# *The Functionalist Tradition and Comparative Education*

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This paper articulates some of the basic theoretical assumptions underlying functionalism, by examining modern functionalist theory, and also by placing the theory in a longer historical perspective. Historical continuities are argued not only between Durkheim and Parsons but between Durkheim and important intellectual forbears. The common assumptions derived from the study of functionalism are then applied to a consideration of exemplars of educational research in the field of modernisation theory, in an attempt to explain the direction given by the adoption of functionalist tenets. The paper includes a critique of some overt and covert assumptions of functionalist educational research, and suggests some avenues for more reasonable forms of research.

The structural-functional school have provided one of the most important logics of research in the twentieth century, and their influence on research in the social sciences, including education, has been profound. The *locus classicus* for modern functionalism is generally taken to be the work of Talcott Parsons, although the starting point for twentieth century functionalism is the work of Emile Durkheim, whose reworking of St Simonian and Comteian themes into a new set of prescriptions for scientific social research proved to be a fountainhead for modern functionalist theory.

Durkheim's programme has been expressed in terms of three major, linked goals: to establish sociology as a strict 'natural science of society' [1]; to articulate the basis for the unity of the social sciences; and to provide the basis for social integration ('modern society's civil region' [2]), in the best traditions of St Simon and Comte:

> The French sociological tradition begun by St Simon, followed by Comte, ... and Durkheim has a common denominator in its repugnance of political upheavals, of group struggles for power, of chicanery and civil strife; the tradition, in contradistinction to Marxist sociology, is to make sociology a healing and stabilising science, one that will find a viable basis for restoring social consensus, and for enhancing societal integration. [3]

Talcott Parsons' debt to Durkheim is both explicit and acknowledged, as for example in the former's monumental *Structure of Social Action,* wherein Durkheim is seen as providing a solution to the Hobbesian problem of 'order' [4]. There are other connections between post-war structural-functionalists and Durkheim, one of the more important being the concept of social pathology and the dependence upon a biological analogy to clarify this concept. For example Durkheim's discussion of the notion of 'normal' and 'pathological' relies on arguments taken from biology, in which normal is a measure of frequency within a species (higher or lower). This law is exactly the same in sociology as in biology: "it has never occurred to

anyone to assume that what is normal for a mollusc, is normal also for a vertebrate" [5]. The morbidity or pathology of a given species is not part of their normal nature for Durkheim, and is not related to the conditions for their general (normal) existence.

The second major continuity of the functionalist school, evolution, again demonstrates the dependence on a biological analogy. Durkheim's concept of the health of a species raises the question of how this state of health came to be the norm in that setting. Here Durkheim answers his own questions: "How could (normal characteristics)... have maintained themselves under so great a variety of circumstances if they had not enabled the individual better to resist the elements of destruction?" [6]. Clearly the greater frequency of normal characteristics, as opposed to pathological varieties, is proof of their greater usefulness. The circularity of the argument—what is normal is successful; what is successful is normal—appears to escape Durkheim's attention.

The last major link in the functionalist chain of thought is the emphasis on the unitary, integrating, systemic quality of sociology, a view which (as Gouldner argues) is a living link to 'Sociological Positivism', and whose clearest modern exponent is Talcott Parsons. Parsons' organicism, expressed in the notion that (an understanding of) the anatomy of the whole must be prior to the interpretation of any individual element, and his view that each element only gains significance in terms of what it contributes to other parts and therefore the whole are sensible in the organic traditions of Comte and St Simon, and crucially, Durkheim. So indeed is Parsons' taxonomic fervour.

The concept of system, then, is an integral part of contemporary functionalism:

> The most essential condition of successful dynamic analysis is continual and systematic reference of every problem to the state of the system as a whole... Functional significance in this context is inherently teleological. A process or set of conditions either 'contributes' to the maintenance (or development) of the system, or it is 'dysfunctional' in that it detracts from the integration and effectiveness of the system. It is thus the functional reference 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. [7]

Apart from the heavy emphasis on the implicit defence of the *status quo*, there is an immediate by-product in this Parsonsian formulation. By excluding aspects of the physical, material and ecological environment, as also of man's own physical functioning and constitution, Parsons achieves a gain in formal terms (those elements which remain within his model of the social system are now the only ones capable of accounting for action) but only at the expense of an important loss in terms of heuristic, explanatory potential. Logical elegance, as Gouldner points out, is no substitute for empirical potency.

A normative direction for action is a further aspect of Parsonsian functionalism, and the relationship of norms to action can even be expressed in terms of rules. A businessman may be guided, in performing a transaction, by the normative rule of honesty which then provides definite limits to his action. But different parts of a 'system' will, of course, vary in their degree of commitment to that system's moral code: "What one conceives to be moral, tends to vary with one's interests" [8]. This is not recognised by Parsons who argues, on the contrary, that the very structure of social systems is gained through the institutionalised 'normative culture'. Moreover, this culture exists hierarchically, and is passed on in descending order from society—"the highest order concrete system of interaction treated as theoretically relevant for the analytical purposes of sociology" [9]—through various forms of collectivity-structure, to the individual. This leads straight to the view that units of a system, such as individuals, which do not obey the overall normative standards of the community are necessarily deviant.

A negative view of change becomes more explicit when we turn to the important question of system-maintenance in Parsons. In Parsons the allegiance tends to be to the biological concept

of homeostatis [10] as a model for system maintenance. That is, the analysis focusses upon the process by which systems maintain a harmonious existence in relation to their environment.

> In focusing on social system equilibrium, Parsons' concern is with the manner in which patterns of interaction are stabilised and unchanged, or on how, when some changes do occur, still others will result whose effect is to limit the first changes or return the situation to what it had been. [11]

Change and social contradiction seem marginal on this view; indeed Parsons' unwarranted assumption seems to be that, once established, a mutually satisfying interaction will simply maintain itself: "the complementarity of role expectations, once established, is not problematical... No special mechanisms are required for the explanation of the maintenance of complementary interaction-orientation" [12].

Perhaps the major assumption of Parsons' system of action is captured in his articulation of 'Pattern Maintenance', which embodies the moral "imperative of maintaining the stability of the patterns of institutional culture defining the structure of the system," involving the "internalisation" of the normative pattern "in the structure of... (the individual's)... personality" [13]. Systemic stability is the aim, in the face of potential disruption posed by changing values, and "mechanisms that tend to protect... order" [14] need to be sought. 'Tension management' is thus seen as an important problem, relating particularly to control over socialisation mechanisms in respect of the individual. Overall, pattern maintenance "plays a part in the theory of social systems, as other systems of action, comparable to that of the concept of inertia in mechanics" [15].

Parsons' concern with the concept of integration deals with the adjustment of subsystems to contribute more effectively to the "effective functioning of the system as a whole" [16] (thereby relating to the problem of pattern maintenance), and also to the external context. Legal norms are principally regulatory here, effecting internal adjustments to contribute to systemic stability; as are also "institutionalisation of money and power... (which are also)... mechanisms of social control" [17]. Integration within the Parsonsian system is acknowledged to be the core concern of sociological theory, a clear indication of the overall functionalist ideology of orderly progress as expressed by Comte.

Naturalism, the view that the logics of natural and social sciences are not fundamentally dissimilar and can be based on an uncritical natural scientific tradition, is also fundamental to Parsons. This view has served both as an apology for the inability of an as-yet-adolescent sociology to find that precision which naturalistic views of science indicated must lie at the end of all the sciences, and as a defence of an uncritical view of sociology.

Naturalism was an important basis of post-war functionalist social inquiry, and lay behind the common claim that industrial society would issue in the end of ideology. The view was that there were essential qualities in industrial society which tended toward unilinear development, transcending class antagonism and particular forms of more radical social and political expression. This was the essence of the all-pervasive myth of the Minotaur, as Gouldner has termed it: the belief in a value-free social theory.

> ... The myth of a value-free sociology has been a conquering one. Today all the powers of sociology, from Parsons to Lundberg, have entered into a tacit alliance to bind us to the dogma that 'Thou shalt not commit a value judgement', especially as sociologists. [18]

The Utopian, ideological quality of this ethic, less readily apparent at a time of post-war optimism and economic progress, has been brought to light by the increasing failure-to-emerge of that putative consensus, indeed a widening gulf between the predictions of consensual socio-political theory and the reality of active social differentiation, strain and antagonism in contemporary industrialised states [19].

Parsons' expression of the goal of value-free social inquiry is based upon a Weberian distinction between value-reference (*Wertbeziehung*), which is accepted as central to the social sciences, and value-judgements (*Wertungen*) which cannot be considered objective, and must therefore be avoided. Facts are, in this view, unproblematic ('objective' and 'verifiable') [20] and can be detailed or explained scientifically:

> ... 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 scheme of proof that is independent of any value system, except the value of scientific truth. [21]

The formal scheme of logical objective proof, as Parsons terms it, is the fixed and unchanging point of reference from which we can judge specific theories in the sciences. But there is a contradiction here. In social inquiry, research is based upon the notion of interest, according to Parsons; that is the relevance of social phenomena and action to those values which the researcher holds to be important. But Parsons still insists we are not justified in making value-judgements in social research. It is as though having admitted value into the understanding of social phenomena, it is now excluded again. For Parsons we can simply shed values like clothes, despite having been brought to study a particular problem by those same values.

Clearly, however, one value which Parsons was quite unable to discard was that of rationality in the form of a reliance upon the 'scientific' application of appropriate means to a given end. Science is conceived here as the "rational achievement par excellence" and thus its procedures ought to be adopted as the paradigm for social action:

> Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by the means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science. [22]

The 'end' in this formula is accepted as "given, without inquiry as to its rationality or 'reasonableness'" [23]. Thus there is an explicit acceptance of scientific logic and the norm of the "intrinsic means-end relationship" [24] as guarantors of rationality. Action is rational only in so far as it is scientifically demonstrable that, given the limitations of knowledge available, the means will bring about the stated ends, which Parsons argues are not to be investigated in terms of their character. This means-ends orientation in Parsons denies the role of ethics in social research; and is largely based on Weber's concept of rationalisation, a view which has received considerable critical attention from Habermas; we shall again encounter such preoccupations with rationality and efficiency shortly in our treatment of modernisation theory.

Variations upon the theme of functionalism have not all been as static in their assumptions as Parsons [25]. Many adopted an evolutionary perspective in their work, in which functions of the system determine structures [26]. Most adopted, with variation, a reasonably uncritical system-concept in their work, although some began to acknowledge the possibility of negative consequences of particular behaviour. But overall, with the possible exception of modernisation theory, the concept of a homeostatic, balanced system tended to dominate the earlier Durkheimian emphasis on evolution:

> Despite the disclaimers of defenders of the faith, functionalism has largely eschewed dynamics. The course of functionalist analysis, among both anthropologists and sociologists, veered from Durkheim's muted evolutionary orientation to 'synchronic', cross-sectional analysis. Not only was the older evolutionism rejected, but also virtually all sequential patterns. [27]

The concept of a stable system nevertheless deployed concepts taken from the evolutionary armoury. In particular, the concept of 'natural selection' appeared common to most explana-

tions of how specific sub-systems either survived (because they contributed to systemic viability) or perished (because they did not). A similar analysis could be made of whole societies which were in competition, or in terms of their interaction with their environment. We need simply note at this stage the assumption, inbuilt in this approach, of the inherent, *a priori* nature of functional prerequisites of a social system, which need to be fulfilled if the system is to survive, and which, taken together, stress the need for compliance or 'social control' [28].

The social system, however, does not appear in a single, universal form, and Parsons' later work was partly a response to insistent criticism that functionalism concentrated on abstract, taxonomic distinctions (based on assumptions regarding systemic imperatives and human nature), rather than on empirical explanations of real change and diversity among systems. But even here systemic needs are postulated rather than demonstrated, and general values are assumed to be held consensually rather than viewed as problematic. Predictably, it is in this part of the Parsonsian *corpus* that we most clearly recognise both homeostatic and evolutionary foundations for functionalist explanation.

The overall Whiggish gloss of Parsons' stages of development in this phase of his work—primitive, intermediate, modern—shows clear allegiance to Durkheim's erroneous anthropological formulations, wherein it was stated that 'primitive' societies such as that of the Australian Aborigine were undifferentiated in structure. This spurious claim dovetailed neatly with the overall, and unexplained, assumption that increasing structural differentiation was a major feature of social evolution. Social evolution is employed here as both "... taxonomic device ... and ... dynamic principle ..." [29]. Education, too, is to play its part in this sedative evolutionary process, in that it is construed here as a mechanism for imparting commitment to the major cultural traditions. Innovation, in the form of artistic or scientific creation is admitted, but only it would appear, within the existing cultural parameters. No mention is made of possible fundamental economic or political change, indeed the conclusion of one of Parson's papers on comparative sociology points to a contemporary trend Parsons discerns whereby, in the spirit of Rostow, Bell and others, "older concerns with economic and even political problems are in course of being considerably relativised" [30].

The evolutionary element within functionalist theory, however, had been, as Giddens has argued, attenuated since its incorporation in Durkheim. Indeed one symptom both of the functionalist school's general theoretical dominance in the post-war period, and its trend towards a more abstract, formal and static analysis, is the hope and interest demonstrated not only by functionalists themselves, but also by philosophers of science such as E. Nagel, I. Scheffler and C. Hempel, in the status of functionalism as a natural science of society. Both functionalists and the aforementioned philosophers of science were interested in the status of functionalism as a formal-rational explanatory system. According to both these groups, functional analysis could largely be contrasted with historical forms of explanation; not only does functionalism largely bracket historical development (system maintenance having much more to do with the internal operation of the contemporary system) but, according to C. Hempel, it relies on general laws [31].

Although philosophers of science remained ultimately somewhat sceptical as to the potential of functionalism as a complete formal system, this is by no means our only interest in their attempts. Such interest clearly exemplifies interest in functionalism as a 'natural science of society'. The exposition by Hempel demonstrates a clear technical interest in prediction and control, and reveals no interest in the lived experience of individuals in the system, or questions of value and politics in social inquiry.

Before turning to an examination of functionalist influence in educational research, one implicit focus must be clarified. The concepts of system, structure and function have been used in other theoretical contexts, notably L. van Bertalanffy's systems theory, and to some extent in recent (and generally French) structuralism. Although these traditions are distinct, the

concept of the abstract and anti-humanist "applicability" of rigorous models to social behaviour" [32], the over-determination of particular elements of the social whole by the structure of that whole [33], and the impossibility of adequately containing human reflexive action by such 'mechanical systems' [34] of explanation, make clear that criticisms of functionalism would be also largely applicable to structuralism, and to systems theory. The particular examination of these theoretical structures, however, will be deemed to be outside the scope of this article.

In education, the dominance of the functionalist paradigm for twentieth century, Anglo-Saxon educational research in the period up to approximately the 1970s has been broadly acknowledged. Although sociology of education has maintained a relatively strong research tradition, education tended to be viewed as an important sub-system with the function of providing skilled manpower for the wider system. The problem was often seen as merely one of increasing access to existing institutions, which were sometimes acknowledged to be over-represented by members of particular classes. "The 'social class and educational opportunity' era was essentially one of structural functionalism . . . " [35] This provoked increasing criticism, from at least the early 1970s, of the emphasis in traditional sociology of education whereby concepts and institutions were simply accepted. Now, by contrast, sociologists of education were to 'make' rather than simply 'take' their problems. This mooted reversal of interest from the problem of order to that of control [36] was an explicit rejection of the functionalist paradigm and its Hobbesian legacy. In particular, the new paradigm returned to eighteenth century views involving the "critical questioning of whatever is taken as inviolable, whether 'God-given' or through 'natural law'", which was now directed against "a new absolutism, that of science and reason" [37], rather than the predominantly feudal and clerical constraints of the eighteenth century. Concepts, institutions and their interrelations were now to be seen as problematic; something to be explained rather than, as in the older functionalist paradigm, assumed.

Although several authors have pointed to the dominance of the functionalist paradigm in educational research of the post-war period [38] one field of particular importance to comparative education will be selected as a case-study of functionalist influence. Modernisation theorists of the post-war period exercised an important influence in proposing a view of education as a significant factor in development. The education system was often viewed as an important index of modernity, particularly in providing a reservoir of skilled manpower for technological progress; and in such models of development, universal and undefended concepts of 'system', a unilinear path for development, and an unchanging index or pattern of development was often found. But before turning to an examination of this corpus, we must consider first one of the few direct statements by a 'founding father' of comparative education on functionalism in comparative education [39].

Nicholas Hans's article is not specifically rooted in any great analysis of core features of functionalism, nor in a consideration and adoption of a particular position based on a specific functionalist theorist. Indeed, the only allusion to the functionalist corpus is a citation of Malinowski's claim that the subject matter of anthropology was largely too complex to lend itself to 'scientific', statistical analysis. But in Hans's reference to Malinowski and in his, albeit brief, exposition of functionalism, he tends to contrast functional analysis with more scientific, or statistical, approaches which take little account of national diversity in their analyses and recommendations. This seems a rather uncommon characterisation of functionalism, and is contradicted by, *inter alia,* Woock, who argues that most of the statistical research into education of the last few decades was informed by generally functionalist assumptions [40]. It appears that Hans may be reading his own views on methodology into his consideration of functionalism, as for example when he claims: "Comparative education is based on history and should be dealt with functionally, which is another way of saying historically" [41]. Having just referred to the views both of philosophers of science and of anthropologists [42]

who both clearly differentiated historical from functional analysis on the basis that the latter was a more formal system operating on the basis of certain scientific laws; and having characterised modern functionalism as becoming increasingly less developmental and more concerned with the internal analysis of relationships in a static system, Hans's assessment of functionalism seems difficult to accept.

In the application of what Hans takes to be functionalist explanation to the study of national education systems, however, it is possible to discern elements of functionalism, at least the anthropological strain to which Hans alludes. In his analysis, although he imparts a greater historical dimension than was perhaps the case for functionalist anthropologists, stress was placed, for example, on the adaptation of institutions to the national needs of a country. Hans proceeds to look at the functions education was to serve in various societies, most particularly those related to the provision of technical personnel for manpower needs and economic growth. In examining various responses of countries to "the identical goal of industrialisation" [43], Hans seems to be operating with functionalist concepts of system. Education, it appears in his analysis, is merely a subsystem with a clear and uncritical function of pattern maintenance, that is servicing the technical requirements of the larger system. There seems little reciprocity in the relationship, nor any consideration of non-technicist values of education; the education system is simply to operate mechanically, as a cog in a given machine. Hans also appears in the above to be operating with a broadly unilinear model of development when referring to industrialisation as an identical problem in different contexts.

Turning now to studies of the process of modernisation in 'developing' [44] countries, it is possible to discern functionalist preoccupations in influential examples of the post-war period. David McClelland's *The Achieving Society* [45], gives education an important role in accelerating economic growth, and at the same time explains modernisation in terms of Parsons' work on Weber's rationalisation of life. Rationalisation meant a lessening of a mystical or supernatural orientation to life, an increase in striving, orderliness, rigidity, orientation to work without reward, and other such features which Weber saw characteristic of modern capitalist orientations. According to McClelland, this process of rationalisation could be linked to the process of development:

> ... it seems reasonable enough to interpret Weber's argument for the connection between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism in terms of a revolution in the family, leading to more sons with strong internalised achievement drives. [46]

We have seen in Parsons the importance of the process of rationalisation, and McClelland's analysis explicitly depends upon Parsons' "reformulations and developments of Weber's ideas" [47]. Increased division of labour, a more contractual style in social relations, a lessening of supernatural and spiritual influences, a corresponding increase in the tendency to be "coldly rational" [48], the substitution of material rather than spiritual forms of need and satisfaction, are all derived by McClelland from Parsons, and then transformed into items which together indicate 'need achievement', the basis of McClelland's modernisation process. Here we not only clearly discern the overall means-ends quality of rationality which is outlined by McClelland, and its dependence on Parsons, but at the same time we realise that the form of social rationalisation described involves, as with Weber, an emphasis, and perhaps defence, of values taken to be basic to the development of modern, western-capitalist society. McClelland's use of rationalisation, which he shows to be an amalgam of the Protestant-capitalist life-orientations and work values, gives considerable cause for unease as a basis for a model of development. If development and modernisation can be reduced to the adoption and implementation of a more technicist value-system based on what Feyerabend has called the unholy alliance of science, rationality and capitalism, then we may clearly discern in McClelland a functionalist definition of development as a unilinear evolutionary process leading towards western capitalism, and based on a definite set of assumptions which inhibit social alternatives.

Clearly, the concept of rationality which underlies McClelland's concept of need achievement and modernisation embraces a technocratic concern with questions of economic efficiency and the like, while eschewing those values of emancipation and human enlightenment which were at the core of the rationality concept that has been consistently advanced by figures such as Feyerabend in the natural sciences [49] and Habermas in the social sciences [50].

McClelland's discussion of the role of education in development bears out the consistent preoccupation with western techno-rationality as a means for increasing need achievement. Nowhere in McClelland's discussion of exposure to foreign "educational influences which might increase achievement" [51], is there any great discussion of the notion of primacy of respect for the values of the host culture. Indeed, McClelland's only admission of the possibility of disruption of personality-structures under such forms of western educational influence indicates his primary concern is with the technical efficiency of various modes of cultural interaction and their effect on need-achievement scores, rather than any fundamental discussion of the politics and ethics of such cultural concourse. The entire discussion of education by McClelland is imbued with a functional means-ends, instrumentalist flavour, whereby questions are limited to choices of strategies with which to achieve most efficiently such assumed targets as the provision of a given level of technical or managerial manpower. Educational sub-systems are then, to use the language of functionalism, simply one unit within the larger system; and schooling simply exists to obey the technical imperatives of the larger system by providing legions of skilled personnel tarred with whatever ideological brush is deemed desirable. The functionalist concern with efficiency, at the expense of ethics, is readily apparent, as is the conception of social change as adaptive.

Similar concerns are evident in another influential work of the 1960s, which although not restricting itself to the process of modernisation and development, devotes a considerable part of its content to the problems of the 'developing world', from a systems-analytic perspective: Philip Coombs' *The World Educational Crisis* [52]. Through his work we may study the extent to which his concept of system is borrowed from functionalist theory and secondly the extent to which his use of systems-theory to analyse 'development' is informed by functionalist intellectual conventions such as technicist rationalisation, a broadly unilinear conception of development, and an emphasis on conservation and homeostasis.

Demonstrably, Coombs's concept of system is largely explicable by reference to functionalist employment of the concept. The initial description of education as "a system with interacting parts" stresses the interaction of sub-units of the larger system, and his subsequent use of clarificatory examples reinforces the notion of functional interdependence of sub-units of the system. A change to one item or sub-unit of the system, as in the case of a change in curriculum, or a change in aims or priorities, will often have a significant effect on other items within the system, such as distribution of resources, allocation or choice of students, and so on. At times, "virtually every component is substantially affected by such a change" [53].

A further link to the functionalist use of system is contained in the recognition that explanation and analysis cannot be limited to a consideration of factors internal to the system. On the contrary, understanding of "the internal components of the system, detached from the environment" [54] is inadequate, and educational systems analysis must incorporate relationships between education and society which are reciprocal, and not limited to any rigid pattern of response on the part of the education system.

As in functionalism, Coombs employs the model of biology to clarify his notion of system. Although, Coombs argues, a doctor can never have full knowledge of a patient's human biological "system and its functional processes" [55], he performs his diagnosis on the basis of indicators which allow him to "appraise the way the total system is functioning, and (to) prescribe... what may be needed to make it function better" [56]. Similarly, educational management seeks to elicit indicators which reveal the state of operation of an educational system, so as to increase its system efficiency: "... if one is to assess the health of an education

system in order to improve its performance and to plan its future intelligently, the relationship between its critical components must be examined in a unified vision" [57].

The functionalist ideology of strategic rationality on which Coombs's analysis rests becomes readily apparent when he argues that the education system can be analysed and managed in just the same manner as a range of institutions, "everything from department stores to military establishments" [58]. The refrain may vary slightly, it would appear, but the song remains the same: "The 'indicators' differ from context to context, but the strategy remains the same" [59]. The strategic nature of the application of a Parsonsian style means-ends rationality for the organisation of education is further reinforced in Coombs's argument that education is an adaptive unit of a larger system, whose function it must uncritically serve. Coombs's major, indeed sole preoccupation here, to the exclusion of political, ethical claims in education, is that the process of education simply "be made more relevant, efficient and effective within the context of the particular society" [60]. This view of education is at the heart of the functionalist research traditions in which education is simply an adaptive sub-unit whose function it is to service the intrinsic needs of the social system mechanically, most particularly with respect to the function of providing skilled manpower in the requisite quantity. Efficiency, rather than ethics, is the prime concern, as with Parsons.

Coombs's hypostatised education system functions within a generally reified social system, as in Parsons. For Coombs, the major components of an educational system, including such "resource inputs" [61] as 'students' and 'teachers' can simply be listed, then fed into a black box described as the 'education process', whence emerge 'educational outputs' known as 'educated individuals' or 'manpower requirements'. It is largely because of his reified system-concept, one suspects, that Coombs can argue that social demand for education must inevitably increase, even despite economic changes, or changes in the level of resources devoted to education.

Coombs implicitly accepts the technicist ideology of the functionalist fold by employing abstract, mechanical, anti-humanist models in social analysis, and by emphasising the determination of education by the social system. A dialectical, reflexive concept of man is entirely absent from Coombs's educational equation, nor is much weight given to education as a form of personal, and critical, liberation. The aim of knowledge and of the education system for Coombs seems to be almost entirely the satisfaction of assumed technical wants of the social system, most particularly its manpower requirements. The discussion of teachers is very largely in economistic terms: not only supply and demand, levels of qualifications, salary levels *vis à vis* other professions; but also "hard economic facts" [62] such as the ageing of the teaching profession relative to costs of pensions and automatic increases, and the pecuniary costs to 'developing' countries of making their teaching body more indigenous.

The mechanistic manner in which Coombs analyses processes of decision in respect of teachers, and wider questions of educational planning, clearly reveals his covert reliance upon a technicist ideology in which values of efficiency and economy are largely unchallenged. Basic questions of personal fulfilment and liberation, and ethical dimensions to education, are rendered invisible in the analogy of the planning process to a self-regulating, self-propelling system or machine. There is no room in Coombs' analysis for the concept of an autonomous human being with feelings, interests and aspirations. There can be no room for autonomous human beings in techno-logically, econometrically restricted discussions of education and its aims, and it is here that Habermas's arguments as to the submerging of political questions into technical considerations, as also his arguments on systematically distorted communication patterns, have peculiar force [63].

The consensus that education was important in general strategies for economic development and political modernisation achieved almost paradigmatic status in modernisation literature of the postwar era. Indeed, some examples of this literature purported to be design-blueprints for development, and analyses only secondarily. One well-known product of such strategically-

oriented thinkers was Harbison & Myers' *Education, Manpower and Economic Growth* [64]. The emphasis in this work was on the development or exploitation of human resources as a vital ingredient in economic development. Human resources were from this view "a form of capital, a produced means of production, and the product of investment" [65]. Given this econometric conception, it is no surprise that education was seen throughout as a basic tool of manpower planning strategy. Hence also the focus of the work could be given as the analysis of the . . . means and possible strategies of human capital formation" [66] as a promoter of economic growth. Here again, although human resource development was acknowledged to be conceivable in other than economic terms, the subsequent substantive discussions of the theory and methodology of human resource development was almost entirely in econometric and strategic terms. Education was a form of capital like any other, and could be employed in quite the same strategically-oriented manner [67].

The scientistic techno-logic which informed the discussion of development, and the contribution of education, was implicit throughout Harbison & Myers' work. The postwar phenomenon of worldwide aspirations towards development, for example, was explained in the context of "the optimistic conviction that man in this century of science can move forward by leaps instead of steps" [68]. This Enlightenment faith in the onward march of progress and its dependence upon the powers of a scientifically ensured rationality omitted any fundamental discussion of values, even its own. The process of development was merely a design problem, like an engineer building a bridge. The unrestrained discussion of the ends of development, or indeed the role and kind of education deemed desirable, was all parenthesised in the rush to attain the Nirvana of technological progress. This technicist vision of progress embraced the conventional functionalist assumption of a unilinear path to a brighter and better, more rationalised world, in which problems of all kinds were to be solved in the most technically efficient manner. This selfsame vision of a techno-rationally ordered society has been seen by other, more critically oriented, scholars [69] as accurately describing the modern, western-capitalist state, with its conception of the paramountcy of scientific reason expressed in terms of a strategic concern with economy and efficiency in human affairs. The possibility that many peoples might desire different goals was overlooked, and modernisation models viewed development as the simple application of rational-scientific planning procedures to the process of becoming modern. This unilinear process of modernisation included as twin aspects a functionalist postulate of progressively changing cultural values and institutions:

> For them, modernisation theory predicts all change. They posit that societies continually strive for economic and social rationality which maximises productive social resources. Social change is unidirectional and consists of the movement from simple to increasingly complex social organisation; from functionally diffuse to functionally specific institutions; from lesser to greater divisions of labour; from social systems of stratification based on ascription to those based on individual achievement; from belief and legal systems that are particularistic and fatalistic to those that are universalistic and subject to human control. [70]

One could go on. It is not difficult to find further examples of modernisation theorists who have been important in the development of postwar comparative education, an importance not unrelated to the tacit or explicit adoption of the functionalist paradigm. The preoccupation with 'becoming modern' [71] was widespread in the postwar period, and theorists often embraced unilinear models of societal development, used *a priori* and uncritical system concepts, emphasised the rationalisation of human existence, saw value-free social inquiry as their aim and duty, and in general worked within the parameters of the functionalist tradition inherited from Durkheim and Parsons, whose genealogy can be traced back to the Enlightenment. There were, however, alternatives to the adoption of the functionalist paradigm, which began to emerge from around the early 1970s [72] and in the process of their establishment

criticised the limitations and errors of the older functionalist school. Some of these criticisms can now be made explicit, although without necessarily limiting the criticisms to those advanced by Carnoy or a newer generation of comparative scholars. The analysis of these shortcomings, however, will reflect a more critical orientation to the development of comparative education, and is connected at several points to the view of social theory advanced by Habermas, and the critique of positivism and rationalism developed in the natural sciences by Feyerabend.

The fundamental importance of the system concept deserves our immediate attention. We have observed in both the founding fathers of functionalism, and in several modernisation theorists, the use of an *a priori* and uncritically held system concept, usually taken from biological models of system. The use of such a formal model is itself an important product of the move to make the study, and the reform, of education more 'scientific' and the world in general more 'rational'. In so doing, however, one of the most acute dangers is the adoption of a false, technicist value-system which is often present in the natural sciences [73] but disastrously constrains the development of the social sciences. The *a priori* functionalist system-concept tends also to embody reified systemic needs, which together encourage the employment of a means-ends rationality, and appears fruitful just because it promises to be so effective and economical in the solution of 'society's problems'. But this is of course the point: we cannot solve 'society's problems' when these have been arbitrarily determined in advance; and in the satisfaction of genuine wants in society we must allow more than a set of technical rules to determine the judgement. In functionalist analysis reified problems tend to be solved, on paper, by the adoption of equally abstract rules for their solution. It is as though one wished to rid oneself of a phantom by using a poltergeist.

But it is not merely that problems, and rules for solutions, are reified in functionalism. It is important to emphasise Habermas's point here, echoed in the natural sciences by Feyerabend, that rationalist projects to devise transcendental rules for the solution of problems denote the embrace of a set of technocratic values, rather than an act of value-free social inquiry. Under the functionalist flag of value-free sociology a panoply of scientistic values are revealed, emphasising efficiency and economy, regardless of politics and ethics. We see our modernisation theorists, for example, giving as one of the quintessential features of 'modern man' a 'coldly rational' demeanour, and using this as a stick with which to beat more 'primitive' societies in which ethics formed a more visible everyday constraint upon action. Both reification and a technocratic scientism are insistent features of functionalist explanations in the social sciences.

The biological model of system in functionalist theory is employed in a telling manner in actual examples of functionalist-inspired research. The use of an (implicitly) unilinear evolutionary path to modernity is an important feature of modernisation theorists. The unholy alliance (as we have used the term) of science, rationality and capitalism provides the basis for this evolution, and no society can be judged truly modern until it has been conquered by this triple alliance. Accordingly, modern man is usually judged in terms of his ability to embrace a scientific outlook, to admire people according to their technical expertise, to embrace mass productive techniques as well as the institutions and relationships which pertain to them. Are these the shining examples of modernity we would wish to hold up for our children to admire and emulate? Are these the institutional models and values we would wish all peoples to adopt? The brave new world which functionalist authors offer as a blueprint for 'modernising' societies is a cheerless, even chilling, society peopled by similarly bleak individuals who have been rationalised to blend unquestioningly into an architectonic environment. Parsons' dependence upon Weberian rationalisation proved an attractive ideology for functionalist social scientists; the view of society which functionalists then painted was not nearly as attractive.

The last, if not the least, feature of the functionalist deployment of the system concept was its organic, unifying quality. Stemming from Comte and Englightenment theorists, this feature

also denoted, as with its forbears, a disrelish for profound social changes, most particularly those which related to social conflict. The functionalist system as used in Parsons and in many modernisation theorists was an integrative healing force which overtly and covertly stabilised society and sedated social conflict. In effect, this legitimated the dampening of popular political expression, and encouraged an instrumentalist view of sub-systems of action. Education, as one such subsystem of action, thus tended to be construed and judged solely in terms of its ability to serve the assumed technical wants of the larger system, particularly those which contributed to its stable continuity. Education could hardly contribute to change at all, since it was normatively subordinate: its norms were uncritically taken over from those of the larger system. Education, indeed, was principally important as a vehicle for transmission of values to smaller units of the system such as schools or 'actors', rather than as a source for change. Here again, we are able to discern an antiseptic, and altogether too harmonious view of social change in the work of functionalist authors in education. Social change was unproblematic within functionalism only by virtue of being rationalised and oversimplified, so that much change was designated dysfunctinal, and to be opposed.

But if sociology can be construed as a sedative science, education is no longer seen as such; and it is perhaps here that the central problem lies. We are now more than ever aware that education is inherently political; and as each new study enhances our understanding of the relationship between ideology and curriculum [74], social class and education [75], politics and the I.Q. controversy [76], ideology and research [77], or education and cultural and economic reproduction [78], we are the less inclined to accept the analytical constraints of functionalist explanations in education. We are now also less likely to accept that sociology ought to be a 'natural science of society'; or that science is the synonym for rationality; or that rationalism and rationalisation are necessarily 'rational'. And if we have grown, as a result of our analysis of functionalist theory and research, a little more sceptical in regard to the beneficent power of the onward march of uncontrolled reason in society, the possibility of formalising social analysis, or the unproblematic, consensual normative basis for order in society, then perhaps functionalism has served us well. As researchers in education, there is much we may learn from studying the pitfalls of our forbears.

## NOTES

[1] See DURKHEIM, *The Rules of Sociological Method,* Free Press (London, Collier Macmillan) 1964, p. 145: "We have... undertaken to establish that it is possible to treat (social facts)... scientifically without removing any of their distinctive characteristics".

[2] TIRYAKIAN, E.A. 'Emile Durkheim', Bottomore & Nisbet *A History of Sociological Analysis,* Heinemann, 1979, p. 188.

[3] Ibid., p. 190.

[4] See PARSONS, T., *The Structure of Social Action* (New York, The Free Press) 1949, pp. 89–91 on the question of order. See also PARSONS, T. *et al. Theories of Society* (New York, Free Press of Glencoe), 1961. Vol. 1, pp. 99–101 for a brief extract from Hobbes.

[5] Ibid., p. 56.

[6] Ibid., p. 58.

[7] PARSONS, T. *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, The Free Press), 1949, p. 21.

[8] GOULDNER, A. *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (London, Heinemann), 1971, p. 218.

[9] PARSONS, T. *et al. Theories of Society,* p. 43. See pp. 43–44 for the view that more all-embracing collectivities are normatively superordinate with respect to smaller or more particular units in the system.

[10] See Parsons' reference to the concept in the work of Cannon, in his discussion of the equilibrium question, Parsons, *Theories...*, i. p. 37. Significantly, Parsons later changed to a cybernetic account of knowledge and information control. See his paper on the biological analogy in *Social Systems and the Evaluation of Action Theory* (New York, The Free Press), 1977.

[11] Ibid., p. 231.

[12] PARSONS, T., *The Social System* (Glencoe, The Free Press), 1951, p. 205.

[13] Ibid., p. 38.

[14] Ibid., p. 38.

[15] Ibid., p. 39.
[16] Ibid., p. 40.
[17] Ibid., p. 40. See also PARSONS, T. The present status of 'structural-function' theory in sociology, COSER, L.A. (ed.) *The Idea of Social Structure: papers in honour of Robert K. Merton* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 1975.
[18] GOULDNER, A., *For Sociology. Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today* (London, Allen Lane), 1973, p. 3.
[19] Moore, a "chastened, penitent" functionalist, affirms this preoccupation with the theme of order and change in the context of "new forms of social interdependence established by a highly rationalized economy and polity": Moore, 'Functionalism', p. 325.
[20] Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action,* p. 594. See also p. 638 (ff) for the defence of value-freedom in the sciences.
[21] Ibid., p. 594. But note that even Parsons, ardent *fidei defensor* of value-free sociology, criticises Weber for failing to acknowledge value-attitudes in the natural sciences, whereas Parsons uses them to explain different scientific traditions. See Ibid., p. 596.
[22] Ibid., p. 58.
[23] Ibid., p. 58. See also p. 170.
[24] Ibid., p. 699.
[25] See Moore's discussion of his own account of innovation within his version of functionalism, Moore, 'Functionalism' p. 330, and Merton's structuralism which began from structures and studied their implications for other structures and wider systems. See BLAU, P.M., 'Structural constraints of status complements' in Coser (Ed.) *The Idea of Social Structure,* esp. pp. 117–118.
[26] An example of this latter interpretation is Kingsley Davis's *Human Society* (New York, Macmillan), 1949.
[27] Moore 'Functionalism', p. 343.
[28] Moore 'Functionalism', p. 347.
[29] Moore, 'Functionalism' p. 328. The link between functionalist assumptions and concepts of modernisation in educational research will be treated shortly. The work alluded to is, of course, ROSTOW, W.W., *Stages of Economic Growth* (London, Cambridge University Press), 1960.
[30] See Parsons, T., 'Some Considerations on the Comparative Sociology', FISCHER, J. (Ed.) *'The Social Sciences and the Comparative Study of Educational Systems'* (Scranton, International Textbook Company), 1970, p. 220. See also p. 201 for the view of education described. The work of Bell which is referred to is, of course, BELL, D., *The End of Ideology* (Glencoe, The Free Press), 1965.
[31] Hempel also cites A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's assessment in his *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London, Cohen & West), 1952, p. 186: "Similarly one 'explanation' of a social system will be its history, where we know it—the detailed account of how it came to be what it is and where it is. Another 'explanation' of the same system is obtained by showing (as the functionalists attempt to do) that it is a special exemplification of laws of social physiology or social functioning." See HEMPEL, C., 'The logic of functional analysis', BRODBECK, M., *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York, Macmillan), 1968.
[32] BOTTOMORE, T. & NISBET, R., 'Structuralism', Bottomore & Nisbet, *A History of Sociological Analysis,* p. 591.
[33] See KOLAKOWSKI, L., 'Althusser's Marx' *The Socialist Register,* 1971, p. 124.
[34] GIDDENS, A., *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London, Macmillan), 1979, p. 75. See also BLAUBERG, I.V., SADOVSKY, V.N. & YUDIN, E.G., *Systems Theory. Philosophical and Methodological Problems* (Moscow, Progress Publishers), 1977.
[35] EGGLESTON, J. (Ed.) *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education* (London, Methuen), 1974, p. 7.
[36] By which is meant an emphasis on the imposition of meaning, with a stress on interaction. In this way it is particularly concerned with the disposition of, and access to, power which is distinct from the functionalist concept of social control. See Dawe, 'The two sociologies' *British Journal of Sociology,* XXI (2), 1970.
[37] YOUNG, M.F.D., *Knowledge and Control* (London, Collier-Macmillan), 1971, p. 3. "Today it is the commonsense conceptions of the 'scientific' and the 'rational', together with the various social, political and educational beliefs, that are assumed to follow from them that represent the dominant legitimising categories." Ibid.
[38] See, for example, the critical introduction to KARABEL, J. & HALSEY, A.H., *Power and Ideology in Education* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 1979. See BERNBAUM, G., *Knowledge and Ideology in the Sociology of Education* (London, Macmillan), 1977, pp. 17–19 for the assessment that functionalism was not the sole or whole feature of research in sociology of education of the post-war period.
[39] HANS, N., 'Functionalism in Comparative Education', *International Review of Education,* 10(1), 1964.
[40] See WOOCK, R., 'Integrated Social Theory and Comparative Education', *International Review of Education,* 27(4), 1981.
[41] Hans 'Functionalism . . .', p. 94.
[42] See Hempel's citation of Radcliffe-Brown, Note [31] above.
[43] Ibid., p. 96.
[44] The use of terms such as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing', is itself a demonstration of a unilinear evolutionary path for national development, as we shall presently detail. For the functionalist basis of post-war modernisation

research in general see, for example, the dependence upon Parsons' Pattern variables in ALMOND, G.A. & COLEMAN, J.S., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, Princeton U.P.), 1960.

[45] MCCLELLAND, D.C., *The Achieving Society* (London, Van Nostrand), 1961. For another, if brief, assessment of the functionalist basis for modernisation theory, see TIPPS, D.C. (1973) Modernization theory and the comparative study of societies: a critical perspective, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 15(2).

[46] MCCLELLAND, *The Achieving Society,* p. 49.

[47] Ibid., p. 173.

[48] Ibid., p. 174.

[49] See for example, FEYERABEND, P., 'On the critique of scientific reason', HOWSON, C., *Method and Appraisal in the Physical Sciences* (London, Cambridge University Press) 1976, and *Against Method* (London, New Left Books), 1975, and *Science in a Free Society* (London, New Left Books), 1978.

[50] See, on Weberian rationality, HABERMAS, J., 'Max Weber's theory of rationalization' (Unpublished M.S.), translated McCarthy, T., 1981 (?) and Habermas earlier *Toward a Rational Society* (London, Heinemann), 1971, esp. pp. 81–90. For a more emancipatory form of rationality, see *inter alia,* HABERMAS, J., *Knowledge and Human Interest* (London, Beacon Press, 1971, pp. 301 *et seq.*

[51] MCCLELLAND, *The Achieving Society,* p. 416.

[52] COOMBS, P.H. *The World Educational Crisis: a systems analysis* (London, Oxford University Press), 1968, p. 8.

[53] Ibid., p. 10.

[54] Ibid., p. 10.

[55] Ibid., p. 8.

[56] Ibid., p. 8.

[57] Ibid., p. 9.

[58] Ibid., p. 8.

[59] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

[60] Ibid., p. 9.

[61] Ibid., p. 35.

[62] Ibid., p. 35.

[63] As has been mentioned before, Feyerabend's strictures on non-hegemonic forms of decision making, and the restriction of open discussions to within the parameters of instrumental reason afford much the same critique. I have focused here only on the analysis of teachers in Coombs; but the examination of other 'resource inputs', 'outputs', manpower, management, or costs and efficiency would not negate the basic critique offered in this paper.

[64] HARBISON, F. & MYERS, C.A. *Education, Manpower and Economic Growth* (London, McGraw Hill), 1964. The same perspective is equally evident in the introductory section of their subsequent *Manpower and Education* (London, McGraw Hill, 1965). See the foreword of the former work, page v, for the claim of the work to be a blueprint for action.

[65] HARBISON & MYERS, *Manpower and Education,* p. ix. The economist upon whose views the analysis depends is given as T. W. Schultz, in particular his work on investment in human capital.

[66] Ibid., p. ix; see also p. xi for expressed aims of "building an effective strategy for human resource development...".

[67] See HARBISON & MYERS, *Education...,* pp. 3 *et seq.* where the 'economic analysis of investment in man' is considered in terms of major economists' views on the subject, and theoretical attempts to tease out the (residual) contribution to economic growth of investment in education.

[68] Ibid., p. 1.

[69] Inter alia, CARNOY, M., *Education as Cultural Imperialism,* 1974; ALTBACH, P. & KELLY, G., *Education and Colonialism,* 1978; ARNOVE, R., ALTBACH, P. & KELLY, G., *Comparative Education,* 1982; and ARNOVE, R. *Philanthropy as Cultural Imperialism: the foundations at home and abroad,* 1980.

[70] KELLY, G.P., ALTBACH, P.G. & ARNOVE, R.F., 'Trends in comparative education: a critical analysis', in ALTBACH, P.G., ARNOVE, R.F. & KELLY, G.P., *Comparative Education* (London, Collier Macmillan), 1982, p. 516. The link here to earlier functionalist studies of other cultures alluded to in this paper is obvious. See references to Durkheim's treatment of Australian aboriginal society and Almond & Coleman's use of Parsons' pattern variables, above.

[71] To borrow the title of yet another work in the field, INKELES, A. & SMITH, D.A. *Becoming Modern* (London, Heinemann), 1974. These authors were still trying to define the 'modern man' in the same year as Martin Carnoy's *Education as Cultural Imperialism* was being published. Moreover, their concept of modern man viewed him as necessarily linked to large-scale productive enterprises, and with an increased faith in 'science and related remedies'. The basic unit of learning in the work of Inkeles & Smith seemed to be the factory. For the above views see chapter two, especially pp. 19, 28 *et passim.*

[72] See KELLY, ALTBACH & ARNOVE 'Trends in...', pp. 506, 515 for the view that modernisation theory was one of the major theoretical foundations for comparative education in the 1960s and early 1970s.

[73] Although wrongly, as Feyerabend argues. Science is not a matter of technical-rational rules.

[74] APPLE, M.W. *Ideology and Curriculum* (Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1979.

[75] WILLIS, P., *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs* (London, Gower) 1980.
[76] MATTHEWS, M. *The Marxist Theory of Schooling* (Brighton, Harvester), 1980.
[77] KARABEL, J. & HALSEY, A. (Eds) *Power and Ideology in Education* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 1977.
[78] APPLE, M.W. *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education* (Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1982.

## Notes

[36] **The Two Sociologies**
Alan Dawe
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[45] **Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective**
Dean C. Tipps
*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Mar., 1973), pp. 199-226.
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