

A SCIENTIFIC THEORY  
OF CULTURE AND OTHER ESSAYS  
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THE FUNCTIONAL THEORY

## EMBRYOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS

FUNCTIONALISM AS A method is as old as the first stirrings of interest in alien, hence reputedly savage and barbarian, cultures, whether the interest might have come from a Greek historian like Herodotus, a French Encyclopaedist like Montesquieu, or a German Romanticist such as Herder. Any small contribution I may have made consists in writing out and pinning the label of functionalism on an existing body of doctrine, method, and interest; and in doing even that, I referred in my original article on the subject to no less than twenty-seven predecessors. Thus, perhaps, I have acted as accoucheur and godfather to the youngest baby in the anthropological litter of schools and I have continued to carry on the *maieutike techne* (obstetric art) in the training of younger students of the subject by the traditions of one great teacher, who liked to describe his art as that of a midwife. There was another great teacher who supplied the motto of functionalism, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Functionalism, in so far as it has been present in every anthropological approach, is concerned with the clear understanding of the nature of cultural phenomena, before these are submitted to further speculative manipulations. What is the nature, the cultural reality of human marriage and the family, of a political system, an economic enterprise, or legal procedure? How can these facts be treated inductively so as to yield valid scientific generalizations? Is there any universal scheme applicable to all human cultures, that might be useful as a guide to field-work and as a system of coördinates in comparative study,

whether historical, evolutionary, or merely aiming at the general laws of correspondence?

When E. B. Tylor inquired at the beginning of his great work on *Primitive Culture* into what religion was, in the widest sense of the term, or, in his own words, when he attempted a "minimum definition" of this subject, he was a genuine functionalist. So was Robertson Smith, when he recognized that the sociological dimension was indispensable for an understanding of primitive faith. Again, Sumner, in his attempts at an analysis and classification of early norms of behavior, represents an initial functional interest. Durkheim's discussion of the primitive type of division of social labor, and his analysis of religion and magic, are within the scope of the functional method. The famous memoir by which Tylor attempted to correlate various aspects of early kinship and economic life; K. Bücher's definition of primitive economics and of the relation between labor and rhythmic song; the work of Hutton Webster and H. Schurtz on age grades, sacred societies, and men's voluntary associations, and the relation of these groups to the political, religious, and economic structure of the community—one and all of these contributions are functional. I might add that the earliest types of effective field-work, such as the work of Charlevoix, Dobritzhofer, Sahagun or Dapper, were also functional in that they contained an appreciation not merely of isolated facts but of essential relations and bonds.

Some functional principles must be embodied in every theoretical treatment of cultural phenomena, as well as in every competent monograph on field-work. Else I be suspected, however, of indiscriminate benevolence culminating in a flabby eclecticism, I hasten to add that non-functional as well as anti-functional tendencies exist in

anthropology. The field-worker with his eye exclusively on the exotic or picturesque is one example. The evolutionist, developing a theory of the origin of marriage and the family, but untroubled about any clear distinction between marriage, merely sexual conjugation, and a temporary liaison, is another case in point. The selection of such a phenomenon as the classificatory system of kinship terms and the handling of it as a survival, a record of what has been but is no more, shows how, by neglecting the functional analysis of vital linguistic phenomena, Morgan misdirected anthropological research for generations. Again, Graebner, rigging up a false or puerile analysis of culture in order to lay the foundation of what he regarded as a fool-proof world-wide diffusionism, has created an anti-functional approach of first-rate imbecility. He first of all assumes that it is possible to isolate single items from their cultural context. He defines, then, form as completely disconnected from function. Indeed, to him those qualities of form in an object alone matter, which are not connected with its uses and purpose. Hence to Graebner only those characteristics are methodologically relevant which can be shown to be culturally irrelevant.

Furthermore, he includes the concept of trait complex as an assortment of disconnected items. I submit that form is always determined by function, and that in so far as we can not establish such a determinism, elements of form can not be used in a scientific argument. I also submit that a concept of disconnected items, in a type of reality where we cannot introduce elements intrinsically related to each other, is useless.

## II GENERAL AXIOMS OF FUNCTIONALISM

I WOULD SUGGEST that all experience in the field, as well as the scrutiny of the really important manifestations of organized human behavior, demonstrate the validity of the following axioms:

A. Culture is essentially an instrumental apparatus by which man is put in a position the better to cope with the concrete specific problems that face him in his environment in the course of the satisfaction of his needs.

B. It is a system of objects, activities, and attitudes in which every part exists as a means to an end.

C. It is an integral in which the various elements are interdependent.

D. Such activities, attitudes and objects are organized around important and vital tasks into institutions such as the family, the clan, the local community, the tribe, and the organized teams of economic coöperation, political, legal, and educational activity.

E. From the dynamic point of view, that is, as regards the type of activity, culture can be analyzed into a number of aspects such as education, social control, economics, systems of knowledge, belief and morality, and also modes of creative and artistic expression.

The cultural process, looked at in any of its concrete manifestations, always involves human beings who stand in definite relations to each other, that is, they are organized, and handle artifacts, and communicate with each other by speech or some other type of symbolism. Artifacts, organized groups, and symbolism are three dimensions

of the cultural process that are closely related to each other. What is the type of this relationship?

Looking first at the material apparatus of culture, we can say that every artifact is either an implement or else an object of more direct use, that is, belonging to the class of consumers' goods. In either case, the circumstances as well as the form of the object are determined by its use. Function and form are related.

This relationship brings us at once to the human element, for the artifact has either to be eaten up, used up, or otherwise destroyed; or else it is produced in order to be manipulated as a tool. The social setting is always a man or a group handling their implements in a technical, economic pursuit; using a house conjointly, consuming the food which they have produced or gathered and prepared. In point of fact, no single item of material culture can be understood by reference to an individual alone; for wherever there is no coöperation, and such cases are hard to find, there is at least the one essential coöperation which consists in the continuity of tradition. The individual has to acquire his personal skill and the knowledge behind it from a member of the community already acquainted with skills, technique, and information; and he has also to receive or to inherit his material equipment.

What is the form and what is the function in sociological realities? Take a relation by blood, contiguity or contract: we have here two or more people who behave to each other in a standardized manner, and who do this invariably with reference to some part of the environment culturally defined, and with reference to some concerns in which items are exchanged, objects handled, and bodily movements coördinated. The form of sociological reality is not a figment or an abstraction. It is a concrete type of behavior characteristic of any social relationship.

In the same way in which the physicist or the chemist observes the movements of bodies, reactions of substances, or changes in the electromagnetic field, and registers the typical recurrent behavior of matter, force, and energy; so too the field-worker has to deal with recurrent situations and activities, and to register their canons or patterns. We could imagine a variety of cinematographic films of parental behavior showing the technology of nursing, fondling, and training, the ritual, as well as the everyday phases in which the sentiments between father, mother, and children are expressed and standardized. When we come to very rigidly defined behavior, such as in religious ceremonies, legal transactions, magical ritual, and a technological operation, a combined sound film would provide us with an objective definition of the form of sociological reality.

Here we can emphasize the first theoretical point, that in such an objective presentation of the sociological dimension, no line of demarcation can be drawn between form and function. The function of conjugal relations and of parenthood is obviously the culturally defined process of reproduction. The form in any specific culture is the manner in which it is done, and which differs in the technique of obstetrics, in the ritual of the *couvade*, and the mode of parent taboos and seclusions; of baptismal rites and of keeping the infant protected, sheltered, clad, clean, and nourished.

The second theoretical point is that it is impossible to isolate the material aspect of social behavior, or to develop a social analysis completely detached from symbolic aspects; and also that the three dimensions of cultural reality enter at every step of the process. A silent film would contain only part of the documentation, such as symbolism in ritual gesture, in sacramental implement,

or in significant signs and conventional movements carried out by the participants. The most important aspect of symbolism, of course, is verbal, and here we know that a great deal of collateral comment, not necessarily contained in the performance itself, constitutes an indispensable additional documentation on the part of the field-worker.

What is the relation between form and function in symbolism? Were we to detach the mere phonetic reality of a word, or any other purely conventional characteristic of a material symbol of a gesture, it might appear that the link between form and function here is purely artificial; and since symbolism in its very essence is but the development of conventional acts for the coördination of concerted human behavior, the relation between form and function here is definitely artificial or conventional. The symbol is the conditioned stimulus, which is linked up with a response in behavior only by the process of conditioning. But in every piece of field-work this process ought to be an integral part of valid research. The context of the formative situation, on the other hand, always reveals the relation between the function of a symbolic act, verbal or manual, and certain physical processes linked up by biological causality.

The form in symbolism therefore, I submit, is not a word torn out of its context, a gesture photographed, or an implement put into a museum, but such an item studied dynamically reveals that it plays a part as a catalyzer of human activities, as a stimulus which releases responses in a chained reflex, in a type of emotion, or in a process of cerebration. In the form of a military command, "fire!" is the performance as a whole, more especially the behavior in *response* to the command, the social coördinate behavior as released by the conventional stimu-

lus. Because the *dynamic* character of the stimulus lies in the response, the word "fire" written on a piece of paper and rediscovered in A.D. 3000 would mean nothing. That is not a cultural reality.

We have thus established that the totality of a cultural process involving the material substratum of culture, that is, artifacts; human social ties, that is, standardized modes of behavior; and symbolic acts, that is, the influences of one organism on another through conditioned stimulus reflexes; is a totality which we cannot cut up by isolating objects of material culture, pure sociology, or language as a self-contained system.

### III

## FUNCTION DEFINED

THIS ANALYSIS will allow us to define the concept of function with greater precision. It is clear that we have to approach it through the concepts of use or utility and relationship.

In all activities we find that the use of an object as a part of technically, legally, or ritually determined behavior leads human beings to the satisfaction of some need. Fruits or roots are gathered, fish caught, animals hunted or trapped, cattle milked or slaughtered, so as to provide the raw materials of the human larder. These again are seasoned, prepared, and cooked so as to come on the table. All of this culminates in an individual or communal meal. The nutritive need controls an extreme multiplicity of processes. It is a commonplace to say that humanity advances on its belly, that you can keep the multitude satisfied by providing bread as well as circuses, and that the materialistic factor of satisfactory food supply is one of the determinants of human history and evolution. The functionalist only adds that the motives which control the parts of this process, and which become broken up into the passion for gardening and hunting, into the interest or greed for suitable exchange and marketing, into impulses of generosity and munificence, must all be analyzed with reference to the main drive, that of hunger. The integral function of all the processes which constitute the cultural commissariat of a community is the satisfaction of the primary biological need of nutrition.

If we turn to another activity, that of the production and maintenance of fire, we once more could refer it to its

primary uses in cooking and in keeping up the environmental temperature, as well as an implement in certain technical processes. A variety of attitudes, religious and secular, legal and technical, which center around fire, the hearth, the sacred flame, can all be related to its main biological functions.

Take the human dwelling. It is a physical object, a construction of logs or boughs, of animal skins, snow or stone. Having form, however, the technology of its structure, as well as its divisions, component parts, and furniture, are related to domestic uses which are linked up to the organization of the household, the family group, its dependents and servants. Here once more, the integral function of the object must be kept in mind in studying the various phases of its technological construction as well as the elements of its structure.

What is the function of kinship terms, primary and derived, individual and collective, descriptive and classificatory? I maintain that in this case the study of the initial situation of kinship, that is, of the small group surrounding the infant and including him as a sociological acquisition to the community, would reveal that the earliest function of kinship terms is to provide the infant with a sociological control of its environment through articulate speech. This, incidentally, implies the assertion that the context of the formative situation in these linguistic symbols, and in human language in general, is essentially sociological and also individual. The non-individual or classificatory meanings of kinship terms are acquired through a series of consecutive extensions. The functional approach to this phenomenon, therefore, implies that all those contexts in which the symbolic aspect of kinship is successively worked out, will be studied by drawing in linguistics, social behavior, and material setting. When we

say social behavior we mean legal norms, economic services, and any ritual that accompanies the stages in the development of an individual from infancy into membership in the widest kinship group, the clan, and the tribe. It would be easy to show that various material objects usually labelled "money," "currency," or "symbolic wealth," would have to be studied also within the context of systems of exchange, production, and consumption. And the same refers to the study of a magical formula or gesture, which once more must not be torn out of its context, but related to its function.



## IV THE ROUGH APPROACH TO FUNCTIONALISM

THE PERSISTENT teaching of experience in field-work, as well as any piece of comparative theoretical investigation, does, and inevitably has, led the anthropologist into the realization that cultural phenomena are related. The ties between an object and the human beings who use it, between the technique, individual and social, and legal ownership, as well as the economics of production, the relation between the human dwelling and the members of the household who occupy it, are so obvious that they never have been completely overlooked nor yet clearly seen! For, proverbially, nothing is as difficult to see as the obvious. If functionalism were merely the tendency to regard "magic and economic attitudes as interlocking," to realize that they are a part of social structure and that we must always correlate further and further, it would indeed be that theoretical lapse into scientific totalitarianism of which it has been often accused. There is no doubt also that in science we must isolate as well as establish relations. Functionalism would lead us into the bog of relating and counter-relating objects if it could not point out some isolates or units which contain natural limits of coördination and correlation. I submit that such natural isolates do exist, and that they should be made the foundation of any sound culture analysis.

The functional isolate that I have labelled Institution differs from the culture complex or trait-complex, when defined as "composed of elements which stand in no necessary relation to each other," in that it does postulate such a necessary relationship. In fact, the functional isolate is

concrete, that is, can be observed as a definite social grouping. It has a structure universally valid for all types of isolates; and it is a real isolate in so far as we can not only enumerate its abstract factors, but also concretely draw a line around it. Functionalism would have no true claim to deal with culture in its fundamental aspects, such as educational, legal, economic, or pertaining to knowledge, primitive or developed, and religion, unless it were able to analyze and thus define each, and relate them to the biological needs of the human organism.

Functionalism would not be so functional after all, unless it could define the concept of function not merely by such glib expressions as "the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activity of which it is a part," but by a much more definite and concrete reference to what actually occurs and what can be observed. As we shall see, such a definition is provided by showing that human institutions, as well as partial activities within these, are related to primary, that is, biological, or derived, that is, cultural needs. Function means, therefore, always the satisfaction of a need, from the simplest act of eating to the sacramental performance in which the taking of the communion is related to a whole system of beliefs determined by a cultural necessity to be at one with the living God.

## V THE LEGITIMATE ISOLATES OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

I MAINTAIN that if you were to take any trait of material culture, or select any custom, that is, standardized way of behavior, or any idea, it would be possible to place it within one or more organized systems of human activity. Thus, if you were to chance upon a group of natives making fire by friction, it could be either the kindling of a domestic fire for cooking or warmth; or just to establish the first kindling of the hearth. In either case, the fire thus kindled would be an integral part of the domestic institution; but it might also be a campfire, part of an organized hunting, fishing, or trade expedition. It might also be a children's game. As a mere technological process, fire-making has also its tradition of knowledge, skill, and in many cases organized coöperation. If we were to study it either as a manual performance, or in the process of traditional continuity of the performance, we would also have to refer it to an organized group of people connected with the transmission of this type of activity.

An implement again has a purpose, a technique, and it can always be referred to the organized group, the family, the clan, or the tribe, within which the technique is cultivated and embodied in a statement of technical rules. A word, or types of words, such as a kinship terminology, the sociological expressions for rank, authority, and legal procedure, have also obviously their matrix of organization, of material equipment, and of ultimate purpose, without which no group is organized. Were we to take any custom, that is, standardized form of behavior, it would be either a skill, a mode of physiological behavior

in eating, sleeping, transport, or game; or else it might express directly or symbolically a sociological attitude. In every case this again belongs to an organized system of activities. I would challenge anyone to mention any object, activity, symbol, or type of organization, which could not be placed within one institution or other, although some objects belong to several institutions, playing specific parts in each.

## VI THE STRUCTURE OF AN INSTITUTION

TO BE QUITE CONCRETE, let me first suggest that it is possible to draw up a list of types; thus, for instance, the family, an extended kinship group, a clan, or a moiety, constitute one type. They are all connected with the chartered and legalized modes of human reproduction. The charter always corresponds to a desire, a set of motives, a common purpose. This is embodied in tradition or granted by traditional authority. In marriage, the charter, that is, the body of constitutional rules, consists in the law of marriage and descent, these two being intrinsically related. All the principles by which the legitimacy of offspring is defined, the constitution of the family, that is, the direct reproductive group stating the specific norms of coöperation—all this constitutes the charter of the family. The charter varies from community to community, but it is a piece of knowledge which must be obtained in field-work and which defines the domestic institution in each culture. Independent of such a system of fundamental or constitutional rules, we still must know more fully the personnel, that is, the membership of the group, the seat of authority and the definition of functions within the household. The specific rules, technological and legal, economic and workaday, are other constituent factors to be studied by the field-worker.

The family life, however, centers around the domestic hearth; it is physically determined by the type of dwelling, the outfit of domestic implements, furniture, and also the sacred objects associated with any magical or religious cult carried out by the household as a group. We have here,

therefore, such elements as charters, personnel, the norms of coöperation and conduct, and material setting. These data being assembled, we still have to obtain a full concrete description of life within the household, with its seasonal variation, its routine of day and night, and also with the full consideration of actual deviations from the norms.

In a community where, over and above the family in the narrower sense, there exists one or more types of extended kinship group, analysis in field and theory along the same lines would show that such a group has also its charter in the customary law of an extended household. It has its rules of give-and-take between the component members, it has a widened personnel, and the material substratum of a spacially contiguous compound, joint enclosure, common symbolic hearth, main as well as dependent dwellings, and also certain objects used in common, as against those pertaining to component families.

The charter of the clan is given in the mythology of a common ancestor, and in the unilateral emphasis on an extended kinship affiliation.

In all parts of the world we would find also municipal groupings. Whether we deal with a nomadic horde, or a local group of Australian aborigines, Andamanese, Californians or Fuegians, we find that people who live contiguously have exclusive claims to a definite portion of territory, and carry out conjointly a number of activities in which direct man-to-man coöperation is indispensable, and tends to become organized. However rudimentary such organization might be, it implies a statement of the group's claim to its lands. This very often is associated with mythological and religious, as well as the strictly legal, claims. Into the charter, therefore, enters the definition of individual rights to municipal citizenship, the claim of a group as a whole to its land and a whole set

of historical, legendary, and mythological tradition that weld the group into a unit grown out of its soil. In a small farcical form, such a charter has been refabricated in the *Blut und Boden* doctrine of modern Naziism.

The local group has also its personnel, with a more-or-less developed central authority, with differentiations or partial claims of individual land tenure, and of divisions in communal function, that is, services rendered and privileges claimed. All the detailed rules of land tenure, the customary norms of communal enterprise, the definition of seasonal movements, especially as regards occasional gatherings of the municipality as a whole, constitute the rules which define the normative aspect of this institution. The territory, buildings, public utilities, such as paths, springs, waterways, constitute the material substratum of this group. The territorial principle may serve as a basis for even wider or provincial units, in which several municipalities are united. Here also, I would suggest the field-worker would have to investigate the existence of a traditional charter, that is, *raison d'être*, and historical antecedents of such a grouping. He would have to describe its personnel, the customary law governing the joint activities of such a provincial or regional group, and the way they control their territory and wealth and the implements of their coöperation, whether these be weapons, ceremonial objects, or symbols.

The tribe is, obviously, the unit at which we arrive in extending our territorial progress into ever-widening modes of organization and coöperative activities. Here, however, I would suggest that this concept has been used with an ambiguity and confusion of principle somewhat prejudicial to an ethnographic terminology. I submit that a distinction must be made between the tribe, in the cultural sense of the word, and the tribe as a politically

organized unit. The tribe as the widest carrier of a unified culture consists of a group of people who have the same tradition, customary law, and techniques, and have throughout the same organization of smaller groups, such as the family, the municipality, the occupational guild or the economic team. The most characteristic index of tribal unity, I, personally, see in the community of language; for a common tradition of skills and knowledge, of customs and beliefs, can only be carried on conjointly by people who use the same tongue. Coöperative activities, in the full sense of the word, are again possible only between people who can communicate with each other by language.

A tribe-nation, as I propose to designate this institution, is not necessarily politically organized. Political organization implies always a central authority with the power to administer regarding its subjects, that is, to coördinate the activities of the component groups; and when we say power, we presuppose the use of force, spiritual and physical alike. I suggest that the tribe in the second sense of the word, the widest political grouping or the tribe-state, is not identical with the tribe-nation. I fully agree with the results of Professor Lowie's analysis, in his book on the origin of the state, that political groupings are absent among the most primitive cultures known to ethnographic observation. The cultural groupings, however, are there.

The charter of the tribe-nation can always be found in those traditions that deal with the origins of a given people, and that define their cultural achievements in terms of heroic ancestral performance. Historical legends, genealogical traditions, and historical explanations used to account for the differences between their own culture and that of neighbors, would enter into this, too. The charter of the tribe-state on the other hand, is that unwritten but never absent constitution of authority, power, rank

and chieftainship. The personnel in a cultural group would deal with problems of stratification or its absence, of rank, of age-grades running through the culture, and obviously also of its regional subdivision. When the regional subdivision differs sensibly in culture and language, we might be faced by the dilemma as to whether we deal with several tribe-nations, or with a federation in the cultural sense of autonomous cultural subdivisions. There is no difficulty in seeing what the personnel of the tribe-state is. It obviously would involve the questions of a central authority, chieftainship, council of elders, as well as methods of policing and military force. Here also the question of tribal economics, taxation, treasury, and the financing of tribal enterprises would come in. As regards the material substratum, that of nationality can be defined only in terms of the differential character of this substratum, in so far as it separates one culture from all others. In the tribe-state the territory politically controlled, the weapons of defence and aggression, as well as the tribal wealth pooled and used in common for the political control, military and administrative, would enter the picture.

Following a line of inquiry divorced from the territorial principle, we could put on our list of institutions any organized and crystallized groupings by sex and age. Here, obviously, we would not include such institutions as the family, where the sexes complement each other and cooperate, but institutions such as the so-called totemic sex groupings, differential age-grades, and organized initiation camps for women and men, respectively. When we have an age-grade system referring only to the men of the community we can say that both sex and age enter as differential principles, and are one-sidedly institutionalized. I doubt whether anyone would find difficulty in defining the charter or norms and material apparatus entering

here. Male associations, that is, secret societies, clubs, bachelors' houses, and such like, can be included in the concept of institutions without difficulty. Let me remind you that each such grouping has also its legal and mythological charter, and that this implies a definition of its personnel and its norms of behavior, and that each of them has a material embodiment, a place of reunion, some wealth, and some specific ritual and instrumental apparatus.

A large group of institutions can be included in a wide class, which we might label occupational or professional. The various aspects of culture, that is, the various types of activity such as education, economics, the administration of law, magical performance and religious worship, may or may not be embodied in specific institutions. Here the evolutionary principle cannot be dismissed from the functional theory. For there is no doubt that in the course of human development the needs for economic organization, for education, for magical or legal services, have been increasingly satisfied by specialized systems of activities. Each group of specialists becomes more and more closely organized into a profession. Nevertheless, the subject of discovering the earliest type of occupational groups is fascinating, not only for the student interested in wide schemes of evolution, but also for the field-worker and the comparative student. Few anthropologists would disagree that in magic and religion, or in certain technical skills and types of economic enterprise, we see organized groups at work, each with its traditional charter, that is, the definition of how and why they are qualified to cooperate; each with some form of technical or mystic leadership in division of functions; each with its norms of behavior and each, of course, handling the specific apparatus involved.

## VII THE CONCEPT OF FUNCTION

I SUGGEST THAT THE concept can and must be fitted into our institutional analysis. The function of the family is the supply of citizens to a community. Through the contract of marriage the family produces legitimate offspring, that have to be nurtured, given the rudiments of education and later equipped with material goods, as well as with appropriate tribal status. The combination of morally approved cohabitation, not only in matters of sex but also for companionship and parenthood, with the law of descent, that is, the charter of the institution with its full social and cultural consequences, gives us here the integral definition of this institution.

The function of the extended family I would define in terms of a more effective exploitation of communal resources, of the strengthening of legal control within a narrow and well-disciplined unit of the community, and in many cases of an increased political influence, that is, greater safety and efficiency, of well-disciplined local units. The function of clanship I see in the establishment of an *additional network of relations* cutting across the neighborhood groupings and providing a new principle in legal protection, economic reciprocity, and the exercise of magical and religious activities. The clan system adds, in short, to the number of those personal bonds which reach across a whole tribe-nation, and allow for a much wider personal exchange of services, ideas, and goods, than would be possible in a culture organized merely on the basis of extended families and neighborhood groups. The function of the municipality I see in the organization of public

services and the conjoint exploitation of territorial resources, in so far as this has to be carried out by coöperation, but within the limit of day-by-day accessibility.

Organized sexual divisions within the tribe, as well as age-grades, subserve the differential interests of human groups, physically defined. If here we try to understand primitive conditions by what is happening in our own society we see that being a man or a woman, respectively, entails certain natural advantages and also handicaps, and that a community in which the sexes combine may be able better to exploit the advantages and compensate the deficiencies between the two natural segments. The same refers to age. Age-grades define the rôle, the potentialities, and the type of services best rendered by each grade, and apportion the reward in terms of status and power. There is little to be said about the function of each professional group. It is defined in terms of specific service and adequate reward. Here again the anthropologist who includes contemporary savagery in his interest in primitive peoples can see the same integral forces operating in the combination of people, who render the same services, share the same interests and look after the customary reward, whether in the conservative spirit of the primitive, or in the competitive mood of our present day revolutionary society.

This type of functional analysis is easily exposed to the accusation of tautology and platitude, as well as to the criticism that it implies a logical circle, for, obviously, if we define function as the satisfaction of a need, it is easy to suspect that the need to be satisfied has been introduced in order to satisfy the need of satisfying a function. Thus, for instance, clans are obviously an additional, one might say, supererogatory type of internal differentiation. Can we speak of a legitimate need for such differentiation, espe-

cially when the need is not ever present; for not all communities have clans, and yet they go on very well without them.

I would like first to say that here I am not too dogmatic myself. I would rather suggest that a concept of function in this sense, that is, as a contribution towards a more closely knit social texture, towards the wider and more penetrating distribution of services and goods, as well as of ideas and beliefs, might be useful as a reorientation of research along the lines of the vitality and cultural utility of certain social phenomena. I would also suggest that in cultural evolution we might introduce the concept of the struggle for maintenance, not of individual organisms nor yet of human groups, but rather of cultural forms. This also might be useful as a principle in assessing the chances of diffusion. Thus I suggest the concept of function with reference to certain wide, separate institutional groups, primarily as a heuristic device.

## VIII

## THE THEORY OF NEEDS

THE CONCEPT, HOWEVER, receives its strongest support from another type of consideration. If we can arrive at the assessment of what the various needs are; which of them are fundamental, and which are contingent; how they are related, and how the contingent cultural needs arise, we may reach a fuller and more precise definition of function, and show the real importance of this concept. Here I would like to suggest that we must take our stand on two axioms: first and foremost, that every culture must satisfy the biological system of needs, such as those dictated by metabolism, reproduction, the physiological conditions of temperature, protection from moisture, wind, and the direct impact of damaging forces of climate and weather, safety from dangerous animals or human beings, occasional relaxation, the exercise of the muscular and nervous system in movement, and the regulation of growth. The second axiom in the science of culture is that every cultural achievement that implies the use of artifacts and symbolism is an instrumental enhancement of human anatomy, and refers directly or indirectly to the satisfaction of a bodily need. If we were to start with an evolutionary consideration, we could show that as soon as the human anatomy is supplemented by a stick or a stone, a flame or a covering wrap, the use of such artifacts, tools, and commodities not only satisfies a bodily need, but also establishes derived needs. The animal organism which creates a change in temperature by the use of shelter, permanent or temporary, of fire, protective or warming, of clothing or blanketing, becomes dependent on those items

of the environment, on their skillful production and use, and on the coöperation which may be necessary in the handling of the material.

A new type of need, closely linked to the biological one and dependent upon it, but obviously implying new types of determinism, arises with the beginning of any cultural activity. The animal, which passes from nourishment obtained directly from environmental contact to food collected, preserved, and prepared, will starve if at any stage the cultural processes break down. New needs of an economic character have to be registered side by side with the purely biological necessity of nutrition. As soon as the gratification of sex impulses becomes transformed into permanent cohabitation, and the rearing of infants leads to a permanent household, new conditions are imposed, each of them as necessary to the preservation of the group as is any phase of the purely biological process.

Were we to look at any community, more or less primitive, or even fully civilized, we would see that everywhere there exists a tribal commissariat determined primarily by the nutritive needs of human metabolism, but in itself establishing new needs, technological, economic, legal, and even magical, religious, or ethical. And again, since reproduction in the human species does not take place by simple mating, because it is linked up with the necessity for prolonged nurture, education, and the first molding into citizenship, it imposes a whole set of additional determinants, that is, needs, which are satisfied by a regulated courtship, by the taboos of incest and exogamy, by preferential marriage arrangements; and as regards parenthood and kinship, by the system of counting descent, with all which that implies in coöperative, legal, and ethical relations. The minimum conditions of bodily survival, as regards inclemencies of the weather, are again satisfied by

dress and habitation. The need of safety leads to physical arrangements within the house, as well as within human settlements as a whole, and also to the organization of neighborhood groups.

If we were to enumerate briefly the derived imperatives imposed by the cultural satisfaction of biological needs, we would see that the constant renewal of apparatus is a necessity to which the economic system of a tribe is a response. Again, human coöperation implies norms of conduct sanctioned by authority, physical force, or social contract. Here we have the response of various systems of control, primitive or developed. The renewal of the human personnel in every component institution, and in the cultural group as a whole, implies not only reproduction, but also systems of education. The organization of force and compulsion in the support of authority and defence is functionally related to the political organization within each institution and also later on in specific groupings, which we have defined as political units, or the prototype of the political state.

Further on, I think that we will have to admit that from the beginning of culture its transmission by means of symbolically framed general principles was a necessity. Knowledge, partly embodied in manual skills, but also formulated and centered in certain principles and definitions referring to material technological processes, has, too, an early pragmatic or instrumental causality, a factor which could not be absent even in the earliest cultural manifestations. Magic and religion can be, in my opinion, functionally interpreted as the indispensable complements to pure rational and empirical systems of thought and tradition. The use of language with reflection on the past, which is characteristic of all systematic thinking, would have early drawn the attention of human beings to the



uncertainty of their purely intellectual predictions. The bridging of gaps in human knowledge and the rounding off of the big lacunæ in the appreciation of destiny and fate led man to the assertion of supernatural forces. Survival after death is probably one of the earliest mystical hypotheses, related perhaps to some deep biological cravings of the organism, but certainly contributing to the stability of social groups and towards the sense that human endeavors are not as limited as purely rational experience shows. Ideas which, on the one hand, assert that man can control some elements of chance, and on the other hand, imply that in nature itself there is a benevolent or vindictive response to human activities, contain the germs of more highly developed concepts, such as Providence, a moral sense in creation, and the goal of human existence. The functional explanation of art, recreation, and public ceremonials might have to refer to directly physical reactions of the organism to rhythm, sound, color, line and form, and to their combinations. It would also relate, in the decorative arts, to manual skills and perfection in technology, and link them up with religious and magical mysticism.

## IX

## CONCLUSIONS

IT WILL BE CLEAR to anyone that I regard this as a mere tentative sketch. We still need a fuller and more concrete answer to the question whether cultural phenomena can be studied in so far as they integrate into natural isolates of organized activities. I think that the concept of institution, with a definite outline of its structure, with a complete list of its main types, supplies the best answer to the question.

The theory of needs and their derivation gives us a more definitely functional analysis of the relation between biological, physiological and cultural determinism. I am not quite certain whether my brief indication of what the function of each type of institution is, will remain final. I feel more convinced that I have been able to link up functionally the various types of cultural response, such as economic, legal, educational, scientific, magical and religious, to the system of needs—biological, derived, and integrative.

The functional theory, as here presented, claims to be the prerequisite for field-work and for the comparative analysis of phenomena in various cultures. It is capable of yielding a concrete analysis of culture into institutions and their aspects. If you imagine a field-worker supplied with such guiding charts, you will see that they might be helpful to him in isolating, as well as relating, the phenomena observed. It is meant primarily to equip the field-worker with a clear perspective and full instructions regarding what to observe and how to record.

Functionalism, I would like to state emphatically, is

neither hostile to the study of distribution, nor to the reconstruction of the past in terms of evolution, history or diffusion. It only insists that unless we define cultural phenomena in function as well as in form, we may be led into such fantastic evolutionary schemes as those of Morgan, Bachofen or Engels, or to piecemeal treatments of isolated items, such as those of Frazer, Briffault and even Westermarck. Again, if the student of distributions maps out fictitious and unreal similarities, his labors will be wasted. Thus functionalism definitely insists that as a preliminary analysis of culture it has its fundamental validity, and that it supplies the anthropologist with the only valid criteria of cultural identification.