

Parson's Theory of Social Action

Parson's theory of social action is based on his concept of the society. Parsons is known in the field of sociology mostly for his theory of social action.

Action is a process in the actor-situation system which has motivational significance to the individual actor or in the case of collectively, its component individuals.

On the basis of this definition it may be said that the processes of action are related to and influenced by the attainment of the gratification or the avoidance of deprivations of the correlative actor, whatever they concretely be in the light of the relative personal structures that there may be. All social actions proceed from mechanism which is their ultimate source. It does not mean that these actions are solely connected with organism. They are also connected with actor's relations with other persons' social situations and culture.

Systems of social action

Social actions are guided by the following three systems which may also be called as three aspects of the systems of social action

Personality system: This aspect of the system of social action is responsible for the needs for fulfilment of which the man makes effort and performs certain actions. But once man makes efforts he has to meet certain conditions. These situations have definite meaning and they are distinguished by various symbols and symptoms. Various elements of the situation come to have several meanings for ego as signs or symbols which become relevant to the organization of his expectation system.

Cultural system: Once the process of the social action develops the symbols and the signs acquire general meaning. They also develop as a result of systematised system and ultimately when different actors under a particular cultural system perform various social interactions, special situation develops.

Social System: A social system consists in a plurality of individual actor's interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect actors are motivated in terms of tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relations to the situation including each other is defined and motivated in terms of system of culturally structured and shaped symbols.

In Parson's view each of the three main type of social action systems-culture, personality and social systems has a distinctive coordinative role in the action process and therefore has some degree of causal autonomy. Thus personalities organize the total set of learned needs, demands and action choices of individual actors, no two of whom are alike.

Every social system is confronted with 4 functional problems. These problems are those of pattern maintenance, integration, goal attainment and adaptation. Pattern maintenance refers to the need to maintain and reinforce the basic values of the social system and to resolve tensions that emerge from continuous commitment to these values. Integration refers to the allocation of rights and obligations, rewards and facilities to ensure the harmony of relations between members of the social system. Goal attainment involves the necessity of mobilizing actors and resources in organized ways for the attainment of specific goals. Adaptation refers to the need for the production or acquisition of generalized facilities or resources that can be employed in the attainment of various specific goals. Social systems tend to differentiate these problems so as to increase the functional capabilities of the system. Such differentiation whether through the temporal specialization of a structurally undifferentiated unit or through the emergence of two or more structurally distinct units from one undifferentiated unit is held to constitute a major verification of the fourfold functionalist schema. It also provides the framework within which are examined the plural interchanges that occur between structurally differentiated units to provide them with the inputs they require in the performance of their functions and to enable them to dispose of the outputs they produce.