

# III                    MANIFEST AND LATENT FUNCTIONS

## TOWARD THE CODIFICATION OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN SOCIOLOGY

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS is at once the most promising and possibly the least codified of contemporary orientations to problems of sociological interpretation. Having developed on many intellectual fronts at the same time, it has grown in shreds and patches rather than in depth. The accomplishments of functional analysis are sufficient to suggest that its large promise will progressively be fulfilled, just as its current deficiencies testify to the need for periodically overhauling the past the better to build for the future. At the very least, occasional re-assessments bring into open discussion many of the difficulties which otherwise remain tacit and unspoken.

Like all interpretative schemes, functional analysis depends upon a triple alliance between theory, method and data. Of the three allies, method is by all odds the weakest. Many of the major practitioners of functional analysis have been devoted to theoretic formulations and to the clearing up of concepts; some have steeped themselves in data directly relevant to a functional frame of reference; but few have broken the prevailing silence regarding how one goes about the business of functional analysis. Yet the plenty and variety of functional analyses force the conclusion that *some* methods have been employed and awaken the hope that much may be learned from their inspection.

Although methods can be profitably examined without reference to theory or substantive data—methodology or the logic of procedure of course has precisely that as its assignment—empirically oriented disciplines are more fully served by inquiry into procedures if this takes due account of their theoretic problems and substantive findings. For the use of “method” involves not only logic but, unfortunately perhaps for those who must struggle with the difficulties of research, also the practical problems of aligning data with the requirements of theory. At least, that is our premise. Accordingly, we shall interweave our account with a systematic review of some of the chief conceptions of functional theory.

## THE VOCABULARIES OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

From its very beginnings, the functional approach in sociology has been caught up in terminological confusion. *Too often, a single term has been used to symbolize different concepts, just as the same concept has been symbolized by different terms.* Clarity of analysis and adequacy of communication are both victims of this frivolous use of words. At times, the analysis suffers from the unwitting shift in the conceptual content of a given term, and communication with others breaks down when the essentially same content is obscured by a battery of diverse terms. We have only to follow, for a short distance, the vagaries of the concept of 'function' to discover how conceptual clarity is effectively marred and communication defeated by competing vocabularies of functional analysis.

*Single Term, Diverse Concepts*

The word "function" has been pre-empted by several disciplines and by popular speech with the not unexpected result that its connotation often becomes obscure in sociology proper. By confining ourselves to only five connotations commonly assigned to this one word, we neglect numerous others. There is first, popular usage, according to which function refers to some public gathering or festive occasion, usually conducted with ceremonial overtones. It is in this connection, one must assume, that a newspaper headline asserts: "Mayor Tobin Not Backing Social Function," for the news account goes on to explain that "Mayor Tobin announced today that he is not interested in any social function, nor has he authorized anyone to sell tickets or sell advertising for any affair." Common as this usage is, it enters into the academic literature too seldom to contribute any great share to the prevailing chaos of terminology. Clearly, *this* connotation of the word is wholly alien to functional analysis in sociology.

A second usage makes the term function virtually equivalent to the term occupation. Max Weber, for example, defines occupation as "the mode of specialization, specification and combination of the functions of an individual so far as it constitutes for him the basis of a continual opportunity for income or for profit."<sup>1</sup> This is a frequent, indeed almost a typical, usage of the term by some economists who refer to the "functional analysis of a group" when they report the distribution of occupations in that group. Since this is the case, it may be expedient to follow the suggestion of Sargent Florence,<sup>2</sup> that the more nearly descriptive phrase "occupational analysis" be adopted for such inquiries.

1. Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (edited by Talcott Parsons), (London: William Hodge and Co., 1947), 230.

2. P. Sargent Florence, *Statistical Method in Economics*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), 357-58n.

A third usage, representing a special instance of the preceding one, is found both in popular speech and in political science. Function is often used to refer to the activities assigned to the incumbent of a social status, and more particularly, to the occupant of an office or political position. This gives rise to the term *functionary*, or *official*. Although function in this sense overlaps the broader meaning assigned the term in sociology and anthropology, it had best be excluded since it diverts attention from the fact that functions are performed not only by the occupants of designated positions, but by a wide range of standardized activities, social processes, culture patterns and belief-systems found in a society.

Since it was first introduced by Leibniz, the word *function* has its most precise significance in mathematics, where it refers to a variable considered in relation to one or more other variables in terms of which it may be expressed or on the value of which its own value depends. This conception, in a more extended (and often more imprecise) sense, is expressed by such phrases as "functional interdependence" and "functional relations," so often adopted by social scientists.<sup>3</sup> When Mannheim observes that "every social fact is a function of the time and place in which it occurs," or when a demographer states that "birth-rates are a function of economic status," they are manifestly making use of the mathematical connotation, though the first is not reported in the form of equations and the second is. The context generally makes it clear that the term *function* is being used in this mathematical sense, but social scientists not infrequently shuttle back and forth between this and another related, though distinct, connotation, which also involves the notion of "interdependence," "reciprocal relation" or "mutually dependent variations."

It is this fifth connotation which is central to functional analysis as this has been practiced in sociology and social anthropology. Stemming in part from the native mathematical sense of the term, this usage is more often explicitly adopted from the biological sciences, where the term *function* is understood to refer to the "vital or organic processes considered in the respects in which they contribute to the maintenance of the organism."<sup>4</sup> With modifications appropriate to the study of human

3. Thus, Alexander Lesser: "In its logical essentials, what is a functional relation? Is it any different in kind from functional relations in other fields of science? I think not. A genuinely functional relation is one which is established between two or more terms or variables such that it can be asserted that under certain defined conditions (which form one term of the relation) certain determined expressions of those conditions (which is the other term of the relation) are observed. The functional relation or relations asserted of any delimited aspect of culture must be such as to explain the nature and character of the delimited aspect under defined conditions." "Functionalism in social anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, N.S. 37 (1935), 386-93, at 392.

4. See for example, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *Modern Theories of Development*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 9 ff., 184 ff.; W. M. Bayliss, *Principles of General Physiology* (London, 1915), 706, where he reports his researches on the functions of the hormone discovered by Starling and himself; W. B. Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1929), 222, describing the "emergency functions of the sympathetico-adrenal system."

society, this corresponds rather closely to the key concept of function as adopted by the anthropological functionalists, pure or tempered.<sup>5</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown is the most often explicit in tracing his working conception of social function to the analogical model found in the biological sciences. After the fashion of Durkheim, he asserts that "the function of a recurrent physiological process is thus a correspondence between it and the needs (*i.e.*, the necessary conditions of existence) of the organism." And in the social sphere where individual human beings, "the essential units," are connected by networks of social relations into an integrated whole, "the function of any recurrent activity, such as the punishment of a crime, or a funeral ceremony, is the part it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of the structural continuity."<sup>6</sup>

Though Malinowski differs in several respects from the formulations of Radcliffe-Brown, he joins him in making the core of functional analysis the study of "the part which [social or cultural items] play in the society." "This type of theory," Malinowski explains in one of his early declarations of purpose, "aims at the explanation of anthropological facts at all levels of development by *their function, by the part which they play within the integral system of culture, by the manner in which they are related to each other within the system.* . . ."<sup>7</sup>

As we shall presently see in some detail, such recurrent phrases as "the part played in the social or cultural system" tend to blur the important distinction between the concept of function as "interdependence" and as "process." Nor need we pause here to observe that the postulate which holds that every item of culture has *some* enduring relations with other items, that it has *some* distinctive place in the total culture scarcely equips the field-observer or the analyst with a specific guide to procedure. All this had better wait. At the moment, we need only recognize that more recent formulations have clarified and extended this concept of function through progressive specifications. Thus, Kluckhohn: ". . . a given bit of culture is 'functional' insofar as it defines a mode of response

5. Lowie makes a distinction between the "pure functionalism" of a Malinowski and the "tempered functionalism" of a Thurnwald. Sound as the distinction is, it will soon become apparent that it is not pertinent for our purposes. R. H. Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), Chapter 13.

6. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "On the concept of function in social science," *American Anthropologist*, 1935, 37, 395-6. See also his later presidential address before the Royal Anthropological Institute, where he states: ". . . I would define the social function of a socially standardized mode of activity, or mode of thought, as its relation to the social structure to the existence and continuity of which it makes some contribution. Analogously, in a living organism, the physiological function of the beating of the heart, or the secretion of gastric juices, is its relation to the organic structure. . . ." "On social structure," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1940, 70, Pt. I, 9-10.

7. B. Malinowski, "Anthropology," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, First Supplementary Volume, (London and New York, 1926), 132-133 [italics supplied].

which is adaptive from the standpoint of the society and adjustive from the standpoint of the individual.”<sup>8</sup>

From these connotations of the term “function,” and we have touched upon only a few drawn from a more varied array, it is plain that many concepts are caught up in the same word. This invites confusion. And when many different words are held to express the same concept, there develops confusion worse confounded.

### *Single Concept, Diverse Terms*

The large assembly of terms used indifferently and almost synonymously with “function” presently includes use, utility, purpose, motive, intention, aim, consequences. Were these and similar terms put to use to refer to the same strictly defined concept, there would of course be little point in noticing their numerous variety. But the fact is that the undisciplined use of these terms, with their ostensibly similar conceptual reference, leads to successively greater departures from tight-knit and rigorous functional analysis. The connotations of each term which differ from rather than agree with the connotation that they have in common are made the (unwitting) basis for inferences which become increasingly dubious as they become progressively remote from the central concept of function. One or two illustrations will bear out the point that a shifting vocabulary makes for the multiplication of misunderstandings.

In the following passage drawn from one of the most sensible of treatises on the sociology of crime, one can detect the shifts in meaning of nominally synonymous terms and the questionable inferences which depend upon these shifts. (The key terms are italicized to help in picking one’s way through the argument.)

*Purpose of Punishment.* Attempts are being made to determine the *purpose* or *function* of punishment in different groups at different times. Many investigators have insisted that some one *motive* was *the motive* in punishment. On the other hand, the *function* of punishment in restoring the solidarity of the group which has been weakened by the crime is emphasized. Thomas and Znaniecki have indicated that among the Polish peasants the punishment of crime is *designed primarily* to restore the situation which existed before the crime and renew the solidarity of the group, and that revenge is *a secondary consideration*. From this point of view punishment *is concerned primarily* with the group and only *secondarily* with the offender. On the other hand, expiation, deterrence, retribution, reformation, income for the state, and other things have been posited as *the function* of punishment. In the past as at present it is not clear that any one of these is *the motive*; punishments seem to grow from *many motives* and to perform *many functions*. This is true both of the individual victims of crimes and of the state. Certainly the laws of the present

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8. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, (Cambridge: Peabody Museum, 1944), XXII, No. 2, 47a.

day are not consistent in *aims or motives*; probably the same condition existed in earlier societies.<sup>9</sup>

We should attend first to the list of terms ostensibly referring to the same concept: purpose, function, motive, designed, secondary consideration, primary concern, aim. Through inspection, it becomes clear that *these terms group into quite distinct conceptual frames of reference*. At times, some of these terms—motive, design, aim and purpose—clearly refer to the *explicit ends-in-view of the representatives of the state*. Others—motive, secondary consideration—refer to the *ends-in-view of the victim of the crime*. And both of these sets of terms are alike in referring to the *subjective anticipations of the results of punishment*. But the concept of function involves the standpoint of *the observer*, not necessarily that of the participant. Social function refers to *observable objective consequences*, and not to *subjective dispositions* (aims, motives, purposes). And the failure to distinguish between the objective sociological consequences and the subjective dispositions inevitably leads to confusion of functional analysis, as can be seen from the following excerpt (in which the key terms are again italicized):

The extreme of unreality is attained in the discussion of the so-called "functions" of the family. The family, we hear, performs important *functions* in society; it provides for the perpetuation of the species and the training of the young; it performs economic and religious functions, and so on. Almost we are encouraged to believe that *people marry and have children because* they are eager to perform these needed societal functions. In fact, people marry *because* they are in love, or for other less romantic but no less personal reasons. The *function* of the family, *from the viewpoint of individuals*, is to satisfy their wishes. The *function* of the family or any other social institution is *merely what people use it for*. Social "*functions*" are mostly *rationalizations of established practices*; *we act first, explain afterwards; we act for personal reasons*, and justify our behavior by social and ethical *principles*. Insofar as these *functions* of institutions have any real basis, it must be stated in terms of the social processes in which people engage *in the attempt* to satisfy their wishes. Functions arise from the inter-action of concrete human beings and concrete *purposes*.<sup>10</sup>

This passage is an interesting medley of small islets of clarity in the midst of vast confusion. Whenever it mistakenly identifies (subjective) motives with (objective) functions, it abandons a lucid functional approach. For it need not be assumed, as we shall presently see, that the *motives* for entering into marriage ("love," "personal reasons") are identical with the *functions* served by families (socialization of the child). Again, it need not be assumed that the *reasons* advanced by people for their behavior ("*we act for personal reasons*") are one and

9. Edwin H. Sutherland, *Principles of Criminology*, third edition, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1939), 349-350.

10. Willard Waller, *The Family*, (New York: Cordon Company, 1938), 26.

the same as the observed consequences of these patterns of behavior. The subjective disposition may coincide with the objective consequence, but again, it may not. The two vary independently. When, however, it is said that people are motivated to engage in behavior which may give rise to (not necessarily intended) functions, there is offered escape from the troubled sea of confusion.<sup>11</sup>

This brief review of competing terminologies and their unfortunate consequences may be something of a guide to later efforts at codification of the concepts of functional analysis. There will plainly be occasion to limit the use of the sociological concept of function, and there will be need to distinguish clearly between subjective categories of disposition and objective categories of observed consequences. Else the substance of the functional orientation may become lost in a cloud of hazy definitions.

## PREVAILING POSTULATES IN FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Chiefly but not solely in anthropology, functional analysts have commonly adopted three interconnected postulates which, it will now be suggested, have proved to be debatable and unnecessary to the functional orientation.

Substantially, these postulates hold first, that standardized social activities or cultural items are functional for the *entire* social or cultural system; second, that *all* such social and cultural items fulfill sociological functions; and third, that these items are consequently *indispensable*. Although these three articles of faith are ordinarily seen only in one another's company, they had best be examined separately, since each gives rise to its own distinctive difficulties.

### *Postulate of the Functional Unity of Society*

It is Radcliffe-Brown who characteristically puts this postulate in explicit terms:

The function of a particular social usage is the contribution it makes to the *total social life* as the functioning of the *total social system*. Such a view implies that a social system (*the total social structure* of a society together with the totality of social usages, in which that structure appears and on which it depends for its continued existence) has a certain kind of unity, which we

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11. These two instances of confusion between motive and function are drawn from an easily available storehouse of additional materials of the same kind. Even Radcliffe-Brown, who ordinarily avoids this practice, occasionally fails to make the distinction. For example: "... the exchange of presents did not serve the same *purpose* as trade and barter in more developed communities. The *purpose* that it did serve is a moral one. The *object* of the exchange was to produce a friendly feeling between the two persons concerned, and unless it did this it failed of its *purpose*." Is the "object" of the transaction seen from the standpoint of the observer, the participant, or both? See A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1948), 84 [italics supplied].

may speak of as a functional unity. We may define it as a condition in which all parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, *i.e.*, without producing persistent conflicts which can neither be resolved nor regulated.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note, however, that he goes on to describe this notion of functional unity as a hypothesis which requires further test.

It would at first appear that Malinowski was questioning the empirical acceptability of this postulate when he notes that "the sociological school" (into which he thrusts Radcliffe-Brown) "exaggerated the social solidarity of primitive man" and "neglected the individual."<sup>13</sup> But it is soon apparent that Malinowski does not so much abandon this dubious assumption as he succeeds in adding another to it. He continues to speak of standardized practices and beliefs as functional "for culture as a whole," and goes on to assume that they are *also* functional for every member of the society. Thus, referring to primitive beliefs in the supernatural, he writes:

Here the functional view is put to its acid test. . . . It is bound to show in what way belief and ritual work for social integration, technical and economic efficiency, for *culture as a whole*—indirectly therefore for the biological and mental welfare of *each individual member*.<sup>14</sup>

If the one unqualified assumption is questionable, this twin assumption is doubly so. Whether cultural items do uniformly fulfill functions for the society viewed as a system and for all members of the society is presumably an empirical question of fact, rather than an axiom.

Kluckhohn evidently perceives the problem inasmuch as he extends the alternatives to include the possibility that cultural forms "are adaptive or adaptive . . . for the members of the society *or* for the society considered as a perduring unit."<sup>15</sup> This is a necessary first step in allowing for variation in the *unit* which is subserved by the imputed function. Compelled by the force of empirical observation, we shall have occasion to widen the range of variation in this unit even further.

It seems reasonably clear that the notion of functional unity is *not* a postulate beyond the reach of empirical test; quite the contrary. The

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12. Radcliffe-Brown, "On the concept of function," *op. cit.*, 397 [italics supplied].

13. See Malinowski, "Anthropology," *op. cit.*, 132 and "The group and the individual in functional analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, 1939, 44, 938-64, at 939.

14. Malinowski, "Anthropology," *op. cit.*, 135, Malinowski maintained this view, without essential change, in his later writings. Among these, consult, for example, "The group and the individual in functional analysis," *op. cit.*, at 962-3: ". . . we see that every institution contributes, on the one hand, toward the integral working of *the community as a whole*, but it also satisfies the derived and basic needs of the individual . . . everyone of the benefits just listed is enjoyed by *every individual member*." [italics supplied].

15. Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft*, 46b [italics supplied].



degree of integration is an empirical variable,<sup>16</sup> changing for the same society from time to time and differing among various societies. That all human societies must have *some* degree of integration is a matter of definition—and begs the question. But not all societies have that *high* degree of integration in which *every* culturally standardized activity or belief is functional for the society as a whole and uniformly functional for the people living in it. Radcliffe-Brown need in fact have looked no further than to his favored realm of analogy in order to suspect the adequacy of his assumption of functional unity. For we find significant variations in the degree of integration even among individual biological organisms, although the commonsense assumption would tell us that here, surely, all the parts of the organism work toward a “unified” end. Consider only this:

One can readily see that there are *highly integrated organisms* under close control of the nervous system or of hormones, the loss of any major part of which will strongly affect the whole system, and frequently will cause death, but, on the other hand, there are the lower *organisms much more loosely correlated*, where the loss of even a major part of the body causes only temporary inconvenience pending the regeneration of replacement tissues. Many of these more loosely organized animals are *so poorly integrated that different parts may be in active opposition to each other*. Thus, when an ordinary starfish is placed on its back, part of the arms may attempt to turn the animal in one direction, while others work to turn it in the opposite way. . . . On account of its *loose integration*, the sea anemone may move off and leave a portion of its foot clinging tightly to a rock, so that the animal suffers serious rupture.<sup>17</sup>

If this is true of single organisms, it would seem *a fortiori* the case with complex social systems.

One need not go far afield to show that the assumption of the complete functional unity of human society is repeatedly contrary to fact. Social usages or sentiments may be functional for some groups and dysfunctional for others in the same society. Anthropologists often cite “increased solidarity of the community” and “increased family pride” as instances of functionally adaptive sentiments. Yet, as Bateson<sup>18</sup> among others has indicated, an increase of pride among individual families may often serve to disrupt the solidarity of a small local community. Not only is the postulate of functional unity often contrary to fact, but it has little heuristic value, since it diverts the analyst’s attention from possible disparate consequences of a given social or cultural item (usage, belief,

16. It is the merit of Sorokin’s early review of theories of social integration that he did not lose sight of this important fact. Cf. P. A. Sorokin, “Forms and problems of culture-integration,” *Rural Sociology*, 1936, 1, 121-41; 344-74.

17. G. H. Parker, *The Elementary Nervous System*, quoted by W. C. Allee, *Animal Aggregation*, (University of Chicago Press, 1931), 81-82.

18. Gregory Bateson, *Naven*, (Cambridge [England] University Press, 1936), 31-32.

behavior pattern, institution) for diverse social groups and for the individual members of these groups.

If the body of observation and fact which negates the assumption of functional unity is as large and easily accessible as we have suggested, it is interesting to ask how it happens that Radcliffe-Brown and others who follow his lead have continued to abide by this assumption. A possible clue is provided by the fact that this conception, in its recent formulations, was developed by social *anthropologists*, that is, by men primarily concerned with the study of non-literate societies. In view of what Radin has described as "the highly integrated nature of the majority of aboriginal civilizations," this assumption may be tolerably suitable for some, if not all, non-literate societies. But one pays an excessive intellectual penalty for moving this possibly useful assumption from the realm of small non-literate societies to the realm of large, complex and highly differentiated literate societies. In no field, perhaps, do the dangers of such a transfer of assumption become more visible than in the functional analysis of religion. This deserves brief review, if only because it exhibits in bold relief the fallacies one falls heir to by sympathetically adopting this assumption without a thorough screening.

*The Functional Interpretation of Religion.* In examining the price paid for the transfer of this tacit assumption of functional unity from the field of relatively small and relatively tightknit non-literate groups to the field of more highly differentiated and perhaps more loosely integrated societies, it is useful to consider the work of sociologists, particularly of sociologists who are ordinarily sensitized to the assumptions on which they work. This has passing interest for its bearing on the more general question of seeking, without appropriate modification, to apply to the study of literate societies conceptions developed and matured in the study of non-literate societies. (Much the same question holds for the transfer of research procedures and techniques, but this is not at issue here.)

The large, spaceless and timeless generalizations about "the integrative functions of religion" are largely, though not of course wholly, derived from observations in non-literate societies. Not infrequently, the social scientist implicitly adopts the findings regarding such societies and goes on to expatiate upon the integrative functions of religion *generally*. From this, it is a short step to statements such as the following:

*The reason why religion is necessary* is apparently to be found in the fact that human society *achieves its unity* primarily through the possession by its members of certain ultimate values and ends in common. Although these values and ends are subjective, they influence behavior, and their integration enables this society to operate as a system.<sup>19</sup>

19. Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, "Some principles of stratification," *American Sociological Review*, April 1945, 10, 242-49, at 244. [italics supplied].

In an extremely advanced society built on scientific technology, the priesthood tends to lose status, because sacred tradition and supernaturalism drop into the background . . . [but] *No society* has become so completely secularized as to liquidate *entirely* the belief in transcendental ends and supernatural entities. Even in a secularized society *some system* must exist for the integration of ultimate values, for their ritualistic expression, and for the emotional adjustments required by disappointment, death, and disaster.<sup>20</sup>

Deriving from the Durkheim orientation which was based largely upon the study of non-literate societies, these authors tend to single out *only* the apparently integrative consequences of religion and to neglect its possibly disintegrative consequences *in certain types of social structure*. Yet consider the following very well-known facts and queries. (1) When different religions co-exist in the same society, there often occurs deep conflict between the several religious groups (consider only the enormous literature on inter-religious conflict in European societies). In what sense, then, does religion make for integration of "the" society in the numerous multi-religion societies? (2) It is clearly the case that "human society achieves its unity [insofar as it exhibits such unity] primarily through the possession by its members of certain ultimate values and ends in common." But what is the evidence indicating that "non-religious" people, say, in our own society less often subscribe to certain common "values and ends" than those devoted to religious doctrines? (3) In what sense does religion make for integration of the larger society, if the content of its doctrine and values is at odds with the content of other, non-religious values held by many people in the same society? (Consider, for example, the conflict between the opposition of the Catholic Church to child-labor legislation and the secular values of preventing "exploitation of youthful dependents." Or the contrasting evaluations of birth control by diverse religious groups in our society.)

This list of commonplace facts regarding the role of religion in contemporary literate societies could be greatly extended, and they are of course very well known to those functional anthropologists and sociologists who describe religion as integrative, without limiting the range of social structures in which this is indeed the case. It is at least conceivable that a theoretic orientation derived from research on non-literate societies has served to obscure otherwise conspicuous data on the functional role of religion in multi-religion societies. Perhaps it is the transfer of the assumption of functional unity which results in blotting out the entire history of religious wars, of the Inquisition (which drove a wedge into society after society), of internecine conflicts among religious groups. For the fact remains that all this abundantly known material is ignored in favor of illustrations drawn from the study of religion in non-literate society. And it is a further striking fact that the same paper, cited above,

20. *Ibid.*, 246. [italics supplied].

that goes on to speak of "religion, which provides integration in terms of sentiments, beliefs and rituals," does not make a single reference to the possibly divisive role of religion.

Such functional analyses may, of course, mean that religion provides integration of those who believe in the *same* religious values, but it is unlikely that this is meant, since it would merely assert that integration is provided by any consensus on any set of values.

Moreover, this again illustrates the danger of taking the assumption of functional unity, which *may* be a reasonable approximation for some non-literate societies, as part of an implicit model for *generalized* functional analysis. Typically, in non-literate societies, there is but one prevailing religious system so that, apart from individual deviants, the membership of the total society and the membership of the religious community are virtually co-extensive. Obviously, in this type of social structure, a common set of religious values may have as *one* of its consequences the reinforcement of common sentiments and of social integration. But this does not easily lend itself to defensible generalization about other types of society.

We shall have occasion to return to other theoretic implications of current functional analyses of religion but, for the moment, this may illustrate the dangers which one inherits in adopting the unqualified postulate of functional unity. This unity of the total society cannot be usefully posited in advance of observation. It is a question of fact, and not a matter of opinion. The theoretic framework of functional analysis must expressly require that there be *specification* of the *units* for which a given social or cultural item is functional. It must expressly allow for a given item having diverse consequences, functional and dysfunctional, for individuals, for subgroups, and for the more inclusive social structure and culture.

### *Postulate of Universal Functionalism*

Most succinctly, this postulate holds that all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions. As with other aspects of the functional conception, Malinowski advances this in its most extreme form:

The functional view of culture *insists* therefore upon the principle that in *every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some vital function*. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Although, as we have seen, Kluckhohn allows for variation in the unit subserved by a cultural form, he joins with Malinowski in postulating functional value for all surviving forms of culture. ("My basic postulate . . . is that *no* culture forms survive unless they constitute responses which

21. Malinowski, "Anthropology," *op. cit.*, 132 [The italics, though supplied, are perhaps superfluous in view of the forceful language of the original.]

are adjustive or adaptive, in some sense . . ."22) This universal functionalism may or may not be a heuristic postulate; that remains to be seen. But one should be prepared to find that it too diverts critical attention from a range of non-functional consequences of existing cultural forms.

In fact, when Kluckhohn seeks to illustrate his point by ascribing "functions" to seemingly functionless items, he falls back upon a type of function which would be found, *by definition* rather than by inquiry, served by all persisting items of culture. Thus, he suggests that

The at present mechanically useless buttons on the sleeve of a European man's suit subserve the "function" of preserving the familiar, of maintaining a tradition. People are, in general, more comfortable if they feel a continuity of behavior, if they feel themselves as following out the orthodox and socially approved forms of behavior.<sup>23</sup>

This would appear to represent the marginal case in which the imputation of function adds little or nothing to the direct description of the culture pattern or behavior form. It may well be assumed that all *established* elements of culture (which are loosely describable as 'tradition') have the minimum, though not exclusive, function of "preserving the familiar, of maintaining a tradition." This is equivalent to saying that the 'function' of conformity to *any* established practice is to enable the conformist to avoid the sanctions otherwise incurred by deviating from the established practice. This is no doubt true but hardly illuminating. It serves, however, to remind us that we shall want to explore the *types of functions* which the sociologist imputes. At the moment, it suggests the provisional assumption that, although any item of culture or social structure *may* have functions, it is premature to hold unequivocally that every such item *must* be functional.

The postulate of universal functionalism is of course the historical product of the fierce, barren and protracted controversy over "survivals" which raged among the anthropologists during the early part of the century. The notion of a social survival, that is, in the words of Rivers, of "a custom . . . [which] cannot be explained by its present utility but only becomes intelligible through its past history,"<sup>24</sup> dates back at least to Thucydides. But when the evolutionary theories of culture became prominent, the concept of survival seemed all the more strategically important for reconstructing "stages of development" of cultures, particularly for non-literate societies which possessed no written record. For

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22. Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft*, 46. [italics supplied].

23. *Ibid.*, 47.

24. W. H. R. Rivers, "Survival in sociology," *The Sociological Review*, 1913, 6, 293-305. See also E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, (New York, 1874), esp. I, 70-159; and for a more recent review of the matter, Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory*, 44 ff., 81 f. For a sensible and restrained account of the problem, see Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, Chapter 5, esp. at 91.

the functionalists who wished to turn away from what they regarded as the usually fragmentary and often conjectural "history" of non-literate societies, the attack on the notion of survival took on all the symbolism of an attack on the entire and intellectually repugnant system of evolutionary thought. In consequence, perhaps, they over-reacted against this concept central to evolutionary theory and advanced an equally exaggerated "postulate" to the effect that "every custom [everywhere] . . . fulfills some vital function."

It would seem a pity to allow the polemics of the anthropological forefathers to create splendid exaggerations in the present. Once discovered, ticketed and studied, social survivals cannot be exorcized by a postulate. And if no specimens of these survivals can be produced, then the quarrel dwindles of its own accord. It can be said, furthermore, that even when such survivals are identified in contemporary literate societies, they seem to add little to our understanding of human behavior or the dynamics of social change. Not requiring their dubious role as poor substitutes for recorded history, the sociologist of literate societies may neglect survivals with no apparent loss. But he need not be driven, by an archaic and irrelevant controversy, to adopt the unqualified postulate that all culture items fulfill vital functions. For this, too, is a problem for investigation, not a conclusion in advance of investigation. Far more useful as a directive for research would seem the provisional assumption that persisting cultural forms have a *net balance of functional consequences* either for the society considered as a unit or for subgroups sufficiently powerful to retain these forms intact, by means of direct coercion or indirect persuasion. This formulation at once avoids the tendency of functional analysis to concentrate on positive functions and directs the attention of the research worker to other types of consequences as well.

### *Postulate of Indispensability*

The last of this trio of postulates common among functional social scientists is, in some respects, the most ambiguous. The ambiguity becomes evident in the aforementioned manifesto by Malinowski to the effect that

in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some *vital* function, has some task to accomplish, represents an *indispensable part* within a working whole.<sup>25</sup>

From this passage, it is not at all clear whether he asserts the indispensability of the *function*, or of the *item* (custom, object, idea, belief) fulfilling the function, or *both*.

This ambiguity is quite common in the literature. Thus, the previously cited Davis and Moore account of the role of religion seems at

25. Malinowski, "Anthropology," *op. cit.*, 132 [italics supplied].