With the rejection of the evolutionary view, some of the activities which it stimulated have also been slighted. The evolutionary perspective required a strong commitment to the study of history, especially man's early history. That interest has largely died out in modern sociology. The effective application of an evolutionary scheme rested on developing typologies of society. Contemporary sociologists generally look on this as rather an empty game—a kind of playing with boxes. One consequence of their neglect of history has been that sociologists played only a minor role in shaping the study of new forms of society, such as the totalitarian systems of Europe and the "new nations" emerging from tribal and colonial conditions in Asia and Africa.[17] The growing interest of younger sociologists in the consequences of industrialism and in the resultant forms of industrial society may, however, be the path by which some types of work earlier fostered by the evolutionary perspective may be restored to a place of importance in contemporary sociology.

The Organismic Model: Structural-Functionalism

Analogies between society and living organisms are as old as social thought. Plato spoke of the three different elements of society as the thinking, or rational; the feeling, or spirited; and the appetitive parts, each represented by a particular social class. The organic analogy was widely prevalent in pre-Comteian thought, and it is not surprising that it appeared very early in sociology's history. The most important manifestation of this pattern has been in the linked concepts of "structure" and "function," which already appear in Spencer, were used by Durkheim, and figured prominently in the work of the great sociologically oriented British anthropologists, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.[18] Through these and other channels this perspective came to have substantial influence in American sociology, particularly among students and followers of Talcott Parsons, and it is now generally known as the structural-functional school of sociology.

There are, of course, variations among structural-functionalists in emphasis, and in the completeness of their devotion to an organismic analogy of society.[19] The basic perspective of the structural-functional point of view emerges in its prime emphasis on society, and on the interrelations of its institutions, rather than on the individual or groups such as the family. The main question to which it addresses itself is this: "How is social life

[17] For important exceptions see: Barrington Moore, Jr., *Soviet Politics: The Dilemma of Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Raymond Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958); Monroe Berger, *The Arab World Today* (London: Nicolson, 1962); Wilbert Moore and Arnold Feldman, *Labor Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1960); Marion Levy, *Family Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

[18] Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*; Émile Durkheim (J. W. Swain, trans.), *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London: Trench and Trubner, 1926); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952).

[19] For a general view of the structural-functional position the following sources are indispensable: Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1957); Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1949); Marion Levy, *The Structure of Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949), and *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951).

maintained and carried forward in time despite the complete turnover in the membership of society with every new generation?" The basic answer it gives is: "Social life persists because societies find means (structures) whereby they fulfill the needs (functions) which are either pre-conditions or consequences of organized social life."

The evolutionary and functional views are not opposed to each other, but their interests and emphases are different. The evolutionary perspective is similar to Comte's idea of "social dynamics," whereas the structural-functional approach is a contemporary relative of his "social statics." The evolutionist is concerned with the classification of societies according to an established evolutionary scale. Time, stages of development, and change are, therefore, central to his interest. The structural-functional approach involves a more limited time perspective. It stops the motions of the system at a fixed point in time, in order to understand how, at that moment, it works as a system. When considering a particular institution, those guided by the evolutionary perspective try to understand how the evolutionary stage of the society as a whole shapes the form of the institution. The structural-functionalists will emphasize more how the institution contributed to keeping the society in operation. It is readily apparent that this approach could easily lead the functionalist to neglect the process of change—a point to which we will return shortly.

The objective of the adherents of the structural-functional view is to delineate the conditions and demands of social life, and to trace the process whereby a given society arranges to meet its needs. To choose an obvious example, if a society is to continue, it must periodically find new members. In all known societies the need is met by some form of family system. The family is the institution which acts "for" society to ensure fulfillment of the functions of sexual reproduction, of early care of the dependent infant, and of his initial training in the ways of the society in which he will live.

The structural-functional analyst must also deal with the way in which the different structures are co-ordinated and integrated to preserve the unity of society as a complete system (or organism). This idea was already quite clearly articulated by Comte when he said "sociology consists in the investigation of the laws of action and reaction of the different parts of the social system." [20]

The structural-functional point of view has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the development of sociological thought and research. Many features of society which otherwise are puzzling and seem to have no reason for existence become comprehensible when seen in relation to their "function" (i.e., their contribution to the flow of social life). Thus, from a functionalist point of view, rather violent, and even individually harmful *rites de passage* may be treated as useful training in the sort of publicly sanctioned bravery and endurance which is required in a society which relies on hunting scarce or dangerous game as its chief source of food. Or the romantic love complex in our own society may be seen as serving the function of providing the "push" required to free young people from the dependence encouraged by our family system, thus getting them to accept the responsibilities of marriage.

This perspective has also made us sensitive to many functions important to the continuance of social life which we otherwise neglect or to which we assign insufficient importance. Durkheim and his associates did much to clarify the significance of public ceremonials as a way of increasing social

[20] Auguste Comte (H. Martineau, trans.), *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (New York: Blanchard, 1855), p. 457.

who are the members of a given society, they may find that the members themselves do not agree on what is in society's interest. And even if the people agree, they may nevertheless be directing their society along the road to ruin and dissolution, which is hardly functional from any point of view.

The structural-functional approach encourages a search for the function of every existing structure. The imagination is generally not lacking to devise such functions. Consequently, everything which exists in a society at any given time is easily assumed to be there because it is "functional." Presumably, if it were not there, some need of society would be left more or less unfulfilled. This principle can obviously be used to justify opposition to experimentation and social change, on the grounds that what exists, being functional, cannot be removed without dire repercussions ensuing.

Despite these defects and dangers in the model, every sociologist to a degree is something of a structural-functional analyst. There are very few sociologists who would argue that there is no order or system in social life. Not many would hold that society can properly be conceived only as a great buzzing blooming confusion, or that the patterns which the sociologist purports to see in social life are nothing more than illusions. It is doubtful that any sociologist would deny that the continuation of social life requires that certain functions, such as the socialization of children, the control of violence, and the regulation of sex be performed by some social agency or propose that it is important to know which does the job and how. Nor would many challenge the importance of studying the distinctive structures of society to see what functions they perform.

Considering its potential universal appeal, it is interesting that the structural-functional approach is the object of such regular and intense criticism. In part this criticism rests on the difficulties cited above—such as the tendency to invent functions for everything in sight. In part it rests on the tendency of those who emphasize structural-functional analysis to act as if they have *the* master key to sociology. Perhaps the greatest challenge to this point of view, however, comes from those who prefer what they call a "conflict model" of society. They place "conflict" in opposition to "equilibrium," which, in their opinion, is the most important concept for those sharing the structural-functional approach.

Equilibrium vs. Conflict Models

The equilibrium model of society is a special version of the functionalist approach. Its critics claim that it deflects attention from the facts of social tension and conflict, and therefore serves as a politically conservative influence in sociological thinking. Conservatism is not a condition inherent in the structural-functional perspective, which is quite well able to handle most problems of change. Indeed, the theory explicitly states that prolonged failure to meet certain functions will bring a dissolution of society, that a change in structure will influence ability to perform function, and that a change in one sub-structure will generally affect other sub-structures in the same system. In the special case of the equilibrium model, however, the problem of change does tend to drop out of sight in favor of concentration on the "steady state" of the system. This defect is not an inescapable characteristic of the equilibrium model, but in practice it tends to develop rather consistently.

The equilibrium theory has been most fully elaborated by Talcott Parsons and some of his students. The general model for this theory, one explicitly acknowledged as such by its exponents, is the concept of homeostasis

as applied to human physiology by Walter B. Cannon in his widely read book *The Wisdom of the Body*. Typical of Cannon's mode of analysis is his discussion of the processes which insure that the tissues are steadily supplied with blood, thus serving to bring them nutriment and to carry off waste. Cannon showed how, following any lesion, the body immediately brings into play a series of mechanisms, such as contraction of the blood vessels leading to the point of injury, a series of adjustments which insure clotting, increased production of red blood cells, and the like. The body in this way prevents blood loss from too drastically upsetting its balance, and then gradually sets about restoring the system to its former equilibrium.[23]

Following this model, Parsons and others have conceived of society as also attempting by more or less automatic adjustments to redress the balance of its equilibrium when it is upset by internal or external forces. To give an example, let us assume that in some strata of society the family is weak and children are often abandoned and generally not properly socialized. If the values of the society stressed the importance of reasonable care and opportunity for all young people, the situation would represent a source of strain on the value system. If, in addition, the affected areas produced a disproportionately large number of juvenile deliquents, a social nuisance would have been created. Taken together these conditions would be elements of disequilibrium in the social system. The equilibrium model would suggest that a society faced with this situation could be expected to take certain corrective measures. These might include intensified social work with the families to strengthen them and to teach new ways of child-rearing, the development of community centers to work with the youth, and investments in new housing to eliminate blighted areas. With intelligent and timely effort on a sufficient scale, the original source of "infection" would presumably be brought under control. In time the affected group would, hopefully, be led to adopt new habits in the care of children and in its relations to society. The latter would, then, have had its equilibrium restored.

As a special case of structural-functional analysis, the equilibrium model has some of the virtues of the former. But the analogy suggested by Cannon's studies does not bring anything important to what structural-functional analysis already contained, and the newly added defects are fairly obvious. There is no end of historical evidence that societies regularly fail to control what happens to them; they change radically and very often simply die out. Second, to apply the analogy of physiological homeostasis, we must know just what is the optimal state of the system to which it should return when disturbed. This may be clear with regard to human temperature, but it is not nearly so obvious with regard to social climate. Third, we need to know what brings the process about. In Cannon's model the necessary adjustments are clearly built into the cell structure, the organs, and the body chemistry of the human organism, but we cannot, with equal preciseness, point out the specific "guardians of equilibrium" in society.

The sharpest criticism of the equilibrium model is launched by those who oppose to it what they call a conflict model of society. It is an illusion, they say, to believe that society, especially modern society, is in some sort of harmonious balance to the preservation of which everyone and everything is devoted. The critics of the equilibrium theory argue that far from being in a state of harmonious balance, most societies are usually experiencing conflict, particularly a conflict of interests. In other words, they maintain that

[23] Walter B. Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: Norton, 1932).