

for Parsons's concept of structural functionalism, which attempted to categorize any level of social life at any level of analysis.

## INFLUENCE ON SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Parsons's major works have influenced the development of sociological theory in a number of ways. *The Structure of Social Action* introduced American sociologists to the work of Durkheim and Weber as general theorists, which not only established a common vocabulary for modern sociologists but also provided them with an important frame of reference. Parsons's analysis of convergence in the works of certain European theorists also set a precedent for other sociologists, for example Anthony Giddens, to make links between oppositions such as conflict/consensus, action/structure, and micro/macro in contemporary social theory. *The Social System* helped develop and further a systems analysis, or large-scale macro, approach in sociology in place of one that stressed the importance of individual or micro elements.

The dominance of Parsons's ideas in sociology declined around the mid- to late 1960s. A resurgence of interest in Parsons's work took place, however, in the 1980s. Jeffrey Alexander in the United States and Richard Münch in Germany, for example, attempted to build upon and resolve certain problems implicit in Parsons's original systems theory through their own distinctive works on neofunctionalism. The theory of neofunctionalism stresses the need to bring together action theory and systems theory while also emphasizing the key importance of collective or macro phenomena in establishing the conditions within which social action takes place.

Critics of Parsonian sociology have focused on its failure to engage with practical reality and empirical social problems. Parsons's work has been stigmatized as merely grand theory. Parsons's excessive concern with the power of the social system also led certain critics to argue that he saw human beings as oversocialized conformists whose individual behavior was largely determined by system constraints. Other commentators have suggested that Parsons's emphasis on social integration, conformity, and harmony disregarded inequalities and those material interests, power, and ideological elements that supported them.

SEE ALSO *Parsons, Talcott; Social System; Sociology, Macro-*

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## SOCIOLOGY, PIONEERS IN

SEE *Ibn Khaldūn; Weber, Max*.

## SOCIOLOGY, POLITICAL

In a seminal article from 1969, Giovanni Sartori drew a sharp distinction between the sociology of politics and political sociology. The sociology of politics, Sartori argued, involved a reduction of politics to its social conditions and thus formed a subfield of sociology much like the sociology of religion or of the family. While a comprehensive analysis of political institutions and processes certainly would involve an analysis of social conditions, the sociology of politics was insufficient, Sartori argued, because it lacked political science's understanding of politics in its own terms and as a fundamental activity. Sartori's solution was thus that political sociology should be a genuine hybrid, though his main concern was to defend against "sociologists eager to expand to the detriment of political scientists" (1969). More interesting, however, was Sartori's argument that the reason this synthesis was so important was that the objective role of politics was increasing and hence the necessity of political analysis for larger social theory was as well: "The power of power is growing at a tremendous pace," he wrote. As a result, "the greater the range of politics, the smaller the role of 'objective [read sociological] factors'" (1969).

It is perhaps ironic, then, that virtually the only scholars who regularly use the term *sociology of politics* today are political scientists, when they want to highlight social variables, such as class or family structure. *Political sociology* is indeed usually used to refer to a subfield of sociology, but one that has long since adopted the kind of hybrid approach Sartori thought sociology lacked. Political sociologists thus study an array of political processes in their own terms, in terms of their social conditions, distributions, and effects, and in terms of their

combination of these two sides. Moreover, in light of the robust theories of power that have developed since the late 1960s in virtually all varieties of social theory, political sociology has long since abandoned any clear separation of the social from the political.

The intellectual roots of political sociology reflect its cross-disciplinary reach from a time even before disciplines. The philosophers of classical antiquity, for instance, wrote extensively about the varieties of political possibility, including kingship, aristocracy, and, most important for modern discourse, democracy. But the ancients did not yet have a clear concept of society, such that politics and society could be seen to interpenetrate and covary in interesting ways. This conceptualization awaited the thinkers of the European Enlightenment, who theorized society as distinct from, but shaping and shaped by, political institutions. Thus Montesquieu (1689–1755) proposed a theory emphasizing the role of climate in shaping the basic forms of governance—republican, monarchic, and despotic; behind each of these forms was a particular “spirit,” comprising the distinct manners and morals of people living in these particular conditions. A. R. J. Turgot (1721–1781), Condorcet (1743–1794), and others—perhaps most importantly the great Scottish economist Adam Smith (1723–1790)—advanced historical accounts emphasizing different aspects of social and economic development that corresponded to transformations in basic forms of governance. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in particular introduced the contemporary notion of civil society, and outlined the ways in which the “General Will” of the collectivity might be propagated through “political religion.”

Like their predecessors, social thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the forerunners of contemporary political sociology—variously developed broad explanations by reconstructing the historical process, theorizing its motors, and delineating the features of key contemporary social structures and institutions. While a wide variety of thinkers—including philosophers, economists, politicians, natural scientists, and sociologists—contributed to the development of political and social thought in this period, Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920) have been the most important for the subsequent development of political sociology.

Beyond the political effects of his work, Marx’s legacy for political sociology consists mainly in his approach to “political economy,” which nevertheless in many respects most clearly embodies the reductionistic “sociology of politics” approach Sartori bemoaned. Because Marx saw the “material”—including the means and relations of production—as the key foundation for social forms, including the state, Marxist political sociology has always emphasized the basis of all politics in economic interests (though

the “economic” has sometimes been understood more narrowly, and sometimes more broadly). In the Marxist tradition, the modern state is thus conceived as an expression of the “interests” of the ruling class—the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the Marxist tradition—always more complex than either its denigrators or doctrinaires portrayed it—has evolved important accounts of the complex relations between state and civil society in the capitalist and postindustrial eras, of the state as a powerful player in class conflict, as well as an emphasis on the role of power, both economic and political, in the process of social reproduction.

Usually taken as a contrasting figure, Max Weber also developed a powerful account of social stratification in capitalism. But for Weber, disparities in wealth were not the only driving force behind this stratification; rather, differences in status and political power also came into play, potentially forming complicated groupings not reducible to class. In contrast to orthodox readings of Marx, Weber held that in modern times political institutions have become separated from economic and social structure, and thus developed a powerful analysis of the state as an agent and product of bureaucratic rationalization. Perhaps most famously, Weber developed a typology of political power, distinguishing traditional, bureaucratic, and charismatic legitimation as ideal types. In his pessimistic account of modernization, Weber traced a general trend toward bureaucratic rationality tending toward complete domination—the so-called iron cage—though the move from traditional to bureaucratic legitimation was punctuated, and would likely continue to be, by moments of charismatic consolidation. Over time, however, this charismatic authority also succumbed to the rationalization process, what Weber termed “the routinization of charisma.”

While many-faceted, three legacies in particular define Weber’s influence on political sociology: first, his broad comparative-historical method; second, his multidimensional theory of class, status, and party, which is usually taken as a refutation of Marxist reductionism; and third, his analysis of the bureaucratic operation of the state as part of his overall account of the “rationalization” process. One subsequent development adapting elements of Weber’s theory was the theory of “the circulation of elites” by Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), which emphasized the power exercised by competing small groups with superior knowledge and technical expertise, as well as the trenchant analysis of political parties as organizing forces of these elites by Robert Michels (1876–1936). But these are only two prominent immediate examples, and nearly all political sociology since Weber has manifested various residues of and engagements with his thought.

In the United States during the twentieth century, scholars in political sociology continued the traditions established by Marx and Weber, among other nineteenth-century thinkers, of conceptualizing their subject matter in broad, macrohistorical terms. For the two decades following World War II (1939–1945), political sociology thus reflected the broader division in sociology between *functionalism* and *conflict theory*.

Amalgamating insights developed by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) into the forms of social solidarity with Weber's account of rationalization, as well as more traditional Anglo-Saxon liberal political thought, functionalism created a model of reality in which various social institutions exist in and sustain an orderly interrelated whole. A facet of this whole was a perceived clear analytical distinction between state and society, a perspective expressing the liberal outlook of this school. Political parties, according to this view, were the main institutions connecting state and society. A central aspect of this agenda, particularly as applied by political scientists, was the comparison between liberal-democratic regimes and communist regimes, in terms of multiple interrelated spheres of polity, economy, society, and culture. The functionalist approach to national socialism and communism, for instance, was associated with the theory of "totalitarianism," which was drawn in distinction to Marxist accounts that portrayed "fascism" as an extreme outgrowth of capitalism; totalitarianism theory saw the Nazis and the Soviets as one type, while fascism saw them as distinct. Where fascism theory gave overwhelming precedence to the economic sphere, functionalism saw "totalitarian" states as polycratic, and ascribed their power to homologies among analytically distinct societal subsystems. In less dramatic and politically charged efforts, functionalist research investigated "political culture"—first the norms and values that supported particular political institutions, then later a more interpretive analysis of political symbols and meanings—as well as topics relating to American institutions, such as the bureaucracy, media and information, the military, and political parties.

In contrast to functionalism, conflict theory borrowed basic tenets from Marx and many of its variants are characterized as "Marxist," particularly those that take a critical stand on the connection between social science and political action. Not all conflict theory is Marxist, however, since one can accept on purely analytical grounds that conflict is pervasive in social and political life. Nevertheless, holding conflict to be paramount, conflict theory questioned functionalism's emphasis on order and individual autonomy from politics. Social order, for conflict theorists, was not the result of functional interdependence but, where present, the outcome of competing social forces. Conflict theorists thus charge that the liberal separation between state and society was unfounded, and

pursued an analysis of many different bases of conflict, including race and gender along with class and other factors.

In contrast to the Manichean distinction between conflict and functionalist perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s, the theoretical landscape since then has been more inclusive of diverse theoretical perspectives. Beginning in the 1970s, then, and continuing in the 1980s and 1990s, political sociology developed a variety of thematic orientations, as opposed to building and defending a few grand theoretical positions. Thus new research agendas emerged. One such agenda argued that the state should be the central subject of comparative sociological and political inquiry. Studies in this vein examined the historical formation of the state with renewed comparative focus on states as autonomous actors with their own interests, while other studies put the state's organizational profile under comparative scrutiny.

A somewhat different research agenda was one that had primarily concerned historians earlier: the study of nationalism. While the methods and ideological orientations of studies of nationalism varied, they tended to have a broad historical scope that sought the genesis of what was usually taken to be a modern phenomenon.

A third research agenda regarded questions of economic-political development around the world, including differential patterns of development. Dominated by so-called dependency theory and world-systems theory, this approach produced a wide array of findings that, though typically having a historical outlook, found a place in more standard debates in sociology and comparative politics.

Yet a fourth research agenda gaining momentum during this period was one that focused on social movements and collective action—to many, the quintessential topic for political sociology. Though a key impetus for the spread of this research agenda was the interest in investigating the civil rights movement of the 1960s, research on social movements grew to cover diverse geographical, political, and historical contexts. Finally, a fifth research agenda pertained to the conceptualization and historical evolution of civil society and its related concept of social capital. Again, with considerable divergence in terms of theoretical and political vantage points, this line of inquiry has attracted attention from sociologists, political scientists, and historians, as well as philosophers and political practitioners, particularly since 1989, when political sociologists saw the development of a vibrant public sphere between the individual and the state as the linchpin of democratization after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

Perhaps the most important topic toward which social scientists in general and political sociologists in particular

have turned their attention since the 1980s is globalization. Referring in general to increasing economic, political, and social interconnectedness across the world, globalization puts many of the traditional concerns of political sociology in a new context. In the face of the expansion of global trade and investment capital, political sociologists have become interested in examining the repercussions of unequal global development, global inequality, and, more generally, the social adjustment to economic change. Political sociologists have extended this critical view to developments in the West as well, such as the spread of neoliberal ideology and the resistance to it through various antiglobalization social movements and other forms of protest. Further, political sociology has adjusted its traditional concerns in the face of emerging political global actors. Thus political sociologists are investigating the role of transnational corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and political and economic intergovernmental organizations. One theme that ties such various facets of investigation together is the question of the challenge these emerging actors pose to the maintenance of the state's modern form. In the face of globalization of culture, finally, political sociology revisits traditional concerns regarding identity, values, political loyalty, citizenship, and migration patterns. Under the influence of poststructural and postmodern theory, political sociology has inquired into the complex processes through which the basic units of its analysis are "constructed" as political actors and entities, including through the disciplinary practices of sciences like political sociology itself.

**SEE ALSO** *Civil Society; Class; Dependency Theory; Durkheim, Émile; Elite Theory; Fascism; Functionalism; Hierarchy; Inequality, Political; Marx, Karl; Merton, Robert K.; Michels, Robert; Parsons, Talcott; Political Science; Postmodernism; Poststructuralism; Poulantzas, Nicos; Sociology; State, The; Stratification; Structuralism; Weber, Max; World-System*

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## SOCIOLOGY, POST-PARSONIAN AMERICAN

Talcott Parson's functionalism became the dominant paradigm in American sociology after World War II. Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) envisioned society as a coherent and auto-regulating social system separated from its environment by boundaries. A social system itself consisted of relatively autonomous but also interdependent subsystems responsible for the general functional imperatives of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. Functionalism held that social systems tended toward equilibrium, change being slow and evolutionary, oriented toward increasing complexity and differentiation. Robert Merton had already criticized his mentor's penchant for grand theorizing and assumption of systemic unity and integration in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949). This book distinguished between latent and manifest functions in social systems and stressed the unintended consequences of action. But Merton himself, in many respects, operated within the functionalist paradigm, which lost its hegemony only in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. While functionalism had for at least two decades unified sociology with an overarching theoretical framework, competing paradigms emerged as both a cause and a result of its decline. American sociology became much more heterogeneous, pluralistic, and contentious. The main strands of post-Parsonian sociology are reviewed below. Research that is either theory driven or has theoretical implications for the discipline as a whole are privileged in this survey.

#### CONFLICT AND DOMINATION

A significant group of American sociologists attacked the integration and consensus premises of functionalism and made conflict and domination in society their focus. Inequality and its social reproduction have also become crucial issues. The politically charged environment of the 1960s undergirded this paradigm shift, and many sociologists took their cues from Karl Marx and Max Weber. Eric Olin Wright rejuvenated the classical Marxian theory of exploitation and class by taking into account not only control over the means of production but also control over how things are produced and control over labor power. Other Marxists, such as Michael Burawoy, studied accumulation processes and class conflict on the shop floor. Alvin Gouldner pointed to the ascent of a new social class formed by the cognitive elite. William Julius Wilson elucidated the logics of economic and racial inequality in the United States, and Douglas Massey dissected the segregation patterns in American cities.

In addition to class and race, gender also became a central research area. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) combined psychoanalysis with