



Functionalism

Criticisms

- X - Logical Criticisms - Functionalism is teleological
- X - Conflict Perspectives - Ignores power inequality and exploitation
- X - Action Perspectives - Functionalism is deterministic
- X - Postmodernism society is not stable, orderly, or predictable

Positive evaluations

- Durkheim's study on suicide - trends still true today
- Governments view society as a system
- Development theorists view society as a system

The basics

- A structural/systems theory - it focuses on the needs of the social system as a whole
- A consensus theory - it sees society as based on shared values
- A modernist theory - research can find the truth and lead to progress
- Historical Context: the 1890s to the 1950s
- Closely related to the New Right and Modernisation Theory

Robert Merton's Functionalism

- Three Internal Critiques:
 - some institutions are dysfunctional
 - not everything is interconnected
 - Not everything is necessary
- Latent and Manifest Functions: Intended and unintended

Talcott Parson's Functionalism (1940s and 50s)

- We should study society as a system (the 'organic analogy')
 - both have sub-systems which perform specific functions
 - both are self-regulating
- Three similarities between society and a biological organism:
 - both have needs
 - The social system has four basic needs: instrumental (adaptation and goal attainment) and expressive (integration and latency)
- Society based on value consensus and social order
 - Society needs individuals to be integrated - achieved through socialisation and social control
- Social change is gradual and evolutionary/ progressive
 - societies gradually evolve by from simple to more complex structures
- Concerned with understanding rapid social change brought about with industrialisation

Emile Durkheim's (1858 - 1917) The first ever 'Sociologist'

- Studied suicide to illustrate the above
- Society exists as a separate entity above its members, as a system of 'social facts'
 - It affects people irrespective of their individual thoughts and feelings
- Mechanical and Organic Solidarity
 - challenge of modernity = how to achieve 'organic solidarity'
 - Industrial society = more complex causes change and anomie
 - Traditional society based on 'mechanical solidarity' and strong collective conscience