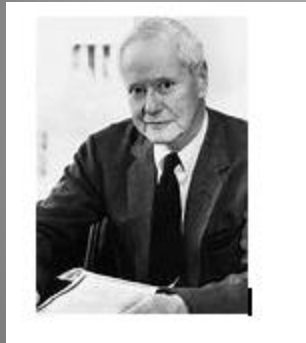


# Robert K. Merton

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# Robert K. Merton

(4 July 1910 – 23 February 2003)

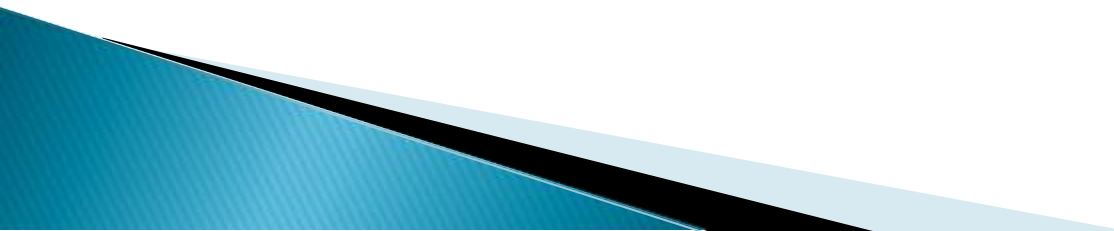


- ✓ Robert King Merton was an American sociologist. He spent most of his career teaching at Columbia University, where he attained the rank of University Professor.
- ✓ In 1994 he was awarded the National Medal of Science for his contributions to the field and for having founded the sociology of science.

# Major Works

- ✓ *"Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England"* (1938)
- ✓ *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949; revised and expanded, 1957 and 1968)
- ✓ *The Sociology of Science* (1973)
- ✓ *Sociological Ambivalence* (1976)
- ✓ *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (1985)
- ✓ *On Social Structure and Science* (1996; edited by Piotr Sztompka)
- ✓ *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science*, 2004

# *Merton's contributions:*

- ✓ Theories of the middle range
  - ✓ Strain Theory
  - ✓ Clarifying functional analysis
  - ✓ Dysfunctions
  - ✓ Unanticipated consequences and manifest and latent functions
  - ✓ Functional alternatives
  - ✓ Theory of deviance
  - ✓ Sociology of science
- 

# *Strain Theory*

- ✓ Merton argued that general strain theory is developed by a blockage in an individual's life which doesn't allow them to achieve their goal, essentially leading to deviant behaviour. Merton uses the progress of achieving the 'American Dream' as an example. If an individual can't achieve this, it can prove frustrating for the individual and may lead to breaking free into illegal escape routes or anger-based delinquency.
- ✓ This theory has many criticisms as it doesn't factor in an individual's social class as someone as a lower socio-economic level might not be striving to achieve the 'American Dream' meaning they don't need to carry out illegal acts. This also creates the idea that only people that fall under the bracket of the lower socio-economic are the only ones that will become a criminal and people that have achieved the 'American Dream' won't which is simply incorrect

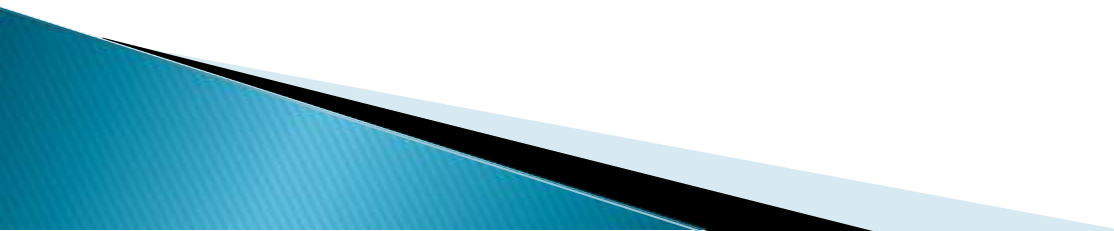
# *Theories of the middle range*

- ✓ Merton believed that middle range theories bypassed the failures of larger theories because they are too distant from observing social behavior in a particular social setting
- ✓ According to Merton, middle-range theory starts its theorizing with clearly defined aspects of social phenomena, rather than with broad, abstract entities such as society as a whole. Theories of the middle range should be firmly supported by empirical data. These theories must be constructed with observed data in order to create theoretical problems and to be incorporated in proposals that allow empirical testing. Middle-range theories, applicable to limited ranges of data, transcend sheer description of social phenomena and fill in the blanks between raw empiricism and grand or all-inclusive theory.

# *Functional analysis*

- ✓ One of the charges hurled against functional analysis in the 1940s and 50s and still echoed today, is that functional analysis is an inherently conservative perspective devoted to preserving the status quo. Merton suggested that this charge is due to the fact that analysts have adopted three postulates that are untenable and unnecessary to the functional orientation.
- ✓ According to Merton's perception of "functionalism", all standardized social and cultural beliefs and practices are functional for both society as a whole as well as individuals in society. This outlook maintains that various parts of social systems must show a high level of integration, but Merton argues that a generalization like this cannot be extended to larger, more complex societies
- ✓ His belief in empirical testing led to the development of his "paradigm" of functional analysis. [According to Merton, "paradigm", refers to "exemplars of codified basic and often tacit assumptions, problem sets, key concepts, logic of procedure, and selectively accumulated knowledge that guide [theoretical and empirical] inquiry in all scientific fields". In terms of structural functionalism, Merton felt that the focus should be on social functions rather than on individual motives

# *dysfunction*

- ✓ Social mechanisms within the system, including the interrelation and predominantly mutually supporting elements of the system, operate to keep these strains in check, attempting to limit or minimize change of the social structure. However, such mechanisms are not always effective, and the accumulation of stress and resulting conflict often cause systemic change.
  - ✓ One of the primary goals of a functional analysis is to identify these dysfunctions and examine how they are contained or reduced in the sociocultural system as well as how they sometimes cause systemic or fundamental change.
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# Manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions

- ✓ “Manifest functions are those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaptation of the system that are intended and recognized by the participants of the system; Latent functions, correlatively, being those which are neither intended nor recognized” (1948/1968, p. 105).
- ✓ Consequently, outsiders tend to label such behavior as mere “superstition” or “primitive,” although they may well serve many latent functions for specific groups or for the entire society. The persistence of these seemingly irrational behaviors may well lie with these latent functions rather than in the manifest functions that people cite as their primary motivation.

# dysfunctions

- ✓ Dysfunction in one or more systems leads to social instability. Both functions and dysfunctions can be latent or manifest. Manifest functions or dysfunctions are deliberate and known. While latent functions or dysfunctions are unintended and/or go unrecognized by many. Positive or negative values are not attached to functions or dysfunctions

# *Functional alternatives*

- ✓ Functionalists believe societies must have certain characteristics in order to survive. Merton shares this view but stresses that at the same time particular institutions are not the only ones able to fulfill these functions; a wide range of functional alternatives may be able to perform the same task.
- ✓ This notion of functional alternative is important because it alerts sociologists to the similar functions different institutions may perform and it further reduces the tendency of functionalism to imply approval of the status quo.

# *Theory of deviance*

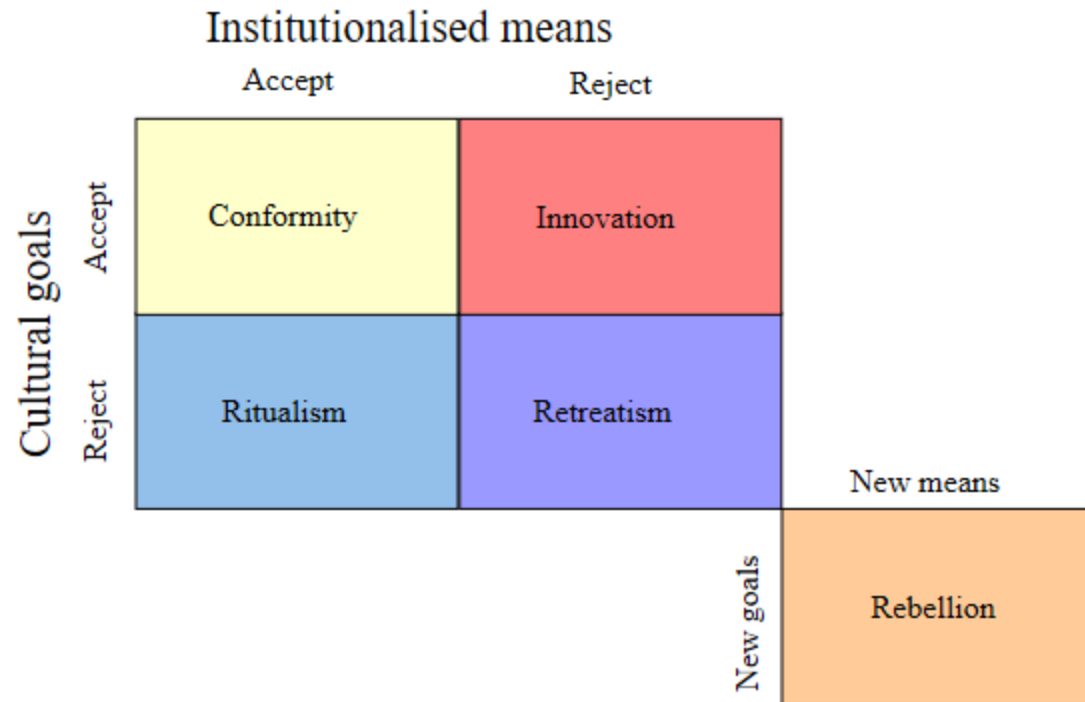
- ✓ In his approach to this problem Merton strips social structure down to two elemental conditions that hold for any society. He makes a distinction between the goals of a culture and the means the culture provides for achieving those goals.
- ✓ Merton claims that in those social circumstances where social goals are highly valued and the means for obtaining the goals are not as highly valued, the likelihood of innovation is increased. Criminal behavior is likely in a society which places great emphasis on success and wealth and does not emphasize the value of legitimate means for obtaining these goals.

# *Deviant behavior*

| Modes of adaptation: | Cultural goals | Inst.Means |
|----------------------|----------------|------------|
| 1. Conformity        | +              | +          |
| 2. Innovation        | +              | -          |
| 3. Ritualism         | -              | +          |
| 4. Retreatism        | -              | -          |
| 5. Rebellion         | <u>±</u>       | <u>±</u>   |

# Robert K. Merton's Deviance Typology

## Robert K. Merton's Deviance Typology



# *Deviant behavior*

1. **Innovation** is a response due to the strain generated by our culture's emphasis on wealth and the lack of opportunities to get rich, which causes people to be "innovators" by engaging in stealing and selling drugs. Innovators accept society's goals, but reject socially acceptable means of achieving them. (e.g.: monetary success is gained through crime).
2. **Conformists** accept society's goals and the socially acceptable means of achieving them (e.g.: monetary success is gained through hard work).
3. **Ritualism** refers to the inability to reach a cultural goal thus embracing the rules to the point where the people in question lose sight of their larger goals in order to feel respectable. Ritualists reject society's goals, but accept society's institutionalised means.
4. **Retreatism** is the rejection of both cultural goals and means, letting the person in question "drop out". Retreatists reject the society's goals and the legitimate means to achieve them.
5. **Rebellion** is somewhat similar to retreatism, because the people in question also reject both the cultural goals and means, but they go one step further to a "counterculture" that supports other social orders that already exist (rule breaking).

# *Sociology of science*

In 1942, [Robert K. Merton](#) introduced "four sets of institutional imperatives taken to comprise the ethos of modern science... communism, universalism, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism." The subsequent portion of his book, *The Sociology of Science*, elaborated on these principles at "the heart of the Mertonian paradigm—the powerful juxtaposition of the normative structure of science with its institutionally distinctive reward system".

- ✓ **Communism** – the common ownership of scientific discoveries, according to which scientists give up intellectual property in exchange for recognition and esteem.
- ✓ **Universalism** – according to which claims to truth are evaluated in terms of universal or impersonal criteria, and not on the basis of race, class, gender, religion, or nationality;
- ✓ **Disinterestedness** – according to which scientists are rewarded for acting in ways that outwardly appear to be selfless;
- ✓ **Organized skepticism** – all ideas must be tested and are subject to rigorous, structured community scrutiny.



# *Conclusion*

*Today, Merton is viewed as one of the founding fathers of modern-day sociology. His works are seen as the driving force of many of today's sociologists' studies. Merton's friends and colleagues credit his guidance to the positive direction of modern sociology .*

**Thank you**

