



Toward a General Theory of Action: Theoretical Foundations for the Social Sciences (Social Science Classics Series)

Edward Shils, Talcott Parsons

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This new edition introduces the social science audiences of a new century to one of the classic highlights of the mid-twentieth century. This is the most general statement of the general theory of action as it was developed by its principle exponent, Talcott Parsons, and his close collaborators who formed the core of the fabled department of social relations at Harvard University. *Toward a General Theory of Action* is an extremely ambitious formulation of the ingredients, dimensions, and ranges that determine human behavior.

Parsons and Shils enunciate principles that are at the core of contemporary social science preoccupations—including the precarious balance between social integration and conflict. The volume is at once universal in intent and highly personal, an expression of Parsons' thought, one of the most notable sociological theorists of the century. Finally, the book symbolizes the interdisciplinary impulse that typified a widespread belief in the unity of the sciences. This edition includes the collaborative group's introductory statement, Richard Sheldon's essay on the theoretical and philosophical status of the general theory of action, and "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" by Parsons and Shils.

Guy Swanson, writing in the *The American Sociological Review*, noted that "Parsons and Shils have performed a major service in clearing away many old controversies, in showing the reasonableness of a behavioral foundation for general theory in social science as a whole and in sociology in particular, in clarifying the interrelations among many concepts, and in the insightful interpretation of particular pieces of data." It is testimony to this book's continuing significance that it continues to generate new lines of research and writings.

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