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SOCIAL ACTION AND MACRO-FUNCTIONALISM IN TALCOTT PARSONS

TALCOTT PARSONS'TA TOPLUMSAL EYLEM VE MAKRO-İŞLEVSELÇİLİK

ABSTRACT

Talcott Parsons' career spanning nearly half a century can be divided into three phases. These three phases include the social action school, traditional functionalism, and finally general or modern systems theory. In this paper based on the literature review, the social action and macro-functionalism approach of Talcott Parsons, one of the pioneers of functionalism, is mentioned. Also, in the context of the sociology of religion, although Parsons rarely wrote about religion, much of what he wrote was about understanding religion.

Keywords: Social Action, Functionalism, Contemporary Sociology, Religion.

ÖZET

Sosyolojik işlevselciliğin kıvılcımını parlatan ve yirminci yüzyılın en önemli düşünürlerinden Talcott Parsons'un yaklaşık yarım yüzyıla yayılan kariyeri üç evreye ayrılabilir. Bu üç evre toplumsal eylem okulunu, geleneksel işlevciliği ve son olarak genel veya modern sistem kuramını içermektedir. Literatür değerlendirmesine dayanan bu çalışmada işlevselciliğin öncü isimlerinden Talcott Parsons'ın toplumsal eylem ve makro-ışlevselcilik yaklaşımına değinilmiştir. Ayrıca din sosyolojisi bağlamında Parsons, din konusunda nadiren yazmış olsa da onun yazdıklarının çoğu dinin anlaşılması ile ilgilidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Eylem, İşlevselcilik, Çağdaş Sosyoloji, Din.

1. INTRODUCTORY

American sociologist Talcott Parsons was born in Colorado in 1902, the son of a minister in a Protestant household. Parsons graduated in 1924 from Amherst College, studying philosophy and biology. He started at the London School of Economics in 1925, where he studied with Bronislaw Malinowski. Then, a year later, Parsons was accepted by Heidelberg University and met with the ideas of Max Weber, who would greatly influence his way of thinking during this period. Because it is known that Parsons was most influenced by M. Weber in his early works (Parsons, 1947, p. 40; Turner, 2005, p. 304).

Parsons' doctoral thesis on "analysis of capitalism in late German thought" was accepted in 1927. In the same year, he took economics courses at Harvard University and started to teach sociology in 1931 (Slattery, 2011, p. 375). He received the title of professor of sociology in 1944. Subsequently, he assumed the duty of Head of the Social Relations Department between 1946-56. It is known that Parsosuns worked at Harvard University until his retirement (1947).

1.1. Social Action

Parsons was interested in the writings of four different social scientists, the sociologist Emile Durkheim, the economist Alfred Marshall, the sociologist-engineer Vilfrado Paraeto, and the sociologist economist Max Weber (Poloma, 1993, p. 148). At the end of this interest, his work titled The Structure of Social Action was published in 1937. The focus of The Structure of Social Action was rational social action, the institutional contribution of the great master Weber. Social action study is to investigate the impulse or subjective meaning attached to the social movement. Parsons' theory of action points to situational influences that contribute to personal action. He argues that social action is a human behavior that is motivated and guided by the meaning that the actor realizes in the outside world. As a matter of fact, man is something that has been enslaved by matter or commodities, abstracted from his emotions, mechanically moving and directed. It is a passive tool that takes action entirely under the pressure of external factors (Parsons, 1976, pp. 178-179; Velthuis, 1999, p. 632). The actor in question can be an individual, a group, an organization, a region or, a civilization. The realization of the action is dependent on the environment. Parsons argues that social action consists of three systems: the personality system, the culture system, and

the social system. Later he added a fourth system to social action: the biological organism. Like Durkheim, Parsons developed an analogy between society and the living. However, Parsons strengthened the similarity through the terms used in cybernetics. Parsons argues that a system of action, like any other functioning system, is characterized by a constant flow of energy and information. The organism is a subsystem. Although its energy is high, its knowledge is minimal and sub-system. Culture, on the other hand, is at the highest level in terms of knowledge and at the lowest level in terms of energy.

1.2. Macro-Functionalism

While keeping the concept of social action as one of the fundamental structural elements, Parsons gradually shifted his modern attention from social action to the structure and functions of societies. The Social System, published in 1951, was Parsons' first attempt to construct a functionalist theory.

Although Parsons retained the concept of "social action", this concept remained only as a contributing element to social system formation. According to Parsons, the social system aims to reach a balance/scale or stability. In other words, the order is the norm of the system. When any irregularity or break from the norm occurs, the system adjusts itself and tries to return to its normal state. He took this view from the sociologist and engineer Vilfredo Pareto. At this stage, Parsons developed the famous phrase "pattern variables" as elements of categorizing actions or roles in social systems (Parsons, 1940, p. 193). In the quintet system, Toennies' classical dichotomy is derived from community and society;

1. Emotional-Emotional Neutrality: It is the state of acting or remaining emotionally neutral in the relationship of the individual for his emotional pleasures and needs. Husband-wife relationship is emotional, Seller-Customer relationship is emotionally neutral.
2. Individual Orientation-Collective Orientation: In individuality, the interests of the individual are in the foreground, while in the collective, group interests are dominant.
3. Universality-Specificity: In a universal relationship, the actor establishes a relationship with the other person according to a criterion applicable to all. It is not a relationship of freedom to exclude a person because of the ethnic, racial, or sexual group to which they belong.
4. Quality-Performance: The variable of quality refers to an individual's innate prestige or membership within a group. Performance is a person's achievement or skill.
5. Certainty-Diffusion: In a certain relationship, the person establishes a relationship with another person according to the separate and limited situation. The Buy and Sell client relationship is a limited relationship. The family relationship can also be shown as an example of a common relationship.

In the first two phases, Parsons's theory was primarily concerned with a static subject, such as the definition of social structure, rather than the theme of dynamic social change. Continuing the holistic institutional tradition that he started about forty years ago, Parsons tried to instill a breath of change in his previous stable model (Poloma, 1993, p. 153).

1.3. Parsons and Religion

Parsons argues that religion has various functions in society. First of all, religion helps members of society to cope with unforeseen and uncontrollable events such as sudden deaths. Secondly, religion through rituals allows individuals to live with uncertainty. Also, religion makes a statement on issues that would otherwise seem meaningless, such as giving meaning to life, issues of pain and suffering, and evil. In this way, religion calms down movements that would otherwise harm the social order and help maintain social stability (Furseth and Repstad, 2011, pp. 93-94).

Parsons argues that the importance of religion in modern societies will continue. He developed a theory of "love religion". Based on what he observed in American counterculture in the 1970s, he thought that a new and important religious movement would develop. American counterculture was similar to early Christianity in its emphasis on love. This new movement, focused on this world rather than the level of transcendence, idealized a society that is far from economic and political interests and pressures, and even rationally oriented disciplines, as a result of achieving spontaneous solidarity by being governed by the necessity of love.

It can be said that religion has a vital function in Parsons' approach. According to him, religion essentially becomes a prerequisite for the survival of society. At the same time, like Durkheim's religion, it is functional not only for society but also for the individual. Again, according to Parsons, all religions support

the family institution. In this context, the education offered in schools, churches, or mosques also legitimizes the family institution (Özkalp, 1998, p. 97). In addition, Parsons claimed that religion will continue to exist even if it takes on a secular volume. As a matter of fact, according to him, there is no disbelief in modern society and religion will be an important structure in the coming years. Even unbelief is a category of religion and religion will always exist.

2. CONCLUSION

From his early days as a social action theorist making fundamental contributions to functionalism to his final work as a general systems theorist, Parsons' writings represent relentless efforts to produce a unified theory of society. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of his theory, Parsons is a voice heard not only in sociology but also in other behavioral sciences. Parsons' theory stipulates that all living systems must meet four functional imperatives: preservation, integration, goal attainment, and cohesion. A subclass of living systems that include behavioral, psychological, cultural, and social subsystems is a system of action. It is the most self-sufficient social system society that integrates the action system. The security system, social group, and political and economic are defined as the functional prerequisites of society.

Although Parsons argues that the analysis of social structure should precede social change, he affirms that society is dynamic rather than static. Parsons' cybernetic model identifies four interrelated evolutionary processes of change: differentiation, escalation of adaptive ability, inclusion, and value generalization. Each of these processes provides feedback within the other processes and the social structure.

Parsons' theory has undergone constant revisions for nearly forty years. The fundamental breakthrough is the move from functionalism to a general systems theory that has the conditions for social change. However, Parsons' work is also one that is expanding with continuous additions. Although social action (developed in phase 1) and structural functionalism (developed in phase 2) have undergone changes, they have remained intact within the evolutionary and cybernetic model of his recent work.

As a result, as Parsons points out, the social system is established by the mutual actions of individuals in certain positions in accordance with their roles; and when these relations become stereotyped, the social structure takes place. In Parsons, social events are reduced to interpersonal relations. Finally, in Parsons's sociology, socialization, internalization, placing individuals in a task and social positions (allocation), different roles, behavior patterns, social groups, settlements, etc. It focuses on themes such as differentiation, personality, and cultural and social systems.

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