

## Chapter 12:

### Construction of the Social System

#### Pareto and Parsons

(perhaps the last of the well-known "Grand Theorists")

## Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923, 75 yrs)

- Grew up in Italy
- Worked in industry prior to inheritance
- Inheritance made him independently wealthy
- Chair of economics at U. of Louisiana
- Wrote 5 volume work entitled: General Treatise on Sociology

## Pareto's Social System

Pareto identified six characteristics found within all social systems.

What do all social systems have in common?

## Pareto's Social System

(six characteristics of the social system)

1. Societies have great stability

"the more things change, the more they stay the same"

or

"while society seems to change, underneath things go on in much the same way"

Do you agree? Examples?

## Pareto's Social System

2. People are often irrational in decision-making  
(opposite belief of economists)

People act first and then rationalize their actions.

Do you agree?  
What would be an example?

## Pareto's Social System

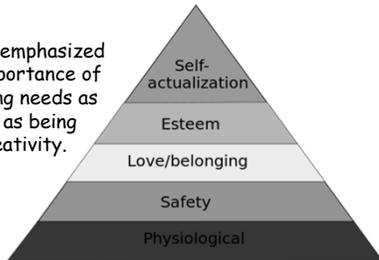
3. Human behavior is driven by two basic human motives:

Security Needs  
Creativity

How might creativity/security be related to previous theorists? Nietzsche? Mead?

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 1943

Pareto emphasized the importance of meeting needs as well as being creativity.



## Pareto's Social System

4. Those who are more biologically gifted than others rise to the top and become leaders.

People are gullible and the elite take advantage of this. For example:

"all that one needs to make them (the general public) accept slavery is to give it the name of freedom."

What does this mean? Example?

## Pareto's Social System

5. Social order is built on "sentiments" (instincts).

The strongest sentiments are the conservative and social ones (the "group preserving" instinct)

## Pareto's Social System

6. Struggle for dominance over the social system.

The guileful people use force and sentiment to "win over" the less cunning/crafty/deceitful.

## Criticism of Pareto:

Doesn't consider social change.

Provides theories that cannot be tested.

## Contributions of Pareto:

People's decisions are more than simply rational, economic decisions.

Decisions are based on non-rational sentiment.

Talcott Parsons  
(1902 - 1979; 77 yrs)

- Sociologist and chair at Harvard
- Introduced Weber's works to English speaking social scientists by translating Weber's works
- Attempted to design a theory that encompasses all the social sciences

Parson's Theory of Society

1. Society is a system
2. Four functions of society
3. Social integration (order)
4. Social change

1. Society as a System

Social order is based on a system of inter-connected parts or institutions

Parsons believed there is an invisible hand guiding society that no single person(s) control.

The task of sociology is to search for the laws that control this "invisible" hand.

2. Functionalism

All societies have four basic functions that they must achieve to survive:

By examining these four, it is possible to analyze all societies in the same way even though they may have many differences.

2. Functionalism

What are some basic functions that all societies need to carry out in order to survive?

2. Functionalism

Parson's 4 basic functions include:

1. Maintaining cultural patterns  
How might this be accomplished?  
e.g., education, family
2. Integrating members to work together  
How might this be accomplished?  
e.g., religion, legal system, family, education

## 2. Functionalism

Parson's 4 basic functions include:

3. Adapting to changes in the environment
4. Goal attainment (making decisions for collective action, politics)

## 2. Functionalism

Social institutions are used in the U.S. to achieve the 4 basic functions.

The institutions support each other in doing this.

For example: the education system supports the family and vice versa.

## 3. Social Integration/Order

Parsons asks:

Why is it that we have social order?

Why do humans follow societal norms and laws?

## Why Social Integration/Order?

The Collective Conscience becomes a part of the individual's psychi.

How does this happen?

## Why Social Integration/Order?

The Collective Conscience develops in the nuclear family where right and wrong and obeying authority are learned.

This socialization takes form as the superego.

## Why Social Integration/Order?

The Superego becomes the basis for society's influence over the individual.

Societies develop their own values (collective conscience) that can differ across societies

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#### Why Social Integration/Order?

So, the Social System is held together by exchanges between people.

—not just economic but also emotional exchanges (collective conscience)

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#### 4. Why Social change?

4a. Advances in technology create more complex division of labor (differentiation)

For example: a farmer producing milk compared to a milk processing plant

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#### 4. Why Social change?

4b. Societies experience social changes to accommodate the technological changes.  
Examples?

4c. Some societies move from specific norms and rules to more generalized and abstract ones.  
How are these ideas similar to those of Durkheim (e.g., mechanical and organic solidarity)?

⋮

#### 4. Why Social change?

If division of labor is a primary cause of social change, what causes the division of labor to change?

⋮

#### 4. Why changes in Div of Labor?

- Science/discovery (e.g., new technologies)
- Economic growth (encourages specialization)
- Institutions adapt to new technologies
- Social values adapt to new technologies

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#### 4. Potential Impacts of Social change?

Higher societal differentiation (or division of labor) threatens social solidarity and social integration.

Why might this be?

⋮

## Parson's Religion and Sociology

God is a symbolic representation of the moral order of society. (or perhaps vice versa?).

"God (society) in the end is stronger than the devil (the individual), and the devil himself knows it.

⋮

## Parson's Religion and Sociology

"Parsons holds that social order and predictable behavior are not only real but necessary just as Christian theology maintains both that humankind is free and that God is nevertheless all-determining."

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## Parson's Religion and Sociology

"People do not have to live up to the values and norms of their society (or God) but they find it best for themselves...if they do."

⋮

## The End

[https://vod.library.unt.edu/cat\\_vodentry.php?film=149](https://vod.library.unt.edu/cat_vodentry.php?film=149)  
(film on social class)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhPH3piqLVQ>  
Talcott Parsons: A Premise of Structural Functionalism

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## The End

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