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Q4(b)

How is social equilibrium maintained in Parsonian framework?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- How is social equilibrium maintained in Parsonian framework?
- Keep the answer within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Parsons:** social equilibrium is moving consistency of a system of action.

AGIL functions specialise in resources, goals, integration, and **pattern maintenance**.

Socialisation and social control restore alignment.

Marx, **Merton**, and **Weber** name conflict, dysfunction, and value clash that the calm picture hides.

Unpaid gendered care can be the hidden cost of maintenance.

Introduction

Talcott Parsons treated society as a system of action that tends toward equilibrium. Maintenance is not a frozen peace. It is the ongoing matching of needs among personality, social system, and culture through specialised functions.

Body**The system picture**

- Action is oriented by norms and values. The unit act sits in a situation of goals, means, and conditions.
- The social system allocates roles. Equilibrium is a moving consistency among role-expectations.

AGIL as maintenance kit

- **Adaptation:** the economy adjusts to the environment and supplies resources.
- **Goal attainment:** politics sets and pursues collective goals.
- **Integration:** law, community, and solidarity manage conflict among units.
- **Latency (**pattern maintenance** and **tension management**):** family, school, and culture transmit values and manage motivation.
- If one subsystem fails, strain appears; other subsystems compensate or the pattern changes.

Mechanisms Parsons named

- Socialisation internalises the "me", in a line from George Herbert Mead, so deviance is not the default.
- Social control, including sanctions, restores alignment.
- **Cybernetic hierarchy**: culture and values inform the social system, which informs personality, with energy flowing the other way.

Limits of the picture

- **Karl Marx** and conflict theory treat equilibrium as a moment of domination, not a functional success.
- Robert K. **Merton** showed dysfunction, latent strain, and anomie inside structures that look integrated.
- **Max Weber**'s conflicting value spheres and charismatic rupture are poorly read as **AGIL** repair.
- Gendered unpaid care, as feminists after Ann Oakley argued, can "maintain" the system by hiding costs.

Flow diagram

Adaptation economy -> Moving equilibrium
Goal attainment politics -> Moving equilibrium
Integration law community -> Moving equilibrium
Latency family school -> Moving equilibrium

Conclusion

In Parsons, equilibrium is maintained by **AGIL** specialisation, socialisation, and social control under a **cybernetic hierarchy** of values. The framework explains institutional complementarity. It underplays class conflict, anomie, and whose labour pays for the calm.

Facts & figures

AGIL

Parsons's four functional prerequisites of a social system.

Pattern maintenance

Latency function: transmitting values and managing motivational tension.

Cybernetic hierarchy

Information from culture downward; energy from economy and personality upward.

Merton

Dysfunction and latent functions qualify a simple equilibrium story.