STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS
IN THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY :
A METHODOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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"Functionalism" is a familiar word in sociology. Its familiarity is however no guarantee of clarity about what it means or is supposed to represent. Is it really "the most promising of contemporary orientations to problems of sociological interpretation"; \(^1\) akin to "sociological analysis in general"; \(^2\) or does it "get in our way of understanding social phenomena" \(^3\) and "neglect important aspects of social reality"? \(^4\) The fact is that there are a large number of sociologists who are known as "functionalists"; who have produced a great amount of work that commands considerable attention. Why are they called functionalists? Is it because they share the same theory; or have a common conceptual scheme; or study the same phenomena? In short, what is "functionalism"?

The answer to this question will be the most important preoccupation of this study. The problem will be to evaluate "functionalism"; to inquire into its position in theoretical sociology; to ascertain the validity of some of the claims advanced by its proponents and to decide on the merits of the standards employed by those who reject it. But this inquiry into the status of "functionalism" has much wider implications. Sociology, like any discipline struggling for maturity, has a plethora of theoretical orientations, conceptual schemes and analytical paradigms. Most of these different approaches share equally impressive designatums with "functionalism" - e.g. Holism, Behaviourism, Ele-
mentarism, Cybernetic-approach, Organismic-approach, Conflict-approach, etc. Their proponents advance certain claims as to their fruitfulness for scientific inquiry, give suggestions for how they should be employed and often point out the shortcomings of other approaches as compared to their own.

The uninitiated or uncommitted sociologist is besieged by conflicting demands for his loyalty, by suggestions of how he should use his time in the best way and is faced with a decision-making dilemma, the outcome of which could have long-term effects on his career as a social scientist. On what basis can he decide? Once he has decided, how can he evaluate the merits of his approach?

These questions are particularly relevant to theoretical sociology. They can all be subsumed under a more general one, namely: How does one evaluate theoretical work in sociology? The answer will of course depend on what one's intentions are with sociology as an area of study. In other words, what kind of knowledge one is searching for, how one can go about attaining such knowledge and when one can be certain that one has such knowledge. If one assumes that sociology, because of the subject matter that it studies, should have a logic of explanation peculiar to itself, then the answers to these questions will differ from someone who views sociology as a special branch of empirical science. Should the latter position be adopted then the question is elevated to a more general level and would read as follows: What is science and how does one evaluate a scientific theory?
These preliminary questions all point to the necessity for one to be explicit about the basis on which a discussion is to be held. The unanimity which exists regarding the importance of a particular problem is very often undermined by an implicit disagreement on how it should be approached. The confusion which usually results is then due not so much to a lack of clarity on what constitutes the problem as to its significance.

As we have mentioned, the problem in this study is to evaluate "functionalism" in theoretical sociology. More specifically, aspects of the work of two theorists, R.K. Merton and T. Parsons, will be evaluated with regard to their respective contributions to this movement in sociology. These two theorists are commonly held to be the leading proponents of "functionalism" in this discipline. But the evaluation will be done in terms of a particular perspective, or, as will become clear, a particular methodological position. Formally defined, the purpose of this study therefore is to give a methodological evaluation of the position of "functionalism" in theoretical sociology through an analysis of some aspects of the work of R.K. Merton and T. Parsons.

The first chapter will be concerned with a discursive exposition of the methodological position adopted in this study. In it our view on science, scientific theory and sociology will become evident. Other positions, which differ from the adopted one, will be mentioned but not contested as the main intention is not a debate on methodology, but an analysis of theoretical
sociology.

Chapter II is in a sense an elaboration and application of the previous one. There is a proliferation of critical articles and publications in sociology. Two examples of contemporary critiques on "functionalism" will be discussed in this chapter. An evaluation will be made of the standards of criticism employed and their validity and fruitfulness will be judged in terms of our own position. The underlying question will be whether these standards and types of critique help us to understand the position of "functionalism" in sociology.

In Chapter III we begin with our analysis and evaluation of "functionalism". This will attempt to state explicitly what the methodological requirements of functional explanation entail. Furthermore, aspects of the work of Robert K. Merton will be reviewed with regard to his application of functional analysis.

The work of Talcott Parsons and the role that "functionalism" or "structural-functionalism" plays in it will be discussed in Chapter IV. As in the case of Merton, we shall attempt to determine what his conception of functional analysis is and how he employs it in theory construction.

Finally the study will be concluded with some general statements on sociological criticism, and a summary and evaluation of the position of "functionalism" in theoretical sociology evident in terms of the level of development of the work of the two abovementioned theorists.


CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF AN APPROACH

Par. 1  Introduction

In the present chapter our main concern is to formulate a reasonably coherent methodological position in terms of which our views on the nature of social science and scientific explanation can be made explicit. At the outset it must be stated quite clearly that our intention is not so much to argue for, or defend this position vis-a-vis others (such a task would fall within the scope of the philosophy of science), but rather to state in very general terms the main points of departure of this methodological position, and more specifically to explain some of the relatively uncontroversial distinctions within this position which are relevant for the evaluation of theoretical work in sociology.

A comprehensive exposition of the methodological position adopted in this study can be found in the works of Hempel, Nagel, Rudner, Braithwaite, Bergmann 1) and other philosophers of science with related interests. Even amongst these philosophers, who in general share the same outlook on the nature of science and scientific explanation, there are distinct differences concerning various aspects of methodological inquiry. The present writer is not competent nor of intention to resolve these differences, but will draw freely on the less controversial aspects of the methodological position represented by these philosophers so that some of the major current issues in theoretical sociology can be brought into sharper
focus. Rather than to view the present chapter as a systematic exposition of a particular methodological position, the reader would be well advised to accept the points of departure stated, and the distinction drawn as an operational frame of reference for the evaluation of the theoretical contributions to be studied in the following chapters.

Par. 2 The Meaning of Methodology

The term "methodology" is consistently employed with ambiguity by philosophers and social scientists. Some philosophers use it as a synonym for epistemology or the theory of knowledge. This usage usually coincides with the study of problems relating to the process of cognition, the relation between subject and object, between knowledge and that which is known. As Kaplan says:

This methodology deals with what can be said about science, or particular sciences, 'in principle' or 'in the last analysis'. Its problems arise either from its own reconstructed logic or from various philosophical positions, rather than from recurrent difficulties encountered in the course of scientific inquiry itself. 2)

Since therefore such "methodological" issues do not have an immediate relevance for the evaluation of scientific inquiry, social scientists mostly have only a general awareness of the implications of this form of methodological pre-occupation for their own disciplines.

Another conception of methodology which is prominent among sociologists, is that it has as its subject-matter the analysis of specific procedures used in a given science, or in particular contexts of inquiry within that science. McKinney's definition of methodology
as "the principles of organized investigation - the 'norms' by means of which procedures and techniques are selected and articulated" 3) could be interpreted in this way. McKinney stresses however that "most of its problems are common to a number of scientific disciplines, those of a more general character being common to all scientific procedure." 4) Nevertheless his emphasis on "procedures and techniques" may be misleading and result in too great a concern with a particular technique in a specific discipline. Should this happen, a real danger is that some such preferred set of techniques will come to be identified with scientific method as such. The fragmentation of sociology into different "schools" of thought and the acerbity of the exchanges between them very often result from an over-enthusiastic and sometimes premature propagation of a particular approach or technique of inquiry. As Kaplan comments: "Their internecine struggles bring into play the tactics of defensive incorporation and exclusion: 'everybody ought to work on' and 'nobody ought to'. In the end each goes his own way and goes alone." 5) Some of the well-known textbooks on theoretical sociology may unwittingly promote this division into academic interest-groups by the way in which they emphasize the differences between various approaches. 6)

There is of course a well-represented group of sociologists which has no patience with scientific methodology or methodological inquiries into the social sciences. Any such attempt is usually regarded by them as a step towards reduction of the social sciences to the procedures
and techniques of the natural sciences. Leaving aside the comprehensibility of this position, this writer feels that the arguments centering around such an accusation have been adequately documented in philosophical and disciplinary publications.\(^7\)

Methodology will be viewed in this analysis as that area of study which has as its primary aim inquiry into the logic of explanation inherent in scientific formulations. These formulations may be related to various aspects of theory-construction or research in any of the branches of science. The position adopted here is represented by Rudner adequately enough to quote him at some length on the function of methodology in relation to science in general and social science in particular:

The claim has often been made in the past that the social sciences are radically different from other sciences because their pursuit requires a 'methodology' radically different from that required in the pursuit of other sciences. Too frequently makers of this claim have done so out of a confusion between methodology and techniques - a confusion that has vitiated either the significance or the tenability of their claim.

It is of particular moment to notice that a claim about a difference in techniques between disciplines is much less fundamental than one about a difference in methodology. For example it has often been held - and quite correctly - that specific techniques of observation, or of experimentation, or experimental control that are applicable to phenomena of physics are inapplicable to phenomena of sociology. But it is clear that the methodological thesis about social phenomena amounts by no means to the trite, simple-minded assertion that sociologists cannot accelerate Cambridge dons in cyclotrons.

In general to become aware that various scientific disciplines employ differing techniques of investigation is not to become aware of anything significant about the nature of social science. It is not even obvious that techniques in social and non-social sciences differ from each other more than the techniques of the non-social sciences differ among themselves.

To claim that there is a difference in methodology between two disciplines or two types of disciplines,
by contrast, is to make a very radical claim. For the methodology of a scientific discipline is not a matter of its transient techniques, but of its logic of justification. The method of a science is, indeed, the rationale on which it bases its acceptance or rejection of hypotheses or theories. Accordingly, to hold that the social sciences are methodologically distinct from the non-social sciences is to hold not merely (or perhaps not at all) the banal view that the social sciences employ different techniques of inquiry, but rather the startling view that the social sciences require a different logic of inquiry. To hold such a view, moreover, is to deny that all of science is characterized by a common logic of justification in its acceptance or rejection of hypotheses or theories. 8)

To paraphrase the title of one of Sorokin's recent articles, 9) the diversity of sociology or any other scientific discipline lies in its many different theoretical approaches and techniques of inquiry into various problems, whereas the unity of sociology or any other discipline is not so much to be found in a terminological or theoretical convergence, 10) but in the common methodological court of appeal which they resort to in deciding upon good or bad theory, sound or unsound propositions, and competent or incompetent techniques of validation.

This does not imply that we would like to destroy all the differences between the various branches of science, nor that the functional autonomy of the working scientist is in any way threatened. In this respect it is important to keep in mind that the boundaries which exist between the different disciplines have historical origins based largely on the reigning interests of individuals or groups during different stages of intellectual development. As Bergman emphasizes:

The names of the several sciences refer to certain groupings or clusters within our scientific knowledge. Nothing is gained by arguing where the boundaries should be drawn or by trying to draw them as precisely as one may. 11)
It follows therefore that the designation of variables as "sociological", "psychological" or "anthropological" is one of expediency based on the simple fact that it is impossible for one person to study all things at the same time. It seems highly unlikely that there are inherent metaphysical or ontological differences between these variables.

Nor does this position imply that the "reduction of one discipline to another" is being advocated. The thesis of reductionism is one that has occurred with persistent regularity in social science literature. Very often it is used as an effective anathema to scare off other social scientists who seem to have an undue interest in a particular problem within one's own field, or, conversely, it is used as an excuse for a lack of interest in what goes on outside one's own field of interest. In fact, to state that "one discipline is being reduced to another" is to display an ignorance of the practical problems involved. As Nagel and others\(^{12}\) have demonstrated, only theories can be reduced and reduction entails "the explanation of a theory or a set of experimental laws established in one area of inquiry, by a theory usually though not invariably formulated for some other domain."\(^{13}\) Apart from the fact that we have as yet no confirmed theory or set of established laws of such generality in any of the social sciences that we can, on their possible reduction, say that a whole discipline has "disappeared", the process of reduction itself seems so embarrassingly free of implications for the usual philosophical arguments for or against it, that social scien-
tists would do well to reconsider the validity of such arguments in interdisciplinary disputes. For as Bergmann comments:

In the reduction debate they air, confusedly and confusingly, some of their own disagreements. What, then, do scientists disagree on? Some would rather experiment, some would rather theorize. Some prefer to work in one area, some in another. Such differences are not really disagreements. Real disagreements within science are, in principle, quite unproblematic. Whether or not a proposed law is true is decided by experiment; whether or not it follows from a certain theory is decided by paper and pencil. 15)

If methodology is seen as inquiry into the logic of explanation common to all the diverse branches of science, then it follows that not only must the competent methodologist have a sound knowledge of the structure and logic of scientific explanation in general, but he should also have authoritative knowledge of the substantive work being done in any specialized branch of science which he makes the object of his methodological inquiry.

Without underestimating the importance of the former requirement, the subsequent analysis aims at applying generally accepted methodological criteria to theoretical sociology for the purpose of evaluating the merits of one particular approach, "functionalism" or "structural-functionalism". It is hoped that such an analysis will contribute to the eventual resolution of some of the cloudy and sometimes unnecessarily controversial issues which have been plaguing theoretical work in sociology.

Now that a general indication of the function of methodology in relation to science has been given, a more
specific demarcation of this area of study would entail the following. Nagel divides the area of study into three principle parts:

The first division is addressed to problems dealing primarily with the nature of scientific explanations: with their logical structures, their mutual relations, their functions in inquiry, and their devices for systematizing knowledge. The second division concentrates on questions concerned with the logical structure of scientific concepts: with their articulation by way of diverse techniques of definition and measurement, their linkages to data of observation and the conditions under which they are scientifically meaningful. The third division is directed to problems dealing with the evaluation of claims to knowledge in various sciences: with the structure of probable inference, the principles employed in weighing evidence, and the validation of inductive arguments. 16)

At the risk of oversimplification we can therefore say that methodology has to do with the logic of theory construction, concept formation and validation in science. These three aspects of methodological inquiry are so all-inclusive that it very seldom occurs that more than one of them receives comprehensive treatment in one publication. In this study, general aspects which fall within all three of the areas of methodology mentioned will be touched upon in our analysis of theoretical work in sociology. This will be done without necessarily relating them systematically to each other, but their separate implications for theoretical sociology will be stated as fully as possible.

Par. 3 Some General Methodological Principles

The above description of the functions and field of methodology implies a certain perspective on science as a human activity. In order that there should be no confusion about the way in which the words "science"
and "scientific explanation" are employed in this study, some of the most general points of departure of the methodological position adopted here may be stated and discussed in the following way:

a) The aim of science is the systematic accumulation of knowledge so that the occurrence of phenomena can be described, predicted and explained.

Not all sociologists subscribe to this conception of the aim of science: D.H. Wrong,\(^1\) who identifies his own with C.W. Mills's\(^2\) position, explicitly attacks it and warns that the sociologist can never afford to lose a "sense of significance" that his theory must be "problem conscious" and concern itself with questions "arising out of problems that are inherent in the very existence of human societies".\(^3\) Mills himself states that his "conception of social science stands opposed to social science as a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by 'methodological' pretensions, which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions, or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues".\(^4\) Apart from raising the thorny question of deciding which issues are publicly relevant, this position seems to imply that every sociologist who fancies himself as a social critic has the prerogative of deciding how he wishes to present his criticism of publicly relevant issues. This is not quite true, however, for what is denied in principle, (methodological pretensions), is very often applied in practice when these sociologists have to decide on the validity and significance of empirical data employed in their criticisms. It is of course true that
an excessive preoccupation with methodological problems may have a stultifying effect on actual theorizing and research, but such an occurrence does not seem to warrant a denial of an articulate methodological position in general. To reflect on how to do something is certainly no alternative to the actual doing, but at least it indicates an awareness of what is being done while it is being done. The social scientist, like any other scientist, gives descriptions and explanations, and sometimes predicts the behaviour, of the phenomena which he studies, and at some stage of this activity he must be prepared to account for the cognitive status of his formulations. It is at this stage that the reflective scientist becomes aware that the claims which he makes for the acceptance of his intellectual activity are the same as those made by other scientists, and that these standards, the logical consistency of his arguments and the empirical adequacy of the propositions and hypotheses included therein, are generic to the cognitive process which has become known as "science". It is these generic features of science that give any particular branch of it, its distinctive and unbroken character. In this connection Braithwaite formulates:

The history of a science is the history of the development of scientific systems from those containing so few generalizations and these so flimsily established that one might well hesitate to call them systems at all, into imposing structures with a hierarchy of hypotheses. This development takes place by the establishment of some of the original hypotheses, by the replacement of others by better hypotheses, and by the construction of higher-level hypotheses under which the lower-level hypotheses can be subsumed. 21)

One interpretation of this statement could be that there is a certain continuity in a scientific discipline. Some
explanations are accepted and others are rejected. Those that are accepted are incorporated into new perspectives and are applied to old and new problems in the field. It seems highly improbable that scientists decide in an intuitive way which explanations or predictions are acceptable or unacceptable. Even the social scientist who has a deep concern for the resolution of pressing social problems has to be aware of the cogency of his arguments and the validity of the generalizations he makes in discussing these problems. His concern for them can surely not be a guarantee of his lucidity in explaining them. This brings us to the second general point of departure.

b) The same logical canons are applicable in the determination of the significance of formulations and explanations within any specialized field of science

The terms 'empirical science' and 'scientific explanation' will here be understood to refer to the entire field of empirical inquiry, including the natural and the social sciences as well as historical research. This broad use of the two terms is not intended to preclude the question of the logical and methodological similarities and differences between different areas of empirical inquiry, except for indicating that the procedures used in those different areas will be taken to conform to certain basic standards of objectivity. 22)

A great deal of controversy and confusion has existed among social scientists as to the tenability of this standpoint. Most of the objections against it centered around arguments related to the "complexity" of behavioral phenomena, the uniqueness of individual action, the necessity for radically different techniques and procedures of inquiry for the social sciences, the inevitability of value-biased explanation in the social sciences, etc. 23) Today, as McKinney 24) has pointed out, most of
these controversies have died down and an uneasy truce has been declared between the polarized factions. This has also been aided by the sympathetic yet critical attention given to these methodological problems by professional methodologists. It is true as well that the relevance of these issues has diminished considerably as a result of developments within the philosophy of science itself. One of these developments concerns the next characteristic point of departure of the methodological position assumed in this study.

c) The most general criterion for the significance of scientific statements is that their refutation or confirmation is dependent on empirically observable evidence.

Whereas there has been a reasonably enduring consensus among scientists on the necessity of an experiential basis for their knowledge claims, they have differed quite considerably on the specific criteria for the admissibility of formulations and theoretical constructs within scientific discourse. These differences have been variations in position on a continuum of greater and less restriction.

The more restrictive position advocated the confinement of scientific concepts and theoretical constructs to a technical level. This orientation was given an explicit formulation by D.W. Bridgeman and became known as "operationism". Some of its basic tenets are summarised by Hempel as follows:

1. To understand the meaning of a term, we must know the operational criteria for its application and every meaningful scientific term must therefore permit of an operational definition.

2. To avoid ambiguity, every scientific term should be defined by means of one unique operational criterion.
3. The insistence that scientific terms should have unambiguously specifiable operational meanings serves to insinuate the possibility of an objective test for the hypotheses formulated by means of those terms. Hypotheses incapable of operational test or, rather, questions involving untestable formulations, are rejected as meaningless.

Operationism was introduced at a time when, as Bergmann puts it, there was a lot of "fuzzymindedness" \(^{26}\) in the social sciences. The result was a more or less general swing to behaviourism. Although the original intention of operationism was praiseworthy insofar as it wished to rid science of metaphysical speculation and abstract philosophical presuppositions, it engendered a great deal of confusion in scientific work and led to the temporary abandonment of many valid scientific problems. Bergmann cites an example of extreme operationism when "some (scientists) refused, presumably on operationist principles, to 'generalize' from one instance of an experiment to the next if the apparatus had in the meantime been moved to another corner of the room or if the experimenter had, in the one case but not in the other, blown his nose. To see through this error one must grasp two important ideas. For one thing there is no such thing as an exhaustive description. For another, there are no rules that lead automatically to the discovery of relevant variables.\(^{27}\) These last two points - the unattainability of exhaustive description of phenomena and the absence of hard and fast rules for finding relevant variables - have been demonstrated and elaborated by Hempel in his logical appraisal of operationism.\(^{28}\) In the following extract one of the noteworthy contradictions inherent in the operationist position is pointed out by him:
Thus an operational definition of the simplest kind— one that, roughly speaking, refers to instrumental operations only— will have to be construed more broadly as introducing a term by stipulation that it is to apply to all and only those cases which, under specified observable conditions S, show a characteristic observable response R.

However, an operational definition cannot be conceived as specifying that the term in question is to apply to a given case only if S and R actually occur in that case. Physical bodies, for example, are asserted to have masses, temperatures, charges and so on even at times when these magnitudes are not being measured. Hence an operational definition of a concept will have to be understood as ascribing the concept to all those cases that would exhibit the characteristic response if these test conditions should be realized. A concept thus characterized is clearly not 'synonymous with the corresponding set of operations.' It constitutes not a manifest but a potential character, namely, a disposition to exhibit a certain characteristic response under specified test conditions.

But to attribute a disposition of this kind to a case in which the specified test conditions are not realized, (for example to attribute solubility-in-water to a lump of sugar that is not actually put into water) is to make a generalization, and this involves an inductive risk. Thus, the application of an operationally defined term of the kind here considered, would have to be adjudged 'not safe' in precisely the same sense in which Bridgeman insists it is 'not safe' to assume that two procedures of measurement that have yielded the same results in the past will continue to do so in the future. 29)

Most of the critiques directed against operationism were concerned with problems of the relation between the theoretical and observational terms of a scientific theory.

In general the critiques can be summarised by saying that there are some concepts in scientific theories which cannot be defined in the way indicated by operationism, but which nevertheless function quite adequately in the deductive explanations and predictions of scientific theories. The successful attempts by methodologists to "liberalise" the restrictive criteria entailed in the operationist position for the introduction of concepts and formulations into scientific theories, are thus both a
plea for tolerance for what Hempel calls the "theoreti-
cian's dilemma", and a demonstration of certain mis-
conceptions concerning the structure of scientific ex-
planation.

A second position which differs from operationism in the
degree of restriction placed on statements accepted in
science, has to do with the limiting of statements with-
in the logical boundaries of certain postulates which
are held to be generic to the accepted laws of science.
Thus McEwen distinguishes five basic epistemological pos-
tulates - "reality", "probability", "system", "causality"
and "coherence" - and states that "without these five
assumptions as principles of objective reference, the
ideas which scientists formulate about the physical and
behavioural world would be nothing more than subjective
constructs." With them, however, the scientist
"can construct reliable hypotheses about that dimension
of reality with which he is concerned, in terms of a co-
herent system of generalizations which have causal impli-
cations that can be verified to various degrees of proba-
ability." It is not quite clear on what authority
McEwen bases such a generalization. On the face of it
he would seem to make an inductive inference of what
scientists have done in the past and then to uphold his
conclusions as the "articles of faith which sustain the
enterprise of persisting inquiry." On an operative
level, for example, this position would accept all state-
ments or hypotheses as scientifically testable and ac-
ceptable if they are formulated in causal or probabilis-
tic terms. This position is less restrictive than ope-
Rationism insofar as all statements which conform to the accepted laws of science are in principle acceptable without the necessity of having the means available to confirm them. Nevertheless the "basic postulates of science" position has been discredited by methodologists as leading to fruitless controversies and needless confusion. Feigl states quite bluntly that the scientific method can be explicated without metaphysical presuppositions about the order or structure of nature and cites the following evidence:

The discovery of the non-Euclidean geometries more than a hundred years ago, and especially their utilization in present day physical and astronomical theories, shattered the rationalistic and absolutistic conceptions of time and space. The electrodynamics, quantum and wave-mechanical theories of matter have transformed the time-honored idea of substance beyond recognition, if they had not indeed made it completely obsolete. In this connection the ancient dogma of continuity, one of Leibniz' basic truths of pure reason, had to give way to the conception of the discontinuous interaction between matter and radiation. Connected with the transition to discontinuity was the even more fundamental critique of the deterministic conception of causality ... Indeed, one would wish to know what the rationalists have to say on the geometrical relation of electric and magnetic field vectors, for this basic asymmetry in our universe should certainly shatter anyone's faith in apriori discernable laws of nature. 34)

He concludes that:

Any proposed assertion concerning the order and structure of our universe, no matter how fundamental its role or pervasive its scope, must be regarded as tentative and may be held only until further notice; such notice being given by data of experience which may conceivably motivate us to modify, if not abandon, the assumption at issue. In other words, any assertion regarding nature, if it is to be scientifically meaningful, must in principle be confirmable or disconfirmable. 35)

The upshot of the argument concerning the "basic postulates of science" position seems to be that the error of its proponents lies in the sufficient and consequently
limiting nature which they ascribe to these postulates, rather than in their validity in scientific theorizing. It is quite true that the principle of causality, for example, plays a prominent part in a great number of scientific explanations but as Nagel\(^{36}\) and Braithwaite\(^{37}\) among others, have demonstrated, causal laws are only one type of explanation within science. Consequently, to state that only those statements which are formulated causally are scientifically admissible is not only to place an unnecessary limitation on the work of theorists, but is also contrary to what is actually being done in science.

The argument thus far has been that: (a) there has been unbroken consensus among scientists that their statements should in principle be refuted or confirmed by empirically observable evidence; (b) that various criteria, differing in their restrictive quality, have been proposed on the basis of which statements and concepts can be accepted as scientifically significant or not.

The two positions so far mentioned, "operationism" and what we call the "basic postulates of science" position, have been found inadequate by philosophers of science with regard to such criteria on two general grounds: (i) they are too restrictive for theory construction; and (ii) they do not give a valid reflection of what is being done in science. Their defence has been found to be both logically false and inductively erroneous.

The present position regarding criteria of significance for scientific formulations is to abstain from giving any specific standards for dichotomizing statements into the
significant and the insignificant. As Hempel puts it:

Experiential significance presents itself as capable of degrees, and any attempt to set up a dichotomy allowing only experientially meaningful and experientially meaningless concept systems appears as too crude to be adequate for a logical analysis of scientific concepts and theories. 38)

Accordingly a sentence makes a cognitively significant assertion

... if, and only if, (i) it is analytic or contradictory - in which case it is said to have a purely logical meaning or significance - or (ii) it is capable, at least potentially, of test by experiential evidence - in which case it is said to have empirical meaning or significance. 39)

The more "liberal" outlook of this position is informally commented on by Ogles thus:

It is sometimes said that under this view anything which is 'conceivable' is permissible. For example, a world in which 'an irresistible force encounters an immovable object' is not allowed, because when one understands the meaning of the terms being used, the statement presents a logical contradiction. But statements about personal identity apart from a physical body, which are highly unlikely according to present knowledge on such matters, are acceptable under this criterion. 40)

Rather than supply some alternative to the criteria mentioned earlier, methodologists have come to appreciate that the cognitive significance of formulations and concepts within scientific systems, and their experiential import, are matters of degree. Hempel suggests that the following outlook on criteria of significance would be more promising for the resolution of issues that develop around them:

Significant systems range from those whose entire extralogical vocabulary consists of observation terms, through theories whose formulation relies heavily on theoretical constructs, on to systems with hardly any bearing on potential empirical findings. Instead of dichotomizing this array into significant and non-significant systems, it would seem less arbitrary and more promising to appraise or compare different theoretical systems in regard to such characteristics as these:-
(a) the clarity and precision with which theories are formulated, and with which the logical relationships of their elements to each other and to expressions couched in observational terms have been made explicit;

(b) the systematic, i.e. explanatory and predictive, power of the systems in regard to observable phenomena;

(c) the formal simplicity of the theoretical system with which a certain systematic power is attained;

(d) the extent to which the theories have been confirmed by experiential evidence. 41)

The importance of this view cannot be overestimated for the social sciences. The social scientist has often been intimidated by the vast technical competence displayed by their colleagues in the natural sciences. This has not only led to apologetic attitudes in the proposition of new theoretical orientations or explicating research findings, but in some cases strengthened the belief that the subject-matter of the social sciences is ultimately incapable of scientific explanation. Recent developments within the philosophy of science have however demonstrated that this attitude is unnecessary and the belief logically false. This in no way implies that the technical lag of the social sciences is not an impediment to the construction of impressive explanatory systems. It does however signify that technical expertise may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for explaining some social phenomena. If we accept Hempel's suggestions as cogent, then logically there are no barriers to the scientific explanation of social phenomena.

In view of the foregoing paragraphs, this point does not
need much elaboration. To a certain extent it is an extension of the aforementioned argument employed by Peigl regarding the "basic postulates of science" position. Here it is relevant to the lower-level assumptions and hypotheses functioning in scientific systems. There is no such thing as an irrefutable scientific statement and those who claim scientific justification for their ideological and valuational preferences do it with a disregard for the conditional nature of scientific knowledge. Rudner remarks:

Empirical inquiry is, logically, not the kind of inquiry that can be undertaken in a manner to make error impossible. Next among the various methodologies advocated in the course of intellectual history for the investigation of the universe, none has been shown to be more reliable than the method of science. This is due in part to science's insistence on corrigibility - the insistence that any hypothesis, however well confirmed, may be susceptible to disconfirmation in the light of future investigation. The books, so to speak, are never closed on any hypothesis in the precise sense that evidence relevant to the confirmation or disconfirmation of it can never be exhausted. 42)

This point is primarily applicable to verified knowledge claims but it is relevant also for social theorists who have an unnecessary dogmatism in their advocacy of certain theoretical orientations or programmes for theory construction. We will return to this point later on.

The necessity for this brief introduction to the methodological position assumed in this study was justified by two general considerations. In the first place the writer's critical frame of reference can easily be identified and thus facilitates criticism. The necessity for methodological explicitness in the various debates taking place in sociology cannot be overemphasized. Secondly,
such an introduction can help to keep consistent the arguments employed when evaluating theoretical work in sociology. It is hoped that arbitrary judgments and uncritical assertions will be limited in this way.

Par. 4 Relevant Definitions and Distinctions
The main points of departure discussed in the preceding paragraphs enable us to proceed with explicating certain well-known distinctions made within this methodological position. They will form the general critical background for the analysis of theoretical problems in the following chapters.

a) The Contexts of Discovery and Justification
For the purpose of evaluating examples of scientific explanation in any discipline two broadly distinguishable contexts can be utilized. The first concerns the actual process of inquiry itself: the way in which scientists develop certain insights, come upon certain hypotheses, discover new problems to be studied, suggest programmes for the analysis of certain problems etc. This area of activity is known as the context of discovery. The other concerns the evaluation of the results of a completed process of inquiry. Questions are directed at the way in which the theory or explanation is formulated, the consistency of the deductive pattern of explanation, the degree of confirmation for generalizations, and so on. This area of activity is known as the context of justification.

The decisive difference between these areas is that the last - the context of justification - consists in fixed
standards for the evaluation of scientific work; that is, comprises the full range of methodological expertise at any particular moment in the history of science. The other - the context of discovery - has in contrast no such systematic prescriptions for the attainment of well-constructed theories and explanations. With regard to the context of discovery Ogles remarks that:

It is simply not known how important and significant ideas arise. The context of discovery is dependent on a well-developed sociology of knowledge or psychology of discovery or both. 43)

Although the precise demarcation of these two contexts may present certain problems, the distinction is pragmatically fruitful and leads to two important conclusions. First, that no degree of methodological sophistication guarantees automatic or speedier discovery of new theories or explanations. It can never be an alternative to the originality of the constructive theorist. Second, that the context of discovery is dominated by the creativity of the scientist for which there exist no hard and fast empirical or logical rules of manipulation.

This last conclusion is thus emphasized by Ogles with regard to the social sciences:

The controversy between the sociologist who advises that one get into the raw data of research in order to develop significant theory and the more armchair inclined sociologist, is clearly concerned with the context of discovery, at least on many important points. The above discussion implies that neither view has enough evidence to support its position as a procedural canon. On rational grounds one should not decide for either view, or, perhaps better, if one does decide one way or the other, then he should realize that he is making a volitional decision rather than a rational conclusion. 44)

Rudner, who finds it necessary to make this distinction explicit in his introductory textbook on the philosophy
of social science, warns that it is often as a result of a confusion concerning the activities related to these two contexts, that the view that the social sciences are methodologically distinct from the natural sciences has been propagated.

What should be clear is that an argument about the method of social science, (i.e. one that falls into the context of validation), must be incapable of being supported by any examples purporting to show that there are greater difficulties in latching on to theories or hypotheses in the social sciences, or that some social phenomenon or other is relatively inaccessible to observation or experiment. Nevertheless, the lure of just such examples has apparently often been too seductive to resist. 45)

The usefulness of this distinction will be demonstrated later on when we consider various points of departure, programmes for theory construction, suggestions for analysis, and so forth, in sociology, and the reasons given by their proponents for their acceptance.

b) Scientific Theory

A scientific theory is a systematically related set of statements, including some law-like generalizations, that is empirically testable. This is a deceptively simple definition and one not quite foreign to sociologists. In order to analyse it properly, however, it would be necessary to explain what is meant by such locutions as "systematically related", "law-like generalizations" and "empirically testable". Problems pertaining to this last were very briefly alluded to in the discussion of criteria of significance for scientific formulations. Without elaborating on the implications of "law-like generalizations" we can very briefly and in an informal and discursive way give attention to what is implied by
the phrase "systematically related".

Most methodologists divide the language of science into at least two parts, in order to indicate the exact conditions which terms and sentences of this language must fulfill in order to explain and predict observable events. They distinguish between observational language, which contains terms designating observable properties of events (e.g. hot, blue, large), or observable relations between them (e.g. X is larger than Y), and theoretical language, containing terms which may refer to unobservable aspects or features of events, e.g. "electron", "superego", "institutionalized structure".

It is possible under suitable circumstances, to decide by means of direct observation whether an observational term does or does not apply to a given situation. Observation may here be construed so broadly as to include not only perception, but also sensation and introspection; or it may be limited to the perception of what is in principle publicly ascertainable.46) The necessity for the introduction of theoretical terms is, according to Hempel, that "the assumption of unobservable entities serves the purposes of systematization; it provides connections among observables in the form of laws containing theoretical terms, and this detour via the domain of hypothetical entities offers certain advantages." 47) The example he cites demonstrates how a sentence consisting of observables, "Wood floats on water; iron sinks in it", can be subsumed under a law containing theoretical terms, such as "A solid body floats on a liquid if its specific gravity is less than that of the liquid."
One of the theses of operationism mentioned earlier is that the language of science should be limited to observational vocabulary. Hempel and Nagel, among others, have demonstrated, however, that non-observational (i.e. theoretical) terms can be related to observational terms by specifying the rules of correspondence between them. The correspondence rules give observational import to theoretical terms by stating in what way they are related to observational terms. It is important to keep in mind that, depending on the nature of the inquiry, the same theoretical term may be linked variously with different observational terms. Thus Nagel states:

The ways in which theoretical notions are related to observational procedures are often quite complex, and there appears to be no single schema which represents all of them.

Furthermore, not all the theoretical terms of a theory need be related to observational terms by means of correspondence rules. Theoretical terms can be related to each other deductively in a descending order of abstraction so that the lower-level theoretical formulations of a deductive network may be related to the observational level by means of correspondence rules. It is, however, necessary that any theoretical formulation which purports to have experiential import should be connected in this way to observational vocabulary. It is in this sense that Hempel says a scientific theory may be likened to a complex spatial network:

Its terms are represented by knots, while the threads connecting the latter correspond, in part, to the definitions and in part, to the fundamental and derivative hypotheses included in the theory. The whole system floats, as it were, above the plane of obser-
vation and is anchored to it by rules of interpretation. These might be viewed as strings which are not part of the network but link certain points of the latter with specific places in the plane of observation. By virtue of those interpretative connections, the network can function as a scientific theory. From certain observational data, we may ascend, via an interpretative string, to some point in the theoretical network, thence proceed, via definitions and hypotheses, to other points, from which another interpretative string permits a descent to the plane of observation. 51)

If the preceding distinctions are brought to bear on a scientific theory, then we may describe it somewhat formally as consisting of the following: primitive or undefined terms which may be theoretical and/or observational in nature; a finite number of postulates formulated in the theoretical language; the conjunction of these postulates; rules of inference and the rules which connect some of the theoretical terms with the observation terms, i.e. correspondence rules. Before the correspondence rules are given; theoretical language, with the set of postulates and rules of deduction, is an uninterpreted calculus. When the correspondence rules are added, certain sentences of the theoretical language may be derived from certain sentences of the observational language, or vice versa. Thus Nagel summarizes the logical structure of a theory by distinguishing these three basic components:

(i) An abstract calculus that is the logical skeleton of the explanatory system, and that implicitly defines the basic notions of the system; (ii) a set of rules that in effect assign an empirical content to the abstract calculus by relating it to the concrete materials of observation and experiment; and (iii) an interpretation or model for the abstract calculus, which supplies some flesh for the skeletal structure in terms of more or less familiar conceptual or visualizable materials. 52)

The above discussion must in no way be seen as an account of the actual process of theory construction. It seems
highly unlikely that any theorist, on being confronted with a particular problem, would first ask himself which observational and theoretical terms, rules of correspondence, number of postulates etc. would suffice for the explanation of the problem. Problems just do not present themselves in such an orderly and systematic way; for in the context of discovery, the theorist may have to retrace his steps, introduce new concepts and postulates and abandon old insights a great number of times before he is satisfied with his explanation. What the above discursive exposition does, however, imply, is that once a theory has been constructed and is being evaluated, i.e. falls into the context of justification, it is supposed to reveal a characteristic logical structure for which a great number of intellectual tools are available for the judgment of its merit.

Furthermore, it should be clear that the term "theory" is one that is applied with caution to any system of explanation. In this regard Rudner remarks that:

In practice, to be sure, only a few theories achieve full formulation, (i.e. are formulated as completely articulated deductive systems), and, indeed, there are reasons that cast doubt on whether attempts at full formulation need always be good strategy, particularly in those sciences where our knowledge is relatively tentative and restricted and where our uncertainty about the precise meaning and 'centrality' of frequently used concepts is marked. The overwhelming majority of extant scientific theories, especially theories in the social science, are not at present susceptible of fruitful or easy full formulation. 53)

This somewhat lengthy but yet incomplete discussion on theory has been deemed necessary for the following reasons:
First, the term "theory" has been vulgarized in social science literature to such an extent that a great deal of confusion exists as to what exactly constitutes a theory. The term has been used synonymously with terms such as "model", "typology" and "analytical scheme", and although the theorists using such locutions may have the intention of constructing theories, they can only be judged as such after they have been constructed. In this study, therefore, the term "theory" will be used with an even puristic methodological precision as referring to a systematically related set of statements, including law-like generalizations, which is empirically testable.

Secondly, if it is true, as Rudner and other methodologists claim, that in the social sciences we do not at present have a system of explanation of such scope and articulation that we can call it a theory, then it follows that it would be inappropriate and premature to apply the methodological criteria relevant for the evaluation of a well-formulated theory to such theoretical efforts as do exist in the social sciences. The alacrity with which theorists are acclaimed or discredited in sociology would seem to contradict this assertion, but on reflection it usually becomes clear that a decision to support, for instance, "consensus theory" rather than "conflict theory" or some other variant, rests on considerations which are mostly not methodological in character. One of the important problems to be stressed in this study is that at present there are relatively few and very often inadequate standards for evaluating the fruitfulness of theoretical orientations or programmes for theory in sociology.
c) Programmatic Theory

If we do not have theories in the social sciences then what are the different sets of formulations that exist to be known by? Rudner seems to be rather explicit on this point:

A striking feature of the literature of social science is that it is copiously salted with non-theoretic formulations. They occur under a dizzying variety of names: 'typology', 'typological schema', 'conceptual model', 'classificational system', 'definitional system' and many others. This variety seems to have proliferated wondrously, but in almost complete absence of any uniformity of usage. Nevertheless the formulations so bewilderingly named are of only a relatively limited number of structural types. 54)

Rudner distinguishes two types of formulation in the social sciences, definitional schemata and analytical conceptual schemata. All other forms of formulation, according to him, conform to the logical structure of these and are variants of them.

Definitional schemata consist of two sets of linguistic entities: a set of predicates and a set of definitions referring to those predicates. The adequacy of a definitional system is usually judged by the degree in which the definitional rules systematize the concepts and the power or scope of application of the system. 55)

An analytical conceptual schema contains a definitional system as a subpart or component. What it includes over and above its system of definitions is a set of analytic or logically true or truistic sentences. These are truistic in the sense that their truth is established not by reference to any empirical evidence, but rather merely by recourse to the definitions of the system. Each statement in an analytical conceptual schema is truistic on
the basis of some definitions of the system, or else is a logical consequence of some set of such truistic statements. Any logical consequence of a set of analytic statements is analytic. 56)

Definitional schemata contain no logically true or false sentences. Analytical schemata contain no empirical assertions. Both, according to Rudner,

... though themselves non-theoretic constructions in social science, are, nevertheless, presumably destined for ultimate inclusion within some social science theory. With respect to the context of validation or justification in science, their function within theories will be to assist deductive elaboration - and hence to assist in effecting the confirmation or disconfirmation of the theories of which they come to form a part.

However, he goes on to add that

At relatively early stages of theorizing, in advance of the formulation of significantly developed theory, non-theoretic constructions, existing autonomously, also appear to play an important, but entirely heuristic role - one which belongs, broadly speaking, to the context of discovery. In this context their significant use is that of suggesting hypotheses for test and inclusion in theories. 57)

The significant point is that if analytical schemata include no statements containing empirical references, how do they suggest hypotheses for empirical test? The answer would seem to be that some formulations in social science, though primarily definitional or analytical in character, do contain statements which are not just of a definitional or analytical nature but do have empirical reference. Just as the working theorist would not present us with the methodological structure of his theory before it is completed, it seems equally unlikely that he would first present us with a pure definitional or analytical system that is to be included in an eventual theory.
When working on the explanation of a particular problem, he may use elements of a definitional system, some truismatic statements forming part of an analytical scheme and very often a number of vaguely and sometimes intuitively related hypotheses that are in principle capable of empirical test. Should we, at this particular stage, demand of the theorist that he give us a reasonably systematic exposition of his work, it would be identical neither to a pure definitional nor to an analytical scheme. It would rather resemble a particular programme for the construction of a theory. It is in this sense that the locution "programmatic theory" will be employed in this study. The term "programmatic theory" will refer to any particular programme for the construction of a theory consisting of definitional and analytical elements as well as some statements that are empirically testable. The utility of this term will be demonstrated when we have to distinguish between programmatic suggestions (context of discovery) and methodological criteria (context of justification).

d) Analytic and Synthetic Statements

This distinction is implicit in the preceding paragraphs, but it is necessary to state it more explicitly here. It is a well-known, though not uncontroversial,\(^{58}\) one in the philosophy of science. Bergmann elucidates this distinction in the following way:

Consider the two sentences 'It is raining' and 'Either it is raining or it is not raining'. Both may be true; but the first only because certain facts are what they are; the second is true whatever the facts may be. Nor is this surprising. The first sentence says something; the second does, in a sense, not say anything. If one knows what the first means, he must still 'look' before he can know which of the two, true
or false, it is. Whoever understands the second knows without looking that it is true. The first sentence occurs, with the proper specifications of time and place in weather reports; the second does not. ... Sentences of the first kind, those that 'say something', are called synthetic; the others analytic. A true analytic sentence is called a tautology; a false one, a contradiction. 59)

To state this briefly: if empirical evidence is needed to establish the validity of a statement, the statement is synthetic; if the statement is true regardless of empirical evidence, then it is analytic. The latter type of statement is also called "true by definition", "logically true", "a formal truth" and so on. In empirical science therefore synthetic statements can only have cognitive significance in an aposteriori way, i.e. after empirical evidence has been established for its validity. Analytic statements on the other hand refer to apriori truths. When sentences are used in a synthetically apriori fashion we have an anomaly in science, that is, events are used as self-evident truths before their validity has been established.

These methodological principles, definitions and distinctions suffice to give an indication of what the nature of our basic critical framework is in terms of which "functionalism" will be evaluated. Others may be supplied as the analysis proceeds but they will be easily identifiable as having the same methodological tenor as the position explicated in this chapter.

The necessity for this explication was indicated by the conviction that criticism and evaluation in science must be done in a methodologically responsible way. That is, the basis of discussion must be established as clearly as
possible so that the ensuing arguments and evaluations may have a critical background in terms of which their cogency can be established. "Functionalism" has received a great deal of favourable and unfavourable attention in sociology. The confusion and ambiguities which surround this movement have often been encouraged by the type of critique levelled at it. It is to examples of such current sociological criticism that we turn in the following chapter. Such an exercise should enable us to develop more specific criteria for evaluating any substantive mode of sociological analysis.

FOOTNOTES


4) Loc. cit.


6) Designations such as "holistic-elementaristic", "organismic-mechanistic", which usually refer to metaphysical commitments, to the writer's opinion, only add to the general confusion. In this regard see:


10) Which is the underlying emphasis in Sorokin's paper.


14) One of the few successful reductions in science, that of Thermodynamical Theory to Statistical Mechanics is discussed by Nagel in the Chapter mentioned in ff. 12)


28) See ff. 25)

30) "The Theoreticians Dilemma: A study in the logic of theory construction", Op. cit., Chapter 8. Although Hempel demonstrates that this dilemma rests on the false premise that the "sole purpose of a theory (is to) establish deductive connections among observation sentences", the whole paper is concerned with the problem of the necessity and functions of theoretical terms in scientific discourse.


32) Op. cit., p. 219. There seems to be certain contradictions in McEwen's framework. He states that the epistemological assumptions cannot be rationally justified, i.e. they are assumed irrationally or metaphysically (p. 219), are nevertheless held to be unconditionally necessary (p. 218), yet this assumption is defended on the pragmatic principle that if they cease to be useful they will be rejected (p. 217). If they are unconditionally necessary for objective knowledge then they cannot be pragmatically dispensable.


48) cf. ff. 25) and 29)
56) Ibid., p. 31.
57) Ibid., p. 32.
CHAPTER II
CONTemporary sociological
CrITIQUes of functionalism

Par. 1 Introduction

As stated in the introductory chapter, our main objective in this study is to inquire into the nature and position of "functionalism" in theoretical sociology. We will try to do this by evaluating some aspects of the work of two theorists in sociology: Robert K. Merton and Talcott Parsons. A recurring theme in current sociological thinking, "functionalism" or "structural-functionalism", is generally accepted as having been rejuvenated and accentuated through the labours of these scientists. "Functionalism" is also very often seen as the common element of the work of these two theorists who in other respects have widely divergent sociological interests. Whether this is a substantial claim, or not, will be one of the main problems to be discussed in the following chapters. The present chapter, however, will be occupied with a discussion of examples of contemporary sociological critiques of functionalism evaluated in terms of the methodological position explicated in the previous chapter.

The debate on "functionalism" or "structural-functionalism" needs no introduction in sociology. What these terms are or are not supposed to represent has been the topic of discussion of a great number of social scientists in numerous publications and papers.¹) Despite this there still does not exist any great degree of consensus on the use of these terms. Some see "functional-
"functionalism" as a distinct sociological approach, either "theoretical" or "methodological." Others regard it as a body of substantive sociological concepts and theories. Members of both these groups attack and defend it. In a provocative article, Davis has claimed that "functionalism" is a myth because in fact it is synonomous with sociological analysis. Martindale depicts it as a form of "organicism in sociological theory," while Whittaker sees it as "the doctrine which asserts that all recurrent social activities have the function of maintaining a social system." The same ambiguity and confusion characterize critiques both for and against "functionalism." Generally speaking the term "functionalism" serves as a catchall for accommodating, among others, these types of critique: the grouping together of a number of sociologists and the attacking of certain theoretical assumptions in terms of other, preferred theoretical assumptions; the applying of rigorous methodological criteria suitable for a well-formulated theory to what is seen as "functional theory"; the giving of practical examples for field research or for the application of functional analysis. Becoming acquainted with all the different perspectives on, and critiques of, "functionalism" can have a somewhat unsettling effect on the student with a serious interest in sociology. As Tumin aptly states "they all sound right when one reads them, but they all sound wrong when one reads their critics." One possible way out of this dilemma is to inquire into the methodological status of the standards of criticism employed.
in evaluating "functionalism". In this chapter therefore, the main intent will be to determine the legitimacy and fruitfulness of some standards of criticism currently employed in the debate on "functionalism". Obviously this can only be done if our own position with regard to what constitutes legitimate and fruitful criticism is made explicit. We hope that this purpose will have been served by our statement in the previous chapter and by further elaboration and application in this and following ones. Furthermore it is hoped that by discussing critiques on "functionalism" certain problems may be clarified for sociological critique in general.

In terms of the previous paragraphs it should be evident that it would be a rather laborious task to accommodate all the divergent critics of "functionalism". Moreover, in some instances where their methodological position bears no logical relation to our own, such an exercise would not be very informative nor rewarding. Such efforts could be judged inadequate without explication and by definition of our own position. Consequently our universe of discourse is narrowed down to critiques by those sociologists whose views on the nature and future of sociology bear more than an incidental resemblance to our own. Even here, for the sake of manageability and clarity, we limit the discussion to two publications, namely that of Goddijn, H.F.M.: *Het Funktionalisme in de Sociologie*,\(^\text{11}\) and Homans, G.: "Bringing Men Back In".\(^\text{12}\)

It should be kept in mind that there is no clear-cut ra-
tioneale for selecting these two sociologists, apart from the fact that examples of critiques on "functionalism" were needed. Furthermore they are not held to be representative of a group of theorists or a "movement" in sociology even though one, Goddijn, advocates "functionalism" and the other attacks it. Neither can these two publications be viewed as a reflection of the status of their authors as sociologists nor held to be representative of all their work.

Because the overriding emphasis is on standards of critique, the right of the writers under discussion to view "functionalism" as an identifiable theme in sociological thinking will to a large extent go unchallenged in this chapter. We grant them any conception they may have of "functionalism" and are interested only in the standards they employ in advocating or rejecting it. Likewise, the correctness of their interpretations of the theorists they consider to be representative of "functionalism" is not at issue here.

Par. 2 H.P.M. Goddijn: Het Funktionalisme in de Sociologie 13)

Goddijn sees "functionalism" as "an identifiable and independent theory" 14) in sociology. It focuses on

... the characteristic nature of social-cultural life, on society and her constituent institutions, groups and group phenomena. As such it is actually the most sociological theory that has developed in the history of American sociology. It focuses on the ways and degrees in which society as a whole, and her constituent interdependent parts, are interrelated in a continuous dialectic between autonomy and interdependence. It focuses on the functioning of the structure of societies and institutions in terms of their goals, values and norms that are continually changing. It focuses on all threatened places, on
the frictions and problems of adjustment between the structure and culture of society, her institutions and groups, and the relations between them. It acknowledges the characteristic nature of social facts, their autonomous reality and own teleology. It demands for sociology an own mode of explanation. 15)

Apart from the fact that certain locutions in this extract such as "characteristic nature of social-cultural life", "most sociological", "characteristic nature of social facts" and "their autonomous reality" are not explicated and are therefore unintelligible, it would seem that in order adequately to understand upon what functionalism "as an independent theory" focuses, one would have to know what terms such as "structure" and "function" are supposed to mean.

As far as "structure" is concerned, Goddijn argues that:

When we give a description of a social object, our observation must be done in terms of the persons and groups that are in various ways connected with the pattern of behaviour that we are studying. This description can best be done in structural terms. That is to say: one must locate participating persons and groups in their mutual and interdependent positions and roles. 16)

In another context he warns that

... we must distinguish clearly between structure in the sense of context, interdependence, relational pattern, and the structural nature of a phenomenon that we want to explain functionally in terms of its external relations with other social phenomena. 17)

If "functionalism" is an autonomous theory and social structure one of its distinctive concepts then one can expect that it would have a rather determinate content in the propositions contained in the theory. But the above quotations leave the meaning of the concept indeterminate. If we accept that "structure" is not an observational term but a theoretic one, then the first quo-
tation gives the impression of an unsuccessful attempt to relate "structure" to the observational level. For the implication is that once we have located participating persons and groups in their mutual and interdependent roles and positions we have given a "structural description". This is by no means obvious. The second quotation gives a dictionary-type of definition - it merely supplies synonyms for the concept. To say that structure means "context, interdependence, relational pattern" does not enable us to understand how it is to function in propositions in a theory. In a similar tautology Goddijn says that the most typical use of the concept "structure" in "functionalism" has the meaning of "structural coercion",[18] thus adding another meaning to it. In fact it never becomes clear what Goddijn means when he uses the term "structure".

Goddijn devotes more attention to the explanation of the concept "function". After investigating the analyses of various commentators on "functionalism" he concludes:

What in the last analysis is entailed in the application of the concept function? According to our view it entails the investigation of the objectively observable consequences of a socio-cultural phenomenon insofar as it has some sort of implication for all those social units, large or small, to which it is related. Also with regard to the social system as a whole? Yes, But when the observation of this unit lies outside the possibilities of empirical investigation, then the consequences of the phenomenon investigated with regard to this unit will be difficult to observe. [19] (Sic!)

It is strange that a proponent of an "independent theory" should find it necessary to spend such a great deal of time in deciding what the meaning of one of its central concepts is. If it is a theory then it should have some
logical consistency in the way in which it employs its central concepts and propositions. Nevertheless, once again in explaining the concept "function" Goddijn refrains from giving a definition and instead tells us what the scientist does when "applying it". But suggesting investigations is not the same as formulating propositions or giving definitions of concepts. The suspicion that "functionalism" as Goddijn explains it, is not a theory and that the concepts "structure" and "function" as used by him have no determinate meaning in it, is heightened when he contradicts himself by stating that "functionalism" is actually both a theory and a method of investigation. 20) Methodologically speaking Goddijn's position is not completely foreign to the view advocated in the previous chapter. Sociology to him is an empirical science that... strives to attain general, explanatory and definite knowledge of groups and group phenomena in terms of their structures, functions and change. 21) He elaborates on this by stating:

The scientific nature of a given body of knowledge can be determined in terms of three criteria. Our knowledge must be definite, explanatory and general. It seldom happens that sociological knowledge conforms perfectly to these standards, but ideally the sociologist also strives to attain that kind of knowledge of society that is as definite as possible, has the greatest explanatory power and as far as possible can be translated into more general propositions. 22)

One way of attaining such knowledge, according to Goddijn, is to recognize the crucial role that theory construction plays in sociology. As he says:

We are not interested in facts if they are not couched in theoretical terms, and we are not interested in theory if it is not related to facts. 23)
This would coincide with our statement previously that the most general criterion for the significance of scientific statements, is that their refutation or confirmation is dependent on empirically observable evidence. According to Goddijn a theory consists of:

A totality of concepts that are logically related and that enables one to analyze and explain a social phenomenon or problem in such a way that eventually one can develop other hypotheses and theories relating to it. A theory is always based on a range of postulates whose elucidation does not fall within the province of sociology as empirical science, but is left to social philosophy and the philosophy of sociology. 24)

Thus it would seem that Goddijn is quite clear on what constitutes scientific knowledge and how one is to set about attaining it. It is when one looks for these characteristics in his exposition of "functionalism" that confusion results. Using his own statement of what constitutes a theory, one fails to identify a "totality of concepts that are logically related" or "a range of postulates" in terms of which the propositions of the theory are couched. Nor are there specified any testable hypotheses that are inferred from the theory itself.

Having decided that a group of statements or a theory can only be judged scientific when we strive to make them as definite and as general as possible, and try to give them the greatest possible explanatory power, Goddijn applies these criteria to "functionalism".

As far as the degree of certainty is concerned, statements in functional theory will have to be "made certain by the methods of scientific investigation." 25) Some of these methods that are, according to Goddijn, extremely
useful for "functionalism", (so much so that in a sense they can be called methods of functionalism 26), are:
the intuitive or "verstehende" method of interpreting the cognitive and affective meaning of the consequences of a particular social pattern for the units participating in it; 27) the "mental or quasi-experiment" through which imaginary variations in the relations between phenomena are brought about; 28) the "comparative method" for "the qualitative comparison of two phenomena which differ in terms of a particular variable"; 29) "the observation of various types of disturbance or shock that are brought about by external or internal causes in a society or group"; 30) mathematical or statistical methods. 31)

Goddijn does not explain the nature of this certainty, and whether the various "methods" give the same kind of "certainty" is not clear. It would seem contrary to the goal of science that one could be intuitively certain, and until Goddijn states explicitly what he means by "certain knowledge", we cannot be sure whether "functionalism as a theory" has anything definite to say.

When applying his second criterion, generality, to "functionalism" he says:

When by generalizing sociology is understood, sociology that leaves the empirical world of social-cultural phenomena (sic!) in order to formulate general insights, laws and tendencies of phenomena, then at this stage in the development of functionalism we cannot call it general. 32)

Anyway, he decides, this is not important for in a science such as sociology

... that has as object of study a highly variable and changing society, it seems more meaningful to search for empirical regularities and tendencies in limited problem areas than to look for laws of general validity. 33)
It is when we investigate the explanatory power of "functionalism", Goddijn says, that we are confronted with a methodological problem that approaches the ... domain of philosophy of science or philosophical sociology. In functionalist literature the terms functional analysis and functional explanation are used interchangeably. One could almost say that many functionalists in their analysis and description of social phenomena view it as an explanation. 34)

But the crux of the matter is that:

The explanatory power of functional theory lies in the determination of the meaning that the consequences of social and cultural phenomena have in terms of each other's continued existence, expansion and development. 35)

It would seem that this is a circular or tautological argument. It runs more or less thus: Functional theory focuses on the consequences that social and cultural phenomena have for each other. Its explanatory power lies in the determination of the meaning of the consequences social and cultural phenomena have for each other. This would be tantamount to saying that evolutionary theory has great explanatory power because it studies the origin and development of species.

As stated initially, our intention is not to question the conception of "functionalism" of the writers under discussion, but to inquire into their reasons for defending or rejecting it. With regard to Goddijn, however, in the light of the contradictions and ambiguities already mentioned, it is difficult to determine what his conception of "functionalism" is. Nevertheless, if we disregard these initial objections for the moment, it appears that Goddijn investigates "functionalism" in this way:
(a) A description of the historical development of "functionalism" in sociology.

(b) A determination of the social antecedents of the development of "functionalism" in America.

(c) An exposition of the content and development of "functional theory" proper and the objects and problems on which it focuses.

(d) Finally, an inquiry into the reasons of its popularity in American sociology. 36)

A considerable part of this book, the part with which we are mainly concerned, is devoted to a comparison between Merton and Parsons as theorists.37) Goddijn makes the commendable point that we cannot use "functionalism" as a convenient designation to group these two theorists in the same camp and then indiscriminately to make them objects of our polemical attack. Each has to accept the blame of his own shortcomings and to direct attacks in an undifferentiated way against "functionalism" is only to add confusion to the issue. Goddijn, however, is not so much concerned about the necessity of evaluating every theorist on what he says, as he is to demonstrate that Merton is a better or purer "functionalist" than Parsons. He suggests a number of reasons why it would seem more fruitful to support one theorist rather than the other. These "reasons" are important, for if they are cogent and valid they can be of considerable use for sociology in general. One of the crucial problems for a scientist in any field is to decide what line of approach would be best suited to the particular problem that he wants to investigate.

In our discussion of Goddijn's comparison between Parsons
and Merton, we will first state separately his considerations for rejecting the former and supporting the latter, and then compile a list of standards of criticism for evaluating a particular theoretical approach.

With reference to Parsons, Goddijn states:

1. Parsons uses inimitable and untranslatable jargon.  

2. The concept structure has priority over the concept function.  

3. The combination structural-functional, that is very seldom used by Merton, can be understood to mean that only phenomena that have, or are, structures can have functions.  

4. Giving priority to structure over function is not without danger. He who first determines the structure or interdependence of a society or a group, and then the functions, at the same time meaning by function the contribution to an unchanging society or group, is immediately confronted with conservative ideology.  

5. Apart from the fact that Parsons uses the concept structure in combination with function, the concept structure is determined and immobilised by the concept of social system as a unitary goal-directed system that has to maintain a self-regulating equilibrium in order to exist and function well. With this conception of the social system and its structure and functioning, no room is left for the investigation of phenomena such as social change, conflict and power and their sociological explanation.
6. Apart from the fact that Parsons' structural-functionalism is irremovably part of his theory of the social system, this theory forms part of a much more general conceptual framework that tries to illuminate in an interdisciplinary manner the relations between the personality-, cultural- and social systems. Parsons' interest is not confined to sociological theory, but roams over the whole domain of the social sciences and sciences such as philosophy, biology and biochemistry.43)

7. The eventual application of Parsons' theory is furthermore complicated by the fact that his work has a deductive, sometimes even speculative character, rather than an inductive verifying character. It moves on a high level of abstraction and has very little affinity with social reality and its actual problems.44)

8. There is not any guarantee that with his vast net of concepts he has succeeded in capturing the whole of reality. On the contrary, there are clear indications that his theory has obscured and distorted important aspects of social reality instead of elucidating them. This is especially relevant with regard to the dynamic and frictional nature of its structure and functioning.45)

In defense of Merton, Goddijn states:

9. Those with an interest in sociology, who search for a balanced point of departure, who want to reconcile theory and research, who do not ignore the problems of social policy and planning, who want to study a few important problems of social reality in terms of a modest conceptual frame of reference, will sooner or later be-
come acquainted with the moderate functionalist position of R.K. Merton.\textsuperscript{46}

10. Merton is a modest, stimulating and 'all round' sociologist who applies his conception of sociology in practice. He lays a solid foundation between sociological theory construction on the one hand and concrete, (pure and applied), investigation on the other hand. Every investigation of social reality is preceded by a theoretical exposition. Instead of getting lost in top-heavy theoretical perspectives that cannot be utilized by the average sociologist, however, he tries, in a nuanced way, to penetrate actual social problems by means of a limited range of concepts inferred from his basic functional theory.\textsuperscript{47}

11. Merton does not write, like T. Parsons for example, for a 'highbrow elite', but for the sociologist in the field and by preference he simultaneously focuses theory and observation on limited problems that have social and practical consequences.\textsuperscript{48}

12. What attracts us in Merton is the completely open nature of his theoretical ideas that stimulates continued and recurrent research in different areas. Nothing is more foreign to him than the pretension that sociology both began and ended with him; a pretension that is characteristic of all system builders from Comte to the present day.\textsuperscript{49}

13. The attractiveness of Merton's theory, finally, is that his functionalist standpoint is free from the conservative ideology of which this movement has been accused.\textsuperscript{50}
14. A dynamic use of the concept function only occurs when it is used for the explanation of the change or conflicts of adjustment in the structure and functioning of a society. This use, as we shall see, is found in the work of R.K. Merton. 51)

15. Merton, in contrast with Parsons, has concerned himself especially with sociology and is interested in developing functionalism as a sociological theory. He has a great interest in interdisciplinary co-operation but in this regard does not go as far as T. Parsons. 52)

16. Merton's functionalism is less abstract than that of Parsons. His functional analysis focuses on current problems of the American society. His functional theory is typical and an expression of a particular historical period. 53)

17. He does not propagate a theoretic and deductive approach, but an empirical and heuristic one in determining the elements of the social system. According to this strategy not one variable that has not been empirically determined must be allowed in the social system. 54)

18. An important point in terms of which Merton's functionalism advantageously distinguishes itself from Parsons's, is Merton's greater sensitivity and fascinating suggestions for problems of social policy and planning. 55)

The above excerpts contain the most important considerations 56) in terms of which Goddijn evaluates the merits of Parsons and Merton both as "functionalists" and as theorists. A list of standards compiled from them for
evaluating and supporting a theoretical approach would read more or less as follows:

A. The concepts that a theorist employs should be familiar and generally applicable by the average sociologist (1, 10, 11).

B. Certain terms have a specific meaning irrespective of the theory in which they function. Note should therefore be taken of the priority of meaning implied in their use, and the implications of their use in combination with one another carefully studied beforehand (2, 3, 5).

C. A theory should have a modest conceptual framework consisting of a limited number of concepts, and should focus on a limited amount of problems (9, 10, 11).

D. There is a certain level of abstraction at which theories should be constructed (7, 16).

E. Certain personal qualities are important for a theorist, such as modesty (10), the ability to stimulate (10) and absence of pretension (12).

F. A theorist should not construct a framework of such generality that it intrudes upon the terrain of other branches of science (6, 15). 57)

G. A theory should be constructed in an inductive verifying way rather than in a deductive speculative manner. No variable must be allowed into the theory that has not been empirically determined beforehand (7, 17).

H. A theorist should be aware of the interaction between theory construction and research (9, 10, 12, 17).
I. A scientist should not construct a theory in such a way that it could be interpreted ideologically (4, 13).

J. A theorist should have an awareness of the problems of social policy and planning when constructing his theory (9, 10, 11, 16, 18).

K. A theorist must give attention to particular social problems when constructing a theory (5, 8, 9, 14).

L. A sociological theory must reflect or be an expression of a particular historical period (16).

All these rules, with the exception of G and H, can be phrased as empirical propositions of questionable validity. Evidence to support the contentions that successful theorists have always used concepts familiar to other scientists (A); not changed the accepted meaning of terms within the context of their theories (B); been careful not to construct theories of too great scope (C) and have not encroached on to the terrain of related sciences (F) is simply lacking. The debate on operationism (58) has demonstrated what a futile pursuit it is to determine what the required level of abstraction is for introducing concepts and propositions in theories (D).

Rules I, J, K and L are more relevant, it seems, to the social sciences and are quite familiar statements in sociological critiques. They have, however, the same logical status as those just mentioned. If it should happen that we develop a testable theory in sociology, then even if it is not amenable to ideological interpretation
(I); the theorist is deeply committed to problems of social policy or planning (J); the theory is concerned with problems of social relevance (K) that are typical of a particular historical period (L), then even these characteristics cannot determine its testability or acceptability. If they were to do so, it would mean that each historical period (whatever the criteria may be for identifying it) would determine which theories are to be accepted. Obviously this is not what has happened with regard to the accepted theories of science.

Goddijn is not unaware of this. In explaining Merton's conception of scientific theory, he quotes Martindale as giving an excellent description of what Merton's conception is:

A scientific theory is a set of logically related hypotheses which form an explanation of a body of events. The two blades of the shears by which the scientist cuts out the pattern of his theories are logical consistency of ideas and empirical adequacy of explanation. Theory construction, this pattern making process, takes time, and though the shears are continuously at work, the pattern emerges only very slowly. Often nothing is more futile than the question which blade of the shears did the most work at any given stage, for both are necessary and particularly important is the fact that they cut against one another. 60)

As has been pointed out 61) the terms "logical consistency" and "empirical adequacy" are highly compressed statements. The exposition of their combined implications for scientific theories would reveal the range of methodological principles at the disposal of the scientist for determining the adequacy of his work. It is trivially easy to formulate a statement that has logical consistency, i.e. is deductively true or one whose empirical adequacy can be tested. To construct a system of logically re-
lated propositions from which hypotheses can be inferred and empirically tested is another matter. When a writer argues for the support of a particular theory or theorist it is in terms of the above principles that he will have to convince us. At this programmatic stage in theoretical sociology it is well nigh impossible to advance conclusive arguments for the support of one theorist rather than another.

This is what Goddijn has attempted to do in his comparison of Merton and Parsons. What needs to be emphasized is that the suggestions he has made for supporting the one rather than the other are based on volitional choice rather than any rational conclusions. It is undoubtedly true that most sociologists, or scientists in general for that matter, have certain "vested interests" or personal preferences or intellectual "hunches" for supporting one line of approach rather than another. But as Popper says:

"From the point of view of scientific method, a social hypothesis suggested by self-intuition is in no different position from a physical hypothesis about atoms. The latter may also be suggested to the physicist by a kind of intuition about what atoms are like. And in both cases, this intuition is a private affair of the man who proposes the hypothesis. What is 'public', and important for science, is merely the question whether the hypotheses could be tested by experience, and whether they stood up to test." 63)

Another way of making the same point is that the reasons that Goddijn has offered for accepting Merton rather than Parsons fall within the context of discovery of sociology as a science. They are not methodological criteria (context of justification) in terms of which we can evaluate a theory. As Dore has aptly remarked in dis-
cussing the various perspectives on "functionalism":

In part they are moral differences about the proper scale of priorities which should guide the sociologist's use of his time. About the methodological differences or issues there is legitimate ground for dispute. But about the 'oughts' implied in these various positions, we can only preach at each other. It would be sad if we stopped preaching, but let us try to keep our sermons and our methodological issues apart. 65)

There are still two "rules", G and H, that we have not discussed and we can now do so. G, which reads as follows: "A theory should be constructed in an inductive verifying way rather than in a deductive speculative manner. No variable must be allowed into the theory that has not been empirically determined beforehand" makes no sense. If the words employed mean what they are generally accepted to mean in scientific discourse, then any adherence to the rule would be a contradiction of what is being done in science. Goddijn himself speaks of a theory as "a totality of logically related concepts" 66) and if this relatedness does not have an inferentially deductive character, then one fails to see what logic has to do with theory construction.

Rule H would seem to be the only statement that bears a resemblance to a methodological criterion. The emphasis on the interaction between theory construction and research could be interpreted in the general and not very informative manner that all scientific theories should be scientifically tested. If it is supposed to imply, however, that the theorist should also be active in research, then it has the same unnecessary character as the "rules" discussed above. 67)

The solipsistic and biased nature of the reasons Goddijn
has formulated for rejecting Parsons and preferring Mer-
ton can easily be demonstrated when we find, for example, 
Mitchell giving the same reasons for his being at-
ttracted to Parsons' work. Mitchell describes Parsons 
as a man of "personal modesty and gentle manner". 

When he (Parsons) does treat particular empirical 
findings, especially in the essays, he persistent-
ly gives attention to conflict situations and their 

Furthermore 

Many critics have completely ignored Parsons' numerous 
theses which not only deal with practical problems of 
the world and especially political problems but usu-
ally offer some kind of policy advice concerning their 
diagnosis and solution. Of his more than one hun-
dred essays, at least one third are directly or in-
directly related to politics and at least twenty of 
them contain diagnoses of and/or solutions to major 
social problems. 

As far as the influence and applicability of Parsons' work 
is concerned, Mitchell supplies a list of more than fifty 
publications under the heading "Some applications of Par-
sons". 

The reference to Mitchell is not an attempt to vindicate 
Parsons from the accusations levelled at him by Goddijn. 
For the present it is not even important which of the two, 
Goddijn or Mitchell, is correct in his interpretation of 
Parsons. What is important is that personal preferences, 
however laudable they may be, cannot be substituted for 
methodological criteria when considering the legitimacy 
of a particular approach in sociology.

G. Homans: "Bringing Men Back In"

This article of Homans, compared to the publication just 
discussed, distinguishes itself in terms of its economy 
of formulation and methodological explicitness. Yet the
irregularities in it, despite the subtlety of distinctions and convincing style, have to a large extent the same logical nature as those stated by Goddijn. Secondly, while Goddijn propagates "functionalism", Homans thinks that it has "run its course, done its work, and now positively gets in the way of our understanding social phenomena." 73)

He sees "functionalism" as a distinct school of thought 74) that consists of both a method and a theory. 75) As a method functional analysis has certain "empirical interests" 76) such as

... the study of norms ... a cluster of norms called a role and a cluster of roles called an institution; the interrelation of institutions;

and

The school was, to put it crudely, more interested in the consequences than in the causes of an institution, particularly in the consequences for a social system considered as a whole. 77)

With regard to "functionalism as a method" with certain "empirical interests" Homans has no objections. He states that:

As empirically I have been a functionalist myself, I shall be the last to quarrel with them. 78)

The problem according to him is that:

As it began to crystallize, the functional school developed theoretical interests as well as empirical ones. There was no necessity for the two to go together. 79)

For

Where functionalism failed was not in its empirical interests but curiously enough, in what it most prided itself on, its general theory. 80)

Our main interests will of course be directed to the reasons Homans suggests for the "failure of functionalism"
as a theory. Before we begin the inquiry, two remarks are in order.

The first relates to the curious distinction Homans makes between analysis or method and theory construction. Functional analysis, he says, has to do with the study of "norms", "roles" and "institutions". But surely these terms do not refer to empirically self-evident phenomena? They are constructs, and as such are rudimentary elements of an eventual theoretical interpretation of social reality. At which stage does "analysis" end and theory construction begin? And when it happens, is there no logical relation between the terms employed in the propositions of the theory and those used in the "analysis"? If so, what is the sense of "analysis" anyhow? Has Homans perhaps not been wasting his time (in terms of his own evaluation of "functionalism") by "empirically being a functionalist" himself?

The second remark refers to the way Homans makes it virtually impossible, given the methodological legitimacy of his accusations, to determine to whom they specifically refer. He talks about "the functional school", "its members", "its general theory". The previous quotation, one example of many similar, leaves one with the question, "Who prided themselves on which or whose general theory?" This is a wholly unsatisfactory way of voicing disagreements. It enables one to direct accusations vaguely at an unspecified source, while at the same time leaving a door of escape open when one is confronted with refutations. When evidence is supplied, for example, that Merton did not say such and such, one could just state that
he was not the "functionalist" one had in mind.

One cannot escape the conclusion that Homans uses "functionalism" as a disguised generalization in order to make some specific polemical points, but is never quite clear to whom it refers. It is largely this use of the term "functionalism" which commits Homans to perform a methodological egg dance \(^{31}\) in order to demonstrate why "functionalism as a theory" has failed.

As far as the "theoretical interests of functionalism" are concerned, Homans declares that

... their theoretical program assumed that sociology should be an independent science, in the sense that its propositions should not be derivable from some other social science, such as psychology. This meant in effect that the general propositions of sociology were not to be propositions about the behaviour of 'individual consciousness' - or, as I should say, about men - but propositions about the characteristics of societies or other social groups as such. \(^{32}\)

The main problem however is that "functionalism" has failed to give any explanation of social phenomena:

The question is a practical and not a philosophical one - not whether it is legitimate to take the role as the fundamental unit, nor whether institutions are really real, but whether functionalism has in fact led to explanations of social phenomena, including the findings of functional analysis itself. Nor is the question whether functionalism might not do so, but whether it has done so of today. I think it has not. \(^{33}\)

Particular note must be taken of this statement. Homans is not saying that "functionalism" fails because it is in principle impossible to give an explanation by means of its theory; he is saying that "functionalism" has failed because it has not, until now, given an explanation of social phenomena. Obviously, in order to understand what Homans is saying, one would have to know what he
means by "theory" and "explanation". With clear methodological insight he explains.

He refers to Braithwaite\textsuperscript{34}) as one of the philosophers of science who have given sound answers to these questions.

A theory of a phenomenon consists of a series of propositions each stating a relationship between properties of nature. But not every kind of sentence qualifies as such a proposition. The propositions do not consist of definitions of the properties: the construction of a conceptual scheme is an indispensable part of theoretical work, but is not itself a theory. Nor may the propositions say that there is some relationship between properties. Instead, if there is some change in one of the properties, it must at least begin to specify what the change in the other property will be.\textsuperscript{35})

To constitute a theory, the propositions must take the form of a deductive system. One of them, usually called the lowest-order proposition, is the proposition to be explained. The other propositions are either general propositions or statements of particular given conditions. The general propositions are so called because they enter into other, perhaps many other, deductive systems besides the one in question. Indeed, what we often call a theory is a cluster of deductive systems sharing the same general propositions but having different explicanda. The crucial requirement is that each system shall be deductive. That is, the lowest-order proposition follows as a logical conclusion from the general propositions under the specified given conditions. \ldots When the lowest-order proposition does follow logically, it is said to be explained. The explanation of the phenomenon is the theory of the phenomenon. A theory is nothing - it is not a theory - unless it is an explanation.\textsuperscript{36})

Consequently it is reasonable that Homans concludes:

I have said that the question is not whether, in general, functional theories can be real theories, for there are sciences that possess real functional theories. The question is rather whether this particular effort was successful. If a theory is an explanation, the functionalists in sociology were on the evidence not successful. Perhaps they could not have been successful; at any rate they were not. The trouble with their theory was not that it was wrong, but that it was not a theory.\textsuperscript{37})

The argument can be abbreviated thus: A theory is an explanation; "functionalism" does not give an explanation; therefore "functionalism" is not a theory. But the argu-
ment does not stop at this rather trite observation, for as Homans himself admits, "Most of our arguments would fall to the ground if we first asked whether we had a theory or not." 88) In order to keep his arguments from "falling to the ground", Homans would have to base his attack not on the reasons why "functionalism as a theory" has failed (for he says that "functionalism" is not a theory and it would be nonsensical to attack something in terms of which it is not), but on the "theoretical interests" of "functionalism".

Homans is aware of this problem. He says that, judged according to the conditions pertaining to a theory,

As theoretical effort, functionalism never came near meeting these conditions. 89)

But, and this is most significant,

Even if the functionalists had seriously tried to meet them, which they did not, I think they would still have failed. The difficulty lay in the characteristic general propositions of functionalism. 90)

This shows a subtle yet contradictory change of emphasis in Homans's attack. For as we have just indicated, Homans says that the problem with "functionalism" is not whether it is in principle possible to give an explanation, i.e. to develop a theory, but that it has not done so until now. Now he says that the problem is not so much that it does not meet the conditions of a theoretical explanation but that it is in principle impossible for it to do so because of the characteristic nature of its general propositions.

With this change of emphasis Homans's attack becomes methodologically irresponsible. For in effect he is saying that "functionalism" has no theory; it cannot be
judged as a theory; moreover it can never become a theory because its general propositions make this impossible. Even the most daring methodologist would shirk from committing himself to saying that a particular theoretical interest could never lead to a scientific explanation. Nevertheless Homans proceeds to explain why this is the case with "functionalism".

The characteristic general propositions of functional theory in sociology take the form: If it is to survive, or remain in equilibrium, a social system, any social system must possess institutions of Type X. 91) The problem was, and is, to construct deductive systems headed by such propositions. 92)

I do not think that members of the functionalist school have set up, starting with general propositions of their distinctive type, theories that were also deductive systems. More important, they did not. 92)

To say that the "functionalists" have not constructed deductive systems or systems from which logical conclusions can be drawn, is of course quite different from saying they cannot do so. But this is what Homans affirms:

From their (the functionalists') lower-order propositions, as from their higher-order ones, no definite conclusions in logic could be drawn. 93)

The argument is thus that the "functionalists" cannot develop a theory because the characteristic nature of their general propositions is such that no deductive systems could be developed or definite conclusions in logic be drawn from them.

It is difficult to see why no logical conclusion can be drawn from any particular premise, and for the characteristic general proposition that Homans ascribes to "functionalism" it is simply not true. As a matter of fact, Flannigan and Fogelman,94) who also have strong doubts
about the fruitfulness of "functionalism", use the same general proposition to construct the following syllogism:

1. If a system S is to be maintained adequately under conditions C, then requisite functions \( f_1, f_2 \ldots f_n \) must be performed.

2. System S is being maintained adequately.

Therefore: Requisite functions \( f_1, f_2 \ldots f_n \) are being performed.  

By supplying one additional premise, Flannigan and Fogelman have drawn a "definite conclusion in logic" from the "characteristic general proposition of functionalism". The scientific significance of this conclusion may be questioned, but there is no doubt that it is a definite conclusion.

What Homans probably means, though he does not explicitly say this, is that the type of general proposition (which is a teleological one) that is "characteristic of functionalism" is such that no deductive systems could be developed or logical conclusions drawn that would have great scientific significance. This is a debatable question whether teleological propositions cannot figure in scientific deductive systems.\(^{96}\) Hempel has some reservations,\(^{97}\) and Nagel foresees some practical problems for the social sciences but finds no evidence that it is in principle impossible.\(^{98}\) Surprisingly enough, it is Braithwaite, commended by Homans as a competent methodologist, who presents the strongest case for the development of teleological systems in science.\(^{99}\) In fact, Braithwaite goes so far as to say that ultimately there are only two types of explanation that give intellectual satisfaction: causal explanations and teleological explanations.\(^{100}\) This last is:
... that in which the 'why' question about a particular event or activity is answered by specifying a goal or end towards the attainment of which the event or activity is a means. 101)

Without elaborating on Braithwaite's exposition of the structure of a teleological system now, it suffices to point out that he finds that

... in general irreducible teleological explanations are no less worthy of credence than ordinary causal explanations. 102)

Furthermore

... it enables one to make reliable predictions as to how the system will behave in the future. It seems ridiculous to deny the title of explanation to a statement which performs both of the functions characteristic of scientific explanations - of enabling us to appreciate connections and to predict the future. 103)

It appears that the question of the scientific significance of the "characteristic general propositions of functionalism" is not such a closed one as Homans would have us believe. Even if it should be so, he has given very flimsy evidence to support his position.

But there is a far more important reason, according to Homans, why the general propositions of the "functionalists" are inadequate. In his explanation of this reason, the plea of the article, to "bring men back in", becomes evident. Under the caption "An Alternative Theory", 104)

Homans says:

I shall now try to show that a more successful effort to explain social phenomena entails the construction of theories different from functional ones, in the sense that their general propositions are of a different kind, precisely the kind, indeed, that the functionalists tried to get away from. 105)

These general propositions must be "psychological", according to Homans, and he points out that when the "functionalists" really try to explain something they make use
of them anyhow. Consequently, he asks:

What is the lesson of all this? If the very things functionalists take for granted, if the very inter-relationships they empirically discover can be explained by deductive systems that employ psychological propositions, then it must be that the general explanatory principles even of sociology are not sociological, as the functionalists would have them be, but psychological, propositions about the behav-iour of men, not about the behaviour of societies. 106)

Moreover, he is careful to warn the reader:

Nor is there any assumption here of psychological reductionism, though I used to think there was. For reduction implies that there are general sociological propositions that can be reduced to psychological ones. I now suspect that there are no general sociological propositions, propositions that hold good of all societies or social groups as such, and that the only general propositions of sociology are in fact psychological. 107)

The question is, quite simply, how does Homans know this? In order for him to know it there would have to be a well-tested theory in the social sciences whose general propositions are "psychological". The present writer is not aware of such a theory. But even if there is, there is no reason whatsoever for maintaining that all social scientific theories can only be constructed if they use general propositions that are "psychological". It is a well-established fact that different deductive systems are capable of explaining the same problem. As a matter of fact, Homans himself admits this when he refers to the example that:

Thermodynamics, for instance, states propositions about aggregates, which are themselves true and general, even though they can be explained in turn, in statistical mechanics, by propositions about members of the aggregates. 108)

In this regard Braithwaite formulates:

Any general hypothesis whose consequences are confirmed by experience is a valuable intellectual device, and the profitable use of such a hypothesis does not presuppose that it will not at some future
time be subsumed under some more general hypothesis in a more widely applicable deductive system, nor that the facts which it explains will not some time be explicable by a quite different hypothesis in another deductive system. 109)

It is clear that the only reason Homans has for propagating the use of "general psychological propositions" is that he, like Goddijn, is committed to a particular line of approach. This in itself is laudable, but the strength of his commitment is no basis upon which we can accept or reject the efforts of other scientists in the field. When these commitments are employed in such a fashion, they become generalized rules as to how fellow scientists should use their time. And if they are based on synthetic a priori 110) generalizations, like those of Goddijn and Homans, then any branch of science can do without them, for thusfar it has been the privilege of the omniscient to make imperative statements on matters about which men have no definite knowledge. Homan's critique, like that of Goddijn, is mainly couched in terms of arguments which fall within the context of discovery and, no matter how plausible they may appear, they can at best serve only as heuristic indices for supporting a particular approach and not as conclusive evidence for evaluating it.

Par. 4 Conclusion

It is the present writer's conviction that the types of critique we have just investigated "positively get in the way of our understanding social phenomena". They obscure many problems and lead to fruitless polemical debates. They very often create a misguided enthusiasm among those who have a desire to be on the "right track".111) Unfor-
tunately there does not seem to be any "right track" in scientific discovery. It is only when we advance certain claims and, as Popper says, our discoveries are made "public", that we can try to find out how wrong or right we have been.

In a sense this chapter is a plea for tolerance for the intellectual commitments of sociologists. For at this stage of programmatic theory in theoretical sociology no theorist can be sure that anyone who differs from him is absolutely wrong, yet each has a feeling that he may be right. What is needed is advice and methodologically rigorous criticism, but no sermons.

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FOOTNOTES

1) See bibliography.

2) Inter alia the following:


3) Inter alia the following:


7) See: (a) Wrong, D.: Ibid. (b) Van den Berghe, P.: Ibid.


13) This book is written in Dutch and the present writer is well aware of the risk that some of the meaning may be lost in translation. Consequently all direct translations will be accompanied by the original in corresponding footnotes. This procedure will largely account for the clumsiness of some formulations, but this was done intentionally in order to give the most literal possible version of the original.

14) Goddijn:

(a) p. 32. Als min of meer autonome theorie in de empirische sociologie mag het funktionalisme nog zo jong zijn, als gezichtspunt is het al zo oud als het Westerse denken.

(b) p. 69. Als herkenbare en zelfstandige sociologische theorie is het funktionalisme pas enkele decennia oud.
15) Goddiijn, p. 66:

16) Goddiijn, p. 144:

17) Goddiijn, p. 158:
We moeten hier duidelijk onderscheid maken tussen structuur in de zin van kontekst, samenhang, in-terdependentie, relatiepatroon, en het al dan niet structuur-matige karakter van het verschijnsel zelf, dat we functioneel willen verklaren vanuit de externe relaties, die het heeft met andere sociaal verschijnselen.

18) Goddiijn, p. 185:
En tenslotte vinden we het begrip structuur gebruikt in de (bijna marxistische) betekenis van struktur-ele dwang. ... de laatste betekenis lijkt ons typisch voor de functionele denkwijze.

19) Goddiijn, p. 163:
Wat behelst nu in laatste instantie de toepassing van het funktiebegrip? Naar onze mening het na-gaan van de objektiief-waarnembare gevolgen van een sociaal-kultureel verschijnsel, vooral dat een of andere betekenis heeft ten aanzien van alle
sociale eenheden, wijdere en kleinere, waarmee het relaties heeft. Ook ten aanzien van het sociaal systeem als geheel? Ook ten aanzien daarvan. Maar wanneer de waarneming van deze eenheid buiten de mogelijkheden van het empirisch onderzoek ligt, zullen de gevolgen van het onderzoeksverschijnsel ten aanzien van deze eenheid ook moeilijk waar te nemen zijn.

20) Godijn, p. 203:
Eigenlijk is de toepassing van de functionele theorie zelf al een methode van onderzoek. De samenhang tussen theorie en methode is hier zo nauw, dat in de literatuur over de functionele sociologie de termen theorie en methode dikwijls dooreen gebruikt worden.

21) Godijn, p. 16:
De sociologie zien wij als een empirische kultuur-wetenschap, welke streeft naar algemene, verklarende en zekere kennis van groepen en groepsverschijnselen onder de gezichtspunten van hun structuur, functies en veranderingen, welke kennis zowel omwille van haarzelve als omwille van haar toepassing wordt nagestreefd.

22) Godijn, p. 210:
De wetenschappelijkheid van een gegeven geheel aan kennis kan worden algemeten aan drie criteria. Onze kennis moet zeker zijn, verklarend en algemeen. Het is maar zelden zo dat sociologische kennis tegelijkertijd op volmaakte wijze aan deze criteria voldoet, maar als ideaal staat toch ook de socioloog voor ogen te trachten kennis omtrent de samenleving te verwerven, die zoveel mogelijk zeker is, zoveel mogelijk verklarende kracht heeft en zo mogelijk in meer algemene proposities vertolkt wordt.

23) Godijn, p. 16:
We hebben aan feiten niets, wanneer we ze niet theoretisch doorlichten, we hebben aan theorieën niets, wanneer ze niet op de feiten betrokken worden.

24) Godijn, p. 233:
Onder een sociologische theorie verstaan we hier een geheel van begrippen, die logisch met elkaar samenhangen, dat vervolgens de analyse of verklaring mogelijk maakt van een bepaald sociaal verschijnsel of probleem en tenslotte vruchtbaar genoeg is om eventueel andere hypothesen of theorieën daaromtrent op te roepen. Ze gaat altijd uit van een reeks postulaten, waarvan de verheldering in laatste instantie niet binnen het kader van de sociologie als empirische wetenschap kan plaats vin-
den, maar wordt overgelaten aan de sociale filosofie en wijsgerige sociologie.

25) Goddijn, p. 210:
Wat nu de zekerheid betreft van de inzichten, welke de functionele sociologie biedt, zij zal verzekerd! moeten worden door het gebruik der methoden van het wetenschappelijk onderzoek, al dan niet in combinatie toegepast.

26) Goddijn, p. 203.

27) Goddijn, p. 204:
... voor een functionele interpretatie de opmerkzaamheid te richten op de kognitieve en affectieve betekenis van de gevolgen van een bepaald sociaal patroon voor de eenheden, die eraan deelnemen, is het gebruik van de intuïtieven of 'verstehende' methode evenzeer beslissend.

28) Goddijn, p. 205.

29) Goddijn, p. 205.

30) Goddijn, p. 206:
Een andere methode der functionele interpretatie is de waarneming van de gevolgen van verschillende typen verstoringen of van schokkende gebeurtenissen, welke door inwendige of uitwendige oorzaken in een samenleving of groep worden teweeggebracht.

31) Goddijn, p. 208.

32) Goddijn, p. 210:
Wanneer onder generaliserende sociologie verstaan wordt die sociologie, welke zo spoedig mogelijk de empirische wereld van sociaal-kulturele verschijnselen verlaten wil om tot de formulering van algemene inzichten, wetten en tendenties omtrent die verschijnselen te komen, dan zijn we geneigd de functionele sociologie, zoals ze zich tot nu toe ontwikkeld heeft, niet generaliserend te noemen.

33) Goddijn, p. 211:
In een wetenschap als de sociologie die een hoogst gevariéeerde en veranderlijke samenleving tot object heeft, lijkt het zinvol om tot regulariteiten en tendenties te komen op basis van empirisch onderzoek van beperkte probleemgebieden dan tot wetten van algemene geldigheid.
34) Goddijn, p. 211:
Een methodologisch vraagstuk, dat ons eveneens op de grenzen der wetenschapsfilosofie en wijsgerige sociologie brengt, is dat van de verklarende betekenis der functionele theorie. In de functionalistische literatuur worden de termen functionele analyse en functionele verklaring dikwijls door elkaar gebruikt. Men zou haast zeggen dat vele functionalisten in de analyse en deskriptie van sociale verschijnselen en hun samenhang op zichzelf al een verklaring van die verschijnselen zien.

35) Goddijn, p. 214:
In het vaststellen van de betekenis, die de gevolgen van sociale en culturele verschijnselen hebben in het licht van elkaars voortbestaan, expansie of ontwikkeling moet wellicht de verklarende kracht der functionele theorie gezocht worden.

37) Goddijn, pp. 84-92, 105-123, Chapter IV, pp. 235-247.
38) Goddijn, p. 87.
40) Goddijn, p. 107:
De termenkombinatie structureel-funktioneel, die men bij Merton hoogstzelden aantreft, kan verder tot het misverstand leiden, dat men alleen functies zou kunnen toeschrijven aan verschijnselen, die een structuur hebben of zijn.

41) Goddijn, p. 108:
De toekenning van prioriteit van het structuurbegrip boven het functiebegrip is vervolgens niet zonder gevaar. Wie eerst de structuur van een samenleving of groep als gegeven vaststelt, vervolgens haar functies nagaat, daarbij het begrip functie de betekenis gevend van: bijdragen aan het onveranderd voortbestaan van die gegeven samenleving of groep, komt bijna onvermijdelijk in conservatief vaarwater.

42) Goddijn, p. 108:
Behalve dat Parsons zijn functiebegrip nauw heeft gelieerd aan het structuurbegrip, laat hij dit structuurbegrip naar zijn inhoud sterk bepalen en immobiliseren door het begrip sociaal systeem als een unilateraal doelgericht systeem dat door zelfregulatie in evenwicht moet zijn om in stand te blijven en goed te functioneren. Bij deze conceptie van het sociaal systeem, zijn structuur en
funtionering blijft er evenwel onvoldoende ruimte voor een behandeling van verschijnselen als sociaal verandering, konflikt en macht alsmede hun sociologische verklaring.

43) Goddijn, p. 109:
Is Parsons struktureel-funktionalisme onlosmakelijk verbonden met zijn theorie over het sociaal systeem, deze laatste theorie maakt op haar beurt weer deel uit van een veel algemener begrippenschema, dat langs interdisciplinaire weg de banden moet ophelderen tussen het persoonlijkheids systeem, het kultureel systeem en het sociaal systeem. Parsons' interesse gaat niet alleen uit naar sociologische theorie, maar bestrijkt het gehele gebied der sociale wetenschappen en wetenschappen als wijsbegeerte, biologie en biochemie.

44) Goddijn, p. 110:
Wat een eventuele toepassing verder bemoeilijkt is het feit dat Parsons' werk eerder een deduktief, soms zelfs een louter spekulatief, karakter draagt dan een inductief en verifiërend karakter. Het beweegt zich op een hoog abstraktieniveau en heeft weinig affiniteit met de sociale werkelijkheid en haar aktuele problematiek.

45) Goddijn, p. 122:
Er is geen enkele garantie, dat hij met het enorme begrippennet, dat hij over de sociale werkelijkheid heeft uitgeworpen, wel die hele werkelijkheid gevangen heeft. Er zijn in tegendeel duidelijke aanwijzingen, dat zijn theorie belangrijke aspecten van de sociale werkelijkheid verzuimde en verduisterd heeft in plaats van hen inzichtelijk te maken. Dit geldt met name de dynamiek en het konflikteuze karakter van haar structuur en funktionering.

46) Goddijn, p. 22:
Wie in de sociologie een evenwichtiger uitgangspunt zoekt, dat theorie en waarneming verzoenen wil, dat de problemen van sociaal beleid en planning niet uit de weg gaat, dat een aantal belangrijke aspecten van de sociale werkelijkheid, in een bescheiden begrippenkader vangen wil, stoot vroeg of laat op het gematigd-funktionalistisch standpunt van Robert K. Merton.

47) Goddijn, p. 22:
R.K. Merton is een bescheiden, stimulerend en 'all round' socioloog, die de sociologie opvatting, die hij huldigt, ook in praktijk brengt. Hij legt een stevig verband tussen sociologische theorie en praktische beoefening enerzijds en het concrete, zowel zui-
vere als toegepaste, onderzoek anderzijds. Aan elke verkenning van de sociale werkelijkheid laat hij een theoretische stellingname voorafgaan. Hij verliest zich daarbij echter niet in topzware theoretische beschouwingen, die door de doorsnee socioloog toch niet benut kunnen worden, maar probeert op genuanceerde wijze in actuele sociale vraagstukken door te dringen aan de hand van beperkte reeksen adequate begrippen, die hij afleidt uit de functionele basistheorie.

48) Goddijn, p. 23:
Merton schrijft niet, zoals b.v. Talcott Parsons, voor een 'high-brow'-élite, maar voor de socioloog te velde en laat bij voorkeur theorie en waarneming tegelijkertijd optrekken op basis van beperkte probleemstellingen, die maatschappelijke en praktische betekenis hebben.

49) Goddijn, p. 23:
Wat ons vervolgens in Merton aantrekt is het volkomen open karakter van zijn theoretische beschouwingen, die noden tot continu en opeenvolgend onderzoek op verschillende terreinen. Niets is hem vreemder dan de pretentie, dat met hem de sociologie tegelijk begonnen en voltooid is, een pretentie, die we vanaf A. Comte bij nagenoeg alle systeembouwers in die sociologie tot op heden aantreffen.

50) Goddijn, p. 24:
Het aantrekkelijke van Mertons theorie is tenslotte, dat zijn functionalistisch standpunt niet gekenmerkt wordt door een conservatieve ideologie, welke deze richting nogal eens wordt aangewezen.

51) Goddijn, p. 108:
Een dynamisch gebruik van het begrip functie vindt pas plaats wanneer men het gebruikt bij de verklaring van de verandering of aanpassingsconflikten in de structuur en functionering van een samenleving. Een dergelijk gebruik vinden we, zoals we zien zullen, bij R.K. Merton.

52) Goddijn, p. 113:
Merton heeft zich in tegenstelling tot Parsons voornamelijk met de sociologie bezig gehouden en het功能alisme als sociologische theorie tot ontwikkeling willen brengen. Aan interdisciplinaire samenwerking hecht hij veel betekenis, maar hij gaat bij zijn plannen dienaangaande niet zover als Parsons.
53) Goddijn, p. 113:
Mertons funktionalisme is minder abstrakt dan dat van Parsons. Zijn functionele analyses richten zich op eigentijdse vraagstukken van de Amerikaanse samenleving. Zijn functionele theorie is kenmerkend voor en uitdrukking van een bepaald historisch tijdpark.

54) Goddijn, p. 122:
Hij staat geen theoretische en deduktieve, maar een empirische en heuristische benadering voor bij het vaststellen van de elementen van een sociaal systeem. Volgens deze strategie mag geen enkele variabele in het sociale systeem worden toegelaten, welke niet empirisch is vastgesteld.

55) Goddijn, p. 115:
Een belangrijk punt, waardoor Merton's funktionalisme zich voordelig onderscheidt van dat van Parsons, achten wij tenslotte Mertons groter gevoel en boeiende suggesties met betrekking tot vraagstukken van sociaal beleid en planning.

56) Those that are left out are either similar to ones selected or biographical in nature.

57) Although this is not explicitly stated in the statements listed above (6, 15), it is quite clear that Goddijn regards this point as important for preferring Merton to Parsons. Cf. for e.g. pp. 109-111, 119-120.

58) See Chapter I.

59) Goddijn, pp. 115-117.

60) Goddijn, p. 117.

61) Chapter I.

62) See Chapter I for explanation of the term.


64) See Chapter I for explanation.


67) The stereotypical diatribe between the armchair theorist and the man in the field was commented on in Chapter I, footnote 44. In this regard one could irreverently refer to the legends that Archimedes was in his bath and Newton under the apple tree when they made their great discoveries.

Mitchell, however, does not suggest these aspects as standards for accepting Parsons' work.

69) Ibid., p. 1.

70) Ibid., p. 38.

71) Ibid., p. 172.

72) Ibid., pp. 205-208.


74) Ibid., p. 809.

75) Ibid., p. 811.

76) Ibid., p. 810.

77) Loc. cit.

78) Loc. cit.

79) Loc. cit.

80) Ibid., p. 811.

81) See p. 62 below.

82) Loc. cit.

83) Loc. cit.


85) Ibid., p. 811.

86) Ibid., p. 812.

87) Ibid., p. 813.

88) Ibid., p. 812.

89) Loc. cit.

90) Loc. cit.

91) Loc. cit.

92) Ibid., p. 813.

93) Loc. cit.


95) Martindale, D.: Ibid., p. 120.
96) This question will be studied in some detail in the following chapters and will here be treated only discursively.


100) Ibid., p. 320:
When an adult asks 'Why' of a particular matter of fact f, he is usually wanting either a causal explanation expressed by the sentence 'Because of g' or a teleological explanation expressed by the sentence 'In order that g'. Each type of explanation will involve an explicit or implicit reference to scientific laws.


102) Ibid., p. 334.

103) Ibid., p. 335.


105) Loc. cit.

106) Ibid., p. 815.

107) Ibid., p. 817.

108) Ibid., p. 815.


110) See Chapter I for explanation.

111) Thus Godijn's book has recently been recommended as an authoritative work on 'functionalism'. Maritz, F.A.: Die Fenomenologie, Academica, Pretoria-Cape Town, 1967, p. 163, ff. 45.
CHAPTER III

MERTONIAN FUNCTIONALISM

Par. 1 Introduction

In this chapter we start with an evaluation of "functionalism" in theoretical sociology. One of our main concerns is to determine whether it is possible to state in unambiguous terms what "functionalism" is, what it promises as an orientation, and what is logically implied in its application. As a convenient starting point we will use R.K. Merton's paradigm contained in his article "Manifest and Latent Functions". ¹

This has been one of the few and important attempts to formulate the logical import of this orientation. In this chapter it will serve two purposes. On the one hand we will use it as a point of reference for inquiring into the nature of "functionalism" itself, independent of its substantive application by any particular theorist. Having done this, we will, on the other hand, refer again to the paradigm in order to give a preliminary assessment of Merton as a functional theorist. This will be done, not by an exhaustive analysis of all Merton's publications - for that would require an independent study - but by pointing out the general implications of Merton's position as a theorist.

But before we begin our analysis it would be expedient to structure the proposed analysis in the present chapter more specifically in terms of the issues outlined in the two previous ones. In Chapter I a general account was given of the methodological position adopted
in this study. The main questions considered here were: What is science? What is a scientific theory? In terms of the answers given certain broad distinctions were drawn that seem relevant to the evaluation of theoretical work in sociology. The underlying assumption in Chapter II was that if the position stated and the distinctions drawn in Chapter I are accepted, then the two most important general criteria in terms of which efforts at scientific explanation may be evaluated are logical consistency and empirical adequacy. Because our primary aim in this study is to evaluate functionalism as an attempt at eventual scientific explanation in sociology, two current examples of such evaluations were reviewed and found inadequate in terms of the two general criteria mentioned above. It was found that the standards employed were either premature, or based on the personal and/or philosophical commitments of the authors, or logically inconsistent.

In this and the following chapter we give our own evaluation of "functionalism". Once again standards of critique are implied. As an introduction to our own attempt at evaluation we should therefore state specifically, in terms of the general methodological principles outlined in the second chapter, what the standards of evaluation are that are implied in our analysis of "functionalism".

Par. 2 Criteria for Evaluating Programmatic Theory

It will be remembered from our discussion on the nature of scientific theory that it was viewed as one of the
most common ways of giving explanations in science. Once such a theory is formulated there are reasonably clear-cut ways of testing it. They all amount to the general procedure of determining whether the explanations advanced by the theory can be refuted by examples from reality. If not, the theory is accepted until evidence to the contrary is supplied. Thus the theory is evaluated by empirical testing.

As we noted, however, most of the formulations in science, especially in the social sciences, have not yet reached the stage where they can be called theories in the sense in which the term theory was explicated in Chapter I. We have suggested the term programmatic theory for such formulations. The problem is then: How does one evaluate programmatic theory? Obviously it cannot yet be tested, and it would therefore be absurd to apply the criterion of testability to a theory that is still in its programmatic stage of formulation. It is our contention that this problem is one of the most crucial for the social sciences and is undoubtedly one of the basic causes of most of the methodological and pseudo-methodological debates in sociology.

Our suggestion for resolving this dilemma can be simply stated as follows: Our main concern must be to try to understand the implications of the programme suggested by a theorist. What are his intentions? What is he trying to explain? How does he go about it? What stage has he reached in his attempt? If these questions guide our evaluation, then the standards we apply in our assessments will be concerned not so much with
accepting or rejecting them (this can be done quite easily once they have developed into theories), but with understanding their logical structure, their eventual empirical import and the practical difficulties with which they are confronted.

These standards are directly related to the general criteria of logical consistency and empirical adequacy. With regard to the former we are concerned with questions such as: Are the concepts and statements clearly defined and formulated? Are the relations between them spelled out explicitly? Are these relations deductively consistent? And in connection with empirical adequacy we come up against such questions as: Can the constructs in the programmatic theory be related to observational phenomena? What operational definitions are needed? What possible hypotheses can be derived and how can they be tested?

These questions can be related to the aspects of a programmatic theory in this way:

1. **Specifying the problem within a range of data:** The first thing that must be understood is which facts the theorist is trying to explain. What is it about these facts that constitutes a problem? The specification of the problem sets boundaries that include data that are to be explained and exclude data that are not relevant to the problem. Thus the problem is situated within a range of data. The scope of this range may be wide or narrow, and it may focus on a particular or on a general problem.
2. **Basic concepts:** Next one can look for the concepts the theorist forms to identify, classify and organize the range of data.

3. **The logical structure:** Here one is concerned with the relations of the concepts to one another. The logical order that is imposed on the concepts must be determined so that one can understand which combinations of concepts are permissible and which are not. Related questions that one can here ask concern the **logical exhaustiveness** of the concepts, i.e. are all the data specified within the range of data fitted into some category? If not, what are the residual categories in the conceptual scheme? These residual categories usually refer to data that are not readily classifiable by the basic concepts. Another set of questions concerns the **mutual exclusiveness** of the concepts. According to this criterion there should be one category to which each datum can be assigned. Sometimes an item seems to share the characteristics of two concepts and one is not certain to which it belongs. In such cases we must determine whether there are clear rules for deciding which category has precedence in ambiguous cases.

It should be clear that within the standard of logical consistency any question which reveals any quality of the relations of concepts to one another is important. Thus one might also ask whether certain concepts are opposites, form a hierarchy, or balance each other in some way. All these questions emphasize the importance of determining the logical import of the programmatic theory we are evaluating.
4. **Operational definitions:** Here one is concerned with indices that the theorist provides for linking some of his concepts with empirical phenomena. The rules that he provides to represent his concepts by data must be determined. This is the process of concept-clarification which makes explicit the character of the data subsumed under each concept. In the first chapter we referred to the correspondence rules of a theory, i.e. the rules by means of which theoretical terms are linked with the observational level. These rules help one to determine the empirical import of the theory.

5. **Deriving hypotheses:** Certain propositions, generated from the logical structure stating the dynamic relations among concepts, indicate how the theorist expects the data to behave over time. Two standards are relevant when evaluating the propositions derived from a programmatic theory. One concerns the problem of whether these propositions can be inferred from the concepts and statements contained in the theory; the other, whether these propositions can be made testable. In the second case one must look for the rules that the theorist provides and according to which the analytical propositions can be translated into testable terms. To develop empirical propositions from analytical ones, he must specify what measurable items in the observational world need to be referred to in order to determine whether the analytical propositions are correct. Making propositions testable is one of the crucial problems for theoretical work in sociology.
6. **Testing propositions**: Here of course all the research procedures and techniques at the disposal of a scientist in a particular field come into play.

The points briefly sketched above refer to the standards implied in the evaluation of a theory in its programmatic stage. The first three points can be correlated roughly with the problem of logical consistency, while the last three are more relevant to problems of empirical adequacy. Of course the same standards are relevant when a theory has been tested and found unacceptable. One can try to modify the theory by introducing new distinctions or assumptions; by giving more adequate operational definitions; by making the propositions more rigorously testable etc.

It should also be clear that not all of these standards would be applicable to all programmatic theories at a particular moment. It all depends at what stage of development the programmatic theory is at a particular point in time. If a programmatic theory is still in an initial stage where the greatest pre-occupation lies in developing a definitional or analytical scheme, attention will primarily be focussed on the logical structure of the programmatic theory. Once propositions are formulated and certain explanations and/or predictions are suggested, then standards of empirical adequacy become relevant. Thus we reiterate, the underlying emphasis in evaluating programmatic theories should not be whether a particular one should be accepted or rejected, but to come to an understanding of its intentions, implications and problems. The decision to sup-
port one programmatic theory rather than another is
thus not determined so much by conclusive arguments
for its acceptability but rather by the fact that the
social scientist is interested in the problem formu-
lated by the theory and by the promise entailed in its
eventual construction.

With these introductory remarks it is hoped that our
position regarding the evaluation of theoretical socio-
logy is clear. It is not suggested that only the above
standards are relevant for such evaluations. It is
only implied that those mentioned above serve to indi-
cate what our intentions are in the analysis of "func-
tionalism" in sociology. In the subsequent analysis,
these standards will not necessarily be applied expli-
citly and formally, but will rather be taken for granted
as the implicit boundaries within which the evaluative
discourse will be situated.

Par. 3 A Definition of Functionalism
Here we are concerned with the first of the two major
tasks we set ourselves in this chapter. That is, to
determine whether we can give a clear answer to the
question: What is functionalism? To start with, we
can begin by considering Merton's paradigm for function-
al analysis. 2) This eleven-point paradigm, according
to Merton, contains "the hard core of concept, procedure
and inference in functional analysis". 3) Merton says
that the most important purposes served by such "analy-
tic paradigms" are that they:

(a) Provide a compact, parsimonious arrangement of
the central concepts and their interrelations
as these are utilized for description and analyses.

(b) They lessen the likelihood of inadvertently importing hidden assumptions and concepts, since each new assumption and each new concept must either be logically derivable from the previous terms of the paradigm or explicitly incorporated in it.

(c) They advance the cumulation of theoretical interpretation.

(d) They suggest the systematic cross tabulation of presumably significant concepts and may thus sensitise the analyst to types of empirical and theoretic problems that may otherwise be overlooked.

(e) They make for the codification of qualitative analysis in a manner approximating the logical, if not the empirical, rigor of quantitative analysis. 4)

Although the paradigm to be discussed does not fulfil all these purposes for functional analysis, it serves to explain what Merton calls its "logic of procedure". From it, it should thus be possible to determine what the logical import of functionalism is. Therefore it is appropriate to give an abbreviated account of its most important points.

A. The Paradigm

1. The item(s) to which functions are imputed.

The basic requirement is that the object of analysis represent a standardized (i.e. patterned or repetitive) item such as social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural pattern etc.

Basic Query: What must enter into the protocol of observation of the given item if it is to be amenable to systematic functional analysis?

2. Concepts of subjective dispositions.

At some point, functional analysis invariably assumes or explicitly operates with some conception of the motivation of individuals involved in a social system.

Basic Query: In which types of analysis is it sufficient to take observed motivations as data, as given, and in which are they properly considered as problematical, as derivable from other data?
3. Concepts of objective consequences (Functions/Dysfunctions).

We have observed two prevailing types of confusion enveloping the several current conceptions of 'function':

(a) The tendency to confine sociological observations to the positive contributions of a sociological item to the social or cultural system in which it is implicated;

(b) The tendency to confuse the subjective category of motive with the objective category of function.

Appropriate conceptual distinctions are required to eliminate these confusions.

The first problem calls for a concept of multiple consequences and a net balance of an aggregate of consequences.

Functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system; and dysfunctions, those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system.

The second problem (arising from the easy confusion of motives and functions) requires us to introduce a conceptual distinction between the cases in which the subjective aim-in-view coincides with the objective consequences, and the cases in which they diverge.

Manifest functions are those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaptation of the system which are intended and recognized by participants in the system.

Latent functions, correlatively, being those which are neither intended nor recognized.

Basic Query: What are the effects of the transformation of a previously latent function into a manifest function?

4. Concepts of the units subserved by the function.

It is necessary to consider a range of units for which the item has designated consequences; individuals in diverse statuses, subgroups, the larger social system and culture systems.

5. Concepts of functional requirements (needs, prerequisites).

Embedded in any functional analysis is some conception, tacit or expressed, of the functional requirements of the system under observation.

Basic Query: What is required to establish the validity of such a variable as 'functional requirement' in situations where rigorous experimentation is impracticable?
6. Concepts of the mechanisms through which functions are fulfilled.

Functional analysis in sociology, as in other disciplines like physiology and psychology, calls for a 'concrete and detailed account' of the mechanisms which operate to perform a designated function. This refers not to psychological but to social mechanisms.

Basic Query: What is the presently available inventory of social mechanisms corresponding, say, to the large inventory of psychological mechanisms? What methodological problems are entailed in discerning the operation of these social mechanisms?


This focuses attention on the range of possible variation in the items which can, in the case under examination, subserve a functional requirement.

Basic Query: Since scientific proof of the equivalence of an alleged functional alternative ideally requires rigorous experimentation, and since this is not often practicable in large-scale sociological situations, which practicable procedures of inquiry most nearly approximate the logic of experiment?

8. Concepts of structural context (or structural constraint).

The range of variation in the items which can fulfill designated functions in a social structure is not unlimited. The interdependence of the elements of a social structure limits the effective possibilities of change or functional alternatives.

Basic Query: How narrowly does a given structural context limit the range of variation in the items which can effectively satisfy functional requirements? Do we find, under conditions yet to be determined, an area of indifference, in which any one of a wide range of alternatives may fulfill the function?


We have noted that functional analysts tend to focus on the statics of social structure and to neglect the study of structural change.

This emphasis upon statics is not, however, inherent in the theory of functional analysis.

The concept of dysfunction, which implies the concept strain, stress and tension on the structural level, provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change.

Basic Query: Does the prevailing concern among functional analysts, with the concept of social equilibrium divert attention from the phenomena of social disequilibrium? Which available procedures will permit the sociologist most adequately to gauge the accumulation of stresses and strains in the social system?
This requires, above all, a rigorous statement of the sociological procedures of analysis which most nearly approximate the logic of experimentation.

Basic Query: To what extent is functional analysis limited by the difficulty of locating adequate examples of social systems which can be subjected to comparative study?

How does one detect the ideological tinge of a functional analysis and to what degree does a particular ideology stem from the basic assumptions adopted by a sociologist?

A careful reading of this paradigm reveals the following central notions:

(a) Phenomena or items that have a "patterned or standardized character" are described and analyzed (points 1 and 6).

(b) They are assumed to have "objective consequences" for some system in which they are situated (point 3).

(c) These units or systems must be distinguished and described as clearly as possible (point 4).

(d) A basic assumption is that these systems have some requirements or states that must be met or maintained (point 5).

(e) Items have a "range of variation" that limits the ways in which they can contribute to meeting the requirements of the system (point 7).

Here it is clear that the term function has a distinctive meaning, namely "the observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system." Merton has given careful attention to the ambiguities that surround the term "function" in social science literature. Where functional analysis is concerned he rejects certain familiar connotations where "function" is
equivalent to: occupation; or functionary; or its pure mathematical sense "where it refers to a variable considered in relation to one or more other variables in terms of which its own value depends"; 7) or subjective disposition.

He would probably agree with Hempel that most of the popular usages of "function" in everyday rhetoric (except of course the mathematical usage), could be dispensed with by a more rigorous statement of what is meant. Thus, for example, if the term "function" implies some subjective disposition in the sense that: "John's goal, namely to graduate with honours, has the effect of making him study hard" or conversely that: "His present hard studying has the function of realizing that goal" (i.e. where some future event seems to be causally efficacious in bringing about a present event), then, Hempel argues, it is an elliptical rendering of an argument that should run more or less as follows:

When the action of a person is motivated, say, by the desire to reach a certain objective, then it is not the as yet unrealized future event of attaining that goal, which can be said to be determining his present behaviour, for indeed it may never be actually reached; rather, to put it in crude terms — it is (a) his desire present before the action, to attain that particular objective, and (b) his belief, likewise present before the action, that such and such a course of action is most likely to have the desired effect. The determining motives and beliefs, therefore, have to be classified among the antecedent conditions of a motivational explanation, and there is no difference on this account between motivational and causal explanation. 8)

After examining certain possible interpretations of the term "function", Merton concludes that the connotation that is
... central to functional analysis ... is the (one) 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'.

Thus it is not surprising that the central notions that we have abstracted from Merton's paradigm refer to a system wherein certain items have "objective consequences" for the system maintaining certain states (adaptation or adjustment). What is of particular significance to the purpose of our evaluation of "functionalism" is that Nagel, for example, states that

Whenever some component part or process in a self-regulating system is explained by exhibiting its role in maintaining the system in a specified operative condition we have a teleological explanation.

Thus it appears that the central import of Merton's paradigm for functional analysis is typical of what Nagel calls a teleological explanation. Furthermore, Nagel asserts that

... despite its general disrepute in modern science, the notion of teleology is neither hopelessly archaic nor necessarily a mark of superstition; and teleological explanations are fully compatible with causal accounts.

Now, anyone who has only a casual acquaintance with sociological literature on "functionalism" will know that the "problem of teleology" has been an irksome one, both for those attacking and those defending this orientation. Nevertheless, it would appear, from our interpretation of Merton's paradigm and Nagel's remarks quoted above, that this "problem" will have to be faced if we are to arrive at a satisfactory definition of "functionalism".

B. Teleology and Functional Explanations

Teleology has always, implicitly or explicitly been held
to be of crucial significance to the success or failure of functional analysis in the social sciences. It has been maintained by some that because of its teleological undertone the functional orientation has only a limited utility for scientific analysis. On the other hand this same characteristic of functionalism is sometimes cited as reason for a distinct mode of explanation for the social sciences. It has been claimed that the "purposive" or "goal-oriented" or "intentional" nature of the action of living as distinguished from non-living phenomena, is unique and consequently necessitates a logic of explanation peculiar to this subject matter and for which teleological explanation is ideally suited. These claims have recently received the rigorous attention of methodologists}^{12)} and have been rejected. The most general conclusions of the analyses of these methodologists have been:

(a) The social scientist studies phenomena where such locutions as "purposive" or "goal directed behaviour" figure strongly and should be taken into account.

(b) These locutions usually refer to some conception of a teleological system but the logical structure for explicating such a system does not differ from that of a non-teleological system.

(c) There are no reasons why it is in principle (i.e. logically) impossible to develop a scientifically acceptable teleological system of explanation in any of the branches of science.

These conclusions will occupy our attention for the remainder of this paragraph. We will try to elucidate them by considering the following questions: (i) What is the distinctive nature of phenomena that are amenable
to teleological explanation (henceforth called teleological phenomena)? (ii) What is the logical structure of such a teleological system of explanation? (iii) Why do the social sciences have a predilection for constructing such systems of explanation?

(i) The distinctive nature of teleological phenomena

The word teleology is derived from the Greek word "telos" or "teleos" meaning "end", and was given philosophical content by the Greek philosophers, notable Aristotle, in the doctrine of the final causes of events.

Thus Nagel says that:

In ancient Aristotelian science, categories of explanations suggested by the study of living things and their activities were made canonical for all inquiry. Since non-living as well as living phenomena were thus analyzed in teleological terms - an analysis which made the notion of final cause focal - Greek science did not assume a fundamental cleavage between biology and other natural science. 13)

But modern science, Nagel continues, regards final causes to be

... vestal virgins which bear no fruit in the study of physical and chemical phenomena. 14)

Another reason why teleological explanations are regarded with suspicion in the physical sciences, apart from their association with the notion of final causes, is because they are assumed to invoke "purposes" or "ends-in-view" as causal factors in natural processes.

... Purposes and goals admittedly play important roles in human activities, but there is no basis for assuming them in the study of physico-chemical and most biological phenomena. 15)

The above two associations with teleological explanations are some of the most important sources for pejorative judgments on teleology in science. But as Nagel has
pointed out, these types of teleological explanations are also dismissed by scientists (especially biologists) who still persist with teleological inquiries. Thus the phenomena studied by these scientists appear to have distinctive characteristics other than those usually associated with the above types of teleological explanations, but which nevertheless still lead to explanations that are called teleological. It is this distinctive nature of these phenomena that must be held responsible for the persistence of teleological explanations in science.

In these terms an item is analyzed not in terms of some final cause or primarily in terms of some conscious goal that is causally efficacious, but in terms of the contribution that it makes to some larger entity of which it is presumed to be a part. Thus Nagel says:

... we shall adopt as the mark of a teleological statement in biology, and as a feature that distinguishes such statements from non-teleological ones, the occurrence in the former but not in the latter, of such typical locutions as 'the function of', 'the purpose of', 'for the sake of', 'in order to' and the like - more generally, the occurrence of expressions signifying a means-ends nexus. 16)

Similarly Braithwaite emphasizes the means-end relationship distinctive of teleological phenomena when he says that:

This type of explanation is that in which the 'why' question about a particular event or activity is answered by specifying a goal or end towards the attainment of which the event or activity is a means. Such explanations will be called teleological explanations. 17)

Rudner remarks that the system for which a particular item is assumed to have some function or contribution may refer either to purposive or non-purposive entities. Thus:
The social scientist may have to cope not only with examples in which there are, ostensibly, references to the purposes of obviously non-purposive entities, but also with examples which refer to systems containing constituents that undeniably are purposive entities: human beings and their purposive behaviour. 18)

The distinctive nature of teleological phenomena is therefore seen to reside in the assumption that they can always be construed as belonging to, or being part of, some larger entity to which they contribute in some way, and this contribution is further assumed to be instrumental in bringing about or maintaining a particular state of affairs in that entity. Thus Rudner says that the following two statements, one from biology and one from anthropology, have the same teleological import:

The purpose served by an increase of leucocytes in the bloodstream during times of infection is that of guarding the body against attack by deleterious invading organisms.

The persistence of type-X burial customs in society Y is explained not by the manifest functions or purposes attributed to them by the members of that society, but rather by their latent function: shoring up the members' feelings of group solidarity and hence improving morale in the face of the terrors death inevitably inspires in most humans. 19)

This import, as we have already noted, is succinctly emphasized by Merton when he asserts that the connotation of the concept "function" that is central to functional analysis is

... the one adopted from the biological sciences where the term function is understood to refer to the 'vital' or organic processes considered in the respect in which they contribute to the maintenance of the organism.

Here we find thus, that what according to Braithwaite, Nagel and Rudner is the distinctive nature of a teleological explanation, is held by Merton to be the central orientation of "functionalism" in the social sciences.
The central orientation of functionalism — expressed in the practice of interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated — has been found in virtually all the sciences of man — biology and physiology, psychology, economics and law, anthropology and sociology. 20)

However, the prominent part that the concept "function" plays in functional analysis in the social sciences, has, according to Rudner, drawn attention away from the fact that these functions always refer to some system in which items are implicated when "functionally" analyzed. He says that

... although references to functionalism or to functions do not always involve overt reference to functional systems, nevertheless an examination of typical contexts shows that the reference to such systems is genuine and virtually universal — however hidden, implicit or elliptically rendered they may be by the usual functionalist locutions. The degree to which such reference is disguised will, of course, vary from context to context and author to author. 21)

From the above we may conclude that if the distinctive nature of teleological phenomena resides in the assumption that they are supposed to have a particular function for, or contribution to some system, then it would seem that we can only understand the nature of this function or contribution if we are acquainted with the system in which it is supposed to operate. This is the major point that is emphasized by Nagel, Rudner and Braithwaite with regard to teleological explanations. Accordingly each one gives attention to the logical structure of a teleological system and considers the problem whether a

... teleological explanation is radically different from, and not reducible to, the kind of scientific explanation associated with non-teleological phenomena. 22)
They all come to the conclusion that this is not the case.

It is important to keep in mind that the logical structure, i.e. the calculus of a teleological system would be the same for any branch of science where it is used. The substantive teleological theory (i.e. the systematically related set of propositions and laws that refer to empirical phenomena and that can be subjected to test), in biology, will obviously differ from one in sociology, but the logical "skeleton" of the system each one refers to would be the same. 23) Rudner, after his explication of the logical structure of a teleological system stresses this point forcibly when he says that:

It has been irrelevant to the purpose of our analysis to specify either the nature of the elements that make up our illustrative teleological system or the mechanisms or processes that are causally efficacious in our system's changes of state. Accordingly, our system may serve equally well as a skeleton outline for any type of teleological system. It will serve in this fashion for systems such as the human body's digestive system, in which case the mechanisms for change in state would be physico-chemical in nature; but it can also serve as the outline of a personality system with system's elements being construed in, say, Freudian terms as an individual's Id, Ego and Superego, in this latter case, the mechanisms of changes of state would be psychological. Indeed, our example might serve equally well as the skeleton outline of a system of human beings, social groups or social institutions - in which cases the mechanisms of changes of state would be, broadly speaking, sociological. 24)

These remarks are important because they serve to forestall the type of argument that because biologists work with teleological theory and social scientists try to construct one, the latter have some naive organismic conception of society. In some instances it may have been true, but as will be shown in subsequent analyses,
this accusation is not valid for social theorists like Merton and Parsons — even though such a charge is sometimes levelled at their so called "functionalism".25)

It is apparent when Merton discusses the "logic of procedure" of functional analysis that he is aware of both the distinction between the logical structure of a system and a theory pertaining to it as well as the possibility of being accused of some organismic analogy.

Thus he cautiously states that:

More immediately relevant is the possibility that prior experience in other disciplines may provide useful methodological models for functional analysis in sociology. To learn from the canons of analytical procedure in these often more exacting disciplines is not, however, to adopt their specific conceptions and techniques lock, stock and barrel. ... To examine the methodological framework of biological researches is not to adopt their substantive concepts. 26)

Although Merton does not state what the logical structure of the "methodological model" for either biology or sociology is, it is clear that in his exposition of "Cannon's logic of procedure in physiology" the central issue revolves around the contributions or functions of particular mechanisms for a particular system. Thus he says:

Having established the requirements of the organic system, Cannon then proceeds to describe in detail the various mechanisms which operate to meet these requirements. 27)

This description according to Merton, is done in four successive steps:

First of all certain functional requirements of the organisms are established, requirements which must be satisfied if the organism is to survive, or to operate with some degree of effectiveness. Second, there is a concrete and detailed description of the arrangements through which these requirements are typically met in 'normal' cases. Third, if some of the typical mechanisms for meeting these require-
ments are destroyed, or are found to be functioning inadequately, the observer is sensitized to the need for compensating mechanisms (if any) which fulfil the necessary function. Fourth, and implicit in all that precedes, there is a detailed account of the structure for which the functional requirements hold, as well as a detailed account through which the function is fulfilled. 26)

From this account it is once again evident that what is the issue here, is an exposition of a particular type of system; one that is known as a teleological system. To elaborate on the conclusion just arrived at: If the distinctive nature of teleological phenomena resides in their functions for or contribution to teleological systems; and if the "central orientation" of functionalism lies precisely in determining what the contributions of phenomena are to systems in which they are implicated, then, in order to understand the nature of such contributions and assess the merits of functionalism as an orientation for establishing the nature of these contributions, it is necessary to determine what the logical structure of the systems is as implied by the existence of teleological phenomena.

(ii) The structure of teleological systems

The following exposition relies heavily on Rudner's analysis, 29) but his exposition does not differ in any consequential degree from either that of Nagel 30) or Braithwaite. 31) It is, however, a more simplified one of the calculus of a teleological system and, for the purpose of our own evaluation, quite adequate.

Rudner maintains that a functional system is a type of teleological system and that the latter is a type of deterministic system. 32) That is why he considers it ne-
ecessary that, in order to understand what functionalism in the social science is all about

... we shall have to inquire by stages first into the nature of systems, then into the nature of both teleological and functional systems, and finally into the use of these concepts in functional explanations. 33)

For his explication of a non-teleological deterministic system Rudner uses the solar system and states that a scientific account of it would include at least the following:

1. An identification of the components of the system.
2. A specification of the characteristics of the components relative to which descriptions of the states of the system are to be provided.
3. A specification of a set of laws in conformity with which states of the system succeed or precede each other, or with which components of the system interact.

For example, the components of the solar system are the sun and the nine major planets. Out of all the possible characteristics of these components Rudner selects two for the purpose of analysis, namely: the momentum and location of each component at a particular time.

Thus Rudner says that the choice of these two characteristics of the components of the solar system

... has the consequence of co-ordinating with each component of the system, two sentences, one which describes the momentum, the other the location of that component. Accordingly for any time t, a description of the state of our entire ten component system will be comprised of twenty sentences whose form may be presented as follows: the location of the sun at time t is l₁; the momentum of the sun at time t is m₁ etc. 34)

The complete set of twenty sentences for time t is called a state-description of the solar system. Thus a state-
description would refer to a particular state that a system is in at time $t$. These states can for the sake of convenience be called \textbf{E-states} of the system. A system can have a great number of E-states or only a relatively few, depending on the possible number and combinations of state-descriptions that bring about the E-states. In the example above "momentum" and "location" are \textbf{state-variables} (characteristics of the components of the system), and it is in terms of them that a description of the state of the system is given. The actual number of state-variables for any given system is not fixed and may vary from system to system.

The laws required in this example of the solar system are the laws of celestial mechanics. They together with some given state-description (the \textit{initial} state-description), allow us to deduce a description of the system's state (the \textit{terminal} state-description) after a given time lapse.

The above kind of system is standardly referred to as \textbf{deterministic}. Perhaps the most important source of the confusion attending the use of 'deterministic' has been the failure to recognize that to call a theory deterministic is to say something about the theory's logical properties, but nothing about the theory's truth. Moreover, to call a theory deterministic, without either explicitly or contextually providing some further information, makes no more sense than to say of someone that he is taller than. This follows that a theory can be \textbf{deterministic only relative to some specific set of variables.} 35)

Having given a simplified exposition of the structure of a deterministic system, Rudner considers the question whether, and in what way, teleological systems differ from the non-teleological example just examined. He finds that an additional distinction is usually introduced regarding the E-states of the teleological system. These E-states are divided into G-states and non-G-states. Thus you have two classes of E-states; those
that are G-states and those that are not.\textsuperscript{36} But in spite of this additional distinction the teleological system

\textit{... does not differ methodologically from that of the solar system. The one apparent difference, our identification of the system's E-states and their division into G-states and non-G-states is not methodologically significant.} \textsuperscript{37}

Rudner concludes that the actual basis for the distinction between teleological and non-teleological systems

\textit{... turns out to be not a matter of logic, but rather a matter of fact. There happen, as a matter of fact, to be a large number of systems (on which the attention of human beings has come to be focused), which are such that their G-states may be distinguished as preferred states of those systems. ... A teleological system then, in contrast to a non-teleological system, has preferred states. To put it in another (equally metaphorical) way, it is one that displays preference for some of its E-states over others. When we talk about actual systems, such preferred states are frequently referred to as goals or goal-states of the system. And such teleological systems, whether purely physical, physiological, psychological or social, are frequently referred to as \textit{goal-directed}, \textit{goal-oriented} or sometimes even \textit{purposive} systems.} \textsuperscript{38}

It is this \textit{"goal-directedness"} of actual teleological systems (in this case a biological organism), that Braithwaite gives particular emphasis. The distinctive nature of teleological systems, he maintains, is not so much that a particular goal is reached or realized, but

\textit{... the active persistence of directive activity towards its goal, the use of alternative means towards the same end, the achievement of results in the face of difficulties. ... Plasticity is not in general a property of one causal chain alone ... it is the property of the organism with respect to a certain goal, namely that the organism can attain the same goal under different circumstances by alternative forms of activity making use frequently of different causal chains.} \textsuperscript{39}

It is the \textit{"plasticity"} of teleological systems which is manifested in the maintenance of some \textit{"preferred"} state
or set of states of the system, that is responsible
for much of the confusion and suspicion regarding the
scientific acceptability of teleological explanations.
For as Rudner says:

The question that immediately arises, is how do
teleological systems manifest their goal-orienta-
tion, or goal-directedness or purposiveness? 40)

In other words, how can we explain the notion of "pre-
ferredness" (a term that is problematical and ambigu-
ous), in such a way, that it would be scientifically
acceptable? What is needed, Rudner (as well as Braith-
waitie and Nagel) argues:

... is an analysis that reveals these problematical
locutions to be similar to corresponding locutions
in non-teleological contexts - similar in the pre-
cise sense that the methodology associated with
their use need not differ from the methodology as-
sociated with use of non-teleological locutions of
science. 41)

Rudner demonstrates that the notion of "preferredness"
can be disposed in alternatively acceptable ways and
emphasizes that these analyses

... do not represent alternative explications of a
single concept, preferredness. In fact, the ex-
istence of these alternatives indicates something
that surely must come as no surprise - namely, that
teleological systems may exhibit different kinds of
preference behaviour, and that the meaning of the
term 'preference behaviour', in any context, must
be qualified by the kind of preference behaviour
to which we are referring. Actually, we might
not count a system as properly teleological unless
it exhibited more than one type of preference be-
behaviour with respect to a goal state(s). 42)

From his two analyses of the concept "preferredness" 43)
it is evident that the way in which a system will mani-
fest its goal-directedness will depend entirely on the
type of lawlike generalizations included in the theory
of the teleological system. Thus in one analysis Rud-
ner demonstrates that the goal-directedness could be
explained by saying that the state that is "preferred" or maintained by a teleological system, could be that state for which the greatest number of possible state-descriptions exist. For instance, if we assume that the characteristics of the components or state variables of the system in terms of which state-descriptions are given, have values that vary within a specified range, then it follows that for some total states (E-states) of the system, there will be a greater number of possible state-descriptions than for others. On the assumption of equiprobability for each state-description it could be inferred that the state of the system for which there are the most state-descriptions, would be the state that system tends to "prefer" or maintain.

This possibility, though plausible, Rudner finds to be unrealistic for actual teleological systems and demonstrates that an alternative explanation could be provided by assuming a principle or law in the theory whereby a probability value is specified in terms of which the possibility could be determined, that if one of the state-variables should change its values, the other state-variables would change in a compensatory way so that a certain state of the system (the "preferred state") could be maintained.

Rudner emphasizes that these are not the only possible explanations for the "goal-directedness" of teleological systems and that they may exhibit different types of teleology or "preference behaviour". What is important, however, is the fact that the degree of "goal-directedness" or "plasticity" or "purposiveness" of teleological
systems

... can be explained in a vocabulary and manner no different from the one required for non-teleological systems (i.e. vocabulary containing only such terms as 'state-descriptions', 'E-state', G-subset of system's E-states' etc.) 45)

After demonstrating that a teleological system is a logically acceptable type of deterministic system, Rudner proceeds to show that a functional system is a particular variant of a teleological system.46) On reviewing typical examples of functional analyses in social science literature, he says that their import can be loosely summarised as follows:47)

1. A component f of a social system is distinguished (e.g. the family).

2. In the context of the system it has a character S (such as socialization of its members).

3. The occurrence of this characteristic determines in turn, some characteristic N of the whole system (normatively regulated role performance).

4. This latter characteristic is necessary for the maintenance of the system in some state G (such as maintenance of the normative pattern of society).

Given this summary, the question arises whether the functional system implied differs in any significant way from the teleological system just considered. According to Rudner

... only a very few modifications would be required. For if we distinguish among the possible E-states of system T, some state(s) let us call it (them) N, and if the theory of T contains two required types of law connecting certain state-descriptions with N, and N, with some G of the E-states - our system T may then serve as a skeleton outline of a functional system. 48)

Thus to revert to the examples of the summary: the cha-
racteristic S (socialization of the young), referring to some component f (the family), is to be construed as a sufficient condition for the occurrence of an N-state (normatively regulated role-performance), which N-state is in turn a necessary condition for the occurrence of some goal-state G (maintenance of the normative pattern of society) of the system.

Rudner concludes that:

If a system and its theory have the above characteristics, the system may be construed as functional. Derivative locutions in which some specific component is referred to as having a function may now be understood as simply an elliptical assertion that they have the indicated place in some functional system. It is important to notice this interpretation because so-called 'functional explanation' takes place all too often through the use of such locutions as '... because X has the function Y ...' without further clarification. 49)

The above analyses lead to the following conclusion that is of particular significance for our evaluation of "functionalism" in theoretical sociology: The analysis and explanation of phenomena in terms of their functions for systems in which they are implicated, is in principle (i.e. logically) possible. Thus, for example, Homan's critique reviewed in the previous chapter that "functionalism" can never explain anything because it cannot develop a theory, is ill-founded. What needs to be stressed immediately, however, is that the above analyses only indicate what is logically possible, i.e. what the logical structure of teleological theories would be like if they were constructed. The practical difficulties that would be encountered in constructing such a theory have not been touched upon in the preceding analyses. The analyses can only provide an ab-
extrasted logical framework for assessing the merits of actual attempts in constructing such theories. Thus Rudner states that

... if the transition is to be made from our example system to an actual one (if the skeleton is to be fleshed out), it will likely be necessary to add and incorporate many complicated hypotheses or laws into the theory of the actual systems. 50)

Nevertheless, the important purpose served by the above exposition for our own study is that it facilitates the evaluation of current attempts at constructing teleological theories in sociology — no matter how vague and uncodified they may be. For if the above analyses are cogent, then it is clear that functionalism as a prominent orientation in sociology, represents an attempt to ultimately develop such theories.

The last question to occupy our attention in this paragraph concerns the reasons why there should be such a predilection for a teleological orientation in the social sciences, especially in sociology. Here of course, we cannot provide conclusive answers but some plausible possibilities may provide interesting insights.

(iii) The prevalence of a teleological orientation in sociology

The first possible reason for the popularity of teleological statements could be traced to a semantic source. Modes and figures of speech referring to the "goals", "motivations" and "purposiveness" of human behaviour, become accepted and attain a pseudo-explanatory power. This point was already alluded to when it was mentioned that locutions such as "the function of", "the purpose of", "in order that" etc. are usually highly elliptical
statements that acquire a certain explanatory authority in everyday discourse. It is only when the logical implications implied by such "explanations" are investigated that we become aware of their inadequacy.

A second and not quite unrelated problem is touched upon by Nagel in his discussion of teleology in biology. The point that he makes is that biologists are in general concerned with a relatively specialized class of systems and these receive greater attention than others. Thus:

When a biologist ascribes a function to the kidney, he tacitly assumes that it is the kidney's contribution to the maintenance of the living animal which is under discussion; and he ignores as irrelevant to his primary interest the kidney's contribution to the maintenance of any other system of which it may also be a constituent. On the other hand, a physicist generally attempts to discuss the effects of solar radiation upon a wide variety of things; and he is reluctant to ascribe a function to the sun's radiation, because no one physical system of which the sun is part is of greater interest to him than is any other such system. 51)

The same seems to apply to sociologists who ascribe functions to items in the social realm. Sometimes the familiarity of the systems implied is taken so much for granted that they are not even specified or distinguished from one another.

Both the above reasons are of course related to the more basic problem that is characteristic in social science, namely the familiarity on the part of the observer with the phenomena that he studies. This familiarity quite often leads him to give equally familiar but quite often inadequate explanations of these phenomena. This is why Rudner says that:
... not a single one of the myriad claims (concerning functional explanation), in sociological literature can be accepted without serious qualification - not because it is, in principle, impossible to achieve functional explanation, but rather, because the achievement of functional explanation simply is too difficult. All too frequently these claims may be counted as at most containing some more or less accurate descriptions, rather than explanations, of specific phenomena, couched in or accompanied by a rhetoric that may be mistaken for explanations by the unwary. 52)

Despite the confusing rhetoric of functional statements and familiarity with the systems being analyzed, the social scientist, in order to furnish a functional explanation of say, the social item X, will, according to Rudner, have to carry out at least the following:

1. Specify X through some accurate description of it.
2. Specify the components composing the functional system Y.
3. Show that X is one of the components of Y.
4. Specify the state variables (or characteristics of the components) of Y.
5. Show that some state-characteristics are characteristics of X and of other components of Y as well, so that state-descriptions can be given.
6. Specify precisely what would constitute the set of E-states for the total system.
7. Specify precisely an N-subset of the E-states.
8. Specify precisely the G-subset of the E-states.
9. Specify a set of state-descriptions of Y, some of which are temporally prior (or posterior) to the one in which X is characterized by the relevant characteristic (i.e. the characteristic that makes it 'functional').
10. (And most difficult of all) produce a body of well-articulated theory which, as the theory of Y, contains at least laws connecting: (a) antecedent state-descriptions with state-descriptions in which Y has the relevant characteristic; (b) the state-description in which Y has the relevant characteristic with the specified N-states of the total system; (c) the N-states of Y with the specified G-states of Y. 53)

We have now reached the stage where it is possible, in terms of the foregoing analyses, to state what can be understood by the term "functionalism" in social science. Ideally, functionalism can be seen as a programme for constructing a theory or theories in terms of the general orientation that phenomena should be studied by de-
termining how they contribute towards the maintenance of a more inclusive system of which they are presumed to be a part. More succinctly stated, functionalism can be seen as a programme for constructing a theory about a teleological system.

The emphasis in this definition must fall on the word "ideally" for it refers to a methodological and not a theoretical programme. This point is of crucial significance. For if it is acceded, then it becomes clear that "functionalism", thus conceived, cannot be equated with an identifiable body of substantive theory or propositions that can be evaluated or be subjected to test. Furthermore, that we cannot group together some theorists and in a catchall fashion refer to "functional theory". According to this definition there is no such thing as the functional theory; there are only different attempts by different, or the same theorists, at constructing functional theories.

The above definition of "functionalism" appears to be the only sense in which the term can serve as a common designation. For if "functionalism" refers to a particular type of teleological explanation, and if we know what the methodological prerequisites are for such an explanation (as we do now after the preceding analyses), then we can refer to theorists as being "functionalists" only in the sense that they have, individually, to a greater or lesser degree, incorporated some or all of these methodological prerequisites into their diverse programmes for theory construction. But then, by calling them "functionalists", we have only suggested some-
thing about the possible logical structure of their programmatic theories and nothing about the nature of their substantive imports. For Merton may prefer to represent the notion of functional prerequisites of a given system theoretically in quite a different manner than, say, Parsons for the same system, and their diverse representations, in the last analysis, are what is important for theoretical sociology and has to be evaluated. That is why, if we have to use the term "functionalism", we prefer to qualify it by referring to the theorist concerned and to speak of "Mertonian functionalism" as distinguished from "Parsonian functionalism".\textsuperscript{56)

We can now proceed to direct our attention to the second major task of this chapter, namely, to give a general assessment of Merton as a "functionalist" theorist.

Par. 4  A Discussion of Merton's Paradigm

After our statement on standards of evaluation for programmatic theory and the subsequent discussion of teleological systems and functional explanations, it should be reasonably clear at what a rudimentary stage Merton's paradigm is codified for functional analysis. Merton himself says that it is only "an initial" and "tentative step" in the direction of codifying functional analyses in sociology.\textsuperscript{57) This is a point that is sometimes forgotten\textsuperscript{58) and which can easily lead to an over-evaluation of the paradigm's practical worth. At this stage the paradigm is more suggestive of a particular approach (in terms of certain loosely formulated assumptions, concepts and distinctions), to studying social
phenomena, than of a well formulated programme for theory construction. Even certain items in the paradigm itself are not quite unambiguous and require our immediate attention.

Both Nagel and Hempel have given reasonably extensive analyses of Merton's paradigm.\(^{59}\) Neither of them rejects or disparages its intentions; on the contrary, they try to point out the necessary distinctions and practical difficulties for its elaboration, but both agree that Merton's attention seems to be

... directed primarily to the preliminary stage of functional analysis rather than to the completed outcome of such an inquiry - to the stage at which crude and tentative discriminations are being explored, and gross relations of dependance between the discriminated items are being established. \(^{60}\)

The points of criticism directed at the paradigm itself can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. There is a general disregard for theoretical interpretation in determining what the items are to which functions are imputed. This refers specifically to point 1. of the paradigm and Nagel states that:

There are no rules for discovering the appropriate set of variables; and there is no assurance whatever that they are contained in a catalogue of miscellaneous items discriminated in a subject matter, no matter how exhaustive such a catalogue may seem to be and no matter how carefully the items are observed and collected. \(^{61}\)

Because of this lack of theoretical interpretation it is not

... entirely clear from Merton's statement whether the items he mentions are intended for some one state of a system, or whether they are a juxtaposition of several partial lists for different states. \(^{62}\)

What is needed are rules whereby
... each state-variable (or certain combinations of them) is connected with matters of gross observation, however involved and indirect the connections may be. 63)

Obviously these rules can only be couched within the framework of a particular theoretical approach and they refer to the necessity of operational definitions.

2. It is not quite clear why Merton reserves special mention (points 2. and 3. of the paradigm), for "concepts of subjective dispositions" in his outline of functional analysis. For

... it seems reasonable to suppose that reference is here being made to motives and purposes as causally relevant for the occurrence of some phenomena. 64)

Consequently

... as a state-variable 'subjective disposition' is on par with any other variables and it is not evident why it should be listed under a special category in what is ostensibly a general paradigm for functional analysis. 65)

This is an extremely important point and one that is apt to be overlooked when Merton's distinction between "manifest and latent functions" is applied. Despite the importance Merton ascribes to it (it is the title of the article in which the paradigm is published), unless

... 'subjective-aim-in-view is explicitly introduced as a special state-variable, Merton's distinction between manifest and latent functions is vacuous, and all functions fall under the head of 'latent functions'. 66)

Rudner puts it more pointedly when he says that:

It makes no difference for the purpose of our analysis (of a functional system), whether the item in question is manifestly or latently functional. 67)

Thus the distinction between manifest and latent functions has no particular theoretical significance but is a practical suggestion for the theorist or researcher
to be aware that certain items may have consequences that are not recognized by members of a system. "This," says Rudner, "if our pre-scientific hunches are correct, is, like any general admonition to be alert, probably good advice."68)

3. Point 6. of the paradigm is according to Nagel a repetition of point 1., for it is

... prima facie simply a call for an explicit listing of the state-variables for the various states of the social system. 69)

However, an additional problem is mentioned here that is of some importance. Merton's insistence that the variables of the social system should be social rather than psychological

... is predicated upon the assumption that a distinction can be drawn between them which is sufficiently clear for the purposes at hand. Moreover, although this is far from certain, he seems to adopt the material assumption that in sociology an adequate list of state-variables for a given state will contain only variables referring to distinctly social items. But the assumptions, whether Merton is actually committed to them or not, involve factual issues that fall outside the scope of this study. 70)

This was essentially one of our main objections against Homans's insistence that the general propositions of sociology will have only psychological variables.71)

4. As we have seen, the distinctive nature of functional or teleological systems is that they succeed in maintaining certain states despite changes within themselves or in their environment. It is thus not only important to specify for each concrete case being analyzed, the nature of the system involved and the states being maintained, but also what the system's relation to its environment is.
However, for reasons that are not obvious, Merton makes no explicit mention of the environment in which an object of functional analysis is embedded, though presumably every such object does have an environment. 72)

The above points are some of the ambiguities and omissions peculiar to the paradigm itself. However, there are more general and important problems, implied by the paradigm and manifested in practical applications of functional analyses, that are pointed out by Nagel and Hempel. These problems are not necessarily characteristic of Merton's work alone but are apt to occur in many of the instances where functional analysis is applied in sociology.

The first problem refers to a subtle shift in the meaning of functional analysis itself. Thus Nagel says that

... even professed functionalists, who explicitly adopt as the paradigm for explanations in social science the functional analysis in biology; (for e.g. Merton+), who do not construe the character of these analyses in identical ways, and sometimes employ in a single discussion different notions of what constitutes a functional explanation. 73)

Merton himself has emphasized this problem, but does not altogether escape from it. In the paradigm he points out that "functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system", 74) the implication being that these functions are related to designated states in a specified system. However, when discussing "Some Functions of the Political Machine" he says "... we can briefly examine the functions more or less common to the political machine as a generic type of social organization”. 75) In the

+ The writer's own insertion. Recall in this regard Merton's exposition of Cannon's logic of procedure mentioned earlier on.
subsequent analysis it becomes evident that Merton refers to functions fulfilled in various systems ("deprived classes", "big business", "certain subgroups in certain ecological areas", "illegitimate business"), with regard to various "needs" ("humanizing and personalizing all manner of assistance", "providing political privileges which entail immediate economic gain", "providing alternative channels for social mobility"). Here functional analysis is employed in a sense where Nagel says

... a more or less inclusive set of consequences that a given thing or activity has either for the 'system as a whole' to which the thing or activity supposedly belongs, or for various other things belonging to the system. ... It seems likely that functionalists associate this meaning with the word (function) when they stress the 'multiple functionings' of various sociological items. But, except for the language used to describe what is being done, it is not clear how functional analysis, which is directed to discovering the various effects some social items have upon other items, differs from the analysis of a physicist which is directed to discovering what consequences follow from, say, the radiation of energy from the sun which affects the constitution of the sun itself or of the various planets. 76)

If functional analysis is employed in this second sense then Merton's paradigm becomes irrelevant to the task at hand. For the paradigm is concerned with determining the contribution of a variable in a particular system with regard to maintaining a designated state in that system, and not to discovering the various effects some social item has for other social items. There are also other ways of shifting the meaning of functional analysis and these have to be guarded against, otherwise much confusion regarding the nature of functional analysis will arise.
The second general problem concerns a reversal of the procedure of functional analysis. Nagel says that the procedure whereby a system is functionally analyzed runs more or less as follows:

... once a system S and a state-\(G\) supposedly maintained in it are adequately specified, the task of the functionalist is to identify a set of state-variables whose operations maintain S in the state-\(G\) and to discover just how these variables are related to each other and to other variables in the system or its environment. \(77\)\)

This process is sometimes, however, reversed in the actual conduct of functional analysis:

Some variable is first identified; and inquiry is then directed toward ascertaining what functions it has, and whether it does in fact contribute to the maintenance of some state-\(G\) which is suspected of being fairly stable. It is therefore quite easy to overlook the requirement that the system S and the state-\(G\) with which the analysis presumably deals, must be carefully delimited, and in consequence to omit explicit mention, in the teleological explanation finally proposed, of the specific system in which the variable allegedly maintains a specific state. \(78\)\)

I think this point is of particular relevance to Merton as a functionalist theorist. Despite the logical import of his paradigm, the practical application of his functional analysis seems to be more "variable-oriented" than "system-oriented". This also facilitates the shift in the meaning of functional analysis away from determining the consequences of a particular item for maintaining a designated state in a delimited system to determining all those "observed consequences" of a particular item for other items. This point becomes evident in Merton's discussion of the rules that must enter into the "descriptive protocol" of "items subjected to functional analysis".\(79\)\) It would appear that, in terms of the logical import of his paradigm,
Merton is, in his application of functional analysis, less of a functionalist than some would have him be.\textsuperscript{80} In his discussion of the functions of the political machine for example, it appears that Merton is more interested in pointing out its functions for various systems than describing how it maintains a particular state in a given system.\textsuperscript{81} The real danger of this reversal of procedure is that it makes functional analysis seem easier than it really is, and leads, as Rudner says,

\begin{quote}
... at most (to) some more or less accurate descriptions, rather than explanations, of specific phenomena, couched in or accompanied by a rhetoric that may be mistaken for explanations by the unwary. \textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

The third problem is familiar to those acquainted with discussions on functionalism in sociology. It concerns the question of the "requirements" or "needs" or "conditions of survival" of the system in question. Merton justifiably called this "one of the cloudiest and empirically most debatable concepts in functional theory."\textsuperscript{83} Hempel in particular, has concentrated on this problem and maintains that every functional analysis should refer to some

\begin{quote}
... general principle to the effect that within certain limits of tolerance or adaptability, a system of the kind under analysis will - either invariably or with high probability - satisfy, by developing appropriate traits, the various functional requirements (necessary conditions for its continued adequate operation), that may arise from changes in its internal state or in its environment. Any assertion of this kind will be called a general hypothesis of selfregulation. \textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Nagel also notes that

\begin{quote}
... the notion of 'functional requirements' suggests something further - classification of the various states of a system on the basis of some principle,
and perhaps the establishment of some hierarchy among them. 85)

The hypothesis of self-regulation or self-maintenance must be stated explicitly and in such terms that its import can be tested empirically, i.e. it should be quite clear as to what is meant empirically when we say that a system "adapts" or "adjusts" or "maintains itself adequately" or "has a degree of plasticity" for every instance of analysis. Hempel says that:

If such an hypothesis is not supplied then functionalists proceed from a statement of a functional prerequisite to the categorical assertion of the occurrence of some trait or other item presumably sufficient to meet the requirement in question. 86)

He maintains that the two basic reasons usually responsible for the omission of an hypothesis or principle of self-regulation are:

(a) Inadequate specification of scope - which consists in failure to indicate clearly the kind of system to which the hypotheses refers, or the range of situations (the limits of tolerance) within which those systems are claimed to develop traits that will satisfy their functional requirements. Merton's formulation (regarding one of the functions of the political machine), for example, does not specify the class of social systems and of situations to which the proposed generalization is meant to apply; as it stands therefore it cannot be put to empirical test or any predictive use. 87)

(b) Non-empirical use of functionalist key terms - It is essential, then, for functional analysis as a scientific procedure that its key concepts be explicitly construed as relative to some standard of survival or adjustment. This standard has to be specified for each functional analysis and it will usually vary from case to case. 88)

Only if the key terms of functional analysis are thus relativized can hypotheses involving them have the status of determinate and objectively testable assumptions and assertions. 89)

To summarize this point: If it is true, as Merton suggests, that "Embedded in every functional analysis is
some conception, tacit or expressed, of the functional requirements of the system under observation," 90) then it is necessary (a) that this conception be made explicit in terms of an hypothesis or principle stating how the system succeeds in regulating the requirements; (b) to indicate clearly the system and its characteristics to which the hypothesis refers; and (c) to formulate the hypothesis of self-regulation in such a way that it can be subjected to test.

For sociology it should be evident that the more inclusive the system that is being analyzed is (for e.g. society), the more problematical the establishment of such an hypothesis will be. We will return again to this point in the following chapter.

The fourth and last general problem we should like to discuss concerns what Hempel calls the "lack of explanatory import of functional analysis". 91) This problem is closely related to the notion of "functional alternatives" for maintaining a particular state in a system and Hempel's argument in this regard can be summarized as follows: If we have described a particular system and identified some state that is being maintained in it; and if in our theory concerning this system we should adopt a probability hypothesis specifying that if the state of the system is changed there would be a probability that a set of variables (functional alternatives) would react in such a way as to bring it "back into its preferred state", then our theory would still not enable us to explain or predict why one variable rather than its alternative would be responsible
for maintaining the state of the system. Thus Hempel says:

... the information typically provided by a functional analysis of item i affords neither deductively or inductively adequate grounds for expecting i rather than one of its alternatives. The impression that a functional analysis does provide such grounds, and thus explains the occurrence of i, is no doubt at least partly due to the benefit of hindsight: when we seek to explain an item i, we presumably know that it has already occurred. 92)

This is, of course, a particularly serious problem for functional analysis and, by implication, seems to vindicate Homans from our critique in the previous chapter. However, Hempel says:

It is of interest to note that a somewhat similar limitation exists also for the predictive use of nomological explanations, 93) even in the most advanced branches of science. 94)

The point is that in these sciences there are usually "good inductive grounds" for expecting a certain event to occur rather than another. Homans on the other hand, maintained that functional analysis cannot explain anything because it did not have a theory and because no conclusions in logic could be drawn from its general propositions. From the preceding analyses it should be obvious that this is not the issue. The real problem, if our interpretation of Hempel is correct, lies in the weakness of the probability (inductive grounds) for expecting one variable rather than one of its alternatives to act in a particular way in our functional system. On the credit side, however, our theory would still enable us to explain how certain states are being maintained through the contribution of certain variables or sets of variables (functional alternatives), and although we would not be able to explain how a spe-
cific variable is responsible for maintaining a particular state in the system, it would seem to be an unnecessarily conservative step to reject all the other valuable information supplied by our theory because of this limitation in the explanatory power of functional analysis. For as Braithwaite has pointed out, it is possible that in the future such a functional theory may be incorporated into a more comprehensive deductive system whose general laws may enable us to explain and predict with a greater degree of precision.

The above are some of the most important problems facing functional analysis in sociology. We have also tried to indicate in what respect they are relevant to Merton as a functionalist theorist. In the previous paragraph we noted that the construction of a functional theory is logically possible. Here we have tried to emphasize the practical problems confronting the social scientist when constructing such a theory. It will be agreed that these problems are of a general nature. To see how they are met in a specific way we would have to evaluate actual attempts by a theorist to construct a functional analytical scheme or theory. For Merton this would entail investigating his various analytical schemes (for e.g. his discussions on Social Structure and Anomie, Bureaucratic Structure and Personality), to determine in what manner he has accommodated the distinctions and implications stated in his paradigm for functional analysis. Such an investigation would, however, take us beyond the scope of the present study, but it should be clear that in such analyses the same
standards of evaluation would be applicable that we employed on this general level.

There is, however, one more general characteristic of Merton's programme that deserves our attention, being related to and having implications for his paradigm on functional analysis. This is his well-known emphasis on developing "theories of the middle range". In 1948 Merton emphasized the difference between his position and that of Parsons with regard to sociological theory and stated that:

Sociology will advance in the degree that the major concern is with developing theories adequate to limited ranges of phenomena and it will be hampered if attention is centered on theory in the large. 99)

This point was again emphasized by him ten years later when he observed that:

Apart from such general theory, there have been developing theories, also analytical and systematic, of far more limited scope, these involving sets of ideas which can be described as theories of the middle range - theories for example, of reference groups and social mobility, of communication, role-conflict and the formation of social norms. These theories also involve abstractions, of course, but abstractions not so far removed from the data of sociological observation. 100)

Presumably the term "theories of the middle range" refer to theories that have a limited scope, i.e. where the range of data to be explained and thus included in the theory, is smaller than what would be the case in more general theories. The right of Merton to "allocate his resources" 101) for the construction of such theories cannot be questioned. It must of course be kept in mind that this is his commitment to sociological activity, and, as he himself has said, does not preclude others, like Parsons, for example, from having other
commitments. Thus it is fruitless to argue whether one should concentrate on "middle range" or on "general theory".

Nevertheless, if Merton is committed to "middle range" theory construction, i.e. to constructing theories with a limited scope, the following broad implications for his functional analysis cannot be overlooked. In the first place the eventual scope of a theory is to a large extent determined by the problem that is to be explained. Thus it seems reasonable to expect that a theory on kinship relations would refer to a smaller range of data than a theory about political processes in a society.

Secondly, if Merton wished to construct a functional theory for the latter problem, for example, then presumably "society" would serve as the basic system of reference. This would entail giving a description of the characteristics of such a system, identifying the states that are being maintained for this particular analysis, and determining which variables or sets of variables contribute towards maintaining those states. It seems highly unlikely that such an explanation would concentrate on a limited range of phenomena or that the theory would have a "middle range" character.

Consequently it would appear that there is a "conflict of interests" in Merton's preoccupation with functional analysis and his insistence on developing "theories of the middle range". This "conflict" can be resolved in the following alternative ways: Either a concentration
on constructing "theories of the middle range" without necessarily accommodating functional analysis; or a concentration on constructing functional theories regardless of whether they are middle range or not; or, finally, constructing "middle range" functional theories at the risk of precluding analyses of more inclusive systems (for e.g. society) where a broader range of data is implicated. It should be interesting to determine which of these possibilities predominates in Merton's substantive sociological work.

Par. 5 Conclusions

In this chapter we set ourselves two tasks: one was to arrive at a definition of functionalism; the other was to give an assessment of Merton as a functional theorist. Our most important conclusions concerning these two problems can be summarized as follows:

1. A functional explanation is concerned with indicating how phenomena contribute in maintaining certain states in a larger system of which they are presumed to be a part.

2. Such systems are known as teleological systems and are characterized by their ability for self-regulation or persistence towards some goal (states) despite changes in their own constitution and their environment.

3. Functionalism in sociology or the social sciences can be seen as a programme for constructing a theory or theories in terms of the general orientation that phenomena may be studied by indicating how they contri-
bute towards the maintenance of a larger system to which they are presumed to belong. That is, functionalism can be seen as a programme for constructing a theory or theories about teleological or self-maintaining systems.

4. The construction of such a theory is logically possible.

5. A problem peculiar to functional explanations pointed out by Hempel, is their lack of explanatory or predictive power. This limitation, as we have indicated, refers specifically to the range of alternative variables that are responsible for maintaining certain states within a teleological system.

6. The most important practical problems confronting social scientists in their application of functional analysis are:

(a) The adequate specification of the system that is being analyzed in terms of its major components; the characteristics of these components, and the states that are being maintained or presumed to be prerequisites of the system.

(b) The formulation of the requirements of the system in such a way that they can be empirically tested. In other words, to avoid the non-empirical use of key terms in our functional analysis.

(c) The difficulties pertaining to the unambiguous application of functional analysis.

7. Merton's paradigm for functional analysis is a preliminary attempt at codifying a programme for functional analysis in sociology.
8. Some of the problematical features of Merton's paradigm are:

(a) Its incoherence and lack of elaboration. Indeed, one might raise the question whether Merton, at the time of writing this paradigm, was aware of its full logical import and the practical difficulties entailed in its application. What is even more perplexing is that, given Merton's avowed commitment to functionalism in 1948, nothing has since been published by him regarding a further codification and elaboration of its "logic of procedure".

(b) The absence of theoretical interpretation concerning the variables to be analyzed.

(c) The presence and overemphasis of distinctions that are irrelevant to the analysis of functional systems, such as the emphasis on "subjective dispositions" and the distinction between "manifest and latent functions".

(d) Omission of reference to the environment in which phenomena are situated.

9. A preliminary evaluation of Merton's application of functional analysis reveals that:

(a) He does not apply the term "function" consistently.

(b) His analysis is more "variable-oriented" than "system-oriented" because of his reversal of the procedure of functional analysis.

(d) He does not state in each instance what system is being analyzed but subjects items to analysis that refer to several systems simultaneously or to several characteristics of the same system.

10. Merton's emphasis on "middle range theories" has problematical implications for his functional analysis.
insofar as the insistence on the former limits the scope of application for the latter.

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FOOTNOTES


3) Ibid., p. 50.


5) Ibid., pp. 50-54.

6) Ibid., pp. 20-25.

7) Ibid., p. 21.


9) Ibid., p. 21.


11) Loc. cit.

12) Vide:


14) Ibid., p. 402.

15) Ibid., p. 402.

16) Ibid., p. 403.


23) This distinction was discussed in our explication of scientific theory in Chapter II. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Braithwaite, R.: Op. cit., Chapter IV.
25) Vide, for example:
32) For an explication of the differences, see pp. 103-104 below.

44) Because the assumption of equiprobability of state-descriptions for teleological systems seems dubious since some states which have a smaller number of state-descriptions can (and usually are) "preferred". Vide p. 92.


54) This conception coincides more or less with Hempel's where he states that it is "... a program of inquiry aimed at determining the respects and the degrees in which various systems are self-regulating" in: Aspects of Scientific Explanation, p. 330.

55) Our objection against Homans. See Chapter III.

56) The implication here being that if social scientists had concentrated on evaluating theories about problems in the first place, most of the confusions regarding "functionalism" in sociology (for example) could have been avoided.


58) Vide Chapter III on Goddijn for example.


61) Ibid., p. 264.

62) Ibid., p. 264.

63) Ibid., p. 265.

64) Ibid., p. 266.

65) Ibid., p. 266.
66) Ibid., p. 271.
69) Ibid., p. 276.
70) Ibid., p. 276.
71) Vide Chapter III.
72) Nagel, E.: Ibid., p. 278.
76) Ibid., p. 525.
77) Ibid., p. 532.
78) Ibid., p. 532.
79) Ibid., pp. 55-60.
80) This is not meant in the derogatory sense that it is a good thing to be a functionalist and that Merton is not a good functionalist; it is simply to draw attention to the fact that there is a discrepancy between Merton's paradigm for functional analysis and his implementation of it.
81) Ibid., pp. 60-82.
85) Ibid., p. 273.
86) Ibid., p. 316. He cites Merton's analysis of the functions of the political machine as one such instance.
87) Ibid., p. 319.
88) Ibid., p. 323.
89) Ibid., p. 324.
91) Ibid., pp. 308-314.
92) Ibid., p. 313.


94) Ibid., p. 315.


97) Ibid., p. 195.


(c) Merton, R.K.: Social Theory and Social Structure, p. 9.


CHAPTER IV

PARSONIAN FUNCTIONALISM

Par. 1 Introduction

Anyone attempting an exposition, let alone an evaluation of Parsons' work, is confronted by a formidable task. Apart from his many and voluminous publications, the continued development of his thought and shifting of interest to different problems that lead to "new levels of generality and synthesis", as well as his complicated style of writing and numerous conceptual distinctions and qualifications, would make it an almost impossible task to do justice to the body of his work within the limits of any one publication - even less so in a particular chapter of such. Consequently it is necessary to state our own qualifications and draw our distinctions in order to indicate which aspect of Parsons' work is relevant to this study.

Perhaps the best way to do this is to begin by stating what we do not intend doing. First of all, this chapter is not concerned with a more or less chronological exposition of the development of Parsons' thought. That is, we are not concerned with a biographical discussion of when and where, and under which influences Parsons developed certain ideas or insights. This has been done by himself and others often enough.1) Secondly, the chapter will not be concerned with an explanation of Parsons' conceptual scheme. For the purpose of this study familiarity with it will have to be assumed. Thirdly, the primary concern will not be a
conceptual analysis of his definitional scheme or with determining the logical integration of the analytical schemata developed from it. Such a venture is of course extremely important and necessary and has already received a great deal of attention,\textsuperscript{2} but we feel that it can only be adequately appreciated subsequent to the type of evaluation we want to make in this chapter.

Our task must be seen in terms of the original problem formulated for this study, namely: What is functionalism and what is its position in theoretical sociology? In the previous chapter we decided the first question and began answering the second by considering general aspects of Robert Merton's work with regard to functionalism. We tried to emphasize that a theorist who adheres to a functional approach has certain methodological commitments that must be incorporated in his programme for theory construction. Only when we have traced these commitments in the work of a particular theorist can we begin to answer the question concerning the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology. Consequently it is those aspects of Parsons' programme that have a direct bearing on functionalism, as an orientation, that primarily interest us. The following questions will be implicit in our analysis: Does Parsons commit himself to functionalism? If so, how does he view functionalism, i.e. what are, according to him, its implications and requisites for theory construction? Does he try to accommodate these in his own theoretical development? How far has he progressed towards con-
structuring a functional theory?

To answer these questions we have read most of Parsons' major theoretical works 3) and papers. We have not, however, read, and do not intend using, everything that Parsons has written. Aspects of his work such as what he calls his "summary and interpretative essays" 4) have not been considered directly relevant to this study although illustrative of his theoretical position. We feel confident that the methodological and theoretical assumptions adopted by Parsons in those publications that we are acquainted with, cannot differ too significantly from anything else that he may have written.

The rest of this chapter is divided into the following sections: First, we shall briefly discuss Parsons' "framework of action" and its relation to his application of functional analysis. Secondly, Parsons' functional methodology will be considered. Thirdly, we shall try to give a general indication of how Parsons' functionalism is accommodated in his theoretical work. This will finally be followed by an evaluation of his work with regard to functionalism and its stage of theoretical development.

Par. 2 "The Framework of Action"

The initial formulation of "the framework of action" was made in Parsons' first major work, The Structure of Social Action. There he stated that an "act" logically involves the following:

1. It implies an agent, an 'actor'.
2. For purposes of definition the act must have
an 'end', a future state of affairs to which action is oriented.

3. It must be initiated in a situation, ... that is, in turn analyzable into two ele-
ments: those over which the actor has no control, that is, which he cannot alter or
prevent from being altered, and those over which he has such control. The former may 
be termed the conditions of action, the lat-
ter the means.

4. Finally, there is inherent in the conception of this unit, in its analytical uses, a cer-
tain mode of relationship between these ele-
ments. That is, in the choice of alterna-
tive means to ends, insofar as the situation 
allows alternatives, there is a normative orientation to action. 5)

In other words, according to this framework, "action"
can be taken to mean orientation of an "actor" to a si-
tuation in which he uses certain means to attain certain 
ends in a normatively regulated way. Although this 
conception was formulated for the first time in 1937, 
Parsons is emphatic in maintaining that, whatever modi-
fications in conceptualization or shifts of theoretical 
interests he may have experienced since then, his work 
has always been couched within this framework. 6) 
What is true, however (and Parsons admits this to be not 
without certain terminological difficulties 7)), is that 
his framework has undergone extensions to such an extent 
that it does not only apply to the individual as an "ac-
tor", but also to the "behavioral organism", "persona-
ality"-, "social"- and "cultural" system. Thus:

Action is thus viewed as a process occurring be-
tween two structural parts of a system - actor and 
situation. In carrying analysis at any level of 
the total action system, the concept actor is 'ex-
tended' to define not only individual personali-
ties in roles but other types of acting units - 
collectivities, behavioral organisms and cultural 
systems. Since the term actor is here used to re-er to any such acting unit, I attempt to avoid -
except for purposes of analogy or illustration -
psychological reference, for example 'motivation'
attributed to actors as individuals. Thus 'actor' can refer to a business firm in interaction with a household, or, at the cultural level, the implementation of empirical beliefs interacting with implementation of evaluative beliefs. 8)

When first formulated, the "framework of action" was accompanied by some pertinent expository comments from Parsons that gave an indication of some important developments that were to follow in his subsequent works. Two of them are of particular relevance to this study. The first concerns the "means-end schema" which Parsons says is "inseparable from the conception of action" 9) and becomes "the central framework for the causal explanation of action".10) The second refers to the fact that one of the principal features of the framework is that it is "couched in terms of subjective categories referring to aspects or parts or elements in the state of mind of the actor".11) These two characteristics of the framework are emphasized repeatedly by Parsons in The Structure of Social Action, and are recognizable features of his subsequent work.12) As first applied these two aspects of the framework are inseparable, for Parsons says that an "end" is necessarily a "subjective category".13)

With regard to the "means-end schema" he states:

The concept end always implies a future reference, to a state which is either not yet in existence, and which would not come about if something were not done about it, or if already existent, would remain unchanged. This process seen primarily in relation to ends, is variously called 'attainment', 'realization' or 'achievement'. 14)

Because "end" thus conceived is an intrinsic component of "the framework of action", Parsons maintains that "the schema of action is inherently teleological".15)
Despite Parsons' careful qualification, it is never quite clear in *The Structure of Social Action* whether the framework is "inherently teleological" because an "end" has a future reference, or because it is a "subjective category", or because it is part of the formal means-end nexus. There are indications, however, which support the interpretation that the framework is teleological because of the implementation of the means-end nexus with a subjective reference. For instance, when Parsons discusses the relation between the individual and social reality he says that the relation must be thought of in "organic not mechanistic terms".\(^{16}\) Furthermore:

It is true that the biological level of analysis involves teleological elements. The concept of organism itself implies them. But these are teleological elements of a character which do not imply a subjective reference, though they do involve the conception of an organism as in some degree an active entity which does more than merely reflect the conditions of existence. \(^{17}\)

In the light of our discussion in the previous chapter it should be clear that the use of a subjective reference is one way of employing the means-end nexus. It is the formal scheme of the nexus itself, however, as applied to particular statements that gives them a teleological character. Especially if the concept "end" is formulated by Parsons:

... so as to include the maintenance of an existing state of affairs as an end, as well as the bringing into being of a state differing from the initial situation. \(^{18}\)

The second characteristic of the framework that we mentioned, namely that it is couched in terms of "subjective categories", is, as we have noted, intrinsically
related to Parsons' use of the means-end nexus. His insistence in *The Structure of Social Action* why this is inevitable within the "framework of action" can be appreciated in the light of the methodological controversies existing prior to the publication of this work. Parsons wanted to avoid a "radical positivism" by insisting that "subjective categories" are necessary because:

... the only reason for admitting such concepts to a scientific theory is that they are in fact descriptive of an empirical phenomenon, the 'state of mind of the actor'. 19)

At the same time he wanted to steer clear of the "idealistic" position with their emphasis on an "intuitionist-approach", by declaring that:

Our immediate intuitions may be real, and as such, correct. But their interpretation cannot dispense with a rationally consistent system of theoretical concepts. 20) ... Once a phenomenon is descriptively given, the establishment of causal relations between it and either its antecedents or its consequences is possible only through the application, explicitly or implicitly, of a formal schema of proof that is independent of any value system, except the value of scientific truth. This schema is basic to all empirical science, and only insofar as they conform with it can scientific judgments that pretend to assert causal relationships be valid. 21)

Today, as far as he is concerned, "the fight is over" and sociological theory is "clearly couched in terms of motives, goals, symbols, meanings, means and ends and the like". 22) However, the initial formulation of the "subjective point of view" contained a curious duality. This was Parsons' insistence that the frame of reference must deal with "things and events as they appear from the point of view of the actor whose action is being analyzed and considered". 23) The problems that such a position would entail should be obvious. If a situation
should be described where more than one "actor" is concerned, one would have continually to shift the "point of view" to accommodate a description of the actions of any one of the actors involved. This untenable position was relinquished by Parsons in *The Social System*, where he says:

Finally, the third fundamental consideration touches the most discussed 'subjective point of view', namely the study of action 'from the point of view of the actor'. Contrary to the view held by the author in *The Structure of Social Action* it now appears that this postulate is not essential to the frame of reference of action in its most elementary form. It is however necessarily involved at the levels of elaboration of systems of action at which culture, that is shared symbolic patterns, become involved. 24)

Apart from the fact that the "framework of action" is regarded by Parsons as the main reference point for all his subsequent work, there are two important reasons for emphasizing the above characteristics (namely, the "means-end schema" and the "subjective categories") of the framework. First, the way in which Parsons explicates the "means-end schema" in *The Structure of Social Action* precipitates his later application of functional analysis. 25) Thus in writing the preface to the second edition (1949) of this work, Parsons says that one of the central problems has been to bring "theory of this sort" closer to the guiding, testing and refinement of empirical research. This has, according to him, been facilitated by:

... a shift in theoretical level from the analysis of the structure of social action to the structural-functional analysis of social systems. 26)

Secondly, it is through his insistence on the importance of "subjective categories" for interpreting human action,
that Parsons is able to maintain that one of the most fundamental propositions of the "theory of action" is the existence of a "normative-order". Thus:

If there is any major empirical generalization in the trend of scientific thinking with reference to the 'life sciences' in our time, the imputation of a normatively controlled order to living systems, and a postulation of a hierarchy of such levels of order, seems to me to be one of the most fundamental. 27) Significantly, the above mentioned "shift in theoretical level" coincides with the extension of the "framework of action" and the formal introduction of functional analysis. This "shift" took place in the period 1937-1951 and is elaborately titled by Martindale as a "Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviorism to Macro-Functionalism". 28) Parsons himself is, however, unembarrassed and quite explicit about the extension of the framework and his shift in theoretical level.

In a sense this basic frame of reference consists in the outline of the structural categories of human personalities in a psychological sense, in terms of the particular values of which each particular character structure and sequences of action must be described and analyzed. But the structure of social systems cannot be derived directly from the actor-situation frame of reference. It requires functional analysis of the complications introduced by the interaction of a plurality of actors. 29) He insists however, that this shift from the study of the action of a particular individual to the study of the interaction of a plurality of individuals, does not mean that the basic "framework of action" has been disregarded. Its application has just been "carried to a more generalized level of analysis". Thus:

In The Structure of Social Action the exposition of the action frame of reference was made largely on the level of goal direction and thus an 'end' as it was there called, was made an essential com-
ponent of the 'unit act'. It seems necessary to push the analysis to a still more elementary level in order to clarify the place into which many of the problems of motivation, as analyzed in terms of modern psychology, must be fitted. However, no fundamental change has been made. The analysis has simply been carried to a more generalized level. 30) On this more "generalized level" the framework becomes the main reference point for the analytical distinction of four "independent but interdependent subsystems of action", i.e. "organism", "personality", "social" and "cultural system". A "fundamental property" of these action systems is their goal-directedness and tendency to "boundary maintenance". 31) What the implications are of these characteristics of "action systems" is pointedly summarized:

Within this frame of reference it is possible to say certain general things about the nature of systems of action. The first is that the notion of a hierarchically ordered (in the control sense) boundary-maintaining system implies the notion of function, as operation relative to a set of exigencies, namely sets of conditions, internal and external to the system, which can be shown to set limits to variation which is compatible with the integrity and effectiveness of the system. There are ranges of tolerance but beyond these, procedures of fundamental change, including dissolution, will be set in motion. The concept of function used here is essentially the same as that used in the biological sciences, e.g. as expressed by W.B. Cannon. 32) In this brief discussion of the "framework of action" we have not been concerned so much with a critical analysis, as with an attempt to emphasize the following points:

1. Parsons' initial exposition of the framework in The Structure of Social Action is an important key for understanding his later theoretical developments.

2. In it (a) his particular explication of the means-
end schema facilitates the introduction and application of functional analysis; and (b) his emphasis on the use of "subjective categories" is the basis for his conception of the normative regulation of action.

3. The extension of the "framework of action" coincides with a "shift" in theoretical level and the formal introduction of functional analysis.

4. The analytical distinction between the four "subsystems of action" follows, according to Parsons, from this extension of the framework.

5. The particular characteristics of these "action systems", i.e. their "goal-directedness" and tendency to "boundary-maintenance", necessitate, according to Parsons, the use of the concept "function".

6. The concept "function" has essentially the same meaning as its use in the biological sciences.

Like Merton, Parsons also refers to biology for an understanding of the logical character of the concept "function". As we have done in the case of Merton, we shall now proceed on similar lines with the work of Parsons. Using the methodological requisites of a functional system outlined in the previous chapter as a point of reference, we shall now inquire into Parsons' conception of the logic and procedure of functional analysis.

Par. 3 Parsons' Functional Methodology

A. The "Goal" of Science

Parsons' introduction of functional analysis must be clearly understood in terms of what he considers the ultimate goal of scientific investigation to be. This goal is to solve "problems of dynamic analysis" and in-
volves two closely interrelated aspects: first, the "causal explanation of past specific phenomena or processes and the prediction of future events"; second, the attainment of "generalized analytical knowledge", of "laws", which can be applied to an indefinite number of specific cases with the use of the appropriate factual data.

The attainment of the two goals, or aspects of the same goal, go hand in hand. On the one hand specific causal explanation is attainable only through the application of some generalized analytical knowledge, on the other, the extension of analytical generalization is only possible by generalization from empirical cases and verification in terms of them. 33)

To realize this goal within any field of investigation the scientist would have to be in possession of a "logically complete system of generalizations which can state all the elements of reciprocal interdependence between all the variables of the system". 34) According to Parsons this goal has only been attained in the formal sense by the systems of differential equations of analytical mechanics. All other sciences are limited to a "more primitive level of theoretical analysis". 35)

In the progress of any particular branch of science Parsons maintains we can distinguish between four "general levels of systematization in order of their primitiveness relative to the final goal of scientific endeavour". 36)

These are:

1. "Ad hoc classificatory systems", which involves the use of more or less arbitrary classes for the sake of making summary statements about the subject matter.

2. "Categorical systems", where the principles of classification, themselves, include statements of certain relationship among classes.
3. "Theoretical systems"; these develop out of "categorical systems" and include specific laws by means of which it is possible to make detailed predictions about the consequences of specific variables.

4. "Empirical-Theoretical systems", which develop whenever a sufficient number of relevant variables can be brought together in a single theoretical system of interdependence adequate for a high level of precision in predicting changes in empirical systems.

Because of these considerations, Parsons maintains it is extremely useful for any branch of science (especially a young one), to develop a conceptual scheme. For such a conceptual scheme performs two important functions. First, it provides a "frame of reference", that is, the most general framework of categories in terms of which empirical scientific work makes sense. By means of these general categories it is possible for us to decide which aspects of the system under consideration are important to our purposes or not. Thus:

It is a logical implication of the structure of a conceptual system that there is a limited number of essential categories, specific values for which must be obtained before the description can be determine. Its use is the only way of locating the important gaps in available knowledge.  

The second function of a conceptual scheme follows from the first, in so far as it permits us to give a description of the "structure" of the system.

This fact seems to be inherent in the most general frame of reference of empirical knowledge itself, which implies the fundamental significance of the concept system as that taken for granted here. Structure is the 'static' aspect of the descriptive mode of treatment of a system. From the structural point of view a system is composed of 'units', of subsystems which potentially exist independently, and their structural interrelations.
Thus a system in mechanics is made up of particles as its units. The structure of the system consists in the number of particles, their properties such as mass, and their interrelations such as locations, velocities and directions of motion. 39)

These two functions of a conceptual scheme, namely the identification of relevant variables and the description of their interrelations as part of the structure of an empirical system, 40) state the necessary facts and "provide the setting for solving the problems of dynamic analysis". 41) That is why, according to Parsons, successful dynamic analysis always implies "continual and systematic reference of every problem to the state of the system as a whole". 42) This, however, can only be done if we possess all the relevant knowledge of the variables in a system, and Parsons notes, has only been attained by the most advanced theories of science. If we do not possess such knowledge then "some method of simplification" 43) must be introduced.

Logically, this is possible only through the removal of some of the generalized categories from the role of variables and their treatment as constants. An analytical system of the type of mechanics does just this for certain elements outside the system which are conditional to it. But is also logically feasible within the system. This is essentially what happens when structural categories are used in the treatment of dynamic problems. 44)

The difference between this "simplified system" and that of mechanics lies in the way the "structural categories", i.e. categories describing the units and subsystems of the system, are used. In mechanics "the structure of the system does not enter as a distinct theoretical element". 45) It is only necessary for the description of any given state of a system but in dynamic analysis the structure "dissolves into process and interdependence". 46)
If the "structural categories" do enter as a theoretical element (by assuming that some of the units and variables to which they refer are constant), their function is to "simplify the dynamic problems to a point where they are manageable". 47)

At the same time the loss, which is very great, is partly compensated by relating all problems explicitly and systematically to the total system. For the structure of the system as described within the context of a generalized conceptual scheme is a genuinely technical analytical tool. It ensures that nothing is inadvertently overlooked, and ties in loose ends, giving determinacy to problems and solutions. It minimizes the danger, so serious to common sense thinking, of filling gaps by resort to uncriticized residual categories. 48)

Parsons maintains that once resort is made to the structure of a system as a "positive constituent" of dynamic analysis, these "static structural categories and their relevant particular statements of fact" must in some way be linked with the dynamically variable elements of the system.

This link is supplied by the all important concept of function. Its crucial role is to provide criteria of the importance of dynamic factors and processes within the system. They are important insofar as they have functional significance to the system, and their specific importance is understood in terms of the analysis of specific functional relations between the parts of the system and between it and its environment. 49)

The difference between the analytical system of classical mechanics, for example, and this "simplified system" lies in the empirical systems as "going concerns" to which they refer and is accentuated by the introduction of the concept function. Thus Parsons says:

Functional significance in this context is inherently teleological. A process or a set of conditions either 'contributes' to the maintenance (or development) of the system or it is 'dysfunctional' in that it detracts from the integration, effectiveness etc. of the system. It is thus the functional refe-
rence of all particular conditions and processes to the state of the total system as a going concern which provides the logical equivalent of simultaneous equations in a fully developed system of analytical theory. This appears to be the only way in which dynamic interdependence of variable factors in a system can be explicitly analyzed without the technical tools of mathematics and the operational and empirical prerequisites of their employment. 50)

In effect Parsons comes to the same conclusion as Rudner with regard to functional systems, namely, that the difference between them and deterministic systems is not one of logic but one of fact. 51) He is also aware that such a theory about a system is but "a second best type of theory", 52) and that as far as levels of conceptual systematization are concerned "we have achieved the stage where the categorical requirements are relatively well met". 53) For him however, the alternative is "losing all the advantages of systematic theory" 54) and rather than accept that he believes that some of the advantages of systematic theory can be retained and "a framework provided for the orderly growth of dynamic knowledge" 55) by a commitment to the construction of structural-functional theory.

It is against these considerations that one must understand Parsons' conviction that at "the present state of knowledge, or that of the foreseeable future we are bound to a structural-functional level of theory" 56) and that the concept of a functional system is the one "most likely and suitable to play a dominant role in sociological theory". 57)

B. The Characteristics of Functional Systems

Parsons has frequently made certain statements about the
characteristic features of functional systems. Presumably these features can be discussed in terms of detailed distinctions, but for our purposes it will suffice to present them in terms of the following broad emphases:

1. The most fundamental property of any system, according to Parsons, is the "interdependence of parts or variables". 58) This is how one identifies the "order" in the relationships between variables in the system. This order must have a tendency to self-maintenance, which is generally expressed in the concept of equilibrium.

   It need not, however, be a static self-maintenance or a stable equilibrium. It may be an ordered process of change - a process following a determinable pattern rather than random variability relative to a starting point. 59)

The distinctive features of functional systems however, is that they maintain a difference between states "internal" to a given system and "those in the environment or situation of the system". 60) This is what Parsons means by the statement that functional systems are "boundary-maintaining systems". 61) Furthermore these states are maintained not because they are imposed from "outside" but because of "the properties of the constituent variables as they operate within the system". The most familiar example that he gives is that of a living organism that maintains a constant body temperature despite the wide range of variability in environmental temperatures. 62)

2. A functional system must also be seen as a "unity relative to its environment". Therefore its self-
maintenance implies:

... control not only of the environmental variations but also control of tendencies to change - that is alteration of the distinctive state - coming from within the system. 63)

Because of this reason a functional system can cease to exist. When this happens "it becomes assimilated to its environment", that is, the distinction between the phenomena within the "boundary" and those outside the system, disappears. A system of mechanics, Parsons maintains, cannot, "given the laws of conservation of matter and energy, - 'cease to exist', it can only change". 64)

The relation between the system and its environment can be studied in terms of the categories of "input and output". 65) By means of "input categories" one considers two problems: the first is the "initial state" of a system before a process of change starts; the second, given this information, what is coming in from "outside" the system, i.e. from its environment. Similarly by means of the "output-categories" one considers the "terminal state" of the system and what has gone "out of it".

3. Because functional systems, in the above sense, are self-maintaining relative to a particular environment, there is, according to Parsons, "an inherent limitation on the compatibility of certain parts or events within the same system". 66) In other words, given the problem of self-maintenance and the exigencies of the environment, there must be "determinate relations" between the variables of the system. This is so because the variables of the system have certain values. If these should
be exceeded, then:

Either processes would be set up which would tend to restore the previous relation by the elimination of the incompatibility; or if the new relation were maintained, there would have to be adjustments in other parts of the system, bringing the system into a new state of equilibrium. 67)

Parsons warns that incompatibility is always relative to a given state of the system. 68) Furthermore, that every change of state of one "unit" of a system will affect all the other units in the system and:

... in turn effects of these effects on the other units will 'feed back' to the original unit. We conceive here of an unbroken circular 'process' of interdependence which is analyzed in terms of the concept of equilibrium. 69)

Because of this tendency to maintain a "compatible relationship" between the variables of the system, i.e. to maintain equilibrium, functional systems are dependent on continuously varying processes which:

... 'neutralize' either endogeneous or exogeneous sources of variability which, if they went far enough, would change the structure. A classic example of equilibrium in this sense is the maintenance of nearly constant body temperature by mammals and birds - in the face of continuing variation in environmental temperature and through mechanisms which operate either to produce heat, including slowing up its loss, or to slow down the rate of heat production or accelerate its dissipation. 70)

The resemblance between the above characteristics that Parsons ascribes to functional systems and those we discussed in the previous chapter, should be evident. To facilitate their comparison we may summarize those mentioned by Parsons as follows:

(a) A functional system maintains certain states relative to its environment.

(b) There are factors, both within the system and its environment, which influence the degree of self-maintenance of the system.
(c) Because certain states of the system have to be maintained there are limitations to the variability of the variables within the system.

(d) To keep these variables of the system within "certain ranges of tolerance" and to accommodate fluctuations in environmental variables impinging on the system, certain processes tend to "neutralize" the exogeneous or endogeneous sources of variability.

(e) If these "neutralizing processes" should fail, the system either dissolves and is assimilated to its environment or its "structure changes", i.e. it moves into a new state.

The above considerations give an indication of Parsons' most general methodological commitments, and it follows therefore that any evaluation of his work that does not consider their implications for Parsons' efforts at theory construction, must necessarily be incomplete. Presently we will try to indicate how Parsons applies them in his substantive theoretical work. Now we must first pay attention to Parsons' views on the procedure of functional analysis.

C. The Procedure of Functional Analysis
Unlike Merton, Parsons has never compiled a paradigm of advisory steps on how one is to proceed with actual functional analysis. There are, however, frequent suggestions in his work of what this would entail. The following list, compiled from various publications, will necessarily be incomplete, though adequate to indicate that Parsons has a systematic approach to the problem of analyzing functional systems. The presentation does not necessarily reflect a chronological procedure to be fol-
lowed when applying functional analysis.

1. One of the most important requisites for the analysis of a functional system is a conceptual scheme. We have already discussed Parsons' emphasis of the importance of such a scheme. More specifically with regard to a functional system, he remarks that:

In the first place completely raw empiricism is overcome by describing phenomena as parts of or processes within systematically conceived empirical systems. The set of descriptive categories employed is neither ad hoc nor sheer common sense, but is a carefully worked out system of concepts which are capable of application to all relevant parts or aspects of a concrete system in a coherent way. 71)

In other words, the conceptual scheme must be such that it makes genuine theoretical development possible.

2. Such a system of concepts must consist "of the generalized categories necessary for an adequate description of states of an empirical system".72) These categories can be divided into two general types, namely "structural categories" and "functional categories".

The "structural categories" must be:

... logically adequate to give a determinate description of an empirically possible, complete empirical system of the relevant class. One of the prime functions of a system on this level is to ensure completeness, to make it methodically impossible to overlook anything important, and thus explicitly to describe all essential structural elements and relations of the system. For, if this is not done, implicit, uncriticized allegations about the missing elements will always play a part in determining conclusions and interpretations. 73)

The "functional categories" correspondingly:

... must articulate directly with the structural categories - they must describe processes by which these particular structures are maintained or upset, the relations of the system to its environment are mediated. This aspect of the system must also be complete in the same sense. 74)
Parsons is explicit about the relations between these two types of concepts. The "functional categories" enable one to make "dynamic generalizations" about the functioning of the system but they can only be formulated relative to their "structural setting". That is why it is so important to him "to press forward with systematic structural classification". 75)

3. An essential reference point, according to Parsons, is the classification of the functional requirements of the system. The spelling out of the "functional categories" implies these requirements or "needs" which provide the "reason" why the system has to maintain itself. At the same time Parsons realizes that, for social science, determining the functional prerequisites is "a protean problem because of the variety of different levels on which it may be approached". 76) There are also certain dangers which must be guarded against. Some of these are: "a hypostatization of the system and its needs" 77) or "inventing ad hoc generalizations about these prerequisites which allegedly explain certain classes of concrete social phenomena". 78) However, if care is taken in this regard, then:

... we may feel free to employ functional analysis without involvement either in metaphysical teleology or in hidden political and ethical premises. Neither of these is in any way logically entailed in the kind of functional analyses we have presented here. 79)

4. Intimately related to determining the prerequisites of a functional system is the necessity for specifying explicitly which particular system is being referred to. Especially if the characteristics of the variables are
such that they may be part of, or "function" in more than one system. Thus:

... keeping system points of reference, that is, points of origin, straight has proved one of the most prolific sources of difficulty in the field. Because they have very often not been kept straight, different treatments of the same problem, and of different problems have tended to be incommensurable. This has certainly played a major part in the conspicuous failure of social science to progress cumulatively. 80)

5. Another important step in functional analysis consists in determining what the ranges of variability of the variables of the system are. That is, one must determine the range of values within which the variables of the system can fluctuate without necessitating a change in the "structure" of the system. In such a way the "levels of incompatibility" 81) between certain parts of the system can be determined. According to Parsons this kind of information is extremely important because:

In this situation we cannot achieve a high level of dynamic generalization for processes and interdependencies even within the same society, unless our ranges of structural variability are really systematized so that when we get a shift from one to another we know what has changed to what end and in what degree. 82)

For Parsons, this is one of the most "vital areas" for the development of sociological theory.

6. When at least the preceding problems have been considered in functional analysis, Parsons says the question arises as to:

... whether we are in a position to state any general conditions governing the equilibrium of such systems. This is essentially what is meant by the statement of the 'laws' of the system, namely, certain fundamental generalizations about the nature of the equilibrating processes such that it is pos-
sible, by applying them, to deduce the nature and directions of changes which will take place in a system, following what we have called above, a disturbance of its equilibrium assuming that the system does, indeed, regain its equilibrium. 83)

Frequently, however, our knowledge of the "dynamic generalizations" governing the processes of the system are incomplete.84) In such cases, Parsons maintains, it may still be possible to "describe the process in terms of the initial and final states, and possibly intermediate stages, or go a step further and state empirical generalizations about it".85) It is for such instances that Parsons uses the concept "mechanism" which he says, is "a sort of shorthand description of complex processes which we do not yet fully understand".86) It helps one to:

... account for the functioning of social systems, for the maintenance or breakdown of given structural patterns, for a typical process of transition from one structural pattern to another. 87)

Parsons warns that the identification and utility of such "mechanisms" in systems under analysis will depend on the amount of available knowledge of the processes which they presumably describe. Thus, with regard to available knowledge of the motivation of the individual he says:

Such a mechanism is always an empirical generalization about the operation of motivational 'forces' under conditions stated. The analytical basis of such generalizations may, however, be extremely variable. Sometimes we may just know empirically that it goes this way, in other cases there may be deeper foundations for the generalization as in the application of the established laws of learning or operation of mechanisms of defense on the personality level. But the formulation of the motivational problem in mechanism terms is essential to establish the relevance of whatever level of motivational knowledge may be available to the problems of functioning of a social system. 88)
By systematically classifying the "mechanisms" of a particular process of the system under consideration "interest is focussed on the significance of alternative outcomes of the process for the system or other parts of it" and knowledge of the possible general conditions governing the "equilibrium" of the system is increased. 89)

7. Another way of compensating for the lack of knowledge of the general conditions that govern the "equilibrium" of the system, is "to approach the problem in terms of the conception of input and output". At the same time this enables him to accommodate knowledge of these general conditions as it becomes available.

Parsons states:

The input-output point of view is not an independent mode of analyzing system process, but rather a way of describing the differences between starting state and ending state of a cycle, by looking at the system from 'outside', i.e. from the point of view of an observer, and attempting to assess the balances between what 'goes in' at the beginning of a cycle and what 'comes out' at the end, including changes in the properties of the system itself. 90)

Therefore Parsons suggests that the major categories of "input" and "output" should be defined. This amounts to specifying the state of a system at a particular instant in time and indicating what the nature of the relations is between the variables within the system and between them and those outside the system, i.e. the environment.

8. Parsons has always maintained that it is extremely important to distinguish clearly between "the processes within the system and processes of change of the system".
The latter type of processes has to do with the problem of "structural change" and, according to him, presupposes some level of theoretical solution "of the structural components and processes within the system". 91)

What Parsons is in effect saying, is that before one can develop a theory of the processes changing the "structure" of the system, one should at least have to know: (a) what the components of that system are; (b) what its prerequisites are; (c) what the relations are between the components and the ranges of their variability, as well as their interrelations with variables within the environment; and (d) what the general conditions or "laws" are governing the equilibrium of the system. 92) All this information will not only tell one how the system succeeds in maintaining itself, but also when it will not be able to do so. At this stage one will be in a position to begin developing "dynamic generalizations" of the processes that tend to change the structure of the system.

Parsons has been misrepresented on this subject so often that it is worthwhile quoting him at length to clarify his methodological position.

Contrasted then with stability or equilibrating processes, are those processes which operate to bring about structural change. That such processes exist and that they are of fundamental scientific importance is nowhere in question. ... The reason for insistence on the importance of keeping the concepts of structure and process and of stability and change analytically distinct, is not a predilection in favor of one or the other item in each pair, but in favor of an orderly procedure in scientific analysis.

As I see it now, the distinction between the two pairs of concepts is one of level of system reference. The structure of a system and of its envi-
ronment must be distinguished from processes within the system and interchange between the system and its environment. But processes which maintain the stability of a system internally through both structure and process, and in interchange with its environment, i.e. states of equilibrium, must be distinguished from processes by which this balance between structure and more 'elementary' process is altered in such a way as to lead to a new and different 'state' of the system, a state which must be described in terms of an alteration of its previous structure. To be sure, the distinction is relative; but it is an essential and ordered relativity. 93)

Viewed from the perspective adopted in this study, the whole "debate" concerning the necessity and importance of studying "social change" becomes a spurious and ideologically toned one, unless a methodological justification of what "change" is supposed to imply, is given. 94) Parsons has consistently done so, even though he admits that his substantive work has not focused as much on this problem as on the problem of "order". 95)

D. Conclusion

In the preceding sections we have tried to give an account of Parsons' functional methodology. This task has been complicated by the fact that Parsons has, to this writer's knowledge, never given a systematic and exhaustive explication of this methodology. References to the methodological issues of functionalism have mostly been made as introductory remarks to particular theoretical problems dealt with in his publications. Nevertheless our presentation is adequate to warrant two general conclusions: One is that Parsons is heavily committed to functionalism for a major part of his programme for theory-construction. The other is that he has a keen methodological awareness of its implications for
such an activity. This last conclusion may be confirmed by a comparison with our specifications for functional analysis in the previous chapter.

In a recent paper Parsons once again gave evidence of this commitment, as well as of his methodological competence with regard to the requisites of functional analysis. In a sense, the following quotation is a succinct summary of the above discussion, and, for the purposes of this study, one of the most concise statements of what functional analysis entails:

Thus, the much discussed concept of function in social science, is, properly defined, indispensable - if not explicitly used, it is smuggled in under other names. If one has the conception of a homeostatically controlled boundary-maintaining system that has some stability and therefore to which some such concept as equilibrium is applicable, then all one means by functional analysis, is a set of classifications of the problems of such a system - either the conditions under which stability will be maintained or the conditions under which it will be sufficiently disturbed so that it will go into some other state of organization, or one of disorganization.

There is here a fundamental paradox, namely that one has a chance of analyzing such a condition if one can speak about a range of variation. This has to do with the balances of input and output. A range of variation in that balance means that there are upper and lower limits such that remaining within them is essential to the stability of the system. There are middle ranges that are compatible with stability and there are border regions where the strain becomes increasingly great. And probably there are threshold phenomena, such that, if the variation goes beyond certain ranges for sufficiently long periods, then irreversible change is the consequence. This is the kind of thing we mean by functional analysis. In my opinion, we all use it whether we call it that or not. 96)

Whatever the significance of such a comparison may be, it is clear that Parsons' conception of functionalism is methodologically more refined than that of Merton. This is evident especially in Parsons' emphasis on the im-
portance of a general conceptual scheme; the interchange between system and environment; the necessity for explicit system reference, and for the development of "laws" about processes in the system. Methodological competence with regard to a particular orientation, certainly seems a plausible consideration for having confidence in a particular theorist. But confidence in this regard is not enough; for, as we pointed out in Chapter I, methodological sophistication is no guarantee for constructive theorizing. Consequently it is to this aspect of Parsons' work that we must now turn our attention in order to determine whether, and to what degree, he has applied functional analysis in his substantive theoretical work.

Par. 4 Parsons' Application of Functional Analysis in Theory Construction

Our inquiry into Parsons' application of functional analysis will be conducted on the same general level as was done with Merton's work. An additional problem is introduced in this case, by the scope of Parsons' framework and the range of his theoretical interests. The four "subsystems of action" distinguished by him, are all considered to be functional systems \(^97\) and should consequently be analyzed in terms of the assumptions and procedures discussed in the previous paragraph. As a matter of fact, one of the first attempts by Parsons in the functional analysis of a "subsystem of action" was done in collaboration with Shils with regard to the "personality system".\(^98\) Since then he has been actively engaged in analyzing various problems within the ana-
lytical boundaries of all the other "subsystems of action". If, within the limits we have set ourselves in this study, our inquiry were to be concerned with Parsons' work on all the "subsystems of action", the analysis would have to be conducted on such a general level that it would run the risk of being trivial. Therefore, when we say that our inquiry into Parsons' application of functional analysis will be conducted on a general level, we mean this primarily with regard to Parsons' analysis of the problems of the "social system" as a functional system. The greater part of his work has, indeed, been concerned with this "subsystem of action" and should afford one a good opportunity to determine how he has applied functional analysis.

A. A Definition of the "Social System"

According to Parsons a "social system" has the following defining characteristics: 99)

1. It consists of a plurality of "actors", each motivated to "the optimization of gratification", i.e. trying to achieve some personal objective or goal, and who interact in such a way that their "action" is oriented by "rules which are complexes of complementary expectations" concerning their roles and the sanctions which apply to them.

2. Because of the "complementarity of expectations" the interaction process between the actors must be considered as a "stable" process, i.e. a process in equilibrium. The tendency to maintain the interaction process in a state of equilibrium is, according to Parsons, one of
the "first laws of social process".

3. However, this stability is continually threatened by: (a) new information that can change the "orientation" of the "actors"; (b) value judgments and emotional reactions introduced by the interaction between various persons in the "social system"; and (c) changes in the "situation" in which the "social system" operates. Consequently, the social system will have "mechanisms" that try to maintain its "boundaries" and adapt itself to changes in the "environment".

The most familiar example of a social system that Parsons uses, is a "society" and he refers to it as the "norm" according to which the problems of such functional systems should be analyzed. This is because of its relative degree of "self-sufficiency". However, a group consisting of two persons may also be analyzed as a "social system" but in relation to "society" they can be regarded as "partial social systems".

Whatever the size and, or complexity of an empirical social system may be, Parsons says that it:

... should be analyzed in terms of three logically independent, i.e. cross-cutting but also interdependent, bases or axes of variability, or as they may be called, bases of selective abstraction. 101)

These are three "modes" of "structural" and "functional" analysis and involve: (a) Determining the "structural" and "functional" categories of the "social system"; (b) Applying the "dynamic mode of analysis", i.e. determining processes that "maintain" the system and those that change it; (c) Applying the "hierarchy of relations of control mode of analysis", i.e. determining the
way in which the "social system" "regulates" itself in a "cybernetic sense". We can briefly try to indicate what this entails for Parsons with regard to the "social system".

B. "The Structural Components of Social Systems"

Parsons uses the concept structure to refer to:

... those elements of the patterning of the system which may be regarded as independent of the lower-amplitude and shorter time-range fluctuations in the relation of the system to its external situation. It thus designates the features of the system which can, in certain strategic respects, be treated as constants over certain ranges of variation in the behavior of other significant elements of the theoretical problem. 102)

At different stages in his work Parsons has tried to classify the "structural" components of the "social system". Thus, he has done so in terms most immediately relevant to "the sociological level of theoretical analysis";103) by giving an elaborate taxonomic description of the components of the social system,104) by using the "pattern variables scheme" and the "four system-problems" as frameworks for classifying the structural components not only of the "social system" but all the "components of action";105) and also in terms of the "principle of cybernetic priority".106)

Without going into the detail of these classifications, it appears that for theoretical purposes, the most general "structural" components of the "social system" narrow down to the following four:107)

1. A "Role" which Parsons defines as:

... the structured, i.e. normatively regulated, participation of a person in a concrete process of social interaction with specified role partners.
2. A "Collectivity" which is a system of interaction of a plurality of role-performers regulated in terms of common "values" and "norms".

3. "Norms" which prescribe "desirable" behaviour within "roles" and "collectivities". Norms are always "particularistic" in the sense that they refer to "roles" and "collectivities" in specific situations with specific functions.

4. "Values" which are general "conceptions of the desirable" within a "social system". "Values" differ from "norms" in so far as they are "universal", i.e. they "transcend", or are independent of the internal differentiation into "roles" and "collectivities" of the "social system" in which they are institutionalized. "Values" are thus not "situation" or "function-specific" but "legitimize" the "norms" and activities within "roles" and "collectivities".

According to Parsons these "structural" components stand in a hierarchical relation to each other in the sense that they can range from (a) the most general to the most specific level, and (b) from the highest "level of control" to the lowest. The order would then be: "values", "norms", "collectivities" and "roles". 108)

C. The "Functional Categories of the Social System"

The "functional categories" of "social systems" concern:

... those features in terms of which systematically ordered modes of adjustment operate in the changing relations between a given set of patterns institutionally established structure in the system, and a given set of properties of the relevant environing systems. 109)

The "functional" categories come into play because the "social system" is faced with two basic sets of exigencies: namely those imposed by the "givenness" of its own structure, and those imposed by the "givenness" of the
environing situation external to the system. Parsons maintains that these "functional" categories operate to meet the prerequisites or "needs" of the "social system". What these "needs" are in concrete terms will be determined by the specific "social system" that one analyzes. However, they will always concern two general categories of "imperatives". The first are those which are "universal to the human species and hence to the existence of stable social systems at all" - called by Parsons, "the universal imperatives". The second concern those that "must meet certain conditions of compatibility within the same social system" - called the "structural imperatives".

Periodically Parsons has stipulated in rather ill-defined terms what the "needs", for example, of "society" as a "social system" are. The following is one of his most recent statements in this regard:

We may sum up the ramifications of the self-sufficiency criterion we used in defining the concept of society.

(1) A society must constitute a societal community that has an adequate level of integration or solidarity and a distinctive membership status.

(2) A society does have to provide a repertoire of role-opportunities sufficient for individuals to meet their fundamental personal exigencies at all stages of the life cycle without going outside the society, and for the society itself to meet its own exigencies.

(3) This community must be the "bearer" of a cultural system sufficiently generalized and integrated to legitimize normative order.

(4) In relation to members as individuals, then, societal self-sufficiency requires - perhaps this is most fundamental - adequate control of motivational commitment.

(5) Finally, self-sufficiency implies adequate control over the economic technological complex so that the physical environment can be utilized as a resource base in a purposeful and balanced way.
Parsons says that a severe deficiency in any one, or any combinations of these criteria may be sufficient to "destroy a society, or to create chronic instability or rigidity that prevents its further evolution". He is, however, aware of the general nature of these statements and for the necessity of elaboration and research, to give them explanatory import. As formulated above, their careless use in the analysis of societies can lead to tautologies.

Nevertheless, Parsons says that whatever the particular exigencies are that confront a specific social system "for the most general theoretical purposes it has turned out that a list of only four is adequate". These are of course the familiar "system-problems", namely: "pattern-maintenance", "integration", "goal-attainment" and "adaptation", that Parsons first developed in collaboration with Bales and Shils. During its operation a "social system" will go through various "phases" in which it is primarily concerned with one of these problems.

These "system-problems" are also used to classify the "structural" components of "social systems" and Parsons says that in the case of "society" even if "structures cannot be identified then various types of processes may be isolated". That is why Parsons uses the "system-problems" as "a fundamental principle" to organize his analysis of "social systems". Though the "content" of the structures may differ from "social system" to "social system", their "meaning" in terms of the "system-problems" are the same for all systems. Thus:
The statement of functions is not equivalent to the description of any one concrete structure. Rather it refers to a determinate range of structural variation, the empirical referent of which may differ from time to time and from place to place. 118)

As in the case of the "structural" categories, a hierarchical relation obtains between the "system-problems". Thus organized they run from "pattern-maintenance", "integration", "goal-attainment" to "adaptation". Consequently the main focus of "values" is on "pattern-maintenance"; "norms" on "integration"; "collectivities" on "goal-attainment" and "roles" on "adaptation". 119)

D. "Processes and Mechanisms of the Social System" ("The Dynamic Mode of Analysis")

Parsons maintains that because the "structure" of the "social system" and its "environment" will only, in the theoretically limiting cases, stand in a constant relation to each other, there "necessarily exists a system of dynamic processes and mechanisms". 120) Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between the processes concerned with the "equilibrium level of analysis" and the "structural change level". Presently we will discuss the latter, i.e. "the structural change level". Now we will first pay attention to what Parsons has to say about the "equilibrium level of analysis". He admits that technical conceptualization in this field has developed more slowly than in "structural morphology or in functional categorization" and that it is "still on the agenda of unfinished business of sociological theory". 121) He believes that an attempt at such conceptualization will have to start by paying attention to two general "categories of the systems' components":
The first are the **resources**, which, starting from outside the system, go through the system, and at certain points are utilized in system functioning, i.e., consumed, some 'products' then being finally put out to other systems. ... The second category of components comprises the types of mechanisms which mediate these processes of generation and utilization of resources, and regulate their rates of flow, direction of use etc. 122)

As far as the "resources" are concerned, Parsons says that they can be classified in terms of the "input-output" categories (mentioned earlier). They serve to organize the exchange of "resources" between the "social system" and (a) other "social systems", as well as (b) the other "subsystems of action".

The "mechanisms" of the "social system" can, according to Parsons, be classified in terms of the four "system-problems" and the level of "hierarchical control" on which they operate. This has not yet been done systematically, and Parsons has so far only given examples of "mechanisms" in his work. For instance:

1. Roles are, from the point of view of the functioning of the social system, the primary mechanisms through which the essential functional prerequisites are met. 123)

2. The main classes of mechanisms by which 'motivation' is kept at the level and in direction necessary for continuing operation of the social system are the mechanisms of socialization and the mechanisms of social control. 124)

3. More recently he has discussed "money", "real commitments", "power" and "integrative communication" as "mechanisms controlling resource processing within the social system". 125)

Apparently the important point to keep in mind is that certain features of the "social system" become "mechanisms" when one applies the "dynamic mode of analysis".
These "mechanisms" must then be distinguished on different "levels of control" and with respect to the different "functional problems" of the system.

E. The Principle of Self-Regulation ("Hierarchies of Control Mode of Analysis")

We have already mentioned the fact that Parsons regards the "hierarchy of relations of control mode of analysis" as one of the basic ones which should be applied to the analysis of "social systems". Here it is appropriate to emphasize Parsons' work in this regard because of the importance that Hempel has ascribed to such a "principle of self-regulation",\(^{126}\) with regard to functional systems. In this regard Parsons states:

The development of theory in the past generation in both the biological and behavioral sciences has revealed the primary source of difficulty underlying the prominent reductionism of so much earlier thought. This was the reductionist tendency to ignore the importance of the ways in which the organization of living systems involved structures and mechanisms that operated as agencies of control in the cybernetic sense of control — of their metabolic and behavioral processes.\(^ {127}\)

His own work in this regard began round about 1957 and was published for the first time in the paper "General Theory in Sociology"\(^ {128}\) in which he distinguished between four levels of "structural organization" in the "social system", namely a "technical", "managerial", "institutional" and "societal" level. Since then the "hierarchical relations of control" have become a familiar feature of his work\(^ {129}\) and is guided by the principle that:

... systems high in information but low in energy regulate other systems higher in energy but lower in information.\(^ {130}\)

Not only are the "functional subsystems" of the "social
system" ordered according to this principle but also the "systems of action" themselves, namely, in the order "cultural-", "social-", "personality system" and "physical organism". With regard to the "social system" Parsons formulates:

The general significance of the hierarchical interrelations of these components indicates that the social system as a whole and its internal processes, should, in regard to behavior, be considered as a complex set of cybernetic controlling mechanisms - not just one governor but a complex series of them. 131)

F. General Theorems with regard to "Action"

On occasion Parsons has tentatively suggested some statements on the "generalized conditions of equilibrium of action systems". The following four, developed in collaboration with Bales and Shils, were regarded by them as major assumptions with regard to the analysis of "boundary-maintaining systems". 132)

1. The Principle of Inertia:— A given process of action will continue unchanged in rate and direction unless impeded or deflected by opposing motivational forces.

2. The Principle of System Integration:— Any pattern element (mode of organization of components), within a system of action will tend to be confirmed in its place within the system or to be eliminated from the system, (extinguished), as a function of its contribution to the integrative balance of the system.

3. The Principle of Action and Reaction:— If, in a system of action, there is a change in the direction of a process, it will tend to be balanced by a complementary change which is equal in motivational force and opposite in direction.

4. The Principle of Effort:— Any change in the rate of an action process is directly proportional to the magnitude of the motivational force applied or withdrawn.

Recently, in the paper, "Pattern Variables Revisited", regarded by Parsons as one of the few statements of his
work approaching the level of general theory, he stated a further development of the abovementioned laws in terms of the following six theorems:

1. "The nature of the hierarchy of control, running from the cultural reference at the top to the physical at the bottom, indicates the structure of systems of action is conceived as containing patterns of normative culture. ... These patterns may be considered as internalized in personalities and behavioral organisms, and as institutionalized in social and cultural systems.

2. "It follows from the first proposition plus the exposure of any system of action to plural functional exigencies, that the normative culture which constitutes its structure must be differentiated relative to functional exigencies. ... This is to say that process in the system must conform in some degree with the rules of a normative order, which is itself both differentiated and integrated.

3. "For this compliance with the normative order to take place, the 'distance' must not be too great between the structure of the acting unit and the normative requirements of its action necessitated by the functional exigencies of the system.

4. "Co-ordinate with the importance of order as formulated in the hierarchy of control and the place of normative culture in action systems, is the pattern of temporal order imposed by the functional exigencies of systems. Co-ordinate with the normative priority of ends is the temporal priority of means; only when the prerequisites of a consuming goal-state have been established in the proper temporal order can the goal-state be realistically achieved.

5. "A 'law of inertia' may be stated: Change in the rate or direction of process is a consequence of disturbance in the relations between an actor or
acting system and its situation, or the meaning of objects. ... Whatever its source, such disturbance will always 'show up' in the form of 'strain' or difficulty in the attainment of valued goal-states. From this point of reference may be distinguished two fundamental types of process:

(a) "Performance" processes: These are processes by which the disturbance is eliminated or adequately reduced through adaptive mechanisms. ... The basic paradigm of this type of process is the means-end-schema.

(b) Learning processes or processes of structural change in the system.

6. "To be stable in the long run, a system of action must establish a generalized adaptive relation to its environment which is relatively emancipated from the particularities of specific goal-states."

The above incompletely quoted statements accommodate most of the assumptions, distinctions and conceptualizations that we have discussed of Parsons thus far. They also serve to indicate that Parsons is seriously trying to develop general and lawlike statements within his framework for a functional theory. Of these propositions he warns that: (a) they are couched at a very high level of generality "deliberately designed to cover all classes of action systems"; (b) it is unlikely that they can be verified at the usual operational levels; and (c) this would require specification to lower levels. Therefore:

Only insofar as codification reveals uniformities of many types of operationally studied systems, do the more general theorems have a prospect of approaching rigorous empirical verifications. 135)

G. "Structural Change of the Social System" ("Dynamic Mode of Analysis")

The problem concerning change of the "structure" of the
"social system" centres on the second set of general processes that we mentioned earlier, i.e. the second general area of application for the "dynamic mode of analysis". In The Social System Parsons maintained that a theory of processes of change of "social systems" logically presupposes a "theory of social structure and a theory of motivational processes within the system". For this reason he then believed that "in the present state of knowledge a general theory of the processes of change of social systems is not possible."\(^{136}\)

In recent years, however, he has begun to devote more attention to the problem of "structural change".\(^{137}\) Possibly he is satisfied that knowledge of the "structure" and "functioning" of "social systems" has reached such a stage of development that it is at least possible to begin with a tentative treatment of the problem of "structural change". Thus:

> If we look at what is meant by a stable equilibrium from the perspective of the principle of inertia, then it becomes a problem to account for alterations in this stable state through disturbances of sufficient magnitude to overcome the stabilizing or equilibrating forces or mechanisms. Once a disturbance fulfilling these criteria is present, then the problem is that of tracing its effects through the system, and defining the conditions under which new stable states can be predicted (or, retrospectively, accounted for). \(^{138}\)

These disturbances, according to Parsons, may have either "exogenous" or "endogenous" sources. "Exogenous" sources of "structural" change consist of "endogenous" tendencies to change in other "social systems", and the "organisms", "personality-" and "cultural systems". "Endogenous" sources can be traced to "strain" within the system itself, i.e. "a condition in the relation be-
tween two or more structured units that constitutes a tendency or pressure toward changing that relation to one incompatible with the equilibrium of the relevant part of the system". 139)

For Parsons, change in the "structure" of a "social system" is a change of its "normative culture", and he warns that there is no primary source or particular set of factors that causes change. Consequently, careful "theoretical identification must be made of the nature of the factors to which an impetus to structural change is imputed". 140)

Par. 5 An Evaluation

From the above discussion the reader can readily appreciate on how general and even elliptical a level we have treated Parsons' work. The depth and complexity of his perspective on social reality, with its different levels of abstraction and modes of interpretation, would require a much more detailed analysis than the above to do justice to it. Nevertheless, for the purpose we have set ourselves, our analysis is adequate to emphasize the following with regard to Parsons' work:

1. He has a definite and clear conception of what the "ultimate goal" of scientific endeavour is. This conception is, in most significant aspects, compatible with the one explicated in Chapter I. 141)

2. In relation to this goal he is aware of the limitations and pitfalls of a functional explanation with regard to social phenomena. That is, he knows what the
logical and empirical implications are for the application of functional analysis. This was evident in our discussion of what he considered the relation of functional analysis to the "ultimate goal" of scientific investigation to be, as well as the problems concerning the prerequisites of functional systems, the necessity for explicit system reference, and the lack of knowledge of the "dynamic processes" in the system.

3. He is committed to functionalism and believes that it is the most promising approach for theory construction in sociology. This was clearly stated by him with regard to the present state of knowledge in the social sciences which, according to him, made it necessary to adopt the functional approach in order to retain some of the advantages of theory construction in sociology. This commitment, like any other within science (for example Merton's insistence on "middle-range theory" and Homans' emphasis on "psychological variables"), may rest on plausible arguments, but must not be regarded as a "logically necessary" step for sociology as a discipline.

4. In his work Parsons has consistently and extensively tried to apply functional analysis. This was evident in our discussion in the last section of the previous paragraph, in which we indicated how he applied the procedure of functional analyses in his attempts at actual theory construction. Compared with his suggestions on the procedure of functional analysis, it is clear to what degree these suggestions have been guidelines for his own efforts at theory construction.
These conclusions are quite familiar ones with regard to Parsons' work. We maintain, however, that their implications (both logically and practically), for his efforts of theory construction, are usually disregarded when attempts are made to evaluate them. We maintain furthermore, that most of the theoretical assumptions discussed in the previous paragraph are directly related to Parsons' conception of the methodological prerequisites of a functional theory. It is significant that, in instances when Parsons has replied to criticisms of his work, he has always referred to these general methodological and theoretical assumptions.

That is why we believe that the inquiry we have attempted with regard to Parsons is a necessary first step to understanding his work. It provides the broad methodological basis on which his conceptual scheme and various attempts at constructing "categorical systems" can be grounded. This does not deny the legitimacy and fruitfulness of criticism at more specific levels of Parsons' work. Thus, for example, constructive criticism has been made by Dubin with regard to "operationalizing" Parsons' "pattern variable scheme"; by Black with regard to conceptual and terminological difficulties; and by Ogles with regard to Parsons' attempts at developing "laws", some of his "philosophical commitments" and theoretical assumptions. These criticisms are, according to this writer, seen in better perspective when they are assessed and placed within Parsons' broad methodological basis outlined in this chapter. For such a basis gives one an indication of what Parsons is trying
to do, irrespective of the measure in which he has succeeded in doing so.

Should one, however, attempt to determine Parsons' progress or stage of development in theory construction, it would be well to consider his own judgments in this regard. He has quite often, and relatively recently at that, said that the application and development of his conceptual scheme is incomplete,\textsuperscript{146} that any systematic presentation of it at the present stage of development must be tentative and is bound to be superseded.\textsuperscript{147} Considered in terms of the "levels of systematization" that he distinguishes with regard to theory construction, Parsons says:

\ldots we have at our disposal a conceptual scheme which is sufficiently developed so that at least at the level of categorization and of problem statement it is approaching the type of closure logically of course - which makes systematic analysis of interdependence possible. We can define the main ranges of variability which are essential for empirical analysis, and the main mechanisms through which variations are propagated through the system. We can quantify to the point of designating deficits and surpluses of inputs and outputs, and here and there we can come close to specifying threshold values beyond which equilibrium will break down. 148)

Furthermore, he believes that the conceptual scheme has now reached the stage where the principal difficulty is not so much in deriving general hypotheses but in "stating them at the level of generality and in the system reference which is most meaningful for the purposes in hand". That is, operational criteria must be specified for them so that they can be put to empirical use. Parsons believes this to be a formidable task because of the complexity of the scheme and that, as far as he is concerned:
... it is too big a task for the same person to be the kind of general theorist I have attempted to be and at the same time to supply the answers to the relevant operational questions over any very large part of the range for which the scheme is relevant. 149)

From these statements it is apparent that for Parsons the "ultimate goal" is still very far ahead.150) For him, however, these judgments are not a recognition of failure of his efforts, but an emphasis of what still remains to be done. Therefore, to build straw men with regard to Parsons' work and then systematically to cut them down with arguments that Parsons himself is aware of, is a futile exercise. For if one is acquainted with the nature of Parsons' work one runs the risk of being facetious in accusing him of not having a well-formulated theory; or that his conceptual scheme is not completely integrated; or that his propositions have not been empirically tested. From our discussion it is clear that he is not only aware of these problems, but also of the difficulties confronting their resolution. Our analysis in the previous chapter has also, however, made it clear that there are no logical reasons for not resolving them.

There are also, however, complicating features of Parsons' work that make an evaluation of it, even at this stage of its development, problematical. Most of them are related to what he calls "a pragmatic approach" to theory construction. He maintains that when he started his theoretical work, the situation in the social sciences was such that it would have been premature to start developing a logically tight theoretical scheme. What he has done since then was:
... to take up a whole series of restricted problems dealing with aspects of the more general scheme, and to work on them with the double reference to their logical and theoretical structure, and the available empirical evidence. 151) Consequently he says of his work that although it has moved in that direction, his approach "is not yet a logico-deductive system, but rather a temporal and historical series of contributions toward the development of such a system".152) Because of his "pragmatic approach" his periodical attempts to "reach higher levels of more generalized theoretical codification" have not developed in a "linear", i.e. logical sense, and:

... has naturally been a source of confusion to people trying to follow the development who have not been intimately involved with the particular phases under intensive consideration at the moment. 153)

Another reason why confusion seems to be inevitable, is because of the rapid development of the conceptual scheme and the concomitant problem of maintaining consistency in terminology.154) If one takes into consideration his emphasis that further development of the conceptual scheme "must follow the pragmatic pattern", then the "confusion" regarding his work is bound to persist for some time, and critics will be confronted with serious problems when trying to evaluate it at a particular stage of its development. If such an attempt is made, however, Parsons feels that the "products" of his work:

... should need careful critical analysis and codification before a full verdict of their place in an attempt at developing general theory can be made. Only a few statements, like the "Pattern Variables Revisited" paper, can be direct statements of general theory as such. 155)

Because of this stage of development with regard to his
own work and that of theoretical sociology in general, Parsons has recently again emphasized the necessity for "getting on with the central tasks of the field". According to Parsons, these are: theory-building and empirical research on theoretically significant problems. With regard to both he says:

But we can never know whether a research idea or a theoretical scheme is of the first importance until it has been fully worked out and tested in innumerable ways. With all due tentativeness, this requires heuristic acceptance of it for purposes of exploration, development and testing, and, if preliminary results are not too drastically negative, it requires acceptance at this level over long periods.

During this "period of acceptance" and the efforts related to it, Parsons hopes that a distinction will be kept between competent understanding of what has been done, which to him is "the indispensable basis for good criticism, positive or negative", and "commitment to doctrines". With regard to the last he says:

I take it that it is the latter attitude which would characterize the disciple and of these I want none.

In our brief evaluation of Parsons' work, we can summarize the following points with regard to his position in theoretical sociology:

1. He is committed to a functional methodology with regard to theory construction.

2. He has consistently accommodated its implications in his own efforts at theory construction.

3. His functionalism represents to him a "heuristic acceptance" of a particular conceptual scheme on which final judgment can only be passed after its full development and testing has been accomplished.
4. At present, much has still to be done before such a stage can be reached.

5. He would welcome competent criticisms and understanding of his efforts and rejects futile arguments and dogmatic acceptance.

Such a position and the attitudes implied seem entirely reasonable and in keeping with the quest of science.

FOOTNOTES

1) Vide for e.g.:

2) For e.g.:
   (a) Most of the papers in the publication by Max Black referred to in ff. 1.

3) We will use the following bracketed references when referring to the following works:
(e) (F.S.I.) Family, Socialization and Inter-
action Process, The Free Press
(f) (E. & S.) Economy and Society, The Free
(g) (T.S.) Theories of Society, The Free

Collaborating authors will be given in the bibli-
ography.

4) For example some of the papers in:
(a) Parsons, T.: Essays in Sociological Theory,
(b) Parsons, T.: Structure and Process in Modern

5) S.S.A., p. 44.

6) (a) S.S., p. 6.
(b) Parsons, T.: "The Point of View of the Author"

7) Parsons, T.: "The Point of View of the Author" in

8) Parsons, T.: "Pattern Variables Revisited", Ameri-
cf. also: "The Point of View of the Author" in

9) S.S.A., p. 638.

10) Ibid., p. 750.

11) S.S.A., Note D., p. 82.

12) In two of his more recent publications Parsons has
again referred to their importance. In "The Point
he says that "the subjective point of view has al-
ways been essential to the scheme".

In T.S., Vol. 1, p. 40 he draws attention to "the
important relation between the two functional ca-
tegories of goal attainment and adaptation and the
old categories of ends and means. The basic dis-

13) S.S.A., p. 207.
14) S.S.A., p. 45.
15) Ibid., p. 44.
16) S.S.A., p. 399.
17) Ibid., Note D., p. 85.
18) Ibid., ff. p. 75.
19) Ibid., p. 295.
20) Ibid., p. 589.
21) Ibid., p. 594.
23) S.S.A., p. 46.
24) S.S. p. 544.
25) cf. ff. 12.
26) S.S.A., p. D.
30) S.S., p. 9.
31) S.S., p. 8.
    cf. also: E. & S., p. 18.
34) Ibid., p. 46.
35) Ibid., p. 46.
    cf. also: S.S., p. 20.
36) "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" in T.G.T.A., pp. 50-51.
38) Ibid., p. 44.
39) Ibid., p. 45.
40) Functions fulfilled by the first two "levels of systematization" of theoretical analysis.

41) Ibid., p. 45.
42) Ibid., p. 47.
43) Loc. cit.
44) Loc. cit.
45) Loc. cit.
46) Loc. cit.
47) Loc. cit.
48) Loc. cit.
49) Ibid., p. 48.
50) Loc. cit.
52) S.S., p. 20.
54) S.S., p. 20.
55) Loc. cit.
59) Loc. cit.

61) Vide also:
(a) S.S., p. 482.
(b) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 70.
63) Ibid., p. 109.
64) "The Dimensions of Action Space" in W.P., p. 92.
65) "Phase Movement in Relation to Motivation" in W.P., p. 217.
67) Loc. cit.
68) Loc. cit.
69) "Phase Movement in Relation to Motivation" in W.P., p. 167.
71) S.S., p. 20.
73) Ibid., p. 49.
74) Loc. cit.
On this point see also:
(a) S.S., pp. 21-22, 203-204, 484.
(b) T.S., Vol. 1, pp. 36-38.
76) S.S., p. 27.
78) S.S., p. 29.
80) "The Dimension of Action Space" in W.P., p. 95.
84) S.S., p. 201.
85) Loc. cit.


87) S.S., p. 22.

88) S.S., p. 22.

89) On the problem of "processes and mechanisms" see also: S.S., pp. 6, 203.


91) S.S., pp. 480-495.

92) The problem of "change" and functional analysis has been lucidly discussed in a paper by Cau-


96) Parsons, T.: "Cause and Effect in Sociology" in Lerner, D.: Cause and Effect, Free Press, Col-

97) Vide:

(a) "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" in T.G.T.A., p. 173.

(b) S.S., p. 17.

(c) In the above references Parsons still regarded the "cultural system" as lying on a "different level of abstraction". He changed his view in this regard and treats all the "subsystems of action" as functional systems. T.S., Vol. 2, p. 964.

98) "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" in T.G.T.A., pp. 110-158.

99) Vide:

(a) "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" in T.G.T.A., p. 196, pp. 227-228.

(b) S.S., pp. 6, 205.

(c) "The Dimensions of Action Space" in W.P., p. 71.

(d) E. & S., p. 8.
100) Vide:
   (a) "Values, Motives and Systems of Action"
in T.G.T.A., p. 196.
   (b) S.S., p. 19.

102) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 36.
104) S.S., pp. 137-150.
110) S.S., p. 177.
111) Parsons, T.: Societies, pp. 17-18. Those men-tioned here are more or less identical to thoseformulated in:
   (b) S.S., pp. 27-36.
112) S.S., p. 28.
114) "The Dimensions of Action Space" in W.P., p. 185.
115) E. & S., p. 47.
117) E. & S., p. 197.
118) E. & S., p. 197.
120) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 36.
121) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 60.
122) Loc. cit.
123) S.S., p. 115.
126) See Chapter III, p. 119.
129) Vide:
   (a) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 38.
   (c) Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, p. 3.
131) T.S., Vol. 1, p. 70.
135) Ibid., p. 483.
136) S.S., p. 486.
    (b) T.S., Vol. 1, pp. 70-78.
140) T.S., p. 72.
141) For a more elaborate exposition of Parsons' methodological position, see especially The Structure
of Social Action, especially the technical notes and his discussion of Weber.

142) For e.g. his reply to Dubin in "Pattern Variables Revisited", Op. cit., and to the authors in the work edited by Max Black: Op. cit.


149) Ibid., p. 342.

150) Ibid., p. 360.

151) Ibid., p. 317.

152) Ibid., p. 321.

153) Ibid., p. 320.


157) Loc. cit.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

One of the main points of departure in this study has been that any evaluation of the work done in any particular discipline will be determined by what one regards as the real significance, or final implications of that particular area of study. That is, if one has clarity about what the goal is that is being sought within a particular discipline, then one's evaluation of the work done in that area will necessarily have to reflect the degree to which this goal has been attained. This is as true for sociology as for any other discipline.

Consequently we have dissociated ourselves from the position that there is a collective pool of "common sense" or "self-evidence" in terms of which all sociological work "makes sense". Instead, we have emphasized the necessity for methodological explicitness, i.e. for stating clearly what one's position is with regard to the task of sociology; the kind of knowledge that is sought for and the conditions under which we can be sure that we have attained such knowledge.

The methodological position adopted in this study is: that sociology is a branch of empirical science; that the goal of science is the systematic accumulation of knowledge to be used for the description, prediction and explanation of phenomena; that the same logical canons are applicable in the determination of the significance of formulations and explanations within any specialized
field of science; and that the canons fall under two
general principles; namely the logical consistency of
formulations and the empirical adequacy of predictions
and explanations. We are aware that this is not neces-
sarily the only position that one could take with re-
gard to sociology and that there are sociologists who
find it unacceptable. However, for present purposes
the issue is not whether it is the most suitable posi-
tion for sociology, but whether it is applied consist-
ently in the treatment of the problem posed for this
study.

We have formulated this problem in terms of two general
questions, namely: What is functionalism? What is
its position in theoretical sociology? Let us summa-
rize our answers and conclusions to these two questions
separately.

What is functionalism?

Our conception of functionalism coincides with that of
other commentators who view it as a methodological com-
mitment.1) Basically functionalism refers to a type
of explanation. In accordance with the analyses of
Rudner, Nagel, Hempel and Braithwaite, we have referred
to this explanation as a teleological explanation. This
may indeed be a controversial interpretation. Bergman,
in his commentary on functionalism, has stated explicit-
ly that in so far as one thinks teleologically one does
not think scientifically and that the vocabulary of
functionalism may reassure those "who are teleologists
at heart".2) Another commentator, Ginsberg, has how-
ever suggested that there may be different kinds of
teleology and that some are more acceptable than others. 3) The last possibility has been the main motive for our own investigation of functionalism. The kind of teleological statement that we have been preoccupied with is the one formulated in terms of a means-end nexus in the sense that a particular phenomenon is seen as contributing to the "maintenance", "goal attainment", "effectiveness" or "adequate operation" of a larger system in which it is implicated. To say that an item has a "function" in this sense is to say something about the nature of the system, of which it is presumed to be a part. Our inquiry into the methodological structure of such teleological systems has revealed that there is no logical difference between this type of explanation and any other acceptable explanation within science.

Our analysis of teleological systems has enabled us to suggest a definition of functionalism. Functionalism must be seen as the approach that attempts to explain phenomena in terms of their contributions to or consequences for the operation of systems of which they are presumed to be a part. The ultimate goal of functional analysis is to construct a theory about a functional system and its application is guided by the methodological requisites of such a system. For this reason we prefer to refer to functionalism as a methodological commitment. It is therefore not a theory, nor an analytical or conceptual scheme, but a methodological approach in terms of which any number of theories, analy-
tical or conceptual schemes may be constructed. Consequently to say of someone that he is a functionalist, is not necessarily to imply that he is a sociologist, psychologist, anthropologist or biologist. As a methodological approach it cannot be associated exclusively with any one of its particular practical applications.

For this reason we are emphatic in maintaining that if one desires to know what the position of functionalism is within a particular discipline one must consider the ways in which it has been applied in actual theory construction. We have stressed the fact that the construction of a functional theory is logically possible, but that there are formidable practical difficulties involved. The position of functionalism in sociology, or any other discipline in which it is applied, will reflect the degree in which theorists have coped with these difficulties.

The position of functionalism in sociology

It is in commentaries concerned with evaluating the position of functionalism in sociology that confusion abounds. It seems that the confusion can usually be traced to the following general sources:

(a) The first is the lack of a methodologically articulate position in terms of which functionalism is evaluated. The result is usually an eclectic and superficial treatment in terms of the assumptions and problems formulated by a particular theorist concerned with its application, and then a comparison of this theorist's
work either with one's own theoretical preferences or with those of another theorist. This was for instance clearly indicated in our review of Goddijn's commentary on functionalism in Chapter II.

(b) The second general source of confusion is closely related to the first and concerns the failure to determine precisely what functionalism is before evaluating or discussing it. Thus functionalism is also seen by Goddijn as "a theory" or "method" without his discriminating between the problems concerned with these different types of formulation.

(c) The third instance concerns a lack of consistency in the application of criteria when evaluating functionalism. The argument can then, for example, take the course that we indicated in our review of Homans' critique on functionalism. It was shown that Homans rejects "functionalism" because it does not, according to him, measure up to certain methodological criteria, but, on the other hand, his own position is suggested as more acceptable because it emphasized the importance of introducing "psychological" variables into sociological propositions.

In terms of the methodological position adopted in this study, the confusion concerning the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology, can be explained by the failure to distinguish between programmatic suggestions for theory construction and the methodological criteria for evaluating such efforts. In short, it concerns the failure to distinguish between the context of discovery
and the context of validation.  

Formulations by a theorist who uses a functional approach are acceptable, or "good" when they are logically consistent and empirically testable - no more and no less is required. Until we have such formulations we shall have to curb our impatience and commit ourselves either to functionalism and try to construct such formulations, or to an alternative position and try to do likewise. Before this is attained neither position is inherently more "fruitful", or "promising" or "acceptable" than the other, apart from the fact that one is committed to one and believes it to be so. Such commitments are vitally important for any discipline and, as we have seen in our analysis of Merton and Parsons, extremely plausible arguments can be given for accepting a particular approach. But in the final analysis, as Parsons has stated, such a commitment concerns a "heuristic acceptance" of a particular approach and, unless it is abandoned, conclusive arguments for its validity can only be given once its development has run its full course.

What happens when programmatic suggestions are employed in deciding the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology? There are a number of such commentaries available. Usually they take the form of expressing strong reservations on the "fruitfulness" of "functionalism" because for e.g.:

(a) It neglects important theoretical problems.  

(b) It does not study "change".  

(c) It overemphasizes the "normative integration"
of human behaviour.\textsuperscript{7})

(d) It studies society as a "unit" and this is a questionable procedure.\textsuperscript{8})

In effect, what such commentaries really imply is that one is confronted with the work of two theorists. One thinks it likely that "society", for example, may be analyzed as a "unit", or that human behaviour is "normatively regulated": the other thinks it unlikely. What purpose is served in arguing about either likelihood? Theorists are seldom convinced of the error of their assumptions unless conclusive evidence to the contrary is supplied. Until we have such evidence, it is more expedient to take note of the different positions; to try to understand what has been attempted and to appreciate the practical difficulties in the way of their development. Such a course of action will at least allow for the development of sufficient clarity about the position that one prefers. That such decisions are necessary and important for sociology cannot be questioned, for it is on the strength of these that theoretical sociology can develop.

There are, of course, also a number of commentaries that give programmatic suggestions for the elaboration and refinement of functionalism in sociology.\textsuperscript{9}) By reason of its appeal and the attention devoted to this approach, such interest is to be expected. The obverse of the danger noted with regard to the use of programmatic suggestions for rejecting functionalism, however, must be guarded against here. This consists of what Bergman says is "the tendency to overestimate what can be achie-
ved by a methodological commitment". When this happens (as we noted with regard to Goddijn), programmatic suggestions are given methodological significance in the sense that they are employed as criteria for accepting the validity of one position against that of another. The real canons for accepting or rejecting formulations in sociology are thus replaced by the programmatic preferences of a particular theorist. Thus "functionalism" is considered significant because it allows the study of society as a "unit", emphasizes the "normative integration of action" etc.

Our own analysis of the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology should be regarded as a commentary neither for nor against it. We have considered the work of two theorists held to be important exponents of this approach in sociology. Our primary aim has been to determine what their individual conceptions of the methodological requisites of functional analysis are and how these are incorporated into their efforts at theoretical construction. In our analysis we have been guided by considerations pertaining to the logical consistency and empirical adequacy of their formulations in so far as these principles can be made relevant to programmatic theory construction.

With regard to Robert K. Merton it was found that:

(a) His initial (and to our knowledge, only) formulation of the requisites of functional analysis is methodologically incomplete.

(b) As far as his application of functional analysis
to theory construction is concerned, there are certain inconsistencies:

(i) the consequences of variables are analyzed without explicit identification and description of the systems in which they are presumed to be involved;

(ii) there is insufficient theoretical explication of the variables imputed to a system and the conditions under which systems operate.

(c) Merton's commitment to "middle range" theory construction may have problematical implications for his commitment to functional analysis. This does not imply that functional analysis cannot be applied on a "middle range" level. It only implies that if Merton refers to "society" as the system of reference, it is questionable whether an eventual theory of such a system would fall within the "middle range" level. In other words, if Merton persists in his commitment to both "middle range" theory construction and functionalism, then his analysis will have to be limited to either less inclusive or smaller systems than for example "societies", or else to only a few of the vast number of variables involved in such complex systems.

With regard to Talcott Parsons we found that:

(a) Although not presented in the paradigmatic and systematic form as that of Merton, his conception of functional systems, and the procedure of functional analysis is methodologically more refined and elaborate than Merton's.
(b) He has, in terms of output of work, given more serious and more consistent attention to the theoretical problems of functional systems in the social sciences.

(c) As far as the level of theoretical development of his work is concerned, it is, according to him, approaching logical closure on an analytical level and in some instances attention can already be given to problems concerning the operational specification of propositions.

If we accept the work of these two theorists as some indication of the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology, it is clear that its application in the construction of a functional theory is still far from complete. This is affirmed by Parsons himself whose work, as was shown above, has reached a much higher level of theoretical development than that of Merton's. This interpretation of the position of functionalism in theoretical sociology is based on:

(a) Our conception of what constitutes a theory and the conditions under which such theories are accepted in science.

(b) Our analysis of the methodological requisites of a theory of functional systems.

(c) Our definition of functionalism as an approach attempting to cope with problems presented by empirical systems.

(d) Our analysis and evaluation of some aspects of the
work of two theorists who attempt to apply functional analysis to theory construction in sociology.

When we conclude that functionalism in sociology is still far from complete in the above sense, it is not intended as adverse criticism, but as a diagnosis of the level of substantive theoretical development in sociology, evaluated in terms of the logical requisites for such a theory that has been specified in terms of our methodological principles. With such a diagnosis we would stress two important implications: (a) there appear to be no logical obstacles to constructing functional theories; (b) the present stage of development of the application of functional analysis to theory construction in sociology, does not provide conclusive grounds for rejecting it as a viable approach to theoretical problems.

On the contrary, if the degree of theoretical interest and research work that adherents of functional analysis have stimulated in sociology, is any indication of its promise, then one would have to consider carefully before dismissing it summarily from the sociological domain. For where else in the current position of sociological theory can a comparable approach be found which is applied to so wide a range of theoretical problems?

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**FOOTNOTES**

1) For e.g.:  


4) This was, for instance, our basic conclusion with regard to the commentaries of Romans and Goddijn considered in Chapter II.


9) For e.g.:


LIST OF REFERENCES

METHODOLOGY


THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY


**FUNCTIONALISM**


