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SCIENCE AND ACTION IN THE WORK OF
TALCOTT PARSONS 1928-50

TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME TWO

Thesis dissertation submitted to the
University of Durham, Department of
Sociology, for the degree of Ph.D.

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IV. Science and Theoretical Systems 1938-50

A. Introduction to Chapters IV and V.

The subject matter of this and the following chapter is the series of essays, reviews and miscellanea published by Parsons between 1938 and 1950. These are concerned with a wide range of topics but in broad terms they are characterised by an attempt to theoretically define sociology as a science of social institutions and to forge links between sociology and psychology. In matters of methodology these theoretical concerns are paralleled by Parsons' adoption and refinement of a 'structural-functional' approach to the study of social systems. As such these essays and preoccupations represent a considerable shift in Parsons' work as compared to The Structure of Social Action and its predecessors. This is recognized by Parsons himself in his two overviews of this period ((1949a) [1949b]). He refers to the material collected in the first edition of Essays in Sociological Theory as '... a major reorientation of perspective as compared with The Structure of Social Action' (1949a:viii). However in these two overall surveys Parsons' own emphasis is on an accumulative evolution of his work from the foundations laid in his first major work.

Some interpreters of Parsons have disagreed with this self-understanding, seeing a major change in the foundations of Parsons' theory occurring in the period covered here. Indeed it is to some extent now a commonplace to refer to the pre-war

and post-war Parsons as representing different types of, or approaches to, sociological theory. In simple terms, the above mentioned interpretations tend to work in terms of dichotomous contrasts such as between voluntarism and behaviourism, (Scott: 1969), social actionism and functional imperativism, (Wallace: 1969), social behaviourism and macro-functionalism (Martindale: 1963). I will present a rather different approach which will essentially attempt to weld these various differentiated aspects of Parsons' thinking into a coherent whole. It will be claimed that, in important respects, Parsons' work in the 1940's can be seen as a continuation of the underlying themes of a science of action.

In what follows Parsons' major theoretical concerns, the concepts of institution and motivation, will be discussed with reference to the problems of subjectivity, normative determinism and value. Further, it will be argued that these problems are interwoven with the formal method of structural-functional analysis and that quite what that method amounts to can be illuminated by linking it to these problems; problems with which Parsons has long been concerned. In other words Parsons' explicit methodology of structural-functionalism and his major theoretical preoccupations will be interpreted in the light of perennial problems in attempts to construct a science of action. But whilst the problems may be perennial their mode of formulation is variable. Just what the 'subjectivity' of action, the 'determination' of action by normative structures and the problem of 'value' mean to Parsons must be carefully

investigated. Chapter III has shown how Parsons defines these problems within the perspectives set by analytical science and voluntarism. This theme will be followed through here. Again the discussion will proceed in two stages. Chapter IV attempts to outline the major characteristics of scientific knowledge as Parsons understands it. In this period Parsons attention is focused on the problems of constructing a system of theory. It is as a solution to this question that Parsons adopts structural-functionalism. Chapter V focuses on the specific methodological problems of a science of action. This chapter will investigate the use of structural-functionalism in a sociology focusing on social institutions and incorporating motivational categories from psychology. It will attempt to show the continuation of Parsons' voluntaristic/analytic understanding of subjectivity, normative determinism and the problem of value. That is, this chapter will put forward the case that the 'solutions' to the methodological problems of a science of action established by Parsons in The Structure of Social Action continue to guide his work in the 1940's.

B. The importance of 'general analytical theory' in science.

Throughout the work being considered here Parsons continues to emphasise the importance of 'theory' in science. This comes across in a variety of contexts. In a review (1) of sociology in the wartime period Parsons concludes with the opinion that sociology is a field 'pregnant with new possibilities',

a field in which '... if great achievements are to be made, much additional work of the highest order will be needed' (1948:256). In this situation 'three great problematic areas seem most important' (1948:256): clarifying the relationship between sociology and neighbouring disciplines, developing research techniques and thirdly, 'the problem of theoretical synthesis'. With respect to the latter, Parsons writes that 'much progress has been made ... But we cannot claim even to have approached the goal - the main task lies ahead'. (1948:257) To pursue this task Parsons pleads for support, financial and evaluative, for research in 'fundamental theory' (1947a:244) arguing that the 'practical usefulness' of sociology will develop only in proportion to its attainment of '... stature as a science, with a highly generalized and integrated body of fundamental knowledge' [1950a:368]. Indeed Parsons claims: 'It is scarcely too much to say that the most important single index of the state of maturity of a science is the state of its systematic theory' [1945a:213]. This judgement is supported by the role of theory in the history of science:

'The history of science testifies eloquently to the fundamental importance of the state of its theory to any scientific field.

Theory is only one of several ingredients which must go into the total brew, but for progress beyond certain levels it is an indispensable one' [1950a:348].

This topic will be returned to in a later section, for the moment mention can be made of Parsons' evaluation of the place of theory in Weber's intellectual achievements: 'This intellectual achievement in no small measure owes its possibility to the fact that its author, in a certain sense against his own will, devoted himself to the problems of systematic theory in his field' [1941a:85].

Basically, however, Parsons stresses theory in science because it is inevitably present, all science is characterised by an explicit or implicit theoretical scheme.

'Every important tradition of scientific thought involves a broad framework of theoretical propositions at any given stage of its development. Generally speaking, differences will be found only in the degree to which this framework is logically integrated and to which it is explicitly and self-consciously acknowledged and analyzed' [1944:197].

The last words of the passage quoted are relevant here. For it is when theory is implicit and unacknowledged that fundamental mistakes are made and dangers appear. This is the reason for explicit theory being important given the inevitability of theory. The mistake and the danger to Parsons is empiricism (see below) and it is in his polemics against this position that the importance of theory stemming from its inevitability is most strongly asserted.

'If this be true, the alternative for the scientist in the social or any other field is not between theorizing and not theorizing, but as between theorizing explicitly with a clear conscience of what he is doing with the greater opportunity that gives of avoiding the many subtle pitfalls of fallacy, and following the policy of the ostrich, pretending not to theorize and thus leaving one's theory implicit and uncriticised, thus almost certainly full of errors' (1938a:15).

The pervasive empiricism of contemporary social science has, however, a brighter side to Parsons. For once the implicit theory of empiricist science is made explicit, developed and refined, he feels that the social sciences have much more of a body of theory than is generally appreciated.

'Finally, it may be asked, have the social sciences outside of economics any analytical theory at all to use? Must we remain empiricists through sheer lack of anything else to turn to? I do not think so. I believe there is far more analytical theory in use than many of us realize. We have been, like Moliere's hero, speaking prose all our lives without knowing it' (1938a:20).

Here care must be taken to state just what Parsons means by 'theory'. So far the term has been used in an undefined way. Yet it must be borne in mind that: 'Theory' is a term which covers a wide variety of different things which have in common only the element of generalized conceptualization' [1945a: 212]. At several points Parsons indicates the breadth of the term theory in this unspecific sense of general conceptualization. He distinguishes three classes of '... conceptual elements which either go to make up, or have become associated with, what are generally called theoretical structures in science, particularly in social science' (1938a:16). These are philosophical underpinnings, 'broad empirical generalizations' and generalized analytical theory (1937a:16-20). In another essay he distinguishes 'five principal types or fields of theoretical development' [1950a:351]: general theory, the theory of motivation, comparative theory, middle-range theory (2) and methodology. From this variety it is clear that Parsons emphasises 'general', 'general analytical' or 'systematic' theory and it is this which is 'of fundamental importance to any science' (1948b:157). Whilst Parsons does not deny the role of other aspects of theory (3) he does warn at one point: 'The trouble with sociology has not been that it has had too much theory but that it has been plagued with the wrong kinds and what it has had of the right has been insufficiently developed and used to meet the need' [1945a:224]. In introducing one of his most significant essays of this period [1945a] Parsons says:

'The theory of concern to the present paper in the first place constitutes a "system" and thereby differs from discrete "theories", that is, particular generalizations about particular phenomena or classes of them. A theoretical system in the present sense is a body of logically interdependent generalized concepts of empirical reference' [1945a:212].

The type of theory that Parsons stresses then is a system of general concepts of empirical reference, that is, the same definition of theory as in The Structure of Social Action. This definition reoccurs at several points ((1938a:18), [1940a:71], [1942a:710]). In discussing theory in The Structure of Social Action I proceeded by examining each of the components of the definition. This will not be done here, it would be repetitive and Parsons says next to nothing on the notion of 'general concept' which was central to the earlier discussion. Rather this discussion will proceed by suggesting some of the reasons why Parsons stresses general analytical theory which will lead into what to him is the crucial methodological problem: the nature of a theoretical system.

C. Why general analytical theory is important.

Three reasons can be offered for why Parsons places such stress on general analytical theory: 1. The place of that form of theory in the physical sciences and the unity of science. 2. Parsons' theory of the development of science and the place of general analytical theory in that process. 3. Parsons' understanding of the methodological problems facing science and the rationale those problems provide for general analytical theory. These reasons will be discussed in turn.

1. The place of general analytical theory in the physical sciences.

At one point Parsons expresses the opinion that generalized analytical theory is 'the most important kind of conceptualization in the physical sciences' (1938a:18). Given this and two further propositions, the success of the physical sciences and the unity of science, the importance of general analytical theory in social science follows. These two further propositions are clearly held by Parsons. Indeed generalized dynamic analysis is described as 'the great achievement of the systems cited from the history of the physical sciences' (1942a:710), the systems being classical mechanics and Willard Gibbs' physico-chemical system.

Parsons' understanding of the unity of science is rather a complex position. He strongly asserts such unity on a fourfold basis. Science is characterized by a unity of method:

'... there are no rigidly drawn boundaries to the scope of science. It should and must be extended wherever its methods are intrinsically applicable. That this includes man's social life and behaviour there can be no shadow of doubt despite the many difficulties and differences among the varied fields of scientific endeavour. In the last analysis science is inherently a unified whole' (1946a:663).

Secondly, science is characterized by a unity of outlook and motivation which grows out of its roots in the rationalism of western culture.

'Our civilisation as a whole is deeply committed to the great adventure of rational understanding of man and society, as well as the physical and biological world. Science as a body of technical knowledge and procedures is the most highly developed expression of this fundamental system of attitudes and values of our civilisation' (1947a:242).

Thirdly, it is impossible to split up science on a crude understanding of different subject matters, say, physical, biological and social objects. As Parsons reminds the reader (1947a:243) the subject matter, human behaviour, is simultaneously physical, biological and social; the position argued so strongly in The Structure of Social Action. So:

'... this fundamental unity of value and attitude toward rational understanding of our world is expressed on the actual level of scientific endeavour. In fact, all science is a fundamental unity. It simply is not possible to draw sharp clear-cut lines between the natural and the social sciences. The unity is not only a unity of fundamental method and outlook, it is a unity of actual shading off of knowledge and its application, of problems and their solutions' (1947a:242).

Finally, Parsons stresses the need (rather than the actuality) for the unity of science in its application (1947a:243). In the use of technology for example it is desirable to have a scientific understanding of its social implications as well as its physical properties and consequences. For example:

'Where health is defined to include mental health, organic medicine, psychiatry and the social sciences are increasingly bound up together' (1946a:661). However, despite the wide-ranging character of Parsons' understanding of the unity of science it is a very general position which, to Parsons, is not

incompatible with the simultaneous emphasis on the autonomy of the various sciences. Indeed Parsons extends the notion of unity to all the 'rational disciplines' (1947a:213) including ethics:

'This, however, is by no means to say that science and ethics should be considered as independent in the sense that they have nothing to do with each other. They are not segregated, unrelated disciplines, but are interdependent parts of the same fundamental system of rational orientation to the world' (1947b:213).

So, in arguing for the importance of general analytical theory on the basis of the unity of science Parsons is not advocating the simple emulation of the physical sciences. This can be seen in his continued warnings against the spectre of positivism and his critique of Dodd's Dimensions of Society (1942a). With respect to the former, in the context of the argument for the unity of science outlined above, Parsons says:

'There have been in the history of scientific thought and its philosophical border lines many attempts to extend the specific thought patterns and conclusions of physical and biological science to the social field. These attempts have for the most part failed. It is always dangerous to reach conclusions without careful specific investigation of the

facts of the particular field in question'

(1947a:242-3).

The unity of science then does not mean that 'the specific thought patterns and conclusions of physical and biological science' can be automatically transferred to the social sciences as the positivists of The Structure of Social Action tried to do. But this is a matter of substantive concepts and propositions, what of methodology? In physics, mathematics is theory ((1938a:18), [1945a:224]). Yet Parsons is highly critical of Dodds' attempt to mathematise sociological theory. Parsons' criticisms will be outlined later. To Parsons what is required is not the simple minded imitation of the physical sciences but a science '... with the nearest possible approach to an equivalent of the role of mathematical analysis in physics' [1945a:224]. The form of general analytical theory in social science must serve the same functions as in physical science but must be adapted to the 'careful specific investigation of the facts of the particular field in question'. Quite what that injunction amounts to will occupy a prominent place in the rest of this chapter.

2. The place of general analytical theory in the development of science.

Parsons' theory of how and why science develops is far more fragmentary in these essays than that put forward in The Structure of Social Action. Further, by comparison with the

latter two shifts in emphasis can be detected. In The Structure of Social Action the focus was on the contribution of empirical research to theoretical development, in these essays weight is given to the importance of theory to empirical research. (See for example, (1937a) and [1950a:352-7]). Secondly Parsons' concern has shifted from the problem of change from one (or more) theoretical scheme(s) to another to change in the sense of development within a given theoretical scheme. So in an essay which has as one of its main problems 'the kind of process by which major theoretical developments in the field of social theory can be expected to take place' [1944:197] Parsons stress is on the 'refinement and revision' of the sociological theory of religion rather than its 'radical structural change' [1944:210]. But these are changes in emphasis which do not mark a departure from Parsons' earlier theory of scientific development nor the implication of that theory for the importance of theory in science.

A point continuously repeated by Parsons is that science is inherently dynamic. ([1944:210], (1946a:663), [1946b:315]). At the same time however science is intimately related with other aspects of society. Parsons remarks at one point that it is 'manifestly impossible' for science to be 'hermetically insulated from the rest of social life' [1946b:315]. It can thus be inferred that change in science is a function of causes both internal and external to science itself. But when Parsons

speaks of progress or development in science his reference is to factors internal or immanent to science, specifically the interdependence of theoretical schemes and empirical research. This proposition Parsons employs on a range of levels. It can be found when he refers to large scale movements of thought:

'For the evidence seems very strong that only when generalized thinking and empirical observation of the detailed fact go hand in hand can either direction of the advancement of knowledge be best served. It is, perhaps, no accident that the time of appearance of the great philosophical systems of Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes and Leibnitz, who laid the foundations of modern philosophy, was also the time of a great development of empirical science. Even though the two tasks were not always carried out by the same men, they were part of one great cultural movement' (1937c:368).

Similarly, in introducing his own volume of essays, the same interdependence is emphasised:

'On the one hand they are concerned with the further development and refinement of the basic conceptual scheme itself and various aspects of it. On the other hand they involve attempts to approach particular

ranges of empirical problems with the help of the relevant parts of the conceptual scheme. In some particular essays the first goal is paramount, in others the second, but often it is difficult to separate the two. This twofold orientation is inherent in the best type of scientific development and should always be kept in mind in interpreting this material' (1949a:vii-viii).

Finally when Parsons reviews Kluckhohn's Navajo Witchcraft it is its sensitive employment of general theory in the context of empirical research which leads Parsons to comment:

'Kluckhohn's monograph is thus an example of the type of empirical study from which we must hope for the sound theoretical progress of basic social science' (1946c:568).

In each of these statements Parsons speaks of 'advance', 'development', 'progress' in scientific knowledge and the importance of the interdependence of theory and empirical research to that. Here the concern is with the implication of this for the importance of general analytical theory in science. This question can be pursued by asking what constitutes progress in science and how progress comes about?

In his brief asides on the question of how change in science is to be judged as progress Parsons stresses what he sometimes refers to as the 'pragmatic' criterion. (1938b:656). Concluding his discussion of conceptual innovations in the sociology of religion he says:

'All of these distinctions by virtue of which the cognitive patterns of religion are treated separately from those of science have positive significance for empirical understanding of religious phenomena. Like any such scientific categories, they are to the scientist sanctioned by the fact that they can be shown to work. Failure to make these distinctions does not in the present state of knowledge and in terms of the relevant frame of reference help us to understand certain critically important facts of human life' [1944:211].

The passage continues in a footnote to say

'Scientifically the sole sanction of such a conceptual scheme is its "utility", the degree to which it "works" in facilitating the attainment of the goals of scientific investigation' [1944:211].

Now this suggests that empirical understanding is the criterion of progress in science and that theory is a useful means in

attaining that goal. (4) This is the case but is not the full story, for theory is a constituent of the goal itself. Parsons writes:

'Ideas would be an essential variable in a system of theory which can be demonstrated to "work", to make intelligible a complex body of phenomena' (1938b:653).

'There is no inherent reason why the Marxian choice of variables should be ultimate. The only scientific test as between it and another, such as that under discussion here, is the pragmatic one, which is the more illuminating in the understanding of certain empirical problems.' (1938b:656).

The goal of science is not just empirical knowledge but 'intelligible', 'understandable', empirical knowledge. Referring to the utilitarian theoretical scheme, which 'worked relatively well' Parsons says: 'But it was simple and in certain respects clear and could give a certain coherence and unity and integration to analyses of social phenomena' (1949c: 47). This gives a clue to Parsons notion of intelligibility although this remark directed to Dodd should not be overlooked:

'But some of us have been brought up to believe that usefulness in solving significant problems, not conformity with a formal system of notation, was the principal criterion of the scientific standing of a conceptual scheme' (1942a:714).

Unless factual knowledge can be situated in a system of general analytical concepts Parsons holds that it is unintelligible in scientific terms. Both the underlined words require explication although we will delay for a while discussing 'scientific'. To be intelligible we must be able to assess the general significance of an item of factual knowledge whether this be Uri Geller's manipulation of natural objects or the report of a factual study such as Lockwood and Goldthorpe's 'affluent worker' studies (1969)

'The basic reason why general theory is so important is that the cumulative development of knowledge in a scientific field is a function of the degree of generality of implications by which it is possible to relate findings, interpretations, and hypotheses on different levels and in different specific empirical fields to each other' [1950a:352].

Do Geller's activities have general implications for natural science? On what grounds can we assess the significance of the affluent worker studies for such general propositions as the 'convergence thesis' or the class structure of Britain, capitalist societies, industrial societies as opposed to the attitudes and behaviour of some workers in some factories in Luton at a particular point in time? Lockwood and Goldthorpe attempt to answer this point by constructing their study as a crucial experiment. Manual workers in Luton were 'affluent', there was little established working class tradition, rather high rates of geographical mobility, employers who adopted 'enlightened' labour policies etc. The argument then was that if embourgeoisement did not occur here, in conditions most favourable to it, it was unlikely to occur anywhere. Thus the results could have some general significance. The sceptic might reply that the conditions contributing to the crucial experiment status of the study were ad hoc and presupposed knowledge of what the relevant causal factors were. This critical position we can plausibly attribute to Parsons. To him the only means of solving the problem of the general significance of particular facts is via a general system of analytical concepts. Yet quite how this solution solves the problem and makes factual knowledge intelligible is something of a mystery. For what we find is that Parsons adopts a rather unenlightening metaphor of 'the sea of fact' and the progressive development of 'islands of theoretical conceptualisation' into a 'continental landmass' [1950a:353-4]. In the early stages of science '... these "islands" of theoretical

implication may be scattered far apart on the sea of fact and so vaguely and generally seen that only relatively broad empirical statements are directly relevant to them' [1950a:353]. The scientist operates in 'the uncharted waters of unanalysed fact' [1950a:354] in which hypotheses come out of the 'blue' and it is impossible to infer what the general significance of a factual discovery is. As a theoretical scheme is developed and empirical evidence is related to it the 'degree of empiricism' [1950a:354] declines, the islands get closer and closer together until, in the ideal state, they form a continental land mass where most hypotheses are deduced from the theory and the implication of factual knowledge can be assessed. To be intelligible scientifically empirical knowledge must be cast in terms of a general system of concepts. Theory in Parsons sense is necessary if we are to be able to say whether a piece of scientific work constitutes a development of science.

Mention was made above of Parsons view that progress in science comes about through the immanent interdependence of theory and empirical research. We can proceed by asking what the respective roles of theory and research are? To begin with the role of empirical fact. When commenting on the inadequacies of 'factor' theories in social science (see below) Parsons notes:

'There would be no objection to this if the resulting theoretical structures had proved to be adequate for the solution of the pressing range of empirical problems which have dominated social science. At point after point, however, this empirical inadequacy has come to be exposed and has necessitated theoretical reconstruction.

A common strategy has been the retreat from one lost factor theory to another - thus from a rational utilitarian type to a bio-psychological instinct theory or one of natural selection. None of these has, however, provided more than temporary relief from the relentless pressure of empirical criticism and developing empirical knowledge' [1945a:222-3].

The overall impression of this passage is that the role of empirical fact is to support or refute a theory. Yet even here, in the context of a discussion not only of theories which Parsons feels inadequate but also of a type of theorizing which he feels misguided, the matter is not quite that. For empirical inadequacy does not imply the abandonment of a theory but its 'reconstruction'. This, rather than the retreat from one theory to another, is far more representative of Parsons position.

Parsons concludes his own outline of a theory of the motivation of economic activities by saying:

'There is no doubt that in a great many respects its formulation will have to be altered as well as refined as our knowledge of the phenomena accumulates, as is the fate of all scientific conceptual schemes' [1940b: 67-8].

Here the fate of all scientific conceptual schemes is not to be proved wrong but to be altered and refined. This contrast is made explicit by Parsons:

'The result of such research will, as always, be to modify the formulations of the problems, and of theorems which appear to be verified, from forms which seemed acceptable when the research process began. But such modification is not "refutation" of a theory; it is the normal course of scientific progress to which the superseded theory itself makes an essential contribution' (1938a:664).

The role of empirical fact is to lead to 'modification' in theory. That term will be examined in a moment. To make the role of fact the refutation or verification of theory would place too

much emphasis on empirical fact, making theory a dependent variable in the progress of science.

'When we look back, the schemes of Tylor and Spencer seem hopelessly naive and inadequate to the modern sociologist, anthropologist, or psychologist. It is, however, notable that the development sketched did not take place by repudiating their work and attempting to appeal directly to the facts without benefit of theory. The process was quite different. It consisted in raising problems which were inherent in the earlier scheme and modifying the scheme as a result of the empirical observation suggested by these problems' [1944:210].

The role of empirical fact then is to throw up problems which demand the modification of theory.

This process is reciprocal. Reorientation in theory can open up new fields and 'concealed factors' in empirical research:

'In order to make clear what I mean, I would first like to note that there is a variety of ways in which what I am calling general theory can fruitfully influence research in the direction of making its results more cumulative. The first is what may be called a set of general categories of orientation to observation and

problem choice in the field which defines its major problem areas and the directions in which to look for concealed factors and variables in explanation' [1950a:353].

The examples Parsons gives are the 'cultural point of view' in modern anthropology, the shift from utilitarianism to an institutional approach by Durkheim and Weber and Freud in the field of motivation. Such changes in theoretical perspective are one way in which theory contributes to progress in science. But as well as this, internal issues within theory can provoke such development. Parsons gives the example of utilitarianism:

'The very basis on which the utilitarian framework was seen to be theoretically as well as empirically inadequate, required a clarification of the structure of systems of social action which went farther than just indicating a new direction of interest or significance' [1950a:353].

Here then progress results from the internal inspection of theory, detection of theoretical inadequacies and subsequent modification of the theory. Once again however the keyword is modification. Even when discussing rationalistic positivism Parsons says 'this schema has proved to be the fruitful starting-point for the development of the sociology of religion' [1944:199].

'The fruitful path has rather been the introduction of specific refinements and distinctions within the basic structural scheme with which "rationalistic positivism" started. The body of this paper will be concerned with a review of several of the most important of these steps in analytical refinement, showing how, taken together, they have led up to a far more comprehensive analytical scheme' [1944:200].

So when progressive development in science is looked at from the sides of both theory and fact the modification of theory seems to be crucial. The question is now what is involved in that process? The passage immediately above gives the clue in referring to the 'analytical refinement' of theory to produce a 'far more comprehensive analytical scheme'. Included in analytical refinement are two tasks. First of all, the operationalisation of concepts. In outlining the 'general guiding lines for the more technical task of building a systematic treatment of sociological theory' (1948b:157) Parsons says that a theoretical system must be framed in terms of 'genuinely operational concepts' [1948b:158]. 'The ideal is to have theoretical categories of such a character that the empirical values of the variables concerned are the immediate products of our observational procedures' (1948b:158). Again when referring to the 'process of refinement' of the basic theoretical outline of The Structure of Social Action

Parsons notes that only at a few points was the theory of action 'operationally specific'. Hence: 'A central problem, therefore, has been and is, how to bring theory of this sort closer to the possibilities of guiding of and testing and refinement by empirical research...' [1949b:xviii]. But far more relevant here is the second task of analytical refinement, the translation of residual categories into positively defined theoretical concepts (to use the terminology of The Structure of Social Action). Parsons' metaphor of islands of theory in a sea of fact has been mentioned above. In an important sense this is most misleading for it implies that the sea of fact is non-theoretical, it contains no theoretical concepts. Yet it has already been noted that for Parsons theory is inevitably involved in science in either an overt or covert form. The sea of fact is not non-theoretical, rather its theoretical framework is covert, the 'uncharted waters of unanalyzed fact' (my emphasis). The task of analytical refinement involves the inspection of knowledge with a view to making explicit the hidden theoretical framework which is inevitably employed. But the task involves more than this, for in this process theory not only becomes overt, it is changed. The nature of this change cannot be deciphered from the literature being discussed in this paper, there is simply not adequate material available. However, by reference to two examples, it can be suggested that Parsons continues to think along the lines outlined in his earlier work.

Analytical refinement involves not only the movement from covert to overt but the translation of metaphysical and ideological assumptions into the positively defined theoretical concepts of science.

The first example is 'the reorientation of thinking about the field of the motivation of economic activity' [1950a:355]. The heritage of classical economics and the utilitarian frame of reference was the assumption that the rational pursuit of self interest was inherent in human nature and that 'this formula constituted a sufficient key to a generalized theory of the motivation of human behaviour, at least in the economic and occupational sphere' [1940b:51]. When this assumption is made explicit it proves inadequate and the theory changes. It is the character of this change which is relevant here.

Parsons writes:

'It is important to note that this formula and the various interpretations that were put upon it was not the result of intensive economic observation and analysis in the sense in which the theory of value and of distribution have been, but of finding a plausible formula for filling a logical gap in the closure of a system' [1940b:51].

The theory of the rational pursuit of self-interest is a 'plausible formula' which lies on 'the peripheries of what has been the central field of interest of the science' [1940b:50] and as such tends to be highly 'speculative' [1940b:51]. The formula worked partly because it had some empirical success [1940b:52], this however is due to peculiar empirical circumstances which only disguise the problem of the adequacy of the formula on a general level. The assumption was accepted and worked also because it was supported by 'such current doctrines ... as psychological hedonism' [1940b:52] and because it was 'integrated with the central ideology of our society' [1950a:355]. The refinement of the theory of economic motivation 'eliminates the alleged absoluteness of the orientation to "self-interest" held to be inherent in "human nature"' [1950a:355]. Such development then, not only makes theory explicit, the process of analytical refinement involves the detection of unscientific allegations, doctrines and ideological components and their translation into theoretical concepts.

The second example of this process is in the development of the sociology of religion. As has been mentioned Parsons regards rational positivism as a fruitful starting point from which considerable progress has been made. He remarks 'In order for this development to take place it was essential that certain elements of philosophical dogmatism in the older positivism should be overcome' [1944:210]. The rational

positivistic position was then supported by a 'philosophical dogmatism', the assumption, in the words of The Structure of Social Action, 'that positive science constitutes man's sole possible significant cognitive relation to external (nonego) reality' [1937a:61]. The development of the sociology of religion as described by Parsons consists in the questioning of this assumption and the introduction of distinctions between scientific, unscientific and non-scientific normative patterns [1944:211]. What is pertinent here is that the making of these distinctions is identified by Parsons as a movement away from philosophical dogmatism to scientific categorisation, to theory in Parsons' sense.

'All of these distinctions by virtue of which the cognitive patterns of religion are treated separately from those of science have positive significance for empirical understanding of religious phenomena. Like any such scientific categories, they are to be scientist sanctioned by the fact that they can be shown to work' [1944:211].

The second process whereby modification of theory contributes to the progress of science is the increasing comprehensiveness of a theoretical scheme. This has already been covered in the discussion of the intelligibility of empirical facts, that is, the generality of their implications. To assess this a

systematic conceptual scheme is required. To 'narrow the range of theoretical arbitrariness' [1950a:353] some means of linking the islands of theory together must be employed. This is the crucial role of a system of general concepts which will simply be noted here and taken up in detail as this section proceeds.

This discussion of the development of science is partial and in itself unconvincing. It has been included because, although inconclusive, it does contribute to the ongoing argument: general analytical theory is crucial to science because of its role in the progressive development of science. A system of general concepts is necessary first of all to assess progress, secondly as playing a central part in bringing progress about. With respect to the latter, Parsons emphasis is on the interdependence of theory and fact. This relationship centres on the modification of theory through operationalising concepts, ridding science of non-scientific elements, replacing them by positively defined theoretical concepts and formulating such concepts into a comprehensive, systematically organized theoretical scheme.

3. Methodological problems providing the rationale for general analytical theory.

General analytical theory is justified and promoted by Parsons as a solution to what he feels are pressing methodological problems in science. By way of introduction to this, attention

can be drawn to Parsons' review of S.C. Dodd's Dimensions of Society (1942a). Dodd's claim is that his 'mathematical' (5) S-theory can be employed to build a system of scientific sociological theory (1942a:709-710). Parsons strongly disputes this levelling a number of criticisms at Dodd. What is relevant here is that these criticisms are precursors of many since directed at Parsons. In summary they are the following. To Parsons, Dodd does not develop a theoretical system in the classical sense at all but only a 'language' which completely fails to provide generalized explanation of complex phenomena (1942a:710) (6). As a language S-theory fails to specify a class of empirical systems to which it is applicable and thus is grossly overgeneralized (1942a:711) (7). Further, in terms of the language of S-theory almost anything can be said but what is said is imprecise and imposed by the language rather than derived from empirical data (1942a:712) (8). Dodd claims to stress the empirical character of his approach but to Parsons it is formalistic and tends to introduce empirical material only in terms of their amenability to the theory (1942a:713) (9). Dodd is preoccupied with elaborating definitions rather than establishing general empirical propositions (1942a:713) (10), and finally he ignores current sociological theory (1942a:714) (11).

The validity of these criticisms is not at issue here, rather what is relevant is the parallel between these points which Parsons makes and what Schwanenberg (1971:570) calls the

logico-empiricist criticism of Parsons. The fact that Parsons puts forward this critique can be taken to suggest that he is not unaware of these issues (12). However the fact that Parsons leaves himself open to the same kind of attack might also suggest that to Parsons the major problems lie elsewhere. This is the approach which will be followed here. To discover where the methodological problems of science lie for Parsons two topics will be discussed, his comments on what he regards as unsatisfactory forms of theory and his explicit writings on methodological problems.

i) Unsatisfactory forms of theory: (13)

Parsons' commentary on forms of theory which he finds lacking will be discussed in order to discover quite what it is which makes them unsatisfactory to him. It will be presumed that Parsons' own form of theory will strive to overcome these failures. In The Structure of Social Action Parsons' criticisms were directed against various types of positivistic and idealistic theories. The attack on idealism is virtually discontinued in the material being discussed here, being restricted to asides on the conception of action as an emanation of culture ((1938b:652), [1941a:6]) and the denial of general concepts [1941a:8-11]. Parsons' critique of positivism however continues into the 1940's and it is with this that this discussion will begin.

Parsons refers to positivism as a 'great stream of thought' [1944:198], a tradition which 'has played such an important role in the last two centuries' (1947b:213). As such positivism is part of the 'general cultural movement' [1942b:131] of rationalization providing, for example, diagnoses of the problems of society and appropriate remedies [1942b:132]. But Parsons is chiefly concerned with positivism in a more limited sense, as a 'scheme of thought' [1944:198] or 'system of thinking' (1949c:47) about the phenomenon of social action. At the core of this is the metaphysical position that science is 'the prototype of all sound cognitive orientation' [1942b:133]:

'The great system of positivistic thought which has played such an important role in the last two centuries attempted to maintain the position that science could be self-subsistent as the sole rational discipline in man's cognitive orientation to his world' (1947b:213-4).

This basic preconception can be interpreted in two ways which gives Parsons his sub-categories of rationalistic and anti-intellectualistic positivism [1944:199]. In rationalistic positivism the view that science exhausts cognitive understanding is applied to the model of the actor employed in theories of action. Parsons example is the sociology of religion developed by Spencer, Tylor and Frazer [1944]. (14). Here the tendency

is 'to treat the actor as if he were a rational, scientific investigator, acting "reasonably" in the light of the knowledge available to him' [1944:199]. To take the example of religious beliefs and ritual concerning death or dreams. Within rational positivism the latter are understood as empirical problems [1944:202], the religious ritual associated with them as practical solutions to these problems. Rational positivism assumes that religious ideas which provide the rationale for these solutions are proto-scientific and must be assessed in scientific terms, that is, in terms of empirical validity. So ritual practices in conjunction with dreams make sense in terms of the belief that the soul can leave the body during sleep. Rational positivism treats such beliefs and practices from the point of view of science; is the belief empirically valid and is the ritual technically adequate to solve the empirical problem? Referring to 'a certain positivistic bias which is very widely prevalent, and must be guarded against' (1938b:656) Parsons writes:

'It is the view, implicit or explicit, that divergence from the standard of empirical verifiability is always and necessarily a matter of empirical shortcomings in the sense that the ideas in question are not only, negatively, not verifiable, but that they can be shown to be positively wrong, that is, that

the basis of their unverifiability is ignorance or error, or both. This judgement clearly implies that there is available an adequate positive scientific standard by which to judge them' (1938b:656).

The second branch of positivism is labelled anti-intellectual by Parsons, so called because it specifically plays down the intellectual capacities of the actor, developing a conception of human action modelled on the behaviour of natural phenomena. (15). So here the basic positivistic injunction stressing the priority and exclusiveness of science is applied to the student of human behaviour: the only way of understanding human behaviour is through science, which is taken to mean the natural sciences. The anti-intellectual positivist then characteristically apes the natural sciences in both description and explanation. In the task of description the emphasis is on 'tangible' facts.

'But already in the direction of emphasis in choosing problems for investigation in the concrete facts, a definite theoretical bias is evident. It is the positivistic bias of emphasis on "scientific" method in the narrow sense of dealing only or mainly with "tangible" facts which are susceptible of quantitative treatment. Hence the emphasis on statistical

material and method which combines empirical concreteness with quantification' (1940c:643).

In explanation the approach is continued in the sort of causal factors stressed by anti-intellectual positivism.

'But the mere collection and technical analysis of statistical data is not enough - the facts must be explained. Here the general positivistic bias of our thought has operated to throw the main emphasis on the factors of biological and psychological determination, or of technology' (1940c:643).

Technology is mentioned here but Parsons' anti-intellectualistic positivist typically explains human behaviour in terms of biological and psychological categories. By psychology here is meant a radically naturalistic approach laying 'the principal emphasis on universal traits or tendencies of "human nature" like instincts' [1941a:26]. Veblen is given as one example (1940c:644). In the field of religion: '... religious phenomena could be treated as the manifestations of underlying biological or psychological factors beyond the reach of rational control, or interpretation in terms of subjective categories. Most generally this pattern led to some version of the instinct theory...' [1944:199]. In other words there is little important difference between biological and

psychological anti-intellectualistic positivism (1949c:51). Biological reduction is particularly characteristic of this approach. Referring to the problems of utilitarian positivism in 19th Century social thought Parsons says:

'The first major reaction to the accumulating difficulties in this field we may mention is the tendency which becomes conspicuous in the later nineteenth century: to attempt to assimilate the phenomena of human action to biological models or theories' (1949c:50).

In justifying his own use of the functional approach Parsons notes that it has been predominantly associated with biology. He is quick to insist however that his own use of this approach does not imply a reduction of explanation to biological terms.

'The "functional" approach has, in the history of thought, been predominantly associated with biology. Its use in other fields has hence not unnaturally been associated with a tendency to attempt to reduce the subject matter of those fields to biological terms.... A social system is treated as a plurality of biological organisms and functional problems are formulated in terms of their functional needs and survival as organisms. In so doing a possibility of fundamental importance

is overlooked - namely, that the functional approach could be used in terms of a different frame of reference, namely that of "action" - or actor-situation rather than organism-environment. If this is done biological considerations become primarily conditional to the main, explicitly considered factors' [1941a:19].

Parsons makes specific criticisms of positivistic theory, for example, of explanations in terms of instincts. He notes that this has suffered '... some very serious scientific handicaps in that it has never proved possible to relate the detailed variations in the behavioural phenomena to any corresponding variations in the structure of instinctual drives' [1944:199]. However this does not imply a total rejection of positivistic theory. Parsons' comments on the fruitfulness of rational positivism in the sociology of religion have already been noted. Similarly the biological influences on human behaviour are appreciated by him ([1941a:19] (1947a:243)). Rather, the main burden of Parsons' criticism lies on the methodological plane; the empiricist fallacy of misplaced concreteness whereby the positivist identifies his theoretical framework with some concrete area of reality. With reference to utilitarian positivism Parsons says:

'Attention has been concentrated on one sector of the total structure of a social system - that of contract, exchange, monetary transactions - and others such as family life have been neglected. But even within the area of focused attention the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" has, understandably enough, played a prominent role. The predominant patterns of thought have, that is, been inadequately placed in perspective and integrated with other elements of a total social system' [1942b:132].

In the case of anti-intellectualist positivism Parsons notes that the world of nature is first of all 'treated not only logically, but also empirically as a closed system' [1941a:8]. That is, a logically integrated theoretical system such as classical mechanics is interpreted as adequately and exhaustively describing a closed area of concrete reality, nature. Then, secondly, '(t)he tendency of "Western" positivistic thought was to identify this "order of nature" with ontological reality as a whole' [1941a:8]. So, as human behaviour is part of the order of nature it can be adequately and exhaustively described by natural science. This sort of reasoning is summarised when Parsons writes:

'... biology seemed to be adequate up to a fairly advanced point simply because of this very simple, obvious thought: Human beings are organisms, aren't they? And biology is the science that tells us how organisms function and how they tick. And biology, of course, applies to human behaviour as well as to the behaviour of lower organisms' (1949c:50-1).

The conclusion drawn by the empiricist-positivist is that as biology is relevant to human behaviour it in itself can describe and explain human behaviour.

The conclusions Parsons draws from his discussion of positivism are twofold. They can be introduced by drawing attention to his remarks on 'the impasse from which Weber took his departure' [1941a:10] on matters of methodology:

'One tendency of the thought of his time was to attempt to assimilate the sciences of human behaviour as closely as possible to the natural sciences. Interpreting the latter overwhelmingly in an "empiricist" manner, the result was to squeeze out all that was most distinctive in the traditional

and common-sense treatment of human problems, notably the use of subjective categories. If, on the other hand, the attempt was made to use these modes of approach it was thought that it had to be in a set of terms which excluded the principal logical characteristics of the natural sciences, notably the use of generalized theoretical categories and their integration in logically articulated theoretical systems' [1941a:10].

To Parsons what Weber began to do and which he attempts to follow through, is a twofold task. First of all, the empiricist method characteristic of both sides of the impasse must be abandoned. The assimilation of the sciences of human behaviour to the natural sciences does not meant that substantively the natural sciences are adequate and exhaustive as theories of human behaviour. The assimilation is on the methodological level. That is, the social sciences are, like the natural, characterised by their use of generalized theoretical concepts and their articulation in logically articulated theoretical systems. But Parsons insists that such theoretical systems are abstract:

'This realization that economic theory had only relative adequacy existed even before the modern development of the realization of

the nature and importance of analytical abstraction. Most of the early economists felt that they were literally describing a concrete world - just as the earlier physicists felt that the Newtonian mechanics was the literal truth about the physical world and that is all there is to it. Only within the last generation or so has the kind of view about the abstractness of scientific concepts, represented by, for instance, Morris Cohen or A.N. Whitehead, become at all common in scientific circles¹ [1950a:50].

Once this step is taken, the second follows, substantively the social sciences must beware of squeezing out what is distinctive about their subject matter, in particular be cautious of developing theory by drawing on analogy with and extension of natural science. This has already been mentioned above in connection with Parsons¹ employment of a functional approach. In opening his essay on stratification Parsons warns:

¹Whilst of particular concern at present in relation to stratification, it may be pointed out that these considerations apply at the same time to any uncritical use of such concepts as

"social space" and "social distance". The burden of proof in cases of their use should always be placed on their relevance to social facts and analytical schemes verified in the social field, not on the logic of deductions from analogies to physical space and distance' [1940a:69].

Generally then:

'There have been in the history of scientific thought and its philosophical border lines many attempts to extend the specific thought patterns and conclusions of physical and biological science to the social field. These attempts have for the most part failed. It is always dangerous to reach conclusions without careful specific investigation of the facts of the particular field in question' (1946:242-3).

In these last two passages it is relevant to note that Parsons insists that a theoretical system must be 'appropriate' to the empirical field it describes and explains. This, and the nature of abstraction in science, are then the crucial methodological problems which emerge from Parsons' encounter with positivism. These will be returned to later.

In the above discussion 'empiricism' has been referred to. When Parsons discusses this in relation to positivism the term connotes the sense employed in the 1930's, that is, empiricism is an epistemological position relating to the status of knowledge, crucially, the status of theory. But, in the main, Parsons in the 1940's uses the term in a different sense, to describe an anti-theoretical position. So:

'Certain of the empirically minded are not merely not interested in attempts to contribute to theory themselves, they are actively anti-theoretical. They consider any work in theoretical fields as positively pernicious and contrary to the canons of science. It is speculation, sterile dialectic, metaphysics or even mysticism' (1938a:14)

Again he refers to 'a school of empiricism which was blind to the functions of theory in science' [1945a:219], 'a kind of "empiricism" which has blindly rejected the help of theoretical tools in general' [1945a:220] regarding '"theory" as an unnecessary impediment' [1945a:224]. Parsons spends little time countering this position for a number of reasons. For one thing 'this wave of anti-theoretical empiricism has, I think fortunately, great subsided' [1950a:351]. Secondly, as has already been noted Parsons is committed to the inevitability of theory in science. Finally, Parsons has sympathy with this position as a justifiable and understandable reaction against unsatisfactory forms of theory

in the social sciences. This is often stated by him ((1938a: 14, 17, 18), (1948a:246), [1950a:351]) and means that his critical reaction is not directed toward anti-theoretical empiricism but toward these unsatisfactory forms of theory. So he says:

'I should like to distinguish three classes of conceptual elements which either go to make up, or have become associated with, what are generally called theoretical structures in science and put forward the thesis that much of the difficulty is due to modes of conception of and undue emphasis on two of them, resulting in distortion of the significance and role of the third' [1938a:16].

These unsatisfactory forms of theory are not so much inadequate conceptual schemes such as positivism but inadequate modes or forms of theorising. As such I will label them competitors to general analytical theory as ways of theorizing in science.

The first conceives theory in the role of a total philosophy or a link between science and a comprehensive philosophical underpinning, a link which is direct and cannot be broken (1938a:16-17). Parsons gives as an example the view that classical economics is intrinsically and necessarily bound up with 'extreme rationalism, psychological hedonism, utilitarian ethics and the rest' (1938a:16).

The second competitor is theory conceived as 'broad empirical generalization' ((1938a:17-18,) [1945a:219-24]), the view that a theory embodies 'a generalized judgement about the behaviour of, or causes in, a hugely complicated class of empirical phenomena' (1938a:17). Parsons includes two subclasses here. Theory can be cast in the role of a philosophy of history, 'the establishment of a highly generalized pattern in the processes of change of human societies as a whole, whether it be linear evolutionism, cyclical or dialectic process, etc' [1945a:219]. The second subclass is what Parsons calls 'the factor type of theorizing' [1945a:223].

'A second major strand of "theoretical" thinking in sociology has been that which has attempted to assess the importance of various "factors" in the determination of social phenomena. Usually it has taken the form of attempting to prove the exclusive or predominant importance of one such factor - geographic, biological, economic or what not' [1945a:220].

Parsons puts forward a number of criticisms of these unsatisfactory forms of theorizing which will be reviewed with the aim of throwing light on what, for Parsons, is a satisfactory

form of theory. The most pervasive criticism is the accusation that these competitors are 'speculative'.

'The era of what I have above called "protosociology" was, as I have noted, conspicuous for the prominence of speculative systems, of which that of Spencer is an adequate example' [1950a:351].

'Hence so far as theory in general is identified with this kind of thing, [the competitors] it is held to be "speculative", only for people who have not absorbed the discipline of scientific caution, of asserting only what they can demonstrate' (1938a:17-18).

As the latter indicates this means first of all that such theories are non-verifiable, they are 'a matter of speculative construction which leads away from respect for facts' [1945a:224]. In them there is a 'purely illustrative relation between theory and empirical fact' [1950a:349]. As such these theories become '... marred by scientifically irrelevant or untenable elements' [1942b:124].

'Whatever was sound in these older attempts, as of a Comte, a Spencer or a Marx, tended to be so intimately bound up with scientifically dubious elements of grandiose speculative construction and methodological assumption

and dogma that the whole genus of analysis has tended to become discredited as a result of the general reaction against speculative theories' [1942b:124].

Parsons example is utilitarian positivism [1942b:132-3]. He writes: 'Such a tradition of thought is inevitably compounded of various different elements which today we find it convenient to distinguish' [1942b:132-3]. He distinguished^s 'certain elements of genuine scientific insight' [1942b:132], (largely the basic concepts of economic analysis), from elements which are scientifically irrelevant, namely utilitarianism's empiricism, its ideological programme and its metaphysical faith in science. These come under the heading of being empirically non-verifiable but also indicate a second sense of speculation. They are speculative in their 'analytical underpinning'. 'Such systems have a notorious tendency to overreach the facts and their own analytical underpinning and by and large have not, in the meanings originally meant by their authors, stood the test of competent criticism' [1945a: 220]. By analytical underpinning here Parsons is partly referring to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness but also to the inadequate understanding of what a 'system' of theory means in science.

'The essential difficulty with the speculative systems has been their premature closure without the requisite theoretical clarification and integration, operational techniques or empirical

evidence. This forced them to use empirical materials in a purely illustrative way without systematic verification of general propositions or the possibility of empirical evidence leading to modification of the theory. Put a little differently, they presumed to set up a theoretical system instead of a systematic conceptual scheme' [1950a:352].

This will preoccupy much of the later discussion in this chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to say that the concept of system is the means by which theory is logically integrated or articulated. Parsons castigates these competitors for using 'speculative' rather than 'scientific' systems. An example occurs in his discussion of Kluckhohn who is praised for avoiding the speculative use of theory (17). Referring to 'the old comparative method' (1946c: 566) by which cross-cultural regularities were integrated or articulated, Parsons gives examples of such speculative systems. The first is to relate such regularities to 'ad hoc hypotheses' about human nature. Secondly:

'Since such ad hoc hypotheses led nowhere, resort has often been had to another level of theorizing, the construction of evolutionary schemas. These, also, have been ad hoc constructions, and their inherent

vulnerability has been largely responsible for the sceptical reaction which has gone under the name of "diffusionism" (1946c:566).

These distinctions between speculative and scientific systems, theoretical systems and systematic conceptual schemes will not be taken up at this point, it is simply of note here that a central methodological problem to Parsons which occurs here and will reoccur in much of what follows, is the nature of a system of theory (17a).

In the above mention has been made of Parsons regarding matters of methodology and metaphysics as scientifically irrelevant. This takes the discussion to his specific criticism of the view of theory as immutably linking science and total philosophies. This approach Parsons sees as leading to a dichotomy. On the one side is the position that science and philosophy 'must necessarily be bound rigidly together in a single completely determinate system' (1938a:10). This implies that to accept a fairly simple scientific proposition implies acceptance of the whole philosophical underpinning and conversely that the complex problems of a total philosophy must be solved as a condition of solving elementary empirical problems. On the other side is the anti-theoretical empiricist reaction divorcing science from philosophy, including theory in science. Parsons regards this as a false dilemma in that it misconceives the relation between science and philosophy. The two are neither rigidly bound

together nor radically divorced. Rather they are inter-dependent which implies degrees of independence on either side (1938a:17). This of course is a standard formula on Parsons' part which can obscure rather than illuminate. However here it can be noted that Parsons goes on to say:

'Above all it is perfectly possible for a scientist, even a theorist, to get ahead with his work without worrying about a philosophical system in general, but only considering philosophical questions one by one when and as they directly impinge on his own scientific problems' (1938a: 17).

In one sense Parsons gets on with his work without worrying about philosophical implications but the passage goes on to say that the scientist should 'only consider philosophical questions one by one when and as they directly impinge on his own scientific problems'. It can be suggested that what this means is that Parsons tends not to reduce science to philosophy but rather the opposite for scientific purposes; to translate philosophical problems into terms amenable to science as he conceives it. This is the strategy I have identified in chapter III and it will be returned to in chapter V but for the moment Parsons' approach to 'the role of ideas in social action' will illustrate the point.

In opening his essay Parsons says: '... the discussion has, for the taste of the present writer, been altogether too closely linked to philosophical problems and has seldom been brought fairly into the forum of factual observation and theoretical analysis on the empirical level' (1938b:652). This seems to suggest that Parsons is eschewing the philosophical problems generally connected with a science of ideas, such as the independent reality of ideas or the causal role of ideas. But Parsons goes on to say:

'I am far from believing that social or any other science can live in a kind of philosophical vacuum, completely ignoring all philosophical problems, but even though, as I have stated elsewhere, [Footnote to [1937a]] scientific and philosophical problems are closely interdependent, they are nevertheless at the same time independent and can be treated in relative abstraction from each other' (1938b:652).

Clearly Parsons is aware of the philosophical problems, he makes reference here, in a caricatured form, to an idealistic metaphysic. But his approach is not to regard such problems in philosophical terms but rather to define ideas in such a way 'that it can serve as the definition of a variable in a system of

interdependent variables' (1938b:652). Further, 'since the present concern is wholly scientific' (1938b:653) the sole important questions are whether ideas can be established as a causal variable with some degree of independence from other causal variables. So Parsons takes over a philosophical problem and transforms it into a matter of the formulation of 'variables', a manoeuvre which obscures the manner in which 'philosophical' problems are operative in his work.

The next three critical points relate specifically to the notion of theory as 'broad empirical generalization'.

'The theory of analytical mechanics, or of general physiology, on the other hand, does not as such contain any empirical generalizations at all. It is a set of tools by which, working on adequate data, both specific empirical solutions and empirical generalizations can be arrived at. To make empirical generalization the central focus of theory in a science is to put the cart before the horse' [1945a:219].

In rejecting broad empirical generalizations as the basis of theory Parsons tends to reject the view that theory is composed of general propositions or laws. To Parsons these are secondary to the elements the relationship of which is stated in a law.

'Indeed it can be said that any system of sound empirical generalizations implies a generalized theoretical system' [1945a:220].

The primary task, then, is to identify causal elements and logically, rather than lawfully, order them. As will be shown later this is connected with Parsons' distinction between the analytical and structural-functional approaches to theoretical systems. Once again Parsons' dissatisfaction with competing modes of theorizing leads him to the problem of system.

The nature of the conceptual components of a theory is Parsons' second specific objection to the broad empirical generalization approach. Factor theories tend to take concrete units not abstract elements as their factors. This is referred to, incidentally, at many points:

'... Marxian theory rests on an analytical basis essentially different from that which is the starting point of the present discussion. For it, the total concrete structure of the industrial enterprise is a "factor", technology, social organization and all. The present attempt is to break down entities like this into simpler elements....' (1938b:656).

'The prevailing explanations talk about the "psychological", "economic", or "political" aspects of behaviour. The tendency has been

to treat these aspects as the behaviour appropriate to fictitious types of man like "the economic man". The following model is intended to cut across these specialized and narrow abstractions' [1941b:44].

Explicit discussion of concrete types and analytical elements is only considered in this period in connection with Weber's ideal types (see below). But clearly the distinction, so prominent in The Structure of Social Action, continues to be important for Parsons, as his scepticism of broad empirical generalization indicates. For him, systematic conceptual schemes are composed of analytical elements, not concrete types.

The third criticism of the broad empirical generalization approach concentrates on the inadequacies of the 'factor' type of theory. For Parsons factor theories have the effect of evading the problems of a generalized theory of specifically social systems. This occurs initially through attributing primary causal importance to factors not peculiar to social systems, such as environmental and biological factors. But the errors which originate here spill over into factor theories which stress factors characteristic of social systems and so distort the understanding of social systems. As such Parsons' criticism of factor theories [1945a:220-3] is based on his criticism of positivism already covered above. They will be briefly repeated here to reinforce the points made above, in particular the point that positivistic

theories are not 'adequate' to the empirical characteristics of social systems.

Parsons classifies factor theories into three groups. The first [1945a:221] stresses environmental and biological factors, being equivalent to 'anti-intellectualistic positivism'. Here the 'sociological' theory is simply a matter of generalizing, say, a biological theory to social behaviour. For example, the application of the theory of natural selection to social development. Parsons agrees that human beings are biological organisms but this type of theory forgets 'the distinctive features of human society in other respects' [1945a:221] than the biological.

'This has led to widespread neglect of the fundamental canon of science, the need to study in the very first instance the facts of the particular phenomena' [1945a:221].

The second type of factor theory is exemplified by utilitarian social thought [1945a:222]. Here the factor emphasised is the 'rational adaption of means to given ends in technological or economic contexts', that is, unlike the first group, a factor 'predominantly observed in human social behaviour'. But emphasis on this factor 'has implied a very specific form of generalized theoretical system', specific in the sense that it treats the above factor 'in such a way as to ignore major elements of the context in which the factor operate(s) in social systems'.

The effect, in a rather more subtle way in this case, is again the denial of 'the empirical relevance of a distinctively social system'. This occurs through the imposition of a conceptual scheme drawn from natural science:

'The utilitarian type of factor analysis is analogous to the environmental and biological in that it singles out elements which also can be treated in complete abstraction from social systems as such. Actual rational behaviour is not, of course, observed apart from social situations. But the implicit conceptual scheme is such that other elements, of a "social" rather than a biological or environmental character, enter only in the role of conditions of the situation in which people act. They become, that is, theoretically equivalent to the physical environment and are thus deprived of any distinctive theoretical role in the social system of action itself' [1945a:222].

So again Parsons' complaint is that factor theorizing of this kind is not 'adequate for the solution of the pressing range of empirical problems which have dominated social science' [1945a:223].

The third type of factor theory is Durkheim's emphasis on the social factor [1945a:223]. Of this Parsons says: 'If however this alternative is taken as simply another "factor" theory it involves the same theoretical and empirical difficulties which all other similar constructions do' [1945a:223]. He does not specify quite what difficulties he has in mind, although the criticisms of utilitarianism above is employed against Durkheim's 'sociologistic positivism' in The Structure of Social Action. More pertinent is a second criticism which Parsons directs against all three classes of factor theory, their empiricist epistemology. Once a given factor is emphasised the theory developed is assumed to be capable of explaining a concrete field of phenomena:

'Until recently it has been rare to find very much insight into the senses in which scientific theory on practically all levels is abstract. Thus natural selection has been interpreted as a generalized description of the process by which changes in organic species came about - not as the formulation of certain elements in the process which might have a more or less dominant role relative to others in different cases. The effect of this tendency to "empirical closure" of a system is to make its application to any given field, especially a new one, a rigidly simple question of whether it

"applies" or not. Application is interpreted in "all or none" terms - it is either a case or not. If it is in any sense a case, then there is no incentive to look further and study the interdependence of the factors thus formulated with others which might be involved, since the latter are assumed not to exist or to be unimportant' [1945a:221-2].

This has already been discussed above. It leads here to a further general criticism of unsatisfactory forms of theorizing: 'the division of the field into warring "schools" of thought' [1945a: 223].

There is not of course, just one total philosophy, but a plurality. If a particular theoretical approach is inevitably linked to a philosophy, then the plurality of philosophical positions spills over into science. As for the broad empirical generalization approach, Parsons notes: 'Indeed it is in terms of such views, if not their philosophical positions that sociological theories are classified. We have evolutionary vs. cyclical theories, economic, biological, religious interpretations' (1938a:17). Each theory has some empirical justification, in that to Parsons they each pick out a general aspect of all social phenomenon. But from their empiricist positions they mistake their particular aspect for the concrete phenomenon in its entirety. So the various theories become mutually exclusive competitors.

The situation of warring schools Parsons finds 'deplorable' (1938a:16):

'Indeed, that there is something wrong with current social theory seems to me to be clearly indicated by the fact that there is such drastic lack of agreement and that most people who write and talk about it feel impelled to divide theorists up into "schools" which, it goes without saying, are mutually incompatible so that a person who agrees with one school in almost any respect, must by definition oppose all other schools in all respects' (1938a:16).

This sorry state of affairs means that rather than sociology having 'that fundamental unity of outlook and purpose which I think all of us feel should actuate the workers in a field of science' (1938a:13) it is characterized by controversy at its very core, for example, over the content of elementary courses. (1938a:13). To attain a unified position a logically elaborated body of theory is necessary, but to Parsons, this must be an alternative form of theory to the two competitors outlined here: both of them are bound up with division and the lack of systematic integration. The problem of system then, again arises out of Parsons dissatisfaction with the war of competing schools.

So far this discussion of methodological problems justifying general analytical theory has been confined to locating what to Parsons are the areas of weakness in other forms of theory he feels to be lacking. The aim has been to draw out the problems Parsons finds important and which he might be expected to attempt to overcome in his own theory. In summary the most important points above are threefold. Firstly, Parsons' statement on the relationship of science and philosophy mirrors a strategy detected already in The Structure of Social Action, the translation of philosophical problems into the framework of a pre-established notion of science. Secondly, Parsons' long standing emphasis on the analytical nature of science comes through here again, science is concerned with abstract aspects of concrete realities which means that in matters of methodology the implications of this must be a prime concern. Finally, a theme which again was present in The Structure of Social Action but one which, as we shall see, now becomes predominant, the nature of systems in science.

So far this section has attempted to elucidate Parsons' understanding of methodological problems by examining his remarks on forms of theory different from his own. I will now turn to his more explicit discussion of what to him are the pressing issues in the methodology of science.

- ii. Parsons' understanding of the methodological problems facing general analytical theory.

To Parsons 'the two most general functions of theory are the facilitation of description and analysis' [1945a:213] :

'A generalized social system is a conceptual scheme, not an empirical phenomenon. It is a logically integrated system of generalized concepts of empirical reference in terms of which an indefinite number of concretely differing empirical systems can be described and analyzed' [1940a:71] .

The task of this section is to bring out what Parsons understands to be the problems of description and analysis and how he sees general analytical theory as providing solutions to these problems. Description will be taken first.

For Parsons a description of reality always involves an abstraction from reality. Speaking of, and entirely agreeing with Weber he says:

'At the same time he found it necessary to attack another very common methodological misconception, that either the aim or the actual result of scientific investigation

in any field can be to attain a complete picture of the ontological reality of the phenomena. Over against this he set the view that all empirical knowledge is in the nature of the case abstract' [1941a:9].

Abstraction means that a description involves two processes; selection and ordering. A description is not to be confused with the phenomenon it describes, it is first of all a selection from the concrete phenomenon: 'If we did not select, if we did not abstract, the writing of history would take as long as the making of history' [1941b:44]. Parsons refers to 'the vast welter of miscellaneous facts we face' and the problem of the 'selective criteria as to which are important and which can safely be neglected' (1938a:20). Secondly, a description involves a 'coherent organization of the factual material thus selected without which a study is unintelligible' (1938a:20). In his critical review of E.L. Thorndike's Human Nature and the Social Order, Parsons notes that: 'Many of Thorndike's facts and observations are of great empirical importance to many sociological problems' (1941c:280). But he complains that 'for the present they are simply "things which have to be taken account of", and remain relatively isolated empirical things' (1941c:281). There is no order in Thorndike's empirical observations which give them intelligibility.

It is from the abstract status of description that methodological problems arise which necessitate general analytical theory. These problems are common to all science [1941b:44] but Parsons suggests they are magnified in social science ((1938a:18) [1950a:348]). They will be discussed here under two headings, the 'adequacy' and 'completeness' of descriptions. In each case I will attempt to indicate how general analytical theory is intended to cope with the problems.

To take the problem of adequacy first, a factual description always involves selection and ordering 'in terms of a conceptual scheme'. On the one hand, then, there is the problem of ensuring that any particular description is adequate in terms of the conceptual scheme employed. But on the other hand, as has already been inferred in the discussion above, there is the converse problem; of ensuring the adequacy of a conceptual scheme to empirical phenomena. It is clearly the latter which lies behind Parsons' criticisms of positivistic and factor theories, his claim that they attempt 'to extend the specific thought patterns and conclusions of physical and biological science to the social field' (1947a:243) rather than basing their conceptual frameworks on 'careful specific investigation of the facts of the particular field in question' (1947a:243). From this it becomes evident that there is an ambiguity in the problem of adequacy. Is the criterion of adequacy to lie in the conceptual scheme employed by

the scientist or in the empirical phenomena studied by the scientist or in a combination of both?

Instances of each can be found in Parsons' writings. With reference to the first, where a conceptual scheme acts as a criterion of an adequate description Parsons says:

'... it is the essence of the ordering function of theory that any old facts, however true, will not do, but only those which "fit" the categories of the system. What facts it is important to know are relative to the logical structure of the theory' (1938a:19).

So, for example, part of Parsons' strictures on Weber's concept of rational action is that it cannot, within the frame of reference of action, which is here the criterion of adequacy, give an adequate description of a concrete act or system of acts [1941a:16-17]. Here then the adequacy of factual statements or substantive descriptive concepts is evaluated in terms of the scientist's conceptual scheme.

But on the other hand Parsons also says, in an essay which employs, by analogy, the doctor-patient relationship as a conceptual scheme to selectively organize a wide range of empirical phenomena relating to propaganda and social control: 'Very great care must, however, be taken to avoid misleading analogies, and to

base conclusions only on the actual nature of the respective systems' [1942c:161]. Again: 'Since the scientist cannot deal with events in all their uniqueness, the best he can do is to construct a conceptual model which reflects with a minimum of distortion certain important relationships which prevail between the phenomena' [1941b:44]. Here then concepts employed by analogy and conceptual models must 'abstract immediately from the concrete behaviour of men in social systems' [1941b:44] and their adequacy must be judged by reference to empirical phenomena.

The seriousness of the ambiguity can be illustrated by referring to the concluding section of Parsons' essay 'Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression in the Social Structure of the Western World' [1946b:320-2]. Here Parsons wishes 'to call explicit attention to some of the limitations of the analysis just developed' in order to 'forestall misunderstanding' [1946b:320]. In terms of the above discussion this aim is far from satisfied. The limited and selective nature of the analysis is stressed:

'It is thus not in any sense a complete or balanced picture of the dynamic psychological balance of Western society, even so far as such a picture could be drawn in the light of present knowledge and on a comparable level of generality and abstraction'.

[1946b:320].

This nicely expresses the ambiguity. Is the adequacy of Parsons' account to be judged in terms of 'present knowledge' which seems to point in the direction of empirical phenomena as the important criterion or its 'level of generality and abstraction' which lays the emphasis on the conceptual scheme employed? Both seem to be considered relevant by Parsons. He notes a number of empirical restrictions to the generality of his account of the problem, admitting that it applies particularly to American, urban, middle-class adults and would have to be modified to apply to non-American, rural, proletarian, pre-industrial and/or adolescent populations. This seems to suggest that the adequacy of Parsons' conceptual scheme for the study of aggression is delimited by specifiable empirical conditions.

Yet on the other hand Parsons says:

'This analysis has been couched in terms of a very high level of "ideal-typical" abstraction. It has presumed to deal with the social structure and psychological dynamics of the Western world as a whole, in full consciousness of the fact that there are and have been innumerable ranges of variation within this enormously complicated sociocultural system' [1946b:320].

So although admitting that empirical situations can vary from his account Parsons claims that it is cast on a level of abstraction capable of grasping the social structure and psychological dynamics of the western world as a whole, i.e. that it is able to incorporate the empirical variations mentioned above. This seems to imply a judgement that some facts, viz, the empirical features of a population of urban, middle class, American adults are more important than others, viz, the empirical features of rural, proletarian, pre-industrial and/or adolescent populations. This is stated by Parsons when he says that his ideal type is 'of prime strategic significance for the whole Western world' [1946b:321]. So facts which fall outside Parsons' scope 'are, however extremely deviant, variations on the same fundamental themes' [1946b:322]. Parsons is then evaluating what is fundamental and what is a variation, or indeed a deviation.

'It is a question, not of a right and a wrong analysis, but of the appropriate adaption of one which is in the nature of the case general and abstract, to the concretely variable circumstances of different particular situations. This adaption is achieved, not by substituting a new "correct" for an incorrect explanation,

but by introducing an analysis of the effect of specific modifications of the generalized structure presented here, and by taking account of additional factors which the generality of this analysis has not permitted to be treated' [1946b: 322].

Once again Parsons' account claims to be general and abstract as against 'the concretely varied circumstances of different particular situations'/'specific modifications'/'additional factors'. All of this implies a criterion of adequacy lying outside the empirical phenomena, lying in the conceptual scheme employed.

So, strictly in terms of Parsons' own criteria, it is difficult to identify quite what criterion to employ to assess the adequacy of Parsons' description of aggression in the western world. Both are no doubt relevant but this does not solve the problem of how they are to be coherently related. For to say that a factual description is inadequate in terms of a conceptual scheme presupposes that that conceptual scheme is itself an adequate criterion whilst conversely to say that a conceptual scheme is inadequate to empirical phenomena presupposes some knowledge of that empirical phenomena.

To resolve this ambiguity in Parsons' thinking we must turn to his conception of the phenomenological status of the concept of 'empirical system'. This can be introduced by commenting on the following passage:

'Apart from theoretical conceptualization there would appear to be no method of selecting among the indefinite number of varying kinds of factual observation which can be made about a concrete phenomenon or field so that the various descriptive statements about it articulate into a coherent whole, which constitutes an "adequate", a "determinate" description. Adequacy in description is secured in so far as determinate and verifiable answers can be given to all the scientifically important questions involved. What questions are important is largely determined by the logical structure of the generalized conceptual scheme which, implicitly or explicitly, is employed' [1945a:213].

Three steps are involved here. A theoretical scheme is the only criterion of selection in description in so far as that description is to be adequate. Adequacy is measured in terms of whether determinate and verifiable answers can be given to the scientifically important questions and a scientifically important question is derived from the logic of the conceptual scheme.

From this two points should be noted. Firstly the above statement refers to the question of the adequacy of empirical statements by reference to a conceptual scheme.

'... the function of the frame of reference is above all to provide a test of the determinancy of the description of a system. It is a logical implication of the structure of the conceptual system that there is a limited number of essential categories, specific values for which must be obtained before the description can be determinate' [1945a:214].

So the other question located in the above discussion, how to assess the adequacy of a conceptual scheme to empirical phenomena is not covered in the passage quoted. Secondly, this latter issue becomes crucial once the circularity of the above statement is noted. Parsons begins by asserting that theory is the only acceptable criterion of selection. A conceptual scheme is then the means by which a selective description is achieved. But at the same time the conceptual scheme is the criterion, not only in the process of selection itself, but of the adequacy of that description. It is clearly necessary to be able to discriminate between the mechanism, implicit or explicit, by which a description is constructed and the standard by which the adequacy of that description is assessed. It is because these two are conflated in

the passage quoted above that it is circular. Now this seems to be a difficult task for Parsons given his general maxim that all description is in terms of a conceptual scheme. How can empirical phenomena be known independently of conceptual schemes so that the adequacy of those conceptual schemes can be judged? As Merton put it, expressing a common response to Parsons' approach, 'Premature categorization may be almost as dangerous as failure to categorize at all' (1948:167). Clearly, within Parsons' basic framework, this is an impossibility. But what is not impossible is to introduce a degree of subtlety into the position in the following way.

Parsons' strategy is to make certain general presuppositions about any and all empirical phenomena insofar as they are knowable to science. Then the adequacy of any particular conceptual scheme to empirical phenomena is judged in terms of those general properties. These general presuppositions are summed up in the term 'empirical system'. Parsons works on the assumption that the empirical world for science is constituted by empirical systems. So a conceptual scheme must be adapted to or correspond to a particular class of empirical system.

'Correspondingly the phenomena to which theoretical systems apply come to be viewed as empirical systems...' (1938a: 18).

'The interrelated concepts of a true theoretical system are adapted to the systematic

description and analysis of any one of a class of "empirical systems",¹ (1942a:710).

Parsons uses the solar system, the physico-chemical system of the blood and the organism as treated by the physiologist as 'classic examples' (1942a:710) of empirical systems but the concept is not subjected to elaborate discussion. However the following properties can be specified, properties which are summed up in the following passage:

'The basic category of all scientific description seems to be that of empirical system. The empirical references of statements of fact cannot be isolated from each other, but each describes one aspect or feature of an interconnected whole which, taken as a whole, has some measures of independent significance as an entity'
[1945a:213].

From this three properties can be distinguished: interdependence, holism and independent significance. The first is interdependence, the empirical phenomena forming the system mutually influence each other ((1937a:18), [1942a:210]). By itself this is an almost meaningless statement (18) but it is qualified by the other two properties. Interdependent phenomena form a whole,

the concept of empirical system refers to 'phenomena which are interdependent in such a way that the system "behaves" or "functions" in some important sense and degree as a whole, as a unit' (1942a:710). So not all interdependence is relevant, only that which can be contained within the boundaries of a working whole. The third property is that this interdependent system has 'some measure of independent significance as an entity'. At times this seems to be a rather pragmatic quality: an empirical system

'.... is that which can, for scientific purposes, be treated at the same time as a body of phenomena sufficiently extensive, complex and diversified so that the results of their study are significant and not merely truistic, and sufficiently limited and simplified so that the problems involved are manageable and the investigator does not get lost in the maze' [1945a:213-4].

In other words the independence of any particular empirical system is a matter of convenience for the conduct of scientific research. But this is a superficial gloss.

'Phenomena which are significantly inter-related, which constitute a system, are intrinsically interrelated on the structural level' [1945a:214] .

The independent quality of an empirical system is not only a matter of interrelationship in the sense of manageability for the scientist but also of 'intrinsic' interrelationship. What Parsons means by this rather puzzling statement is the structural irreducibility of empirical systems: a particular class of empirical systems has its peculiar structure which cannot be reduced to the structural features of other systems. (19). Discussion of the concept of structure will be postponed until later but an aspect of Parsons' criticism of Dodd (1942a:711) can be employed to make the point pertinent here. To Parsons, Dodd's theoretical system is 'too general to describe a determinate class of empirical systems'. Dodd uses only three basic variables, the first two, space and time, 'are general to all concrete empirical phenomena whatsoever' and so they do 'not structurally distinguish human populations from any other, even the "population" in molecules of a gas'.

'Then everything else, everything which is distinctive to the structure of human social systems which, after all, are the subject matter of Dodd's studies, is thrown into a single residual category, "characteristics" (I). This includes literally anything which

can, in the logical sense, "modify" a person, the relationship of persons, their behaviour, or any aggregate of persons. Any specific differentiation, classification or structuring of the characteristics of people is, with a few exceptions such as those to be mentioned presently, left to the ad hoc consideration of the particular empirical situation as it is studied. On this basis it is clearly impossible to build up a generalized description of a determinate class of empirical systems' (1942a:711).

So Parsons' complaint is that Dodd's conceptual scheme is inadequate to empirical phenomena in that it does not meet the third characteristic of empirical systems, the independent significance of a particular class of empirical system. Dodd is an anti-intellectualistic positivist, attempting to employ one conceptual scheme to study all empirical systems rather than recognizing the autonomy of the structural features of different classes of empirical system.

The problem of adequacy in description then is tackled in two stages. Firstly a description of empirical phenomena must be

adequate in terms of a conceptual scheme. But, secondly, the conceptual scheme must be adequate to empirical phenomena. By the latter is meant that the conceptual scheme must be sensitive to the interdependence, holism and structural independence of empirical phenomena.

'One fundamental condition of the determinacy of a theoretical system is the adequacy with which it defines, and provides a set of generalized categories for the description of, the relevant class of empirical systems - that is, contains a "generalized system" on the descriptive level' (1942a:711).

The concept of empirical system breaks through the circularity of the problem of adequacy. But why is the concept of empirical system 'the basic category of all scientific description' [1945a: 213] such that it can play this quite crucial role? Is Parsons claiming that the systemic properties of empirical phenomena can be known independently of a conceptual scheme? In fact this is not Parsons' position. Rather intrinsic interrelationship of phenomena on the structural level Parsons says is a quality which

'... seems to be inherent in the most general frame of reference of empirical knowledge itself, which implies the fundamental significance of the concept of system as that is taken for granted here' [1945a:214].

The concept of empirical system then is a feature of all scientific frames of reference. Parsons' emphasis is usually on the distinctions between different scientific frames of reference especially as between the frames of reference of action and the physical world. But the concept of empirical systems is a common property of both and all scientific frames of reference. Furthermore, frames of reference on this level are 'the most general framework of categories in terms of which empirical scientific work "makes sense"' [1945a:214]. They are constituted by categories which must be granted an a priori status as properties of the knowing mind (20). This then is the status of the concept of empirical system which allows it to act as a criterion of adequacy for any particular conceptual scheme.

The present discussion of the problem of adequacy has brought to the fore the importance of the concept of system in Parsons' thinking. But care must be taken here as the concept is more complicated and problematic than as yet described. So, for example, Parsons distinguishes between empirical and theoretical systems [1940a:71] whilst in the above discussion my remarks have been concerned only with the former. The notion of theoretical system comes into the picture when we turn to the problem of the 'completeness' of descriptions.

In discussing the problem of adequacy the overall focus of the argument has been on the question of how a conceptual scheme can be said to be adequate to empirical phenomena. To bring out

that issue the converse has been noted; how a factual description of empirical phenomena can be said to be adequate in terms of a conceptual scheme. It is now time to look at this second issue more closely. As has been mentioned already Parsons often speaks of the necessity to obtain the 'right kind' of facts in terms of what is 'important' from the 'logic of a conceptual scheme'. The question at issue here is what kind of logic gives us an indication of what is important?

Parsons distinguishes between two kinds of descriptive concepts; frames of reference and structural categories [1945a: 214]. About the first he says almost nothing in these writings; whilst there is frequent mention of the frame of reference of action there is little on the concept of a frame of reference per se. It can be suggested that the reasons for this neglect are twofold; firstly that Parsons feels he has said all that is required in The Structure of Social Action, secondly that his attention is caught by the notion of structural concepts. To understand why the latter preoccupies Parsons requires consideration of what will here be called the problems of completeness.

Here the issue is not that a description involves the selection and neglect of phenomena but that which is selected can only be understood in its context. Statements of fact are about aspects of interdependent systems. From this it follows to Parsons that there is a need for knowledge of the systemic context from which a particular description abstracts.

'Specific descriptive propositions often refer to particular aspects or properties of an empirically existent set of phenomena. Such propositions are, however, empirically meaningless unless the "what" which they qualify is clearly and determinately conceived and defined' [1945a:213].

This is the problem of completeness, the necessity of having some overall view of the complete empirical system in order to properly assess any particular descriptive statement or series of statements.

A substantive example of Parsons awareness of this problem is the following passage, taken from his essay on modern anti-semitism.

'A broad general characterization of modern Western society which would correspond to that just given of the Jewish community is a most difficult thing because it involves the problem of the selection and selective ordering of the facts. We know so much factual detail for the United States, for instance, that it is difficult

to see the wood for the trees. Nevertheless an attempt will be made here, for without it, as said at the outset of this essay, it is practically impossible to analyze the problem at hand' (1942d:108).

But the ad hoc sketching of historical and structural context characteristic of Parsons' more empirical essays will not in itself do. Though Parsons resists the temptation of being overwhelmed by the interdependence of the phenomenal world the reader can sometimes sense something approaching that. In his essay on racial and religious conflict Parsons touches upon a host of factors, biological, psychological, social and cultural and concludes with the following.

'In this rapid review, it has been possible to give only a very general account of the problem of the control of group tensions. It is to be hoped, however, that it is enough to give a general picture of the nature of the problem. The first impression perhaps is that of its complexity. The whole position taken here, that it is a matter of the interdependence of many factors in a system, militates strongly against any belief in panaceas and is in one sense a doctrine of disillusionment of facile optimism' (1945b:198).

To avoid the proliferation of unrelated, perhaps impressionistic, background maps requires what Parsons calls a 'generalized system' on the descriptive level (1942a:711).

To introduce this the following passage can be noted.

'Implicitly or explicitly then, sociological analysis must operate with a generalized system of institutional structure such that it supplies generalized categories adequate to the complete [Footnote: Not in detail, but in terms of functionally essential aspects] description of a functioning institutional system' [1942c:144]. (21)

In view of Parsons' insistence on the cardinal quality of abstraction in description the demand for a complete description appears at first sight anomolous. Perhaps looking at the problem the other way round clarifies the issue. If the incompleteness of description vis-a-vis concrete phenomena is the starting point then some attempt must be made to clarify the degree and nature of incompleteness.

'... the values of the variables of such a system state only a very limited number of facts about the concrete phenomena to which it applies. It is very seldom that other elements are sufficiently constant

within any very wide range of variation of these variables so that trustworthy interpretation and prediction can be based on the laws of this analytical system alone. It needs to be supplemented by considerations involving the others as well. This is one of the most important reasons for the unsatisfactoriness of proceeding directly to broad empirical generalization. The case of some of the deductions from economic theory is an extremely vivid one. The facts relevant to any system of analytical theory are never all the facts knowable about the phenomenon in question' (1938a:19).

Parsons is then casting a sceptical eye on the notion of ceteris paribus, the interdependence of empirical systems implies that other things are rarely equal. 'One of the commonest sources of fallacious conclusions lies in the tendency to treat certain aspects of a social structure without taking account of their interdependence' [1942c:144]. So the blind statement of the principle of ceteris paribus is not enough, one must know what the other things are and when, if ever, they are equal. (22).

Parsons then is not asking for a complete description of the context in a literal sense but in a way which will facilitate assessment of the incompleteness of a description and the implica-

tions thereof. So to go back to the passage quoted above [1942c: 144] in which Parsons insists on concepts which give a complete description of a system it is to be noted that the concepts are 'generalized' and 'essential'. The generality of concepts can be understood in relation to what was said above about the need for context in Parsons' essays on substantive empirical topics. If descriptions of discrimination against Jews and blacks are to be compatible, if one wishes to say something about racial discrimination per se, then the contexts of those descriptions cannot be ad hoc but developed in terms of a level of generality pertinent to the overall problem. But which level of generality is pertinent and what general features are relevant to the problem? What, in other words are the 'essential' concepts?

'One of the prime functions of system on this level is to ensure completeness, to make it methodologically impossible to overlook anything important and thus explicitly to describe all essential structural elements and relations of the system' [1945a:218].

The concept of system then provides the key to what is essential. But care must be taken here in discriminating the appropriate sense of the term system. It refers here to a system of concepts, a logically integrated or articulated scheme. It is the logic of the scheme which dictates what is essential. This

is what Parsons is driving at when he discusses Weber's fundamental concepts of sociology as the beginnings of 'the conception of a generalized system of action and relationships on the social level' [1941a:22]. Of this he says:

'And the systematic ordering of these categories is not possible without the "functional" point of view; it provides the integrating principles in terms of which such categories constitute a generalized system rather than an ad hoc collection of disconnected concepts' [1941a:22].

Here then system implies the ordering, integration and connection of concepts. But how does this give an answer to what is essential? The discussion is back to its starting point as to the 'logic' of conceptual schemes from which what is important can be derived. Now, however, the problem has been specified and an answer can be outlined.

The generalized theoretical systems Parsons is concerned with 'consist of the generalized categories necessary for an adequate description of states of an empirical system It includes a system of structural categories which must be logically adequate to give a determinate description of an empirically possible, complete empirical system of the relevant class' [1945a:218]. What is essential to a complete description is a

a function of the concept of empirical system: the interdependence of phenomena, their boundedness, their structural autonomy. The latter in particular is crucial to the problem at hand. A particular class of empirical system has structural features peculiar to it which cannot be reduced to those of other empirical systems. The properties of social systems, for example, cannot be reduced to those of personality systems and vice versa. It is these autonomous features contained in the conceptual scheme which in particular act as the criterion by which to assess the completeness of a description. To use an example much employed by Parsons ([1939], [1940b]), to describe the motivation of the businessman solely in terms of psychological hedonism would be incomplete. The businessman is, for one thing, an actor in a social system whose properties cannot be reduced to the conceptual framework of hedonism. A generalized theoretical system, in this case, a generalized social system would map out the concepts necessary for a complete description so that the place of hedonism could be properly assessed. These concepts would specify what was logically required to describe 'an empirically possible, complete empirical system of the relevant class'.

But this only helps to pinpoint the methodological problems of description facing general analytical theory, it does not solve them. To say that the world is constituted by empirical systems only makes more formal the evident organicism of The Structure of Social Action. There Parsons argued that unit concepts were

abstract because they isolated a part from a whole. Here this is elaborated somewhat, quite what a whole is is identified by the notion of empirical system. Hence a system of concepts must cope with this quality. But how is not self-evident, the problem of the nature of theoretical systems is still open.

So to summarize the conclusions of the discussion of what, to Parsons, are the methodological problems involved in scientific description. The problem of the adequacy of those concepts to empirical phenomena introduces the concept of empirical system, the problem of the completeness of description leads from this to the need for a theoretical system. These problems then lead Parsons to stress the centrality of general analytical theory, or a system of theoretical concepts. But the notion of system is unclear, this becomes the central problem. This conclusion is reinforced by Parsons' remarks on problems of dynamic analysis to which this discussion now turns.

'The ultimate goal of scientific investigation' is 'dynamic analysis' [1945a:214]. This is said to have two facets:

'... first the "causal explanation" of past specific phenomena or processes and the prediction of future events; second, the attainment of generalized analytical

knowledge, of "laws" which can be applied to an indefinite number of specific cases with the use of the appropriate factual data' [1945a:214-5].

On the face of it, then, Parsons' understanding of the aims of science is most conventional within the bounds of orthodox philosophy of science. But when Parsons' conception of the difficulties which lie in the way of attaining the goal are investigated a rather less conventional picture emerges. For one thing, the reader of Parsons' essays cannot but be struck by the absence of causal explanation via the application of laws despite the intention to apply theory implied by the title of his collection of essays (1949a). Moreover there is little methodological discussion of the notion of 'scientific law'. Now this is not because Parsons sees no difficulties in the aspiration toward and establishment of such laws. As has been noted he is highly sceptical of the 'laws' of the empirical generalization approach to theory. This is extended to Weber's 'type generalization', on which Parsons comments:

'Where it is possible on the basis of ideal type analysis to construct not merely a structural form, but, under certain conditions, a course of events which can be predicted if certain conditions are given, it is possible to formulate such generalizations.

These generalizations are, however, not methodologically equivalent to most of the laws of physics, especially of analytical mechanics. The latter do not generally formulate a concrete course of events, but rather a uniform relationship between the values of two or more variables.

Weber does not even consider the possibility of formulating laws of this latter type....' [1941a:108].

The last sentence suggests an air of scepticism about type generalizations but beyond this at least three types of generalized uniformity are discriminated by Parsons: empirical generalizations, type generalizations and the above mentioned laws of physics. Yet Parsons does not elaborate such distinctions beyond such brief footnotes to Weber's text. This is because unlike conventional philosophy of science where the problem of explanation has lain in the very notion of scientific law Parsons focuses his attention in a rather different direction. It is not the generality of propositions stating relationships between phenomena but the generality of concepts, the elements of such relationships which poses the problems for dynamic analysis as Parsons understands them. So in a brief 'assertion of the inevitability of theory in science' (1938a:15) against anti-theoretical empiricism Parsons writes:

'Now I wish to assert that such an imputation of causal relationship cannot be proved without reference to generalized theoretical categories. If it is asserted, the assertion is logically dependent on these categories whether they are explicit or implicit' (1938a:15).

The emphasis is on the necessity of general concepts, rather than general laws, to causal explanation.

On this Parsons has been severely criticised. The most vociferous critic has been Homans who exclaims that Parsons 'took his stand as a theorist, and it was as a theorist that he vexed me' (1962:43). To Homans, Parsons reverses the proper order of concepts and propositions emphasising an interdependent system of concepts out of which propositions as to the relationships between conceptualized phenomena somehow grow. It is this which vexes Homans who believes that what is important are deductively related propositions from which appropriate conceptualization will follow (23). This sort of objection is carried further by Mulkay (1971:70-2) who claims that Parsons mistakes the completed state of a theoretical system for its method of construction. The logical integration of concepts is not typically the way in which science progresses but its final form. Parsons' strategy then becomes insensitive to the interplay of theory and controlled observation and open to conceptual formalism (24). These criticisms

are basic and have wide ramifications for Parsons whole approach to theory construction. But despite important explorations into Parsons' strategy such as Mulkey's it seems to me that the reasons why Parsons pursues this emphasis have not been fully understood.

Parsons' rationale for this emphasis lies in his understanding of the simplest case of dynamic analysis.

'On the common sense level explanation is usually a matter of showing the presence of certain conditions without which the phenomenon could not have happened. The conditions are usually treated as "given" independently of the phenomena on which attention is centred' [1941a:23].

Rather than asking, how can a general uniformity, or constant conjunction, be established between cause and effect Parsons asks how can the necessary prior condition be treated as 'given'? It can be so treated by being subsumed under a general concept.

'Even the simplest rational practical activity would be impossible without the ability to establish a dynamic relation between a single, simple "necessary condition" and a consequent effect under the assumption that in a relevant degree "other things are equal".

This, applied in a particular case, implies some degree of generalization that this kind of factor is a necessary condition of the kind of effect, thus, that "boiling" for a certain length of time - i.e., a generalized type of antecedent process - is necessary if potatoes are to be "cooked" - i.e., reach a certain kind of observable state' [1945a:215].

This leads Parsons to characterize theory not as a system of propositions bearing a deductive relationship to each other but rather as a system of general concepts. Such concepts function as 'a set of tools by which, working on adequate data, both specific empirical solutions and empirical generalizations can be arrived at' [1945a:217]. The analogy with tools is a favourite one of Parsons (e.g. (1942e:62), (1946c:567)) but from the above if the place of general concepts is accepted it is still not clear quite what is to be done with the tools. That is, how a relationship of cause and effect is to be established between phenomena after the latter has been analyzed as cases of generalized concepts.

Parsons' position here is elaborated in his outline of the logical schema of proof of causal relationship he develops from Weber [1941a:11]. This involves three steps, the first two of which have already been covered. Firstly, the phenomena under

study must be described in terms of an inherently abstracting conceptual scheme. Such description however still refers to the concrete particularities of the specific phenomenon under study. So Parsons distinguishes between 'factors' as 'concrete events or state of affairs' and 'generalized, analytical elements like "mass" or "ideas"' (1938b:658). The second step is 'the subsumption of the detailed statements of fact involved under generalized theoretical categories' [1941a:11]. This is the employment of analytical tools discussed above. The third step brings in the relationship between factual states of affairs subsumed under generalized concepts. In the model of explanation generally known as the deductive-nomological approach this is achieved by the application of a general law stating a relation of constant conjunction between cause and effect. To Parsons this is the aim of the exercise but a set of generalizations from which causal relationships can be deduced is a shorthand or completed version of a more complex procedure whereby such generalizations are established. The problem then lies in establishing such generalizations, in particular, in ascertaining the relevant conceptual elements which must be included (25). To Parsons this requires resort to the comparative method.

'The question here at issue does not touch the explanation of particular facts, but the establishment of uniformities. The only possible procedure by which this can be done in our field is comparative method which permits the isolation of variables' [1938a:658].

Comparative method is, to Parsons, the logical equivalent of laboratory controlled experiment. ((1938a:658), [1939:46]) (26). It is by this procedure that the causal relationship between states of affairs described and analysed under steps one and two is demonstrated, or not. The application of laws depends upon this underlying rationale. Comparison then is the third step in the logic of proof. It involves:

'With respect to the problem of imputation of causal significance to a "factor" in the antecedent state of a system, it is logically necessary to show, by application of generalized knowledge to the comparison of states, that if the facts of the antecedent state had been different, the later state of the system, the facts to be explained, would also have been different in specific ways' [1941a:11]

So Parsons follows the method of difference, the task of the comparative method is to make 'the isolation of variables' possible ([1939:46], (1938a:658)) so that the difference that the presence or absence (in the crudest sense) of a variable can be ascertained.

To exemplify. If situation A involves factors x, y, z followed by event k and situation B involves factors w, x, y followed by event non-k then it can be said that z bears some causal relationship to the occurrence of k. The great problem

with this method is that the two cases may not be comparable. It is just because of this problem that Parsons stresses the second stage in the proof, the subsumption of particular factors under generalized elements is to Parsons what makes comparison and subsequent generalization possible. Comparisons are made between states of affairs 'in which the detailed facts are different but the generalized categories the same' [1941a:11]. In the light of this the above example ought to be elaborated. Situation A comprises factors x^1 , y^1 and z^1 and k , each of which is a concrete case of general elements X , Y , Z and K . Situation B is constituted by x^1 , y^1 and z^2 and non- k , each of which again can be identified as cases of X , Y , Z and non- K . It is this employment of generalized concepts that Parsons is referring to when he speaks of the "application of generalized knowledge to the comparison of states" in the passage quoted above.

There is a further reason why Parsons lays such stress on general concepts in dynamic analysis. This is best understood by reference to two alternative modes of proof which he rejects but takes cognisance of. There are the historical and functional methods. The former attempts to establish causal relationships pertaining to the particularities of a historical individual by reference only to its peculiar path of genesis. (1938b:658). Parsons' example here is Marxism, especially the proposition that cultural systems are epiphenomenal reflections of an economic infrastructure. Parsons comments that

so long as such a proposition is framed in genetic, historical terms alone then 'analytical generalizations as to the role of ideas cannot in principle be either proved or disproved by such a method' (1938b:658). The historicist thinker gives unity to his work by drawing out the temporal coherence of his subject matter the second alternative mentioned by Parsons focuses on spatial coherence. It is the functional method advocated by the English anthropologists. Here again the emphasis is on the peculiarities of a historical individual, in this case the importance of placing any item of fact into the context of its function for a specific, organic, society. This aspect of functional anthropology arose as a reaction to the nineteenth century penchant for comparative method. The point relevant here is that in Parsons' brief mention of functionalism in this context it is precisely this which is at issue. He praises Kluckhohn's Navajo Witchcraft for contributing to 'the process of transcending the old dilemma between "comparative" ... and "functional" methods' (1946c:566).

'The old comparative method, by isolating "traits" from their context, both in the particular social structure and on the level of the motivation of action, made it impossible to relate to any satisfactory dynamic explanatory scheme the uniformities which comparative study revealed' (1946c:566).

Use of the comparative method alone is fraught with the danger of isolating traits from their context. Parsons gives 'the resort to ad hoc hypotheses on the psychological level' and 'the construction of evolutionary schemas' (1946c:566) as examples of attempts to provide a unifying framework to link together items abstracted from a temporal sequence or spatial context.

Parsons is sensitive to the historicist/functionalist criticism of comparative method even if he rejects their solutions on the grounds that it is impossible to establish causal relationships and arrive at generalizations on the basis of particular cases whether conceived temporally or spatially. The problem is how the tendency to wrench facts from a context is to be avoided when the whole point of comparative method is to isolate variables, not literally but as the functional equivalent of the laboratory control of causal variables. Parsons' solution is that a system of theory provides the context. Any particular factor is first of all a case of a general concept which, secondly, is a component of a logically articulated system of concepts. The systemicity of general theory acts as a defense against the misuse of comparative method. Rather than situating religious beliefs, for example, in a historical sequence of development or a functioning society they are subsumed under a generalized concept (ultimate values, say) which has a place in a coherent scheme of concepts. So referring to Weber Parsons says:

'In pursuing his interest in the society of his own time, to a degree unknown before, he made use of the comparative method, illuminating the subject of interest by contrast as well as by agreement and historical antecedent. It is this, with the orientation of his comparative analysis to generalised theory, which distinguishes his work most strikingly from all the historical schools of thought...'
[1941a:78].

Here then Parsons picks out 'the orientation of comparative analysis to generalized theory'. Again in discussing the role of ideas Parsons says that 'the theorems relative to the role of ideas are not isolated, but are an integral part of more comprehensive bodies of theory' (1938b:662). The role of ideas in systems of action can only be established by comparative method but once abstracted from their concrete setting idea systems are grounded in a theoretical setting.

So far this discussion has been confined to what is involved in a dynamic analysis of a simple case of causation and/or uniformity. This has led once again to the centrality of the concept of system in Parsons' methodology. This conclusion is reinforced when attention is turned to more complex cases of analysis. As has been noted the above model of dynamic analysis

is grounded in 'the simplest rational practical activity' [1945a: 215]. Causal explanation and the establishment of uniformities on this common sense level merges gradually into science as the scope of dynamic analysis increases: '... scientific advance consists especially in the gradual widening of the scope of dynamic analysis' [1945a:215]. The notion of scope here has two aspects. Firstly, it means the number of causal variables and their mutual relationships which can be treated together. Scientific knowledge is furthered when an increasing number of interdependent variables can be simultaneously related. If the complexity of their relations cannot be grasped then the number of variables must be reduced, for example, in economics, a limited set of variables must be analysed in abstraction from a host of others which are assumed to remain equal. From this first aspect of the scope of dynamic analysis the aim is to increase the number of variables dealt with.

On the other hand the second aspect of the scope of analysis tends to be encouraged by the quantitative paucity of variables and the simplicity of their relations. This is the 'breadth of applicability' to a variety of situations of analytical generalizations stating the relationships between causal variables. If the economist is concerned only with the relationship between investment, employment and interest rates then a model exploring their relationships will have a broad scope of application, to all economies having capital and labour markets. But any one of those economies involves other economic and non-

economic variables. Two consequences follow from this point. Firstly, the model, although broad in application is necessarily abstract vis-a-vis any concrete situation. ((1938a:19) [1945a:215]). Secondly, the other relevant variables may well be different in the various concrete cases. The model may be differentially influenced by the effect of political variables such as a militant trade union movement in one case, a policy of military aggrandizement in another. So increasing the number of variables may decrease the breadth of applicability of such a model if the extra variables included are particular to a narrower field of concrete situations.

But in both aspects of the scope of analysis the root problem 'which presents the greatest theoretical difficulties to science' [1945a:215] is the same. It is the mutual interdependence of causal variables. In the simplest case of dynamic analysis above attention is directed to 'the effect of variation in one antecedent factor' on others but to Parsons the crucial difficulty is that in itself 'this ignores the reciprocal effect of these changes on this factor' [1945a:216] from the others. So '... the essential feature of dynamic analysis in the fullest sense is the treatment of a body of interdependent phenomena simultaneously in the mathematical sense' [1945a:215]. As in the case of description the interdependence of phenomena comes across time and time again as the prime difficulty facing social science. Whether Parsons is dealing with practical solutions to 'the German problems' [1945c:274] or the relationships between the treatment of

children, adult relationships and witchcraft amongst the Navajo (1946c:567) the point is constantly to the forefront.

The implications of this problem from the point of view of the extension of scope are twofold. If the scope of analysis in the sense of increasing the number of variables is to be extended then the variables must form a system, the fact of empirical interdependence must be reflected in the logical integration of relevant variables.

'The scientific function of the theoretical system is precisely to make dynamic analysis of the behaviour of the empirical system as a whole possible, thereby eliminating certain of the dangerous forms of abstraction inherent in a "one at a time" analytical procedure' (1942a:710-11).

If the causal variables are not somehow mutually related then there is a danger of treating relations between clusters of variables discretely; of asking what is the effect of a change in x on y and z? What is the effect of a change in y on x and z? etc., without asking how a change in x changes y which reverberates back onto x¹ and so on. The second implication of the problem is that in order that this complex of variables is not of such narrow scope that it only applies to one concrete situation the variables must be generalized so as to incorporate a wide variety of particular factors.

'It may be said, however, that science becomes theoretically sophisticated in so far as it is able to treat a variety of interrelated phenomena simultaneously in terms of their interdependence. To do this without error involves the use - the more complex the system the more so - of a complex generalized conceptual scheme' [1941a:23].

The main thread running through this discussion of the methodological problems with which general analytical theory is designed to cope has been the centrality of the concept of theoretical system. Before moving on to examine this the point can be finally reinforced by briefly noting four further functions of general analytical theory mentioned by Parsons, other than description and analysis. Firstly to refer back to the importance of the 'generality of implications' [1950a:352] of empirical research mentioned in the above remarks on the development of science.

'Through the mutual logical implications of different analytical systems for each other general analytical theory provides a source of cross fertilization of related fields of the utmost importance' [1938a:20].

Note that it is through the systemicity of theory that such cross fertilization is said to arise, Parsons claims that this might well not occur if fields of research 'remained theoretically isolated' [1938a:20]. Two examples in which Parsons at least wants to give the appearance of using theory to generalize across concrete fields are his application of economic theory to the general problem of the role of ideas in action (1938b) and his use of psychoanalytic therapy as a general model of social control mechanisms [1942c].

The second further function of general analytical theory is to reveal 'the gaps in our existing knowledge and their importance' (1938a:20). By following through the implications of knowledge systematically the scientist can arrive at what he really ought to know. Finally, theory provides a means of integrating knowledge. Again this has been noted earlier and will only be touched on here. Parsons refers to 'the organizing power of generalized theory' [1950a:354], its capacity to interrelate the work of a wide variety of researchers. So when he writes of the 'general theoretical tradition' of 'a working professional group' it is integration and mutual implication of research which is emphasised and 'the responsibility of theory to promote this process is heavy indeed' [1950a:350]. On the one hand Parsons complains that potential for fruitful integration has not yet been exploited, ((1941c:278,279), [1945a:219]) on the other hand he directs his attention to 'a system of

related abstractions - which cuts across the social sciences' [1941b:44]. For him, it is 'only the availability and common acceptance and employment of a well articulated generalized theoretical system' which can give such integration of knowledge and scientific activity. Perhaps at this point the function of theory and its systemic form become synonymous. This is indicative of the next task to be investigated.

This section has deliberately avoided broaching quite what is involved in the concept of a theoretical system although throughout its centrality has been drawn out. This procedure has been followed because the nature of theoretical systems is itself problematical to Parsons, indeed it is the central methodological problem which he tackles in this period leading to the advocacy of a structural-functional approach. The discussion now turns to this issue of how to formulate a system?

D. The central problem: how to formulate a theoretical system?

1. The centrality of the problem and its implications.

Throughout the last section it has been noted how time and time again Parsons returns to the notion of system to overcome what he sees as important methodological problems in science. Yet a comment in his review of Dodd intimates that 'the problem of formulating a system' (1942a:710) is not a closed issue. Parsons contends that '... not only can Dodd's claim to have offered the

the best available system not be admitted, but general adoption of S-theory would positively impede the achievement of the highest levels of generalized analysis attainable in the present state of the subject' (1942a:710). There are clearly alternative approaches to a system of theory available.

The centrality of the problem, of which alternative to take, can be indicated in various ways. Firstly, although Parsons' remarks on this point are sparse, the systemicity of theory seems to mark off practical common sense and scientific knowledge. All human societies possess a degree of empirically valid knowledge which is 'not theoretically systematized in the sense of modern science' (1938b:656). What Parsons means here has already been touched upon above: the use of explicit theoretical concepts and the capacity for coping with complex interdependence. It is the latter which is relevant here. When Parsons discusses the significance of classical economics, Freudian psychology and institutional sociology as breakthroughs in social science it is their employment of 'dynamic system(s) of interrelated variable elements' (1949c:49) which Parsons particularly emphasises as marking off these 'advances' from common sense.

'The common keynote of this development of modern dynamic psychology, of modern institutional sociology, and of social anthropology is that they deal with the phenomena of human behaviour precisely as complex dynamic systems. The capacity to do that and to attain some order of both

empirical accuracy and generality of analysis in terms of a conceptual scheme is, in my opinion, the most important single step from common sense to science' (1949c:52).

Further evidence for the centrality of the problem of system comes from Parsons' own reports on how he developed his theory in the post Structure of Social Action period. He notes the problem of restating the conceptual scheme of that book in terms of 'current levels of empirical research and conceptual schemes'. (1949a: viii). The 'major clues' in this process came from Henderson's stress on social systems and Cannon's formulation of structural-functional systems (1949a:viii). That such ruminations continued to the end of the period considered here is evidenced by Parsons' remark in his 1950 paper regarding the inadequacies of speculative theory in sociology. He says '... they presumed to set up a theoretical system instead of a systematic conceptual scheme' [1950a:352]. This is significant in that throughout the 1940's Parsons had himself advocated the development of a theoretical system in social science, then he appears to distinguish a systematic conceptual scheme from this and dissociate himself from theoretical systems. This, then, indicates that Parsons is throughout concerned with just what form his theoretical system should take. In the statement from 'The prospects of sociological theory' above, by a theoretical system Parsons means what he calls elsewhere an analytical system, by a conceptual scheme a

structural-functional system. These plus Weber's system of ideal types are the three alternative conceptions of system Parsons considers.

This section will review Parsons' remarks on this subject, noting his reservations and objections to analytical and ideal typical systems and his advocacy of a structural-functional system. It will conclude by attempting to specify the properties of a structural-functional system and how such a system can be seen as providing solutions to the methodological problems so far discussed. The crucial point is that these general problems of any and all science do not in themselves provide a rationale for the adoption of a structural-functional theoretical system and that, in itself, a structural-functional system does not solve these problems. In other words, something else must be added. It will be the major claim of this and the following chapter that, appearances to the contrary, Parsons continues to be concerned with methodological problems peculiar to the science of action. These problems are the 'traditional' issues of subjectivity, normative determinism and value but Parsons construes these issues in a rather idiosyncratic way. That is, he continues the discussion in terms of the framework established in The Structure of Social Action. The methodology of structural-functionalism is bound up with Parsons' attempt to construct a science of action and the traditional problems contained in that enterprise. For Parsons science and action or system and action are never two separate programmes or temporally distinguishable

phases in his work, their interrelationship is a central preoccupation.

2. Analytical theoretical systems.

The first type of theoretical system considered by Parsons is what he calls an analytical system. His model here is analytical mechanics ([1941a:23] [1945a:216]) (27). Such a system (28) is composed of two kinds of concepts. Firstly, structural concepts whose function is to describe the units of empirical systems [1945a:217]. In mechanics a system is composed of particles as its units [1945a:214], in biology the organism is made up of cells, in sociology the units of social systems are roles. In an analytical system such structural concepts serve only to delimit the system from its environment [1941a:23] in the sense of that which is irrelevant for the theory. In mechanics the theory of classical physics is only 'about' phenomena as physical bodies. As such in this kind of system structural concepts are essentially secondary in importance to causal variables. In an analytical system empirical phenomena must be capable of conceptualization as variables, a variable being 'a combination of logical universals to which many different particulars, the values of the variables, may be fitted' (1938b:652-3). The important point here is that a variable is a general property of empirical phenomena whose variation has important consequences for the behaviour of an empirical system, a concept must be general and stand as a variable in the literal sense.

Such concepts form a theoretical system: they are interdependent with each other in two senses. Firstly, logical interdependence, the system contains all the relevant variables necessary to describe any state of the empirical system and explain any behaviour of the empirical system as delimited by its structure. It is thus an interdependent system in the sense of being adequate to its subject matter, requiring no undefined residual categories or special pleas for special cases. It is because the system's variables are logically adequate in this sense that structural concepts play such a limited role. Only when the conditions of applicability of variables is in question does structural analysis play a part. The second sense of interdependence is causal, the variables composing the system stand in relationships of reciprocal causation so that a change in one reverberates throughout the system. Such dynamic relations are ideally understood in terms of mathematics. A series of mathematic equations stating all the possible variations of combination of the system's variables would represent the laws of the system: '... mathematics in physics is theory' [1945a:224].

Parsons flirts with the possibility of developing analytical systems in social science in his essay on the role of ideas (1938b) and believes that a start has been made toward such a system in economics [1945a:224]. But the latter is a special case (see below) and in general Parsons continues to be sceptical about the contemporary feasibility of this kind of theoretical system ([1941a:23-4], [1945a:216]). As in The Structure of Social Action

Pareto's failure to make this enterprise work persuades Parsons that if Pareto, with his training in and understanding of mathematics, physics and economics, could not succeed then the chances are that at the moment no one can [1945a:225]. The attainment of theoretical systems of this kind stands as an ideal only actually achieved in analytical mechanics [1945a:216], a fact which is not as discouraging to Parsons as it appears at first sight as alternatives are available.

Parsons outlines two conditions for the successful construction of an analytical system, neither of which are presently feasible in social science [1945a:216]. One is that the variables must be susceptible to mathematical manipulation. Parsons seems to regard this as a remote possibility even in economics, to him the most advanced social science [1945a:225]. Secondly, the variables must be empirically operational in that they 'must vary only in numerically quantitative value on a continuum' [1945a:225]. It is the feasibility of this in a money economy which accounts for the partial success of analytical systems in economics [1945a:225], just as heat can be measured in terms of temperature so demand can be measured in terms of price and quantity ratios. Parsons insists though that it is not measurement per se which matters, the first requirement is that the variables measured are the relevant ones and relevance is not determined by measurability ((1938a:19-20), [1945b:216]).

So analytical systems stand as an ideal in science but an ideal which is impractical in current social science. Note that the difficulties mentioned by Parsons are technical ones, difficulties which can be overcome in principle. Whilst Parsons is critical of thoughtless attempts to ape physics such as Dodd's he wishes to attain '... the nearest possible approach to an equivalent of the role of mathematical analysis in physics' [1945a:224]. Parsons then does not pursue the building of analytical systems but in the sense of a standard and director analytical systems play a role in his thinking. His alternative is judged by reference to them. This is certainly how Parsons himself regards analytical systems and no doubt this ideal plays a part in his adoption of structural-functional theoretical systems. However it will be argued below that other preoccupations also play their part in shaping Parsons' thinking on structural-functionalism. Parsons' alternative formulation of theoretical systems is not only a function of the technical difficulties in analytical systems but also a response to methodological problems of a science of action.

3. Ideal typical theoretical systems.

The second approach to formulating a theoretical system Parsons considers is that of Weber in Economy and Society. He regards this as '... the systematic development ... of a comprehensive, logically integrated scheme of "ideal types" of social action and relationships' [1941a:4]. Parsons' discussion of Weber is marked by a rather paradoxical position.

On the one hand he notes that Weber explicitly denied the possibility or desirability of a system of theory in the social sciences. On the other hand Parsons argues that Weber is important because of his implicit contribution to systematic theory. It is because Weber 'hides his light under a bushel' [1941a:7] that his ideal typical approach to systematic theory is inadequate. It is inadequate because it is incomplete but to complete the system involves going beyond the ideal typical approach [1941a:3, 7, 14, 28]. (29).

The adoption of this general stance gives Parsons' remarks on Weber a peculiar quality. Although written as an introduction to a translation of the opening chapters of Economy and Society they can hardly be read as an essay in exegesis. As Parsons himself says the introduction '... represents the author's first major attempt since The Structure of Social Action to discuss critically the basic methodological problems of a theory of social systems' . (30) As in much of his writing on major thinkers his discussion is an exercise in development of Parsons' thinking, using Weber as a foil, perhaps a challenge. His remarks then are hopelessly biased from the point of view of an accurate commentary on Weber. For example, as in The Structure of Social Action he gives no serious consideration to Weber's claim that no one system of theory is desirable or possible in social science and Weber's criticism of such an aspiration. Rather the critique of anti-theoretical historicism is noted but the parallel critique of general theories is largely ignored, being confined in this present work to rather condescending

excuses for Weber's scepticism of psychology (see below). From the point of view of the present discussion then Parsons' remarks on Weber are significant in illuminating his own position in a number of respects. These will be drawn out later particularly with reference to functionalism, psychology and Parsons own understanding of ideal type concepts.

Weber's approach to sociological theory then is in terms of a system of ideal type concepts [1941a:4, 14, 28] and type generalizations [1945a:108]. In Parsons' presentation ideal types have the following characteristics [1945a:13]. Ideal types are firstly abstractions and generalities. They describe typical courses of action which can incorporate a range of particular instances. The ideal type is abstract vis-a-vis any one of those instances for the following reason:

'The ideal type as Weber used it is both abstract and general. It does not describe a concrete course of action, but a normatively ideal course, assuming certain ends and modes of normative orientation as "binding" on the actors' [1941a:13].

The ideal type is abstract because it formulates a normatively ideal course of action. This will be returned to in a moment.

It is of note here that whilst there is a suggestion of this in Weber's work there is considerable ambiguity in his position which is dissolved by Parsons. Only one connotation of Weber's approach is drawn out by Parsons, others are ignored. In the second characteristic of ideal types the Parsonian reinterpretation of Weber is far less subtle.

Parsons notes that for Weber an ideal type must describe an 'objectively possible' course of action. Now it seems to the present writer that for Weber this means simply that an ideal type must be logically internally consistent and in terms of inductive knowledge, empirically possible. Parsons goes a good deal further than this. Elaborating the phrase 'objective possibility' he says: 'It [an ideal type] contains, within the logical requirements of the relevant frame of reference, all the necessary properties or features of a concrete act or complex of action' [1941a:13]. Objective possibility then is assessed by reference to what must necessarily be included in any concrete case according to the logic of a frame of reference. This introduces an element of deductive reasoning into type construction, an ideal type is built up from a limited number of non-ideal typical components, in Parsons' terminology, analytical elements. Quite which analytical elements are necessary for any given ideal type is a function of the frame of reference employed. The importance of this point comes out in the third characteristic of ideal types.

'... the different logically distinct elements which are essential to the formulation of this type may be, indeed generally are, independently variable. The ideal type contains no particular statement of fact. But it does, logically, involve a fixed relation between the values of the various variable elements involved' [1941a:13].

The non-ideal typical concepts which, by virtue of Parsons' second characteristic, are the components of ideal types stand in fixed relationships to each other when they constitute ideal types. It can simply be noted here that this is nothing but a Parsonian gloss on Weber, as far as the present writer knows nowhere in Weber's methodological writings is such a position even suggested. This is significant in that it is this Parsonian characteristic of ideal types which Parsons takes objection to. His criticism of ideal type theory will be discussed presently.

Before considering the latter the first characteristic of ideal types, their normatively ideal status, must be returned to. 'The ideal type, then, is not merely an abstraction, but a particular kind of abstraction. It states the case where a normative or ideal pattern is perfectly complied with' [1941a:12]. A footnote is added to this to the effect that the point of reference of ideal here is the actor not the observer, it is not

the observer's normative orientation which is idealized in the type but the actor's. Parsons' cue here is Weber's advocacy of rational ideal types in sociology. To Parsons the rationality of action refers to a peculiar type of normative orientation, in The Structure of Social Action called the norm of intrinsic rationality. Action is rational insofar as the actor's action can be understood in terms of verifiable relationships of cause and effect where the action, that is the employment of means, is the cause and the end, a future state of affairs to be attained, is the effect. To Parsons such action depends upon the actor making sense of the world in a particular kind of way: especially selecting means in terms of whether or not it is possible in principle to establish a causal relationship of this kind between them and an end and, if it is, selecting the means most efficacious to the attainment of the end. The rationality of action then is not natural or inevitable but a function of the actor's normative orientation. Understood in this way there is no ambiguity in the term rationality and certainly this sense of rationality plays an important part in Weber's thinking.

But Weber is not unambiguous on this point. There is a different aspect of his writing on and employment of rational ideal types which does not involve the use of a fixed criterion of rationality such as that above. Rather than rationality being assessed by the equivalence of means-end and cause-effect relationships Weber sometimes suggests that the rationality of action simply

means the reasonableness of action to the actor, it has sense and meaning (31). Then the concept of rational ideal types has a different connotation. An ideal type is rational in that it articulates and clarifies the actor's rationality. Here then rational ideal types do involve abstraction in the direction of a normatively ideal course of action. In concrete action meaning is often implicit, buried in a mass of tacitly accepted rules and projects. The 'understanding' of meaningful action involves the elucidation of meaning, a task which involves idealizing and typifying actors' rules and complexes of motive. Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, in which the ideal types of protestant and capitalistic orientation to economic action serve to draw out the meaning of that action, is an example of the use of rational ideal types in this sense. Essential to the rationale for an interpretive sociology is that on the one hand it is presupposed that human behaviour has meaning to its agents and on the other hand that quite what meaning is problematical, a task for investigation not presupposition on the part of the sociologist. In this sense rational ideal types can be seen as an essential tool in that process of investigation.

What Parsons does then is to juxtapose the narrow sense of rationality and the injunction to draw out and idealize embodied in the understanding of action. This combination involves the loss of the problematic status of the actor's rationality. Instead

the notion of a normative or ideal course is placed in a different context, Parsons' voluntaristic metaphysic (39). This is indicated by his phraseology in the passages already quoted. An ideal type describes a course of action where a norm 'is perfectly complied with', where a normatively ideal course is '"binding" on the actors'. The reason why such points are added to the normatively ideal character of ideal types is clearly stated.

'As the editor has shown in previous works, it is inherent in the frame of reference of "action" which is basic to Weber's whole methodology, that it is "normatively oriented". The actor is treated not merely as responding to stimuli, but as making an "effort" to conform with certain "ideal", rather than actual, patterns of conduct with the probability that his efforts will be only partially successful, and there will be elements of deviation' [1941a: 12].

In the above sketch of the place of rational ideal types in interpretive sociology the sociologist employs such types to draw out the sense and rationale of action from the dense complexity of taken for granted understandings. Parsons' use of normatively ideal types is quite different. For him actual action always departs from the ideal course because action is a function of two opposed sets of courses, normative and conditional. The former influences

action only insofar as the actor strives to conform to them. Ideal types describe a situation in which the actor's efforts are completely successful, a situation extremely rare in the real world.

This discussion of the normatively ideal character of ideal types is significant for two reasons. The first is that this aspect of Parsons' thinking links with a strand in his work in the 1930's, the notion that laws in the science of action are equivalent to rules of action. In the 1930's this was very much a straw in the wind, never seriously developed. Indeed it is missing from The Structure of Social Action but it re-emerges here. Secondly, it is pertinent to note here that although Parsons rejects the form of system of theory he sees Weber as advocating he does not reject ideal type concepts per se. It is the notion of a system of ideal types he objects to. So he says that ideal types are 'a kind of conceptualization which is essential at some point in the development of systematic sociological theory' [1941a:14]. Given this, it is relevant to note the nature of these concepts as he understands them for although not important to Parsons' work in the 1940's ideal types formulated along these lines are used by Parsons, for example, the notion of perfectly institutionalized limiting cases in The Social System (1951b: e.g. 42, 44).

This discussion now turns to Parsons' criticism of Weber's alleged approach to a system of theory. A number of objections are put forward to ideal typical concepts in themselves. Because an ideal type involves a fixed relationship between its component

elements a sense of the independent variation of those elements is missing [1941a:13]. The use of ideal types focuses attention on extreme or polar cases and encourages 'type atomism' in which the types become reified [1941a:15]. These points are illustrated by reference to the problem of rationality but essentially remain undeveloped because the main drift of Parsons' remarks is toward the problem of constructing a system of ideal types.

'Ideal type theory is, however, perhaps the most difficult level on which to develop a coherent generalized system. Type concepts can readily be formulated ad hoc for innumerable specific purposes and can have a limited usefulness in this way. This does not, however, suffice for a generalized system. For this purpose they must be arranged and classified in a definite order of relationship' [1941a:28].

This is a very real problem particularly with reference to Weber's Economy and Society. Throughout the pages of that work the reader is given little indication as to why particular conceptual avenues are explored and others neglected and how the plurality of type concepts are to be related. As Parsons says if one aspires to a generalized system 'they must be arranged and classified in a definite order of relationship'. To do this presupposed theoretical principles governing what is selected and how it is ordered; it presupposes a non-ideal typical theoretical structure.

So far Parsons' criticism is valid, a system of ideal types presupposes non-ideal typical principles. But he carries this point considerably further to specify quite what form those principles must take. To Parsons a system of ideal types presupposes 'the analysis of the structure of a total social system which is a logically necessary prerequisite' of a classification of ideal types [1941a:14-15], (see also [1941a:14, 18, 29]). Logically prior to a system of ideal types is a theoretical system of a different kind, a system of structural concepts taking a total social system as a point of reference. Parsons does not actually argue this case. But it is a claim which requires argument as alternative solutions are quite plausible. The systemicity of a series of ideal types can arise from concern with an empirical problem as in Weber's exploration of rationalization and bureaucratization which certainly gives Economy and Society a rather different kind of coherence than that suggested by Parsons. This overlaps with a second possibility, philosophies of man and society functioning as the guiding principles of complex theoretical structures. Ollman, (1971) for example, has explored the corpus of Marx's work in terms of the unifying theme of the alienation of man. Tonnies (1955) is more explicit in constructing a complex scheme of 'normal concepts' guided and shaped by a dualistic philosophy of natural and rational will. Rather than arguing his case Parsons' strategy is to claim that Weber despite what he says, does in fact go beyond ideal typical concepts in the direction advocated by Parsons [1941a:14, 20, 25, 28]. He does

this implicitly however and consequently there is no rigorous development of this non-ideal typical approach [1941a:14, 20, 21, 25]. This is a contentious claim on Parsons' part which will not however be examined here. It is enough to note that it is Weber's failure to develop the approach to generalized theory actually underlying his ideal types which partly accounts for his rejection of functional analysis and psychology as a necessary complement to sociology. Once the obstacle of the vain enterprise of an ideal typical system is removed Parsons feels that Weber's objections to these dissolve away. These claims will be examined in the appropriate places below. The possibility of an ideal typical theoretical system then is discounted on the grounds that it is secondary to a different kind of system to which this discussion now turns.

4. Structural functional theoretical systems.

The approach to theoretical systems advocated by Parsons is what he calls a structural-functional system. In what is perhaps his major theoretical paper of this period Parsons says: 'It is the primary thesis of this paper that the structural-functional type of system is the one which is most likely and suitable to play a dominant role in sociological theory' [1945a:219] (see also (1942a:714) (1948b:158)). Parsons' use of a 'functional' way of thinking, broadly the description and explanation of particular phenomena in terms of their contribution to an organic whole, is not new. It can be found in Parsons' papers in the 1930's (see, for example, the comments on magic in (1935a:301)) and has been discerned in the structural analysis of The Structure of Social Action. This

implicit functionalism continues in his papers published between 1937 and 1940 before Parsons explicitly raises the structural-functional approach as the key to his methodology. So in his remarks on the professions he situates the professions in terms of their function for the working of a society as a whole, saying 'If seems evident that many of the most important features of our society are to a considerable extent dependent on the smooth functioning of the professions' [1939:34]. Such a working society is thought of as having certain needs which must be satisfied. Institutions will be differentiated to achieve this and can be understood in this way. So speaking of the difference between business and the professions Parsons says: 'The institutional patterns governing the two fields of action are radically different in this respect. Not only are they different; it can be shown conclusively that this difference has very important functional bases' [1939:46]. The professions then are analyzed in terms of such needs; for example, after noting that the universities are the 'trustees of learning - the agencies responsible for its perpetuation, transmission and advancement' Parsons observes 'that the performance of this crucial function of the university has been, and is, entrusted to a professional group, the "academic" profession' (1937c:366). The need is for trusteeship of learning, the academic profession is understood in terms of its contribution to satisfying that need.

'Functionalism' here is very much of the taken for granted variety so common in much everyday thinking about society. But in 1941 Parsons makes his functional approach not only explicit but the primary aspect of his method. This comes out haltingly in his review of Thorndike in which he complains that, though 'well schooled in a "functional" mode of thinking' on the biological level Thorndike fails to 'carry out the same kind of analysis in a systematic manner' in the social context, 'ignoring ... the structure of a functional system' (1941c:279). The essay which most clearly announces Parsons' functionalism is his 'Introduction' to Weber's chapters from Economy and Society [1941a]. (33) He says of this piece: 'It was in this that a formulation of such a body of theory in structural-functional terms was first approached, and the role of the concept of function first clearly worked out' (34). The origins of his adoption of structural-functionalism are made quite clear by Parsons. They are threefold: Durkheim and the British school of anthropology, psychoanalysis and biological theory, particularly the work of W.B. Cannon. ((1942a:710), [1945a:218-9, 226-7], (1948b:158), (1949a:viii)). Of these it can be suggested that the latter is by far the most significant. It is pertinent to note that Durkheim's use of functional analysis is largely ignored in The Structure of Social Action. It is only after the growth of Parsons' interest in functionalism that this aspect of Durkheim's work becomes prominent for him. Similarly, in the case of social anthropology, although Malinowski's work

was known and used by Parsons throughout the 1930's his functionalism was not stressed. It is significant that Parsons calls these 'antecedents' of the structural-functional type of theoretical system [1945a:226]. It is only after his adoption of structural-functionalism that he goes back and seeks out the functionalist aspects of Durkheim and the British school.

The second influence is the treatment of the mind as an integrated structure, characterised by dynamic interrelations of its parts, in psychoanalysis. Parsons notes that the development of a structural-functional theoretical system is 'less complete' in psychology than biology [1945a:218]. Now, whilst it is self-evident that Freud adopts a holistic and dynamic conception of the human mind it is far from self-evident that his is a structural-functional model of the mind. Parsons' treatment of id, ego and superego as complementary, mutually supporting parts of an interdependent whole is surely one of his more audacious re-interpretations. Few readers of Freud would disagree that the overall tenor of psychoanalysis is the conflict of the mutually opposed components of the system. The point of this remark is to suggest again that Parsons' structural-functionalism does not come directly from psychoanalysis. Rather, as in the case of its sociological antecedents, Parsons reads Freud in terms of structural-functionalism.

In varying degrees then, Durkheim, social anthropology, and psychoanalysis support structural-functionalism, the major source of which is biology, specifically W.B. Cannon's The Wisdom of the Body. So Parsons says: 'On a relatively complete and explicit

level this type of generalized system has been most fully developed in physiology' [1945a:218], to which is added a footnote to Cannon. Again, Parsons says that Cannon, along with Henderson, (35) supplied the 'major clues' in the re-orientation of his conceptual scheme (1949a:viii). The influence of biological theory has been picked out as the major source of Parsons' structural-functionalism because of the tenor of his only consideration of objections to such an approach, those put forward by Max Weber. Parsons' discussion of this hardly touches on the logic of structural-functional analysis. Rather, his remarks are geared to the refutation of any suggestion of biological reductionism concomitant on the adoption of an approach taken from biological theory. [1941a:18-20]. Parsons' defense then is the converse of his own attack on anti-intellectualistic positivism.

So structural-functionalism is an approach which is employed in biology but is not particular to the empirical problems and substantive theory of biology. It is an approach (a term favoured by Parsons, for example, (1941c:279), [1941a:19, 21]) to formulating a theoretical system, that is a way of logically articulating a scheme of concepts ((1941c:282), [1945a:228], [1950a:352]). The rest of this section will be concerned with briefly outlining the major features of this approach. The primary task will be to indicate the importance of the concepts of structure, process and function and to show in a general way

their significance in relation to the methodological problems of description and analysis already discussed. Crucially however, this present section will refrain from enquiring in any detailed way into what these concepts actually mean. This will be the major theme of chapter V, the overall claim of which is that the structural-functional approach can be related to and elucidated by Parsons' underlying concern with methodological problems specific to a science of action. The central concepts of structure, process and function will then be elaborated in that context.

It has already been noted that theory serves the description and analysis of empirical phenomena, or more accurately, empirical systems. These two tasks will provide the framework for these remarks beginning with description. Much of what was said above in discussing the problems of description is relevant here, notably the concept of empirical system. The aim of a structural-functional theoretical system is to facilitate the description of empirical systems. A structural-functional system: '... consists of the generalized categories necessary for an adequate description of states of an empirical system' [1945a:218]. The following paragraphs will seek to show the centrality of a concept of structure in this and to delimit the specific attributes of a structural-functional, as opposed to any other, description of empirical systems.

It was suggested in the earlier discussion that three points characterise empirical systems; their interdependence, their holism and their autonomous irreducibility. The interdependence of the

phenomena constituting empirical systems means that such phenomena are intimately interwoven with each other. Further, the holism of empirical systems suggests that this is not a haphazard or random series of relations, in it can be discerned pattern or structure. To describe a system is to map out that structure. It is in this context that Parsons says:

'Structure is the "static" aspect of the descriptive mode of treatment of a system. From the structural point of view a system is composed of "units", of sub-systems which potentially exist independently, and their structural interrelations' [1945a:214].

For example, to describe the solar system is to identify its units, the sun, planets and their moons; to specify their properties such as mass and to investigate their movements, their orbits for example, All of these may be in a process of change, indeed for purposes of analysis this is taken as given [1945a:217] but to cope with change science must be able to state what is changing to what. It is in this sense that Parsons calls structure the "static" aspect of the description of systems. But this example is taken from an analytical type of system, Parsons' usual guiding light, classical mechanics. Whilst what has been said holds for structural-functional systems the peculiarities of this kind of description must be noted.

The following passage is instructive:

'Every social system is a functioning entity. That is, it is a system of interdependent structures and processes such that it tends to maintain a relative stability and distinctiveness of pattern and behaviour as an entity by contrast with its - social or other - environment, and with it a relative independence from environmental forces. It "responds", to be sure, to the environmental stimuli, but is not completely assimilated to its environment, maintaining rather an element of distinctiveness in the face of variations in environmental conditions. To this extent it is analogous to an organism [1942c:143].

Three points can be made here. Firstly, the phrase 'a relative stability and distinctiveness of pattern and behaviour as an entity' suggests the meaning of structure already noted. But secondly, structure in the simple sense of pattern is considerably elaborated building upon the interdependent and holistic characteristics of empirical systems. To understand the movement of a planet it may well be necessary to describe it as a part of the solar system but it is not necessary to distinguish sharply between the solar

system and its environment and to describe the system in terms of the maintenance of the distinction between system and environment. The holism of a structural-functional description implies this contrast between system and environment and the structural-functional description of the interdependence of system phenomena emphasises the teleological maintenance of structure against the threatening forces of environment. This takes these comments on to the third characteristic of empirical systems, their mutual irreducibility. Empirical systems have features which are autonomous in the emergent sense. They are properties of phenomena on a given level of complex relationship. If this level is simplified these properties are lost. Again structural-functional description of this quality has its distinct peculiarities. Here '... the basic structural principle, as in the case of anatomy, is that of functional differentiation' [1945a:231]. The autonomous, irreducible properties of empirical systems are conceived as functional needs of systems from the structural-functional point of view.

'Now on the level of the total social systems as a whole there are certain basic aspects of its structure which can be differentiated out when the system as a whole is treated from a functional point of view.... It would seem to be a fundamental fact, crucial to the functional approach, that the primary modes of

differentiation in the structure of a system are related to its functional needs in such a way that some differentiated parts are particularly important and effective in contributing to one or a related group of functional needs' [1941a:213].

To describe then involves the employment of structural concepts. To describe in structural-functional terms involves reference to the maintenance of structure as problematic and the needs of the system. This is a familiar 'functionalist' approach which has been subject to many pertinent criticisms which will not be taken up here. Rather the following procedure will be followed. In this present discussion no attempt has been made to examine in any detail just what Parsons means by structure or structural concepts, simply to record rather well known aspects of the structural-functional approach with the intention of indicating the place of the concept of structure in description. In Chapter V the concept will be returned to and its meaning explored in a rather different context to those addressed by the above mentioned criticisms.

The second task of theory is to facilitate dynamic analysis; explanation in terms of uniformities between causal variables (36) As has been noted, the great problem with this from Parsons' point of view is the interdependence of causal variables. This means that 'The most essential condition of successful dynamic analysis is continual and systematic reference of every problem to the state of the system as a whole' [1945a:216]. By 'the system as

a whole' here is meant the capacity to grasp the mutual influence of changes throughout the system of causal variables. An analytical system is one way, indeed the ideal way, of coping with this problem but in the absence of the conditions necessary for this type of system an inferior substitute is required. In its analytical use a structural-functional theoretical system is proposed as such an alternative. It is admitted to be 'technically far less than perfect' [1941a:24] but is designed to address the same problem of interdependence.

Any theoretical system tackles the problem by the strategy of simplification, that is, for the purposes of solving some empirical problems some phenomena are excluded from the system by being made constant, the assumption of ceteris paribus.

'Logically, simplification is possible only through the removal of some generalized categories from the role of variables and their treatment as constants. An analytical system of the type of mechanics does this for certain elements outside the system which are conditional to it' [1945a:216].

It can be noted here that by constant Parsons clearly means irrelevant to the dynamic problem at hand. The danger in pushing the assumption of ceteris paribus too far, however, is that the scope of analysis in the sense of the number of variables treated together decreases and the resulting theoretical model

becomes more and more abstract in its application to concrete cases.

To obviate this danger Parsons proposes a variation on the strategy of simplification through the use of constants. Rather than excluding constants from the theoretical system Parsons claims that it is logically feasible to include constants in the system [1945a:216]. So some of the analytical elements which constitute the theoretical system are constant rather than variable. These are structural concepts.

'The structure of the system, from the point of view of the logic of analysis, treats certain features of the empirical system as constant for the purposes in hand. They are thus removed from involvement in the dynamic problem, which is in so far simplified' [1941a:24].

This 'involvement of the structure of the empirical system as an essential element in the solution of dynamic problems' Parsons calls 'the fundamental logical difference' between analytical and structural-functional theoretical systems [1941a:24]. It is 'the most essential point about a structural-functional theory' (1948b:158). As such it requires a few words of comment.

Firstly, to follow this strategy involves the distinction between two types of conceptual constituents of theoretical systems. These are structural concepts which are constant and process or dynamic concepts which are variable. So Parsons contrasts '"static" structural categories' with 'the dynamically variable elements in the system' [1945a:217]. Secondly, Parsons is guilty of a dubious play on words here. In an analytical system the use of constants through the assumption of ceteris paribus means that the causal elements held constant are assumed to be irrelevant to the problem at issue. Constancy here means irrelevance. But Parsons use of constancy in a structural-functional system is entirely different. The constant elements of the system are the structural elements which are constant in the sense of being empirically stable. Structure refers 'to sufficiently stable uniformities in the results of underlying processes so that their constancy within certain limits is a workable assumption' [1945a:217]. In a moment further ambiguities in meaning will be noted which along with the notion of constancy will here be taken to indicate that the concepts of structure, process and function owe their significance not just to this formal role of being substitutes for an analytical system but to other influences which throw light on such rather glaring blunders.

The third point relevant here is that the inclusion of structural categories in this role as constants simplifies the problem of causal interdependence whilst at the same time maintaining

the scope of analysis. The latter is sustained because constants are not excluded from the analysis. But in what sense does this approach maintain the interdependence of the elements of the system? Parsons says:

'Their [structural concepts] function is to simplify the dynamic problems to the point where they are manageable without the possibility of refined mathematical analysis. At the same time the loss, which is very great, is partly compensated by relating all problems explicitly and systematically to the total system' [1945a:217].

Once again there appears to be some sleight of hand here. When Parsons says that the condition of dynamic analysis is the capacity for reference of any particular problem to the state of the system as a whole [1945a:216], 'whole' implies only the total quantity of mutually related causal elements in the system. Here reference to the total system is necessitated because of the interdependence of causal elements. In the structural-functional formulation however a rather different picture emerges. The whole system is not simply the total of causal elements, rather it is an entity described by its structure.

'It is thus the functional reference of all particular conditions and process to the state of the total system as a going concern which provides the logical equivalent of simultaneous equations in a fully developed system of analytical theory' [1945a:218].

Here then reference to the whole is not required because of interdependence but instead of interdependence. The meaning of 'whole' is not a totality of elements but a substantive state of affairs, the state of the system as a going concern, described by its structure. (37)

Structural-functional analysis involves the distinction between structural (constant) and process (variable) concepts. Rather than focusing on the interdependence of variables or processes (whole as totality) the analysis involves relating variable processes to a constant structure (whole as entity). The question which arises here, forming the basis for the fourth point in this comment, is what is the character of the link between variable process and constant structure? This is the role of the concept of function ([1941a:24], [1945a:217-8]). Variable processes are analysed with reference to their functional significance for the maintenance of the structure of the system. This confirms what was said above about the substantive conception of 'whole'.

'The essential link is supplied by the concept of function. The processes which are dynamically analysed are those which are "functionally" related, in the given situation, to the maintenance of a level of functional performance by the system, as a whole, as a "going concern"' [1941a:24].

Structural-functional analysis is concerned not with causal relations between variables but with 'functional' relations between part and whole. But a further ambiguity arises here.

One meaning of function is the contribution which a part makes to the maintenance of the system's ongoing structure. But Parsons' claim is that this acts as 'the logical equivalent of simultaneous equations in a fully developed system of analytical theory' in that through functional relationships the 'dynamic interdependence of variable factors can be explicitly analyzed' [1945a:218]. Something more than part-whole relationships seems to be implied here, that via the whole the interdependence of parts can be grasped. The whole, that is, the structure of the system acts as a mediator whereby the fit or correspondence of parts is established.

'And the systematic ordering of these categories is not possible without the functional point of view; it provides the integrating principles in terms of which such categories constitute a generalized system rather than an ad hoc collection of disconnected concepts'

[1941a:22].

The aim of the above discussion has been to establish the place of the concepts of structure, process and function in a structural-functional theoretical system. Parsons provides an explicit rationale for these concepts but it is hoped that the ambiguities identified in the above discussion support the contention already announced that there is more to Parsons' position than this explicit rationale. My claim is that implicitly the crucial concepts of structural-functional theoretical systems are infused with an underlying concern with problems of a science of action. As such in the next chapter these concepts will be examined more closely in that context.

V. Voluntarism, Normative Control and Value in the Structural Functional Approach to Institutions and Motivation.

A. Introduction

Chapter IV has been concerned with what, to Parsons, are the problems and requirements of science in general. These are, of course, elaborated in the context of his discussion of the science of action but they are never claimed to be peculiar to such a science. Indeed Parsons' position in these essays is marked by the absence of any explicit awareness and concern with methodological problems particular to the science of action. Rather, he seems to suggest that the methodological problems of such a science are the same as those of the physical sciences only more difficult to solve in practice ((1938a:18), [1950a:348]). As has already been noted this does not mean that Parsons advocates a simple minded aping of physical science, indeed this qualification can be pushed rather further. A system of scientific theory must be 'adequate' to its subject matter. The insistence on this point arises from the critique of positivism and empiricism; attempts to describe and explain action in terms of the substantive concepts of non-action sciences. Also, the adequacy of a theory can be taken a step further than its substantive components, to key elements in its logical structure. When the central concepts of structure, process and function are examined in the specific context of the science of action then a concern with their adequacy to the subject matter of action can be discerned in Parsons' work. In other words although there is an absence of explicit focus on methodological problems of a science of action

the major concepts of structural-functionalism, as an approach to theoretical systems, manifest a continuing, underlying, pre-occupation with such problems.

It is the prime task of this chapter to substantiate this claim. It is a claim which is prima facie implausible, for example, the polemical insistence on 'the subjective point of view of the actor', so marked in The Structure of Social Action, has disappeared. It only becomes a plausible claim in the light of the definition of the problems of action in The Structure of Social Action. The point made in chapter IV as to Parsons' thinking on the relationship of philosophy and science can be reintroduced here. This is his strategy of translating philosophical problems into terms amenable to his understanding of science. In chapter III it has been suggested that Parsons follows this practice in The Structure of Social Action. There, long standing methodological problems in the philosophical debate on the nature of a science of action were presented and defined in a manner peculiar to Parsons. When it is claimed that Parsons continues to display an implicit concern with problems of a science of action it is the problems as Parsons formulates them that is meant. This is why his concern is implicit, for The Structure of Social Action was intended to resolve the problems of a science of action and, from Parsons' point of view, achieved its aim. So this chapter will attempt to identify these Parsonian formulations of problems of a science of action and link them to the methodology of structural-functionalism.

B. The problem of subjectivity.

1. The loss of meaning and the gain of psychology.

Throughout the essays being considered here Parsons continues to speak of the subjective point of view of the actor to a science of action even if in less insistent terms than previously. When briefly outlining the frame of reference of action he says:

'Studying the processes of action, the scheme takes the point of view of the meaning of the various elements in the system to the actor' [1950b:336]. In his essay on the role of ideas in action the point is made that: '... ideas are in some sense imputed, not only to the sociological observer of action, but to the actor himself. It is a question not of what honesty means to the observer, but to the actor' (1938b:661). Again the situation of action must be analyzed in terms of 'the various types of significance of situational facts to the actor' (1948b:158).

These passages all suggest that by the subjective point of view Parsons is intending the meaning of action to the participant actors. Such a position would be consistent with Parsons' claimed allegiance to Weber's sociology of social action. Not only does Parsons explicitly point to the parallel between his own approach and that of Weber [1941a:9-10] but also he sometimes employs a mode of expression clearly reminiscent of the latter. For example, when he says that 'It is only through the understanding of "adequate motivation" that the dynamic connections between situation and behaviour in the different areas of human social life can be established' (1946c:568), Weber's notion of a

sociology 'adequate on the level of meaning' is an evident inspiration.

The above examples and the influence of Weber both suggest that by the phrase 'the subjective point of view of the actor' is meant the importance of including the meaning of action to the actor in scientific accounts of action. Parsons describes the action frame of reference couched in such terms as 'a broad and noncommittal schema which is, in fundamental respects, in general current use' (1948b:159). However, this statement conceals a number of ambiguities in Parsons' position. Four such equivocations can be noted which cast doubt upon quite what Parsons means by the subjectivity of action, in particular the place of actors' meanings in scientific accounts.

First of all it can be noted that the actor's point of view is not the only point of view employed by Parsons. He often draws a contrast between the point of view of the actor and that of the social system ([1942c:144], (1948b:160)). Of course, social systems do not have 'points of view' in the ordinary sense, what is meant is a different kind of analysis, as is indicated by the observation that:

'It is the structurally significant elements of the total concrete relationship pattern which are institutionally relevant. What these are cannot be decided in terms of

the subjective sentiments of participant observers but only in the perspective of structural analysis of the social system⁰ [1945c:239] .

This contrast is sometimes seen as a major dichotomy running through Parsons⁰ work or, again, as an axis of change from one type of Parsonian theory to another. From the present author⁰s position this is a mistake in that it puts too much credence on Parsons⁰ rhetoric of the actor⁰s point of view, fails to investigate just what that implies and hence fails to grasp the close connection he draws between (what he takes to be) the actor⁰s point of view and structural-functional analysis of social systems. For the moment then the two points of view will be left as an ambiguity in terms of the sense of subjectivity in the theory of action.

A second question arises from the following passage in which Parsons justifies the importance of the subjective point of view by the fact that it facilitates the union of sociology and psychology.

'The theory must be formulated within what may be called the "action" frame of reference. It cannot, that is, be completely behaviouristic in the sense of excluding all reference to the point of view of the actor himself and to what is imputed as belonging to his

internal or subjective mental processes.
This postulate is essential in order to
make it possible to achieve a high degree
of articulation with the motivational
categories of contemporary psychology
which deals with such things as attitudes,
sentiments, complexes, and the like'
(1948b:158).

The brief list of motivational categories here indicates the problem;
the concept of goal can be employed to describe actor's meanings;
the notions of attitudes and sentiments may be so used but surely
the concept of 'complex' cannot, it belongs to a type of psychology
which seeks to understand action not in terms of meaning but in
terms of psychic states in principle distinct from conscious
meanings. This then raises the question of the relationship
between Parsons' employment of the subjective point of view of the
actor and his adoption of psychology as a central component of the
theory of action, a question which will be returned to shortly.

Again a quotation can serve to indicate the third ambiguity.

'I think it is probably fair to call it
[Parsons' approach] the "theory of social
action". I do not want to place any
particular stress on the term "action".
"Behaviour" is probably almost as good,
especially now that behaviourism is not

longer a fighting word in very wide circles, as it was about twenty years ago. Behaviour has become much more of a neutral and descriptive word; it is simply what people or organisms do' (1949c:51).

This is significant not only by contrast to The Structure of Social Action but also because Parsons is willing to use a concept which describes 'simply what people or organisms do'. The theory of action then refers not only to the behaviour of people but also to 'organisms'. This raises the problem of the sense of subjectivity in an acute form for whilst some non-human organisms may have complex mental processes their behaviour cannot be described in terms of its meaning. It is such statements which give prima facie plausibility to the thesis of a change in the Parsonian action scheme from an action to a behaviouristic foundation. But care must be taken here as to what the subjectivity of action means to Parsons, in chapter III ambiguities as to the relationship of the subjective categories of the frame of reference of action and concrete meanings of action to actors have been located. This continues in the work being presently discussed.

The fourth ambiguity is whether the subjective point of view implies the actor's understanding of action or the observer's understanding via subjective categories. Of course, it is claimed that the latter refer to the actor's state of mind but if the crucial criterion is not actors' meanings but subjective

categories quite what entity is implied by the concept of mind becomes ambiguous. Parsons' editorial footnote on Weber's use of the term Verstehen is instructive.

'The German term is Verstehen. As Weber uses it this is a technical term with a distinctly narrower meaning than either the German or the English in everyday usage. Its primary reference in this work is to the observation and theoretical interpretation of the subjective "states of mind" of actors. But it also extends to the grasp of the meaning of logical and other systems of symbols, a meaning which is usually thought of as in some sense "intended" by a mind or intelligent being of some sort. The most important point about this concept seems to the editor to be the fact that in so far as phenomena are "understood" in the technical sense, the relevant facts are stated and analysed within a certain frame of reference, that of "action". For present purposes the most important feature of this reference is its use of "subjective

categories". The essential thing is the operational applicability of such categories, not the commonsense empirical question of whether the actor is conscious of the meanings imputed to him or in the ordinary sense "intended" a given course of action" [1941a:87].

Three points are of note here. The opening part of the passage suggests that by the subjective point of view is intended actors' meanings, verstehen being a technique of investigation of such meanings. But then Parsons comes to the 'technical' sense of the term, here the emphasis shifts from understanding of actor's meanings to description and analysis through the subjective concepts of the frame of reference of action. Further, the essential thing is not the actor's conscious meanings and intentions but the operational applicability of the concepts, suggesting that the concepts refer to a much wider sense of 'state of mind' than conscious meanings.

A further observation can be made here. Parsons uses Weber to justify his use of a scheme of subjective concepts rather than the meaning of action to the actor. This is clearly set out in the following passage:

'In this connection Weber's polemical orientation was directed against a methodological position according to

to which such [subjective categories] could only be used to formulate individually unique complexes of meaning and sequences of motivation. Weber fully agreed with the proponents of this position that concrete phenomena were individually unique, but disputed the relevance of this fact to his problems. Scientific conceptualization is, he said, in the nature of the case abstract and never fully exhausts or reflects concrete reality. This seems to be the logical pattern underlying his statement at the very beginning, that "meaning" may be of two kinds, the "actually existing" meaning to a concrete individual actor or, on the other hand, the "theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning" [1941a:11].

The argument here is that description involves the use of concepts which abstract and select from the individual uniqueness of particular phenomena. This is then held to justify a contrast between the actually existing meaning to a concrete individual actor which is irrelevant to science in its uniqueness and, on the other hand, the theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning. Two points can be noted, firstly, the instrumental status of Weber's types should be remembered. They serve as means to describe historically particular phenomena. For Weber one could never

describe concrete phenomena without concepts but the task of concepts was to describe historical phenomena, that is, meaningful action. Parsons does not adopt this position, his concepts are not just more or less useful but realistically describe (selected and ordered) aspects of reality. The second point then is what aspects of reality are grasped by Parsons' subjective concepts if they do not have an instrumental status serving to facilitate the description of concrete meanings? It can be suggested that Parsons sees his concepts as describing general patterns which somehow underly concrete meanings. He says, for example, that 'Meaning may be of several different types, of which, perhaps, the most important are the cognitive and the affective or emotional' [1950b:336]. This is the beginnings of Parsons' use of a trinity of 'modes of orientation' of action so prominent in his 1951 publications ([1951a], (1951b)). What is being suggested here, then, is that Parsons uses the argument for the necessity of abstract concepts to support a shift away from the conscious meanings of action to the actor to a distinct object of study, the unconscious patterning of the actor's state of mind.

So far this section has sought to outline an ambiguous situation. On the one hand Parsons suggests that the subjective reference of the theory of action implies taking into account the meaning of action to the actor, on the other hand various aspects of Parsons' thinking have been noted which mitigate against such an intention. This situation can be clarified by considering the place of psychology in Parsons' thinking. The

introduction of psychological concepts into the theory of action represents a major shift of his work as compared to The Structure of Social Action. Indeed in his Preface to the second edition of that book Parsons says: 'A major one-sidedness of the book is its relative neglect of the psychological aspects of the total conceptual scheme - a balance which a thorough revision would certainly have to attempt to redress' [1949b:xvi]. This indicates the importance which Parsons undoubtedly attributes to psychology. Quite what this amounts to can be best understood in the context of Parsons' criticism of Weber on the question of psychology. This is so because it is here that the questions of subjectivity and psychology come together. As such this piece will form the framework for the present discussion.

Parsons notes that Weber insisted on the inclusion of the motivation of the individual actor in sociological accounts. He refers to Weber's '... strong conviction of the indispensability, in order to attain the level of knowledge he considered possible and essential, of careful detailed analysis of the motivation of the individual' [1941a:20]. It is clear that by the motivation of the individual here Parsons intends 'the subjective point of view'. Speaking of Weber's types of social relationship he says:

'But to each of these in turn
corresponds directly a complex of

typical motivation in Weber's sense.
Hence the "subjective" point of view
is as essential to the description of
social structure as it is to the action
of the individual' [1941a:22].

With this insistence Parsons is in agreement with Weber, he
observes: 'He [Weber] felt strongly, and rightly, that only
through relating the problems of the dynamics of the whole to the
motives of individuals could he achieve a genuinely scientific
level of explanation' [1941a:25]. But to Weber the employment of
the notion of actor's motivation does not imply the embracement of
psychology, indeed he rejects the view that sociology is closely
linked with or dependent upon psychology [1941a:25]. With this
Parsons disagrees. 'Weber, however, got into serious trouble which
could have been greatly mitigated had he extended his systematic
theory into a more careful analysis in the direction of
psychology' [1941a:27]. Parsons' argument against Weber's
rejection of psychology rests on two points, just what psychology
is concerned with and its status in an overall theory of action.

Parsons notes:

'He [Weber] does not anywhere discuss in
detail just what he meant by the term
psychology, but there was a tendency
to think of it primarily in the context
of natural science and hence not accessible
to the application of subjective categories
[1941a:25].

Again Parsons observes that in Weber's time 'psychological approaches to human behaviour' laid 'the principal emphasis on universal traits or tendencies of "human nature" like instincts' [1941a:25-6]. If psychology is understood in this sense, as the description and explanation of behaviour in terms of universal physio-biological concepts, then Parsons agrees with Weber. Such a psychology would be no 'more relevant to sociology than any other science which dealt with factors conditional to human behaviour, like physics, geology, etc' [1941a:25]. This is quite consistent with Parsons' assessment of Thorndike's psychology. The latter is oriented strongly toward biology; 'Thorndike's whole scheme is, in essentials, an extension of biology' (1941c:281). Parsons does not reject this out of hand but sees it as concerned with the conditions of human behaviour.

'This is by no means to say that the light Thorndike is able to throw on social problems from the results of psychological investigation he summarises is negligible - far from it. These results are, however, rather in the nature of quite general considerations which set limits of variation and define necessary conditions of social phenomena' (1941c:278).

However Parsons is unwilling to accept such a narrow definition of psychology, instead he wishes to advocate a science of psychology as a science of the actor in the theory of action rather

than a focus on the biological organism. In Weber's types of social relationship it is to Parsons 'necessary to clarify the unit of reference' [1941a:76], the 'actor'.

'It cannot be true that the conceptual scheme in terms of which this unit is treated is no more closely relevant to sociology than any other dealing with the conditions of action. For the actor is the unit of systems of action, and the frame of reference and other categories in terms of which this unit is treated, are inherently part of the same theoretical system as categories on the level of types of action or social structure. Hence in some sense, a "psychology" is an essential part of (not note, "basis" or "set of assumptions for") a theory of social action' [1941a:26].

For Parsons then psychology takes as its object of study the unit of action systems as an actor, not a biological organism. But Parsons wishes to stress not only that psychology is a science of action but also that it is part of a total theory of action, that is, it is only one part of an overall theory. This is why Parsons includes the qualifications in the last sentence of the passage just quoted. This leads to the second part of Parsons' argument,

the status of psychological concepts in the overall theory of action.

Parsons shares Weber's doubts about the possibility or desirability of reducing sociological concepts to a psychological level, he puts this in terms of 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness' [1941a:26].

'Psychologists as a group have not treated the individual as a unit in a functioning social system, but rather as the concrete human being who was then conceived as proceeding to form social systems. They have thus not adequately taken account of the peculiar sense in which their categories are abstract. The categories of psychology in the motivational field, for instance, are not concrete motives, but elements in motivation, describing such aspects as its affectual tone. Weber was fundamentally right that the adequate concrete motive always involves the situational elements which are specifically non-psychological' [1941a:27].

To say, then, that psychology is concerned with the actor in systems of social action does not to Parsons mean that psychology alone can adequately comprehend the actor's motivation. A theory

of motivation is not just 'the simple "application" of psychological generalizations' [1945a:233] for two reasons. Firstly, any concrete motive is composed in part of socially shared cultural symbols and secondly, variable motives are channelled by institutions into the same pattern of activity [1945a:233-4]. An example of this is Parsons approach to the motivation of economic activities. Here 'the immediate goal of economic action in a market economy is the maximization of net money advantages or more generally of the difference between utility and cost' [1940b:53]. But:

'It certainly is not legitimate to assume that this immediate goal is a simple and direct expression of the ultimate motivational forces of human behaviour. On the contrary, to a large extent its pursuit is probably compatible with a considerable range of variation in more ultimate motivations. Indeed, it will be the principal thesis of the subsequent analysis that "economic motivation" is not a category of motivation on the deeper level at all, but is rather a point at which many different motives may be brought to bear on a certain type of situation. Its remarkable constancy and generality is not a result of a corresponding uniformity in "human nature" such as egoism or hedonism, but of certain features of the

structure of social systems of action which, however, are not entirely constant but subject to institutional variations' [1940b:53] .

Any concrete motivation includes psychological elements general to all motives and sociological elements particular to given cultural and institutional systems. Both of these elements are in themselves abstract and must both be included in an account of concrete motivation.

Indeed to Parsons this is what Weber actually does in his ideal types of social relationships.

'Weber's motives are not, as he himself clearly saw, "psychological" entities. Their concreteness relative to the psychological level is precisely defined by the fact that they include socially structural definitions of the situation, and hence articulate directly with the structural-functional analysis of social systems, which means the variability of social systems'

[1941a:22].

Weber, however, failed 'to complete the analysis on its psychological side' [1941a:27] just as he failed on the sociological side. He does not break down his concrete types into their general analytical elements. This leads to an ad hoc character in the work of both psychologists and sociologists. Psychologists

(Parsons mentions Freud and Gorer) tend to:

'... categorize social structure ad hoc ... without systematic reference to the social system as a conceptual scheme and the criterion of relevance inherent in such a reference. Certain sociologists likewise indulge in ad hoc psychological constructions without reference to technical psychological considerations. Footnote: In essence this is what Max Weber did on a high level in his construction of ideal types of motivation' [1950b:341-2].

Parsons feels then that he has overcome Weber's misgivings about psychology whilst maintaining his dictum to incorporate the motivation of the actor into sociological accounts. His case is that concrete motivation includes, conceptually, two abstract components; general properties of the psychology of actors (not organisms) and particular properties of socio-cultural systems. The fact that psychology is a science of the actor in the core of his emphasis on subjectivity, the variability of the sociological components of motivation is the crux of his insistence that to include psychology is not to reduce sociology to psychology, a position facilitated by the abstract status of the conceptual components of motivation.

But what is missing here is Weber's emphasis on action and social structure as meaningful to the actor. Here a rather 'throwaway' comment by Parsons is instructive:

'Much the same is true of Weber's tendency to confine ideal type analysis to the rational case and the related tendency to confine, in his methodological formulations at least, the applicability of subjective categories to consciously intended motives. In questions like these Weber shows a vacillating uncertainty which could largely be cleared up by better psychological analysis' [1941a:27-8].

Here it can be granted that 'Weber shows a vacillating uncertainty' on certain key issues, for example, whether in his rational types it is the actor's or scientist's standard of rationality which is being ideally typified. The point here is that to say that such problems can be cleared up by 'better psychological analysis' essentially overcomes the uncertainty by coming down on one side of a two sided position. It opts for psychology as a system of general concepts of the actor and omits the actor's own understanding of the situation. So the actor's 'consciously intended motives' and 'rationality' are defined by Parsons as rather anomolous, aberrant 'tendencies' in Weber's thinking.

Parsons understanding of 'meaning' is nicely summarized when he says:

'Similarly, the process of social behaviour as of any other are psychological. But without the meaning given them by their institutional-structural context they lose their relevance to the understanding of social phenomena' [1945a:235].

It is the manifestation of constant psychological structures and mechanisms in particular cultural contexts that Parsons intends by meaning. His obliviousness to the actor's meaning can be illustrated by a section of his essay 'The Problem of Controlled Institutional Change'. Here Parsons is discussing how human behaviour might be changed or controlled. One 'channel of influence' [1945c:247] is 'through "subjective" elements - their sentiments, goals, attitudes, definitions of situations' [1945c:247]. Here Parsons stresses that:

'The most important thing to be said is that the chances of successful influence do not depend mainly on the "reasonableness" of what is transmitted but on its relation to the functional equilibrium of the system on which it impinges' [1945c:247].

So the overall argument is as follows. An idea or goal cannot be treated discretely in its relation to a course of action, it must be put in a larger context. Quite what is meant by this is open to a number of alternatives. But Parsons is quite clear. He discounts the possibility of people acting on the basis of the 'reasonableness' or 'logic' of an idea. Now there are two possibilities here, 'reasonableness' may be judged from the observer's point of view, his standard of what the logical implications of an idea are for action. Here in broad terms it can be agreed that this is irrelevant to the description and analysis of action. But a second possibility is that what is 'reasonable' is not judged a priori but made empirically variable, that is, the actor's standard of reasonableness is taken seriously. Then it is an open question whether people act in the light of the reasonableness of an idea. Here the context into which the idea must be put is a larger context of meaning through which the actor understands his world. This possibility is ignored by Parsons. Instead an idea or goal which is subjectively meaningful to an actor must be placed into the context of a system of non-meaningful but subjective categories, what Parsons in this example refers to as sentiments. Then actor's subjective meanings are regarded as 'manifestations' of sentiments.

'... ideological and symbolic patterns associated with the sentiment system do not stand in a simple relation of correspondence with the sentiments manifested. Ideological patterns are inevitably highly selective if not distorted relative to the system of sentiments which support institutions' [1945c:247-8].

Earlier in this section it was noted that Parsons continues to employ a contrast between two points of view.

'In all this, the point of view of interpretation of action has a peculiar duality. One essential component is its "meaning" to the actor, whether on a consciously explicit level or not. The other is its relevance to an "objective" concatenation of objects and events as analyzed and interpreted by an observer' [1945a:229].

It has already been pointed out that by the observer's point of view Parsons means the point of view of a social system, or better, structural analysis of the interrelations of social relationships. But what of the reference here to the meaning of action to the actor? The above account of the place of psychology can enable us to understand quite what Parsons intends. Several times he refers not to two 'points of view' but to two 'levels' of analysis; psychological and sociological.

'All social behaviour, including the "policies" of the most complex collectivities like nation-states, is ultimately the behaviour of human beings, understandable in terms of the motivation of individuals, perhaps millions of them, in the situations in which they are placed. Therefore the psychological level of understanding of individual motivation is fundamental to even the most complex of mass phenomena. At the same time, however, the complications and modifications introduced by the facts of the organization of individuals in social systems are equally crucial' [1946b: 299].

Clearly the sociological level here is the structural analysis of social relations. Then is the psychological level equivalent to the actor's point of view? The above discussion suggests this and it can be further seen in the place Parsons gives to the concept of role. He says that this throws light on the relationship of the psychological and sociological levels of analysis [1945a:233] in that: 'Role is the concept which links the subsystem of the actor as a "psychological" behaving entity to the distinctively social structure' [1945a:23]. The concept of role at one and the same time describes the units of social systems and the psychological constitution of the actor. In important respects roles are the 'objects' in 'objective'

concatenations of objects and events', they also describe aspects of 'the actor as a "psychological" behaving entity'. The two points of view, then, are not the actor's and observer's understanding of action but the observer's account of action in psychological and sociological terms. This chapter will be further concerned with this duality in much of what follows.

To summarise this discussion of psychology Parsons' position means that, despite the rhetoric noted at the beginning of this section, actor's meanings are excluded from his account of action. The description and explanation of action in terms of actors' meanings is replaced by the injunction to incorporate the subjective categories of a psychology of the actor, categories which are clearly distinct from actors' meanings. In fact the term replaced is misleading, for in essentials this position is similar to that of Parsons' earlier work where again he systematically avoids serious reference to actor's meanings. That is, by the subjectivity of the action scheme Parsons never intended actors' meanings. But a more positive continuation of earlier characteristics can be located. If by the subjective reference of the theory of action is meant the 'voluntarism' of Parsons' image of man and society then the subjectivity of the scheme does continue, a point which becomes evident once Parsons' voluntarism is properly understood. This discussion will continue with an investigation of the subjectivity of action along these lines.

2. Preliminaries to voluntarism in the structural-functional approach.

The term voluntarism occurs most infrequently in Parsons' work in the 1940's (e.g. [1945a:228]) and it no longer carries the polemical weight attributed to it in The Structure of Social Action. Nevertheless it will be argued here that the voluntarism of the latter book continues to play a significant role in Parsons' thinking. In particular that voluntarism underlies both the concept of action that he employs and the structural-functional approach to action systems. By voluntarism here is meant a way of thinking about human action in terms of three key features. Firstly, a dualism in human life between 'normative' aspects involving an ideal component and 'conditional' aspects carrying the connotation of standing as realistic imperatives. Secondly, these two aspects exist in some degree of tension, to put it metaphorically, the demands of each are incompatible, compromises have to be reached which represent delicate states of balance. But the odds are stacked in one direction, toward the conditional, which influences human behaviour automatically, men are bound up with the causal forces of the conditional world. On the contrary the normative world depends upon the efforts of men, a far more fragile mode of influence but one whose nature fascinates Parsons. This is the third feature of voluntarism, the necessity of 'effort', will or motivation whereby the normative world exercises some determination over human behaviour.

As a preliminary to the main task of locating this metaphysic in the structural-functional approach to action this section will be concerned with illustrating voluntarism in three rather ad hoc selections from Parsons' work.

In the 1940's the professions became, and were to remain, an important focus of Parsons' theoretical and practical concerns. The influence of voluntarism here can be seen in the closing paragraph of his first publication in this area. Parsons holds that what constitutes a civilization is the possession of a 'great cultural tradition'. This is the mark of civilization in that 'It is integration with such a tradition which leavens the lump of the blind struggle for existence and for wealth and power in society' (1937c:369). Here then is the voluntaristic dualism between culture and the constraints of existence. But the two sides are 'intimately connected', in the present context by the universities and professional education.

'The function of universities is vital, not only in maintaining and developing this tradition, but in relating it to contemporary life. Professional education, as carried on by the university, is one of the most vital channels of this influence on contemporary society' (1937c:369).

This is 'one of the most important channels by which the cultural heritage leavens the lump of everyday social life'. However, there is also 'a reciprocal influence', by which 'the practical life of the world' influences the cultural tradition, again via the universities and their links to the professions.

'But at the same time it would not be a healthy state of affairs for ... members of the university and the tradition they exist to maintain and develop, to be radically cut off from the society in which they exist' (1937c:369).

Here there is clearly a degree of tension between culture and existence, they do not blend together without friction which leads Parsons to emphasise the mechanisms through which the two influence life, in this context professional education 'for the world' but conducted in the universities by the guardians of a cultural tradition. So here voluntarism permeates into Parsons' approach to an institutional area. What can be termed institutional voluntarism will be discussed at length later.

The second example of interest here is taken from the essay 'Max Weber and the Contemporary Political Crisis' (1942e:168-9). In this Parsons outlines Weber's views on moral responsibility in politics. It seems from the context that Parsons takes over much of what he understands Weber to be advocating. He takes up 'the question of the possibility of the accomplishment of decisive results by political action'.

(1942e:168) noting that Weber rejects deterministic theories of history. However, in elucidating Weber's grounds for his position, two distinct strands can be distinguished in Parsons' exposition. The first is methodological. At any point in historical time a situation is constituted by a 'delicate balance between the forces working in radically opposed directions' (1942e:169). So the situation contains 'different potentialities'. Which of these is actually realized often depends on a particular event or series of actions which make the difference between the various possibilities. A war, a political movement or the influence of a single man are given as examples. Here, then, the emphasis is on differential possibilities and the deciding influence of a particular event which may, in itself, be small, but in that situation 'it is sufficient to throw the total balance in favour of the one possible outcome rather than the other' (1942e:169). The second strand is substantive, referring to Weber Parsons says:

'No one was more empirically realistic than he, no one better realised the limitations placed upon action by the conditions of the situation which are beyond the actor's control. But at the same time, to him, human choice and decision were fundamental factors in the determination of events' (1942e:168).

So the methodological argument that relatively small and prima facie insignificant events can, in the context of a concatenation of circumstances, have far reaching results is paralleled by the ontological argument that 'decision and character and effort' (1942e:168), 'human choice and decision' are 'fundamental factors in the determination of events', not by themselves but in the context of a conjunction of forces which map out the realistic conditions of situations.

The third example of the presence of a voluntaristic element in Parsons' 1940's essays occurs in his introductory remarks to a paper on racial and religious conflict (1945b:182-4). This amounts to a statement of Parsons' practical orientation to social problems. He begins with the 'naively utopian optimism' which was 'not so long ago the prevailing temper of the Western world' (1945b:182) noting how this attitude had been shaken to its roots by the world wars and the rise of fascism and communism. In its place Parsons senses the emergence of a pessimistic reaction marked by a temper of gloom, doom and fatalistic resignation. He himself, however, rejects both naive optimism and disillusioned pessimism. His alternative bears the stamp of voluntarism. He says:

'It would, of course, be a reversion to the naive utopianism of our past to suppose that there were not limits to the rational controllability of things affecting human values and welfare. Many of the sources of human conflict and antagonism go very deep' (1945b:185).

Here is the dualism of human values and welfare on the one hand and on the other, a world of things which may, at any given point in time and space, be beyond human control but which represent the sources of conflict and antagonism. To ignore the latter is the characteristic of naive optimism. But conversely: 'Ours, however, is a civilization which is not accustomed to taking evils "lying down"' (1945b:183). The conditional side of the dichotomy is not just accepted, as in the case of disillusioned pessimism. Rather, '... it is in the great tradition of our society to approach evils as "problems", to mobilize the resources of knowledge and scientific method to see what could be done about it' (1945b:183). The value side of the dualism can be influential via men's efforts, in this case the marshalling of science to tackle a human problem. Parsons uses the example of death to illustrate his point. Death is an ultimate expression of the influence of the conditional world on human life. As such it is a universal and probably ineradicable phenomenon. But human attitudes toward disease, suffering and death are widely variable, here is the normative side. Parsons contrasts the attitudes of Buddhism and modern medicine toward the problem, the one giving compassion but little practical aid, the other concentrating on the latter with little spiritual comfort entering in. The lesson drawn from this is:

'The position taken in this paper will be that very important factors in group antagonism and hatred are understandable and controllable in the same sense that this is true of physical suffering and premature death. But no more than in the other case is there reason to assume that there is no ultimate residue of tragic conflict of value and of human helplessness' (1945b:184).

This list of examples could be extended but this section is but a suggestive preliminary. I will now move on to a more systematic discussion of the voluntaristic sense of subjectivity in the structural-functional approach to action.

3. Voluntarism and the frame of reference of action.

During the 1940's Parsons spends little time elaborating the frame of reference of action. However, 'The first essential of a generalized theoretical system is the "frame of reference"' [1945a:228]. Further, what Parsons does say about the frame of reference of action clearly illustrates the presence of voluntarism in the sense outlined above.

The first component of the frame of reference is the concept of actor, the behaving individual as 'actively oriented to the attainment of a system of goals and wishes' [1950b:336]. What is stressed about the actor is the individual's striving to achieve his goals in the face of obstacles.

'Action is, in this frame of reference, inherently structured on a "normative", "teleological", or possibly better, a "voluntaristic" system of "coordinates" or axes. A goal is by definition a "desirable" state of affairs, failure to attain it a "frustration". Affective reaction includes components of pleasurable or painful significance to the actor, and of approval or disapproval of the object or state which occasions the reaction. Finally, cognitive orientation is subject to standards of "correctness" and "adequacy" of knowledge and understanding' [1945a:228] (See also [1941a:12] [1945a:230]).

So here the actor is oriented to desirable, pleasurable, approved, correct or adequate states of affairs. But, their opposites; frustration, pain, disapproval and falsity are always present as possibilities. Hence the necessity of a model of the actor struggling to attain the former and avoid the latter, the actor as:

'... an entity which has the basic characteristics of striving toward the attainment of "goals", of "reacting" emotionally toward objects and events,

and of, to a greater or less degree, cognitively knowing or understanding his situation, his goals and himself' [1945a: 228].

Here then the actor must strive to attain his goals because he stands in a dualistic situation, or, as Parsons likes to put it, in 'a "voluntaristic" system of "coordinates" or axes'. The first side of the dualism is the normative, defining 'the desirable direction of action in the form of goals and standards of behaviour' [1945a:228]. What is desirable, pleasurable, approved is not intrinsic in a course of action itself, they are states defined by norms and values which carry on ideal connotation. Normative ideas:

'... refer to states of affairs which may not actually exist, but in either case the reference is not in the indicative but in the imperative mood. If the state of affairs exists, insofar as the idea is normative the actor assumes an obligation to keep it in existence; if not, he assumes an obligation to attempt its realization at some future time. An idea is normative insofar as the maintenance or attainment of the state of affairs it describes may be regarded as an end to the actor' (1938b: 654).

So normative patterns form part of cultural systems [1945a:229]. Parsons is quick to add however: "But a "system of culture" is a different order of abstraction from a "social system" though it is to a large degree an abstraction from the same concrete phenomena" [1945a:229]. Normative patterns expressed in cultural symbols form only one part of the voluntaristic dualism.

The other is the conditional world of realistic imperatives.

'Even in abstraction from social relationships, features of the situation of action and the biologically determined needs and capacities of an individual provide certain fixed points of determination in the system of action. The functional needs of social integration and the conditions necessary for the functioning of a plurality of actors as a "unit" system sufficiently well integrated to exist as such impose others' [1945a:229].

A number of points are of note here. Parsons is describing 'fixed points of determination', the actor, 'operating in a situation which is given independently of his goals and wishes' [1950b:336], that is, the conditional side of the voluntaristic dualism. The conditional world is composed of

a number of elements, physical, biological and social. In The Structure of Social Action the conditional components were heredity, environment and the generalized means. In chapter III it was noted that the generalised means of power and wealth did not quite fit. Now Parsons has discovered a means of unifying his concept of the conditional world in the notion of functional needs. This is quite consistent with the concept of conditions of action, a need is an unchanging requirement which must be met but is given independently. It does however represent a shift, a movement away from emphasis on the biological and physical conditions of action to the 'social conditions of action'. Parsons has, however, never been happy with such an expression construed from the point of view of the actor. (1) The notion of functional needs of social systems gets over this. They are conditions necessary for a social system 'to exist as such' but are not construed from the actor's point of view, being conditions to the social system, not the actor. Finally, just as in the case of normative elements, the existence of functional needs does not mean that action can be conceived only in terms of such entities, biological, physical or social. Rather such needs provide "'foci" around which attitudes, symbols, and action patterns cluster' [1945a:230]. Functional needs must be treated in conjunction with normative patterns, each provides one side of the dualism.

'From the present point of view, however, a social system is a system of action, i.e. of motivated human behaviour, not a system of culture patterns. It articulates with culture patterns in one connection just as it does with physical and biological conditions in another' [1945a:229].

The main conceptual components and their interrelationship then, contain the three characteristics of Parsons' voluntarism: the dualism of normative and conditional elements, the actor striving to attain normatively defined goals but always exposed to failure through the constraints of conditions. But the notion of a frame of reference can be applied on different levels, for example, in his discussion of Weber's methodology Parsons distinguishes between the "'action" level' and 'a generalized scheme of the structure of social relationships and groups' [1941a:28]. (2) In the essay 'Toward a Common Language for the Area of Social Science' [1941b] Parsons attempts to outline 'some primary categories which might serve as the basis of a conceptual scheme' [1941b:46] on the social systems level. These categories are pattern, status and role and hence they have considerable significance, role becoming a central concept in Parsons' developing sociology. What is of note here is that these concepts again manifest Parsons' voluntarism.

The concept of pattern refers to 'the uniformities in the sayings and doings of men' [1941b:44] but Parsons stresses that these are 'ideal' patterns [1941b:42, 43]. Such patterns help to define statuses, a status being 'a patterned definition of who and what a person is' [1941b:43], in terms of three components; rights, obligations and expected performances (or role aspect)' [1941b:42]. So, 'Each definition of a status includes that of an expected role' [1941b:43]. But role must be differentiated from status, role 'is the dynamic aspect of status, the behaviour counterpart of the ideal or expected position defined by a status', [1941b:43]. The point is that behaviour is not just the 'counterpart' of ideally expected behaviour. For: 'These expectations are, however, conformed with to varying degrees, and the kinds and degrees of deviance from the ideal pattern which are found in the actual behaviour patterns are of the greatest importance' [1941b:43-4]. As a consequence 'Role, as the behavioural aspect of status, furnishes the link between the ideal and the behavioural patterns of a society' [1941b:43]. Patterns and statuses compose the ideal aspect of social systems, in a moment the conditional aspect will be noted. Both bear upon the actor's role. At one point Parsons asks 'what is social structure from the point of view of the actor playing his roles within it?' [1945a:230]. He says:

'The clue ... is found in the normative-voluntaristic aspect of the structure of action. From the point of view of the social system, a role is an element of generalized patterning of the action of its component individuals. But this is not merely a matter of statistical "trend". It is a matter of goals and standards' [1945a:230].

A role represents a regularity in action but not just a statistical trend. On the other hand a role involves normative patterning, but again not just this. A role involves the actor striving to attain goals and standards but failing, for roles involve a further aspect which relates to the conditional side of voluntarism.

Parsons notes the wide range of cultural diversity in human societies [1941b:45]. But to him 'these variations are grouped about certain invariant points of reference' [1941b:45] or 'certain fixed points we call foci' [1941b:46].

'These are to be found in the nature of social systems, in the biological and psychological nature of the component individuals, in the external situations in which they live and act, in the nature

of action itself, in the necessity of its coordination. In the orientation of individuals and the patterning of action these "foci" of structure are never ignored. They must in some way be "adapted to" or "taken account of" [1941b:45].

Here then are functional needs again standing in the role of conditions of action. Parsons' strategy of relating cultural patterns to functional needs will be discussed again later. For the moment it is role playing conceived in terms of effort to conform to ideal patterns whilst taking account of invariant conditions, role playing conceived voluntaristically which is of note.

So far this section has been concerned with the voluntaristic content of the concepts of the frames of reference of action and social system. A voluntaristic component can also be detected in the justification Parsons employs for the various conceptual schemes he employs. Parsons' approach to concept formation and the justification of schemes of concepts revolves around two points of reference. He works in terms of the internal logical coherence of the frame of reference of action and its derivatives and, secondly, in terms of a variety of functional thinking, justifying concepts in terms of the functional necessity of the states of affairs they describe.

This finds formal expression in the section entitled 'Some Methodological Prerequisites of the Formulation of a System' in his essay 'The Position of Sociological Theory' (1948b: 158-60). There, three prerequisites are identified. The first Parsons calls 'analysis of the action frame of reference' which involves 'work(ing) out some of the major features and implications of the action schema' (1948b:158). The second requirement is 'an analysis of the functional prerequisites of the social system' (1948b:159) which is complemented by the third, 'the basis of structure in social systems' (1948b:159-60). Here the second and third can be taken together, the central structural concepts of the system are analyzed by reference to 'certain invariant points of reference about which differentiated structures focus' (1948b:160). These are the functional prerequisites.

The claim put forward here is that these two approaches represent the two sides of the voluntaristic dualism. Functional thinking forms the conditional aspect as has become clear in the above discussion. Rather less clear is that the logical elaboration of the concept of action represents the normative side. This is not immediately evident because Parsons introduces two further procedures which will be noted in a moment. But what Parsons does in analyzing and elaborating the frame of reference to generate and justify concepts is to adopt the actor's point of view in the sense of asking how an individual is able to understand his action and

situations in the particular sphere of activity Parsons is concerned with? What sort of ideas, goals, norms or whatever are implied in, for example, a stratification system or men's religious life. But having started with this Parsons follows two strategies which rather alters the resultant conceptual scheme. Firstly, he engages in what Wagner (1964) aptly terms 'the displacement of scope'. The problems which face individual actors become the problems facing empirical systems of interacting actors (3). Secondly, the concepts which are generated by adopting the point of view of a concrete actor become causal elements in a theoretical system.

The above has mapped out Parsons' manner of justification of concepts without providing any demonstration that this is indeed his procedure. Demonstration in such matters is difficult, but illustration is not. It is hoped that the two examples which follow lend some weight and illumination to the outline above.

The first example is the essay 'The Theoretical Development of the Sociology of Religion'. Here Parsons summarises what he feels has been 'a notable advance in the adequacy of our theoretical equipment to deal with a critically important range of scientific problems' [1944:197], an advance marked by the extension and refinement of a fruitful but limited conceptual scheme. This is the rational positivistic approach. It is instructive to note why Parsons feels this a sound starting point.

'The earlier positivistic theory started with the attempt to analyze the relation of the actor to particular types of situations common to all human social life, such as death and the experience of dreams. This starting point was undoubtedly sound. The difficulty lay in interpreting such situations and the actor's relations to them too narrowly, essentially as a matter of the solution of empirical problems, of the actor's resorting to a "reasonable" course of action in the light of beliefs which he took for granted' [1944:202].

Rational positivism formed a sound basis because it adopted the point of view of the actor in the straightforward sense of asking how actors understand such phenomena as death or dreams. But the approach was severely limited in that it took seriously only actor's understandings which could be fitted into the preconception that 'the actor was a rational, scientific investigator, acting "reasonably" in the light of the knowledge available to him' [1944:199].

The contribution of Pareto was to break through this restriction, to add non-logical ideas, goals and actions to the concepts in terms of which actions were interpreted [1944:200-1]. But this is not just a matter of extending the

conceptual scheme of the actor's point of view. The cognitive elements beloved by the rational positivist are seen as in a state of 'functional interdependence' with Pareto's 'sentiments' which Parsons describes as a 'functionally necessary' category [1944:201]. Here then is Parsons' second point of reference.

As is to be expected the latter continues in Parsons' account of Malinowski's contribution to the development of the conceptual scheme [1944:202-4]. Here magical beliefs are interpreted in terms of the functional problems which face the actor, the problem of uncertainty in important aspects of life. Magical beliefs and actions serve to compensate for uncertainty and make intelligible its effects. Malinowski then, follows through the initial starting point, elaborating the scheme in terms of the actor's point of view. To this is added a functional point of reference, the problems which actors face and how they cope with them.

This functional point of reference is shifted when Durkheim is considered [1944:205-7]. As Parsons says the latter puts the problem of religion and social structure 'in a different functional perspective in that he applied it to the society as a whole in abstraction from particular situations of tension and strain for the individual' [1944:206]. Here the same pattern of juxtaposing ideas, beliefs or whatever with functional problems is present but with the difference that

the problems are not construed from the actor's point of view but from the standpoint of the 'integration of the society'.

This displacement of the functional point of reference from actor to social system reoccurs in Parsons' discussion of Weber's sociology of religion [1944:207-9]. What is emphasised here is Weber's 'clarification of religious ideas' functional relation to action' [1944:208]. By this Parsons means Weber's focus on 'the problem of meaning' as a functional problem which actors face; 'the functional need for emotional adjustment to such experiences as death' and the correlative 'need for understanding, for trying to have it "make sense"' [1944:208]. Weber's approach from this point of view is then put alongside the social system functional point of reference.

'In the theories of Malinowski and Durkheim, certain kinds of sentiments and emotional reactions were shown to be essential to a functioning social system. These cannot stand alone, however, but are necessarily integrated with cognitive patterns; for without them there could be no coordination of action in a coherently structured social system. This is because functional analysis of the structure of action [i.e. of actor's

functional problems I.P.] shows that situations must be subjectively defined, and the goals and values to which action is oriented must be congruent with these definitions, must, that is, have "meaning"¹ [1944:209-10].

In this example of the way Parsons justifies a conceptual scheme he takes from antecedent inquiries two points have been covered. Firstly, the use of the actor's point of view in relationship to functional problems, the two representing the two sides of the voluntaristic dualism. Secondly, a coincidence of the employment of actors' and social systems' functional problems. Now this can be regarded as prima facie problematical, for example, in the field in question, prophetic movements may be functional from the point of view of the actor's problem of meaning but may not be functional for social integration. Clearly at least a sharp distinction between the two reference points is required. This is recognized by Parsons in his emphasis on the complementary but distinctive nature of psychology/personality systems and sociology/social systems but as the passage quoted above exemplifies this does not suffice to prevent him mixing the two functional reference points in the development of a conceptual scheme. This is in part because of the second procedure mentioned above, a second move in a different sense away from the actor's point

of view. Once a concept has been generated by using the actor's understanding of his action it becomes an element in a theoretical system. The cognitive patterns associated with religion are 'brought into functional relationship with a variety of other elements of social systems of action' [1944:207]. Whatever the origin of a concept, whether it be by use of functional problems facing actors or social systems, the concept becomes an element in Parsons' theoretical system. This strategy is much more apparent in Parsons' paper 'The role of Ideas in Social Action' which forms the second example to be considered here.

This paper is designed to establish a case for the causal role of ideas in action. Parsons begins by noting aspects of the debate (basically for and against vulgar Marxism) with which he is dissatisfied (1938b:652-3). Firstly, the discussion has been cast in terms of the role of ideas in general, Parsons feels this is too crude, he proposes to break the problem down, to examine different types of ideas. That is, he wishes to develop a more refined conceptual scheme. To do this involves dividing 'ideas' '... into certain broad classes which differ appreciably from one another in their relations to action. How these classes shall be defined, and how many there are, are pragmatic questions in the scientific sense; the justification of making a distinction between any two classes is that their members behave differently in their relation to action' (1938b:653). The crucial phrase here is 'in

their relation to action¹, this being the basis on which Parsons develops his conceptual scheme, so that for each class of ideas he distinguishes he speaks of their 'role' in action (1938b:655, 657, 660). Three classes of ideas are distinguished, empirical existential ideas, non-empirical existential ideas and normative ideas. The details of these concepts are of no interest here, what is is Parsons' manner of justifying their necessary role in action. Again it is the mixture of the actor's point of view and functional thinking. This is neatly summarized when Parsons says:

¹So far discussion has been confined to the role of existential ideas. These have been dealt with in two quite different contexts. Empirical ideas have been analyzed in their relation to the problem of selection of means according to the norm of rationality. Non-empirical ideas, on the other hand, have been treated in relation to the actor, the justification of ends to pursue. There is a gap between these two treatments which must now be filled. Selection of means has no significance except in relation to ends, while what has been called teleological orientation is equally meaningless unless there is, facing actors, a problem of choice between alternative ends' (1938b:660).

Here the three classes of ideas are grounded in three functional problems, the selection of means, the justification of ends and the problem of choice. These are problems for an actor pursuing ends, having knowledge of situations and following rules. As Parsons says '... ideas are in some sense imputed, not only to the sociological observer of action, but to the actor himself. It is not a question of what honesty means to the observer, but to the actor' (1938c:661).

But once the concepts have been justified in these voluntaristic terms they become variables in a theoretical system. So the second aspect of the debate over the role of ideas with which Parsons is dissatisfied is that the discussion has been linked far too closely with deep philosophical problems. Parsons devotes his attention to 'the statement of a theoretical framework for the analysis of the role of ideas on an empirical scientific basis' (1938b: 652). This means treating concepts as elements in a system of interdependent causal elements.

4. The structural-functional approach to theoretical systems and the distinction between psychological and sociological concepts in the theory of social systems.

So far subjectivity in the voluntaristic sense has been explored in the sphere of frames of reference. But

as was shown in chapter IV Parsons main interest lies in the analysis of empirical systems via theoretical systems, specifically structural functional systems. It will be remembered that this approach entailed a distinction between structural and dynamic or process concepts. The next step in this discussion involves investigating quite what the structural-functional approach and such distinctions as between structural and dynamic concepts, (4) amounts to in the particular context of the theory of action. Specifically, can links be drawn between Parsons' structural-functional method and his voluntaristic metaphysic? It is the thesis of this chapter that such links can be forged, a process which can be initiated by turning again to the relation of psychology and sociology.

In the discussion above it was noted that Parsons argues that any concrete motivation or action must be described and explained in terms of two complementary but distinct conceptual schemes. On the one hand psychological concepts referring to the general characteristics of any and all actors, on the other hand sociological concepts which refer to institutional features of action which are culturally variable. This can be put another way by saying that both psychology and sociology share the same frame of reference but that they each make separate conceptual contributions to that frame of reference [1945a:228].

Psychology contributes concepts referring to the actor, sociology, concepts which focus on the interaction of actors, but actors are always involved in interaction and interaction necessarily involves actors.

The major point of this section is to show how Parsons juxtaposes these two distinctions, marrying together the methodological distinction between structural and dynamic concepts with the substantive distinction between sociological and psychological concepts. That there is some connection between these two pairs of categories is indicated by the following.

'If we had a completely dynamic theory of human motivation it is probable that this difference of levels of abstraction [between personality and social system] would disappear. Then the use of structural categories, on the levels of either personality or the social systems, would be unnecessary, for such categories are only empirical generalizations introduced to fill the gaps left by the inadequacy of our dynamic knowledge'

[1950b:341].

Here Parsons is contrasting an ideal with a practically possible state of affairs. The ideal would be 'to treat a total social system directly as a dynamic equilibrium of motivational forces' [1950b:337]. In this case a

social system would be analyzed by reference to motivational forces which would be both psychological and sociological but this distinction would be of little consequence, all concepts would hold the status of variables in an analytical system. This ideal is contrasted to a structural-functional system in which some concepts are structural, an approach which as Parsons says entails the difference between psychological and sociological levels of analysis. The adoption of the distinction between structural and dynamic concepts somehow parallels the distinction between psychological and sociological concepts.

Before establishing this connection a further point made in chapter IV must be reintroduced. This is Parsons conflation of two senses of the term 'constant', the methodological sense of irrelevance contained in the ceteris paribus clause and the substantive sense of empirical stability. This is exemplified in the essay 'The Motivation of Economic Activities'. Here Parsons says:

'The theoretical analysis of economics is abstract probably in several different senses. This is crucial to the argument because it is precisely within the area of its "constant" data or assumptions that the problems of the present discussion arise' [1940b:53].

For purposes of economic analysis certain factors are assumed as constant, notably for Parsons, institutionalized rules of proper behaviour and motivation. This is clearly the methodological sense of constancy, the variability of institutions is not a matter for economic analysis. But Parsons also says:

'... in so far as the patterns are effectively institutionalized, action in social relationships is not random but is guided and canalized by the requirements of the institutional pattern. So far as they are mandatory they in a sense directly "determine" action, otherwise they set limits beyond which variation is not possible and sets up corrective forces' [1940b:54].

Here institutions are not constant in the methodological but in the empirical sense, insofar as a pattern of activity is institutionalized it is not random but displays stable regularity. The relevance of this is that in a structural-functional theoretical system structural concepts are constant, in this dual sense, and process/dynamic concepts are variable. Structural concepts are not just constant in the methodological sense, rather they refer to aspects of action which are empirically stable.

The connection between the structure/dynamic and sociology/psychology distinctions can now be returned to. It is that the sociological contribution to the theory of action, the concept of institution, forms the constant structural component of the theoretical system whilst the psychological concept of the actor forms the variable, dynamic component. So Parsons says:

°This required treating structural elements of the system as relatively stable points of reference for functional and dynamic analysis. The concept of "institutionalized patterns" as developed particularly in the analysis of Durkheim's work and part of that of Weber seemed to provide an adequate framework for the descriptive analysis of this aspect of social systems, the "anatomy" of societies' (1949c:viii-ix).

On the one hand then, Parsons makes a threefold conflation of empirical stability, structural concepts and institutions. On the other hand a parallel connection is made between variability, dynamic concepts and the psychology of the actor. Praising Kluckholm for his use of psychological concepts in his sociological-cultural study of the Navaho Parsons says

'The effect of this use of "psychology" is to transform ethnography into the dynamic analysis of social systems' (1946c:567).

'This analysis is one of the best available empirical demonstrations of the essential role of psychology in the social sciences; for, given, the frame of reference in which the latter operate, without these psychological links dynamic analysis in the sense of this monograph is not possible' (1946c:568).

To sum up, then, Parsons proposes:

'... to treat sociology as the science of institutions in the above sense or more specifically of institutional structure. This would, as here conceived, by no means limit it to purely static structural analysis but could retain a definite focus on problems of structure, including structural change. Dynamic, particularly psychological, problems would enter into sociology in terms of their specific relevance to this context' [1945a:235].

The task of this section has been simply to establish the parallel threefold links Parsons draws between structure, constancy and sociological concepts and process, variability and psychological concepts. The following sections will be concerned to explore the rationale and meaning of this conflation in terms of problems of a science of action.

5. Concepts of social structure. Institutional voluntarism.

Throughout much of what has been said so far the term 'structure' has occurred. This indicates its ubiquity and importance in Parsons' thinking. Clearly the notion of structure is central to structural-functional systems. It is time now to clarify its meaning. Unfortunately as well as being ubiquitous the concept seems to be plural in meaning. This section will begin by outlining a number of different senses of structure to be found in Parsons and then suggest a way of amalgamating them, a process which leads back to voluntarism.

The first meaning is structure as empirical order, structure refers to observable patterns or regularities in empirical phenomena.

'Structure does not refer to any ontological stability in phenomena but only to a relative stability - to sufficiently stable uniformities in the results of underlying processes so that their constancy within certain limits is a workable pragmatic assumption' [1945a:217].

Structure in the sense of empirical order is one aspect of the interdependence characteristic of empirical systems:

' An empirical system's structure is that system of determinate patterns which empirical observation shows, within certain limits, "tend to be maintained" or in a somewhat more dynamic version "tend to develop" according to an empirically constant pattern' [1945a:217].

But when Parsons refers to the structure of an empirical system he often means more than empirical regularity. The second meaning of structure is the organization of units in a system. To refer to structure here means to specify the units or parts of an empirical system and to describe how these units are related together. So:

'A structure is a set of relatively stable pattern relationships of units' [1945a:230].

'From the structural point of view a system is composed of "units", of sub-systems which potentially exist independently, and their structural interrelations' [1945a:214].

This is more than empirical regularity, it is the organization of units in definite ways. Both the nature of the units and their organization provoke problems for the scientist describing structure. As Parsons says:

'There are two major aspects, on one level, of any basic conceptual scheme for the analysis of action. One aspect is the way it handles what you may call the "action units", and the other is the way in which it handles their relationships in systems. This is a very simple schema, but it will serve for our purposes' (1949c:47).

To give some simple examples. It makes a difference whether the units of social systems are conceived as organisms, personalities, actors, role players, groups or institutions, the list could be extended. Many theoretical problems in sociology bear on this question, for example, methodological individualism/holism, psychological reductionism, system or social integration. On the question of organization does structure refer to spatial, ecological organization, or how units form groups, or how units interrelate together as in a hierarchy, for example? All of this goes rather further than empirical regularities as reflected in statistical rates of birth, death, frequency of movement, communication etc.

However, structure in both these first two senses serves to describe empirical systems, to specify: 'This "what", the interconnected empirically existent phenomena which constitute the field of description and analysis for a scientific investigation...' [1945a:213]. The third sense of structure involves a shift from empirical to theoretical systems, from the units of systems to the causal elements and from empirical interrelation to logical relation. At one point Parsons describes social structure as 'a framework of factors' (1940c:643) which in his terms should be quite distinct from an organization of units. This is evident in Parsons' remarks on Weber's ideal types. He describes Weber's 'systematic conceptual scheme as essentially a system of such logically interrelated ideal types of social relationship' [1941a:14], he refers to 'the structure of [Webers] own system of ideal types' [1941a:20]. The reference here is clearly to the logical ordering of concepts. But one of Parsons' fundamental points is that ideal types conceptualize the units of empirical systems, to classify them and explore their logical organization in theoretical systems requires a different kind of approach, in terms of the elements of action systems. However Parsons again refers to this as the structure of action. He accuses Weber of neglecting 'to develop the analysis of the structure of a total social system' [1941a: 14-15] although:

'In any case there is implicit in
the organization of his type-system
the outline of a systematized general
theory on another level, that of the
structure of systems of action'
[1941a:28].

The logical structure of a theoretical system also implies rather more than just the articulation of concepts. Theoretical systems must reflect the autonomy and distinctiveness of empirical systems (1942a:711). They do this by elaborating those concepts which are logically necessary in terms of a frame of reference. When Parsons refers to 'structural elements' [1942f:105] or 'structural components' [1950a:357, 358, 360] he intends concepts which are logically necessary, which derive from 'the structure of social action' which 'provides a basic frame of reference' [1949b:xix]. So Parsons says that it is 'inherent in the structure of human action' that behaviour can be controlled through two channels, rational and non-rational [1942f:149]. Here the two channels are inherent in terms of the implications of the conceptual framework Parsons uses. Again he says: 'That action in a social system should, to a large extent, be oriented to a scale of stratification is inherent in the structure of social systems of action' [1940a:74]. Although Parsons claims that 'this fact is constant' [1940a:74] implying an empirical justification for this claim other aspects of his discussion indicate that it is based on the

logical necessity of a concept of stratification. He says: 'Stratification, as here treated, is an aspect of the concept of the structure of a generalized social system.

Footnote: A generalized social system is a conceptual scheme, not an empirical phenomenon⁰ [1940a:71]. So this third sense of structure, the logical order of a theoretical system, implies not only the manner of organization of concepts but also those concepts which are logically required by that organization, the structural concepts of a theoretical system.

But such structural concepts are not just logically necessary, they express the causal determinants of action. Here is a fourth sense of structure, not only describing how units are organized but also containing a reference to the reason for that organization. Again, in this case it is not the logical necessity for such organization but the causal determinants behind it which is centred upon. Here structural concepts are not themselves the causes of action, they express such causes.

This sense of structure is clearest when Parsons speaks of functional needs as determinants of action. It has already been noted that Parsons treats functional needs as 'invariant points of reference' [1941b:45] or 'fixed points of determination' [1945a:229]. As such functional needs act as the

'"foci" of structure' [1941b:45], as 'invariant points of reference around which differentiated structures focus' (1948b:160). There are two steps in Parsons' thinking here. Firstly, the use of functional needs as fixed points of reference. It is claimed that all social systems face certain imperative problems which must be solved if the social system is to continue. Secondly, the existence of such functional needs is paralleled by the structural features which correspond to them, answering the need so to speak.

'It would seem to be a fundamental fact, crucial to the functional approach, that the primary modes of differentiation in the structure of a system are related to its functional needs in such a way that some differentiated parts are particularly important and effective in contributing to one or a related group of functional needs' [1941a:21].

These Parsons calls the structural elements of social systems, a term which he uses to describe stratification [1949d:325] saying at another point:

'Thus stratification is one central focus of the structuralization of action in social systems' [1940a:74].

This does not mean that stratification is a functional need of social systems, this would be extending the tautology of functional thinking to absurd lengths. Rather the functional need here is for internal integration, stratification is a structural feature which (with others) corresponds to that need [1940b:54-5].

For most of the period being considered here Parsons speaks of structural elements only with reference to functional needs. However a rather wider sense of structural element is indicated by his reference to structural categories as being equivalent to the basic frame of reference of action [1945a:229]. In terms of the voluntarism outlined above this would imply that structural categories would not only express functional needs but also the normative aspect of action. This is taken up in Parsons' essay 'The Prospects of Sociological Theory' [1950a]. In this paper he announces a new advance in theory made by his group at Harvard. What is of particular note here is the evident excitement Parsons displays, his conviction that he and his colleagues had made an important break through. (See for example [1950a:356, 357, 358, 363]). Yet what strikes the reader is the prima facie insignificance of the 'discovery'. Parsons had apparently been working with two broad categories, actor and situation. He and his colleagues had been deliberating whether to place values in the actor category, as a component of the actor's orientation, or in the situation category, as an

object of orientation. The breakthrough was to place values in neither but to treat them as a distinct range of components of action, a third broad category [1950a:357-8]. This then seems to be an example of Parsonian concept, or even verbal, jugglery. (5). But Parsons' excitement can be understood in the context of his voluntarism. The three broad categories represent basic elements of his voluntarism, value-orientation the normative aspect, situation the conditional aspect and motivational orientation the idea of effort. But this is not the significant point here. What is significant is an implication of the breakthrough that Parsons outlines [1950a:362-3]. To make values an independent element:

'... encourages the search for elements of structural focus in that area. The "problem areas" of value choice seem to provide one set of such foci, that is, the evaluation of man's relation to the natural environment, to his biological nature and the like. But along with these there are foci differentiating the alternatives of the basic "direction-ality" of value orientation itself' [1950a:362-3].

So structural elements express or correspond to not only the functional needs of action systems but also the imperatives of culture as well. Parsons speaks of 'problem foci', the

functional needs discussed above, and 'orientation-foci' [1950a:363], a qualitatively different point of reference but serving the same function in his thinking, to generate structural categories which express the determinants of action. In this latter case there are the cultural determinants, the imperatives later to be developed as the pattern variable scheme.

So the concepts of structure and structural elements have to be unpacked in several distinct directions. Descriptively, structure maps the organization of units in a system, perhaps via empirical regularities. Logically, structure is tied up with a system of concepts. It furthermore expresses the causal determinants of action (6). Finally a fifth sense of structure can easily be discovered, institutions as the structure of social systems. This has already been mentioned above in Parsons conflation of sociological and structural concepts, sociology being the science of institutions. It is suggested by his use of biological analogies, institutions being 'the skeletal backbone' [1948b:163], the '"anatomy" of societies' (1949a:ix). It is stated at numerous points in these essays. For example referring to the shift in his work from The Structure of Social Action Parsons speaks of:

'... a shift in theoretical level from the analysis of the structure of social action as such to the structural-functional

analysis of social systems. These are, of course, "in the last analysis" systems of social action. But the structure of such systems is, in the newer version, treated not directly in action terms, but as "institutionalized patterns" . . . [1949b:xviii].

In the above paragraphs five different senses of 'structure' have been identified in Parsons' work, a plurality of meanings which he himself does not admit or clarify. Yet it will be suggested in what follows that this plurality is not random, that there is a logic which lies behind this apparent confusion of different things. This can be brought out by focusing on the concept of institution, a path which will return the discussion back to Parsons' voluntarism. Unfortunately this is not a straight and narrow path, for once the concept of institution is investigated the confusion only worsens. What Parsons says about the concept is marked by three anomalies.

In the last section it was noted that Parsons conflates institutions, structure and empirical stability. Yet at some points it is unclear whether institutions are the causes of stabilization in social systems or the effects of other stabilizing forces. In one paragraph, for example, he says that:

'Institutional patterns are the "backbone" of the social system... Their relatively stable role in social systems, however, indicates that institutional patterns do in fact mobilize a combination of forces in support of their maintenance which is of primary significance in the total equilibrium of a social system' [1945c:239] .

Yet in the same paragraph he also says:

' Institutional patterns are only relatively stable uniform resultants of the processes of behaviour of the members of society, and hence of the forces which determine that behaviour. Their relative stability results from the particular structure of interdependence of those forces, and institutional structure is subject to change as a function of any one of many different kinds of change in the underlying system of forces' [1945c:239].

So on the one hand Parsons speaks of institutions mobilizing forces to maintain a stable state whilst on the other hand institutions are but the resultant of an underlying system of forces.

The second anomaly is whether institutions are one aspect or element in social structure or whether they constitute that structure? (7). Parsons' equation of institutions and social structure has already been noted. Again he says:

'The fundamental, structurally stable element of social systems then, which according to the present argument, must play a crucial role in their theoretical analysis, is their structure of institutional patterns defining the roles of their constituent actors'

[1945a:231] .

But on the other hand Parsons writes that:

'Institutions, or institutional patterns, in the terms which will be employed here, are a principal aspect of what is, in a generalized sense, the social structure'

[1940b:53] .

'Institutional patterns in this sense are part of the social structure....'

[1940b:54] .

Now this is a serious problem in terms of the structural-functional approach. The keynote of that approach is the holding constant of structural elements of the system so that variable elements can be related to it. Parsons often says that the conceptual components of social systems must be treated in a state of interdependence by this method. The essential components are listed as the psychological mechanisms of its component persons, the institutional structure, the concrete situation of action and the cultural tradition ([1942c:142-3], (1948b:160-1)). One of these components then is institutions but Parsons vacillates as to whether institutions form the structural element in toto or whether they are only part of the structure. So a measure of confusion marks quite what constitutes the constant structure and what the variable components.

Perhaps this can be exemplified by Parsons' use of biological analogy. He often compares institutions with the anatomy of an organism ([1942c:144], (1949a:ix)). Now the latter cannot be regarded as a component or element of an organic system, the components are proteins, carbohydrates, etc. Anatomical structure describes a state of organization of these components as Parsons well knows [1942c:148]. If then institutions are a part or element in social structure the analogy should be with the bio-chemical elements, not anatomy itself. Conversely if the analogy is between institutions and anatomy then institutions are not component

elements of social systems but describe a state of organization of those elements. This is a clue which will be returned to shortly. In passing it can be noted that Parsons is guilty of a cardinal sin in his own terms, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness: if institutions are elements of social systems they cannot be analogous to anatomy which refers to the concrete pattern of organization of an organic system.

The third anomaly takes up a point implicit in the first. The concept of institution is patently central to Parsons' theory of systems of social action. Yet a sceptic might plausibly claim that, from some of Parsons' statements, institutions can be reduced to other elements of action systems, that the concept is rather secondary. In his essay 'Propoganda and Social Control' [1942c] Parsons employs a system of three conceptual elements to analyze his problem. These are institutions, the situation of action and the cultural tradition (8). He insists that these elements must be treated as interdependent:

'Just as it is dangerous to ignore the interdependence of institutional patterns with each other, so it is also dangerous to ignore their interdependence with the other elements of the social system, with the situation of action and the cultural tradition' [1942c:144].

Yet Parsons' actual procedure is far from this. The sceptic might claim that Parsons suggests that institutions can be reduced to the situation of action and the cultural tradition. He says for example: 'From the point of view of any given person the institutionalized pattern of his own society constitute one of the most fundamental aspects of the concrete situation in which he acts' [1942c:144]. Again: 'Since institutionalized patterns consist of norms defining what action and attitudes are legitimately expected of people, they are, in one aspect, actually part of the cultural tradition' [1942c:147]. But reductionism would be the sceptic's position, Parsons' procedure is just the opposite, to incorporate the situation of action and the cultural tradition into the category of institution leaving them with a residual status. The situation of action is not an external world to the actor which constrains his action but, firstly, a definition of the situation and secondly, an institutionalized definition of the situation. [1942c:144-6]. Parsons lists four respects in which the concept of situation stands immune from institutional definition but these stand as residual survivals [1942c:145]. Similarly with the cultural tradition, Parsons says that 'no part of the cultural tradition is completely indifferent to the balance of interdependent forces in the social system' [1942c:147], meaning that in varying degrees most aspects of culture are drawn into the web of institutions. By inter-

dependence then Parsons hardly means a system of independent causal elements varying in relationship to each other, rather he makes the situation and the cultural tradition residual by tying them into the concept of institution. Just what is involved here will be discussed shortly, for the moment what is pertinent is that whether the reductionist or the incorporation path is taken, this anomaly indicates some special status for the concept of institution. Whatever that may be the second and third anomalies indicate that it cannot be one conceptual element of Parsons' theoretical system which is granted the status of a constant, structural component of the system. In practice the methodology of structural-functionalism turns out to be something rather different from Parsons explicit but abstract programme.

This discussion will now proceed to explore the special status of institutions. It is hoped that this will link together the various senses of structure, resolve the anomalies and show why Parsons conflates institutions with structure and empirical stability with methodological constancy. The essential hinge of all of this, and the central claim of this section, is that the concept of institution embodies Parsons' voluntarism. This is the reason and justification for its special place and the various conundrums which hang around it.

It will be remembered that structure in the first sense, of empirical order, denotes 'stable uniformities in the results of underlying processes' [1945a:217]. But Parsons says:

'... in the present state of social science, knowledge of the institutional structure of a social system is as essential to the understanding of its functioning as is knowledge of anatomy essential to understanding the physiological functioning of an organism. In neither case can the structure be derived, and especially its variations from system to system, from dynamic analytical considerations alone. At best there is only fragmentary insight at this level' [1945c:144]

The context makes clear that by structure here Parsons means empirical order. The point is that whilst social science may be blessed with a plethora of statistical regularities this in itself is insufficient, what is required is regularities in the dynamic relationship of analytical variables. It is in this that social science displays only fragmentary insight. Then knowledge of institutional structure must substitute, supply the relevant generalized categories adequate to a complete description in functionally essential aspects [1942c:144]. So,

'Institutions are not independent entities - from a certain point of view they are rather relatively stable crystallizations of uniformities in the processes of action and interaction of human personalities' [1942c:144].

Here then is the link between structure as empirical order and institutions. Uniformities in the interaction of persons are too complex to be grasped directly in the relevant respects. The normative order is taken as a substitute (9). The reasons why Parsons feels this a plausible step are complex.

The first is that institutions form an order, not an incoherent aggregate of disconnected uniformities.

'... it is of fundamental importance that in any given case the basic institutional patterns constitute a relatively integrated system and not a mere agglomeration of distinct elements or "traits" [1942c:143].

It is via this order of institutions that the units of social systems are organized. '... institutional structure is a mode of the "integration" of the component individuals' [1940b:54]. So, for example, Parsons speaks of the institution of age-grading (what is expected of the young, the adult, the old etc.,) as 'interwoven with other structural elements' [1942g:89]. These other elements are kinship structure, formal education, occupation and community participation. Parsons says:

'in relation to these ... age-grading institutions constitute an important connecting link and organizing point of reference.

Age and sex constitute one of the main links in structural continuity in terms of which structures which are differentiated in other respects are articulated with each other...' [1942g:89].

Here then is the second sense of structure, structure as an organization of the units of a system, as an integrated system institutions facilitate this (10). Indeed Parsons says that the major preoccupation of the papers collected in Essays in Sociological Theory was 'The attempt to portray and analyze social structure as an articulated system of institutionalized patterns....' (1949a:ix). But note here that Parsons goes on to say

'For such structural analysis to provide more than a disconnected series of morphological "pictures" it is essential that it should be fitted into some system of classification built on generalized principles....' (1949a:ix).

This takes the argument from structure as the organization of units to structure as the logical integration of causal

determinants. Again institutions represent such a state of integration.

'Such an institutional structure is, indeed essentially a relatively stable mode of the organization of human activities, and of the motivational forces underlying them' [1940b:54] .

'Institutional structures in this sense are the fundamental element of the structure of the social system. They constitute stable crystallizations of behavioural forces in such a way that action can be sufficiently regularized so as to be compatible with the functional requirements of a society' [1950b:337-8] .

With this step the anomalies above can be resolved. An institution is not so much a causal determinant of stability as a description of a stable state, indeed institutions are not one component element of social systems but represent the coherent organization of such elements, this being the reason why institutions appear either as reducible to other elements or as incorporating other elements. But what of the other two senses of structure, structure as the logical integration of a system and as expressing the causal determinants of the system?

To take the latter first. It has already been noted that Parsons' voluntarism maps out the major causal determinants of social systems, the normative and conditional elements. This is continued in the concept of institution. On the one hand institutions '... are normative patterns which define what are felt to be, in the given society, proper, legitimate, or expected modes of action or of social relationship' [1940b:53]. Again;

'... the essential aspect of social structure lies in a system of patterned expectations defining the proper behaviour of persons playing certain roles ... Such systems of patterned expectations ... are conveniently called "institutions"' [1945a:231].

But on the other hand Parsons stresses that an institutional system is closely related with the conditions of action, the functional needs of social systems. Institutions:

'... are resultants of and controlling factors in the action of human beings in society. Hence, as a system they must at the same time be related to the functional needs of their actors as individuals and the social system they compose' [1945a:231]. (See also [1942c:143]).

So it is in a system of expected patterns of behaviour that the causal determinants of action are expressed in social structure. Having noted their voluntaristic status this notion of expression can be specified more closely. This takes this discussion to the final sense of structure, the logical integration of a theoretical system. Institutions represent this integration but this is not a logical state, rather it represents the opposition of normative and conditional, the second component of Parsons' voluntarism.

An institution does not just contain the twofold reference to the normative and the conditional. It is a delicate balance between them. Parsons stresses that institutionalized normative patterns:

'... are not "utopian" patterns which, however desirable they may be regarded, are not lived up to except by a few, or by others in exceptional circumstances. Thus the extreme altruism of the Sermon on the Mount or extreme heroism are very widely approved but the ordinary individual is not expected to live up to them. When, on the other hand, a pattern is institutionalized, conformity with it is part of the legitimate expectations of the society, and of the individual himself' [1940b:54].

An institution is a normatively valued way of acting but a practical way of acting in the sense that it is adapted to the functional needs of social systems. Parsons expresses this by saying that to count as an institution a normative pattern must be of 'strategic significance' in the social system.

'A pattern governing action in a social system will be called "institutionalized" in so far as it defines the main modes of the legitimately expected behaviour of the persons acting in the relevant social roles and in so far as conformity with these expectations is of strategic structural significance to the social system' (1948b: 159).

An institution, then, represents a compromise between the demands of realism and the normative values of a social system.

The conditional qualifications of being non-utopian and of strategic significance which Parsons adds to the normative character of institutions conveys the different demands of the normative and the conditional but not necessarily their opposition. Here the special status of institutionalized patterns is crucial. The concept of institution refers to a state of organization of the voluntary causal elements. That this is a state of balance or

compromise between the opposed demands of the normative and conditional world is indicated by the problematical quality of the state of institutionalization. The delicate balance of normative and conditional is difficult to attain and maintain. It is this which gives sociology its raison d'être. Parsons defines sociology as 'the science of institutions' [1945a:235] but in another context makes it plain that '... institutions are the focus of [sociology's] interest and that almost any component of the social systems which bears on the functional and dynamic problems of institutions should be defined as sociological' (1949^{48b}:161). It is not so much institutions as an element of action which defines sociology as the state of institutionalization which gives it its focus. Any component of action systems which bears on this state is relevant to sociology. The fact that sociology hangs on this is sufficient to indicate the problematical status of institutionalization, the compromise of the voluntaristic oppositional dualism.

Subjectivity in the sense of Parsons' voluntaristic metaphysic is then not just a feature of the frame of reference of action. It is characteristic of his structural-functional approach to systems of action. The complex concept of structure centres on the sociological category of institution, a notion which gains its multiple centrality from the voluntarism which it embodies. An institution expresses the normative and conditional sides of the dualism

in that it describes a point at which the conflicting demands of the ideal and the real are in equilibrium. But what of the third component of voluntarism, the actor's 'effort'? For this, this chapter turns to the second problem of a science of action, the problem of normative determinism.

C. The problem of normative determinism.

A structural-functional approach to theoretical systems involves a distinction between constant/structural concepts and variable/dynamic concepts. In section B it has been established that in the theory of action this is equivalent to a further distinction between the sociological concept of institution and the psychological concept of the actor's motivation. It is now time to turn to the second half of Parsons' paired distinctions, to ask, in what sense and why do psychological or motivational categories take on the character of dynamic variables?

This will be approached via what has been termed the problem of normative determinism in a science of action. The long standing issue is whether normative, or indeed any subjective, phenomena can legitimately be regarded as 'causes' of action in the traditional sense of a constant conjunction between cause (norm) and effect (action). It is often held that norms determine action in a manner not susceptible to the causal formula, for example, that the norm-action

relationship is contingent upon the actor's understanding of the norm, an understanding which is not only culturally variable but also always contains the possibility of originality.

In chapter III it has been shown that Parsons manifests a concern with the problem of normative determinism, a concern which continues in the 1940's. But what has also been noted is Parsons' persistent conflation of methodological and substantive problems. The issue of the nature of the relation between norm and action is bound up with the empirical mechanisms by which norms control action. This conflation continues in Parsons work considered here.

For example, when Parsons addresses himself to the question of whether normative ideas can be regarded as causal determinants of action what is striking is the mixture of methodological and substantive considerations that he brings to bear, (1938b:660-1). It is not just a matter of whether or not normative ideas make a difference to the course of action and hence must be regarded as an independent variable but that normative ideas make a difference to the actor, they are significant to him.

Secondly, writing of Veblen, Parsons says:

'above all, he saw and emphasised the historical relatively of economic activities. He also saw that they

were related to a framework of factors, a "social structure", the main outline of which was independent of the individual ad hoc actions. From the point of view of freedom of adaption to environmental exigencies, it was a restraining framework' (1940c:643).

Here 'social structure' is cast in two ways. Parsons praises Veblen for his awareness of social structure as a causal factor in action but at the same time social structure is described in substantive terms as 'a restraining discipline over individual interests' (1940c:644). Again the mixture of causation and control is present in a final example.

'Every social system, functionally regarded, faces a control problem on the level of overt behaviour. Even a moderate level of the integration of the complex elements of a system of social action is no more to be taken for granted as in the "nature" of the human material which makes it up than is the analogous integration of one of the higher organisms in the physio-chemical nature of the proteins, carbohydrates, and other chemical substances which make up the body' [1942c:148].

This passage begins with the control of overt behaviour but then quickly shifts to the integration of causal elements.

This conflation of the methodological and substantive senses of 'determine' will be a major theme in what follows. What is significant initially is that it suggests a rather idiosyncratic formulation of the problem of normative determinism on Parsons' part. The problem is set in the context of delineating mediating links between abstract causal elements and concrete behaviour. The easy 'Propoganda and Social Control' illustrates this. Here two rather different points of emphasis are prominent. The first is the exploration of automatic control mechanisms in social systems, automatic meaning beyond common sense understanding of situations [1942c:149] and/or outside deliberate intention [1942c:159, 170, 173-4]. In particular, Parsons elaborates the socialization and social control functions of doctor-patient relationships. The second emphasis is on the institutional control of individual behaviour. The paper is dominated by 'the point of view of the social system' in which:

'... the institutional patterns are, in one principal respect, agencies of the "control" of the behaviour of its members, in that they keep it in line with the established structure and functional requirements of the social system' [1942c:144].

These two themes are connected in that, for Parsons, automatic mechanisms depend for their successful operation on the institutional control of behaviour.

'It has become clear from the foregoing analysis that the institutional patterns of society perform important automatic control functions on at least two different levels, that of ordinary "personal" social relations and of the institutionalization of medical practice. In the latter case it should be kept clearly in mind that not only does the physician "control" his patient but, in order to be in a position to do so, he must himself be controlled, he must adhere sufficiently closely to an institutionalized definition of his role, and to a situation which is enforced overwhelmingly by automatic, informal mechanisms' [1942c:160].

This nicely illustrates the mutual intermingling of automatic mechanisms and institutional control, an instance of the link Parsons draws between the level of causal relations among abstract variables and the norm-action relationship in concrete behaviour. The following paragraphs will attempt to map out these links more systematically.

During the 1940's Parsons does not elaborate in any detail a system of causal elements. However at two points he sketches a fourfold scheme of cultural tradition, situation of action, institutions and 'motivational forces and mechanisms' ([1942c:142-8], (1948b:160-1)). This requires brief comment on its relation to the voluntaristic dualism. The place of institutions has already been outlined, that of the actor's motivational structure will be the preoccupation of this section. The cultural tradition is broadly equivalent to the normative side of the dualism. This leaves two questions: how the situation of action relates to the voluntaristic approach and the place of functional needs as conditions of action.

To take the latter first. Parsons does not treat functional needs as components of social systems because they are not variable, they act as 'invariant points of reference' across cultures. Thus, whilst within a culture, institutions form a stable structure, across cultures they differ. Functional needs do not. So they could be added to the above four components but in the role of constants in the strict sense of invariable.

Finally, the situation of action. In The Structure of Social Action this element plays the role of the conditions of action in the sense of the bio-physical bounds of action systems, hereditary and environment. This puts Parsons in

the rather strange position (as a sociologist) of refusing to include the social conditions of action as a causal element in his scheme. This continues as is indicated by the following passage.

'... it is essential to keep continually in mind a distinction of two major levels. The first is the structure of the situation from the point of view of any given individual actor; the second, from the point of view of the social system under consideration as a whole. Failure to distinguish these two levels was, for instance, the primary source of the dilemma into which Durkheim fell which was responsible for most of the controversy over the group mind problem' (1948b:160).

The situation from the point of view of the functioning of the system is constituted by the system's functional needs. This is an advance on hereditary and environment as it includes the imperatives of social systems as well as the constraints of the biological and physical worlds. This leaves the situation from the actor's point of view as the locus of the problem. Parsons is aware that the social world is in many respects conditional to the individual actor. He says:
'From the point of view of any given person the institutionalized

patterns of his own society constitute one of the most fundamental aspects of the concrete situation in which he acts' [1942c:144]. Yet if this is generalized as an element in a theoretical system, the construction of which is Parsons' ambition, it leads to a dilemma. If other actors, their expectations, use of sanctions etc., form the situation then not only are some aspects of action 'double-counted' but it seems impossible to generalize this element, each actor's situation is peculiar to him. If, on the other hand, social structure as a whole is made conditional for all actors this amounts to Durkheim's sociologistic positivism, positing the social as external and constraining to each and every actor, what Parsons refers to above as the group mind problem

Parsons' solution to this problem is as follows [1942c: 145-6]. Firstly, the situation of action becomes the definition of the situation (11). Rather than a stubborn objective world parallel, from any one actor's point of view, to the bio-physical world, the situation becomes a subjective understanding of that world. It would seem that this does not overcome the problem of particularism above, subjective definitions of situations are just as peculiar to any one actor as the concatenation of realistic circumstances in which he finds himself. However this shift allows a further step which overcomes this, the institutionalization of definitions of the situation. Each individual's

definition is controlled by the normative and functional requirements of an institutional system, becomes, that is, a part of an integrated system which can be treated generally. However Parsons insists that institutionalized patterns do not exhaustively define a situation, this brings in the third step in the resolution of the problem. Non-institutionalized definitions form a residuum giving a degree of flexibility but standing as particular to the concrete situation, random to the system. So the factors which Parsons mentions as being outside institutional definitions are as follows. Firstly, within any actor's role there is 'a range of toleration within which action ... can vary ..., within which the specific details are contingent on particular personalities and circumstances' [1942c:145]. Secondly, deviation from institutionalized roles is an ever present contingency which institutionalized definition of who other actors are as role player's cannot cope with. Finally, 'in relation to the non-human situation there is likewise a range of detailed variation, and of elements of change and uncertainty' [1942c:145].

The above paragraphs represent something of an excursion from the main thread of this section necessitated by the need to clarify the relation between the four components of social systems mentioned above and the overall voluntaristic framework of the theory of action.

The discussion now returns to the problem of normative determinism cast in terms of links between abstract causal elements and concrete behaviour.

The first link is the integration of causal elements into institutions. This has already been discussed above, institutions are not elements of social systems but states of organization of elements. The point at issue here is the place of motivational elements in the overall institutionalized nexus of causal elements. It has been noted that concrete motivation is a complex phenomenon comprising general mechanisms of the psychology of the actor and the particular content of variable cultures. As such concrete motivation can be analyzed both psychologically and sociologically. Parsons is concerned with the sociological relevance of motivation but not in isolation from its psychological mechanisms. Rather his question is what are the aspects of motivation relevant to social systems? 'The judgements of significance on which the statements of sociological problems of motivation are based must therefore be couched in terms of the frame of reference of the social system...' [1950b:339-40]. Parsons approaches this question via the concept of function: '... it is only in terms of the functional significance to the social system of the behaviour motivationally analyzed, that generalizations about it become sociologically relevant' (1949a:ix-x). Here then the notion of function is

a standard of relevance, the sociologist is concerned with motivation insofar as social system behaviour 'is a function of' motivation or vice versa. But the issue is not so simple, a rather different sense of function is also present. 'For only when the motives of individuals are seen in their significance for a more comprehensive functioning systems does motive interpretation achieve a truly sociological level' [1941a:29]. This narrows the criterion of relevance considerably, it is those aspects of motivation which are relevant to the functioning of a system which are of interest to the sociologist.

Parsons' understanding of what it is about motivation which is so relevant owes much to Freud's hydraulic model of the unconscious. When speaking of aggression, for example, he refers to 'the ultimate reservoirs of aggressive motivation' [1946b:299]. Here aggression is pictured as a 'disposition' or 'potential' inherent in the human actor equivalent to the welling energies of Freud's id. Like the latter motivation is conceived by analogy to motive power or fuel. (12) Parsons refers to man's interest in religion as a 'driving force' of action (1938b:659), again:

'Indeed, group interest seems in many ways to operate like gasoline. Controlled and canalized in a well integrated institutional structure, it

can serve as a powerful constructive motive force. In a disorganized situation, on the other hand, it can be an explosive and destructive force. Its "nature" is not to be one or the other" (1945b:194-5).

This brings out a further point. Motivation is the driving force of action but its direction is not intrinsic to motivation, it is, in itself 'free floating'. So man's interest in religious salvation might be a universal driving force but it is channelled by diverse systems of religious ideas (1938b:660). Similarly for aggression.

'The specific goals and objects to which these aggressive dispositions are attached, the ways in which they are depressed, deflected, projected, or can be directly expressed according to the forces which channel or oppose them - all these are equally important with any aggressive potential in general in determining concrete behavioural outcomes' [1946b: 299].

Here two general points can be noted. Firstly, Parsons' fusion of psychological, dynamic and variable concepts has been noted. Essentially there is here again a play on

words. Motivation is dynamic in the sense of the analogy with motive power, the actor's motivation is the dynamo of the action system, to pile metaphor on metaphor. Further, motivation is variable in the sense of undirected and free-floating. It is these metaphors which underpin Parsons' use of the psychology of motivation as the dynamic and variable elements in a structural-functional system.

The second point is the place of motivation in the institutionalized nexus. Institutions require motivation, an institutionalized pattern is 'a culture pattern to which a certain structured complex of motivations and social sanctions have become attached' (1948b:159). But not any particular kind of motivation. An institution is a 'mechanism by which the extremely varied potentialities of "human nature" become integrated in such a way as to dovetail into a single integrated system capable of meeting the situational exigencies with which the society and its members are faced' [1945a:231]. For example, the profit motive is a 'structurally generalized goal' which has nothing to do with psychological universals ([1940b:53], [1950b:339]). It is rather 'a level of the structuring of motivational forces which is essentially a function of the institutional situations in which people are put, rather than of their particular personality structures' [1950b:339]. Motivation is but a general driving force which is channelled and directed, given content by institutions. 'Similarly, the process

of social behaviour as of any other are psychological. But without the meaning given them by their institutional-structural context they lose their relevance to the understanding of social phenomena' [1945a:235]. The first link in the chain of determination then is the organization of causal elements into an institutional order. But actual behaviour is rarely equal to the institutional pattern, the relationship between the two is a contingent one. The institution-behaviour (norm-action) relationship is the second link in the chain.

This can be approached by asking why motivational components are essential to institutions? It is because the institution-behaviour relation is highly problematical to Parsons. He speaks of 'an essential factor of "resistence" to the fulfilment of normative expectations and obligations', 'tendencies to "laxity", to letting down standards' [1942c:150]. There are three reasons for this. Firstly an institutional pattern may well be non-utopian, adapted to the realities of functional needs, but it is still a normative pattern, an ideal to aspire to. As such:

'As the editor has shown in previous works, it is inherent in the frame of reference of "action" which is basic to Weber's whole methodology, that it

is "normatively oriented". The actor is treated not merely as responding to stimuli, but as making an "effort" to conform with certain "ideal", rather than actual, patterns of conduct with the probability that his efforts will be only partially successful, and there will be elements of deviation¹ [1941a: 12].

The second reason is that social action is interaction. Actor A's behaviour (1) is a function of A's expectation that B will behave in way (2). But whether or not B in fact behaves in way (2) is, in part, a function of A's behaviour (1).

¹In the social field the fundamental problem is as follows. It is not difficult, knowing an individual's "motives" in Weber's sense, and knowing the situation in which he is placed, to achieve a fairly satisfactory understanding of a particular act of his. That situation, is, however, compounded of the actions, past, present and prospective, of a large number of

individuals whose action is interdependent, "mutually oriented" as Weber puts one aspect of it.

Though it is not difficult, knowing the situation, to understand the action of any one individual, it is an entirely different matter to grasp the behaviour of the system of action as a whole, when the concrete situation of each component individual is a varying function of the action of the others' [1941a:23].

But this interactive quality of social action is further compounded by its basis in expected action. 'For in social relationships it is the expected and actual behaviour and manifestation of the sentiments of others which is the most important component of the situation in which any one person acts' [1945c:240]. A's behaviour in relation to B is not only a function of A's expectation of what B is likely to do but of A's expectation of what B expects A to do. This 'double contingency' (13) of interaction then is the second reason why the institution-behaviour relationship is problematical. Parsons often speaks of action as 'governed' by an institutional pattern but that term covers a complex area. The institution governs not only A's expectation of himself, of B's action but also A's expectation of B's expectation of A and vice versa.

It has been noted that as an ideal an institutional pattern requires the actor's 'effort' to conform. Yet the source of that effort, the actor's motivational energy is variable in its direction, easily diverted along 'inappropriate' paths. The structuring of motivation by institutions is a complex matter, oversimplified in the above to get to the root of the matter. This complexity is a central concern of Parsons' sociology. His approach studies 'the individual in terms of the balance of motives to conformity with, and deviance, in various respects, from the institutionally defined expectations of his various roles' (1949a:x). So the free-floating character of motivation is the third reason for the problematical relationship between institutional pattern and actual behaviour.

The attachment of motivation to institutional patterns in definite, orderly, ways is the means by which the problematical character of the institution-behaviour relation is overcome.

'It is the application of generalized psychological knowledge of the mechanisms of human behaviour under certain conditions which supplies the essential connecting link between the social and other situational conditions which impinge on individuals, on the one hand, and the patterned behavioural manifestations ... on the other' (1946c:566).

Parsons' preoccupation with the institutional integration of motivation is generally regarded as a manifestation of his concern with the problem of order. This is not denied here, but it is also a manifestation of his concern with the methodological problem of normative determinism. This can be illustrated by turning to the concept of function in the structural-functional approach. It will be remembered that this approach involved the distinction between structural and dynamic concepts in a theoretical system. This distinction then requires some means of linking the two. The concept of function fulfills this role [1945a:217]. Dynamic processes are related to the structure of the system in terms of their functional significance, that is, their significance for the ongoing functioning of the empirical system [1945a:217-8]. But it has been established above that institutions are the structure of the system, motivation the dynamic variable. What the functional part of the structural-functional approach focuses on then is the mechanisms by which motivational forces are integrated with institutional patterns. The concern with the problem of normative determinism, understood as the normative control of action, is, like the voluntaristic sense of subjectivity, built into the structural-functional approach to a theory of social systems of action.

D. The problem of value

The aspect of the general problem of value particularly relevant to this discussion is the place of value within a corpus of knowledge, the degree to which 'the world' for science is a function of the value standpoint of the scientist. As such we must return to the problem of description of the world and the selectivity of such description.

If description is selective it must involve some criterion of selectivity. Parsons follows Weber in locating the criterion in the 'interests' of the scientist. Empirical knowledge '... never includes "all the facts", even that can easily be ascertained, but only those which are relevant to certain interests of the investigator' [1941a:9]. The problem is the character of those interest, specifically their origin. Here Parsons uses a contrast between uncriticised ad hoc criteria drawn from common sense and the technical concepts of theoretical schemes.

This is exemplified in two of Parsons' discussions of psychology and sociology. A feature of this is the claim that the two sciences necessarily complement each other. If this is not recognized then the scientist will tend to be guilty of covertly employing common sense criteria of what are the significant 'facts' about personality or social systems. So after Thorndike's position as a psychologist has been noted Parsons turns to his approach to broadly sociological questions:

'When we turn to the social side of his material a notable fact is the closeness with which he adheres to a kind of common-sense level. It is a refined and sophisticated common sense, but none the less tends on the whole to avoid the more technical aspects (such as they are) of especially economic, anthropological, and sociological work. Where authors from these fields are quoted it is generally in terms of their riper empirical wisdom as to the phenomena of their fields rather than their technical conceptual schemes' (1941c:278).

A similar contrast comes out in the relationship of sociology and psychoanalysis:

'The sociologist must face the problems of human motivation whether he wants to or not. If he does not acquire a genuinely competent theory, he will implicitly adopt a series of ad hoc ideas which are no less crucial because they are exempted from critical analysis.

Turning to psychoanalysis with the proper adaptations can provide him with a way out of the dilemma. Perhaps the situation is not altogether incomparable in reverse. The analyst is in fact dealing with social systems. His ideas about them have tended to be ad hoc and common sense. Such ideas may be adequate for many empirical purposes but tend to break down as subtler levels of generalization are attempted. There is the possibility that this gap can be filled by the products of genuinely technical analysis' [1950b:347].

Although this contrast of selective criteria of interest is not followed through the implication is clear that theoretical conceptual schemes provide a 'scientific' criterion of selection. This is stated specifically at one point:

'In the first place our study of fact, however little we may be aware of it, is always guided by the logical structure of a theoretical scheme, even if it is entirely implicit. We never investigate

"all the facts" which could be known about the phenomena in question, but only those which we think are "important". This involves a selection among the possible facts. Now if we investigate carefully, though few empiricists do, what is the basis of this selection, it will, I think, uniformly be found that among the criteria of importance and the only ones of strictly scientific status is that of their relevance to the logical structure of a theoretical scheme' (1938a:15).

The influence of this methodological point on Parsons' approach to particular substantive problems can be seen in his 'Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification' [1940a]. Although Parsons was probably not the first nor the only exponent of a 'functionalist' approach to social stratification there is no doubt that this essay represents an early statement of a drastic shift in the sociology of stratification away from the conceptual framework established by Marx and Weber. Both of these centred their discussion on control relations between groups. Parsons' framework hinges upon the ranking of roles within a group (i.e. society). Where do these new criteria of what is significant about stratification come from? This question cannot

be answered here, but what is relevant in this context is that Parsons outlines his own self-understanding of the answer. He begins his essay by saying that his 'first task' is to discuss why differential ranking is 'a really fundamental phenomenon of social systems' and, secondly, by justifying his assertion that ranking in terms of moral approval and disapproval is the crucial aspect of ranking [1940a:69-70]. Parsons' elaboration of both of these points is grounded in the following:

'In one sense, perhaps, the selection of moral evaluation as the central criterion of the ranking involved in stratification might be considered arbitrary. It is, however, no more and no less arbitrary than, for instance, the selection of distance as a basic category for describing the relations of bodies in a mechanical system. Its selection is determined by the place which moral evaluation holds in a generalized conceptual scheme, the "theory of action"' [1940a:70].

To Parsons, then, the theory of action as a generalized conceptual scheme provides the criterion of selection of the

phenomenon of ranking by moral evaluation as the important facts of stratification.

So far this discussion has proceeded on the assumption that one can distinguish between theoretical and common sense criteria of selection and that the former can sustain the connotations of superiority implied in the use of the adjective 'scientific'. Now this certainly cannot be taken for granted, the notion of a selective criterion immediately implies some sense of relativity of knowledge to its guiding point of view. The passage quoted above introduces this, the conceptual framework for describing stratification has a quality of 'arbitrariness' about it. Once again Parsons takes his lead from Weber. Outlining, with approval, Weber's understanding of conceptual abstraction Parsons says: 'There is, in this selectivity of facts, both for the formulation of problems and for the content of conceptualization, a very important element of relativity in all science, natural or social' [1941a:9-10]. However there are quite crucial points of difference between Parsons and Weber on the nature of this relativity. These can be discussed in terms of the following passage.

'Every treatment of questions of fact and every empirical investigation is "in terms of a conceptual scheme". . . . Hence the conceptual structure of any system of scientific theory is subject to the same kind of relativity with "arbitrariness". It is subject to the disciplining constraint both of verification in all questions of particular empirical fact, and of logical precision and consistency among the many different parts of a highly complex conceptual structure. The "theory of social action" is by now a theoretical structure so highly developed and with so many ramifications in both these respects that elements structurally essential to it cannot be lightly dismissed as expressing only "one point of view"' [1944:211].

Now Weber would agree with Parsons' disciplining constraints; adherence to publicly knowable procedures of empirical verification and logical argument but to Weber science is relative in the sense of being grounded in value systems

which necessarily represent only one of many possible points of view. The stress is on the one-sidedness of concepts and empirical knowledge due to this quality of value relevance. Parsons' position is distinct from this in that science is relative, not to values, but to schema's of theoretical concepts which, as the passage above says, 'cannot be lightly dismissed as expressing only "one point of view"'. Now without necessarily accepting Weber's argument it can be used as a convenient tool for examining Parsons' position. In what sense can theoretical schemes be made independent of cultural values? In what way can the objectivity of scientific knowledge be established in a more radical way than the appeal to empirical verification and logical argument, in terms of the objectivity of the standpoint of the scientist? In other words, the theory of action may well be a theoretical structure well developed and with many ramifications both empirically and logically but it might still be an expression of one value relevant point of view. This brings the discussion to what Parsons says about the relationship of science and values.

In fact Parsons argument is for a fundamental fusion of science and values, a fusion however which is the basis for the objectivity of science. Parsons is clearly aware that value-commitments form part of the everyday practice of science. He remarks at one point:

'The fact that a Veblen rather than a Weber gathers a school of ardent disciples around him bears witness to the great importance of factors other than the sheer weight of evidence and analysis in the formation of "schools" of social thought' [1941a:40].

Again in a paper arguing for governmental support for social science Parsons touches on the question of whether social scientists can achieve 'the kind of objectivity which would enable them to rise above partisan politics' (1946c:662). He notes the view that 'the social scientist is in effect primarily concerned with rationalizing his own sentiments' (1946a:662) commenting 'A relative justification of this view must be admitted - such lack of objectivity is more common among social scientists even in the direct context of their professional subject-matter than among natural scientists' (1946a:662). However Parsons adds:

'But above all, it is not proper to judge a scientific field by the average standards of its proponents. The basis of its support should rather be the potentiality for the future which is shown by the best and most advanced level of work which has yet been attained' (1946a:662).

In terms of (almost) ideal possibilities then the relativity of science to its sentimental or value basis can be overcome. The fusion of science and values is not in terms of the commitment of the scientist to partisan value positions and policies. Rather it is a unity on a much broader cultural level.

Parsons' position is grounded in the following 'fundamental fact' (1947b:215).

'It is a further implication of this basic conceptual scheme for the analysis of social action that scientific investigation must itself be regarded as a process of social action.... Understanding of truth, whether it be the truth of the physical world or of the social, is an achievement - an achievement to be analyzed in the same fundamental terms as the achievement of any other type of goal. If scientific investigation is a process of action it follows that it, in the same sense as any other action, is governed by moral values and ethical standards' (1947b:215).

This, in The Structure of Social Action Parsons calls 'the solidarity of science and action' which at that time rested on the claimed universality of the norm of intrinsic rationality as an element of action. There the problem of relativity is solved in part by translating the value of rationality into the analytical element of rationality, a component in a theoretical scheme of universal properties of action. Although there is a hint of this in the work being considered here [1941a:12-13] it is a rather different implication of science as a process of action which Parsons develops in these writings.

This is the close link Parsons sees between the norms governing science and the most general values of western civilization. The latter focus on the value of rational understanding and control of the world, natural and human.

'The understanding of nature in the broadest sense of the total world we live in, including ourselves and our place in it, and the control of natural processes in terms of rational understanding, are values which have been realized in the Western World to a higher degree than anywhere else in history. ... Our civilization as a whole is deeply committed to the great

adventure of rational understanding
of man and society, as well as the
physical and biological world'
(1947a:242).

Such values find their 'most highly developed expression' in the practice of science (1947a:242). Conversely the development of science in the west, a unique historical phenomenon, has been, partially at least, dependent upon these values (1947b:215). So, 'science is not a mere isolated technical tool in modern western society. Its roots penetrate to the deepest level of our cultural and moral motivations' (1947a:242). It is in the nature of personality and social integration that the values of science must be compatible with other values which govern the individual scientist's and the social system's total action (1947b:215). But, surely, this raises acutely the problem of relativity. Behind, and in fact underpinning theoretical schemas are indeed cultural values which knowledge is relative to. Even if Parsons attempts to couch this in extremely broad cultural terms those theoretical structures could still be held to be an expression of 'one point of view'. Indeed Parsons seems to take this position. Opening his discussion of social science and ethics he makes the point that the two 'are interdependent parts of the same fundamental system of rational orientation to the world' (1947b:213). He says

that he will not go into 'the deeper ontological questions which may be involved from the philosophical point of view' (1947b:213). Rather, his discussion will be couched in terms of the 'level of relativity to a given cultural situation' (1947b:213). But in fact Parsons wants to go beyond such relativism. For the content of the values which science is relative to is seen by him as itself overcoming relativism. Rationalism is a general value of western civilization which in particular areas of action becomes concretized in particular directions, as norms and practical standards of conduct. Within science this means that 'objective impartial truth' is 'the dominant standard of science' (1947b:216). As such, for the scientist:

'... this implies, on the one hand, the moral values of intellectual honesty, the impossibility of admitting even to oneself what cannot within the relevant fields be objectively demonstrated. At the same time it involves a certain humility, a willingness to be guided by the facts regardless of their conflict with personal sentiments or wishes' (1947b:216).

This, then, is the fusion of sciences and values by which Parsons sees the dangers of relativity inherent in the selectivity of knowledge as being overcome. Ideally the very values and norms governing science free science of its grounding in values and allow theoretical concepts to act as the criterion of selectivity of what is important.

Again Parsons analytical conception of science is crucial, just as in the problems of subjectivity and normative determinism a system of integrated conceptual elements plays a central role in resolving the problem of value. In this case such a scheme eliminates value as a criterion of selection of what is of 'interest' to science. But, further, this concept of science is bound up with the voluntaristic metaphysic; theoretical schemes can only play their role if the practical activity of science is conceived as a process of action in Parsons' voluntaristic sense of effort to conform to norms with the objective properties of the world acting as the conditional side. When the norms of science are the pursuit of truth then the 'tension' between science as value-imbued activity and the world it seeks to know is resolved, the two sides of the voluntaristic dualism are brought into equilibrium.

VI. Conclusion

A. Summary of the Argument

The argument of the preceding chapters has rested on two assumptions which have only been partially validated but which can be taken as sufficiently self-evident to pose the problem for this study. These are, firstly, that the very idea of a science of action contains within it a number of methodological problems which require attention and some form of resolution. However, the concept might be refined the basic quality of 'action' is its subjective and/or normative predicate. As such it is an area of study sufficiently different from the behaviour of natural phenomena to pose peculiar obstacles in investigation. Three such issues have been examined in the above pages; the nature of subjectivity, the type of relationship between normative entities and action and the problem of value. These are very general labels which is significant in that the way the problems are defined is variable. For example, the reaction against 'positivism' in social science proceeds in several different directions. Schutz's phenomenology focuses on the nature of subjectivity and his criticisms of 'orthodox' philosophy of social science (1971:48-66) in the shape of Hempel (1963) and Nagel (1963) concentrates on this with very little being said on the logic of scientific procedure by which investigation of

subjectively meaningful action is to be carried out (1). By contrast, the English analytic tradition, for example, Winch (1958) and MacIntyre (1962), focus especially on the latter topic, specifically the applicability in social science of the deductive-nomological framework of causation and covering laws. In the terminology of this study their focus is on the problem of normative determinism. Finally, the Hegelian-Marxist's critique of positivism centres on the problem of value, the divorce within positivism of science and metaphysics and the refusal to incorporate ultimate questions of value and history within 'scientific reason'. (See, for example, Marcuse (1968), Horkheimer (1972) and Habermas (1972: Preface and 3-5)). The point of these sketchy remarks is merely to show that the nature of the problems in a science of action depend upon quite how the 'elementary' qualities of action are elaborated so that methodological issues are posed.

The second assumption underlying this study is that, certainly during the period covered here, Parsons is aware that his ambition to build a science of action does involve methodological problems. As well as his explicit statements on this in the 1930's his background and training would lead us to expect such an awareness. For Parsons was well schooled in the methodological debates of the Neo-Kantian movement in German social science and philosophy. In that context the three problems outlined above were well to the forefront, Dilthey analyzing the concept of meaning, Rickert

the problem of value and the Schmoller-Menger debate airing questions of general causal laws.

Assuming then that a science of action does pose problems and given Parsons' awareness of these, the question for this study follows. I have been concerned with how Parsons formulates the three methodological problems of subjectivity, normative determinism and value and the ways in which he attempts to overcome them. Crucial to my argument has been the claim that Parsons' strategy consists of two interrelated components; an analytical conception of science which centres on the importance of abstract conceptual schemes for description and explanatory analysis and a voluntaristic metaphysic as to the nature of action which emphasizes an antagonistic dualism between normative and conditional worlds which must be resolved through effort.

This strategy synthesizes in The Structure of Social Action so that my examination of that work has taken the following path. Firstly, Parsons' general methodology of science was outlined exploring the reasons why he emphasized the theoretical character of science and then quite what 'theory' involved. The various distinctions Parsons made between different types and functions of concepts led him to stress the centrality of a systematically articulated scheme of general elements for the structural analysis of

action. Secondly, the precise meaning of voluntarism was examined before investigating the methodological problems peculiar to a science of action. I have attempted to show how Parsons' analytic methodology and voluntaristic metaphysics provide the essential parameters in terms of which these problems are broached and solved. In the case of subjectivity, rather than an emphasis on meaning Parsons' voluntarism provides the content of his conception of subjectivity and his structural analysis the form in which this content is organized. The components of voluntarism become analytical elements in a coherently organized theoretical scheme. Parsons' problem of normative determinism centres not on the validity of conceiving of normative entities as causes of action but firstly on the ordering of analytical elements in a theoretical scheme and secondly on the substantive mechanisms by which norms of action control action. Finally, Parsons remoulds the Weberian approach to the problem of value so that the Parsonian emphasis on theoretical schemes replaces the positive relevance of values in the Weberian position.

In chapters IV and V I have followed through these themes into the body of work published by Parsons between 1937 and 1950, that is, the period in which he explicitly adopts a structural functional approach to social action. The organization of this argument has been similar to my examination of The Structure of Social Action beginning

with Parsons' general methodology and then turning to the methodology of a science of action. In the former I attempted to elucidate the nature of the problems as Parsons saw them leading up to what to him was the central question, that of the type of theoretical systems appropriate to the description and analysis of empirical systems of action. Parsons' answer to this question was the structural functional approach but on examination of this it was found that a number of anomalies were present which suggested that the search for a 'functional equivalent' to an analytical system was not the only influence on Parsons' thinking. The claim here, then, is that implicit in Parsons' structural functionalism is the continuation of the problems and resolutions as to the nature of subjectivity, normative determinism and value in a science of action. Chapter V attempted to substantiate this claim by examining structural functionalism in the light of these problems. At this point the distinction between structural and process elements in Parsons' system is central. In practice this is paired with two further distinctions between sociological and psychological and empirically stable and dynamic components. With reference to the problem of subjectivity the structure/sociological/empirically stable juxtaposition was examined focusing on the concept of institution. This central concept was found to account for the ambiguities in the concept of structure and to embody the voluntaristic sense of 'subjectivity'. On the other hand the process/

psychological/dynamic side of the pairing gains its rationale from the problem of normative determinism. Motivation as the psychological element in Parsons' theoretical system is conceived as 'fueling' institutionalized behaviour so that the problem of the normative control of behaviour can be overcome, it represents 'effort' as the third component of voluntarism.

In two respects the thesis of this study represents a challenge to conventional interpretations of Parsons' early work. For one thing the sense of 'voluntarism' outlined here departs from the common sense rendering of the term which characterizes commentaries on Parsons. It is partly this which has led to claims that there is a shift in the foundations of Parsons' thinking from an 'action' to a 'system' perspective, a claim which is doubted here in that Parsons' 'system' approach is an extension and embodiment of the voluntaristic conception of action. These alternative interpretations of voluntarism and their implications will now be examined in more detail than the occasional reference I have made in the preceding chapters.

B. Interpretations of Voluntarism.

It is pertinent to note that two reviewers of The Structure of Social Action complained about Parsons' lack of explicit description of just what was entailed in a

voluntaristic theory of action. ((Wirth: 1939:402), (Spratt: 1950:261)). One reaction to this has been simply to depreciate the term, to see it as a piece of 'obscure and pompous jargon' (Andreski: 1972:83). So Murphy says 'Parsons' "voluntaristic theory of action" can be viewed as a vast sponge that soaks up other theories and redistributes them in bits and pieces throughout its cellular structure' (1972:69). But more usually (2) the term has been understood in the conventional sense of 'voluntary' implying that action is in some measure freely chosen by an actor able to self-consciously decide upon his ends and the appropriate means to attain them. A voluntaristic theory then is one which more or less emphasizes the importance of such processes in its analysis of social structure and change. Once Parsons' pre-war work is defined in this way it then seems self-evidently the case that 'Parsons' work shows a long-term shift in emphasis' from the 'subjective point of view of the actor' to 'the objective systematic perspective' (Robertson: 1969: 219). (3).

Crucial to the establishment and validation of this view is Scott's scholarly paper 'The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme' (1969) in which it is argued that the voluntarism of The Structure of Social Action is transformed into 'a cautious naturalism' (1969:258) in Parsons' post-war action framework, naturalism been opposed to voluntaristic non-naturalism (1969:247). Scott makes

two valuable contributions, he emphasises that voluntarism is a metaphysical position, the term refers to Parsons' philosophy of the ultimate constituents and nature of reality. Further, he recognizes the dualistic character of this philosophy.

'Asserting that human action participates in two metaphysical realms, that of ideas and values for its formation, and of material fact for its realization, it gives a metaphysical dualism as the foundation for sociology as a science' (1969:251).

On these two points the interpretation of voluntarism given in chapter III above agrees with Scott. However beyond this Scott makes crucial errors of interpretation which lead him to miss the other two components of voluntarism, the tension between the two realms and the role of effort as a mechanism for routinely resolving that tension.

These crucial errors are threefold and are neatly summarized in the following passage:

'Values are not completely describable in a natural determinate system, even though values have consequences in that system, because valuation involves

creative and innovative factors which rest on "acts of will". The result is that the sciences of action are methodologically independent of the sciences of nature ...' (1969:251).

The first error here is the claim that 'values are not completely describable in a natural determinate system'. By this Scott means that the pre-war Parsons thought that values could not be described and explained within the action scientist's system of theory. But in this he is mistaken, when Parsons makes the following statement, on which Scott bases his view (1969:250) it is the positivist scheme of action, in which the actor is thought of only as 'a rational scientist' which is being denied:

'It should be clear that the creative, voluntaristic element which we have found to be involved in the factor of ends precludes action ever being completely determined by modern scientific knowledge in the sense of the positive sciences' (Parsons: 1935a: 287).

It is not that Parsons' voluntaristic scientific system cannot fully describe values but that a positivistic scheme which ascribes the actor only the property of 'intrinsic rationality' cannot cope with the element of values.

The second error relates to the nature of valuation which Scott says 'involves creative and innovative factors which rest on "acts of will"', '"effort" and "will"'. . . means non-natural effort and a will at least partly free from natural constraints', (1969:250) 'the ends that men do seem to choose can never be fully explained by a natural or empirical science' (1969:250). This is the conventional sense of voluntarism, Scott seems to take the view that by the terms Parsons wished to emphasize the freedom of the actor to make self-conscious choices, this being the basic reason why values are outside the scope of science and necessitate methodological dualism. (See below). Yet the evidence put forward in the above chapters argues against this, the place of 'effort' is not to emphasize freedom of choice and self-consciousness on the part of the actor but to act as a mechanism whereby the recurrent tension between the normative and conditional worlds is overcome by giving some causal 'potency' to normative elements in the face of the 'automatic' causality of the conditional.

Finally, Scott claims that Parsons holds to the methodological independence of the sciences of action from the sciences of nature (1969:251). (See also Scott: 1961: 55, 56, 58). In the sense of the independence of conceptual schemes this is correct but in terms of methodology, the logical procedures of science, Parsons was never a methodological dualist, as he consistently took Newtonian mechanics as the model for all science.

Scott's interpretation of voluntarism seems flawed and with it the thesis that the foundations of the action scheme shift over the pre- post-war period. For once the pre-war scheme, which is supposed to change, is seen as a straw man little related to Parsons' voluntarism then the incompatibility of the pre- and post-war schemes dissolves.

Several commentators on Parsons have sensed that Scott's thesis was incorrect and have offered alternative renderings of voluntarism. Unfortunately, from the point of view of my analysis these are also misunderstandings of what lay at the heart of Parsons' early work. Atkinson (1971: Chapter 2) notes the 'highly novel definition' (1971:31) of voluntarism in Parsons early work and on this basis rejects Scott's thesis (1971:13). In his version Parsons describes action as voluntary because it is constrained by norms rather than physical necessity, norms exercising this constraint via the actor's feelings which are part of his own personality. (1971:10-11). There is clearly an element of this in Parsons' position but to emphasize this alone misrepresents voluntarism in that it comes far too close to Parsons' 'idealism' and misses the essential dualism of normative and conditional elements. Rather than being incorporated, the conditional side is seen as a contradictory aspect of Parsons' thinking.

This is the essential claim put forward by Atkinson, that The Structure of Social Action is 'ambiguous' (1971: 21, 23) and 'unclear' (1971:13) in containing a number of contradictory possibilities which are not welded together into a coherent position. The first such internal contradiction centres on Parsons' 'peculiar view of human nature' (1971:18) (See also 1971:31), a mixture of man as a moral being, the point made above, and Hobbesian man (1971:18). The latter seems to be linked to Atkinson's claim that Parsons has a bias toward rationalism in the radically rationalist positivist sense (1971:13). The crucial point here is that Atkinson sees moral and Hobbesian man as contradictory strands in Parsons' thinking rather than as the normative and conditional components of the voluntaristic dualism, contradictory in their relationship in Parsons' metaphysic but hardly an internal contradiction in his thinking. But Atkinson sees a further contradiction, between this view of human nature and one which derives from Weber's action sociology in which the action is analyzed in terms of its meaning to the actor (1971:10-11, 17, 20, 25, 26, 31). The contradiction is between emphasis on meaning and emphasis on man determined by moral systems or Hobbesian passions. The presence of these opposing strands in The Structure of Social Action leads Atkinson to his final claim relevant here. The book is said to contain a number of possibilities (1971:9, 14) as to the future development of Parsons' work, one of which was to elaborate the meaningful action theme, another that of system (1971:11-12).

From this incoherent set of possibilities Parsons is interpreted as selecting the system strand and the theme of action is dropped to be replaced by Freudian psychology and the Lintonian concept of role (1971:26, 31, 32).

As in Scott's case Atkinson's argument has its strengths, he realizes that the early Parsons emphasized the 'voluntary constraint' of internalized norms and that he was concerned with systems of action and their properties. But, rather than rounding out the components of voluntarism he treats the half-developed elements as contradictory possibilities. The Structure of Social Action is represented as an internally contradictory work some parts of which must be dropped as others are developed. In terms of my interpretation this is a serious misrepresentation of the place of The Structure of Social Action in Parsons' overall work, to me it is an attempt at a synthetic resolution of the problems of a science of action providing the foundation on which Parsons goes on to build his theory of social systems.

Turner and Beeghley (1974a) would agree with such a conclusion but not the analysis on which it is based. Their paper is written specifically in criticism of Scott's thesis and argues for 'the continuity of the Parsonian scheme, especially of the voluntaristic component' (1974a:48). In support of this claim two themes are stressed, the first is that voluntarism is interwoven with Parsons' strategy of theory construction. This agrees with an overall component

of my discussion, the 'interdependence' of Parsons' conception of science and voluntarism. The second part of the Turner/Beeghley case is to follow through 'voluntarism' in Parsons' 'mature' theory, for example, the cybernetic hierarchy of norms and conditions and the generalized media of exchange. As such this goes beyond the limits of my concern but this is not important as the central question here is just what Turner and Beeghley understand by 'voluntarism'. It is, in fact, the paradigmic case of voluntary action in the conventional sense. To them Parsons maintains a 'clear conceptualization of voluntarism as involving choice and decision making that is circumscribed by ideas and situational conditions' (1974a:49). Voluntarism connotes the 'interpretive and decision making processes on the part of actors', (1974a:49) but here with the emphasis that action takes place within limiting conditions; there are constraints on free activity which are patterned and orderly but which always leave open the possibility of choice. In summary, then, 'action involves the actor making decisions as to the means to achieve goals, all of which are constrained by ideas and situational conditions' (1974a:49).

Two points must be noted here. Firstly, Turner and Beeghley's characterization of action implies that the actor's purposes and rules are significant to the description and explanation of action. It is the actor who makes the decisions by reference to his interpretation of rules and

plans for the future. The significance of men as purposive, self-conscious and reasoning beings is inherent in the conventional sense of voluntary action. Secondly however, the conventional definition also contains the idea of constraints upon freely determined action. Action involves choice between more or less favourable alternatives. A less favourable possibility carries with it greater costs. The actor makes his choice according to the various constraints under which he labours. Note how Turner and Beeghley include the actor's ideas under this category. Indeed, they use the term to include norms, values, sentiments, etc., (1974a:49). So the actor's 'society', understood as a normative order of culturally defined attitudes and practices, are part of the conditions under which the actor acts. So the conventional definition implies that a voluntaristic theory includes a) a conception of the actor as a purposive, self-conscious and reasoning being and b) a conception of society as, to a degree, a condition of action. Yet we have found that Parsons denies both of these points as constituents of his action scheme, the first in practice despite the Weberian rhetoric and the second explicitly in the rejection of 'sociologistic positivism'. Turner and Beeghley are right to stress the link of methodology and metaphysics and right (so far as the limits of this work allow judgement) to stress the continuity of voluntarism but wrong in their understanding of what it is that continues (4).

Unlike the first three interpretations of voluntarism I have considered my final two commentaries are unconcerned with the issue of change and continuity in Parsons' work. The focus for them is the comparison and contrast between Parsons and Marx. Whilst this throws up some interesting points it is unfortunately no guarantee of accurate interpretation of Parsons. Therborn's (1973) paper is a contrast of Parsons' voluntaristic theory of action and Marx's concept of practice. To him 'Parsons' "voluntaristic theory of action" is neither voluntaristic nor about action in the ordinary sense of these words' (1973:160). To Parsons the distinctive quality of action is that it is 'subjective' whilst to Therborn the ordinary sense connotes 'doing something', a point I will return to. Again 'voluntaristic is not conceived as the opposite to deterministic' (1973:159) rather, 'the crucial thing' (1973:159) about a voluntaristic theory of action is that it includes normative elements in a systematic way. Therborn notes that Parsons differentiates voluntarism from idealism by including objective conditions but since idealism plays such a limited role in the Anglo-Saxon world he says Parsons' main thrust is toward emphasis on normative elements. The effect of this is that Therborn forgets about the dualistic character of Parsons' metaphysics: 'Parsons' "voluntarism" means determinism: the ends individuals strive for are determined by the common values of the society they live in' (1973:160). A qualification is, however, added; Parsons is aware of the Durkheimian danger of elevating social conformity into the supreme moral

virtue so that Parsons stresses not so much conformity as 'the positive value of collective value commitment', (1973:161) the value of commitment per se with little concern for actually doing anything 'for the realization of values' (1973:161).

Whilst Therborn has the merit of moving away from the conventional sense of voluntary action his positive contribution seems to me to be badly flawed. The conditional side of Parsons' dualism, whilst noted, is quickly forgotten so the tension and the focus on how the dualism is bridged are missed. As a consequence Therborn's emphasis is that Parsons shows 'little concern for practical activity for the realization of values' by contrast to the Marxian concept of practice in which the emphasis is on the transformation of objects through action (1973:169). As Therborn puts it, in the theory of action 'nothing is being done' (1973:169). In a sense this is a point but it is more to do with Parsons lack of an active concept of the actor than his lack of concern for the realization of values. The latter is a primary concern in the sense of the balance of normative and conditional elements represented by the state of institutionalization and the role of conformity with norms as the causal 'force' behind the normative elements.

The final interpretation of voluntarism I shall consider is that put forward by Gouldner (1971:189-95). At some points Gouldner comes close to the analysis of

voluntarism presented here, for example, he stresses the close connection between norms and effort, only through the latter are the former realized and this is the primary function of effort and will in Parsons' voluntarism (1971: 190-1). But again Gouldner's account has a number of crucial flaws which I will return to after outlining his position. Parsons' voluntarism portrays man as 'a goal-oriented, striving creature', (1971:189) 'action refers to a process in which the concrete human plays an active, not merely an adaptive role' (1971:190). This means that Parsons stresses the difference that men's efforts make to the course of history, he does not say that men attain what they strive for but the fact that they so strive has an influence (1971:192). 'It is this sheer difference that is important to Parsons because his voluntarism is primarily an expression of his anti-determinism' (1971:190). Gouldner emphasizes this anti-deterministic character of voluntarism in which values and men's efforts to attain them form a randomizing factor the effect of which on the social process is unpredictable. So he points out that Parsons, in insisting that the normative cannot be reduced to the conditional, skirts the possibility that moral norms might be shaped by social conditions. Instead, they stand as 'the prime starting mechanisms, the unmoved movers' (1971:190). But they are not the only 'movers',

Gouldner points out that voluntarism also incorporates obstacles to the attainment of values. It is these, together with the random quality of moral norms that lead the consequences of action to be other than men intend. So:

'Man is seen as bound by non-rational moralities, confined and thwarted by other forces, and repeatedly trapped by the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action. To Parsons men are free to strive, but are not free to achieve what they strive for' (1971:192-3).

To Gouldner this is Marx's alienated man 'but what for Marx is an historical pathology to be overcome is for Parsons the unavoidable and eternal condition of man' (1971:193).

On one or two points Gouldner elaborates his account rather further than Parsons' texts will allow, for example, the unanticipated consequences of action is not a major theme of Parsons' early work. However the major deficiency of Gouldner's position is his claim that voluntarism is an expression of Parsons' anti-determinism (5), through the randomizing status of moral values and norms. This is

simply not the case, Parsons wants to treat ultimate values and norms of action as causal elements in a theoretical systems analogous to classical mechanics. Parsons' theoretical systems are in principle internally determinate, the element of non-determinacy entering in from his claim that any concrete situation must be analyzed through a plurality of theoretical systems which, as a whole, will only be fully integrated in an ideal state of perfect knowledge. Gouldner's error, then, is to divorce the voluntaristic metaphysic from Parsons' methodology of science. In the context of the latter voluntarism is not an expression of anti-determinism but Parsons' source of the determinate causal elements of action.

This section has considered a number of interpretations of voluntarism criticising them from the point of view of the interpretation of Parsons pursued in the above chapters. As a concluding section I will turn to some critical consideration of Parsons' contribution to sociological theory.

C. Parsons' Contribution to Sociological Theory.

My primary task in this study has been one of exegesis, the location of one problematic theme and the exploration of its ramifications in Parsons' early work. As such my efforts have been self-consciously limited in two respects whatever the other deficiencies of my argument. Firstly, I have been concerned with Parsons' work over a limited time period,

1928-50, although it seems to me a critical period in Parsons' career as it marks the foundation phase in which the cornerstones of methodology and theoretical content were laid. Secondly, I have not systematically criticised Parsons' position. In discussing methodological problems of a science of action I have used issues developed by others as a foil to highlight Parsons' particular stance but I have not felt sufficiently committed to such alternatives to use them as standpoints from which to compare, contrast and criticise Parsons. However, in this concluding section I propose to put forward a critical assessment of Parsons' contribution to sociological theory using the discussion of the above chapters as my base but going rather beyond what that base, in itself, will stand.

I will consider Parsons' contribution in four respects, his role in establishing classical European sociology in the mainstream of modern American sociology, his emphasis on theory, his place in conceptual debates in sociology and the value of his substantive conceptual scheme for sociological analysis. In each case it seems to me Parsons' contribution is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, his positive contribution to sociology in the above areas has been enormous, on the other hand it has been an influence which in its particular Parsonian form has retarded the development of sociology. The last point obviously implies a judgement on what a state of 'healthy' development of sociology consists in which I shall return to at the end.

As a translator of the classics, an influential teacher and perhaps particularly as the author of The Structure of Social Action Parsons has played a major role in establishing classical European sociology, notably Durkheim and Weber, as an essential component of modern, American dominated, western sociology. Parsons was not, of course, alone in this, one can think of a long list of European emigres to America who brought with them methodological and substantive ideas from the fertile plains of European social thought in the period between 1890 and the second world war. Boas, (6) Sorokin and the wide variety of refugees from Nazi Germany are obvious examples. As well as this other scholars besides Parsons studied in Europe and brought back ideas to America (7). However, Parsons' contribution was perhaps outstanding because he focused on what is the major import of the classical tradition, the interpretation of the essential and distinctive features of modern societies. Differentiation, an individualistic moral order and anomie from Durkheim, rationalization, bureaucracy and Protestantism from Weber are all present in The Structure of Social Action and in Parsons' 1940's essays. (For example: [1942b], (1942d), (1942e), [1942f], [1942g], [1945c], [1946b]). Yet Parsons' contribution has been a selective one in two ways; selective in the theorists whom Parsons included as major sociologists and selective in the interpretations offered of those so designated. On the first Levine (1965:10) has noted the

absence of Simmel from the Parsonian corpus (8) and no doubt other historians of the discipline would wish to emphasize the importance of other thinkers. But one omission is outstanding, that of Marx (9).

Of course, Parsons included two brief sections on Marx in The Structure of Social Action which, within their limits of space and focus seems to me quite penetrating. But Parsons' essay 'Social Classes and Class Conflict in the Light of Recent Sociological Theory' which was written as a 'stocktaking of where Marx and Engels stood in an important line of development of social science' [1949d:323] seems more representative of Parsons' treatment of Marx. Of this two things can be said, Parsons' Marx is 'vulgar' in the extreme and overshadowed by the Parsonian framework in terms of which Marx is cast. This is unfortunate as, in two senses, Marx ought to have merited closer study by Parsons, he self-consciously faced and attempted to overcome the division between idealism and positivism (10) and emphasized the close links between what are now termed economics and sociology. One can, of course, only speculate as to what the outcome of Parsons taking a more serious view of Marx might have been but if he had regarded Marx as a founding father rather than grandfather of sociology, that is, if such themes as exploitation, class conflict and ideology had been as

central as the Durkheimian and Weberian then perhaps some of what now seems to many to be crudities in the Parsonian corpus, notably the notion of common value system and the continued failure to appreciate the power element of social relationships, might have been avoided. Of course, these are big 'ifs'.

I mentioned a moment ago that Parsons reads Marx in terms of his own framework. This tendency, however, is not particular to Parsons' treatment of Marx, it is a general characteristic of his interpretation of the classical thinkers. Indeed, this is his admitted procedure, The Structure of Social Action was not intended as a contribution to the history of sociology but aimed to use that history as a resource to build Parsons' theory ([1937a: xxi], [1949b:xvi]). This has its commendable aspect but also regrettable consequences. It can lead to serious misrepresentation of the ideas of others, the most notable case of this considered here is Parsons' 'Introduction' [1941a] to his translation of the first three chapters of Weber's Economy and Society in which Weber's discussion of psychology, functionalism and general theory in relationship to sociology are bowdlerized by Parsons (See Chapters IV and V above). Others have made similar claims, for example, Pope (1973) and Giddens (1972) on Parsons' Durkheim and Butts (1975) and Cohen et al. (1975) on his treatment of

Weber. But these are particular cases and some would argue that Parsons' reading of the classics is only as one-sided as any other man's.

There is, however, a more serious charge here, to do with the nature of the Parsonian framework in terms of which the classical sociologists are interpreted. It is marked by the convergence thesis, the claim that the categorial frameworks employed by the classical sociologists in differing intellectual traditions developed in such a way as to move together and form a single body of theory. Three points are of note concerning this. Firstly, dubious interpretations of the classics by Parsons on particular points are linked to the overall framework of convergence, the particular is moulded by the general framework. For example, Bensman and Givant (1975) have demonstrated the contrast between Weber's use of the term 'charisma' and its sense in modern sociology, including Parsons. Whilst Weber stresses the relationship between charisma and social change the modern usage makes it a mechanism of legitimation of established values and institutions. Bensman and Givant note (1975:590) that it is on this basis that Parsons makes the claim of convergence between Durkheim's and Weber around the concepts of 'sacredness' and 'charisma'. The second point of note here is the validity of the convergence thesis. Only recently has the thesis been subjected to detailed examination and that of only journal article length. But Pope et al. (1975) do enough in their paper to substantiate

the suspicions of many who have been unconvinced by the claim. They show how Durkheim and Weber diverge on key components of Parsons' thesis such as the importance of subjective states in sociological explanation, the centrality of norms of conduct and common values in social life and the nature of moral and market behaviour. A full assessment of the convergence thesis and its critics is beyond the scope of this work but one last point seems particularly relevant. Whether or not the thesis is valid it has an important consequence for Parsons' treatment of classical sociology. It means that he stresses the similarities between different bodies of theory and plays down their differences, the unity of the sociological tradition overshadows the variety of approaches to the social world displayed in that tradition, the different kinds of sociology available and the varying problems and insights they generate. This point can be exemplified in the next two areas in which Parsons has made a contribution but again one which has its negative side.

Parsons has, of course, always insisted upon the theoretical character of sociology, an emphasis which, according to Rocher was 'against the tide of American sociology' (1974:15) in the 1930's so that Parsons must be partly credited for establishing the place of theory in sociology. But Parsons' conception of 'theory' has not found universal approval amongst his colleagues, from early in his career criticisms of his systematic,

analytical, general theory have been forthcoming (11). Specific points of dissension have been noted in the above discussion which will not be taken up here. Rather, some more general observations can be made. Firstly, although Parsons writes a good deal on the nature of his approach to theory this, like other aspects of his work, is often muddled and requires considerable effort to decipher. In The Structure of Social Action, for example, the distinctions between the different kinds of concepts and analysis which Parsons insists upon are not only difficult to follow but also imply elaborations not made at all explicit. The nature of what I have termed 'structural analysis' illustrates this. Further, my analysis of the structural functional approach to theoretical systems exemplifies a further trait, the covert conglomeration of methodological procedures with substantive and metaphysical assertions. Another prominent example of this is the notion of 'equilibrium' which Buckley (1967: 11-17) for one, points out is not only a state of relationship between causal variables but an empirical state of social order in Parsons' thinking.

A second general observation is especially important. Parsons' response to criticism is typically not to argue his case point for point against others but to incorporate the critic's position as a particular aspect of his general theory. So Merton's (1948) criticism of Parsons' programme

for general theory in sociology is not replied to but becomes on field of theoretical development which must be related to general theory. [Parsons: 1950a:351]. This is to bypass Merton's point that 'the road to an effective conceptual scheme will be the more effectively built through work on specific theories, and that it will remain a largely unfulfilled plan, if one seeks to build it directly at this time' (1948:166). Schwanenberg ironically comments that the controversy between Parsons and the logico-empiricists is 'boundary-maintaining', (1971:570) meaning that each side maintains its position against the threatening forces of the outside environment rather than addressing criticism openly and exploring the nature and variety of 'theory' in sociology.

The same 'incorporationist' strategy is manifest in Parsons' third contribution to sociology, his response to conceptual debates on the nature of the social world. But before elaborating this point Parsons' positive contribution must be noted, as one of his most severe critics says 'there is no other work by an academic sociologist today that is as relevant to the entire galaxy of important theoretical issues' (Gouldner: 1971: 168). In so far as this means that in almost any area of debate Parsons is there, that he has addressed the problem, this is the case. One can instance the three methodological problems of a science of action discussed in this work as well as

individualism and collectivism (personality and social systems) or the relationship between micro and macro-level processes and structures (12). Yet Parsons seems to me to recurringly close the issue by avoiding it. With respect to the problem of subjectivity the issue has centred on the quality of 'meaning', the significance for sociology of man as a purposive, self-conscious and reasoning being. But this question is never seriously broached by Parsons, rather it is reformulated and thereby bypassed within his analytic/voluntaristic theory. Similarly with normative determinism, the different possibilities presented by causal and meaningful relationships between norms and actions are closed off by transforming their different methodologies into types of substantive norm thereby begging the methodological issues. The effect of this is again to depreciate the variety of possible conceptualizations of the social world and the different logics of procedure and practical action they imply.

When one turns to the significance of Parsons' substantive scheme of concepts the insidious effects of this persistent incorporationist, issue closing, turn of mind come to the fore. Parsons' framework of role, collectivity, institution, social system, socialization and social control/deviance mechanisms is often employed in sociological description and analysis, explicitly or not.

Yet it is a framework suited to a selective range of questions relating to the conditions of and interrelationships between institutionalized behaviour. The controversy over the concept of role, for example, as to whether roles are 'taken' or 'made' is, as Mennell (1974:76-7) points out, in some respects a non-argument as roles are 'taken' if institutionally available whilst 'made' if not. Parsons, however, claims his to be the sociological framework, to use his own terms he attempts to be 'encyclopaedic' and 'imperialistic' and hence is insensitive to his own limitations. Perhaps in reaction to Parsons' stress on unified conceptual frameworks my own bias is toward a Weberian/Popperian approach in which theory is a means to an end, a tentative and temporary conjecture to be judged in terms of what it can do in the way of explanation of problems. Such an approach makes it incumbent upon the sociologist to be continuously aware of the limits of his own approach and the possibilities of others, it sensitizes one to the variety of sociology and what that reflects, the variety of possible social worlds. Parsons on the other hand displays what Jaroslav Hasek calls a 'syncretic' state of mind: 'he tried to settle conceptual contradictions by means of compromises which were carried to a point when all views merged and lost their identity' (1974:433).

NOTES

CHAPTER 1.

1. The four commentaries in the text are all quite recent. However, emphasis on the proper understanding of Parsons' methodology is long standing, see for example: Boskoff (1950), Barber (1956), Ogles (1961).
2. Ignorance of Parsons' methodology still seems to be widespread, a recent textbook on the philosophy of social science happily labels him a 'positivist' and ignores his own 'analytical realism' and his longstanding concern with causal mechanisms despite advocating the notion of realistic mechanisms itself (Keat and Urry: 1975:90-5).
3. These problems will be detailed below.
4. I am particularly indebted to Ivan Oliver for pressing this point home to me. A further aspect of the irony is that Parsons, as one of the positive as well as negative influences on ethnomethodology is one link between the German and American Methodenstreit (Lassman (1974:131)).
5. A further point here is the parallel between Rudner's (1966:83) criticism of Winch on the grounds that he commits the 'reproductive fallacy' and the Parsons-Weber criticism of idealism's attempt to describe the social world in all its concrete detail. On the latter, see below.
6. At the L.S.E. on 14th May, 1974.
7. As Parsons tells us in (1974:216-7, 221). However this is quite evident in his early work, see especially [1937a:27-41].
8. It might seem here that I am overlooking the popular view deriving from Scott (1969) that during his career Parsons has changed from an anti-science, action position to a scientific, systems one. This view will be considered later, suffice it to say now that I will argue that it is fundamentally in error.

9. I must beg the reader's pardon for this rather convoluted terminology, it would take too long to clearly define the terms employed here and their context. This will be done in more systematic discussion below, the point at the moment being simply to illustrate Parsons' awareness of the question of the relationship between subjective entities and behaviour.

CHAPTER II

1. This contrast of science and common sense empirical knowledge will be returned to shortly.
2. Although the major resource for Chapter II and III is The Structure of Social Action occasional reference will be made to Parsons early papers.
3. See also [1937a:57] and (1936c:359). Parsons is of course making a considerable empirical claim here which his example hardly 'proves'. Some would perhaps want to agree with him, Burke (1968:447) points to the similarity between Parsons and Aristotle but others would not, Whorf, for example, sees the couplet 'actor' and 'action' as a characteristic of Standard Average European language but not all languages (1956:241-4). Again, Gouldner makes the same point (1956:37). The universality of the basic framework of action will be taken up again later.
4. Whether the theory is verified, in particular its convergence thesis, is open to serious doubt. I will make a comment on this in the conclusion.
5. A third position, the dialectical, where development is immanent to theory in itself is mentioned [1937a:725, xxi-xxii] but is irrelevant here.
6. Compare this with O'Neill (1972) in which it is argued that classical sociology's moral concern with the value and rationality of the modern social order are transformed by Parsons into the 'analytical elements' of value and rationality. This translation of 'value' into 'theory' will be further discussed below.
7. In this respect as in others Parsons' theory is something of a precursor of Kuhn's (1970) history/philosophy of science. The Parsonian change in theoretical systems is similar to Kuhn's paradigm

shifts, Parsons' residual categories might be compared to Kuhn's anomalies as indeed might the emphasis on theory as a paradigm mapping out the world.

8. The criterion by which such a judgement can be made will be discussed in the section on frames of reference below.
9. The paradox that the positivistic theory of action is not 'really' a theory of action is taken up by Scott (1962). However this paper is marked by the failure to put Parsons' discussion of positivism and utilitarianism into the context of the development of science.
10. This account is, for the sake of present discussion, cast in rather over-simple terms, in particular it should be noted that the division of labour is an analytical one, not one of concrete 'things'.
11. With which Parsons was familiar and indeed concerned, see for example (1970:826). For discussion of institutional economics which tends to confirm Parsons' 'encyclopedic' description see Ayres et al. (1963).
12. Others are not so convinced, see for example, Sorokin (1966:405), Kirkpatrick (1938), Mulkay (1971:68-69) who express doubts on the empirical status of The Structure of Social Action.
13. This phrase should be noted particularly, realism applies to some, not all, scientific concepts.
14. Parsons position on the place of values in science also bears upon this question but discussion of this will be postponed until the next chapter.
15. Compare with Levison (1974:103-7) in which a similar example of the different idioms in which an event can be described is discussed.
16. Parsons does not make this distinction explicit although he does use the primary-secondary distinction in [1937a:737-748].
17. This has been particularly emphasised recently by Bershadsky (1973: Chapter 4) although Hinckle (1952: 226-39) clearly stated it some considerable time ago.

- 17a. Compare with Bershady (1973:39-40) where Parsons' penchant for 'analysis' is brilliantly summarized.
18. This is hardly a new distinction, compare with Comte's 'theoretical and historical sciences (1974:46-9) and abstract and concrete laws (1875:30-1).
19. Parsons' 'idiosyncrasy' here will be taken up and discussed further in Chapter IV.
20. The content of the above paragraph will be greatly expanded and discussed in Chapter III.
21. Commentators on Parsons have rarely thought well of his analytical laws, Martindale (1961:424-5) nicely exemplifies a common response: ironic condescension.
22. Other commentators on Parsons have noted that his manner of reasoning is not quite what he claims (e.g. Black (1961:271) Wood (1968)) and have hence attempted to reconstruct Parsons' logical procedure. For example: Devereux (1961:45-53), Williams (1961:93), Mitchell (1967:11-12).
23. The importance of 'systemicity' to Parsons thought has of course long been realized but so often this is seen as a feature of his post-war work, an exception is Schwanenberg (1971) who recognizes and clearly outlines the place of systemicity throughout Parsons' life-work.
24. See also Cohen (1975), Parsons (1975) and Pope (1975) in which Pope's original paper is commented on and he defends his case.
25. The general theory of scientific progress which forms the context for this point has already been outlined.
26. This is emphasised and explored to some degree by Martel (1971).
27. A tendency which is still prevalent according to one recent study of the sociology of economic behaviour (Martin and Fryer: 1973:21-2).

CHAPTER III

1. Parsons' concern with and rejection of idealism has often been rather underplayed in favour of his polemic against positivism, two notable exceptions are Devereux (1961:16-18) and especially Bershady (1973). But this tendency is unfortunate as his brief analysis of idealism [1937a:473-87] is directly to the point of this present work showing a grasp of the methodological arguments offered within idealism against a science of action.

2. Parsons has been rightly criticised on this point by Sorokin (1966:306) and Bottomore (1975:39).
3. It is perhaps pertinent to note in these days of rampant sociological subjectivism that two of the contemporary reviewers of The Structure of Social Action adopted a behaviourist stance in criticism of Parsons (Pinney: 1940:190-1, Bierstedt: 1938) and of course behaviourism still lives, a nice example being Sutherland (1970).
4. I will take up the various interpretations of voluntarism in chapter VI.
5. I add this qualification as it seems to me quite inaccurate to say that Weber works in terms of a dualism of values and heredity/environment, his stress is on the tragic dualism of values and conditional social structures, (see below). This is nicely summarized by Salomon (1934:152-3).
6. See in particular (Pope et al.: 1975), the contrast of Weber and Durkheim on this issue is of course well known, as well as the obvious primary works see Bendix (1971), Levison (1974: Chapter 3) Taube (1966).
7. Parsons grounds his discussion of utilitarianism in the history of ideas, ^{but} his interpretation of actual historical figures has been recurrently doubted (e.g. Barry (1970: 76-86), Peel (1971: Chapters 3 and 4), Scott (1962), Sorokin (1966:406)). It would seem best to regard 'utilitarianism' and 'positivism' as conceptual structures relevant to Parsons' thinking rather than analyses of the thought of self-confessing utilitarian and positivistic thinkers. This is all that is required for my purposes.
8. The rationale for this conflation will be examined below in the discussion of the problem of normative determinism.
9. A point noted by Pinney (1940:185-6) and Wallace (1969:34).
10. This aspect of American functionalist thinking has been noted by Dore (1967: 411) who takes up the contrast between natural systems in which the parts simultaneously effect each other and social systems in which this is not the case, rather, for example, 'The mutual relation of, say, the system of socialization to the system of political control is mediated by the personality structure and as such it is a relation which requires a long time interval to work through the whole causal sequence'.

11. It is perhaps relevant to note Merton's (1934) early paper on Durkheim here for two reasons:
a) His acknowledgement to Parsons: 'I am deeply indebted to Dr. Parsons for much of the viewpoint here expressed' (1934:107). b) His explicit concern with the methodological problems of causation in Durkheim (1934:105). It would appear that Parsons was aware that 'the changing meaning of constraint' had methodological implications as well as consequences for Durkheim's conceptual scheme.
12. It is interesting to compare this with Gorman's (1975) analysis of Schutz's phenomenological sociology in that he found a pattern in Schutz parallel to the present interpretation of Parsons, namely, the reworking of the problems of causality, freedom and determinism so that Schutz's actor chooses freely to obey socially expected patterns of behaviour.
13. Compare this with Rocher's statement: 'It was predictable that Parsons should be led to undertake a psychological analysis of social action... the idea of action ... implied that the social actor possessed psychological energy and motivation which Parsons ought one day to attempt to explain' (1974:99).
14. Indeed the link between Parsons' methodology and the problem of social order has already been made by Schwanenberg (1971) and to a lesser degree by Zimmerman and Wider (1971:236-7).
15. Parsons' interpretation of Weber on value relevance has been criticised by Sahay (1972: Chapter 6) and Butts (1975). For the kernel of Weber's ideas on value relevance and their significance for concept formation in sociology see Bryant (1976:343-4).
16. See for example Weber (1949:112). There is no reference to Weber given by Parsons at this point. I can only think that he has the typology of world religions in mind. This begs the question, the typology is the object of study not the perspective of study. The four great religious systems understood in terms of the twofold dichotomy asceticism=mysticism/inner-other worldliness forms a finite system only from the limited perspective of the problem of rationalization.
17. I will substantiate this claim and further discuss the changing foundations thesis in chapter VI.

CHAPTER IV

1. With B. Barber.
2. To use Merton's term, it is clear that this is what Parsons is referring to.
3. [1945a:157]. With reference to the two lists of varieties of theory in the text it is clear that Parsons himself contributes to all types in the second list whilst with reference to the first Parsons objects to the overemphasis of the first two elements not to their status as types of theorizing (1938a:16).
4. Bierstedt (1967:161) construes Parsons in this way.
5. Doubt is cast on the mathematical stature of Dodd's approach by the parallel review by the mathematician E.T. Bell (1942).
6. Compare with the criticisms of Parsons put forward by Bierstedt (1959:138) and Butts (1970).
7. Cf. Black (1961:280-1), Rocher (1974:97) Turk (1967:45-7).
8. Cf. Moore (1965), Bottomore (1975).
9. Cf. Mulkay (1971:76-83), Bierstedt (1959:138).
10. Cf. Homans (1971:105-8), Schrag (1952), Turk (1967:48-50).
11. Cf. Faris (1953), Sorokin (1956:14-5).
12. Again, for criticism of Parsons from rather closer to home see Sheldon (1962: e.g. 43).
13. Parsons' critique of Max Weber's approach to theory in science will be omitted from this section as it is more appropriately discussed later.
14. For examples of what Parsons has in mind see Goldenweisser's characterization of the rationalism of evolutionary theory (1925:220) and Stark's (1973) contrast of Voltaire (rationalistic positivist) and Herder (idealist).
15. Racial determinism is one example of anti-intellectualist positivism. (For examples see Harris (1969: Chapter 4)). A rather different current example is Pratt's notion of biologically selected social needs (1975).

16. Compare with Cancian's (1968) use of Navaho Witchcraft to exemplify the fallacies of functional explanation!
17. It is of interest to compare this with Merton's (1948) discussion of Parsons (1948b) in which he expresses the fear that systematic theory is but another example of nineteenth century system building. In the opinion of many Merton's fears have been substantiated but as the above indicates Parsons himself felt that a distinction could be made between his approach and the sterility of the past and that certain problems led toward the necessity of systematic analytical theory.
18. See Gouldner (1967:153-6), in particular the point that to talk simply of the interdependence of empirical system parts makes this an 'undifferentiated attribute' of all the parts of a system, everything is related to everything else to an equal degree.
19. A point emphasized by Bershadsky (1974:152) and Devereux (1961:14, 15, 20).
20. Compare with Mitchell (1967:50), Butts (1970:48-9) and Meadows (1957:3-6) who arrive at a similar conclusion. The acceptability of the conclusion however is debatable; Butts and Barry (1970:170-1) criticize the non-empirical status of the system postulate, Lee (1965) sees it as a popular myth used in everyday life to order social worlds but reified by social science whilst some philosophers of science have explored the possibilities of a non-systemic, disorderly assumption, see the papers by Feibleman, Hartshorne and Weiss in Kuntz (1968:3-13, 253-67, 14-20 respectively).
21. This passage contains too much for what is required at the present point of discussion. The notions of structure, function and institution will be considered presently. They are constituents of Parsons' solutions to the problems at issue here. The latter is the focus at the moment.
22. Compare with Brodbeck's criterion of completeness in perfect knowledge (1973:298-301).
23. See also Black (1961:283).
24. Turk puts forward a similar criticism (1967:48-50).
25. It is of interest that Parsons still seems to hold to this definition of the problem of explanation. In 1974 he writes:

'If I was unduly partial to the covering law model, that is, that of a logico-deductive system of which the great historical example

has been that of Newton, for a good many years, I was early sensitized to one problem about it, namely, the problem of level of abstraction¹ (1974:217).

That is, the generality of concepts and the categorization of a particular event as a 'case' of a general concept. Something akin to Parsons is suggested by Taylor (1970:53).

26. In a rather later essay Parsons mentions that statistical manipulation may also perform this function (1946a:664).
27. Parsons has recently admitted the importance of the Newtonian mechanics as a model of science in his early work (1974:216-7, 221).
28. Something akin to Parsons¹ analytical system seems to be suggested by Brodbeck (1973:295-8) and Meehan (1968:48-55).
29. This is sarcastically noted by Cahnmann and Boskoff who write: 'Those engaged in research of this sort agree with Parsons that ideal-type theory is "the most difficult level on which to develop a coherent generalized system", but they are likely to supplement that statement by saying that the development of such a "system" is not the purpose for which ideal type theory is intended' (1964:11). For an example of ideal type theorizing which admits to be non-systemic see Rex (1974: Chapters, 5, 6, 7, note particular comment on Parsons criticisms of Weber's type atomism pp. 97).
30. Footnote to the reprint of the Introduction [1941a] included in Essays in Sociological Theory, First Edition, pp.67.
31. Note for example: 'A subjectively "rational" action is not identical with a rationally "correct" action, i.e., one which uses the objectively correct means in accord with scientific knowledge. Rather, it means only that the subjective intention of the individual is planfully directed to the means which are regarded as correct for a given end. Thus a progressive subjective rationalization of conduct is not necessarily the same as progress in the direction of rationally or technically 'correct' behaviour. Magic, for example, has been just as systematically "rationalized" as physics' (Weber, 1949: 34).
32. From the point of view of the overall structure of my argument the present paragraph is rather premature but is included for the reason outlined below.

33. I date this as 1941 although it was not published until 1947 for reasons explained in the bibliography.
34. Footnote to the reprint of the Introduction [1941a] in Essays in Sociological Theory, First Edition, pp.67.
35. Also a biologist and a long standing influence on Parsons but an advocate of an analytical rather than structural-functional theoretical system. For further information on this background see Parsons (1970:828-33), Heyl (1968), Barber (1970).
36. This has been outlined by Isajiw (1968:10-15) but in a most uncritical way, in particular his acceptance of the distinction between structure and process concepts which will be much discussed below. See also Buckley (1957:249-50).
37. Basically what is involved here is a conflation of mechanical (analytic) and organic (structural-functional concepts of system, a distinction often made in the literature (e.g. Deutsch (1963:22-38), Krupp (1965), Meadows (1957) and Russett (1966: 78-85))).

CHAPTER V.

1. See the discussion of this in chapter III. For expressions of doubt on the notion of social conditions in the 1940's see [1945a:222], (1948b: 160).
2. Note the distinction between primary and secondary frames of reference in chapter II.
3. Dawe (1970:216-7) and Black (1961:281) have sceptically noted this strategy,
4. Catton (1966:80-4) has criticised Parsons on his use of 'statics' and 'dynamics' particularly the equation of statics with stability, dynamics with variability.
5. There is, of course, an issue here as to the status of 'values', see, for example, Kolb (1957). What creates the impression of concept/verbal jugglery is Parsons' expression of the problem, whether values belong in this or that classificatory box or have one of their own!

6. The distinction between the empirical and logical sides of the concept of structure is similar to Gluckmann's point of contrast between Radcliffe-Brown and Levi-Strauss: '... in the one case, structural thought, the approach derives from the analogy with biology, and involves an empirical investigation of the structure of social relations, while the other takes this level of analysis for granted and tries to discover more abstract principles of organization governing social relations. Structure refers to quite different levels of reality in the two cases' (1974:243).
7. Buckley (1967:23-31) has noted the ambiguity as to whether Parsons' social system is composed of all patterned processes of interaction or only institutionalized patterns and has traced the consequences of this on Parsons' treatment of deviance, conflict and change.
8. A fourth element, the actor's psychology, is also included by Parsons but it will be omitted here for brevity and because it poses special problems to be discussed later.
9. Parsons substitution of normative order for behavioural uniformities has been critically noted by Gellner (1973:94-5), Homans (1971:103) and Murphy (1972: Chapter 2).
10. See Mayhew (1968) especially pp. 427-8.
11. The ambiguity between situation as 'subjective definition' and as 'realistic constraints' in Parsons work has been noted by Merton (1948: 166) and Sprott (1952:208).
12. Other commentators have noted Parsons' use of metaphors here, for example, Devereux speaks of Parsons turning 'on the motivational currents and seeking to observe what happens when the juices of affect are coursing through them' (1961:51), Meadows says that an organic system 'is represented as a system of energy. Its form is, as White has asserted, "energy, laid down in structure or structuralized energy"' (1957:6), Rocher observes: 'As for motivation, Parsons really means all the internal energy which could be described as fuel for the personality' (1974:106). But none of these critically consider either the context or the validity of the metaphor. Compare with Geertz: 'At the same

time that the arts have been establishing the cognitive power of "distortion" and philosophy has been undermining the adequacy of the emotivist theory of meaning, social scientists have been rejecting the first and embracing the second' (1972:194).

13. To use the terminology of The Social System (1951b: 36) where this quality of interaction is further developed by Parsons.

CHAPTER VI

1. See for example, Gorman (1975).
2. Many examples of the common sense interpretation of voluntarisms can easily be found, viz: Skidmore (1975:155), Mennell (1974:27-30), Cohen (1975), Bierstedt (1938:666-7), Rocher (1974:28-9).
3. Again this view is extremely common, for example, Peel (1969:181), Outhwaite (1975:12), Mitchell (1967:22-5). Indeed, acceptance of this thesis is described as 'current folklore' by Turner and Beeghly (1974a).
4. It is pertinent to note here Parsons' commentary on Turner and Beeghly (Parsons: 1974b). This, on the one hand, supports the Turner/Beeghly thesis against Scott but on the other hand is sufficiently ambiguous to cast doubt on the conventional sense of voluntarism, perhaps because the debate becomes side tracked from the precise meaning of 'voluntarism' into a mutual denial of absolute free will. (Parsons' (1974b:55), Scott (1974:59), Turner and Beeghly (1974b:62)). As to ambiguity it is of note that Parsons includes Tolman, Koehler, Freud and Durkheim under the heading of theorists who stressed voluntarism (1974b:56). Secondly, note that Parsons says 'freedom and hence the capacity for voluntarism is a function of organization. This organization is relevant at all levels of the system of human action' (1974b:56). What Parsons is referring to is the organization of the component elements of systems of action, as such organization increases and becomes better coordinated so freedom increases. Turner and Beeghly note the rather paradoxical nature of this conception of voluntarism (1974b:62).
5. Martins (1974:262) has also objected to this claim.

6. See Harris (1969: Chapter 9) for Boas' role in carrying the Geisteswissenschaft to American anthropology.
7. Robert Park is one example, see Coser (1971:368).
8. Although Simmel may be a more influential figure than one would prima facie expect, see Bershadly (1973: 72-81).
9. See Sallach (1973) for a view on the large scale neglect of Marx in American sociology.
10. A point made in John Rex's lectures some years ago.
11. See for example, Merton (1948), Homans (1962), Turk (1967), Mulkay (1971: Chapters 3 and 4), Turner (1974: Chapter 3).
12. See Wagner (1964).

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N.B. In most of the references below I have simply used the date of publication in elliptical brackets to identify a work in the text. E.g. Parsons (1949a). However in some cases I have wished to preserve the original date of publication, this is indicated by the use of square brackets, e.g. Parsons [1937a].

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PARSONS, T. [1941a], 'Introduction' and editorial footnotes to Weber, M. The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, New York, First Free Press Paperback Edition, 1964. N.B. This was reprinted in Parsons' Essays in Sociological Theory: Pure and Applied First Edition. In a footnote to that edition Parsons writes 'Though not published until 1947 ... this 'Introduction' was written in 1941, publication being held up by the war'. (67). In the present work this essay will be dated 1941 as there is no evidence of post 1941 revision. This is significant as Parsons says: 'Section II on Weber's Methodology of Social Science represents the author's first major attempt since The Structure of Social Action to discuss critically the basic methodological problems of a theory of Social Systems. It was in this that a formulation of such a body of theory in structural functional terms was first approached, and the role of the concept of function first clearly worked out. It was above all also the occasion for a further clarification of the relation of psychological categories to the analysis of social structure on the institutional level' (67). In the light of the importance of this essay it has seemed appropriate to preserve its original date of preparation rather than publication.

PARSONS, T. [1941b], 'Toward a Common Language for the Area of Social Science' in Essays in Sociological Theory: Pure and Applied, 1st Edition, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1949, pp.42-51. N.B. This is a selection from a larger unpublished document written by Parsons, J.F. Dunlop, M.P. Gilmore, C. Kluckhohn and O.H. Taylor. In a footnote (pp.42) Parsons writes: 'It happens that authorship of this particular section was mainly mine, though it was revised considerably as a result of group discussion'.

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