

# Consensus Structuralism – Functionalism –

**Consensus** means agreement, harmony, balance and **structuralism** refers to the way in which the individual is seen as constrained by society

## Durkheim 1858-1917

Emile Durkheim was the first professor of Sociology and the founding father of Functionalism.

Durkheim introduced the concept of 'collective conscience' to show how societies needed agreement to stick together. He was concerned that the changes in modern society were weakening the social solidarity and consequently we needed the institutions in society to act together to prevent a state of anomie (normlessness, anarchy etc) from emerging.

Use the notes on family, education, religion and deviance to illustrate how this 'solidarity' is achieved

Society exists external to the individual for Durkheim and there are a group of external factors (social facts) acting on us shaping our behaviours.

Remember to link all of your Functionalist notes to work done on NEW RIGHT

### NB

You must also link this Knowledge Organiser to your notes and revision notes for a fuller understanding

## Parsons 1902-79

Talcott Parsons is credited for developing the modern strands of functionalism and introduced the biological (organic) analogy where society is compared to a human body with all the institutions working together like the parts of the body.

Remember how the family is often seen as at the 'heart' of society!

For Parsons, as with Durkheim, the key question was how does society hang together – how is social order achieved – just what is the social glue?

Having a shared culture (norms, values, beliefs, goals etc) is essential for social order. This is achieved via:

- **Socialisation** – passing these values down the generations through the family, education, media, beliefs etc
- **Social Control** – Rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour – thus reinforcing the value system to the majority of the population

Parsons identifies 4 basic needs of society and shows how they are met: GAIL

## GAIL

**G - Goal Attainment:** society needs to set goals and try to achieve them. This is done via the political system e.g. Local and national government

**A - Adaptation** this is where the material needs of society are met - e.g. working, wages etc

**I - Integration** - The different institutions must work together e.g. the family links to school links to work etc

**L - Latency** - refers to how underneath the whole system is maintained and kept going e.g. the role of family in socializing and being a pressure valve to let off steam

### Internal Criticisms - Merton

Although himself a Functionalist – Merton did have some issues with the work of Parsons

- Dysfunctional elements – Merton recognized that some elements can be harmful in society. e.g. religion can unite but can cause divisions too
- Indispensability – Merton argues that other institutions can perform tasks well e.g. single parent families can do just as good a job as nuclear 2 parent ones.

## 2 Types Of Society

Building on work by Durkheim Parsons identifies 2 main types of society each with its own patterns of norms and values – what he called pattern variables.

Type A Societies Traditional Societies	Type B Societies Modern Societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status is based on ascription (e.g. birth)</li> <li>• Relationships are multifunctional – e.g. knowing all the people in your community</li> <li>• Particularistic standards are used to judge people –i.e. who you are not what you are.</li> <li>• Immediate gratification prevail (living for the moment)</li> <li>• Collective orientation is important - all for one and one for all – the group comes first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status is based on achievement – what you do!</li> <li>• Relationships are specific – i.e. linked to specific purposes</li> <li>• Universalistic standards are applied – e.g. qualifications are used to determine the best person for the job!</li> <li>• Deferred gratification is more common – e.g. staying on at school to get better rewards later.</li> <li>• Individualism is rife – pursuing one's own interests</li> </ul>

As societies have changed mainly from type A to B, our institutions have evolved and adapted. E.g. extended family to nuclear family, schools replacing education at home.

Both Parsons and Durkheim did appreciate that this process has its dangers – something Postmodernists certainly pick up on

### External Criticisms

- Functionalism over emphasizes 'consensus/agreement'. They ignore conflict. People often have different values to others. Functionalists see the world through 'rose tinted specs'
- Functionalists use reification - *This means 'treating something as though it were alive'*. Functionalists see society as a human body – but societies are not tangible, 'real' things!
- Functionalism is a tautology - This means it uses a circular (therefore unscientific) argument: institutions exist because they are functional. They are functional because they exist...chicken or egg?
- Feminists say functionalists are sexist - They assume women should all be housewives, rather than take up important positions in society
- Marxists claim functionalists ignore the evils of capitalism - Functionalists think capitalism is functional – maybe they are under false consciousness?
- Interactionists say functionalists are deterministic and ignore individuality and free will. They assume individuals all share the same norms and values – is this really the case?
- Postmodernists are critical of the 'meta-narrative' of functionalism i.e. a big cover all explanation for social behaviour. Society is so fragmented now that such explanations are redundant.