I. Robert Merton’s Structural Functionalism

A. Merton’s criticism: three postulates

1. functional unity of society

a. societies have a functional unity that leads to harmony.

b. all cultural beliefs and practices are functional for society as a whole and for all individuals in society

c. Merton: only true of traditional societies, but not of more complex societies (civil wars, ethnic conflict, apartheid, religious conflict)

2 universal functionalism: all cultural beliefs and practices have a positive function

a. Merton: not true, contradicts real world

b. Example: poverty as a positive function for whom?

3. indispensability: not only do cultural beliefs and practices have positive function but they are necessary parts of whole

a. Merton: not necessarily, there are others that function in the same way

b. Example: religion shapes values, but in more secular society so do other institutions, for example media and consumerism.

B. New ideas

1. dysfunction

a. disconnection between cultural system and social system

b. individual internalizes cultural norms, but institutions do not

allow individuals to achieve goals (mis-directed action!)

c. goal: success in terms of wealth through hard work (no jobs)

d. unintended consequences is dysfunction: deviance (black market) in order to become successful

2. manifest and latent functions

a. Freud

b. manifest function: overt or intended purpose of action

c. latent: unintended or implicit purpose of an action (more significant)

d. Merton: Hopi rain dance

i. manifest function: rain

ii. latent function: ( as a ritual) it affirmation of social ties and celebration of shared identity

e. Merton: the business lunch

II. Lewis Coser

A. Conflict theorist or structural functionalist?

B. major work: *The Functions of Social Conflict*

C. main question: how can conflict be functional for maintaining social order?

D. Coser argues conflict can

1. stabilize a social system by reinforcing group identity

2. reinforce social solidarity

3. establish power arrangements

E. As long as it doesn’t challenge society’s core values

D. propositions

1. Conflict can act as a safety valve,

a. allowing expressions of opposition

b. creation of scapegoats

2. Conflict with external groups help to unify society.

3. Groups seek enemies and conflict to unify themselves.

4. Conflict can help establish a balance of power within a social system.