

## A Formalization of Functionalism

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E. Nagel, "A Formalization of Functionalism", *Logic Without Metaphysics*, Free Press, 1956, pp. 247-83.

For some years now outstanding students in the social sciences have been urging and debating the use of so-called "functional analysis" in their disciplines. In the opening chapter of his book, Professor Merton (1949) has surveyed sympathetically but critically much of the literature of functionalism, noted some of the ambiguities and other unclaritys in the formulations of its nature and objectives, and offered what he calls a tentative "paradigm of the concepts and objectives of functional analysis with the aim of supplying a heuristically more adequate codification of this approach in sociology. There would be little profit in going over the literature that he has canvassed in such masterly fashion. However, functionalism in the social sciences has admittedly been inspired, and continues to be influenced, by the supposed character of functional analyses in physiology. Merton acknowledges this inspiration and influence; but his paradigm nevertheless does not make explicit how its various parts are related to elements in the functional approach in biology. It is the aim of the present essay to examine Merton's paradigm in the light of a schema of distinctions derived from an analysis of functional explanations in biological science. This examination is undertaken with one primary objective in mind: to exhibit the several items in Merton's codification as intimately related features in a coherent pattern of analysis, and thereby to make more evident than he has done the indispensable requirements which an adequate functional account in sociology must seek to satisfy.