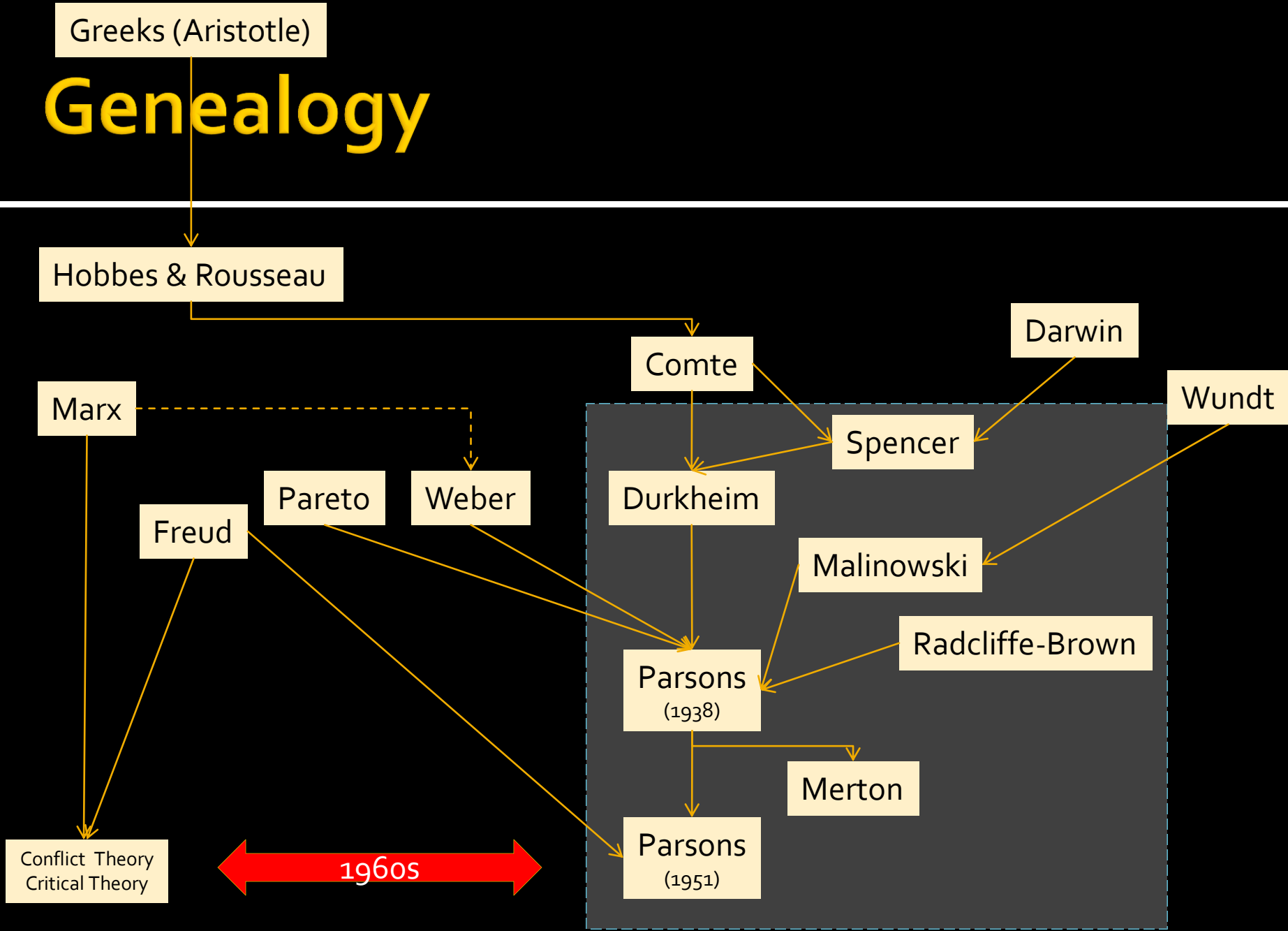


Fall 2010

# Structural-Functionalism

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# Genealogy



# Definition I

**Functionalism:** "mode of analysis concerned with interrelations between social phenomena in general, and, more particularly, with the consequences of given items for the larger structure or structures in which they are embedded"

(Coser 1976, 146) [after Merton & Stinchcombe].

# Definition II

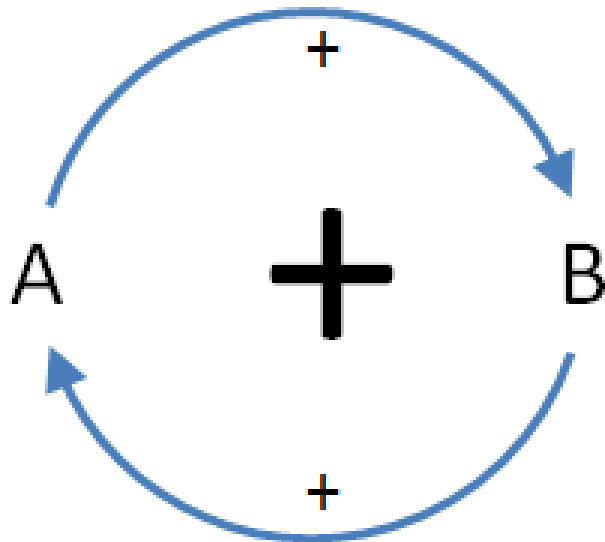
**Functionalism:** a theory that **explains** the existence and **persistence** of social practices **in terms of the benefits** these practices have for the system in which they are embedded

*Example: Patriotism and patriotic symbols and rhetoric promote solidarity and willingness to sacrifice for society and the more of this you get in a society, the better off the society is.*

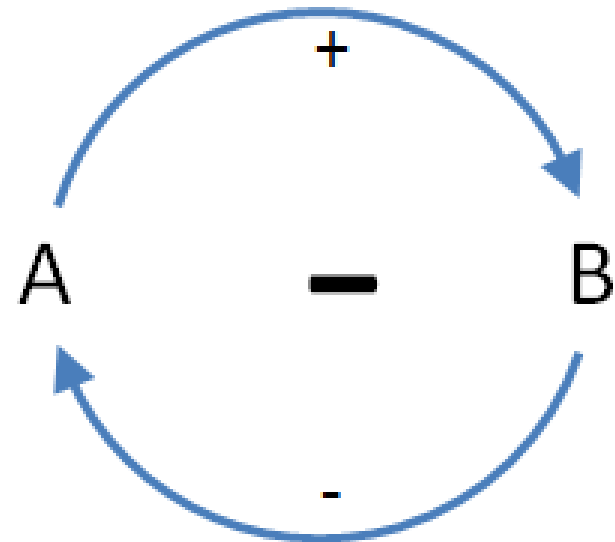
# Why...

- ...don't pets blow up?
- ...do people ever stop having sex?
- ...is it hard to get back on a diet?
- ...do compliments improve behavior?
- ...do parties die when a few people leave?
- ...is there a "monthly cycle"?

# Answer: Feedback

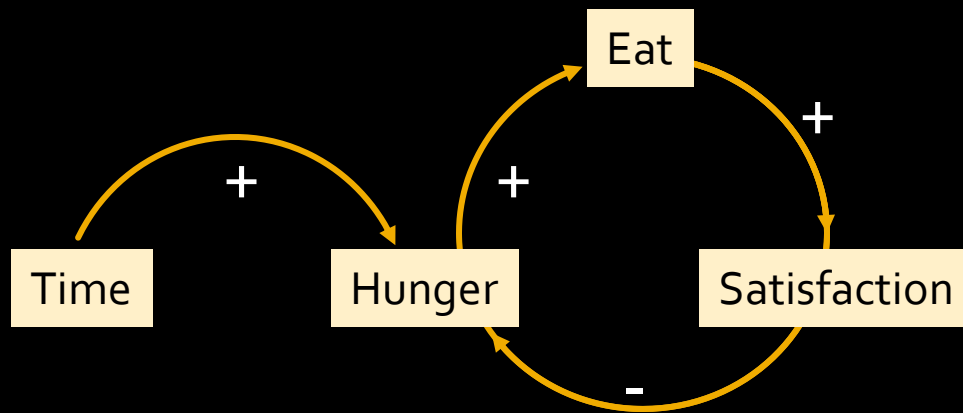


**Positive Feedback Loop**  
"reinforcing"

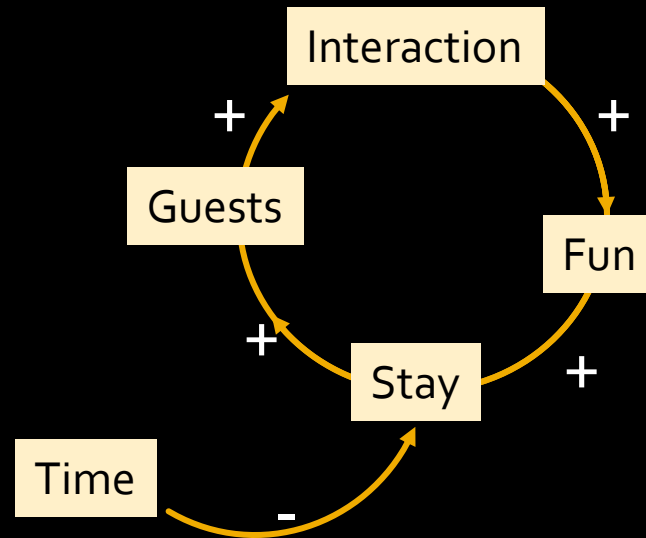


**Negative Feedback Loop**  
"diminishing"

# Why do we stop eating?



# Why does a party die?



# Logic

1. Society is a system.
  2. Systems have parts...
  3. ...that are interrelated.
- WHAT IS “INTERRELATED”?
    - Mutual dependence and Functional requisites
    - Feedback
      - Amplification
      - Attenuation

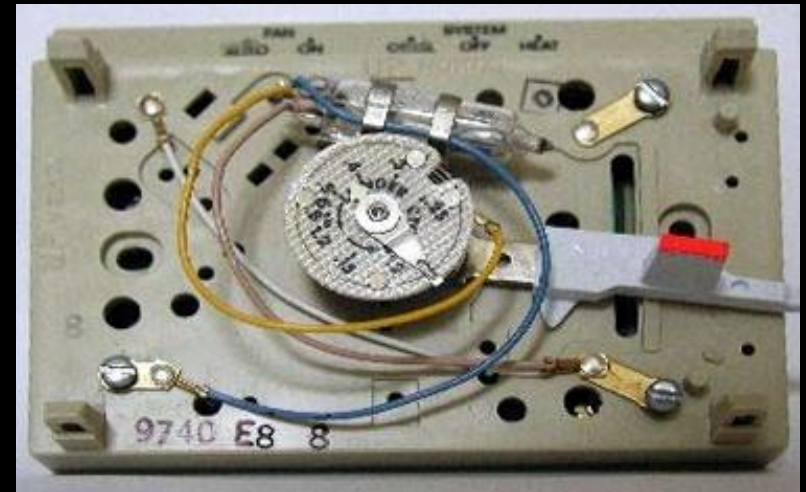
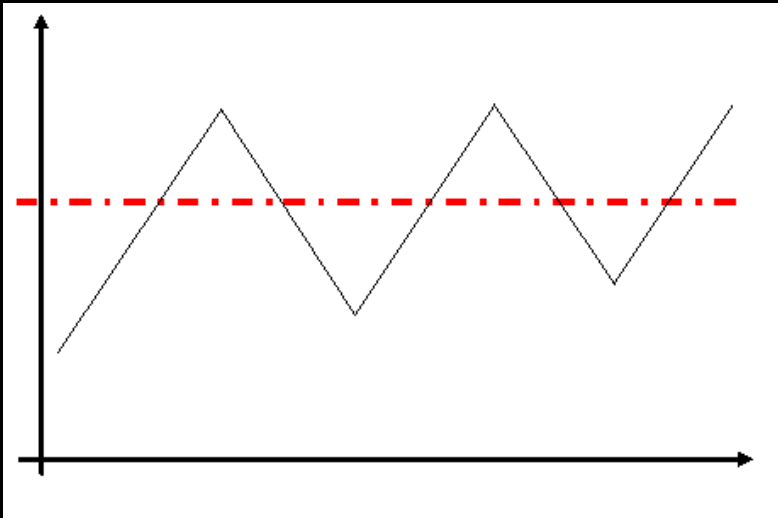
# Functional Requisites

- Social systems need things like
  - Tools to coordinate behavior
  - Communication
  - Generational transmission
  - Techniques for generating solidarity
- Recall Durkheim's notion of "normal"

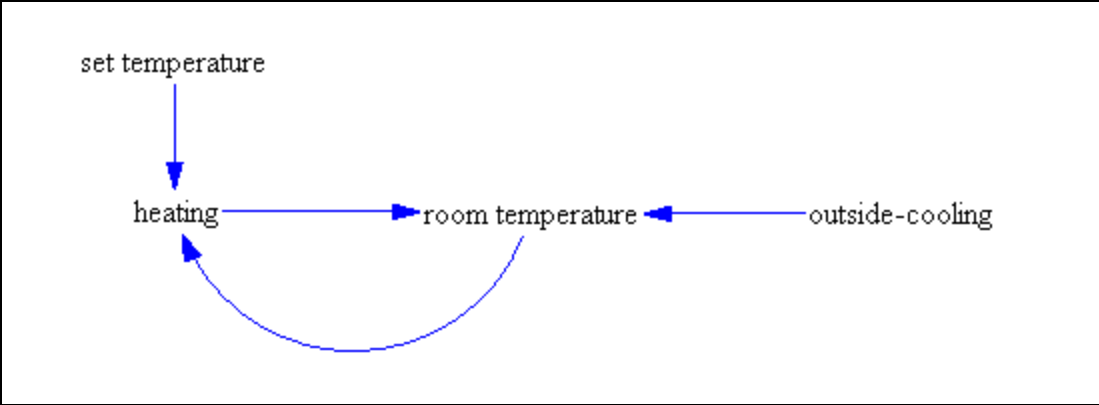
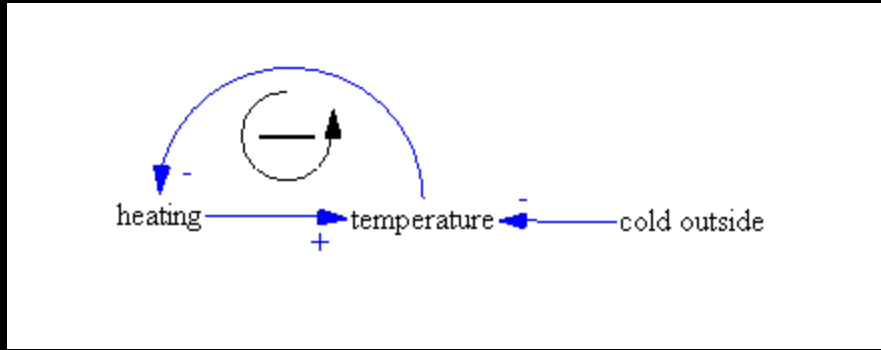
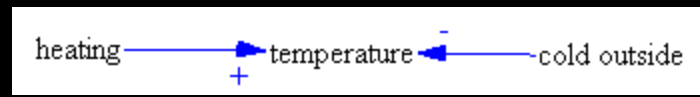
# Feedback



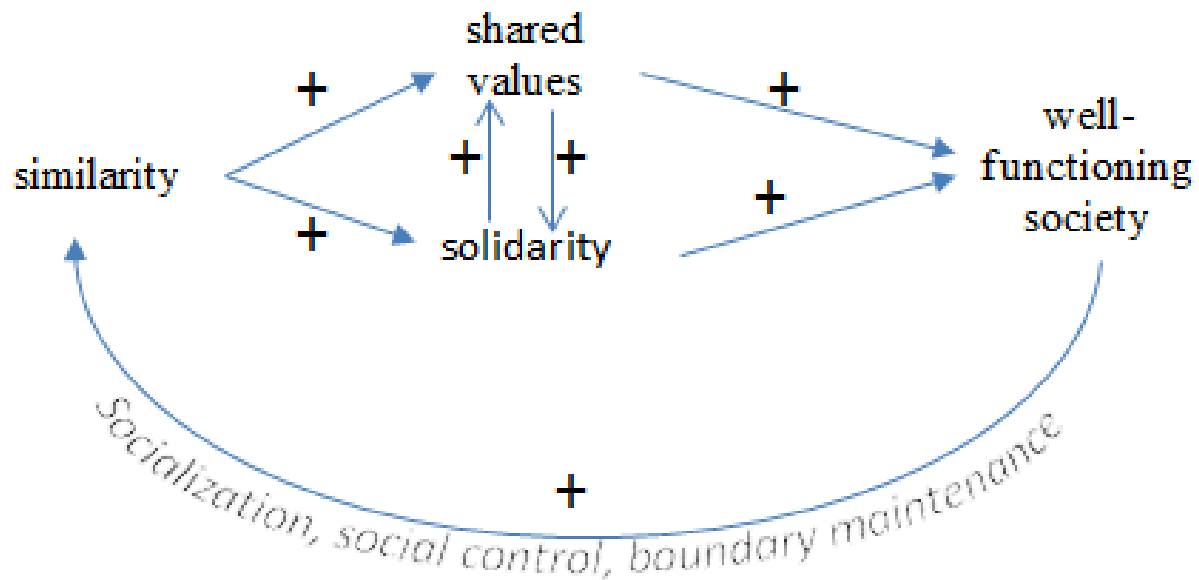
# Feedback



# Feedback

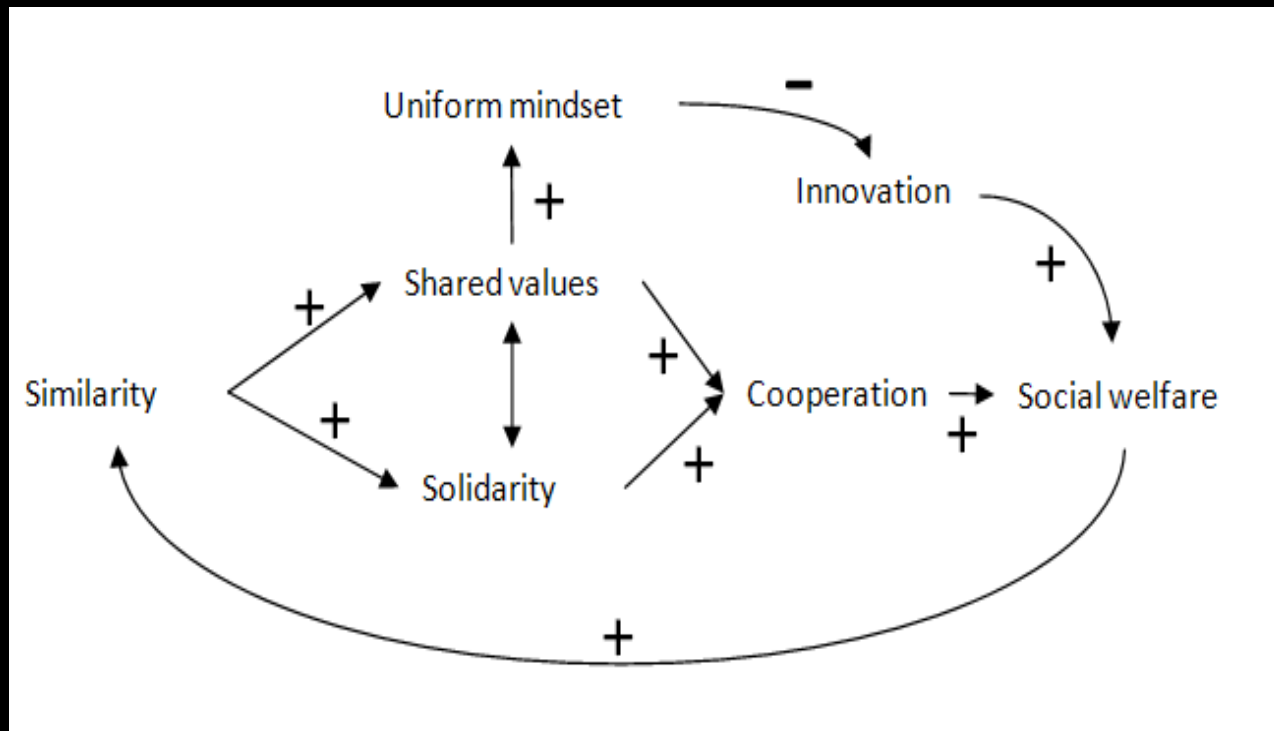


# Feedback



**Mechanical Solidarity Functional Feedback Loop**

# Introducing a “dysfunction”



# Functionalist Theories

1. Explain practices in terms of system benefits
2. “Socially” rational vs. individually rational
3. Systems of functional requisites

# Development

- Reaction to ethnocentrism and diffusionism\*
  - Cultural context matters
  - Ethnographic data matters
- Need to study societies as “wholes”

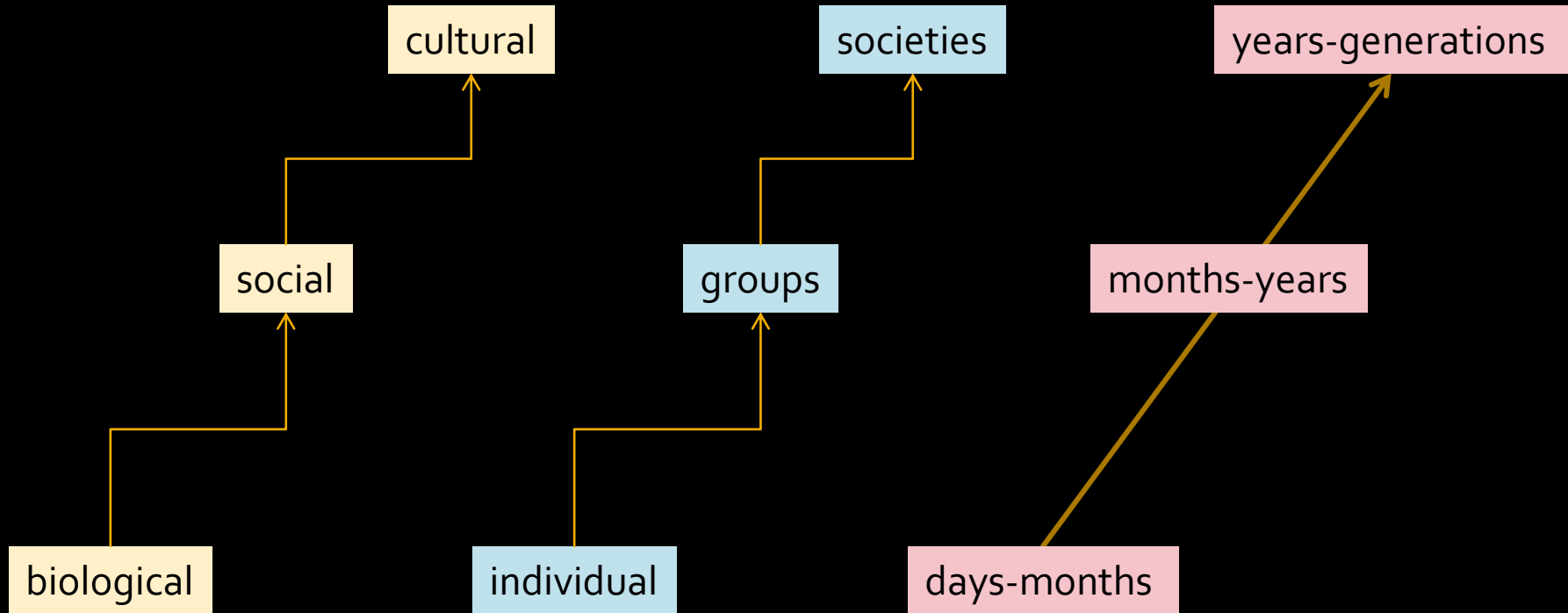
\* see Baert ch. 2

# Malinowski's "needs"

Level of Needs

Level of Organization

Time Scale



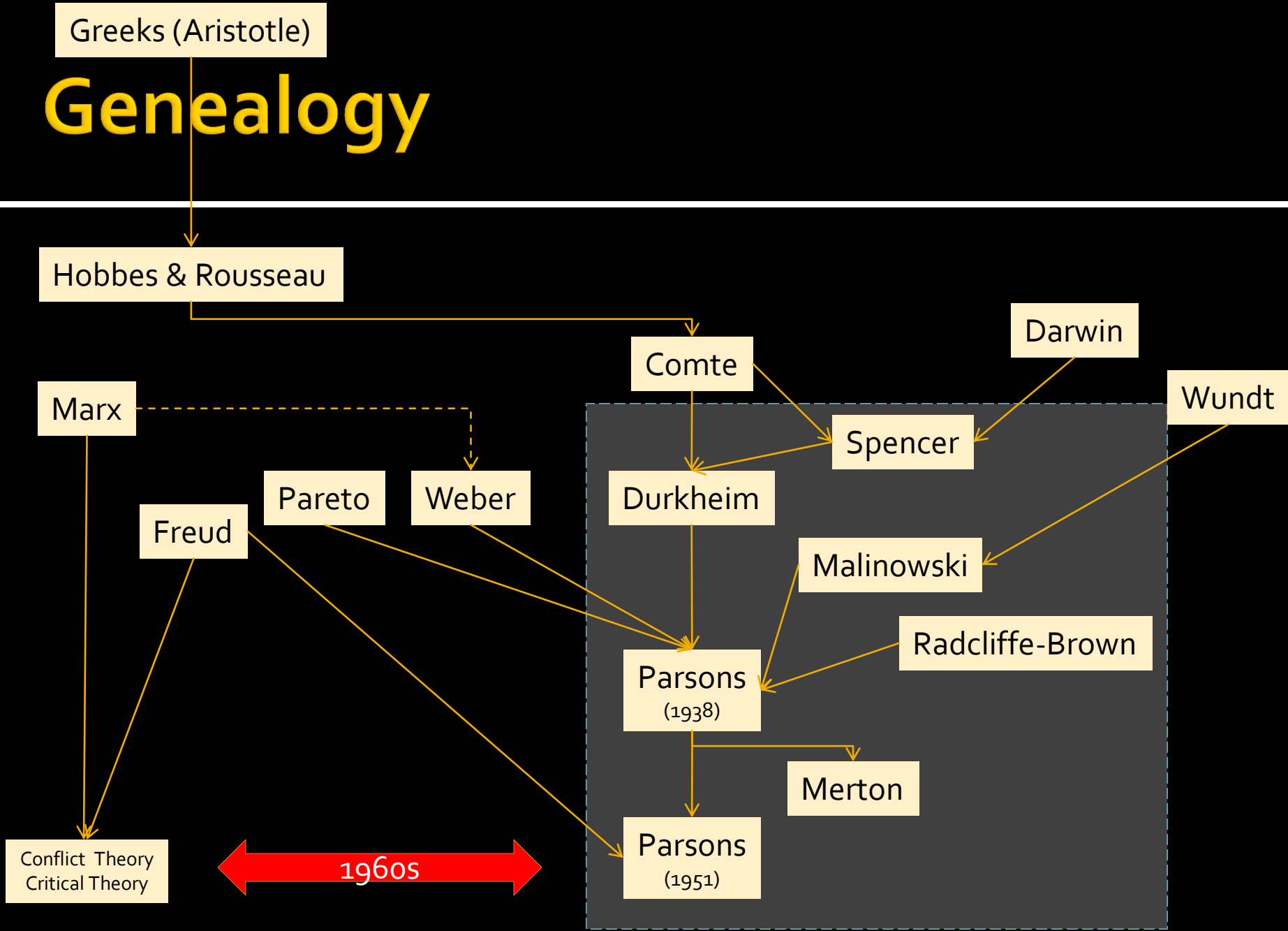
# Problems in Early Functionalism

- Everything as functional
  - There are other reasons practices can survive
- Naïve about cohesion as necessary
  - Unclear concept of system “survival” (or thriving)
  - How much? What kind?

# Parsons' Contributions

- Toward a “unified theory of society”
- Problem: Hobbes' “problem of order”
- Weber:

# Genealogy



# 1930s Shift in American Sociology

- From Chicago to Harvard
- American Journal of Sociology to American Sociological Review
- Crude Dichotomies
- Fieldwork to abstract theorizing
- People problems to systems problems

# Marxian Functionalism\*

- Marx's argument
  1. Relative power of classes determined by
    - a) Mode of production
    - b) Authority system required by that mode
    - c) Who owns the productive property
  2. Mode changes over time
  3. Therefore distribution of power changes

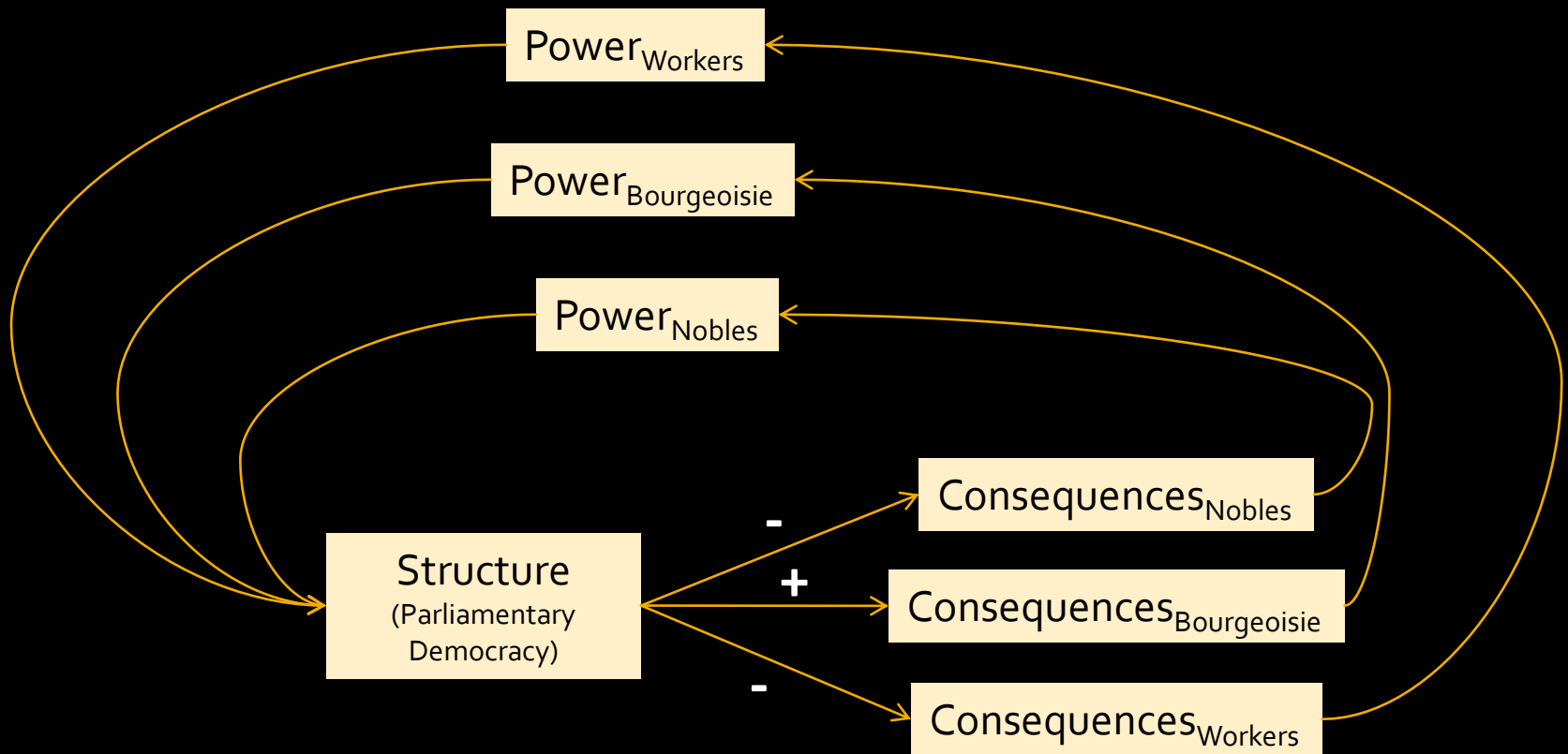
# Marxian Functionalism\*

- HOW?

1. Power of classes change institutions and structures.

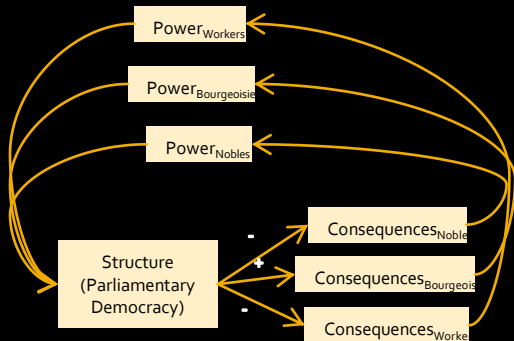
“The greater the power of a class, the more effective that class is as a cause of social structure” (Stinchcombe 1987, 94).

# Marx's Dialectic in Functionalism



# Feudalism

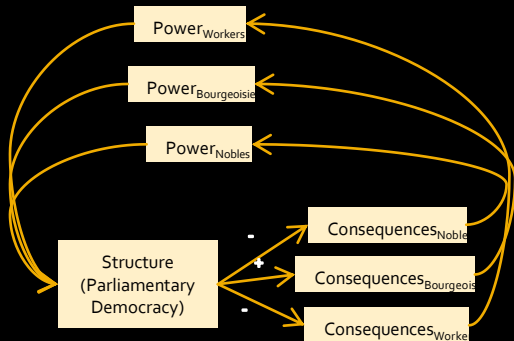
Class	Consequences of S	Power of Class	Causal Force $\pm S$
Nobles	-1	5	-5
Bourgeoisie	+1	2	+2
Workers	-1	0	0
		Net Causal Force	-3



...then technology changes, markets expand, factories emerge...

# Bourgeois Capitalism

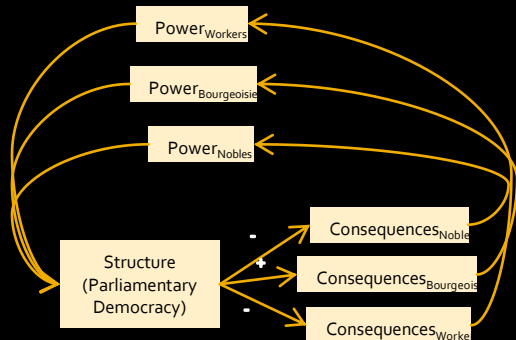
Class	Consequences of S	Power of Class	Causal Force $\pm S$
Nobles	-1	2	-2
Bourgeoisie	+1	5	+3
Workers	-1	0	0
		Net Causal Force	+3



...then proletariat concentrated in factories, organize, unions, political movements...

# Late Monopolistic Capitalism

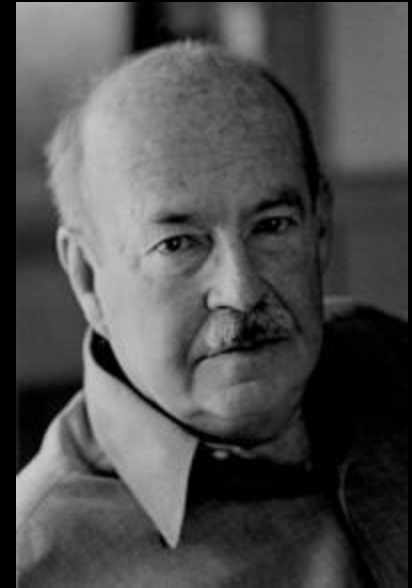
Class	Consequences of S	Power of Class	Causal Force $\pm S$
Nobles	-1	0	0
Bourgeoisie	+1	2	+2
Workers	-1	5	-5
		Net Causal Force	-3



...then proletariat concentrated in factories, organize, unions, political movements...

# Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)

- Education and Work
  - Amherst. LSE. Heidelberg
  - Taught at Harvard from 1927
- Major Works
  - 1937(8) *The Structure of Social Action*
  - 1951 *The Social System*
- Contributions
  - *Action Theory*
  - *Systems Theory*
  - *Unified Theory*
  - *AGIL paradigm*



# Functional Requisites of Systems\*

- **A**daptation
  - System must change in response to environment
- **G**oal Attainment
  - System needs to get things done, make stuff, achieve)
- **I**ntegration
  - Parts of the system need to work together
- **(L)** Pattern maintenance. (L stands for "Latent function")
  - System must remember and transmit how it does things.

# Levels and Sublevels of Systems\*

- The Social system level:
  - The economy — social adaptation to its action and non-action environmental systems
  - The polity — collective goal attainment
  - The societal community — the integration of its diverse social components
  - The fiduciary system — processes that reproduce historical culture in its "direct" social embeddedness.
- The General Action Level:
  - The behavioral organism/system.
  - The personality system.
  - The social system.
  - The cultural system.
- The cultural level:
  - Cognitive symbolization.
  - Expressive symbolization.
  - Moral-evaluative symbolization.
  - Constitutive symbolization.
- Social System level:
  - (A) Economic system: Money.
  - (G) Political system: Political power.
  - (I) The Societal Community: Influence.
  - (L) The Fiduciary system (cultural tradition): Value-commitment.

# Levels of Systems\*

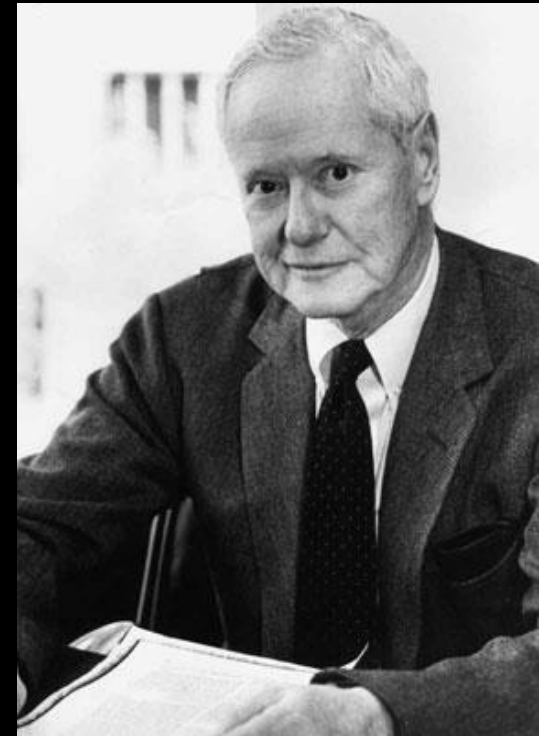
- The Social system level
- The General Action Level
- The cultural level
- The Generalized Symbolic media
- Social System level

# Levels of Systems\*

- The pure AGIL model for all living systems:
  - (A) Adaptation.
  - (G) Goal Attainment.
  - (I) Integration.
  - (L) Pattern maintenance. (L stand for "Latent function").
- The Social system level:
  - The economy — social adaptation to its action and non-action environmental systems
  - The polity — collective goal attainment
  - The societal community — the integration of its diverse social components
  - The fiduciary system — processes that function to reproduce historical culture in its "direct" social embeddedness.
- The General Action Level:
  - The behavioral organism (or system). (In later version, the foci for generalized "intelligence.").
  - The personality system.
  - The social system.
  - The cultural system. (See cultural level).
- The cultural level:
  - Cognitive symbolization.
  - Expressive symbolization.
  - Evaluative symbolization. (Sometimes called: moral-evaluative symbolization).
  - Constitutive symbolization.
- The Generalized Symbolic media:
  - Social System level:
    - (A) Economic system: Money.
    - (G) Political system: Political power.
    - (I) The Societal Community: Influence.
    - (L) The Fiduciary system (cultural tradition): Value-commitment.

# Robert Merton (1910-2003)

- Contributions
  - “Theories of the middle range”
  - Clarifying functional analysis
  - Dysfunctions
  - Unanticipated consequences
  - **Manifest and latent functions**
  - Functional alternatives
  - **Merton's theory of deviance**
  - **Sociology of science**



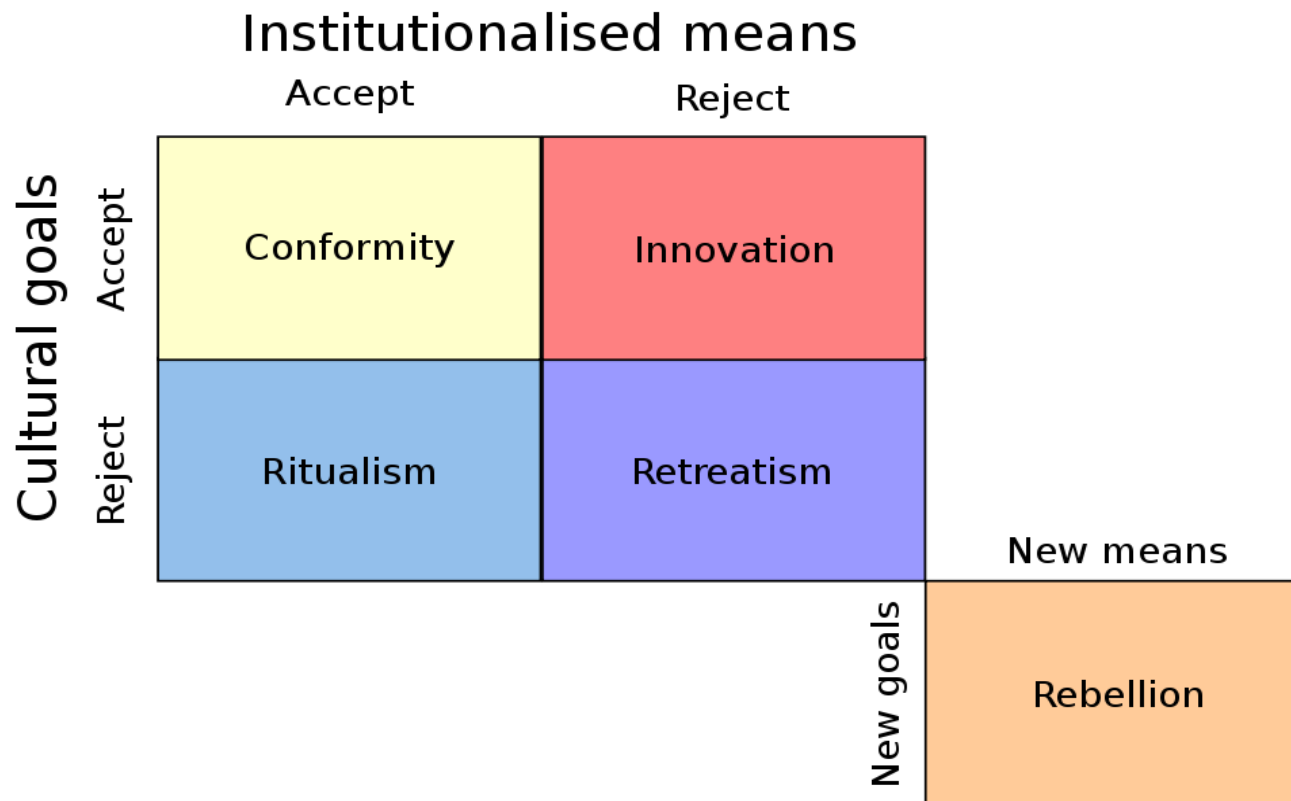
# Manifest & Latent Functions

- **Manifest** : what we (actors) think the purpose or consequence of an institution or practice is
- **Latent** : what institution or practice actually does

Institution	Manifest	Latent
antigambling legislation	suppress gambling	create an illegal empire for the organized crime
Christian missions in Africa	convert Africans to Christianity	Destroy indigenous tribal cultures and provide impetus towards rapid social change
Dominance of Communist Party over all sectors of social life	assure dominance of revolutionary ethos	created a new class of comfortable bureaucrats disinclined to the self-denial of revolution
voluntary associations America	sociability and public service	Create new status indices for those permitted to join

# Merton's Theory of Deviance

## Robert K. Merton's Deviance Typology



# Merton's "Norms of Science"

- **C**ommunism – the common ownership of scientific discoveries, scientists trade intellectual property for recognition and esteem.
- **U**niversalism – truth claims evaluated in terms of universal or impersonal criteria, not on basis of race, class, gender, religion...
- **D**isinterestedness – scientists are rewarded for acting in ways that outwardly appear to be selfless
- **O**rganized **S**kepticism – all ideas must be tested and subjected to rigorous, structured community scrutiny.

Emergence of CUDOS = "Merton's Theory" of the Scientific Revolution

# Readings: Parsons

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# Readings: Merton

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