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The Offspring of Functionalism: French and British Structuralism

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Durkheim's functional and structural sociology is examined with an eye to the two structuralist modes of inquiry that it inspired, French structuralism and British structuralism. French structuralism comes from Lévi-Strauss's inverting the basic ideas of Durkheim and others in the French circle, including Marcell Mauss, Robert Hertz, and Ferdinand de Saussure. British structuralism comes from A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's adoption of Durkheimian ideas to ethnographic interpretation and theoretical speculation. French structuralism produced a broad intellectual movement, whereas British structuralism culminated in network analysis, which is beginning only now to become a broad intellectual movement. In both cases, the intellectual children and grandchildren of functionalism may prove to be more influential in sociology and elsewhere than Durkheimian functionalism, the parent.

At a time when some sociologists are celebrating the miraculous resurrection of functionalism as neofunctionalism (Alexander 1985; Alexander and Colomy 1985), we should not forget that functionalism's two offspring—French and British structuralism—have grown up and, in many ways, now surpass their parent in influence (Turner and Maryanski 1979). In this paper we will examine the birth of the two structuralisms from Émile Durkheim's version of functional theorizing (Durkheim [1893] 1933, 1895). The French lineage, of course, is long, distinguished, and continuous, but we need to understand why and how Claude Lévi-Strauss stood Durkheim on his head' and initiated the broad structuralist movement. In contrast, the British lineage is less broadly based, but we argue that A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's adoption of both the functional and the structural aspects of Durkheimian sociology is largely responsible for the emergence of British network analysis and its merging with a parallel line of thinking in the United States. This divergence in the French and the British conceptualizations of "social structure" from Durkheim's original formulation, we believe, is a useful exercise in the history of ideas because it helps us to understand one of the reasons why sociologists have such difficulty in defining their most basic topic, social structure.

THE EMERGENCE OF FUNCTIONALISM

As is well known, functional theorizing is based upon an analogy to organisms: sociocultural structures are analyzed with respect to their effects on the need states or requisites of the more inclusive system. Organismic analogies are as old as classic Greek philosophy; they moved through early Christianity and the limited scholarship of the Middle Ages to the organismic imagery of Hobbes and Rousseau. It was Comte (1830–1842), however, who reintroduced the organismic analogy explicitly into sociology. According to Comte, there was a "true correspondence between Statical Analysis of the Social Organism in Sociology and that of the Individual Organism in Biology"

(Comte 1851-1854, p. 239). Herbert Spencer (1874-1896) then converted the organismic analogy into an explicit mode of functional analysis: social structures were to be analyzed with respect to their functions for meeting three basic classes of system needs: operation, regulation, and distribution (see Turner 1985 for a detailed analysis).

Émile Durkheim borrowed the organismic imagery of Comte and Spencer; despite his attacks on Spencer, his early work ([1893] 1933) appears very Spencerian (Turner 1981, 1984). Durkheim's functionalism was distinguished by its emphasis on the problem or requisite of social integration and on the mechanisms for meeting this one master requisite. In this regard, Durkheim stood directly in a long line of French thinkers, starting with Montesquieu, proceeding through Condorcet, Turgot, and Rousseau, and then moving on to Saint-Simon and Comte. Over his career, Durkheim posited four basic types of mechanisms for resolving integrative problems: 1) cultural (collective conscience, collective representations), 2) structural (structural interdependencies and subgroup formation), 3) interpersonal (ritual and the ensuing sense of effervescence and social solidarity), and 4) cognitive (classification, modes of symbolization). In essence, Durkheimian sociology examines how systems of cultural symbols, patterns of group formation and structural interdependence, ritual performances, and systems of cognitive classification integrate variously differentiated social structures.

We argue that the underlying conceptualization of "structure" in these approaches to the issue of system integration has been decisive in the development of both British and French structuralism. Durkheim views structure in much the same way as Comte —that is, as a form of "statical analysis"—but he uses Montesquieu's term "social morphology." For Durkheim, as for Montesquieu ([1748] 1900), morphological analysis focuses on the "number," the "nature," and the "interrelations" of parts or "elements."

In *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1895, p. 81) views classification of social facts as involving attention to "the nature and number of the component elements and their mode of combination," whereas explanation "must seek separately the efficient cause (of a social fact) and the function it fulfills" (Durkheim 1895, p. 96). Thus the social facts, or "things," that are caused and that are operating to fulfill integrative functions are to be classified in terms of their number, nature, and mode of combination. Durkheim's sociology always has been somewhat ambiguous as to whether structures, when broken down into their morphological components, are mental, interpersonal, cultural, or material. The most reasonable interpretation is that the early Durkheim (i.e., 1893, 1895, 1897) emphasized a combination of material and cultural structure, whereas the later Durkheim ([1912] 1954) and his followers (e.g., Durkheim and Mauss [1903] 1963; Hertz [1909] 1960) shifted to the analysis of cultural, mental, and interpersonal "structures." We should emphasize that they saw these structures as reflecting material structural arrangements—i.e., number of people, their patterns of differentiation, their location in space, and their modes of interrelations.

Both structuralisms—British structuralism as it evolved into such precise modes of conceptualization as network analysis and French structuralism as it became a broad intellectual movement inside and outside sociology—employ Durkheim's basic view of "morphology" but draw from different periods in his work. British structuralism, as it was carried forward by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1924, 1935, 1952) and later by S.F. Nadel (1957), draws from the early Durkheim's conceptualization of structure, especially its emphasis on "material facts." French structuralism, as it was fashioned

by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1945b, 1949, 1953, 1963), draws from the later Durkheim as his ideas were extended by key scholars in the orbit of the Année School.

The end result has been two structuralisms in sociology, each of which is the intellectual offspring of functional sociology. Thus, as functionalism emerged, rose to prominence and domination, endured a merciless critical flogging, lapsed into apparent death, and re-emerged as neofunctionalism, each of its progeny has become a full-blown school of thought. We now examine in greater detail how Durkheimian functionalism created the two structuralisms. Let us discuss French structuralisms first because its history is somewhat more complicated than that of British structuralism.

DURKHEIMIAN FUNCTIONALISM, THE ANNÉE SCHOOL, AND LÉVI-STRAUSS'S STRUCTURALISM

Among sociologists, two works—Durkheim's "Incest: The Nature and Origin of the Taboo" (1898) and Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification* ([1903] 1963) are given much less prominence than other works in Durkheim's sociology (e.g., Durkheim [1893] 1933, 1895, [1897] 1954, [1912] 1954). Yet these two works are important in understanding Durkheim's late turn to social psychology, and at the same time are crucial to the emergence of French structuralism, for in these protracted essays, greater emphasis is placed on structure than on function and on mental structure than on either cultural or material structures.

In "Incest," Durkheim reconstructs the historical causes of the universal incest taboo; in *Primitive Classification*, Durkheim and Mauss address the origins of human classification and modes of symbolic thought. The ideas of *Primitive Classification* reappear in highly muted form in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim [1912] 1954), but the excesses of the former anticipate the key elements of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. In this work, Durkheim and Mauss argue that the human mind lacks the innate capacity to construct systems of classification—a line of argument that Lévi-Strauss was to turn inside out. According to Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1963), however, it is the material structure of society that serves as the template or model for constructing systems of mental classification. As they note,

> Society was not simply a model which classificatory thought followed; it was its own division which served as division for the system of classification. The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men, into which these things were integrated. It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct. Moieties were the first genera; clans, the first species . . . And if the totality of things is conceived as a single system, this is because society itself is seen in the same way. It is a whole, or rather it is *the* unique whole to which everything else is related. Thus logical hierarchy is only another aspect of social hierarchy, and the unity of knowledge is nothing else than the very unity of the collectivity, extended to the universe ([1903] 1963, pp. 82–84).

Moreover, Durkheim and Mauss provide Lévi-Strauss with yet another lead for his structuralism by emphasizing the importance of mythology, especially as derived from religion, as a reliable source for decoding the "logical hierarchy" and structure of thought. Finally, near the end of this long essay, Durkheim and Mauss introduce

another element of structuralist thinking: mental structures are composed of logical connections that reflect how material and cultural "facts" are juxtaposed, merged, distinguished, and, most important, opposed. Although they do not pursue this thought, they clearly introduced to Lévi-Strauss what he was to conceptualize later as "binary oppositions." For example, Durkheim and Mauss noted:

> There are sentimental affinities between things as between individuals, and they are classed according to these affinities. . . . All kinds of affective elements combine in the representation made of it. . . . Things are above all sacred or profane, pure or impure, friends or enemies, favourable or unfavourable; i.e., their most fundamental characteristics are only expressions of the way in which they affect social sensibility ([1903] 1963, pp. 85-86).

In sum, then, several key elements of structuralism are evident in Durkheim's work at the turn of the century: 1) Mental structures involve the logical ordering and generation of classificatory systems which, although modeled after society, become the basis for individuals' interpretation and action in society. 2) Such structures are designed to show the connectedness of phenomena as part of a coherent, systemic whole. 3) Finally, these structures are created by the logical relations of affinities and oppositions as they are encountered in the cultural and material structure of society.

On this latter point, others in the Durkheimian circle were to pursue the notion that mental structures are constructed from oppositions. Most notable is Robert Hertz, who was killed in World War I, like so many of Durkheim's younger colleagues. His best-known essays are published as *Death and the Right Hand* ([1909] 1960), in which the notion·of binary opposition is developed beyond Durkheim's and Mauss's conceptualization. According to Hertz, mental structures are built up from oppositions: strong-weak, night-day, left-right, natural-social, good-bad, and so on. Yet although the critical effort in *Death and the Right Hand* is to uncover the underlying principles beneath the surface structure of observed phenomena, an ambiguity exists: Are mental categories—such as "left" and "right"—reflections of social relations, or are they generated from some underlying cognitive capacity? On the surface, Hertz took a straight Durkheimian line—that mental categories reflect social structures— but his work gives consistent hints, supported by his examples, that mental processes per se produce their own structures.

Mauss, by himself, also may have provided Lévi-Strauss with implicit suggestions for turning Durkheim on his head. Although Mauss adhered very closely to Durkheimian principles, seeing himself as "the keeper of the Durkheimian tradition" (Lévi-Strauss 1945b), his book (with Henri Beuchat) titled *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A Study of Social Morphology* ([1904-1905] 1979) emphasizes the oppositional nature of thought—in this case the dualistic categories and behaviors created by the facts of winter and summer for the Eskimo. Moreover, in his most famous work, *The Gift* ([1925] 1941), Mauss emphasized once again the search for underlying principles and practices—in this instance the principle of reciprocity—beneath surface structures and practices such as gift giving, even in its most extreme forms, as among the Kwakiutl. Thus, because Lévi-Strauss read Durkheim, Mauss, and others in the Durkheimian circle, such as Hertz, the basic elements of his structuralism are readily evident. Yet the question remains: What made Lévi-Strauss reverse Durkheim's and Mauss's position and argue that the material and the cultural structure of society (e.g., kinship and mythology respectively) reflect innate capacities of the human mind for generating structures?

Commentators often view Lévi-Strauss's *interest in linguistics* as decisive in his reversal of the Durkheimian tradition. Yet the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics in Europe, probably saw himself as a Durkheimian (see Doroszewski 1933, who states that Saussure knew and probably followed the Durkheimian creed). Saussure's posthumously published lectures, *Course in General Linguistics* ([1915] 1966), have a decidedly Durkheimian tone: he says that the parts of language acquire their meaning only in relation to the structure of the whole; the units of language—whether sounds or morphemes—are only points in an overall structure that transcends the individual; language is "based entirely on the opposition of concrete units" (Saussure [1915] 1966, p. 107); the underlying structure of language (*langue*) can be known and understood only by reference to surface phenomena, such as speech (*parole*); and the structure of language is "no longer looked upon as an organism that developed independently but as a product of the collective mind of linguistic groups" (Saussure, [1915] 1966 p. 108).

In essence, when Lévi-Strauss received these very Durkheimian ideas through linguists in the Prague Circle, he appeared to have focused on the distinction between *langue* and *parole* and on the notion of language as constructed from oppositions, while ignoring Saussure's emphasis on the social structural origins of *langue*. Following the work of Jakobson (1962, 1971), he began to see morphological or structural analysis as involving 1) a search for the institutional equivalents of phonemes in language, then 2) an exploration of the relationships of opposition, permutation, and transformation of these institutional elements, and finally 3) an articulation and a comparison of the systematized forms or models that are abstracted from institutional elements. Jakobson would have proceeded in this way in linguistics; when the units are no longer language elements but material and cultural elements of society (e.g., mythology, kinship, religion), this approach comes very close to the essential tendency of modern French structuralism.

Yet why did Lévi-Strauss find linguistic analysis so appealing and why did he ignore the Durkheimian tendency of Saussure? Lévi-Strauss's own self-reflective answers are not particularly revealing (Lévi-Strauss 1979). For example, he claims that he was probably born a structuralist, recalling that even when he was a two-year-old and still unable to read, he sought to decipher signs with similar groupings of letters. Another childhood influence, he claims, was geology, in which the task was to discover the underlying geological operations for the tremendous diversity of landscapes. In regard to more direct intellectual influences, he constructs many genealogies, including Freud to Jung to Lévi-Strauss; Boas to Lowie and then Kroeber to Lévi-Strauss; Marx to Lévi-Strauss; Saussure to Nikolai Trubetskoi ([1949] 1964, 1968) and Roman Jakobson (1962, 1971) to Lévi-Strauss; and, somewhat less widely? openly? readily? acknowledged, Comte to Durkheim and Mauss to Hertz and others in the Année School to Lévi-Strauss. Indeed, for a time, Lévi-Strauss (1961, p. 63) declared that he was an "anti-Durkheimian" and would embrace Anglo-American methods as an alternative to the Durkheimian approach, but he always kept a foot in the French tradition. For example, he dedicated his essay "French Sociology" (1945a) to Mauss. As he emphasized:

> One could say that the entire purpose of the French school lies in an attempt to break up the categories of the layman, and to group the data into a deeper, sounder classification. As was emphasized by Durkheim, the true and only basis of sociology is social morphology, i.e., this part of sociology the task of which is to constitute and to classify social types (Lévi-Strauss 1945a, pp. 524–25).

Lévi-Strauss's goal thus became that of reworking the French tradition for analyzing morphology or structure. At first his work seems to lie squarely in the Durkheimian tradition. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* ([1949] 1969) (certainly a very Durkheimian-sounding title), he focuses on how kinship rules regulate marriage, a fact that owes a great deal to Mauss's *The Gift* ([1925] 1941). Lévi-Strauss concludes that exchange is a "common denominator of a large number of apparently heterogeneous social activities"; like Mauss before him, he posits a universal structural "principle of reciprocity." Moreover, drawing from and criticizing Durkheim's (1898) early analysis of incest, whereby incest was seen as the product of rules of exogamy, Lévi-Strauss views rules regarding incest as ordering principles in their own right. The details here are not as important as the recognition that this work is basically Durkheimian, but there are hints of significant additions; in particular, Lévi-Strauss postulates an unconscious mind involving a blueprint or model for coding operations. For example, "reciprocity" is perhaps a universal unconscious code, lodged in the neuroanatomy of the brain and existing *before* the material and cultural structure of society.

Why did Lévi-Strauss make this change in Durkheimian sociology? Our answer is that he wanted to say something new; if he merely borrowed Durkheim's idea of morphology, Mauss's and Hertz's concern with underlying structural principles, Mauss's principle of reciprocity, Durkheim's and Mauss's concern with categories of thought, mythology, and ritual, and Saussure's basic ideas in linguistics, what would be original about his work? His strategy was simply to turn the Durkheimian school upside down and to view mental morphology as the underlying cause of cultural and material morphology. He decided essentially to convert what Durkheim saw as "real," "a thing," and a "social fact" into an unreality. In doing so, he changed what Durkheim saw as unreal into the ultimate reality. Thus structuralism was born as the result of Lévi-Strauss's search for something new to say in the long and distinguished French lineage. All elements of the French lineage remain, but they are reversed. And so, just as Marx turned Hegel on his head, Lévi-Strauss turned Durkheim upside down.

DURKHEIMIAN FUNCTIONALISM AND BRITISH STRUCTURALISM

It is likely that functionalism as a mode of analysis would have died with Durkheim but for its adoption by anthropologists, particularly Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (Turner and Maryanski 1979). Although both scholars worked within the English tradition and drew inspiration from Durkheim, Malinowski (1913, 1944) followed Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) and anticipated by several decades the Parsonian approach, whereas Radcliffe-Brown (1924, 1935, 1948, 1952) borrowed more heavily from Durkheim and hypothesized one master functional requisite, namely social integration. Indeed, upon receiving a copy of Radcliffe-Brown's pamphlet "Three Tribes of Western Australia" (1913), Durkheim wrote Radcliffe-Brown to say that he was "grateful for the opportunity that you have thus offered me of entering into direct relations with you and I am extremely glad to learn from you that we are in agreement concerning the general principles of the science (of sociology)." J.G. Persistiany, who came into possession of this letter shortly before Radcliffe-Brown's death, stated that the latter "considered Durkheim one of his masters," and that the care with which the letter was preserved indicated its importance to Radcliffe-Brown (Turner and Maryanski 1979, p. 34).

Radcliffe-Brown's early works, such as his analysis of kinship among Australian tribes (1913) and, more significantly, his analysis of ritual in *The Andaman Islanders* ([1914] 1922), reveal many parallels to the late Durkheim's (1912) analysis of ritual. Equally important, however, Radcliffe-Brown adopted more than Durkheim's view of function; he also borrowed and sought to develop Durkheim's views on social structure. This latter effort was particularly evident in Radcliffe-Brown's more theoretical work, especially on kinship, after he retired from active field work. In his classic essay "On the Concept of Function in Social Science," Radcliffe-Brown (1935, p. 396) asserts that "the concept of function . . . involves the notion of a structure consisting of a set of relations amongst unit entities, the continuity of the structure being maintained by a life-process made up of the activities of the constituent units." In anticipating Kingsley Davis's (1959) ploy two decades later, he argued that there is no such thing as a "school of functionalism," and regarded it as a "myth created by Professor Malinowski."

In Radcliffe-Brown's thinking, then, structural functionalism was to emphasize structure—i.e., relations among entities—over function. Moreover, he was to emphasize his differences with Lévi-Strauss when he wrote to the latter:

> I use the term "social structure" in a sense so different from yours as to make discussion so different as to be unlikely to be profitable. While for you, social structure has nothing to do with reality but with models that are built up, I regard the social structure as a reality (quoted in Murdock 1953, p. 109)

In his last major theoretical statement, made in *A Natural Science of Society* (1948), Radcliffe-Brown echoes the sentiments in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (Durkheim 1895) and argues that social systems are an emergent natural system composed of the properties of relations among individuals. Therefore, they must be distinguished from psychological systems, which study relations *within* individuals.

As the most influential anthropologist of his time, Radcliffe-Brown exerted enormous influence through his analysis of structure. Curiously, a group of young sociologists at Harvard in the 1930s, led by then-graduate student and instructor Robert Merton, focused on Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism (see, for example, Merton's famous critique in "Manifest and Latent Functions," 1949). British anthropologists, however, emphasized Radcliffe-Brown's conception of social structure, although functional analysis also can be found in their work. Moreover, they began to link the concepts of "structure" and of "role."

S.F. Nadel (1957) is perhaps the most significant figure in this movement, arguing that "we owe . . . to Radcliffe-Brown" the development of the concept of structure but asserting nonetheless that the concept is still too vague (Nadel 1957, p. 3). Much like Radcliffe-Brown, however, he went on to assert that "when describing structure we abstract relational features from the totality of the perceived data, ignoring all that is not 'order' or 'arrangement'; in brief, we define the positions relative to one another of the component parts" (Nadel 1957, p. 7). Although few people today read Nadel's analysis of structure and role (the dynamic and processual aspect of positions in which actors take cognizance of their mutual attributes in order to "mutually orient" themselves to each other's positions), the notion of structure as positions, occupied by actors with attributes, who establish and sustain relations based upon these attributes, was similar to developments in role theory in the United States. Examples include Linton's (1936) famous distinction between status and role as well as Parsons's (1951) conception of social systems as structured in terms of status roles. Yet the central and

enduring idea is the view of structure as relations among positions.

This view of structure stimulated the British version of network analysis. Network analysis also was emerging in the United States with the development of sociogram technology (Moreno 1934, 1953) as well as with the emergence of experimental work on communication and structure (e.g., Leavitt 1951) and formal representations of group structures (e.g., Bavelas 1948; Cartwright and Harary 1956). Meanwhile the British tradition evolved independently; only over the last two decades has it merged with American thinking to form an intellectual movement. Although not nearly as influential across many disciplines as French structuralism, this movement is also interdisciplinary. In the long run it is likely to be more enduring in the social sciences than structuralism for network analysis retains the positivism of the early Durkheim, eschewing the vague and highly metaphorical tenets of French structuralism. More-over, Nadel's use of formal representations—mostly symbolic logic, plus a few twists of his own—sets the stage for the analysis of social structure in terms of more precise conceptual tools, namely mathematics and computer algorithms.

Key figures in the British school of structuralism include such British-trained anthropologists as Clyde Mitchell (1974), John Barnes (1972), and Elizabeth Bott ([1957] 1971), all of whom draw inspiration from Durkheim via Radcliffe-Brown and Nadel. The details of such works are less important than the basic mode of analysis: to view the social world as composed of positions and relations, and then to analyze these positions and relations in terms of criteria enumerated by Durkheim (1895, p. 81)—that is, "the nature and number of component elements and their mode of combination." Thus a direct and undistorted intellectual lineage is present in British structuralism—from Durkheim to Radcliffe-Brown to a variety of British-trained anthropologists, such as Nadel, and finally to other British anthropologists who initiated European network analysis. At each point in this lineage, functional ideas become increasingly recessive and modes of structural analysis become ever more precise and more formal. The full intellectual impact of this movement, we believe, is yet to be felt, because network analysis is only beginning to be an established interdisciplinary field of inquiry. In contrast, the French structuralist movement may well have peaked; the British lineage emanating from Durkheim may well become the more prominent of functionalism's offspring.

CONCLUSION

From Durkheimian structural functionalism have come two opposed views of "struc-ture" and, equally significant, two ontological visions of social reality. Modern-day network analysis represents the persistence of a materialist and highly positivistic approach to analyzing structure, whereas much structuralism advocates a mentalistic and sometimes antipositivistic position. (Of course, many structuralists are not antipositivistic, although in sociological circles this is increasingly the case.)

Network sociology clearly sustains the tendency of the early Durkheim (and of earlier French thinkers, such as Comte and Montesquieu), whereas structuralism represents an inversion, or a "turning on his head," of the later Durkheim. Conse-quently we view network sociology as a more viable sociological approach. If structuralists would "stand Durkheim back on his feet," then structuralism could be more sociologically interesting, for the later Durkheim clearly had embarked on an important line of inquiry, viewing mental categories, systems of ideas, and ritual practices as linked to social structures (conceptualized in terms of the "number,"

"nature," and "arrangement" of parts).

We believe that recent efforts in "cultural sociology" (Bourdieu 1984; e.g., Wuthnow 1987) have brought the best elements of structuralism into mainstream and materialist sociological analysis. Yet cultural sociology (Lamont and Wuthnow 1990) as well as structuralism (Lemert 1990) will be used in many other ways, often to mount strong antipositivist attacks. It is difficult to know whether this application reflects the fecundity of Durkheim's sociology or the failings of modern sociologists, although our biases are clear. At any rate, at a time when neofunctionalism is touted as a viable perspective, we should not forget what was born from functionalism.

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