

of comparing or ranking groups according to how much access they have. And if access is a central concept, then in comparing access we will also be indirectly comparing influence and effectiveness. And this, after all, is the objective of the group approach.

EVALUATING THE GROUP APPROACH

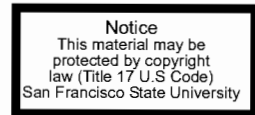
While group theory seems a useful (in terms of suggestiveness) approach to the study of politics, it does not go without criticism. Let us conclude our analysis of the approach by evaluating several of these criticisms. We have already mentioned one in a different context. It claims that group theory leaves out one important set of variables, namely the characteristics of individuals. But as we pointed out then, the political scientist does not have to be a holist assuming the existence of emergent group properties to base his study of politics on the group. In short, most group theorists do not reject the importance, let alone the existence of individuals in politics. They only point out that it is a wise strategy to stay at the group level. This criticism, then, probably misses the mark.

There is another criticism which argues the other side of the coin. It claims that the group approach is wrong and misleading in not considering the nation, the state, or society. Instead, the argument goes, group theory studies a limited range of political phenomena, never thinking about the supergroup of which they are all a part. This often leads to the closely related claim that group theory cannot properly handle the notion of "public" or "national interest." One reaction to this criticism is well articulated by David Truman: "In developing a group interpretation of politics . . . we do not need to account for a totally inclusive interest because one does not exist."¹⁴ Instead, that which we call the public interest is the result of the group struggle. So most group theorists would reject the idea that a public interest exists apart from or independent of the political process. Groups compete, governments make decisions, and the output can be labeled the public interest. But we should realize that this is a derivative concept with no emergent status of its own. Thus, as Truman suggests, one should not be criticized for ignoring a nonexistent entity.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 51. For an analysis of various interpretations of "public interest," see Glendon Schubert, *The Public Interest* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

Alan C. Isaak,
Scope and Methods of Political Science
 (The Dorsey Press, 1975)

14



Systems theory and functional analysis

Two of the more popular methods of organizing thought in social science are *systems theory* and *functional analysis*. As a matter of fact, the latter is an offshoot of the former, and so they can be placed in the same methodological category. The basic point is that functional analysis assumes the existence of a system, and therefore it is reasonable to begin with a brief consideration of systems theory. Then we will devote more time to its perhaps more sophisticated and impressive relative, functional analysis.

SYSTEMS THEORY

Like many approaches in social science, systems theory has a commonsensical appeal. It is natural to think of phenomena as parts of wholes. For many people it is difficult to conceive of the entity which does not fit somewhere.

This is, in effect, the starting point of the political systems theorist. He begins by assuming that political phenomena can best be analyzed by viewing them as parts of a systematic whole. Morton Kaplan, one of the foremost users of systems theory in the study of international politics, asserts that "a scientific politics can develop only if the mate-

rials of politics are treated in terms of systems of action."¹ This may be a bit strong for those who are not themselves systems theorists, but even they might admit the utility of a rudimentary notion of system as a starting point for theory construction in political science.

The commonsensical appeal of systems models is not a phenomenon unique to contemporary social science. Plato and Aristotle viewed the polis as a political system made up of interrelated elements. And more than 300 years ago Thomas Hobbes wrote: "By systems I understand any number of men joined in one interest or one business."² While this is a primitive and perhaps unacceptable definition, at least it demonstrates the historical pervasiveness of the concept of system.

The components of systems

Systems theorists agree that every system has several components. First of all, it has elements which are clearly identifiable. The planets and the sun are the elements of the solar system. If we are treating the family as a system, the individual members would be its elements. The elements of a political system could be individuals, groups, or nations, depending on the scope of the system.

We don't, however, call every set of elements a system. Something else is clearly needed. This something else is a set of relationships among the elements. A family is not a system because it is made up of identifiable elements but because the elements interact, because they are interdependent. The characteristic of interaction prevents us from labeling every set of elements a system. Systems theory then allows us to make a methodological distinction between, let us say, all the people who happen to be in a department store at the same time and an interest group made up of a set of interacting and interdependent people.

If we are going to talk about a system, we had better be able to

¹ Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1957), p. 4. Other basic expositions of the systems approach can be found in David Easton's works: "An Approach to the Analysis of Political Systems," *World Politics*, vol. 9, 1957, pp. 383-400; *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956); and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965). For the best "neutral" analysis of various types of systems theories, see H. V. Wiseman, *Political Systems: Some Sociological Approaches* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966).

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 22.

define its extent—where it ends and other systems begin. In other words, every system has *boundaries* which ought to be specifiable by the systems theorist. It makes little sense to speak of a system developing or changing or influencing other systems if its boundaries are not at least roughly described.

In general, then, we can say that every system has three characteristic components: identifiable elements, relationships among the elements, and boundaries. In addition, most systems will have subsystems. That is, the elements and relationships of a system will, in effect, break themselves down into smaller systems. For instance, the Congress is a subsystem of the U.S. political system, the Senate a subsystem of Congress, and the Foreign Relations Committee a subsystem of the Senate. One implication of this analysis is that systems exist at a number of levels. In addition, the indication seems to be that every system has an environment—there are always other systems "on the outside," so to speak. The political scientist slices the conglomeration at the level he wants to study, treating smaller systems as subsystems and the larger ones as possible environmental conditions.

The systems theorist who adds some substance to this rather bare frame usually does so by talking about the inputs and outputs of political systems.³ Inputs include demands—indications from the political system's environment of what is wanted, needed, and required—and supports—the extent to which the society is willing to consider the system and/or its leaders legitimate. Legitimacy is one of the most significant concepts to flow from the systems approach. It suggests that political leaders and their government can lose authority, that is, the mass public's acceptance of their right to rule, if they are unresponsive to the demands of the people. Outputs boil down to various aspects of the policy-making process—rule making, rule interpretation, and rule enforcement. These concepts are significant because they describe how a systems model accounts for linkage between the system and its environment, or between systems. For instance, we might view the decision-making apparatus of the United States (legislatures, executive, and courts) as a political system, and then study its inputs from the larger social system and its outputs for the social system. Or the entire set of elements—inputs, decisions, and outputs—could be viewed as a system having certain relationships (inputs and out-

³ These notions are developed in Easton, "An Approach to the Analysis of Political Systems."

puts) with its environment, which in this case would be the international society. Or one could move in the other direction, viewing, let us say, a congressional committee as a system with inputs from, decisions, and outputs for the larger political system. The point is that input-output analysis provides the conceptual basis for the notion of linkage between systems.

There is one other concept that is basic to systems theory. It is the notion of "feedback." Feedback refers to the influence of outputs on inputs and so, ultimately, on decisions. An interest group makes demands (inputs) on Congress, asking for the passage of a particular bill. Despite these demands, Congress defeats the bill (output). There will be feedback resulting finally in a reaction of the interest group to Congress' decision. There will probably be new inputs, perhaps even the withholding of support, including civil disobedience. Congress then learns of the results of its decision through the change in inputs, and perhaps modifies its behavior.

"Feedback" is important to systems theory because it provides a kind of continuity. That is, it builds into the approach a method for handling the two-way relationship between inputs and outputs. The behavior of systems then can be viewed as a continuous process in which outputs are reactions to inputs and inputs are in turn influenced by outputs.

The uses of systems theory

For political scientists who use it, systems theory is primarily a way of looking at phenomena—it is in many ways a state of mind. The commitment is made to concentrate on the system and its behavior, including the interaction of its elements, but not the characteristics of the elements. Systems theory is most accurately placed within the category of macro, as opposed to micro, approaches to politics. Now, as it is used by political scientists, systems theory seems to be of heuristic, not explanatory, significance. Thus the label "theory" is a misnomer; it is much more accurate to think of the systems approach as a conceptual scheme, perhaps even more realistically, as we just pointed out, as a state of mind or general orientation which serves as a jumping-off place for more specialized political research.

It seems that the systems approach generates two basic sets of questions: First, how does the system handle inputs and outputs? In other

words, what are the relationships between inputs and outputs? Secondly, how does a system cope with its environment? What kinds of system behavior lead to system survival or maintenance, what kinds to system deterioration or death? The second set of questions is the major concern of functional analysis, the more highly developed, and it would seem more useful, relative of systems theory.

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Ernest Nagel has said that, "In the judgement of many students a comprehensive theory of social phenomena is most likely to be achieved within the framework of systematically 'functional' analyses of social phenomena."⁴ While not yet the major school of thought in political science that it is in sociology and anthropology, functionalism has nevertheless come into its own as an important approach to analyzing political phenomena.⁵ The label "functional analysis" is applied to a number of activities and styles of analysis. Functional analyses are used to generate hypotheses and organize existing knowledge of the political system, and at times a functional explanation is proposed to account for political phenomena. The feature which characterizes all of them is a primary focus on the functions of political systems.

Strictly speaking, the functional approach is concerned with system maintenance—how political systems survive over time. This is how functionalism ties in with the more general systems approach. However, while an assumption of system maintenance may underly all functional analyses, practically speaking many of them go no further than a consideration of the effects that certain variables have on a system. Thus, we should not expect every functional analysis to explain why a system is maintained. However, since this is the ultimate objective, we can legitimately criticize a proposed functional explanation if it is going in the wrong direction or no direction at all, even though it is not yet dealing directly with system maintenance.

⁴Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 520.

⁵The main influence on functional analysis in political science has been the work of the sociologist Talcott Parsons. His basic theoretical work is *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951). For an application to politics see "Voting and the Equilibrium of the American Political System," in Eugene Burdick and Arthur Brodbeck (eds.), *American Voting Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1959).

In its simplest form, functional analysis contains the following elements: a system; variables; arguments demonstrating the effects of the variables on the system. The fully-developed system-maintaining variety has the additional feature of arguments showing how the variables contribute to the maintenance of the system by performing certain necessary functions. Thus, the analysis is called functional because of an assertion that certain conditions (functions) are necessary for the continuance of the system.

The major methodological requirements of this approach are rather simple, commonsensically so. First, the system being referred to must be explicitly defined and its boundaries clearly indicated; otherwise, it will be impossible to determine if the system is in fact being maintained or changed. Looking at it from another standpoint, if one wants to examine the influence of a variable on a system, he has to first have the nature and extent of the system clear in mind. This leads to a second requirement. The influencing variables must be empirically conceptualized; they must be defined in terms of testable properties of the world. Finally, in the case of system-maintenance explanations, the necessary conditions or functions that the variables are supposed to perform must be empirically defined.

Types of functional analysis

Having made these general comments about the methodological foundations of functional analysis, let us examine several of the activities which are commonly assigned this label. The first has been labeled "simple-functional" or "eclectic" by William Flanigan and Edwin Fogelman.⁶ It is probably the most widespread of those activities that, lumped together, constitute "functional analysis." Eclectic functionalism involves the listing of activities that an institution, individual, or nation engages in. Thus, Clinton Rossiter has enumerated the functions of the President,⁷ Herman Finer the functions of the legislator,⁸

⁶ William Flanigan and Edwin Fogelman, "Functional Analysis," in James C. Charlesworth, ed., *Contemporary Political Analysis* (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 72-73.

⁷ Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), chapter 1.

⁸ Herman Finer, *The Theory and Practice of Modern Government* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949), pp. 379-84.

and Frank J. Sorauf those of political parties.⁹ "Function," then, is equated with "action." Ernest Nagel has characterized this activity as an attempt to "denote a more or less inclusive set of processes or operations within (or manifested by) a given entity, without indication of the various effects these activities produce either upon the entity or any other."¹⁰ When the functional approach is used in this manner, its intention is not to explain the maintenance of a political system. Eclectic functionalism is more a descriptive enterprise. The central concept of "function" is used to organize the behavior of political actors and institutions.

However, eclectic functionalism sometimes becomes intermingled with a more promising activity. For instance, Sorauf's *listing* of party functions carries with it the implication that they have some effect on the political system—that is, they politically educate and socialize the public. Now we can call this kind of functional approach "system-affecting" to distinguish it from the more basic and important "system-maintaining" variety. For there is no mention of the activity or function, *X*, contributing to the maintenance of a system. It may, in fact, be doing just that. But there is no claim that the system needs *X* to survive; only that *X* has some effect on it. Of course, it is clear that system-affecting arguments can often become system-maintaining if further analysis is carried out. Perhaps another example will clarify this point.

In his study of political party behavior in Michigan, Samuel Eldersveld makes much of the functional consequences of parties; in our language, this means the effects the parties have on the political system of Michigan.¹¹ Thus Eldersveld concludes a section of his analysis with these words: "We have seen how party effort is associated with increased voting turnout, strengthening party identifications and loyalties, and developing attitudes favorable to working for the party operation. In addition, our analysis revealed that exposure to the party results in greater interest in foreign affairs, national domestic affairs, and local public affairs."¹² These seem to be the findings of a study

⁹ Frank J. Sorauf, *Political Parties in the American System* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964), pp. 2-6.

¹⁰ Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, p. 523.

¹¹ Samuel Eldersveld, *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 541-42.

that is based upon the system-affecting functional approach. The activities of the parties have an effect on the nature of the political system. And in the body of his study, Eldersveld presents statistical evidence, often in the form of generalizations—"party exposure, combined no doubt with other influences and interlinked with them, seems to be related to high voting participation"—to substantiate such claims.¹³ Thus we see that the generalizations generated by the system-affecting approach are not very unique. They differ from other hypotheses only in that the dependent variable is "the nature of the system" (in Eldersveld's case, a political system with high voting participation).

We said that system-affecting arguments often become, implicitly or explicitly, system-maintaining arguments. That is, the initial demonstration that element *X* has *Y* effects on system *S* frequently results in the claim that *X* contributes to *S*'s maintenance. Thus, we find Eldersveld making such statements as this: "In strengthening the foundations for political consensus, the party effort is also functional to the system."¹⁴ Here, we see a shift in emphasis to explaining the *maintenance* of the political system—this is clearly what "functional" means in this context. Using Eldersveld's analysis as a basis, we can succinctly summarize the nature of such an explanation: "A political system *S* requires for its continued existence, among other things, a certain degree of consensus among its members; political parties contribute to the realization and reinforcement of such consensus; therefore, the maintenance of the system is partially explained."¹⁵ Political party activity is a partial *sufficient* condition, not a necessary one. The most general laws upon which the explanation might be based are: (1) consensus is necessary for a *D*-type political system; (2) increased party activity tends to strengthen consensus. Thus it can be seen why "increased party activity" is a partial (there may be other influencing factors at work at the same time) and sufficient (it is enough, in combination with the other factors to strengthen consensus, yet there may be other elements that could take its place) condition. While it tends to produce consensus, it is possible for other factors to do the job.

Another example of system-maintaining explanation can be found in Donald Matthews' discussion of senatorial folkways, because the

¹³ Ibid., p. 467.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 542.

¹⁵ Ibid. This is a compact statement of Eldersveld's argument.

maintenance or existence of the Senate is partially accounted for by the existence of the folkways.¹⁶ Thus, "apprenticeship," "courtesy," etc., help keep the Senate a going concern. We see the same pattern here as was manifested in Eldersveld's explanations. To operate, the Senate has to have certain functions performed. The folkways perform them, and so the Senate continues to function. In Matthews' words. "These folkways we have suggested are highly functional to the Senate social system since they provide motivation for the performance of vital duties and essential modes of behavior which, otherwise, would go unrewarded. . . . Without these folkways, the Senate could hardly operate with its present organization and rules."¹⁷ The last clause implies a definition of the political system known as the "Senate." It is maintained with the help of the functions performed by the folkways.

A final example can be cited to indicate just how general this sort of analysis can be. Gabriel Almond has formulated one of the best known and most influential system-maintaining models.¹⁸ It is a general model because he attempts to describe the main political functions of all political systems. He begins by making a list of seven functions that the political system performs for the more inclusive social system.¹⁹ Almond argues that all political systems perform these functions: he calls this phenomena "the universality of the political functions."²⁰ But what is important for us is the fact that different political structures, both within a society and in different political structures, both within a society and in different societies, can perform the same functions. For instance, in modern political systems, interest groups are the primary performers of the function of "interest articulation." But, "We find in Indonesia that the few and relatively poorly organized trade unions or business associations are not the important interest-articulating structures, that we have to look at the bureaucracy, status

¹⁶ Donald Matthews, *U.S. Senators and Their World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁸ Gabriel Almond, "Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics," in Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 3-64.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17. Almond distinguishes between input and output functions. The former include "political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication." The latter include "rule-application and rule-adjudication."

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 12-17.

groups, kinship and lineage groups and anomic phenomena to discover how interests are articulated."²¹ Thus the same pattern appears: the social system requires that certain functions be performed for its continued existence, and political systems perform them *in various ways*. Here, then, is a clear manifestation of the sufficient (partially) and nonnecessary nature of system-maintaining arguments. Interest groups articulate interests in the United States, but not in Indonesia.

We can conclude this section with a favorable comment about system-affecting and system-maintaining approaches. Through their use it is possible to generate hypotheses suggesting that various political institutions can partially explain "a feature of," "the existence of," or "the maintenance of" a political or a social system. It would seem that this is the most important and promising activity among those that are usually classified as functional.

Equilibrium analysis

A special type of system-maintaining explanation is often thought of as a distinct approach to political analysis. This is usually called equilibrium analysis, and it seems to be most widely used in the study of international relations. We will attempt to show that equilibrium analysis is a variation on the system-maintaining approach. The main task of the political scientist would thus seem to be an analysis of how systems retain an equilibrium. Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan have defined political equilibrium and at the same time implied its relationship to system-maintaining analysis. After speaking of systems and system-maintenance, they make the following observation: "The standpoint of equilibrium analysis directs inquiry to the isolation of such systems and investigation of the conditions of their maintenance: disturbances may lead to a re-establishment of equilibrium or the disruption of the system."²² We might say that a system is maintained as long as it is in equilibrium.

However, some political scientists have used equilibrium in another way. They assume or attempt to demonstrate that a political system has tendencies toward a steady state. Then, political behavior is explained through the application of the resulting theory. Hans Morgen-

thau's famous "balance of power" theory can be interpreted as such an undertaking. Morgenthau sees a movement toward equilibrium as one of the main characteristics of all social systems made up of autonomous units.²³ His use of the concept "balance" implies that if there were a grouping of states which did not seek such a balance, they could not be engaged in international politics among themselves.²⁴ This is acceptable; but one may ask if anything empirical is being said, or is the law really a tautology? Has what is a set of empirical questions: Do nations tend toward an equilibrium of power? If so, to what extent? and, How can this explain international behavior? been transformed into a statement, "A political system is one which seeks an equilibrium," which is true by definition? Quentin Gibson has noted that, "There is of course one infallible way of preserving a higher-level law and that is to make it true by definition."²⁵ Furthermore "If a procedure of this kind is persisted with, it becomes clear that the alleged empirical law is one which could not be refuted under any conceivable circumstances."²⁶ This, in a sense, is why Morgenthau can eventually call the present bipolar international system a "new" balance of power even though it diverges greatly from the traditional system upon which his theory is based. The upshot of all this is that while we may better understand what Morgenthau means by "international politics," his "law" can give us no information about the world—it can neither describe nor explain—for it is analytic, not empirical.

Our criticism of Morgenthau's theory implies an important feature of any would-be explanation based on an equilibrium theory. If a political system has a tendency toward equilibrium it has ways of maintaining itself. This is why we are discussing equilibrium in this chapter. However, if "equilibrium" is to be employed in a meaningful way, we must be able to state that to a certain degree, the system *lition*." It is the basic proposition required to make an equilibrium theory nomological and so potentially useful. Most equilibrium theories do not state such a law, let alone provide it with empirical referents.

²¹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 167.

²² *Ibid.* Morgenthau states "that the balance of power and policies aiming at its preservation are . . . inevitable . . . in a society of sovereign states."

²³ Quentin Gibson, *The Logic of Social Enquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), p. xiv.

in question does tend to develop characteristics which perform its necessary functions; in other words that it tends toward an equilibrium. This is what Carl Hempel has called an "hypothesis of self-regulation." It is the basic proposition required to make an equilibrium theory nomological and so potentially useful. Most equilibrium theories do not state such a law, let alone provide it with empirical referents.

However, several political scientists have attempted to give the hypothesis of self-regulation empirical content, in preparation for its use in explanations. For instance, S. Sidney Ulmer has analyzed the voting behavior of Supreme Court judges using the Shapeley Shubik power index. His objective is the testing of the hypothesis that there is "equilibrium in certain behavior patterns in the Court."²⁷ Phillips Cutwright has, in a similar vein, searched for an equilibrium law of national political development. The hypothesis he statistically tests is that if a nation is underdeveloped it will tend to improve its position, while an overdeveloped nation will make downward adjustments to bring itself into line.²⁸ This first calls for the discovery of an equilibrium point at which all types of development are in balance. The difficulty of such an undertaking is obvious; but the *attempt* is what is important for our analysis, because it indicates that some political scientists realize that equilibrium theory requires an *empirical* law of self-regulation. We have seen the shortcomings of a theory that is not given empirical content.

One of the most interesting uses of equilibrium theory is in the explanation of revolutionary change. In this type of analysis the emphasis is placed not on how political systems keep themselves in a state of balance, but rather what causes them to lose their equilibrium and undergo revolutionary change. The most thorough development of this idea has been carried out by Chalmers Johnson.²⁹ His central hypothesis is that revolutions are largely the result of a "disequibrated social system—a society which is changing and which is in need of further change if it is to continue to exist."³⁰ Disequilibrium is

²⁷ S. Sidney Ulmer, "Homeostatic Tendencies in the United States Supreme Court," in S. Sidney Ulmer, ed., *Introductory Readings in Political Behavior* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961), pp. 167–88.

²⁸ Phillips Cutwright, "National Political Development: Its Measurement and Social Correlates," in Nelson W. Polsby, Robert A. Dentler, and Paul A. Smith, eds., *Politics and Social Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), pp. 569–82.

²⁹ Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

usually the result of growing discrepancy between a society's value system and the other institutions of the society. Within a disequibrated social system, the factor which more often than not stimulates the revolution is "power deflation—the fact that during a period of change the integration of a system depends increasingly upon the maintenance and deployment of force by the occupants of the formal authority statuses."³¹

Functional-teleological analysis

Political scientists sometimes argue that a particular behavior pattern or institution is explained if they can demonstrate that it performs a necessary function for the political system. For instance, the origin and present nature of the interest group would be explained by showing that it performs the functions of interest articulation and integration, functions which, let us assume, have to be performed in every political system. If this kind of analysis helps the researcher sort out structures which might perform important functions, then it is of heuristic value. But as an explanation it is unsound.

Let us examine its methodological weak points. First of all, it is difficult enough to demonstrate that a certain function, interest articulation for instance, is necessary for the maintenance of a system. But it is empirically conceivable. However, it is another thing to demonstrate that a particular political institution or activity is the only one that can perform the function. For it is always possible that another institution might perform the same function. As a matter of fact, we have already pointed out that in assuming that different structures can perform the same function, the functional approach provides a foundation for meaningful comparative analysis. And if it is true that a function is performed by different structures in different political systems, why is it not possible that the function is or could be performed by several *structures* within a political system?

An example might help clarify our argument. We will use Donald Matthews' study of the folkways of the Senate as a *point of departure*.³² This usage of Matthews' analysis should be emphasized, for we are not claiming that he attempts the unsound kind of functional argument we are criticizing here. We will fit a part of the discussion

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Matthews, *U.S. Senators*.

of folkways into a schema provided by the philosopher of science Carl Hempel.³³ It is as follows:

1. At time T , S (the Senate) functions adequately in setting of kind C (under certain conditions).
2. S functions adequately in a setting of kind C only if a certain necessary condition N (adequate assignment of work loads) is satisfied.
3. If trait i (apprenticeship) were present in S , then, as an effect, condition N would be satisfied.
4. Therefore, at T , trait i is present in S .

In this way, the folkway of apprenticeship seems to be accounted for. However, it is not in fact explained by showing that it contributes to the maintenance of the Senate. Now, apprenticeship may, as a matter of fact, perform such a function. If such an argument were made, then we would be giving an explanation of the system, using the folkways as causal factors. Thus, the folkways help explain why the Senate continues to function. This, of course, is, in form at least, a sound system-maintenance explanation. However, at this point we need only observe the apprenticeship cannot be explained in the above manner because there might be other ways of assigning work loads. These would be, like apprenticeship, sufficient conditions for carrying out the requisite function. And, there is no way to demonstrate why apprenticeship has a preferred status. It is the possible existence of these "functional equivalents" that deprives the argument of explanatory power. Thus, we see why it is fair to say that the folkways can help explain the maintenance or nature of the Senate, while they themselves cannot be explained on the grounds that they contribute to system-maintenance. Perhaps it is now clear why this functional approach is sometimes labeled *teleological*. The present existence or nature of a political phenomenon is being explained by its end. It exists to perform function X . The influence of biology and physiology can be discerned in such social scientific arguments. In other words, the same approach—the heart is explained on the basis of its blood-circulation function—has long been taken in these fields, and some political scientists have no doubt been impressed.

³³Carl G. Hempel, "The Logic of Functional Analysis," in L. Gross, ed., *Symposium on Sociological Theory* (Evanston, Ill.: Row & Peterson, 1959), p. 301.

A tempting way out of this methodological bind is to make the folkways part of the definition of the Senate. This can be done if the Senate and its conditions (C) are not clearly described. Then, any functional alternative that is discovered can be dismissed as insignificant since the same system is no longer being referred to. The obvious shortcoming of this tactic is, of course, that analytic statements tell us nothing about the world. Making the statement, "the Senate has the structure apprenticeship," analytic removes it from the class of useful empirical generalizations. These difficulties have led some philosophers to the position articulated by Ernest Nagel: "The cognitive worth of functional explanations modeled on teleological explanations in physiology is therefore and in the main very dubious."³⁴

There is another way to interpret some apparent teleological arguments so as to give them a sound logical structure. These are the arguments which refer to human purposes. A behavioral pattern is explained by demonstrating that an agent believes that something is functional either for himself or for a valued system, and then employing a law that describes what a person with such a belief and such an intention tends to do. Thus, we know why he performs or seeks it. For instance, referring again to Donald Matthews' study of Senate folkways, we might argue that they are desired by senators. That is, the senators believe that to function efficiently, the Senate cannot allow the public venting of personal animosities. Thus, they have intentionally adopted the folkway, "courtesy." The senators consider the folkways functional for the Senate—they are a means to a desired end. This kind of argument, it would seem, falls within both the functional and intentional approaches. But the important point is that it is not teleological.

³⁴Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, p. 534–35.