

I VO MOŽNÝ

THE CATCH IN THE FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE FAMILY

Motto:

Those who do not steal rob their families

A folk dictum

What I am arguing . . . is that analytical distinctions which do not take account of commonsense interpretations of social reality (but instead use simply what is accepted as commonsense in sociology) are generally misleading.

David Silverman (1972)

1.

The family is one of the few institutions in Czechoslovakia that cannot complain of a lack of functional analyses. The country's sociological production of the past few decades is very poor in examples of the use of functional analysis in the study of e. g. the automation process, the enterprise body, youth, social homogenisation, value orientation, or way of life — to mention at least some of the most prominent topics of the past years. Explaining the causes of this situation would distract me from the problem under consideration and therefore. I will confine myself to stating that unlike other spheres of social life, the study of the family was marked by the clear advantage of the functionalist approach for a number of years; in my opinion, it was almost idiosyncratically enforced as the only legitimate approach to the study of the family within Marxist sociology.¹

¹ Functionalism, especially structural functionalism, was explicitly dismissed and its concepts proclaimed ataboo. The consequences were partly comical (I myself was advised to avoid the word „role“ when analyzing the family, because it was a term from the structural functionalism vocabulary, and to use the marxist term „function“ instead). A more serious consequence was the fact that the functional analysis that gave up a holistic approach to society as a hierarchically ordered structure of roles and institutions.

The reasons for Marxist sociology's inclination to the functional analysis were of two kinds: pragmatic and ideological. From the pragmatic point of view, the functional approach offered a most convenient way of organizing even fairly heterogeneous data such as information on birth, marriage, abortion and divorce rates collected by demographers, on sexual behaviour collected by sexologists, the results of time utilization analyses, the intergeneration studies of educational and professional mobility, traditional speculations concerning promiscuity and monogamy and changes in the size and internal structure of the family, normative views of pedagogues of the relations between two different generations and the functional cooperation of parents and school in the process of education, feminist demands for liberation and a socioeconomic analysis of the employment rate for women, the theory of social formations and the constitution of a person's class consciousness in the process of his socialization within the family. All that, and much more; all the heterogeneous and confused topics of social matrimoniology and official Marxism were easily assorted and organized by the functional approach.

There is another pragmatic cause of the family theory's preference for functionalist analysis. The sociology of the family has the disputable luck of attracting the interest of the layman. Everybody can see what is wrong with the family. And the functional analysis has similar "luck": everybody knows that 'function' means "what a thing is good for". The most important Czech sociological studies of the family written in the past few decades served as a source of information and means of influencing educated laymen rather than as a basis for elaborating the theory and extending the horizons of cognition. This fact is also corroborated by the type of publishing houses and editions that have produced these studies (e.g. Socialistická akademie [The Socialist Academy], Mladá fronta [Young Front], Práce [Labour]. The studies promoted and supported what was called "the socialist conception of the family". The functional approach was easy to understand and therefore very well suited for popularization: an explanation of an object limited to demonstrating its purpose satisfied the layman's intuitive teleological perception of the universe.

This simplified version of the functional analysis was most popular not only for practical but also ideological reasons. Most sociological family studies of the last few decades made explicit or implicit efforts to reach the noble goal of arguing against the ideology of the enemy. It should be particularly noted that Marxist sociological polemics contained two levels of abstraction. They tackled the residua of capitalism in the widest sense, residua that the family reproduced by socialization. At the same time they tackled "family ideology" in the narrow sense, i. e. familiarism, a world view in which the family is the axis and the centre of the life of both the individual and the society and where the wealth of the family is the natural goal of all people. The familiarist view was long considered

highly dangerous for a socialist society; Marxist sociology, analyzing familiarism as a "petty-bourgeois mentality" and a typical bourgeois approach to life, felt professional responsibility for its suppression.

Under these circumstances functional analysis was applied in the ideological struggle as the most convenient polemical strategy. Through functional analysis sociology was able to show that the family does not exist "for its own sake", that it always serves the society as an irreplaceable social instrument. The family produces labour forces for the future, promotes the socialization of children to dominant social values, helps the individual to overcome a life crisis, takes care of the old and handicapped members, provides for the redistribution and eventually also production of economic values. The original revolutionary radicalism slackened with the development of "real socialism" and the claim that most of the family functions should be taken over by the state as soon as possible receded: since the early seventies there has been no dispute over the irreplaceability of the family under socialism in discharging certain social tasks. The achievement of this state of affairs, however, was part of a complicated development, which will be dealt with later on.

2.

Although the Marxist functional approach applied in the sociology of the family served, above all, the extra-scientific needs of a particular time, it kept all the advantages and disadvantages of functionalism. It could not claim to be immune to the well-known criticism of functionalism; the word 'Marxist', of course, could not protect it from its power in a sociological context.

Let us now have a look at the main objections raised to functionalism and see to what extent they apply to the examined case. We can hold on to Cohen's logical conception (1968: 47—66). Cohen distinguishes three categories of criticism: logical, substantive and ideological: "The main logical arguments against functionalism are that it encourages teleological explanation, that it suggests hypotheses which are untestable, that it demands a level of scientific inquiry which does not exist in sociology and, finally, that it inhibits comparison. . . . The chief substantive criticism of functionalism are these: it overemphasizes the normative element in social life; it minimizes the importance of social conflict at the expense of social solidarity; it stresses the harmonious nature of social systems; and, finally it fails to account for social change and even treats this as abnormal". Ideological criticism argues that "functionalism encourages or reflects a conservative bias".

Examining functionalism from the viewpoint of the ways of protecting it from the above criticism, we reveal many varieties of functionalism,

the criticism in some cases being justified and in others completely void. An example of an unaccountable objection is the criticism of teleological explanation and normative deviation addressed to that branch of sociological functionalism which developed from Malinowsky's work. Malinowsky's functionalism is based on needs, in the first instance biological needs. Social needs, in his view, are coordinational and communicative needs arising from the necessity of people to associate and cooperate in satisfying their primary needs.

Czech Marxist functionalism, however, does not draw on this source. It is based rather on a sort of autonomy of social needs. The needs are established by norms based on social consensus, as it is in Parsons' conception.² In Parsons' view the state or the society expects and requires "rightfully" that the family will ensure certain things even though they may be in contradiction to the most important needs of the family and its members and even if they cannot be derived from these needs in any logical way. These needs were usually accounted for by social aims and "generally shared values", which needed no further defence.

In addition, these social needs lacked empirical evidence, which is another logical weakness of functionalism: functionalist hypotheses defy empirical testing. If, for instance, "the society" raises claim to a higher birth rate, the task of the family is to give birth to and educate an appropriate number of children. This claim will not be explained as an expression of the natural needs of the family (which suffers from the shortage of flats and other problems), nor as part of the need for higher order derived from the family's needs — e. g. part of the need for improving the perspective of the jeopardized kinship network of social services and care for old and disabled people but simply as a need to carry out the state population policy, whose aim is to maintain and raise the number of inhabitants. This aim will not be explained further, although there is an explanation. The explanation, however, is outside the scope of this teleological approach. (The explanation could be e. g. the army's need for a particular number of recruits, or the inertia of the economy, which needs more labour forces to keep its extensive rise, or the power of the social

² Let us rely once again on the exciting approach of Parsons: „According to Parsons, values and norms must be understood analytically as independent of any special group or role. We said they were a condition for a stable interaction. Roles and groups are „particularistic“ in a given system, they are roles of particular individuals and groups with particular participation in the roles. But in the given framework, values and norms are „universalistic“, they are not specific either to situations or to functions (as opposed to aims), and they are independent of the inner differentiation of the system. Roles are controlled by normative necessities of the groups. The behaviour of a group as a subsystem of broader systems is controlled by institutionalized norms specifying the way of behaviour of any type of group according to its position in the system. And the norms are legitimized — and thus in the normative sense controlled by the values institutionalized in the society. (Kolífáč, Tlustý, 1968).

groups that are interested in carrying out the above claim). The social need thus cannot be tested empirically and can be substituted for by some other demand if needed. (In the case we have discussed it could be e. g. a denatalist policy as the aim and social value declared at the moment when those who formulate 'social needs' start preferring less pressure upon schools, flats and job opportunities. We witnessed the former variety of the functional explanation in the middle of the nineteen seventies, the latter is forthcoming now. Similarly, the teleological explanation of the social need for the general and full employment of women and the collective education of children has changed.)

The last instance of teleological explanation is the 'socialist way of life' and the goals at lower levels deduced from this explanation, i. e. the parameters of its value orientation, such as collectivism, egalitarianism, optimism, security, a universal conception of social security, state paternalism, etc. From these values, further operationalized partial goals have been deduced, which, however, changed under the changing circumstances and turned into their opposites. Examples? the plan to provide each family with a flat built by the state * encouraging families to build private houses by themselves, leading eventually to the prevalence of private over state-owned flats; the appreciation of the worker's wages being as high as an engineer's salary * the small income differences causing negative equalization; the goal to provide collective nursery education for all children from the lowest age * the achievement of a long maternity leave; the encouragement of collective trade-union holidaymaking * the rush for private weekend houses. All these have been functional at one time or another in the development of the socialist way of life. Operational changes, however, have shaken the initial values by means of feedback. The original unequivocal enthusiasm for collectivism and egalitarianism and the feeling of security and optimism have subsided but the inertia of the functional explanation remains there.

Our problem, of course, is not the existence of the change of social aims as teleological explanations. Reflecting the change alone would disprove the criticism of functionalism's incapability to explain social change. The problem is that there is no such reflexion in the studies of Czech family sociology of the last decades. Regrettably, all the studies conceive the family functions as universal and, in a socialist society, ahistorical.

This ahistoricity results from the consensual basis of the Czech functionalist conception: how could sociologists analyze movement if, from the chosen angle, they could not see the conflict, which is the driving force of social development, so familiar to every Marxist. All the functions and the derived needs were presented as universal needs of the entire society. The four basic functions of the family (or three, or ten, if we divide them into subfunctions like Tyszka, the number is of no importance) are considered the primary common denominator of the uniform basis of the life of all families in every society and the society's uniform de-

mands on the families: the reproduction of the population, socialization of the population to dominant values, the economic and caring functions . . . The economic and caring functions have been the cause of much argument but nobody has ever tried to see how differently this function is carried out in different social groups, how the society treats the collision of different socioeconomic interests of different groups. It is only natural that there are differences also in the values to which different groups socialize their children, etc.

No attention has been paid to partial interests and values specific to particular groups, both being the source of differences and conflicts between individual social groups and different types of families. All the family studies of the past twenty years deal with the 'socialist family'. Besides a few attempts there are no monographs in Czech sociological production analyzing a specific social group of families and their specific problems, needs and interests, not to mention studies of the conflict between families from the bottom and the top of the society. Let me quote again the textbook criticism of the factual faults of functionalism: 'The functionalist analysis overemphasizes the normative element in social life, minimizes the importance of social conflict at the expense of social solidarity, stresses the harmonious nature of social systems, and fails to account for social change.' It exceeds the scope of the abilities of the functionalist analysis, based on teleological apriorism, to explain why the 'residuum' of familism in this country has grown stronger although it should have receded as we would rightfully expect a residuum to behave.

It rests with the reader to decide to what extent this inability is also the result of an ideological conservative bias.

3.

In a different context,³ Ferdinand Mount (1982) pointed out that all ideologies are inherently hostile toward the family, they try to reinterpret the family and use it for their own purposes, which the family has always resisted. The family has always followed its own aims straightforwardly, aims that are essentially unchangeable. The hostility is particularly distinct immediately after a revolution, after the change of the leading ideology. Revolutions cannot avoid open or concealed hostility toward the family, because it is the main rival loyalty of all movements. The family drains strength even from the most loyal adherents of the move-

³ Mount argues here against a powerful surge of historical family sociology from the beginning of the 1970s (Aries, Stone, Mittenauer . . .). It is not within the limits of our interest to investigate to what degree he is right especially in his claim about the invariability of the family.

ment and diverts their attention from the revolutionary struggle even in the most critical and decisive moments.

The postrevolutionary enthusiasm in this country, too, was unfavourable to the family and its private world. The man in the crowd was addressed as an individual and the conception of collectivity had rather a political orientation. (It supported the movement collectivity structured mainly according to age or sector: the Socialist Youth Movement collective, the working collective, the collective of the trade-union holiday-makers, etc.) This approach was promoted by propagandistic writings and works of art celebrating the idea of socialism in the post-revolutionary period. A brilliant sociological document is above all that of films produced in the early fifties.

What the Marxist revolution introduced, however, was not just a new rhetoric. The new regime saw the decisive lever of change in the economy and therefore, being well aware of what it was doing, expropriated the family: it deprived the family of the basis of economic subjectivity and sovereignty by proclaiming the family enterprise illegal. In some cases this was done even at the expense of the economic rationality (cf. repair services) but it had to be done because the revolution required it. In order to strengthen its power the revolution had to split up the old structure of family networks and to become the leader of the population, successfully homogenized by the uniform status of an employee.

The first stage of the family's adaptation to the new situation was assimilation. The family adopted the reality of the new socialist state and had to conform to it, unless the individual family members had already fully identified themselves with the aims of the movement. In turn for the strict limitation of the family property accumulation, the new arrangement of the society offered, or promised, considerable advantages: women could achieve liberation from never-ending household chores and acquire a new dignity based on economic independence in paid employment; in addition, they were promised the "liberated household" within the forthcoming system of socialist services; the tradesmen and small-scale private producers as heads of families were offered a safe permanent job and a relief from the pressure of the competition; the peasants achieved regular working hours and eventually also free Saturdays; many workers were recruited into the expanding bureaucracy and offered less dirty work; young people were pleased to be safely appointed to comfortable jobs and appreciated the perspective of getting a flat on a just rationing scheme (without having to invest money or worry about anything) and the introduction of cheap workers' canteens and almost free-of-charge nurseries and nursery schools; in exchange for religious belief in justice and wealth in heaven, people were offered justice there and then and were assured that the country would outrun capitalism by the the end of the sixties and that 'the young generation would live to see communism'.

Of course, not all people believed absolutely, not all people were attracted by the new values. The psychology of offered advantages met above all the demands of young people who had a natural sense of collectivism, egalitarianism and optimism. The conception of the family as an instrument of higher collectivity was not unacceptable for a young family: it provided the illusion of extended youth. Young families founded in the fifties adopted the new ideology quite easily, even if they did not belong to the whole-hearted adherents. In keeping with Mount we can say that the new ideology reinterpreted the family and persuaded above all young people to support its aims, or forced them at least to adopt the aims as the best pragmatic solution.

The victory was firmly supported by economic reality and power policy. Ideologically, however, it was very frail. It is not difficult, after all, to make the family give up its previous egoism; it is more difficult, however, to make it believe for ever that it was a good thing. This was the task of the system of political education, mass media, school and science. Like the functionalist family theory, the entire public rhetoric tried to persuade everybody that the family had numerous irreplaceable social functions whose fulfilment should be considered a 'task' and that people who did not follow this task were egoistic parasites doing harm to society. The instrumental family conception was even more distinct in agitation and propaganda than in sociological theory.

Science, however, has no monopoly of social theory. All laymen have their own social theory. All people can understand their destiny and social position, or the function of the individual institutions, and can guess what interests are hidden behind the obstacles that impede their needs and interests. All people try to take in not only the social world around but also the meaning of the official explanations of this world they are offered. They try to find out who is giving the explanation and why it should be this and not some other explanation. People differ in their attentiveness to these phenomena. Czech people seem to display a high degree of circumspection and vigilance, they are quite a distrustful population.

No wonder that this population detected the catch in the instrumental family conception quite easily. While scientific theories and mass media spoke about the functions of the family in the socialist state, the families asked more and more frequently: And what does the family gain from the state?

The families were dissatisfied mainly because many of the attractive promises were not carried out. There is no need to enumerate them. Even basic research theoreticians know about the shortage of flats and household services, the failure of medical care and education, and other family demands that had traditionally been ensured by the state. Not only does a country teacher have to build a house with his own hands, he also

has to lay a drainpipe and connect it to the public sewerage system, or in some cases he and his neighbours have to build the whole sewerage system themselves if they want to have it. Families not only have to reconcile themselves to their children learning in overcrowded classrooms, sometimes even on shifts, they also discover with astonishment that the state is not able to provide school education without the help to the parents; untalented children whose parents cannot explain to them at home what the teacher does not manage in the packed classroom have bad luck. And higher education is selective, much too selective, indeed.

The families, however, did not complain. There was no one they could complain to, anyway. They began to defend their interests by themselves, as always before in history. After a short period of initial fumbling and chaos, families revitalized the traditional kinship networks and developed a non-pecuniary exchange of goods and services and reached an unprecedented degree of self-sufficiency. The gains derived from this second economy started to determine the status and prospects of the family.

The basic problem that families had to solve was their strangled economic independence. The family enterprise being illegal, there were strict limitations of family enterprise activities in the widest sense, not to mention the limitations of economic expansion. Families could accumulate the surplus achieved by reasonable application of the family sources or a suitable strategy of ensuring advantageous positions and status rise for the individual family members. They could not, however, use the surplus as investment.

It was discovered later that this obstacle could be overcome as well. You could not buy a prosperous petrol station but you could win the post of the station manager for your nephew through a reasonable investment. (An independent observer would call it a bribe.) Similarly, you could take over a service station, a butcher's shop, a pub in the square, or acquire posts that are only too dangerous to mention. The whole official network of trade and services can be looked upon as an economic base of an autonomous family business. This network provides for the state's profit and loss and produces family profit in addition. The family profit consists in the advantage of gaining a reciprocal service, a better position in a waiting list, or some shortage goods . . . These are non-pecuniary profits. There are also pecuniary profits — from overpriced goods, cheating, pilferage, bribery . . . This is an ideal arrangement, in a way. It has made a lot of families quite happy. Not only the enterprising families but also those families that buy and sell the others' enterprising spirit, i. e. those who give protection, who accredit persons nominated for various posts . . . The families get a net profit while the costs and losses are carried by the state, which grows poorer. In such an arrangement, the state pays for the heating, electricity and the rent. The families do business, and grow richer.

This process resulted in the redefinition of ownership within the lay-

man's reflexion of the life-world. The manager of the Economic Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, academician Abalkin writes that objects of socialist ownership at first sight seem to be the common property of all people, and at second sight the property of no one. From the economic viewpoint, however, the things are owned by those who have the power to dispose with them. This power establishes the relation of ownership, though illegitimate and uncontrollable (Abalkin, 1989). And power can even become a commodity. In any case, it is a social reality and a much more reliable basis than social rhetoric, which gives things wrong names.

The family reinterpreted socialist ownership and the relation between private and state ownership very quickly, much quicker than the academy of sciences.⁴ The family thanked for and turned down the post-revolutionary reinterpretations of the state and the family functions, if it had adopted them at all, and started building its system of explanations of social reality on different principles. If we dare to look for parallels between the layman's interpretation of social reality and theoretical explanation, we can say that the functionalist analysis had receded and was substituted for by another school of interpretation. Paradoxically, this new school of layman's interpretation, against which our official sociology has argued so intensively in the past decades (accusing it for the deadly sin of being pettybourgeois and declaring it a residuum of bourgeois mentality) is in its basis an explicative principle very close to classical Marxism.

The basic interpretative category is not that of a function but that of an interest: a supra-individual, collective interest. There are two other similarities that point to the homology of the structures of the intellectual Marxist world and the laymen's reinterpretation of the actual world of our social reality (bearing in mind all the principal differences I am not sure to which side I should address my apology): it is the perspective of interest conflicts as the principal motivating forces in social life and the criterion of practice as the last instance of justification of a theory.

The average Czech family has relatively quickly recognized the fact that those who have not assumed the official reinterpretation of the family and have not given up familiarism are socially much more successful than the families who with all their sincerity have adopted the instrumental interpretation of the family with regard to the social reality of a higher order. A family oriented towards the familiaristic theoretical interpretation is quite successful in coping with their interests, even under very difficult external conditions. With a certain simplification we may

⁴ It is necessary to note here that not everybody slept on their laurels. In this country it was Roško who as early as in the beginning of the 1980s pointed out the theoretical relevance of the existence of „home working circle“. Compare (Roško, 1993); (Radličová, 1988).

even say that if the state was at the beginning successful in the reinterpretation of the family in the strangulation of its economical and power sources and thus in the attempt to create a collectivity of a new order the situation has changed rapidly. The result was not so easily recognizable but nowadays even the blind can see it: the family has colonized the state successfully.

A common Czech family deliberately orientates the activity of all its members towards asserting and defending family interests. It knows that these interests are realized in an battle field of conflicting interests of other families. It knows that a nuclear family as an isolated whole is disadvantaged and survives only with difficulties if it does not join its forces with other nuclear families, most suitably in a kinship network constituting a modern analogy of the traditional family.⁵ It also knows that individual family clans must form coalitions of a higher order among them and something which in a theoretical discourse would probably be called a "class instinct" orientates them in acknowledging interests of which families are antagonistic to their own interests.

Familiarism has become a very influential philosophy of our actual life-world and thus also a very significant social force. In the end it has reinterpreted even the state — including the interpretation of the functions in the state apparatus as family sources. It juxtaposes loyalty towards the family to a sharp contraposition against the loyalty towards higher units even when concerning the traditional moral norms, the entire disloyalty is in the interests of the family: Those who do not steal rob their families.

Of course not all families are equally successful in this world of reflected social conflict and sharp competition between family clans. Another catch that a simple mind has discovered under the functional interpretation of the family might be formulated as follows: "and who is the state?"

The reason that this question is placed in the second position is not due to the fact that it is considered to be secondary. On the contrary: from the view of understanding the perspective of the actual life-world it is a matter of paramount importance. By this question the layman defines a problem of why he is offered this very instrumentally functional explanation of the family and why his theory of conflicting family interests remains inarticulated by the social rhetorics. The social scene in fact is not for a "nontheoretician" as little transparent as for the theoretician. Many a theoretician is himself a graver victim of mystifications he produces than those for whom they are meant. If a man in a life-world examines who are those who offer the instrumental family interpretation and how they behave he answers this question consequently within the

⁵ More about the existence and typology of family networks see (Možný, 1982).

framework of a familiaristic conception of the society: they are only other families.

In a smaller community where people have known each other since their early school years and the local "aristocracy" is socially in touch, the networks of relatives between the local centers of government, economic life and political power cannot remain unseen. If anyone speaks about the "needs of the society" that are superior to petty-bourgeois selfishness of families and at the same time he happens to be one of these blood-related networks then the folk theory has no problem of interpreting his motives.

4.

This text was not meant to add anything to the functional analysis of the family and it has succeeded in doing so. I have tried to reconstruct a very influential interpretation of the family that competes with the functional approach to family analysis. In this theory the family is the ultimate end, the final value orienting human behaviour that needs no further explanation. The fact that this theory has not been so far articulated in our theoretical discourse does not allow a direct confrontation of these two competing explanations but none of them is discredited by it.

My paper rather than trying to evaluate these two conceptions has attempted to explain them from their social roots and time context. But I think that due to the aspirations of marxist functional analysis to a scientific status this approach will have to reflect itself critically also in view of the alternative explanations (no matter how extrascientific they might be) and cope with the criticism existing implicitly in these two competing explanations. Of course sociological reasoning must not trust to common sense blindly. It should not believe it at all. But to be able to remain a reasoning it has to pay attention to it closely, very closely.

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ČERTOVO KOPÝTKO FUNKČNÍ ANALÝZY RODINY

V české sociologii rodiny sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let zcela dominoval funkcionální přístup. Mělo to své důvody praktické, umožňovalo to přehledné třídění nestejnorodého materiálu a inkonsistentních matrimologických teorií podle funkcí rodiny. Mělo to však především důvody ideologické: sociologie se tím podílela na propagandistickém tažení, které kladlo důraz na instrumentalitu rodinného celku vzhledem ke společenským celkům vyššího řádu, zejména vzhledem k údajným „potřebám společnosti“ a „společenským hodnotám“. V odborném kontextu zařazuje stať tento funkcionalismus k teleologicky orientovanému myšlení pokleslé Parsonsovy školy. Odkrývá historický vývoj a postupnou ztrátu autenticity instrumentálního pojetí rodiny a sleduje vývoj reakce laického vědomí na tímto pojetím předkládanou interpretaci rodiny. Ukazuje na zdroje spontánní formulace českého familiarismu a způsoby, jimiž se vyrovnával s ideologickým tlakem, jenž nakonec správně identifikoval jako pláštík pro cíle určité skupiny rodin z vládnoucí vrstvy, která jím kryje své vlastní zájmy: spontánní filozofie žitého světa se nakonec podobala více klasickému marxismu nežli oficiální výklad, jenž se sám označoval za marxistickou sociologii.

