



Society is like: [a human body]	
A. Features of [human body]	B. Features of society
1. Bones	Link parts of the body together just as all parts of society link together.
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Structuralist perspectives

For structuralist sociologists society, as **Philip Jones** (*Theory and Method in Sociology*, 1987) argues, is seen as, 'A structure of (cultural) rules', guiding our behaviour and telling us:

- how to behave appropriately in any given situation
- what to expect in terms of the behaviour of others.

From this perspective, individual behaviour is considered both uninteresting (structuralists don't want to know why I didn't like going to school) and relatively unimportant. The fact I didn't like going to school (and managed not to go for a year or so) is what **C. Wright Mills** (*The Sociological Imagination*, 1959) has called a:

- **Private problem:** It is an issue for a small number of people and not very interesting to the majority. If, however, everyone

stopped going to school this would represent a:

- **Public issue** – something of concern to everyone. Structural sociologists, therefore, start to get interested at the point where *private problems* become *public issues*. Attention, in this respect, is focused on how society pressurises individuals to perform roles, for example, so social life can continue on an orderly, predictable, basis.

This general idea – that sociologists should study the way society impacts on individual behaviour – represents the main way structuralist sociologists differ from action sociologists. However, just to complicate matters we can, as I noted earlier, sub-divide structural perspectives into two further categories, consensus structuralism and conflict structuralism.

Consensus structuralism

These sociologists focus on the way social order is created and maintained through agreement ('consensus') – through, for example, the development of shared norms and values. In this respect, one of the main consensus perspectives we can examine is **functionalism** – a perspective that involves a number of key ideas.

- **Social system:** Functionalists use this idea rather than 'society' because systems involve the idea of things working together – harmoniously – and, consequently, being dependent on each other. The human body, for example, is a system in which the various parts (heart, lungs, brain and so forth) work together to form a living thing. In a similar way, all the different parts of a social system (family, school and so forth) are