

TALCOTT PARSONS, THE THEORY OF SOCIAL ACTION AND THE THEORY OF RATIONAL CHOICE

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Abstract

The ancient debate about the role of action theory in foundation of the rational choice theory is current. Many sociologists continue to compare these two theories with a lot of arguments. In fact we can conclude that the work of T. Parsons remain in the core of sociological thinking even if another theories are now actual or the critics are numerous. In this article we present the main ideas of this important theoretical confrontation and we open possible ways of future debates.

Keywords: *T. Parsons, action theory, rational choice*

Preliminary consideration of Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory has the roots in the utilitarian theories who claims the rational actions of human beings based on continuous calculus of the opportunities and the costs and of course on the maximization of utilities and gains. In this case we have an important question: how is possible the existence of the social systems and social relations in general. Many sociologists have different answers to these questions and these issues have separated two great groups of annalists: *pro* and *anti* utilitarian point of view in the social sciences. For the sociologists like J. Coleman or J. Elster the utilitarian point of view can explain the human relation, the social structure etc. by an interesting reduction to individual action. They were able to impose the main issues of the utilitarian theories (J. H. Turner, 1991; 354):

1. Humans are purposive and goal oriented
2. Humans have sets of hierarchically ordered preferences, or utilities.
3. In choosing lines of behavior, humans make rational calculations with respect to:
 - the utility of alternative lines of conduct with reference to the preference hierarchy
 - the costs of each alternative in terms of utilities foregone
 - the best way to maximize utility.
4. Emergent social phenomena -- social structures, collective decisions, and collective behavior -- are ultimately the result of rational choices made by utility-maximizing individuals.

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5. Emergent social phenomena that arise from rational choices constitute a set of parameters for subsequent rational choices of individuals in the sense that they determine:
 - a. the distribution of resources among individuals
 - b. the distribution of opportunities for various lines of behavior
 - c. the distribution and nature of norms and obligations in a situation.

Sociologists from this group of theories have formulated a lot of explanations but for us are important to emphasize that these studies goes from the theory of action in general and where one of the important contribution is made by T. Parsons. In this article we try to explain these theory the relations of these theory with the rational choice theory and related critics.

T. Parsons and the foundation of action theory

T. Parsons was born in 1902 of a father who was a congregational minister (a fervent religious practitioner and a leftist), which marked the future development of his son. At Amherst College in New York he turned towards social sciences (1924), although he had initially oriented for a career as a doctor. He spent the following two years in London and Heidelberg. His interest in M. Weber's work dates from this period and influenced the theories of the American sociologist (starting first of all from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which T. Parsons had already translated in English in 1930). After returning to the U.S., T. Parsons teaches economy at Harvard and joins in 1931 the Sociology Department founded in the same year and chaired by P. Sorokin. During this period he is influenced by the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead from which he retains the idea of "analytical realism" to which he opposes the idea of "empirical realism" (supported by A. Schutz as an incentive for the greater closeness to "life-world") [Sciulli, 2001]. Nevertheless, T. Parsons' basic approach is a fundamentally theoretical one, opposed to the empirical approach that was in full swing in the U.S.A. This tendency can be observed in all the important works of the author, although illustrative pursuits do exist. As a matter of fact, T. Parsons was not against empirical research, but he wanted to demonstrate that good practice is first of all good theory and that empirical research is ultimately a *reconstruction of reality* that resorts anyway to theoretical bases. In 1944 T. Parsons becomes a professor within the same department and there follows a period during which his students are future resonant names of social research (H. Garfinkel, R. F. Bales, etc.) who joined his previous students (R. K. Merton, D. Kingsley).

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While it is hard to find a leading thread of the entire work of T. Parsons or if this work is controversial (Turner, 1991), one can however discern three distinct stages (Durand, Weil, 1989):

- the beginning period until 1937 (the year when *The Structure of Social Action* was published)
- the period until 1957, when the American sociologist built *the general theory of action* and *the theory of the social system*
- the period after 1957, when T. Parsons analyzed the overlaps between the structural functionalist sociological theory and other socio-humanistic sciences.

In what concerns the first stage, one must mention that during this period T. Parsons clarifies in many articles or translations the influences from European sociology. Thus, in 1928 he wrote several articles regarding authors such as W. Sombart, A. Marshall, V. Pareto, M. Weber etc., the general theme of which was related to the elements of sociology identified in economic thought. All these first essays contributed to the publication of the volume in 1937, as well as, later, of the volume *Economy and Society* (Parsons T, Smelser N. J., 1956). In a review of T. Parsons' interests during that period, N. J. Smelser (2005) observed in this regard:

- the critique of formalism, but also of rationalism involved in economic analysis
- the rejection of unilateral thought on economy (K. Marx, W. Sombart) and the adoption of a multipolar vision (M. Weber).
- the rejection of economic rationality as psychological postulate
- the argumentation for the infusion of the economic life with *value* elements and *normative* elements
- the idea that capitalism has its origin in a complex system of values and norms, retaining at the same time its internal autonomy and logic (although it is a system itself)
- the concept of system becoming ever more important (and it will actually prove to be crucial in the entire work of T. Parsons)!

All these ideas developed gradually until the abovementioned volume published in 1957, although the training of T. Parsons as an economist was questionable (see N. J. Smelser, 1990).

The first resounding work of T. Parsons was *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) which was subsequently re-edited several times. In the preface of the reprint in 1968 the author pointed out the fact that the work had a theoretical character. Reviewing the thought systems of four important authors (A. Marshall, V. Pareto, E. Durkheim and M. Weber) corroborated with other contributions, T. Parsons aimed at characterizing a major movement of theoretical thought, a new pathway, different from utilitarian positivism, as well as from idealism. In all the four authors T. Parsons observed the double sociological and economic orientation (implicit and explicit) present in their works.

The accent that T. Parsons places on *theory* also derives from the importance the author attributes to it. For the great sociologist, theory is “the independent variable in the development of science” (*op. cit.* 6), an “integrated system” of general, logically related, propositions, with direct reference to empirical facts or to relations between them (if this did not happen, T. Parsons states, the respective propositions do not have a scientific character!).

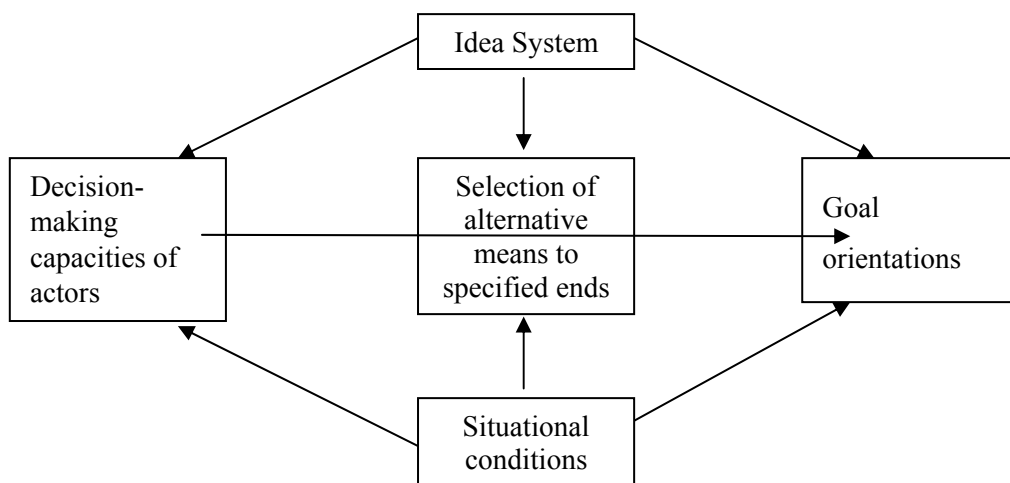
Returning to the work *The Structure of Social Action*, as the title shows, the author tends to situate the abovementioned authors in a general theory of action and, more precisely, in a *positivist theory* of action built as a theoretical system. The starting point in a theory of action is the *unit-act* (unit of action system), which, without having a concrete, spatial designation, serves in this case as a frame of reference. A *unit-act* or, in short, an *act* involves the following (*op. cit.*, p. 44):

- a) an agent (actor);
- b) an end, a state towards which the process of the action is oriented,
- c) a “situation” (whose development differs from the direction towards which the action itself is oriented). The situation comprises a sum of elements over which the actor has or does not have control.

The acts have a series of characteristics which T. Parsons itemizes: they are normatively oriented (in the teleological sense of the actor, and not of the observer); they are processes that are firstly temporal, and only secondly, spatial; they can be burdened by the agent’s choice errors; they are related to an *individual actor* hence the involvement of subjectivity broadly speaking (T. Parsons discriminates between *objectivity* – as the point of view of the scientific observer of the action and *subjectivity* – as the point of view of the actor); these should not be mistaken for the simple particles in the physical or biological environment.

In his search of the roots of the actionalist way of thinking, T. Parsons pauses at the observation that in any language the verb “to do” is the expression thereof. Starting from here, the American sociologist explains the evolution in time of the utilitarian way of thinking rooted in the individualism inspired by Christianity, Greek philosophy, etc. The accent put on individualism also explains the impression of atomistic division of action in general, more precisely, of the system of action. Obviously, once one can identify actors that pursue common goals, one will also witness a natural grouping of unit-acts. Returning to the utilitarian vision of action, while also emphasizing here the role of modern science, T. Parsons insists on an important characteristic: the rationality of action. To this end, Parsons refers to “the choice of means best adapted to its ends”. Specifically “action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science” (*op. cit.*; p.58).

Furthermore, in a schematization of this definition, an American sociologist, J. H. Turner (1988, 8), suggests a significant representation:



T. Parsons then adds to the utilitarian point of view the positivist and the empirical points of view. The aim of the great American sociologist is to create a theoretical framework at the highest level of generality: the general system of the action regards the human factor, but after all, the theoretical framework is at a much higher level of generality and abstraction. The social actor is thus situated in a physical environment, which in its turn is subjected to a general system of action. Social action is concluded to be just a particular case of the general system of action, essentially retaining the *structuring* characteristics. As mentioned before, the unit-acts as the simplest elements of action in general tend to structure or order themselves to form the foundation of the system. These basic particles tend to group according to the position and the roles of the respective actors: one can conclude that a multitude of unit-acts can be grouped, for example, to constitute the social roles, whether talking about a single subject or a group. After all, human actions as a whole can be systematically analyzed at different levels of generality. For example, one can identify a series of unit-acts that illustrate the activity of a teacher. However, all his/her actions will constitute a sub-system of a greater system: the school. This institution in its turns becomes a sub-system of the system of social integration etc. Thus, it is obvious that human actions can be regarded through a systemic grid. T. Parsons uses in this case a maximum degree of generality: *the general system of action* with its specific sub-system, *the system of social action*.

This entire theoretical foundation has epistemological and methodological bases connected to the relation between the scientific notion and the studied reality (Parsons, 1968; 728). If to this end, Parsons rejects the exaggerations of empiricism –

he identified three forms of empiricism! - he accepts however the analytical point of view to outline the action frames of reference. The notion of *frame* does not refer to a set of data of an empirical problem, or to components of an actual system of action, but it should be understood as the space-time binomial in the physics theory, and for the sociologist, this help in the formulation of a coherent descriptive schema. For example (Parsons, 1968; 735) the social analyst who studies a suicide by deliberate jump off a bridge will identify: a) an actual end (death by jumping off – which the social actor is aware of); b) the means through which the action is completed (the jump); c) the conditions of the action (from the height of the bridge to the psychological effects of the impact etc.). These elements are important for the social analyst who, according to the frame of reference will deduce additional information and will determine the relevant facts for the analysis.

An important question in the examination in *The Structure of Social Action* is how is a theory of action determined from the convergence of the four great classics of socio-economic theories? T. Parsons summarizes this examination which had as a starting point the characterization of the rationality of action (actually, of *voluntary* action). In short, the conclusions of the four authors were as follows (Parsons, 1968; 697-726):

a) A. Marshall – important to be studied from the point of view of the utility theory, of marginal utility (closely related to the means-ends schema, to the rational choice, etc.). But from a sociological point of view, that theory proves to be rigid, as economic life can have other consequences besides *satisfaction*, such as personal or social development. The novelty of A. Marshall's theory referred to the fact that the adaptation of means to ends in this utilitarian vision cannot be separated from the internalization of a system of values, an idea that goes back to M. Weber's thought. Moreover, let us mention that A. Marshall emphasized the role of continuous development in rationality and in the empirical knowledge of the human activities. To this end, T. Parsons underlines the step forward made by the British economist in comparison to the utility theory or the radical positivism.

b). V. Pareto (1917) indicated that actions in general can be classified according to several types of dichotomies:

- logical actions/non-logical actions (the logical ones are, according to Pareto, only the technological actions, the economical actions and some types of cultural creation, while the majority of non-logical actions deviate from the efficient discourse of the former ones)

- objective actions/subjective actions (the objectivity is conferred by the compliance with the scientific norms, while subjectivity involves ends, preferences and personal goals. It does not necessarily follow that the subjective actions are without rationality).

- illogical actions/non-logical actions (illogical and non-logical are not equivalent terms: in a non-logical action, rationality is still present; in the illogical actions there is no rationality).

- logical actions/non-logical actions (the improved version). According to V. Pareto, human action has three components: actor, ends and means, and if the means available to the social actor are converted into operations and the pursued goal coincides with the end result, the action is logical, and if not, the action is non-logical. The itemization above made V. Pareto think that the non-logical actions are predominant and this is why social research should focus on them. During the action, the social actor is influenced by personal experiences, feelings, etc. (all these are called residues, although they are not confused with them), but also by a tendency to justify one's choices, even if they are non-logical, by invoking an authority, an ideology, etc. (called derivations). Human actions are determined, first of all, by residues, which are of several types: the *sociality* residue (predisposition for association), the *integrity* residue (each person's tendency to delineate and keep one's possessions), the *exteriority* residue (the need to be acknowledged by the others), the *sexuality* residue, the *persistence of aggregates* residue (the tendency to keep the status-quo and to reject the unknown), the *instinct for combinations* residue (the need for exchanges and the novelty of experience). These residues are grouped by Pareto into secondary (the first four) and primary (the last two are those the "state of society" depends on). According to the prevalence of a certain residue, there can be conceived a typology of societies, but also of the social agents.

For T. Parsons, V. Pareto's theory clarifies what could be called "the voluntarist theory of action" and this comes closest to the vision of the American sociologist because is emphasized that a lot of social actions are not economic or utilitarian.

Although V. Pareto's vision is similar to A. Marshall's (the logical actions are those in the economic field), it still has a pronounced sociological character (without being limited to the problem of utility).

c). E. Durkheim also poses the problem of individual actions, but in a specific way (states T. Parsons), parting from economic thought. "In political economy, as in ethics, the role of scientific investigation is extremely limited" emphasized the great French sociologist (Durkheim, 2002; 60). He placed the analysis of social acts in the exterior of the individual, because they are coercive and they determine the behaviors and the human actions. The latter are *ways to do*, "capable of exercising over the individual an external coercion" (Durkheim, 2002; 48). Society is a *sui generis* reality and it imposes itself through collective representations (collective consciousness) although the individual human actions cannot be reduced only to subjective, hereditary factors etc. However, T. Parsons tries to identify the actionalist goal of the actor as it appears in E. Durkheim and mentions the meaning of moral obligation, the fear of collective sanctions (repressive or restitutory). While E. Durkheim did not speak in terms of utility theory, for Parsons, however, the societal/moral values constitute, in the end, even as constraints, an integrator system that justifies the social actions. In other words, the means-ends schema involved in the explanation of the social action, although different from that of V. Pareto, is also present in E. Durkheim, but from a different

perspective, that of the social action mediated by the social environment through *institutions* that define society as a reality sui generis, as *moral reality*. This method of analysis can also be found in his reference to the *division of social labor* (which is not only a source of economic progress, but also of social solidarity), to *anomie* (clarified by E. Durkheim first of all for the economic environment) and to *suicide* (as the result of an imbalance between goals and the available means).

d) Unlike E. Durkheim, in M. Weber (1971; 343) the definition of action is subjective: “an activity within the meaning of a meaningfully comprehensible orientation should not be considered as such unless it takes the form of the behavior a person or of several singular persons”. For M. Weber an individual’s *activity* is *social* insofar as it modifies or it takes into account the activity of another individual. “Not every type of contact of human beings – says Weber – has a social character, this is rather confined to cases where the actor’s behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others” (1971; 52). The social actions can be determined by:

a) the *instrumental* rationality (“zweckrational”) that ensures the attainment of one’s own rationally pursued goals

b) the *value* rationality (“wertrational”) determined by the belief in intrinsic value (of some ethical, aesthetical, religious order, etc.) of a determined behaviour, independently of its result

c) the *affective* manner (“affektuel”) determined by present passions and feelings

d) the *traditional* manner (“traditional”) determined by customs and usages.

The great German sociologist showed that the person who acts according to instrumental rationality cannot be influenced by affections (emotions), nor by tradition and can be characterized by the “rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends” (1971; p. 57).

In its turn, the value rationality can still be influenced by irrationality “the more the value to which action is oriented is elevated to the status of absolute value”.

Activities oriented strictly by tradition, although they are at the limit of, and often beyond what is called “meaningfully oriented action”, are familiar daily activities that betray a more or less variable attachment to customs and this is exactly why, for example, mentality, the “culture” person in charge can have a major influence on the decisional process. The affectively oriented activities also situated situate at the limit or beyond the “meaningfully oriented action” can be transformed by *sublimation* into *value* oriented actions or even *goal* oriented actions.

Therefore, in Weber’s text there is a certain relativity of discourse in his intention to distinguish real actions from the “pure types” of actions useful in the sociological analysis. Weber himself says that absolute *instrumental* finality is only a limit, theoretical case.

T. Parsons thinks that Weber's methodology is similar to that of Durkheim, especially when one talks of the means-ends schema applied on a theoretical religious background.

The action theory from micro to macro level

Turning from the micro- to the macro-social level, T. Parsons' vision can be said to be that of social action as a system, a system that has to meet three conditions: structural conditions (that determine the organisation and the stability of the system through the influence of the *pattern variables*), functional conditions (regarding the achievement of the functions of the system, which are four in number: the adaptation function, the goal attainment function, the integration function and the latency function for maintaining the cultural model) and conditions of change (related to the evolution of the system). There follows a schematic presentation of these determinations summarized according to G. Rocher (1972; 49):

<i>Conditions of existence for a certain system:</i>	<i>Conditions of existence for the system of social action:</i>
Structure (organization)	Normative models Pattern variables
Function (to satisfy needs that are strictly necessary to the existence of the system)	Functional dimensions Functional requirements
Systemic processes (related to the nature of the system)	Activities, changes, evolutions subjected to some regularities

If one stops at the first level of analysis (the structural one), one can see that the system of social action must have the so-called pattern variables, which are actually five dichotomous "choice dilemmas" (they provide a framework for the development of any social action). According with Parsons (1951a, 77) these are:

1. <i>Affectivity</i> - e.g. friendship	<i>Affective neutrality</i> - e.g. professional relationships
2. <i>Self orientation</i> - singular action	<i>Collective orientation</i> - action that regards solidarity
3. <i>Universalism</i> - general criteria of evaluation	<i>Particularism</i> - specific criteria of evaluation
4. <i>Achievement</i> - evaluate according to <i>what is</i> a physical/social object	<i>Ascription</i> - evaluate according to <i>what does/produce</i> a physical/social object
5. <i>Specificity</i> - specific social relationships -e.g. student-teacher relationship	<i>Diffuseness</i> - "total" social relationships

All these action “dilemmas” are dichotomous and they are included in a long tradition of social models of this type (see for example the dichotomy community/society). In action, in a situation, any actor chooses one of each of the five alternatives (in other writings were four alternatives!).

For example, with reference to the role and the social status of a doctor, T. Parsons (1951, 428) considered that this profession is characterized by an appreciation of goal achievement – here, elimination of disease – through universalism, specificity and affective neutrality. But, unlike other professions, this is collective oriented, not *self* oriented. Very similar, for example, is the role of a banker: his interaction with a client is specific, universalist, justified by performance (what he *does* and not who the client *is*). The social action of a banker will be affectively neuter and self oriented.

All these pattern variables constitute a frame of reference for any social action at four different levels:

- the concrete level (of immediate action)
- the personality level (reflected in the development of choice skills and in the orientation values)
- the collectivity level (the specification of the rights and duties inherent in the social roles imply pattern variables choices)
- the cultural level (the dichotomous choices correspond to a set of values that guide any practical activity).

Also, the five pattern variables are, according to T. Parsons, instruments for the classification of need-dispositions: *focused allocations of the personality system* and role-expectations: *focused allocations of the social system*.

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Parsons’ basic idea is that a social action is at the same time a *whole*, with its component parts, but also an *element* of a greater totality, a sub-system of the system of social action in general.

In reference to the relation social actor - social system, it should be mentioned that, for Parsons, this relation is influenced by the prevalence of norms, values and functional imperatives, and this is why human action must comply with standards of the given system (1951; 121), standards that can be easily identified through the analysis of the notions of *status* (the position of a social actor within the system) and *role* (what the actor does in relation with other actors). As these attributes are objectified and they actually belong to the system, while the individual finds himself restricted by the normative codes, sometimes it was concluded that the actor does not act, but *is acted* upon. There can also appear dysfunctional actions, but Parsons considered that these were abnormal, and the system acts automatically to re-establish the functional balance and to eliminate what is considered “irrational” or “pathological”.

The theory of social action, his critiques and the theory of rational choice

If the first important work of Parsons began with the rhetorical question: “Who now reads H. Spencer?” the same can be said today about T. Parsons. The irony of this question is arguable, as shown by B.S. Turner (1991): it would be more correct to ask ourselves “why read Parsons?” and B.S. Turner also proved that without this reading it would be difficult to understand the main trends in modern sociological thought (whether they are for or against the American sociologist); secondly, the work of T. Parsons has the quality of having connections with other social sciences, and thirdly, it makes the connection between theoretical and empirical sociology. We can add the fact of Parsons like precursor of many social theories (maybe if these theories are in fact „middle range theories” after R. K. Merton): one of these is the theory of rational choice.

As we already saw, many times T. Parsons speak about the relation means-ends and the rationality of social action even if he reject the reductionism of the economic interpretation. But is this frame of thinking enough?

One of the important points of view we recognize in an article made by R. Boudon (1989) about the “actionist sociology”: to preserve but to exceed the theory of Parsons. After Boudon, in the case of Parsons is important to explicit the notions like utilitarianism, rationality etc. in confrontation with the theories of Spencer, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber. Because of new trends of thought based on *models*, on distinction between *formal* and *syntactic definitions* we can now resolve the apparent discrepancy of the classical theorists. But, for Boudon, very important is the fact that Parsons rejected the utilitarianism for the social sciences (because that is the field of the economic thought even if Parsons reject Spencer and accept Marshall!) and suggested that the theory of *collective conscience* (E. Durkheim) can explain the *aims* of the social actors. Boudon is critical with the solution of Parsons and claim that actually the concept of E. Durkheim is utilitarian in its essence. In conclusion, for Boudon, Parsons did not succeed to integrate the thoughts of the three great sociologists (Boudon, 1997; 16) because he can consider the utilitarian model like a model between others. But very important is the fact that the *sense* of the social action is one the central point of meditation in the thought of Weber, Pareto and Parsons himself.

For Boudon the social action is rational if we can identify the reasons that are at the origin of it. But, unfortunately, says Boudon, Parsons don’t insist here and the model of social action can’t explain these *reasons* of social action. For Parsons these reasons/motives are rather non/rational that rational and there be in concordance with societal norms and values. If the role of non-rational is accepted, Parsons included for example the importance of emotions in social action. J. S. Fish (2004) has emphasis the role of emotions in the parsonian theory of action mainly related to the efficiency of internalized norms and derived from the durkheimian earlier lectures. Parsons will return at the problems of emotion

(1951a; 10) this time with the concepts of *affect* and *cathexis* (object oriented affect) like important elements of social action. Unfortunately Parsons doesn't insist with this subject for a clarification of the role of emotions in social actions even if we consider them like residual categories. Another point of discussion is the role of *ideas* in social action (T. Parsons, 1938).

Very important is the fact that T. Parsons departed of its initial program. J. Coleman (1986) considered that the great sociologist acted in the direction of functionalism even if American sociology moved to individual-behavioristic direction. Many other sociologists after T. Parsons, observed Colemans, derived them application from micro level to macro level or to other directions (is the case of G. Homans, R. K. Merton etc.). In the personal vision of J. Coleman all these sociologists abandoned the core of actionalism: the purposive action of individuals. By opposite the social action at the macro level can be better understood with common or constitutional law. Conversely Coleman says that the theory of action in terms of T. Parsons was less adapted to the new social American realities (who were very influential for the new sociological research techniques and the elaboration of a new sociological theory!). The subject of this critique is the *functionalism* what is theoretically immobile at the macro level of sociological explanation.

If we review the introduction of this article we can conclude that the sociological vision of T. Parsons was attached to the theory of rational choice just for the beginning because after that the American sociologist has changed the interest for systemic sociology. But the fact that he emphasis the role of purposive action remains very important. In fact, says M. M. Marini (1992; 21) the models of purposive action is most general and closed related with the theory of rational choice (who came from economics), theory of social exchange (from sociology) and the theory of judgment (from social psychology). On the other side -with M.M. Marini and others- we can observe that the explanation of purposive action by the expected utility/economic rationality raises other problems: the social actors can't knows all the possibility to choice the best way to act, they can have at most *bounded rationality* (H. Simon) or *incremental thinking* (Ch. Lindblom), adversity to risk taking etc. In conclusion we can detect a frame of study of analysis who confirms that T. Parsons have right: purposive action has a utilitarian background but we can't eliminate the role of social norms, values or emotions! This discussion can be extent to the strengths of the rational choice theory (apud D. Sciulli, 1992; 161 and after):

- individual actors are dedicated to maximizing their own private wealth
- actor's subjective interests or desired ends are ultimately "sovereign"
- any society's existing distribution of rights and duties is also given or random
- actor's normatively unfettered efforts to maximize their own private wealth are more likely to result in collective prosperity or social wealth

- actor's relatively unfettered pursuit of their own preferences is more likely to yield and sustain benign direction of social change

Related with these strengths, observed D. Sciulli (1992;162), one of the problem emphasized by T. Parsons where 'how or why actors arrive at there preferences' .

In conclusion the connections between action theory and rational choice theory remain very complex and the debate is, of course, unfinished, and we will try to come back in the future at this point of discussion with a second part of this article.

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