

Structural-Functional Analysis and the Study of Politics

Introduction

Iliya Harik*

With a growing interest in the analytic study of comparative politics and development, the structural-functional approach has taken a prominent place in the field of political science. Since 1960, books and articles have appeared giving this approach special attention and recommending its use for political analysis.¹ However, it has already become clear that structural-functional theory has not met with unqualified success, and, while it is still gaining great momentum in the discipline of political science, it has also received serious criticism.² Sociologists and anthropologists have shown a greater degree of sophistication in dealing with functionalism than have political scientists hitherto, and this may well be due to the head start which they enjoy over the latter.

In this discussion we shall be concerned with the contribution of the theory to the understanding of some major problems dealt with in political science rather than with a general evaluation of the theory itself. There are three main contentions put forth by the exponents of this school with regard to the relevance of their approach to the study of political phenomena; first, that functionalism constitutes a theory of politics; second, that it is a comparative method for the study of politics; and finally, that it is particularly suited to the study of political change and development. The following is a theoretical assessment of the three contentions made in the hope that the results may sharpen our understanding of the uses and limits of the functional approach in political science.

I. Functionalism.

There is no single version of functionalism, and its exponents differ on many points with regard to details and sometimes essentials as well. No attempt will be made here to enter into these differences since we are not concerned with an exposition of the approach as such but with a selective set of theoretical

* I. Harik is an assistant professor of Political Science at the University of Indiana.

problems upon which it bears. Its basic principles and assumptions will therefore be presented here in one single and undifferentiated form as a condensed synthesis solely for the purpose of making subsequent analysis practicable.

Modern functional analysis starts with the basic principle that the most inclusive unit of political analysis is the **system**. A system is conceived of as an ordered complex of interdependent activities or classes of activities which are essential to the continued existence of the system as a whole. A system, in other words, is a postulated model abstracted from empirical reality and should be considered as a device for the analysis and ordering of data. It does not have to be an isomorphic true image of a particular society.

As a theoretical model, a system has a set of logical properties which give it its distinctive character. First, its constituent parts should reflect unity and coherence as a whole. Second, the parts should be interdependent so that an occurrence in one part should register a corresponding impact on the other parts of the system. Third, the system as a unit is indissoluble in the sense that no part or variable could be isolated or separated from the rest without ruining the whole construct. In other words, a system can only be taken as a whole. The concept of system is applicable to any field of action and not necessarily limited to the study of whole societies.

The coherence and indissolubility of the model are abstract qualities, not empirical ones. By insisting on the study of whole societies one is either misusing the concept of **system** or regressing to a vague idea about an amorphous whole called **society**.⁴ Neither as a concept nor as an empirical object is the term **society** clear or endowed with a definite referent.

Structural-functional analysis should be distinguished from the whole-system approach. The distinction is necessary because the concept of system is basic to functional theory whereas functional categories are not indispensable to the whole-system approach.

In addition to the system concept, functional analysis is based on two other concept categories: **structure and function**. For a system to continue as a living organism, certain necessary functions ought to be fulfilled, but whether these func

tions are all performed by one structure or many is a question to be determined by empirical research. It is important to emphasize here that the three variables-- system, structure, and function-- should be taken together to form one coherent model. The implications which follow from this point are quite significant, for only on the basis of this statement can we distinguish between what is relevant and worth studying and what should be ignored. First, we are told that not all functions which are performed at one level or another are to be included as part of the framework of study, but only systemic functions, those which are necessary for the system as a whole.⁵ That is why the terms **functions** and **functional requisite**, though different in meaning, are often used interchangeably.⁶ Similarly, with respect to structure, to say that only those structures which contribute to the fulfilment of functional requisites will be taken into account, puts a great many political structures that are within the system beyond the manageable scope of functional analysis.

Another thing that has to be taken into account here with regard to the concepts of structure and function is that the theory **a priori** specifies a set of functions in the system which are indispensable and invariable, while the only thing assumed about **structure** is that some kind of structure will inevitably be present to contribute to the fulfilment of the functional requisites.⁷ The number and kind of structures are deliberately left unspecified because it is conceived that this is the varying category of the model. This view frees the theory from the useless and erroneous assumption that one and only one structure can perform a specified function, as, for instance, maintaining that only parliaments can and should perform the function of legislation.

Definitions of these terms in the literature vary in emphasis and detail, and, although a synthesis here will run the risk of adding still one more set of definitions, it is deemed advisable for the purposes of this paper. One preliminary point with which we should start is that the term **structure** refers to a group of interrelated roles, and since no generic difference exists in the meaning of the two terms **structure** and **role** we shall start with the more simple term of **role**. In most societies, a varying degree of division of labor is to be found and therefore roles assume a certain measure of specialized activity. A **role** is a

distinct class of activities exercised over time as an attribute of a point of reference in the division of labor system and which has become part of the pattern of expectations of the members of society. It is "organized participation,"⁹ to use Parsons words, but one with reference to two other dimensions - division of labor and cultural systems. Thus, a class of activities referred to as role is both related to other roles and to the normative orientations of the participants. We may also speak of roles as institutionalized behavioral regularities. A number of such complimentary roles related and coordinated in the performance of functional requisites are called **structure**.

Each class of activities whose performance is necessary for the survival of the system as a whole is referred to as a **function** or **functional requisite**.¹⁰ A function of a certain role is considered as its share or contribution to the rest of the system and its goals. The functional question thus is: what purpose in the system does this political activity or kind of behavior serve? As put by Holt, "Functions are **system relevant** effects of structures. The term has meaning, therefore, only if the terms **structure** and **system relevant** are explicitly identified."¹¹

Hardly any two writers agree on what the functional requisites are as to content and number,¹² and it is thus difficult to know where to draw the line in an exposition of this type. In such a situation, it is perhaps advisable to follow the Parsonian version, since it is a more representative scheme. Holt, following in Parsons' footsteps, states that the functional requisites are four. The first is **pattern maintenance** and tension management, which is to say the "maintenance of conformity to the prescriptions of the cultural system" Second is **goal attainment**, i.e. the preservation of society mainly by means of defense. Third is **adaptation** or the control of resources for the supply of the material needs of society; and finally **integration**, (and here Holt sharply differs with Parsons since he defines the term as the coordination of the interdependent roles which operate in the system.)¹³

The preceding are the essential requisites which every social system must fulfil in order to continue as a living organism. All the activities which contribute to the satisfaction of functional

requisites are considered functional, and on this basis a political scientist discriminates between what is politically relevant and what is not. Needless to say, this statement draws no boundaries between the political and the non-political but rather, between what has system relevance and what is partial and non-systemic.¹⁴ This theoretical orientation toward whole systems is perhaps what makes functionalists in political science turn to the study of the all-encompassing social system instead of the polity.¹⁵

Although the functional theory just outlined is obviously teleological, this kind of teleology should not be construed as a metaphysical stand-point. For while the statement of system requisites is clearly not empirical it nevertheless does not refer to the system external goals. All the functional requisites of the system are within it and their satisfaction should be empirically demonstrable. There is nothing logically wrong with this, for if a functional activity is one which serves a purpose in the system as a whole, then only by knowing that purpose or end in advance does one become able to specify and sort out relevant from irrelevant activities. However, this kind of approach, as we shall later see, is heavily weighted in favor of explanations in terms of the needs, requirements, and ends of the whole.

The functional theory of politics, advanced by Almond in terms of probability and also by Holt, states as its main thesis that the ends of a political system are fulfilled when structures perform their assigned functions. Almond analytically separates political functions from political structures and thus revamps the classical legalistic functional theory. In Almond's words, "we have specified the elements of two sets, one of functions and one of structures, and suggested that political systems may be compared in terms of probabilities of performance of the specified functions by the specified structures."¹⁶

Limitations of Functional Theory.

What are the limitations of this theory of politics? The least a theory can do is to offer an explanation for social phenomena. The essence of functional analysis rests on the proposition that political behavior reflects regularities in the relationships of structures and functions. The central proposition upon which this theory rests can thus be summarized in two steps. First,

that a person acting in a political role or roles will act in conformity with the demands and pattern of behavior expected of his role whether these expectations are prescribed or ascribed. Second, that in so acting he is invariably contributing to the functional requisites of the system. When the contribution of some organized activity to the whole is not clear or evident, it becomes the task of research to discover the link, or, to use the jargon, its latent function.

At its face value, this theory seems reasonable and subject to confirmation by empirical research, since we can go into the field and check whether these relationships really hold. Let us then check on a hypothetical but nonetheless realistic case.

Suppose a person is a councilman in a town of some new state. The thing that we can be almost certain of is that he is hardly ever faced with a situation in which he has one and only one alternative of action in his role as a councilman. If this is granted, then we can maintain that a man acting in such a role often has a number of alternative courses of action to choose from without their conflicting with the rules to which his role is subject. To say, then, that a person will behave in conformity with his role does not tell us much about political behavior. This way of looking at things may be more suited to anthropological inquiries than to political science in view of the special interest of anthropologists in traditional communities where the situational simplicity and the strong hold of tradition upon individuals makes behavioral conformity to roles quite high.

Let us look at this same example from still another angle to see how that same person will act in a situation in which there is conflict in the courses of action open to him as a role player. Suppose that the councilman is also a head of a clan in that town. As a clansman his obligations go to his clan first, but as a councilman his duties are defined by law in terms of the public interest of the whole town. One day he finds himself confronted with a case of an entangled nature. A nephew of his is involved in a dispute with another man from town who is the chief officer in the water department, a position coveted by the councilman's nephew. The nephew claims that the water officer committed an irregularity and should not remain in his post. In his role as councilman, our friend should act impartially and equally toward his nephew and the water officer. As a clansman, it is his obliga-

tion to favor his nephew and support him. It is clear that the demands made upon him in this case by the two roles he performs as a councilman and as a head of a clan are in conflict.

The question is, how will he act? According to the structural-functional theory, he is supposed to act in such a way as to satisfy the functions expected of him as a role player. But this is obviously not possible any more since he has more than one role and more than one function, and they are not in harmony in this case. How is this kind of conflict resolved in terms of functional analysis? If we follow the structural-functional theory of political behavior, we will neither be able to predict the councilman's action, nor will we have the adequate conceptual tools with which to explain his behavior once he has made up his mind. One may retort that, while not being able to predict the course of action the councilman takes, we can still explain his action once it is completed, because whichever course he takes, it will be in conformity with one or the other of his roles. This answer may not be wrong, but it is certainly not useful as it explains one set of behavior and its opposite in terms of one and the same principle. This is a fault inherent in most teleological explanations.

What this illustration shows is that the structural-functional theory of politics, as it stands now, is quite narrow in its view of political behavior and consequently lacks the power of satisfactory explanation. Its conceptual apparatus, consisting as it does of relations between roles and functional requisites, needs to be further refined. The first thing this functional framework is in need of is some intervening variable which would differentiate the explanation in terms of roles and functions. A third principle is necessary to explain such phenomena as are not explainable in terms of roles and functions. Needless to say, an addition of one intervening variable to the conceptual framework will not transform this approach and make of it a scientific theory of politics, but it will at least give it partial explanatory power over political behavior.

Aware of the truncated view of political behavior upon which the functional theory is based, Robert Holt tries to introduce the concept of process as an intervening variable by means of which he hopes to achieve two things; first, to break away from the

narrow functional view of politics and second, to introduce a measure of dynamism to what is otherwise a formalistic approach. Unfortunately, Holt fails to make clear what he means by process, and if one is to make up the meaning of the term from his examples, it becomes obvious that the term refers to activities that are really part of the definition of role. Let us take, for example, **the social control process**, which he explains as "the application of sanctions for violations of the prescriptions of the value system."¹⁷ Is not the application of sanctions one of the activities which define the role of a judge, policeman, parent, or teacher? In short, what Holt calls process is nothing other than that activity which one attributes to roles, and he is using two terms for one and the same thing.

Aside from the fact that Holt leaves the concept of process as an intervening variable, vague and inadequate for analysis, the concept itself is hardly the required solution. In its common sense usage, the concept of process refers to how an issue or an activity is generated, the course it takes, and its consequent results. If, as is maintained by functional theorists, all relevant interactions in the system can be understood in terms of roles and functions, then an issue which arises in the system will be resolved by the appropriate structure in accordance with the systemic functional requisites. In short, the introduction of the concept **process** does not shed any new light on the function framework. The point of a theoretical framework is, indeed, to enunciate the principles which govern the generation, the course, and the outcome of political activity; in other words, to explain process.

The second major problem with functionalism as a theory of politics is its emphasis on coherence and unity of the system. In the first place, coherence is an abstract quality which has to do with consistency and complementarity of formal concepts, not with empirical reality. Unfortunately, there is every evidence that the functional theory is formalistic in this sense, namely, that it substitutes formal categories — roles, functions, and systems — for individuals and groups. In Almond's words, "Social systems are not made up of individuals but of roles; i.e. a family consists of the roles of mother and father, husband and wife,

sibling and sibling, and the like . . . In the same sense, the political system consists of the roles of nationals, subjects, voters, interacting — as the case may be — with legislators, bureaucrats, judges, and the like.”¹⁸ At this point, one wonders to what extent we can rightly reduce a political actor to the formal schema of roles and functions.

In the second place, emphasis on coherence and unity of the system imposes in advance unwarranted conclusions on research; namely, that in reality the constituent parts of a community should be closely interrelated and integrated. When, for instance, conflict is observed, the researcher immediately looks for the functions and ends which the particular conflict serves in the system, because he has already assumed, on theoretical bases that the parts of the system constitute a coherent whole. In short, conflict in functional research is given, more often than not, a cohesive value or no value at all.

There are two concepts in politics that cannot be overlooked in any political study — conflict and power — yet, at best, they are given scanty attention and partial explanation in functional analysis. Just as conflict, for instance, is given a cohesive and integrating value, so also is power.

There is a predominant conviction in functional analysis that the most significant thing about the study of politics is the tasks which structures must perform for the whole of society. As a task-oriented philosophy, it is not surprising to see that functionalism has substituted the concepts of performance and service for those of power and conflict. An observer cannot help feeling that in functional theory, the political system is an immaculate one.

At this point we are perhaps in a position to question the claim made by the exponents of the new version of structural-functional analysis, i.e., that they have overcome the formalistic character of the classical theory.²¹ The exponents of the new version make the point that the classical theory of functional analysis in political science, with its legalistic and formal character has failed to cut deep into the reality of politics as a dynamic activity. To avoid such legalism, they refuse to be limited in their study of politics by functions which are prescribed in state documents such as, say, the U.S. Constitution. Instead of taking

function and structure as legally inseparable, they redefine the relationship between the two concepts and look at them as two separate categories whose connections should be determined empirically.

Structure becomes the varying factor of analysis. That is what Almond means by the statement: we are not structure-bound.²² Functions, on the other hand, are held analytically invariable and constant in all systems. Thus to the extent that political functions are formal categories derived from the system concept, and to the extent that they are necessary and inalterable in all systems, they are also prescribed kinds of activities. If we also remember that according to this theory roles and not individuals are the units of analysis, and that the behavior of a role player invariably conforms to the requirements of his role, then we have in the new version of structural-functional analysis a formalism no less legalistic and no less normative than in the classical theory. As in the classical theory, therefore, regularities in political behavior according to the functional framework are of one kind: prescriptive, i.e. those which conform to the normative requirement of role expectations.

III. Functionalism and the Comparative Method.

The second problem we are concerned with in this essay is structural-functional analysis as a comparative method for the study of politics. Interest in the comparative study of politics in recent years has not been matched by equal progress in method, and, as has been observed by Shils, "there is at present no complete identity of comparative and general theory."²³ There can be no doubt that the discipline has witnessed some remarkable and serious efforts to develop analytic tools, but with the exception of the statistical method of cross-polity analysis, itself still at the stage of inception, progress has been mainly limited to studies of particular cases rather than bringing together lessons learnt in several cases to reach comparative generalizations. Limited as it still is, the comparative method today marks a considerable progress over traditional approaches, particularly in putting aside historical and cultural barriers among nations and delving into the basic similarities of all political phenomena. A theoretical

apparatus of this kind enables the student to understand, within a relatively short time, foreign political systems, the details and particulars of which were previously unfamiliar to him.

The structural-functional approach is one of the many analytic schemes offered as a method for the comparative study of politics.²⁴ Almond, for instance, suggested that "political systems may be compared with one another in terms of the frequency and style of the performance of political **functions** by political **structures**."²⁵ This is proposed as an analytic scheme in terms of which different societies may be systematically examined. As a set of variables theoretically determined to be crucial, the above is a strategy for attack or a universal guide book that can be used in every society that one finds himself passing through. Needless to say, the scheme proposed by Almond is on the whole descriptive; it offers neither a method for explanation of political phenomena nor one for verification of hypotheses. At best, it provides a plan to order discrete material. In spite of its great influence and ready acceptance by a large number of political scientists, a rigorous application of Almond's scheme is still to be awaited. Since the studies that have more or less followed Almond's framework are country studies one would expect them to give results to new hypotheses stated in the proposition. At a certain point in time, the Dinka came into contact with another tribe, the Nuer, and the relations between the two groups were hostile. Yet the emergence of this hostile relationship with another group was not accompanied by new developments in the defense organization of Dinka society. According to the proposition, the Dinka, who did not have a central government, should have developed one, after their contact with the Nuer in order to face the new danger which the latter posed for them. As this case unfolds itself, its theoretical components become clearer. It was originally assumed that the political behavior of the Dinka in their conflict with a hostile and powerful group would conform to the goal-attainment functional requisite of the system, i.e. the defense need. On checking to find whether this did actually take place, the result was found to be negative and the Dinka did not, as would have been expected, build up a new political structure which would be adequate to meet the defense needs of their community. In order

which may be brought together to advance comparative analysis a step further, but nothing of this has been offered.²⁶ Almond's contribution lies in his ability to stimulate discourse in the discipline and in his enrichment of political vocabulary with aptly chosen terms that have gained wide currency.

Holt and Mitchell show great awareness of the theoretical foundations of functionalism; and its logical implications, as a method of comparative import, can be more clearly drawn from their writings than from those of Almond's. Functional analysis, as we had occasion to point out earlier, explains patterns of political behavior in terms of how they relate and fit in the whole system and with respect to their contribution to its goals. This brings us to the peculiarity of this approach, namely that in very fundamental respects it is not a comparative one, although its exponents in political science give special credit to its comparative nature. Functional analysis concentrates on the political system as a whole, which by definition is a complete self-contained unit by and for itself.²⁷ Whatever happens inside that system should be understood and explained in terms of the relations of the constituent parts to one another and to the whole. We may refer to this as the coherence method of explanation and verification, that a certain occurrence in the system has meaning only if its relations to the rest of the system are discovered and found consistent with the ends of the system as a whole. Things that may happen in other societies, unless they bear directly on our system, are irrelevant so far as explanation and verification of observations are concerned. In order to discover, verify, or explain political behavior, one does not need to look outside the system to find confirmative support for his observations and hypotheses, for the criterion of truth in functional analysis is consistency, not inductive evidence.

In order to illustrate what is meant by the coherence method of structural-functional analysis, let us take any of Holt's propositions and find out how he explains them. One of Holt's propositions reads as follows: "the contributions of government to the satisfaction of the goal attainment requisite [i.e. defense in this case] will increase as the contact with other societies increases..."²⁸ He takes as an example the Dinka, an East African tribe, as a negative instance to this rule and tries to explain why Dinka behavior did not follow the same pattern as

to explain Dinka deviance from this rule, Holt did not turn to other comparable instances of behavior but looked at the internal relationships within the Dinka system. By doing this, he discovered that the failure of the Dinka to behave in accordance with the goal of the system was the direct result of their maintaining consistent relations in the constituent structures of which the system was composed. As he put it, development of new structures in Dinka society to meet the defense need would have "undercut other structures that make crucial contributions to the satisfaction of other requisites."²⁹ In other words, the compatibility of existing structures with one another was dysfunctional to the goal attainment requisite. The need to keep relations among structures consistent explains the deviant behavior of the Dinka. To conclude, the explanation of the patterns of political behavior among the Dinka was made on the basis of the coherence method of verification rather than the comparative. The coherence of truth is thus the basic principle underlying the structural-functional method of analysis.

The purpose this discussion serves is to underline the distinction between the method of structural-functional analysis and the comparative method of study; it makes no criticisms or objections to the coherence method of analysis per se. The point advanced for consideration here is that if by the comparative method is meant the establishment and verification of hypotheses by the systematic comparison of confirmatory instances, then the structural-functional approach is not such a method. If, on the other hand, by comparative method is meant merely the provision of an analytic scheme that can systematically be applied to every society regardless of differences in time and place, then the structural-functional approach is such a method.

Without overlooking the merit of the coherence method of the structural-functional approach, one may question certain aspects of it that seem to be left obscure, in particular, the question of time relevance. The theory understandably stresses the functional relationships of one unit with another, and since this is a logical relationship, the time element is irrelevant to it. Yet one major assumption of the structural-functional theory is that these logical relationships are enduring. Thus the assumption of

endurance brings to the fore the importance of establishing the meaning of regularities in time sequence in relation to functional regularities. In his study of the American polity, Mitchell, for instance, highlights this dichotomy by pointing out the time-less character of the coherence method. At the same time he views his subject in historic perspective without stating the explicit relationship between the historic and functional methods³⁰

Viewing political relationships in equilibrium demands attention to consistency and the coherence method of analysis becomes especially valuable, but in focusing on political change, an analytically historical approach is indispensable. By the analytically historical approach, we mean systematic empirical research to assess the impact of one or more facts on other facts in time sequence.

To conclude this section on method, we may suggest that it will be scientifically rewarding for the investigator to keep the lines clear, at least conceptually, between his method of approach and the theoretical assumptions upon which it is based. Second, there are several approaches with special methods and techniques the choice of which should depend not on an exclusive claim of truth or falsehood, but on which one is more fruitful for the particular research problems the investigator is faced with.

IV. Political Change.

Functional theorists' early reaction against the historical approach and their emphasis on pattern-maintenance has brought against them the charge that no adequate explanation of change within this framework was possible,³¹ and Almond's recent contribution in **The Politics of Developing Areas** has served to give additional evidence in support of this charge. Rather than reject off-hand the functional theory of change, in this section we shall be concerned with enunciating the theoretical assumptions and principles in terms of which the exponents of this approach explain political change, with a view to its scope and limitations.³²

In order to appreciate the scope of the functional approach in the study of political change, one has to take into account that the theory has a dynamic as well as a static character, depending on whether one is concerned with relations of units in

equilibrium or with relations which are seeking to readjust to a new state of equilibrium. Emphasis on order, socialization, control, and consequently behavioral conformity to role requirements, underlines the equilibrium assumption, namely, that the system's predominant tendency is to maintain its order and form. Any theory of change based on this assumption should find the source of disequilibrium to lie in external forces which encroach on the system and disturb its established boundaries. While the conceptual implications give the impression of a rigidly ordered pattern, it is sometimes stressed that in reality the system is flexible.³³ It is pointed out, for instance, that there is usually some strain within structures and also ambiguity in role definitions that make modification of existing structures quite possible.

When, on the other hand, we look at the dynamic aspect of change in functional analysis we find three major principles in terms of which change is explained. The first striking principle is that the source, and mostly, too, the agent of change, come from the system environment.³⁴ The second principle is related to the order of change in the system and is based on the proposition of interdependence of the constituent parts of the system. This principle maintains that when one constituent part of the system changes under the impact of environmental factors, other units will register a corresponding change. The third main principle of change is that the varying category of the system model is the structure and not functional requisites, which are constant. Stated differently, the state of the system changes when one or more of its structures change.

When and how does change take place in accordance with these principles? In the first place, it is to be noticed that the causal relationship between the environment and structures of the system is mechanical, since the environment is an external force which impinges on the particular structure, forging a change in its makeup. An invasion of a certain country by another, for instance, may lead to direct change in the judicial and military organizations of the subject nation. However, not all environmental factors affect the inner system in such a direct manner, and thus not all changes that take place in the system are mechanically determined. An external force will be resisted unless there are favorable conditions within the system which prove

receptive to it, or promote its course. Here the argument changes character and the principle of change, instead of remaining mechanistic, takes on a teleological form. A structure changes, it is maintained, when in its existing form it fails to contribute adequately to the functional requisites of the system. For instance, when a feudal military organization under the impact of the invention of firearms ceases to have the capacity to meet the defense of society, it gives way, say, to a centralized professional military organization. When this happens, it is said that a state of disequilibrium has occurred in the system and an adjustment in structure is necessary to restore the system to a new state of equilibrium. It is important to notice here that the adjustment creates a new kind of equilibrium and therefore a change of state.

If it is the case that a system may or may not change under the impact of environmental factors, then we are in need of a theory which would indicate when a system will change and when it will not. In an article devoted to the subject of political change, Almond tries to establish a criterion as to when a change in the system takes place. "The criterion of political change," he writes, "is the acquisition of a new capability, in the sense of specialized role structure and differentiated orientation which together give a political system the possibility of responding efficiently, and more or less autonomously, to a new stage of problems."³⁵ Why some systems acquire new capabilities while others fail to do so is anybody's guess. This statement provides one basis for a taxonomy to rank societies on a developmental scale, but as a theory of change, it sheds no new light.

Holt offers another explanation. According to him, change is a process which is regulated by the functional requisites of the system. A structure will change when the functional requisite to which it contributes is no longer being satisfied. This is a return to the teleological argument. However, if we are to take this proposition as a guideline, then we would not be able to tell in which direction change will take place, for a certain structure may develop in either one of several forms which could be poles apart. Any one of these forms may satisfy the functional requisites. Our complaint is not only that this proposition is too general but also that it may not stand up to empirical testing. Many political structures are known historically to have survived

for generations without change or breakdown even though they contribute poorly to the functional requisites.

The second central principle of political change in functional analysis is the proposition of interdependence. It is curious that such an important and pivotal point as this should be so inadequately introduced in the literature of political science. For the sake of analysis, we have to reconstruct it from cursory statements. In writing about this proposition, David Easton thinks in terms of mutual dependence of system parts, while Almond and the anthropologist F.G. Bailey state the proposition in terms of interdependence of subsets or roles.³⁶ Whether one considers parts or roles as the unit of analysis, the proposition reads the same: the constituent units of the system are interrelated in such a way that: (1) if A changes its properties, then B, C, D, etc. will also change their properties: (2) when A affects B, then there will be a feedback and B will have a reciprocal effect on A. In other words, the causal relationship between the variables is reversible.

I have tried to restate and perhaps clarify the main points of the interdependence proposition as logically and succinctly as possible. Due to its presentation in the literature, however, the proposition remains hopelessly vague. Several questions remain to be answered. For instance, will any change which affects a variable in the system lead to a chain reaction in all the rest, or does the change have to be a major one and one which is limited in its effects to a few other variables? Easton answers that "any change will influence the rest";³⁷ while, for Almond, it has to be a significant change.³⁸ Yet he fails to define this significant change. Also, to what varying degree do the parts or structures effect the system? Will, for instance, a change in the electoral system from proportional to single constituency transform the whole of the political system? Will a change from trial by jury to trial by judge in criminal cases change political structures as much as will a change from civilian to military government? These questions have led Goulder to charge that in functional analysis each constituent part of the system is given value equal to every other one.³⁹ This problem is the result of both inadequate consideration of the point, and of attributing the logical qualities of a model to empirical reality. Statements about the relations of various roles in a system are true only if they are empirically

verifiable, and we cannot hold them true of the actual world by deductive procedure.

The second part of the interdependence proposition also has a serious difficulty. In stating that constituent parts of the system are interdependent, i.e. that each part will affect the others and be mutually affected by them, functional theorists have reduced all relationships among the system variables to one kind: a causally reversible relationship. They have either disregarded or failed to see that certain variables are related to one another in an irreversible order of causation in which one is an independent variable and the other is dependent.

To conclude, in this essay I have tried to expound and assess the structural-functional approach as a theory of politics, as a method of analysis, and as a view of political change. We have seen, first, that by focusing on roles and functions, the theory in effect remains formalistic in approach and analytically continues to be limited to normative regularities; second, that the functional method rests on the evidence of coherence in the verification of its hypotheses, not on comparative analysis. Finally, with respect to political change, whatever promising potential it has remains at a level of generality which precludes precise and useful application.

FOOTNOTES

1. The following are some outstanding contributions in this line. Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman (eds.) **The Politics Developing Areas**, Princeton: University Press, 1960. William C. Mitchell, **The American Polity: Social and Cultural Interpretation**, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962. Richard Rose **Politics in England: An Interpretation**, Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964. Jean Grossholtz **Politics in the Philippines**, Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964. Talcott Parsons, **Structure and Process in Modern Societies**, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960. Don Martindale, **Functionalism in the Social Sciences: The Strength and Limits of Functionalism in Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, and Sociology**, Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1965. Numerous articles have been written on this subject, some of which will appear in subsequent footnotes.
2. See for instance, Reinhard Bendix, **Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order**, New York: John Wiley and Son, Inc., 1964, pp. 14-15. David Easton, **A Framework for Political Analysis**, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965, p. 105. Leonard Binder, **Iran: Political Development in a Changing Society**, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962, pp. 7-8. Karl W. Deutsch, **The Nerves of Government: Models for Political Communications and Control**, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, pp. 47-50. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Theory", in Llewellyn Gross, ed., **Symposium in Sociological Theory**, New York: Harper and Row, 1959. See also the articles written by L.C. Jarvie, William Flanigan and Edwin Fogelman, and Don Martindale in Martindale, **Functionalism**.....
3. In his short essay **A Framework for Political Analysis**, David Easton has made it clear that his present concept of system is a construct of the mind and an analytic tool. However, his continued insistence on equating "system" with "society" is not consistent with his theoretical assumptions. See especially pages 52, 56.
4. Robert T. Holt, "Proposed Structural-Functional Framework for Political Science", in Martindale, **Functionalism**..... p.87. Also Harold Fallding, "Functional Analysis in Sociology," **American Sociological Review**, XXVIII (February 1963), p.6.
5. Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework" p.92.
6. See the writings of Almond, **The Politics of Developing Areas**; also his articles: "Political Systems and Political Change," **American Behavioral Scientist**, VI (June 1963) and "A Developmental Approach to Political Systems," **World Politics** XVII, (January 1965). See also Mitchell, **The American Polity** ... p.5. Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework" pp.96-100. Also David Easton, **The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science**, New York: Knopf, 1963, pp. 147-38.

7. Parsons, **Structure and Process**, p.171.
8. See A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "On the Concept of Function in Social Science," **American Anthropologist**, Vol. XXXVII, (July-September 1935); also Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework ...", pp.87, 88, 92, 93.
9. Holt, **Ibid.**, p.87.
10. Almond, for example, changes their number and definitions three times in three different writings: **The Politics of Developing Areas**; in "Political Systems and Political Change," and in his recent article, "A Developmental Approach to Political Systems." D.F. Aberle et al., in "The Functional Prerequisites of a Society," **Ethics**, LX (January 1950) make them nine in number, whereas those who follow Parsons more closely make them only four.
11. Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework," pp.92-93.
12. Although Easton has recently acknowledged that system concept is an analytical tool and may be applied to smaller units than society, he still considers systemic relationship as the political, while study of smaller units as "para-political." See his **Framework for Political Analysis**, chapter four.
13. Mitchell and Holt make it explicit in their writings that they are concerned with the social system as a whole; Mitchell, **The American Polity**, pp.3-7, and Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework," p.87.
14. Almond, **The Politics of Developing Areas**, p.59.
15. Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework," p.93.
16. Gabriel A. Almond, "A Developmental Approach to Political Systems," **World Politics**, XVII (January 1965), p.188. Reference to this point can be also seen in Alvin W. Gouldner, "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Analysis," in Llewellyn Gross (ed.), **Symposium in Sociological Theory**, New York: Harper and Row, 1959, pp.252-2253.
17. Almond, "A Developmental ...," **World Politics**, XVII (January 1965), p. 196 and Mitchell, **The American Polity**..., pp. 5, 73, 94.
18. Parsons, "Power Party and System," reprinted in S. Sidney Ulmer (ed.), **Introductory Readings in Political Behavior**, Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., p.127; see also his **Structure and Process in Modern Societies**, p.181.
19. Almond, **The Politics of Developing Areas**, pp.3-64.
20. **Ibid.**, p.13. Also see Easton, **The Political System**..., pp.137-38.
21. Edward Shils, "On the Comparative Study of the New States", in Clifford Geertz (ed.) **Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa**. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963. p.18.
22. Almond, **Politics of the Developing Areas**, p.3.
23. Almond, **Ibid.**, p.61.
24. See the Little, Brown series in Comparative Politics.
25. Regarding system coherence see Easton **The Political System**, pp.291-292.
26. Holt, "Structural-Functional Framework...", p.107.
27. **Ibid.**, p.107.
28. Mitchell, **The American Polity**, p.25.
29. See for instance, Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," **American Anthropologist**, LIX (February 1957), pp.32-33. Also E.R. Leach, **Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954, pp.4-7, Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out

✓

of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis," **American Journal of Sociology**, LXIV (September 1958).

31. This account is based on the same literature of functional analysis reviewed in earlier parts of the essay with one more addition, namely Francesca Cancian, "Functional Analysis of Change," **American Sociological Review**, XXV (December 1960).
31. Kenneth E. Bock, "Evolution, Function, and Change", **American Sociological Review**, XXVIII (April 1963) p.232.
32. The argument made by Kenneth E. Bock that functionalists, like evolutionary theorists of the 19th century, argue from the immance of change seems to the present writer not based on sufficient evidence from the literature of functionalism. See Bock, *Ibid.*, p.237.
33. Almond, "Political Systems...", **American Behavioral Scientist**, VI (June 1963), p.8.
35. Easton, **The Political System**, pp.96-97, 291. F.G. Bailey, **Tribe, Caste, and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa** Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960, p.6. Almond, **The Politics of Developing Areas**, p.8, and his article, "A Developmental Approach to Political Syatems, **World Politics**, Vol. XVII (January 1965), pp.185-186
- 3 Easton, **The Political System**, p.291.
36. Almond, **The Politics of Developing Areas**, p.8, and "A Developmental Approach...." **World Politics**, Vol. XVII, p.185.
37. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Theory," in Llewellyn Gross ed., **Symposium in Sociological Theory**, see pp.263-266.

التحليل الهيكلي الوظيفي في دراسة علم السياسة

إبراهيم حريق

مع ازدياد الاهتمام بالدراسات التحليلية ، احتل المنهج الهيكلي - الوظيفي مكانا بارزا في حقل العلوم السياسية وبالذات منذ مطلع الستينات .

وهذا البحث معنى باسهامات المنهج المذكور في فهم علم السياسة . وليس في تقييم ذلك المنهج بشكل شامل . ويتلخص جوهر البحث في تقديم تحليل نظري للقناعات الرئيسية التي يؤكد عليها دعاة اعتماد المنهج الهيكلي - الوظيفي في دراسة العلوم السياسية ، وفي تفحص دقة تلك القناعات .

وتأمل الدراسة في النهاية الاسهام في بلورة وتحديد الميزات والعيوب التي تواكب استخدام ذلك المنهج في تحليل الظواهر السياسية .