It is Durkheim who clearly established the logic of the functional approach to the study of social phenomena, although functional explanations, it will be recalled, play a major part in Spencer's approach, and the lineaments of functional reasoning were already discernible in the work of Comte. In particular, Durkheim set down a clear distinction between historical and functional types of inquiry and between functional consequences and individual motivations.

When . . . . the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills. We use the word "function," in preference to "end" or "purpose," precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful results they produce. We must determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists, without occupying ourselves with whether it has been intentional or not.25

"The determination of function is . . . necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomena. . . . To explain a social fact it is not enough to show the cause on which it depends; we must also, at least in most cases, show its function in the establishment of social order."26

Durkheim separated functional analysis from two other analytical procedures, the quest for historical origins and causes and the probing of individual purposes and motives. The second seemed to him of only peripheral importance for sociological inquiry since men often engage in actions when they are unable to anticipate the consequences. The quest for origins and historical causes, however, was to Durkheim as essential and legitimate a part of the sociological enterprise as was the analysis of functions. In fact, he was convinced that the full explanation of sociological phenomena would necessarily utilize both historical and functional analysis. The latter would reveal how a particular item under consideration had certain consequences for the operation of the overall system or its component parts. The former would enable the analyst to show why this particular item, rather than some others, was historically available to subserve a particular function. Social investigators must combine the search for efficient causes and the determination of the functions of a phenomenon.

The concept of function played a key part in all of Durkheim's work from The Division of Labor, in which he sees his prime objective in the determination of "the functions of division of labor, that is to say, what social needs it satisfies," to The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, which is devoted to a demonstration of the various functions performed in society through religious cults, rites, and beliefs. An additional illustration of Durkheim's functional approach is his discussion of criminality.

In his discussion of deviance and criminality, Durkheim departed fundamentally from the conventional path. While most criminologists treated crime as a pathological phenomenon and sought psychological causes in the mind of the criminal, Durkheim saw crime as normal in terms of its occurrence, and even as having positive social functions in terms of its consequences. Crime was normal in that no society could enforce total
conformity to its injunctions, and if society could, it would be so repressive as to leave no leeway for the social contributions of individuals. Deviance from the norms of society is necessary if society is to remain flexible and open to change and new adaptations. "Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take. How many times, indeed, it is only an anticipation of future morality--a step toward what will be."\(^{27}\) But in addition to such direct consequences of crime, Durkheim identified indirect functions that are no less important. A criminal act, Durkheim reasoned, elicits negative sanctions in the community by arousing collective sentiments against the infringement of the norm. Hence it has the unanticipated consequence of strengthening normative consensus in the common weal. "Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them."\(^{28}\)

Whether he investigated religious phenomena or criminal acts, whether he desired to clarify the social impact of the division of labor or of changes in the authority structure of the family, Durkheim always shows himself a masterful functional analyst. He is not content merely to trace the historical origins of phenomena under investigation, although he tries to do this also, but he moves from the search for efficient causes to inquiries into the consequences of phenomena for the structures in which they are variously imbedded. Durkheim always thinks contextually rather than atomistically. As such he must be recognized as the direct ancestor of that type of functional analysis which came to dominate British anthropology under the impact of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski and which led, somewhat later, to American functionalism in sociology under Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton.

The sections that follow will provide more information on Durkheim the man, and on his activities as an applied scientist and engaged reformer. This section was limited to his theoretical work, but it could not possibly do justice to all the facets of the work of so complicated a social theorist as Emile Durkheim. Space did not permit a discussion of Durkheim's contributions to the sociology of education, although they are considerable; nor could justice be done to Durkheim's fascinating if highly speculative work on the importance of professional associations as intermediary links between individuals and the all-encompassing, and possibly suffocating, powers of the state. Even his important contributions to the sociology of law could be alluded to only in passing.

As a social theorist, Durkheim, to quote him directly, had as his "principal objective . . . to extend scientific rationalism to human behavior."\(^{29}\) And although he may have failed in many particulars, the fact that his work has become part of the foundation for all modern sociology testifies to his overall success.

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ENDNOTES

25. Rules, p. 95.
26. Ibid., p. 97.
27. Ibid., p. 71.
29. Suicide, p. xxxix.
Functionalism (http://www.webref.org/sociology/f/functionalism.htm)

An approach or orientation of studying social and cultural phenomena. It holds that society is essentially a set of interrelated parts, e.g., institutions, beliefs, values, customs, norms, etc., and that each of these parts has a particular purpose, i.e., that each of these parts functions in a particular way. It is held that no part, its existence, or operation, can be understood in isolation from the whole. Society is seen, from this position, as analogous to the human body or any other living organism. Each of the "parts" of society are seen as operating much like organs of the body. As in the body, it is held that if one part of society changes it affects the other parts and how they operate or function, and it also affects how the total system performs as it may also affect the continued existence of the total society (organism).

Functionalism's critics have pointed to its tenuous assumption of the necessary integration of all of the social systems parts. Critical and radical sociology thus see functionalism as essentially conservative in nature, both intellectually and politically.