SOCIAL THOUGHT INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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The Unanticipated Consequences of Human Actions

The Functional Analysis of Robert K. Merton

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Introduction

American sociology, until the time of World War II, engaged in an indirect idealization of the American family farm and the small, semirural American community. For American sociologists of that era, the problem confronting humankind was largely how to regain a rural paradise lost. Sociological studies took the form of elaborate comparisons between rural and urban modes of living. The rural mode somehow usually appeared as the better way of life.

This naive and pastorally romantic sociology gave way to more analytical forms of social theory and research that sought to identify and then relate the most fundamental, and therefore the most abstract, conditions of society. This approach to sociology is not especially concerned with such specific social problems as rural-urban contrasts in divorce rates or crime. It

turns, instead, to a consideration of what is meant by a social system. What are the properties of any and all human social systems? How are the elements within a human community interrelated to form a structure? How do the parts, and the manner of their relationship, bear upon the performance of the entire system? What are the functions and dysfunctions of the different parts? What are the consequences of a given structure for the people who move within it?

❖ *The Structural and Functional Approach*

Sociologists taking this approach to the study of human social organization call themselves "structural and functional" sociologists. By the end of World War II, structural and functional analysis was extremely active. In 1949, the publication of *Social Theory and Social Structure* placed Robert K. Merton at the forefront of those who advocated structural and functional approaches to the study of society.[1]

There is an important caveat to enter here. The structural and functional analyst presents the appearance of being a scientist analytically examining the parts of society in much the same manner as a biologist examines the functioning of the organs of a dog or monkey. Merton even relies on such examples to help define what he means by *function*. However, unlike biologists, sociologists *never* have an opportunity to observe the whole of society. They work, instead, with the idea or concept of a society.

The term *function* refers to the extent to which a particular part or process of a social system contributes to the maintenance of that system or to some designated section of that system. It is necessary, if we are going to gain a clearer conception of Merton's use of this term, to note that *function* does not mean the same thing as *purpose* or *motivation*. It means, instead, the extent to which a given activity does, in fact, promote or, in the case of a dysfunction, interfere with the maintenance of a system. As Merton puts it, "Social function refers to observable objective consequences, and not to subjective dispositions (aims, motives, purposes)."[2]

This distinction is subtle, and it calls for clarification through an illustration. It is one thing, for example, to speculate on the aims, motivations, and purposes underlying advertising in modern America, and another to see it from a functional perspective. If we ask an advertising person to tell us the aims or purposes of the profession, he or she might mention several things. Advertising seeks to make Americans aware of the wealth of goods and services American industry has the capacity to provide. Advertisers are motivated to sell their clients' products. Advertising seeks to upgrade the consumer tastes of people. Advertising keeps alive the American dream of happiness through possessions. The list can be extended.

A functional analysis promotes a different way of looking at advertising. What does advertising in fact do? Furthermore, what are the unintended consequences of what it does for the greater society? Compare the following

functional evaluation of advertising with the motivational evaluation given earlier.

It is well known that one thing that advertising does is to pretend to make significant differences out of what are known to be virtually identical products. It has been factually established, for example, that the typical consumer cannot tell one brand of coffee from another when blindfolded. Typical beer drinkers cannot distinguish between one brand and another. By creating differences where none, in fact, exists, advertising serves the function of enabling a variety of coffee manufacturers, brewers, and other companies to survive where there is no utilitarian basis for their survival. Thus, a functional analyst would claim that one of the functions of advertising is to maintain a form of industrial and commercial pluralism.

❖ *Manifest Functions and Latent Functions*

Merton makes a distinction between two forms of social function. One of these he refers to as "manifest function" and the other as "latent function." *Manifest functions* are objective consequences—for an individual, group, or social or cultural system—that contribute to its adjustment *and were so intended*. *Latent functions* are consequences that contribute to adjustment but *were not so intended*.

The manifest-latent distinction is a valuable one; it makes clear the nature of sociological investigation as perhaps few other distinctions do. Manifest functions are essentially "official" explanations of a given action. Latent functions are the unrecognized or "hidden" functions of an action. Socially patterned motives and purposes are essential concepts for understanding the interaction between social structures and individual behavior.

An example of latent function used by Merton is the Hopi Indian rain ceremony. The manifest function—the intended use of the ceremony—is to bring rain. At the same time, it is obvious that such a ceremony does not bring rain. Even the Hopi, over the long generations, must have observed that there was little connection between annual levels of rainfall and the conduct of the rain ceremony.

Yet, the ceremony persists. The Hopi have retained the ceremony regardless of its bearing on actual rainfall levels. The reason, Merton informs us, is that the ceremony performs other functions for Hopi society than merely bringing rain. To examine only the manifest functions of a ceremony, a tradition, a social group, or a particular role is to examine it at a superficial level. The beginnings of sociological understanding are found in a consideration of the latent functions. Referring to the Hopi rain ceremony, Merton goes on to say:

> With the concept of latent function, we continue our inquiry, examining the consequences of the ceremony not for the rain gods or for meteorological phenomena, but for the groups which conduct the ceremony. And here it may be

found, as many observers indicate, that the ceremonial does indeed have functions—but functions which are non-purposed or latent.

Ceremonials may fulfill the latent function of reinforcing the group identity by providing a periodic occasion on which the scattered members of a group assemble to engage in a common activity. . . . Such ceremonials are a means by which collective expression is afforded the sentiments which. . . . are found to be a basic source of group unity. Through the systematic application of the concept of latent function, therefore, *apparently* irrational behavior may *at times* be found to be positively functional for the group.[3]

When a latent function is important, though the manifest function is not being met, there is a tendency to rationalize social action. Thus, when a rain ceremony does not produce rain, it is not considered the fault of the ceremony. Instead, the fault is likely to be found in the incompetent performance of one of the participants. In this manner, it is possible to show a perfect relationship between the ritual and its intended effect.

It becomes apparent, with further thought, that the concept of latent function has the qualities of an after-the-fact rationalization or excuse for the world as it is. The functional analyst appears to be saying, "Well, if something exists in the social order, there must be a good reason for it—otherwise it would not exist. Therefore, let us think long and hard on the matter, and sooner or later the reason for its existence will come to us."

Are latent functions an apology for the status quo? We will find ourselves running into much the same problem in connection with Durkheim's discussion of crime (see chapter 9). After all, when Durkheim said that crime is necessary to any society, he provided crime with a latent function. With the example of the Hopi, the structural and functional sociologist is explaining the persistence of ritualistic rain dances as functional features of the social order. Merton, aware of this disturbing feature of structural and functional thought, has tried to get around it by introducing yet another idea—the idea of dysfunctions.

❖ The Dysfunctional Process

Dysfunctional events lessen the effective equilibrium of a social system. Dysfunctional aspects of a society imply strain or stress or tension. A society tries to constrain dysfunctional elements somewhat as an organism might constrain a bacterial or viral infection. If the dysfunctional forces are too great, the social order is overwhelmed, disorganized, and possibly destroyed.[4]

One of the clearest examples we know of a dysfunctional feature in a social system was the Catharist heresy in Europe in the twelfth century. The Cathars were of the opinion that affairs of the flesh were damning to the spirit. As a consequence, they concluded that the ideal relationship between a man and a woman is one of brother and sister. They advocated brother-sister relationships in marriage. So extreme were their views that they

would eat no food that they considered the product of a sexual union. They would not, therefore, eat eggs, milk, meat, or cheese.

They married, but, ideally, they did not consummate their marriages sexually. Feudal leaders in provinces where such heretical views existed recognized fully the implications of this point of view: It meant, if followed through, an attrition of population. Had the Cathars been completely successful, the consequence would have been the loss, in a generation or two, of the total society—perhaps a painless loss; but a certain one. Despite their peaceful and gentle nature, the Cathars were too threatening. They were destroyed. Their elimination from society was unusually thorough. The only evidence we have of their existence is of an indirect nature, consisting for the most part of allusions to the Cathars in church records.

The next example, illustrating the possible dysfunctional use of prisoners as slaves in ancient Rome, is an engaging one.

> Lead poisoning, according to Dr. Gilfillan, killed off most of the Roman ruling class and damaged the brains of Commodus, Nero, and all those other mad emperors. Such poisoning became common, he points out, about 150 B.C., after the wealthy Romans began to use Greek prisoners of war as their household servants. These slaves brought with them the Greek custom of using lead-lined pots for cooking, especially for warming wine and for concentrating honey and grape syrup, the sweeteners most popular at that time. . . . Writing in the *Journal of Occupational Medicine*, Dr. Gilfillan notes that fashionable Roman matrons began to drink wine at about the same time they acquired Greek cooks; and that they soon began to show the classic symptoms of lead poisoning—sterility, miscarriages, and heavy child mortality. Their surviving children often suffered permanent mental impairment. As a consequence, he estimates, the aristocracy lost about three-quarters of its members in each generation.

Gilfillan goes on to report that meanwhile the common people were spared—because they cooked in earthenware pots and couldn't afford to drink much wine. Moreover, they did not use the lead water pipes and lead-based cosmetics that the wealthier classes enjoyed. The result, Gilfillan argues, was a systematic extinction of the ablest people in the Roman world.[5]

Let us suggest one more illustration of a dysfunctional process that has evolved over the past forty years with the desegregation and integration of American public schools. Political and educational leaders believed that the desegregation of elementary and secondary schools would lead to equal opportunities in education for all children. They fought for and conscientiously worked to pass laws to achieve educational equity. When laws were passed mandating the integration of public schools, these leaders conceived of busing black students from segregated schools within a school district to integrate them with the white children in that district. Yet, what has arisen in the decades since the Supreme Court decision in the *Brown* v. *Topeka Board of Education* case in 1954? Busing children to desegregate schools has triggered "white flight" from the major city school districts to the suburbs, creating a resegregation of schools into even more viciously segregated inner-city

school districts of mainly poor children of color and outer-area metropolitan school districts of mainly white, more affluent students. (See Jonathan Kozol's documentary and prize-winning volume, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1991.) These deleterious conditions demonstrate quite clearly how the dysfunctional process occurs over time. Further busing for integration of students in American public schools and the resultant white flight from urban areas become a classic example of another of Robert K. Merton's contributions to social thought— that of the unintended, or as Merton labels the phenomenon, *unanticipated consequences of social actions*. Later in this chapter we will return to this concept; but first we want to press on to elucidate the uses of the structural and functional analysis.

❖ *Values of Functional Analysis*

The point of these illustrations of the dysfunctional process is that functional analysis orients thought toward the social consequences—intended and unintended—of a particular action. Merton maintains that functional analysis has the following virtues.

First of all, it inhibits the tendency to dismiss a seemingly irrational social event with the casual observation that it is merely superstition, foolishness, or craziness. For example, instead of ignoring astrology as nonsense or idiocy, functional analysts would be inclined to ask what it does. Why does it exist? What function does it serve? Why is astrology, or something similar, a part of virtually all known human communities? How does astrology relate to the other elements in the system?

Second, the concepts of manifest and latent function provide sociologists with a means of probing into features of social action that are more theoretically valuable. The sociologist can, for example, study the effects of a federal government bond campaign to determine its effectiveness. At the manifest level, we consider its purpose as that of stirring up patriotic fervor to get people to invest their money in public projects or, in times of major wars, to help finance the warfare. Such an investigation is of primary value to administrators and others interested in producing an effective propaganda campaign. The latent consequences of the campaign carry us further into the matter. Merton investigated the appeals used by the singer Kate Smith during a war bond campaign during World War II. One of the latent consequences of the campaign was to stifle expressions of objections about official policy.

Third, a functional approach to social action has ethical and moral implications. Essentially, such an approach brings a more sophisticated awareness to the moral issues involved in a particular situation. Merton puts it this way:

> The introduction of the concept of latent function in social research leads to conclusions which show that "social life is not as simple as it first seems." For as long

as people confine themselves to *certain* consequences (e.g., manifest consequences), it is comparatively simple for them to pass moral judgments upon the practice or belief in question. Moral evaluations, generally based on these manifest consequences, tend to be polarized in terms of black or white. But the perception of further (latent) consequences often complicates the picture.[6]

Thus, to return to an earlier illustration, desegregation and integration of schoolchildren are an obvious moral good at the manifest level. However, at the latent level, we see how over time the movement for school desegregation has caused severe societal problems and inequities, possibly exacerbating the very inequalities that the original measures were intended to ameliorate.

A fourth value of structural and functional analysis, somewhat similar in nature to the last-mentioned value, is that it replaces naive moral judgment with sociological analysis. Merton illustrates his meaning, in this instance, with a reference to political "machines." Traditionally, the political machine in America has been viewed simply as an evil. It is a source of graft, it is corrupt, and it is a perversion of democratic processes. The political boss buys votes instead of earning them through public service. The political machine protects criminal elements rather than exorcising them. The machine gives public jobs and offices to loyal members of the organization rather than to the people best fitted to the tasks. So the criticisms continue. A functional analyst, however, argues that the existence of political machines over relatively long periods of time suggests that they serve social ends abdicated by other, morally approved organizations. Merton says:

> Examined for a moment apart from any moral considerations, the political apparatus operated by the Boss is effectively designed to perform functions with a minimum of inefficiency. Holding the strings of diverse governmental divisions, bureaus and agencies in his competent hands, the Boss rationalizes the relations between public and private business. He serves as the business community's ambassador in the otherwise alien (and sometimes unfriendly) realm of government. And, in strict business-like terms, he is well paid for his economic services to his respectable business clients.[7]

This statement should not be read as an apologia for bossism and the political machine system of government. Merton continues:

> To adapt a functional outlook is to provide not an apology for the political machine but a more solid basis for modifying or eliminating the machine, *providing* specific structural arrangements are introduced either for eliminating demands of the business community or, if that is the objective, of satisfying these demands through alternative means.[8]

If we wish, then, to operate either as relatively detached social analysts or as social and political activists, a structural and functional point of view is necessary. It inhibits a tendency toward naive moralizing about social issues, and it places any given social action within the greater context of the total social structure.

❖ *The Nature of Deviant Actions*

Among the contributions to social thought by Merton, perhaps the best known and most generally applied has been his consideration of the nature of deviant actions. Rather than view such actions as the product of abnormal personalities, Merton is concerned with the extent to which such actions might, at least in considerable part, be a result of the structural nature of society itself.

It might seem that Merton's theoretical position, first introduced in the 1930s, was obvious and one that had become a labored cliché. However, Merton is concerned with more than merely stating a truism on the order of statements that delinquents or social derelicts are the sorry products of the society that spawned them. He is, instead, interested in specifying the *process* whereby deviant actions are generated within a social structure.

Deviant actions present a critical problem to those who accept a sociological perspective. The problem is this: On the one hand, the sociologist is aware that society and culture have an almost-crushing capacity to induce conformity on the part of the individual. On the other hand, innovation and deviation do exist. The directives of the culture can be challenged or modified. How can deviation occur within a system that has so much power to prevent it? Merton deals with this problem in the following manner, using American culture as the basis for his observations.

To begin with, he has developed the reasonable argument that American culture places great emphasis on the value of individual attainment of success. At the same time, and this is quite significant, there is relatively less emphasis on the means of achieving success. Institutional means for attaining success—the legitimate pathways to money, fame, or power—are not given any special emphasis or consideration. However, Merton points out that in order for deviant behavior to remain a useful concept rather than merely a moralizing phrase, we must distinguish two major kinds. The first can be called "nonconforming behavior" and the second called "aberrant behavior." Both kinds are forms of deviant actions that differ systematically in their makeup and in their social consequences. He clarifies:

> Nonconformers announce their dissent publically: they challenge the legitimacy of the rejected norms and aim to change them, lay claim to legitimacy by drawing upon the society's ultimate values rather than its particular rules and, sometimes breaking the rules of institutional process (as in cases of dedicated civil disobedience), seek to change the social structure to provide actual equality of opportunity rather than allow its mere appearance to be mistaken for the real thing. A frequent response to principled deviant behavior of this sort has less critical, conforming members of society sometimes acknowledging, however reluctantly, that such rule-breaking represents moral behavior of a high order. In contrast, aberrants try to hide their violations of social norms even if they regard the norms they violate as legitimate. Rather than working to institute new norms and laying claim to legitimacy of their behavior, they seek only to escape the sanctions that go with violating norms. As a result, their rule-breaking is

socially defined simply as an effort to satisfy their personal interests in normatively unacceptable ways.[9]

Merton is concerned with the problem of how people adapt to society and the ways in which the structural features of society affect the form that such adaptations take. His approach to this problem strips social structure down to two elemental conditions that hold for any society. He does this by making a distinction between societally established goals and societal means provided for achieving those goals.

Before continuing, we should notice that on the surface, the distinction between goals and means seems simple and clear; in practice, it is not. Let us take a concern that is constantly central to student life as an example, that is: "What is my grade in this course?" Grades may be viewed simultaneously as a means and an end for the college student. At one level, they are a means of getting through school and getting into a profession. At the same time, they may be a goal for which the student must struggle.

This demurrer is important. However, a goals-means approach to social affairs is common. If we accept the distinction between goals and means, then Merton's scheme provides a new way of looking at things. How a person will respond to goals and means depends on how *the society* sustains them. If, for example, a community strongly encourages the attainment of certain goals while, at the same time, providing little guidance with respect to the means for obtaining those goals, then deviant actions become more frequent. If means are emphasized over goal attainment, then people act differently—becoming ritualistic in their concerns. Merton has developed a typology to summarize the five forms of adaptation that are possible (see Table 5–1).[10]

The nature of these alternative modes of adaptation can be illustrated by a brief examination of goals and means in institutions of learning. One of the legitimately supported goals of educational systems is the grade-point average. To simplify things, we shall look on grades as a socially sustained goal and ignore the fact that they are also a means to broader goals. The

Table 5-1 Modes of Individual Adaptation

Modes of Cultural Adaptation	Institutionalized	
	Goals	Means
I. Conformity	+	+
II. Innovation	+	−
III. Ritualism	−	+
IV. Retreatism	−	−
V. Rebellion	±	±

institutionalized means for achieving grades are studying, working hard, and taking tests and examinations.

At institutions where goals and means are strongly supported by the system, the common response of students is in the conformistic mode. An example, perhaps, might be the way in which goals and means are regulated in military academies. The institution itself emphasizes grades and also pays close attention to the fairness of the competitive process. Deviation from institutionally prescribed forms of conduct leads to severe penalties or dismissal from the academy.

In circumstances where grades are strongly emphasized and means are not as carefully regulated, innovation is more likely to occur. A possible example of this is the situation in which modern college athletes find themselves. They must make grades, and, at the same time, there are pressures to protect them from academic dismissal. Various innovative devices assuring the college athlete relatively safe passage through the system have been devised as a consequence. (This is a sociological stance, insofar as it suggests that corruption of the individual is a matter of corruption of the community.)

The ritualistic mode of adaptation is better seen by looking not at grades, but at learning itself. Schools are constantly criticized for emphasizing how learning takes place (the means) over *what* is to be learned (the goal). In this circumstance, what counts is that people show up for class, sit still during class presentations, make no disturbances, turn assignments in on time, and otherwise remain attentive to the proper means of conduct, while learning itself is not emphasized. A school principal in Chicago was recently rebuked severely by parents for failing a third of an entire grade school because the students could not read. The parents forced the principal to reinstate the students. This is school as ritual.

The professor who reads from yellowed notes the obsolescent ideas of another era is a ritualist. The students who come to class and then write letters during class time are ritualists. The school administrator who demands signatures on loyalty oaths—regardless of more concrete manifestations of loyalty—is a ritualist. In all of these instances, we have people placing emphasis on the means of attaining an end, to the detriment of attaining the goal itself.

It is difficult to exemplify a case in which both educational goals and means are given little or no support. Usually, this occurs in other institutional complexes associated with education. For example, the spoof film *Animal House* portrays a fraternity in which grades and the means for attaining grades are a matter of scorn and contempt. The important point to grasp in this is that it is the group or community within which the pattern of emphasis on goals and means is established. Where both goals and means are rejected, the consequent pattern of action on the part of members of the community is a retreatist pattern.

A situation where there is a mixed response, with the community being ambivalent about education (either the means or the goals), might be that of

inner-city schools and members of the poor families of the community itself. There is, on the one hand, a recognition of the value of education and, on the other hand, an awareness that education is not immediately relevant to the problems confronting an inner-city dweller. In such community contexts, people take an adaptive pattern characterized, according to Merton, by rebelliousness. They want education, but they want to change the goals of education and the means whereby it is attained. There is a great deal of argument over the "relevance" of education.

By making these distinctions, Merton has attempted to establish more than a simple typology of different forms of individual action. His primary emphasis is directed toward locating conditions within the *community* that increase the likelihood of conformism, innovation, retreatism, or ritualism. For example, Merton is not concerned with the psychological characteristics of cheaters (an innovative *approach to grades*). Instead, Merton asserts that in communities where social goals are highly valued and the means for obtaining the goals are not as highly valued, the likelihood of innovation is increased.

Criminal conduct, another form of innovative action, is likely in a society that places great emphasis on individual success, wealth, and power and that at the same time does not emphasize the value of the legitimate means for obtaining these goals. Merton points out that such a situation exists in the United States.

It is necessary, if we are to grasp the significance of Merton's conceptions, to recognize the extent to which he gives culturally established, collectively held value priorities a place in the interpretation of individual conduct. A culture that, for example, values cleverness over the *dignity of work* will be likely to find itself peopled with clever loafers. The source of the condition is, however, within the manner in which the culture establishes the balance between means and goals—not in the individual.

❖ *The Sociology of Science*

One of Merton's strong interests is a consideration of the sociology of knowledge and, more specifically, what has become known as the sociology of science. The emergence of science—the development of science as a massive and powerful institution—poses a variety of sociologically valuable questions.

Science is not, certainly, a simple response to the demands of a growing and expanding population. It is not a simple product of intelligence. It appears, rather, to be a way of viewing the world that emerged from culturally established attitudes conducive to its development. Moreover, Merton points out that modern science in the West was an outgrowth of worldviews contained in early Protestantism. Weber saw capitalism as coming from Protestantism; Merton sees science as yet another contribution of the Protestant ethic.

Merton summarizes the character of his argument with the following statement:

> It is the thesis of this study that the Puritan ethic, as an ideal—typical expression of the value—attitudes basic to ascetic Protestantism generally, so canalized the interests of seventeenth-century Englishmen as to constitute one important *element* in the enhanced cultivation of science. The deep-rooted religious *interests* of the day-demanded in their forceful implications the systematic, rational, and empirical study of Nature for the glorification of God in His works and for the control of the corrupt world.[11]

Merton isolated several facets of Puritan thought and practice and concluded that scientists of the seventeenth century were functioning as innovators. Although they still held to the ethical, moral, and spiritual goals of Protestant-Christian doctrine, they were engaged in a modification of the means whereby such goals were to be attained. Specifically, they were in the process of turning to nature itself rather than to theological inspiration or speculation as a means of attaining Puritan goals.

Foremost among these goals was the endeavor to serve and glorify God. If Puritanism instilled in people the desire to glorify God, and if Puritanism had a bearing on the development of early science, then seventeenth-century scientists would evaluate their work in terms of the extent to which it worked toward the greater glorification of God. This, claims Merton, is what did in fact happen. Seventeenth-century scientists not only dedicated their works to the greater glory of God, but also saw the true ends of science to be the glorification of the Creator.

> In his last will and testament, Boyle echoes the same attitude, petitioning the Fellows of the Society in this wise: "Wishing them also a happy success in their laudable attempts; to discover the true Nature of the Works of God; and praying that they and all other Searchers into Physical Truths, may cordially refer their Attainments to the Glory of the Great Author of Nature, and to the Comfort of Mankind." John Wilks proclaimed the experimental study of Nature to be a most effective means of begetting in men a veneration for God. Francis Willoughby was prevailed upon to publish his works—which he had deemed unworthy of publication—only when Ray insisted that it was a means of glorifying God. Ray's *Wisdom of God* . . . is a panegyric of those who glorify Him by studying His works.[12]

The Puritan ethic was also strongly utilitarian; that is, it emphasized human welfare. Early scientists were as eager to indicate the social merit and worth of their studies as they were to dedicate them to God's glory. Moreover, scientific studies promoted discipline, work, and serious rather than idle thoughts—all Puritan values.

There is, then, a congruence between the basic tenets of Puritan thought and those of early scientists. We are thereby confronted with the irony, if this interpretation of the origins of science carries any validity, of observing a religious ethic bringing into being (or at least serving as the midwife of) an

ideology that, in its extreme forms, has generated religion's most serious opposition and intellectual challenge.

Puritan values provided the sanction for science. Scientists could feel justified in the belief that their work not only was meaningful to themselves, but also was an entry into the works of God. There was a greater end to scientific formulations than the mere statement of empirical regularities.

The fact that Protestant thought emphasized individualism, rationality, utilitarianism, and empiricism might have had only a fortuitous relationship to the development of science. Merton has suggested that a significant test would be to determine whether or not Protestants, in the early days of scientific discovery, were more often found within the ranks of scientists than we would expect on the basis of their *representation in the total population*. To determine this, Merton has investigated the membership of the Royal Society, an "invisible college" of scientists, in its formative years. He comments:

> Of the ten men who constituted the "invisible college," in 1645, only one, Scarbough, was clearly non-Puritan. About two of the others there is some uncertainty, though Merret had a Puritan training. The others were all definitely Puritan. Moreover, among the original list of members of the Society of 1663, forty-two of the sixty-eight concerning whom information about their religious orientation is available were clearly Puritan. Considering that the Puritans constituted a relatively small minority in the English population, the fact that they constituted sixty-two per cent of the initial membership of the Society becomes even more striking.[13]

This disproportionate representation of Protestants within the ranks of science occurs, as well, in present times. Merton cites the observations of Knapp and Goodrich to the effect that several Protestant denominations are proportionately several hundred times more strongly represented among lists of meritorious American scientists than we would expect on the basis of their representation within the general population.[14]

One of the latent *functions* of the Puritan form of Protestantism in the seventeenth century, then, was to set the stage for the development of rational and empirical science. Merton summarizes his argument by making four principal observations:

First, the relationships between emerging science and religion were indirect and certainly unintended.

Second, science, after the ideological orientation necessary for it was set, acquired a degree of functional autonomy—a character of its own, which eventually would lead to the point where science would appear to be completely removed from religious modes of thought.

Third, the process of institutional modification of thoughtways and the development of new institutional forms may be so subtle as to occur below the threshold of awareness of those involved in it.

Fourth, the dramatic conflict between science and religion—particularly in the nineteenth century—possibly obscures the more significant relationship that exists between the two.[15]

Merton is aware that his study follows in the path of Max Weber. Weber was concerned with the influence of Protestant thought on the development of capitalism. Weber also suggested, in a sketchy manner, that Protestantism had a similar influence on the development of science. However, Merton elaborates what Weber left implicit.

❖ *The Unanticipated Consequences of Social Actions*

Early in his career, with the publication of his first monograph in 1938 titled "Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England," Merton became fascinated with the idea of the unanticipated consequences of social actions. In a retrospective article fifty-one years later, this creative social thinker writes of his enduring interest in the idea of unanticipated, unintended, and unrecognized consequences and its links to the oft-cited, overused, now-popularized sociological concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy.[16]

The concept of unanticipated consequences formed one of the resonant underlying themes of Merton's work. Out of Puritan religion, unexpectedly and without design, came science. From propaganda campaigns designed to solicit money came unanticipated and subtle constraints on democratic political ideology. From fears of loss of freedom came repressive measures to assure that liberty will be preserved. It is this feature of human social conduct that requires, if people are to make the best social use of their reason, a constant and subtle examination of the functional and dysfunctional aspects of any social action. To evaluate a policy only in terms of its apparent or official objectives is to see considerably less than half of what is taking place.

Merton asks us to consider how the phenomenon of unintended and unanticipated consequences comes about. How are we to think about its recurrence in every domain of society, culture, and civilization? For a half-century now, Robert K. Merton has posed these questions to his students, his colleagues, and the worldwide readership of his works. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century we recognize that over his auspicious career and throughout his writings he has reiterated the importance and interrelations of the sociological concepts of latent functions; dysfunctions; the self-defeating or self-fulfilling prophecy; and the unanticipated, unintended, or unrecognized consequences of human social actions.

Encounters with Social Thought

*Functional Analysis and
the Drug Problem in America*

To illustrate the uses of the structural and functional analysis, along with the major sociological concepts detailed in this chapter, we have selected the issue of modern drug use in the United States. Few topics so quickly demonstrate the difference between a functional analysis of human activities and other fashionable or popularized explications.

Conventional explanations of drug use have several notable characteristics:

1. They tend to focus on the individual as the source of the problem.
2. They commonly are strongly moralistic in tone.
3. When they do happen to be institutional in orientation, they focus on a single institution for blame: The family, schools, or urban lifestyles, for example, are singled out for particular attention.
4. A great deal of literature on the drug issue views it as a kind of medical problem in which the drug user is seen as the victim of an "illness."
5. Drug use is looked on as "abnormal," and the drug user is thought of as suffering from a kind of moral or character defect.
6. Drug use is seen as something to be controlled primarily through appeals directed to the public and through law enforcement.
7. Drug use, as a problem, is commonly restricted to a consideration of illegally distributed drugs, as opposed to those distributed through the medical system.
8. Drug use is commonly defined in such a manner as to exclude some drugs while including others. The most obvious manifestation of this is the inclination to exclude alcohol from consideration while including marijuana or amphetamines.
9. The drug problem is viewed as a consequence of criminal mentalities to be fought as a "war against crime."

In sum, popular explanations of what we shall call, throughout this section, "the drug problem" are simplistic, psychologistic, and legalistic. They are commonly more concerned with finding a scapegoat to blame than with conducting reasoned analysis. A structural and functional approach that includes attention to dysfunctions and to unanticipated consequences to the problem leads to a different realm of

understanding. The structural and functional analysis manifests the following differences:

1. It tends to locate the individual within the social structure and hence calls for a consideration of the entire social structure for insight into why drug use is so prevalent.
2. It does not moralize about the problem. If drugs are a part of modern American life, there must be a reason for it. Drugs serve a function; they satisfy a demand coming from within the society or community itself. There are, after all, societies in which drugs are rarely used and others in which they are extremely popular. What accounts for the differences between *societies?*
3. The functional analysis does not isolate a particular institution for special blame or criticism. It argues that all institutions interact with each other in support of the total system. Therefore, a systemic analysis is required, rather than an institutionally specific one.
4. The functional approach, rather than seeing drugs as an "illness," raises the question of whether or not they are part of the ongoing operations of the social system as a whole. If they work against the functioning of the system, then they are dysfunctional. If they sustain the system, then they are functional. Whether drugs work against or sustain the socioeconomic system as a whole is not at all an easy question to answer. Certainly the instantaneous removal of what is touted as a $100 billion "industry" would have serious and unanticipated consequences for the system as a whole.
5. Whereas popular conceptions of drug use tend to view it as an abnormal or peripheral activity, a functional analysis forces us to accept the possibility that drug use is far from an abnormal activity in American culture. Few people in America are not drug users of some kind. Alcohol is popular, along with tranquilizers, stimulants of various kinds, painkillers, diet controls, nicotine, caffeine, sleeping pills, and a host of other drugs. Do unrecognized and unintended consequences result from the use or abuse of the substances listed?
6. Structural and functional analysis raises a disturbing question with respect to control. Because it turns to the entire community or social system as its center of concern, the implications for control are severe: If you wish to control the drug problem, you must deal with the entire system. Because people are not disposed to alter entire communal structures, there is probably little possibility of any real control having any kind of effect—short of a major sociocultural revolution or crisis.

It is immediately obvious that structural and functional analysis does not go down the same intellectual road as popular thought. It is a point

of view that generates a powerful vision with respect to what is actually going on, while at the same time indicating the structural obstacles to serious reform. If this observation is correct, it suggests that apparently easy solutions to social problems are more a product of ignorance than of knowledge. The more we know about the human social condition, the more difficult are the problems it poses.

The Potential of a Structural and Functional Analysis   The basic approach to the drug problem implied in a structural and functional perspective can be seen in the kinds of questions that such a perspective raises: How does the drug culture fit into the total social structure as an element of the larger system? What kind of social structure would incorporate a strong drug culture as an element within itself? What does the drug culture "do" in terms of the rest of the system? What unanticipated consequences of the recognition of a societal drug problem might arise?

As we gain a sense of what this functional analysis is asking of us, we begin to see that the so-called drug culture fits into a larger pattern. No single institution is responsible for it. Instead, the complex interactions among all of the elements of the culture make the existence of a drug culture more understandable as a reasonable consequence of everything else that is going on. To clarify this, we shall lightly sketch in the characteristics of several large-scale institutional forces within modern American society—with particular emphasis given to how these institutions are, in themselves, structured in such a way as to enhance drug use. When the combined influence of all of these structures is taken into account as a macrostructure, one wonders not why Americans use so many drugs, but rather why the current situation is no worse than it is.

Economic Institutions   The American economy is dedicated to consumption and the idea that progress is realized through material comfort. Moreover, material comfort should be immediate. The economy exists to make people happy. American advertising, an important institution within the overall complex, contains within it an implicit philosophy of sybaritic hedonism. At another level, the American economy is a stressful one. The American worker is subjected to stresses that come from routinized work, the constant possibility of layoffs, continual changes in production systems that call for reeducation of the worker to avoid worker obsolescence, the demands of production lines, movement from place to place, social mobility, and so forth. Dealing with stress is now a common concern. One acceptable form of dealing with stress is to rely on stress-reducing drugs. Such drugs are dispensed to a broad array of cases, ranging from hyperactive children to high-level executives coping with the stress of possible bankruptcy or revelations of nefarious financial manipulations.

Another major element in the American economy is the multi-billion-dollar legitimate drug industry. American companies thrive or falter in terms of profits and losses. That which augments productive and *consumptive* efficiency enhances the survival chances of a company within a competitive system. It therefore is incumbent on the American drug industry to "push" its products—and push them it does. Americans are encouraged to use drugs to solve every kind of problem, from drying up hemorrhoidal tissues to curing cancer. The American drug industry, by the nature of its product and the nature of how things are produced and distributed in America, must find markets for its products. Like any other economic enterprise, the drug industry is driven to expand its markets as fully as possible. It is therefore called on to create new drugs that will have a popular appeal and to encourage the broader use of drugs that have established markets. These activities could be viewed as the unanticipated consequences that promote drug use and drug abuse in America.

The Political System   To provide another striking example: The American political system historically experienced a singular encounter with drug use. It lost. The American approach to drugs has, ever since, been more tentative. The manufacture, transportation, or sale of liquor was prohibited in 1919 by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In 1920 the Volstead Act, which enforced the Eighteenth Amendment, went into effect, and Prohibition was launched. Its life was short. In 1933 the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed, after a decade of the most flagrant and widespread disobedience of American federal law that had been seen to that point. The lessons learned from the era of Prohibition still linger.

One lesson was that the political system does not have the ability to uphold unpopular laws: Millions of Americans openly flaunted the Eighteenth Amendment. Another lesson was that any political attempt to constrain a popular activity immediately generates powerful black-market systems that circumvent political restrictions. Informal systems are at work within any society to compensate for *perceived* inequities in the formal system. One other lesson learned from the Prohibition years was that social problems cannot be solved simply by legislating them out of existence.

The American political system is designed to appeal to popular sentiments. Its structure is democratic, and its rhetoric is populist. It offers, ideologically, freedom and the right to pursue happiness. It encourages privacy. Given simply these qualities, we can begin to see that the political system in America is not powerfully coercive in and of itself. So it is, in present times, that powerful people in America turn to appeals and slogans as a way of trying to curb drug use.

The American political system does not, of course, encourage drug use in any explicit or overt manner. At the same time, it is not a

powerful system with respect to controlling the problem. Perhaps the proper term is that it is a political system that is "congenial" to drug use. Although political rhetoric condemns drug use, the political structure is essentially an ineffectual one.

Or, to consider the matter from still another perspective, we might ask ourselves this: What kind of political structure would the members of a drug ring "design" if they could create a political system congenial to their interests? They would want one that would elevate the price of certain drugs by enhancing the risk involved in the distribution of such items. At the same time, it would be a system that would back away from a show of authoritarian strength or the use of an effective, massively powerful enforcement system. They would also want a system that was hesitant to censor expressions of freedom and privacy. All of these are characteristics of the present American political system.

Social Service Agencies There exists within American society a complex of agencies working with the victims of drug abuse. These agencies vary greatly in character—ranging from volunteer groups working within limited budgets to elaborate hospitals staffed by well-paid professionals who provide therapy for troubled millionaire athletes, movie stars, and alcoholic politicians. These agencies, given the problems they have to deal with, do good work. At the same time, they are a structural element of the society and the economy.

After a social agency comes into existence, it tends to look after its survival needs as an ongoing entity. The agency, in other words, acquires its own unique interests. Psychiatry, for example, in order to continue as a professional field, needs a steady supply of psychotics, neurotics, and others who feel the need for psychiatric care. Alcoholic treatment centers need alcoholics. Treatment agencies do not necessarily create the demand for the services they supply, but they are not especially interested in diminishing it, either.

The consequence, unrecognized or unintended, is a therapeutic philosophy in which emphasis is directed toward cure rather than any systematic attempt at prevention. An emphasis on curing the victim rather than trying to prevent the victimization in the first place leads to a general belief that if you get ill or addicted, someone will save you. The seriousness of addiction is tempered by the promise of a cure if things get too far out of hand.

Religious Institutions The role played by religion in Western drug use is complex, and we can sketch in only a few suggestions. They are intended more as a point of origin for further discussion than as conclusions. There is, throughout Western religious thought, constant reference to the ecstasy of the deeper forms of religious experience. This ecstasy is sought in various ways: It can be induced through

temple chanting, the overwhelming architecture of the great cathedrals, religious music ranging from gospel singing and Gregorian chants to Handel's *Messiah*, fasting, sexual repression, meditation, speaking in tongues, and other forms.

The ecstatic or Dionysian quest is characteristic of Western culture, and it permeates our institutions—religion is no exception. Although Western religions pursue ecstasy in the form of union with God, they also place severe restrictions on how this union can be consummated. In Merton's terms, the goal is well defined and institutionally sustained. At the same time, not all of the means that might possibly be used to attain the ecstatic state are legitimate. Western religion, in its more severe forms, bans the use of any kind of drug. The Mormons, for example, include coffee drinking as a violation of their tenets.

Merton argues that where the pressure to reach a socially defined goal is great, while at the same time the means for attaining the goal are less well defined or uncertain, the likely consequence is nonconformist or deviant activity. What makes the role played by religion in Western drug use so complex is that religion is embedded within other institutional systems, and these other systems tend to reinforce the quest for ecstasy while at the same time undermining the traditional, ritualistically defined means for achieving the goal. The consequence is a large number of people willing to experiment with the possibility of finding the godhead through the ingestion of an organic or inorganic chemical agent. Why go to church if a pill will do the job more sensationally?

During the 1960s, when more exotic and nontraditional drugs became a matter of common discussion, one of the rationales underlying their use was the argument that they offer people a "religious experience." Mescaline, "magic mushrooms," LSD, and other drugs were commonly described as agents capable of inducing a sense of the infinite; the perfect unity and harmony of the cosmos; a sense of divinity, love, peace, and serenity; and so forth. Drugs were talked about then, and are still talked about, as an avenue to "cosmic" revelations. It is one thing to say that drugs make people drunk, dizzy, confused, irrational, incoherent, disoriented, forgetful, stupid, and incomprehensible—and something else to say that they offer "cosmic" revelations.

Sociologists have long been aware of the fact that alcoholism rates have been lower in the Jewish community than in the Christian community. The prevailing interpretation of this finding is that alcohol is ritualistically incorporated into Jewish life and controlled much as other dietary matters are controlled. Christian practices do not include alcohol or other drugs in a controlled fashion—even the Eucharist is commonly celebrated in many Protestant churches by substituting unfermented grape juice for the wine that symbolizes the blood of Christal.

We live, then, within a social system whose central religious ideology provides a metaphysical motive for drug use while at the same

time relegating drugs to the underworld. The result is a culture in which individuals are bedeviled by the appeal of drugs as a source of ecstatic experience while at the same time having little instruction or guidance in how they are controlled.

Law Enforcement Institutions There is much talk by the media about getting tough with drug dealers, foreign countries that smuggle drugs into the United States, and drug users. One journalist has advocated that drug users be pilloried mercilessly before the public as living examples of what happens if people take drugs. The rhetoric is powerful, but it is expressed without much evident thought about the structural implications of such a policy.

Law enforcement is a delicate matter in a nation that subscribes to strong beliefs in freedom, liberty, individualism, and privacy. Where the law itself sustains such values, the police are placed in the odd position of having to sustain a way of life that is antithetical to police activity. That is to say, police work is much more efficient, simple, and effective when it does not have to worry about freedom, individualism, liberty, and privacy. At the same time, the American public is fearful of the police. We do not want the police to have too much power or authority. A truly effective police system has authoritarian overtones, and authoritarianism is anathema to the American spirit. So it is that the American police official is placed in a bind—a kind of "damned if you do and damned if you don't" situation. If the police are ineffectual, they are condemned. If they are unusually effectual, they are also likely to be condemned.

There is little doubt that the police could stop drug use in the United States in a relatively short period. However, in order to do so, they would have to be given powers they are not now permitted to exercise. To bring drug use to a halt through the employment of police powers would require a police system that could assure a low probability of success on the part of anyone who either attempted to distribute or use illegal drugs. This would require police surveillance of such intensity as to bring all members of the society under close and constant scrutiny. However, to accomplish this would mean ending the American dream in favor of a police state. If, on the other hand, we continue to support freedom and privacy as basic American values, then the police can make arrests and bring before public scrutiny an occasional miscreant, but the probability of being apprehended remains low enough to assure most individuals that they will not be caught.

It is not the severity of punishment that acts as a primary deterrent with respect to criminal action. It is the probability of being detected and apprehended that is the primary deterrent. In a nation in which individuals can become "lost" within the massive structures that make

up a modern city or the remote areas that make up the hinterlands, to increase the probability of any criminal action's being punished requires massive funding and support.

America, in a sense, has made a choice between two evils. It can opt for a powerful, certain, effective, and highly efficient police force, or a citizenry that is relatively free to indulge itself in popular criminal activities. We appear to have accepted the notion that, at the very least, petty crime is the price we pay for freedom. There is, however, considerable controversy over the choice, and it is one we try to renegotiate every few years.

The Class Structure   We now have a more complete awareness of what a structural and functional analysis means when it is brought to bear on a given social issue. We have considered economic, political, medical, religious, and law enforcement institutions as elements in the puzzle. Each in a way has qualities that, though not openly promoting drug use, at the same time are not antagonistic to it. As a complex of interacting systems, they appear to be quite congenial to the development of what can be called a drug culture.

We shall add one more element in an attempt to reveal the implications of a structural and functional analysis. Drugs are social in character; their use does not occur in a social vacuum. A nice example of this came to our attention during a stay in South America. Excellent native rums were available at absurdly low prices in the local markets. Nonetheless, Americans staying in the area preferred high-priced Scotch. Scotch is a status drug for Americans; rum is not. Scotch is traditional; rum is not.

Drugs reflect class interests and class traditions. Like other aspects of human communal life, drugs are used to sustain as well as to reflect class structures. In industrial England, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, gin was plentiful and extremely cheap. Its use as a numbing agent in industrial areas where life was brutish, painful, short, and almost worthless became scandalously prevalent, and "Gin Row" became a place where the human detritus of the cities drowned their despair in cheap drugs.

There is a "dynamic" in human social class structures that has a place for drugs in several ways. Drugs can be used as a distinctive privilege. They can also be employed as a diversionary device, distracting attention and energy from other activities, such as political organization and resistance.

The basic point from a structural and functional perspective, however, is that drugs can be functional within a social class context. Drugs can be used to control, distract, and pacify groups that might otherwise organize in terms of class interests. We are all familiar with the Marxist argument that religion is the opiate of the masses, though large numbers

might disagree. It is more difficult to argue against the claim that opiates are the opiate of the masses.

A Concluding Comment The structural and functional approach has been applied to the issue of drug use in America in an effort to exemplify how a particular strategy in social thought can be used and the general conclusions it suggests. Even though we have considered only several structures in current social systems, it quickly becomes evident that any attempt to deal with social problems is also an attempt to deal with the society as a whole. If we remove a particular feature from the system, the removal has consequences for the entire society. Merton states it this way:

> It is argued that the interdependence of social structure makes for ramified unforeseen consequences. Thus, precisely because a particular action is not carried out in a psychological or social vacuum, its effects will ramify into other spheres of value and interest. It is the composites of aggregated and socially patterned actions that generate various kinds of unanticipated consequences for individuals, groups, society, culture and civilizations.[17]

We must ask this question, then: If it were possible to remove the drug culture from American society, what might take its place? What would happen? Would American society be radically transformed? Would it be better? Would it be worse? A structural and functional analysis gives us a framework in which to examine these questions as well as to contemplate what unanticipated consequences might arise.

Engaging in Critical Social Thought

1. Merton has brought us a more mechanistic view of society with various elements that form a "structure." Each of the persisting elements has functions and dysfunctions and works to sustain the entire structure. Whether we agree or not with this simile, it can be used to orient us toward a variety of problems. In modern times, sports have become an entrenched element within the society. Merton leads us to consider the manifest and latent functions of such activity, as well as aspects of dysfunctions and unanticipated consequences. How do sports fit into modern societies? At the manifest level, sports appear to function as models of enterprise and equality of opportunity. At the latent level, sports may function to sustain inequality. What dysfunctions or unanticipated, unintended consequences might sports, both amateur and professional, produce in American society?

2. Merton was interested in the extent to which discrepancies between institutionalized goals and institutionalized means for achieving these goals can produce deviant conduct. What are some of the "goals" that

this society promotes? How does this influence (socialize) young people in America to obtain these goals?

3. When we begin talking about the structural and functional features of a society, we have moved away from psychological explanations of human actions. Presuming, for the moment, that a psychological explanation has been more popular among Americans, why might this be so? How do you think a structural and functional analyst would respond to an extensive psychological analysis of people's problems?

4. Toward what ends do we expect people of high intelligence to dedicate themselves to the betterment of our society and why? How do we define intelligence or the several intelligences? Are we coming to definitions of varying types of intelligence that permit us to think of eventually computerizing such qualities? How will this affect our society in the twenty-first century?

5. Find and describe more examples of the dysfunctional process that you are familiar with or that have occurred in your life. How did these occurrences affect you or the others involved? Were these examples of dysfunctions interrelated with unanticipated consequences or self-defeating prophecies?

6. Do you know any nonconformers? How would you describe their behavior? How do nonconformers differ from individuals who have aberrant social behaviors? Does this view of human behaviors affect our interpretations of deviance in American society?

7. In this chapter we demonstrated how Merton provided us with a subtle but important example of unanticipated, unintended consequences related to the origins of scientific thought in the Western world. Read about and discuss Merton's thesis on Puritanism and the rise of modern science. What implications does it have for science and technology in the twenty-first century?

8. Choose another social issue or social problem, such as the controversies around school integration and the busing of students to achieve equal opportunity in education touched upon in this chapter. Draw upon your own experiences and those of others you have known in relation to the issue. Delineate the manifest and latent functions, the dysfunctions, the unanticipated consequences surrounding the problems or issue. Have there also been self-defeating or self-fulfilling prophecies complicating the situation? Share your ideas with other students and obtain their reactions.

Endnotes

1. The following selected listing of Robert K. Merton's works will provide an indication of the extent and variety of his contributions to sociological thought:

Contemporary Social Problems: An Introduction to the Sociology of Deviant Behavior and Social Disorganization, 4th ed., Merton and R. A. Nisbet, editors (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1976); *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "the American Soldier,"* Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, editors (New York: Free Press, 1950); *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* with Marjorie Fiske and Patricia L. Kendall (New York: Free Press, 1956); *Mass Persuasion: The Social Psychology of a War Bond Drive* with Marjorie Fiske and Alberta Curtis (New York: Harper Bros., 1946); *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York: Free Press, 1985; 1993); *Reader in Bureaucracy,* Merton and others, editors (New York: Free Press, 1952); *Social Theory and Social Structure,* enlarged ed. (New York: Free Press, 1968); *The Student-Physician: Introductory Studies in the Sociology of Medical Education,* Merton, George G. Reader, and Patricia Kendall, editors (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); *Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects,* Merton, L. Broom, and L. S. Cottrell, Jr., editors (New York: Basic Books, 1959); *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1976); *Social Science Quotations,* vol. 19 of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* Merton and David L. Sills, editors (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1990); *The Sociology of Science: An Episodic Memoir* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979).

2. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure,* p. 24.
3. Ibid., pp. 64–65. Italics Merton's.
4. It is worth noting that the idea of dysfunction has grown in importance over the decades, since Merton first delineated this concept, to become as familiar a sociological term as *manifest and latent functions.*
5. John Fischer mentions this interesting theory in his article "Christmas List," *Harper's Magazine,* December 1967, pp. 16 and 18.
6. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure,* p. 68.
7. Ibid., pp. 75–76.
8. Ibid., p. 76.
9. Merton, "Opportunity Structure: The Emergence, Diffusion and Differentiation of a Sociological Concept, 1930–1950," unpublished paper.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. Italics Merton's.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. (Merton cites Dean Stimson as the source of his data.)
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences and Kindred Sociological Ideas: A Personal Gloss," in *L'Opera di Robert K. Merton e la sociologia contemporanea,* C. Mongardini and S. Tabboni, editors (Genoa: Acig, 1989), pp. 307–329; and in "STS: Foreshadowings of an Evolving Research Program in the Sociology of Science," in *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science: The Merton Thesis,* I. Bernard Cohen, editor (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 362.
17. Ibid., p. 308.

Social Thought on the World Wide Web: Robert K. Merton

Our perusal of the Web found no sites providing information on Robert K. Merton beyond what has been offered in this chapter.