

# An Introduction to Social Theory

## Consensus and Functionalism

---

Name and date begun:

**Time allocation:**  
3 lessons

### Learning objectives:

- Students should begin to appreciate that sociology is a subject that has a large theoretical base.
- All students should realise that theory underpins practice in sociology.
- Consensus theory and functionalism is based on a theory that stresses a shared order of meaning. Students will need to ensure that they have a good knowledge of consensus theory and of functionalism.
- Consensus theory claims to be scientific, objective, and value-free. Students should be able to evaluate and to criticise the claims of consensus theories.

### Key Concepts and vocabulary

See your lesson notes for a list of ideologies and philosophies. These must be learned in addition to the following:

- Consensus
- Structuralism
- Empiricism
- Functionalism
- Theory
- The organic analogy
- Positivism

### Additional reading and references

It is strongly recommended that you learn as much as you can about each type of theory. Use as many texts, CD-ROMs and Websites as you can to collect notes and ideas about each type of theory. Write summary notes and then develop them more fully. You cannot do too much in this area and much discussion is difficult if you do not learn this work. Share work with your friends. Ask questions. Use the LRC and the local libraries.

Haralambos and Holborn (1995) *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* Ch. 1

Taylor *et al.* (1996) *Sociology in Focus* p 1 - 24

Jorgensen *et al.* (1997) *Sociology: An interactive approach* p vi and vii, p 4 – 6,

**Make a note of any additional sources that you have used below**

### **Personal Development ideas**

- Develop your notes constantly.
- Start to look in the Internet to see how many sites there are for classic sociological theory.
- Use CD-Rom to collect information about major social theorists.
- Use encyclopaedias to gather information

### **Overview of the debate**

- Why do we need social theory?
- What is the difference between consensus and conflict sociology?
- What implications does consensus theory have for thinkers in this tradition?
- Why is functionalism rather unpopular as a perspective in modern thinking?

### **Revision tips**

- Return to this work each week until you feel completely secure that you know what you are talking about.
- Refer to these ideas in all of your written work.
- Be sure that you understand that functionalism is a perspective and that there are arguments and different points of view within functionalism.

### **What you should have in your folder when this work has been completed correctly:**

- A clear explanation of each of the glossary terms
- Acceptable lesson notes.
- Evidence that you have looked at least two textbooks and made notes on functionalism and consensus theory.
- A list of the main ideas of consensus theory and functionalism. Look for revision texts to help you summarise these.
- A list of arguments both for and against functionalism. Use revision texts to help you.
- Notes on the ideas of the two main theorists, Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons.
- Evidence that you are attempting to gain a personal view of the value of functionalism as a theoretical perspective.
- You should hand in a short essay of approximately 500 to 1000 words to the title:

**Evaluate the usefulness of functionalism as a sociological theory.**