and the consequent problems of integration of the individual into the social whole. The basic tendency of social systems is towards equilibrium and a harmonious balance between its various institutions. Elements of mal-integration will, however, always be present, and hence the importance of social control mechanisms.
  - iv) Social change is adaptive and evolutionary, even rapid social change has the tendency to leave the basic institutional framework intact.
  - v) Social integration is achieved essentially through 'value consensus' i.e. a pervasive set of principles which legitimize the existing political, social and economic structure.
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## **INTERPRETIVISM.**

**The school created by Weber. They are the least scientific of all sociologists.**

## **SOCIAL ACTION THEORY.**

Action is to be distinguished from behavior in that it involves meaning or intention. Action theory is then, analysis of action starting with the individual actor. Action theory originates in the work of Max Weber. He distinguishes 4 types of actions.

- (a) **Traditional actions** are those performed simply because they have been performed in the past.
- (b) **Affectual actions** are those performed simply to express an emotion. (Weber is most concerned with the remaining 2 types.)
- (c) **Purposively rational action** is that in which the actor not only compares the different means to a goal, but assesses the utility of the goal as well.
- (d) **Value rational action** where the actor takes the goal as an end in itself and may not even compare the different means to the goal.

Weber makes it clear that there are ideal types and it is possible for an action to be a mixture of 2 or more types. for Weber, it is important that action is defined in terms of meaningfulness and sociological analysis must proceed by identifying the meaning the actions have for the actors. Talcott-Parsons develops social action theory from this by conceiving of the world as consisting of human beings making choices about, and deciding between different goals and the means to achieve them. He wanted to make a basic model of human action, defining in abstract terms, all of its components. This model comprises of:

1. The human actor;
2. Goals or ends that an actor must choose between; and
3. Different means by which these goals may be achieved, again the actor choosing between them.

However, the choices are not made in a vacuum. The environment is made up of a number of physical and social factors, which limit the range of choices. Most importantly, the environment includes generally accepted norms and values, which influence our choice of goals and means. The unit act, one act, is made up, therefore, of an actor, means, goals and an environment which comprises physical and social objects and norms and values. This is an abstract description of all actions.

Now, Parsons is not just concerned with the individual action, but with systems of action. Among the objects in the actor's environment, are other actors. And for Parsons, a system of action is made up of relations between actors. The emphasis changes here from voluntarism to the way systems of action limit and even determine individual choices. Parsons assumes that each actor aims for maximum gratification, and if he engages in interaction with another and receives gratification, he will repeat the action. Each actor will come to expect certain responses from the other, so social rules or norms will develop, what Parsons calls a system of "status roles," develops, i.e. a network of behaviour to which expectations of behaviour and rewards and sanctions are attached. Behaviour becomes institutionalized in such a way that it remains constant, no matter who occupies the status role. Society as a whole and each institution in society may be considered as a system of status roles, each governed by established norms and values. There is a pre-supposition here of three other systems:

- (a) A personality system, i.e. actors aiming for maximum gratification;
- (b) A cultural system, i.e. a system of wider values which gives coherence to the different norms attached to different status roles; and
- (c) A biological system, i.e. a physical environment to which societies adapt.

Parsons further argues that any system must satisfy four needs or requirements if it is to survive, and in each case, a specialist sub-system is developed to meet each requirement. The 4 requirements or '**functional pre-requisites**' are:

- i) Each system must adapt to its environment. (adaptation)
- ii) Each system must have a means of mobilizing its resources in order to achieve its goals and thus obtain gratification. (goal attainment)
- iii) Each system must maintain the internal integrity of its parts, or in other words, it must keep itself together. (integration)
- iv) Each system must keep itself in a state of equilibrium. (pattern maintenance / latency)

### **CRITISISMS.**

1. Conflict theorists argue that Parson's model of social life, with its emphasis on equilibrium, balanced exchange and functional relationships cannot make sense of social change and conflict. (general argument against functionalism)
2. Persons are biological organisms, societies are not. Parsons proposes that social systems have needs which must be met. Critics say that this is meaningless. We would need examples of societies that did not survive and narrow down the causes to the fact that they didn't meet the functional pre-requisites.

3. It is often argued that to explain the existence of something by the function it fulfills is to make a mockery of the idea of cause. In other words, you end up with a circular argument.
  4. At the center of Parson's theory, there are norms and values. David Lockwood suggests that there is another factor at work in social life, i.e. the material substratum
  5. The theory is descriptive rather than explanatory.
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## **SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM.**

This has been called 'a deliberately constructed vagueness.' The interactionist uses the anthropological method of participant observation, i.e. the interactionist will find a group in his own country and live in it. The major theorist is George Herbert Mead. Symbolic interactionism stays with social action and does not concern itself with the analysis on the systems level. In Parson's terms it stays with the unit act the way actors make choices and in this sense it can be seen as a fragmentation of his social action theory. In Mead's "Mind, Self and Society," his starting point is the discussion of the crucial feature that separates human beings from other animals - he settles on language, which he calls the significant symbol. Animals cannot communicate like human beings. The significant symbol - language - brings out the same reactions in oneself as it does in the other and vice-versa. Each person puts himself in the shoes of the other. Animals cannot do this. Another way of putting it is that language has a shared meaning. It is developed in the course of interaction. Social interaction produces meanings and meanings make up our world. There is a sense in which we create our world by giving meanings to it. For example, a piece of wood when it is given the name table, carries with it connotations of the working act, eating act etc... Such meanings change and develop and as they do, the world changes and develops. So far we have talked about external conversations, the process of interaction in which we create together our shared world. But there is also an internal interpretive process, which is also a conversation between two different phases or parts of the self. The significant symbol brings out the same reaction in me as it does in others, it enables me to look at myself as others see me. The '**me**' is precisely that, myself as others see me.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: The '**I**' is the part that looks at myself and Mead sees this as the source of originality, creativity and spontaneity. The internal conversation provides a channel through which all the external conversation or patterns of interaction must pass. This conception of the self also involves a description of the process of socialization in the life of an infant. Initially, random gestures become refined as he/she learns those which others recognize. Through play he/she learn to fake the roles of individual others and through games he/she learns to see themselves as the group sees them, and so increasingly as the world sees them.

Erving Goffman has developed from this what he terms 'the dramaturgical approach,' in his book, "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life."

Roles, i.e. the expectations which others have of your behaviour in specific circumstances are seen as scripts which we enact, and Gauffman is concerned to show how we act, the way in which we manage our performance. All aspects of life are seen in these terms, from the most private to the most public, we are constantly aware of impression management as if we were advertising agents, for ourselves. We use our physical surroundings like props and we maintain areas of privacy backstage where we can relax from our performances. This can be seen in the context of the 'I' and the 'me.' Goffmann is describing how the 'I' presents the 'me.'

Another interactionist is Herbert Blumer, of the Chicago school. He had made a synopsis of interactionist theory:

- (a) Human beings act towards things on the basis of their meanings that the things have for them.
- (b) These meanings are the product of social interaction in human society.
- (c) These meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs each encounters.

### **CRITICISMS.**

- 1) We never find out what the 'I' is because Mead says only that it is the source of creativity and originality.
  - 2) Interactionism ignores the wider features of social structure and thus cannot say anything about power, conflict and change.
  - 3) To ignore society, to treat it as a fiction is to ignore its effects on those who we study.
  - 4) Interactionists see people as purely cognitive beings as if we understand people when we understand what they think they know about the world. They ignore emotions and the subconscious self.
  - 5) The theory tends to be descriptive rather than explanatory.
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### **PHENOMENOLOGY.**

*Alfred Schultz (banker & philosopher), "Phenomenology of the Social World." (1934)*

In Schultz's view, Weber failed to give any real account of the way in which action can only be constructed by drawing upon a shared set of social concepts, symbols and meanings. As a result, he presented an overly mechanical account of the relation between actions and their reasons/motives.

Phenomenology means 'the study of the way in which phenomena, i.e. the things of which we are conscious, appear to us, and the most basic way in which they appear is as a continuous flow of sense experiences, which we receive through our 5 senses. When we give meanings to these sense experiences, we distinguish objects etc... We do not think about this change, we just do it! The basis of our social world is also made up of such, taken-for-granted knowledge. This knowledge is the basis for our taken-for-granted common sense world, which Schultz calls the 'life world.' He argues that this life world is a precarious set of shared meanings available to the whole social group. It is a shared stock of common sense knowledge of taken-for-granted assumptions about society, other actors

and the world. In this sense, the reality of social life is only created by these shared arbitrary assumptions and conceptions. However, actors in normal circumstances do not realize that their world is based on the fragile fabric of assumptions and meanings. They approach the world and society in a natural way, regarding the world they see as solid, inflexible and constraining, even though it is, in reality, the product of their shared ideas. The basic structure of the social world can be seen as resting solely upon establishing or interpreting meanings. Phenomenologists claim therefore that sociologists who claim that there really is a constraining world of social facts, are suffering from the same commonsensical self delusions as any ordinary member of society, i.e. society exists in the mind of the sociologists.

In contrast to other views of action, Schultz rejects the idea that single acts can be associated with identifiable motives, rather, there is a constant flow of action which takes place with the actor using commonsense knowledge, not reflecting on goals and future acts (except for long-term projects). We must all understand the socially given meaning of an act in its context. We act successfully when all share the same set of meanings.

### **CRITISISMS.**

Schultz emphasizes the collective nature of meaning so much so that he dissolves social life into purely, inter-subjective terms. Social life becomes a mental event. We learn the importance of shared meanings but are left with no tools to understand social structures or unintended consequences. This task of the sociologists, therefore, is limited to describing correctly the nature of social action. The sociologist cannot correct the account of the world given by actors. Schultz rejects this vehemently. Those living in the social world can think about it best. Such a conception of sociology removes any potential it might have for isolating social constraints upon actors, helping them overcome them.

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### **ETHNOMETHODOLOGY.**

Ethnomethodology means the study of people's method for creating social order. (Major theorist is Garfinkel). Life phenomenology, ethnomethodology sees social organization as something which has to be established out of different experiences of different individuals. However, where Schultz would argue that order is the result of shared commonsense, knowledge itself is inherently unstable, something which is created anew in every encounter. We conspire together to create the impression of shared commonsense. Hence, maintaining the impression of social order is a never-ceasing activity and hence like ethnomethodology. Each time social order is created is an achievement. For the ethnomethodologist, we should analyze areas of social life which are usually taken for granted, these include use of language in conversation etc...

