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Parsons and Dahrendorf Two Opposing Concepts of Social Change in the U.S.A.: A Tribute to The Depth of Sociological Theory in the 21 Century (Contemporary Theory)

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ABSTRACT

The last in a series of “The Depth of Sociological Theory”, this effort compares and contrasts Parsons’s concept of Functionalism with Dahrendorf’s Conflict View.

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Introduction: Talcott Parsons' definition of Functionalism, is the parts of society (family, education the economy, so on) are structured to maintain social equilibrium. Indeed, in the event a part of society is dysfunctional, (not maintaining social balance) it manifests further dysfunctionality among all other parts that it embraces. Finally, Functionalism is a voluntaristic social action base in the synthesis of Weber, Durkheim, and Pareto's social theories.

Weber's concepts of Ideal Types, and the Calvinist social/religious movement in the USA toward capitalism, and the protestant work ethic.

Durkheim's work on religion, philosophy, ideas, and morals are seen as products of the human social condition, and **Pareto's** definition of social systems describing the general state of human society.

Ralf Dahrendorf's intellectual roots can be found in Marxist view of the "*Two Class Structure*" found in the Capitalist system, with the need of the "Workers Revolution" in order to remove capitalism. Hence, venturing to develop a new theory which would bring together Structural Functionalism (Consensus Theory) and Marxist Theory.

Sociological Theories of Social Change:

Parsons' AGIL scheme or Pattern Variables consists of four "cells" Adaptation, Goal attainment, Latency, and integration.

The Adaptation Cell contains the instrumental actions and capacities toward the means, selection, and cognition for the adapting of balanced social change (social homeostasis). Parsons further argued that social actors as biological entities (similar to animals in Natural Environment) are always interacting and adapting to the social environment. The *Goal Attainment Cell* contains the expressed symbolization for balanced social action. *The I Cell* the moral evaluation to integration. The L cell contains the normative commitments and (ideal type) norm for balanced social change.

The key to Parsons Theory of social change is the Institutionalization and Generalization of values, norms, and beliefs in the "I" cell. The "L" cell contains action toward system membership, and social solidarity. Thus, allowing for the inclusion and acceptance of new concepts/ideas (i.e., Technology, freedom, individuality), and the so-called outgroup. To clarify, social change seen in an equation, I cell = universality and generalization of values, beliefs, and norms, L cell= inclusion of new concepts (i.e., technology/ideas of freedom, hard work, individuality) and "Newcomers to the U.S.A. = harmonious social change (Gerardi, 2010) ^[1].

Conflict View: Ralf Dahrendorf^[3] argued that social systems are based in hierarchies of social power. These powers are always in conflict and opposing one another for what is conceived to be "scarce resources (i.e., authority, wealth, health care, education employment and housing). Therefore, social conflict must be ever present and can never be eliminated in order to bring about social change in a vast class structure in Post Modern capitalism.

Furthermore, Dahrendorf ventured to develop a new theory which would bring together Structural Functionalism (Consensus Theory) and Marxist Theory. Suggesting that Post Modern capitalism has gone through major changes, resulting in capitalism as a complex system of inequality. Thus, Marx's remedy for evils of capitalism is the "Workers Revolution" is now antiquated. Indeed, only continuous social conflict of action groups over scarce resources, in which "every society, at every point", is subject to the process of social change, not revolution. Indeed, Dahrendorf believed that both Conflict Theory and Functionalism are necessary to bring about social change which benefits the society, thus progress is conflict, and conflict is progress an ever-present feature (Gerardi, 2010) ^[1].

Conclusion: As was outlined in the Conflict Section, Dahrendorf argued that Social Conflict was necessary to create social change through

the cycle of conflict =solution= new conflict = new solutions (so on) =social Change.

Moreover, Dahrendorf disagreed with Marx's historical concept of the two-class system requiring a "worker revolution" to bring about permanent social change. Rather, argued that in post-modern capitalism there are three-class action systems for change:1) Quasi group,2) Interest, and 3) Conflict Groups all preparing(prepared) for social change, thus "conflict is progress and progress is conflict".

Parsons by contrast argued social change must occur naturally through social evaluation leading to a homeostasis social outcome. This effort will suggest that based in the "American Exceptionalism" concept, Parsons^[4] argued that the normative and ethical concepts found in the USA are based in the Calvinist religious/social movement. This movement stressed individuality, egalitarianism, limited state power and control, the importance of hard work (Protestant work ethic), private property ownweship (Marx referred to private property as the all summarized expression of alienate labor), and Civil law absent of religious intervention.

Therefore, based upon the above-mentioned social convictions, this effort will suggest that in a multi-ethnic/racial Republic/democratic society harmonious social change is essential for societal/economic growth and system membership, and social stability.

In "Dialectical Political/Social Discourse in the USA" Gerardi, 2019^[2], the example of Roe V. Ward was used to clarify Parsons' Consensus Theory (*legalized abortion*) in the U.S.A. Roe V. Wade was passed into law 50 years ago, and yet in 2021 this law (50 years later) is still controversial and emotionally charged (the main issue is over the definition of Human life, therefore no consensus).

To summarize, Parsons suggested the need for conscience of the population, in order for balanced social change (social harmony) to occur. By contrast Dahrendorf suggested that modern capitalism has evolved into a complex

organization of interest groups, and not the two class/class/caste system Marx predicted, leading to the "people's revaluation". These interest groups are always in "conflict over what is seen as "scarce resources". Hence, without "Conflict" there would be little or no progress toward equality in postmodern capitalism.

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