

# SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM & SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCTIONISM

WINTER TERM 2023



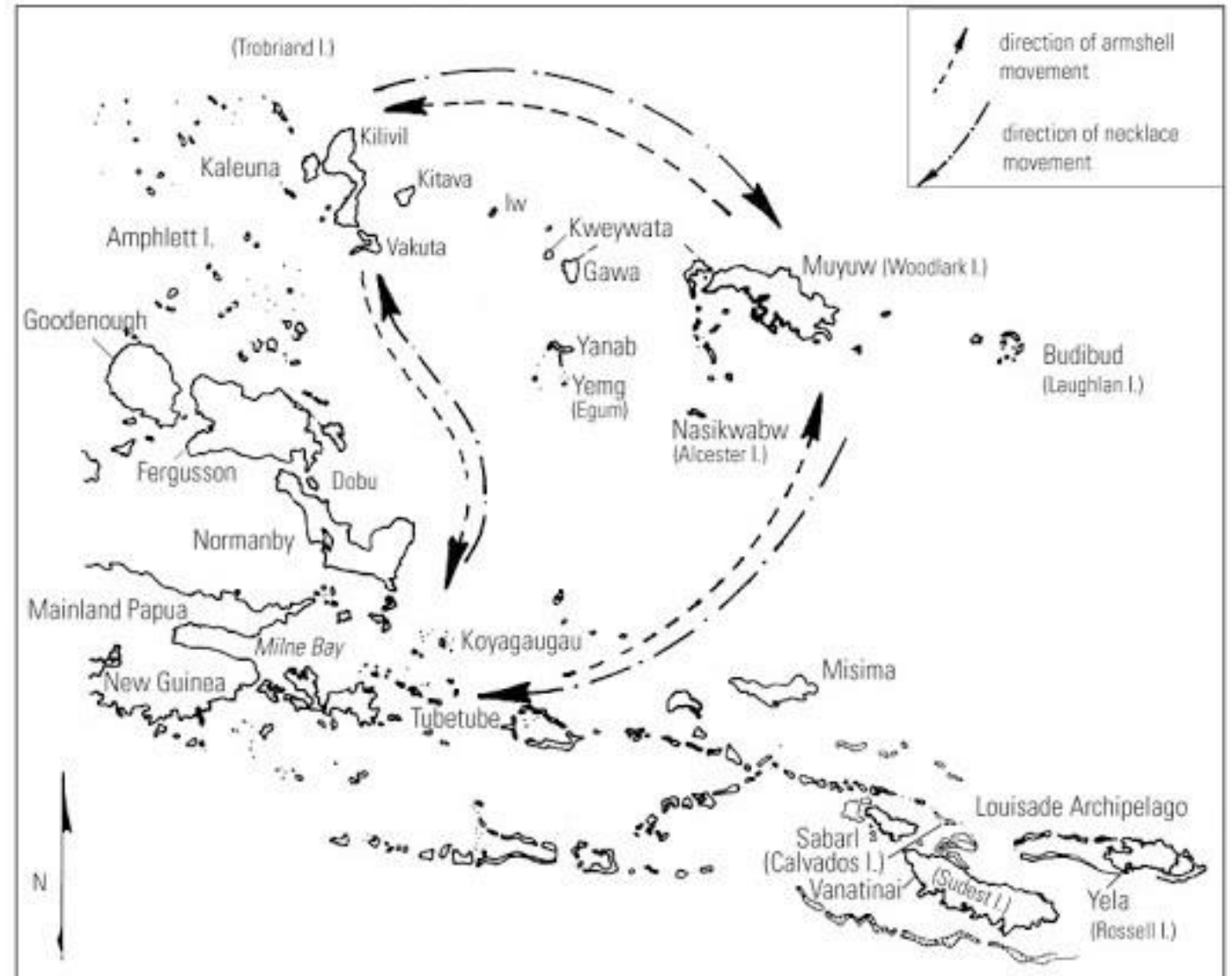
What is functional paradigm about?  
What is society by functionalists?  
What is self-fulfilling prophecy?

the origins of functional thinking...

Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown in social / cultural anthropology...

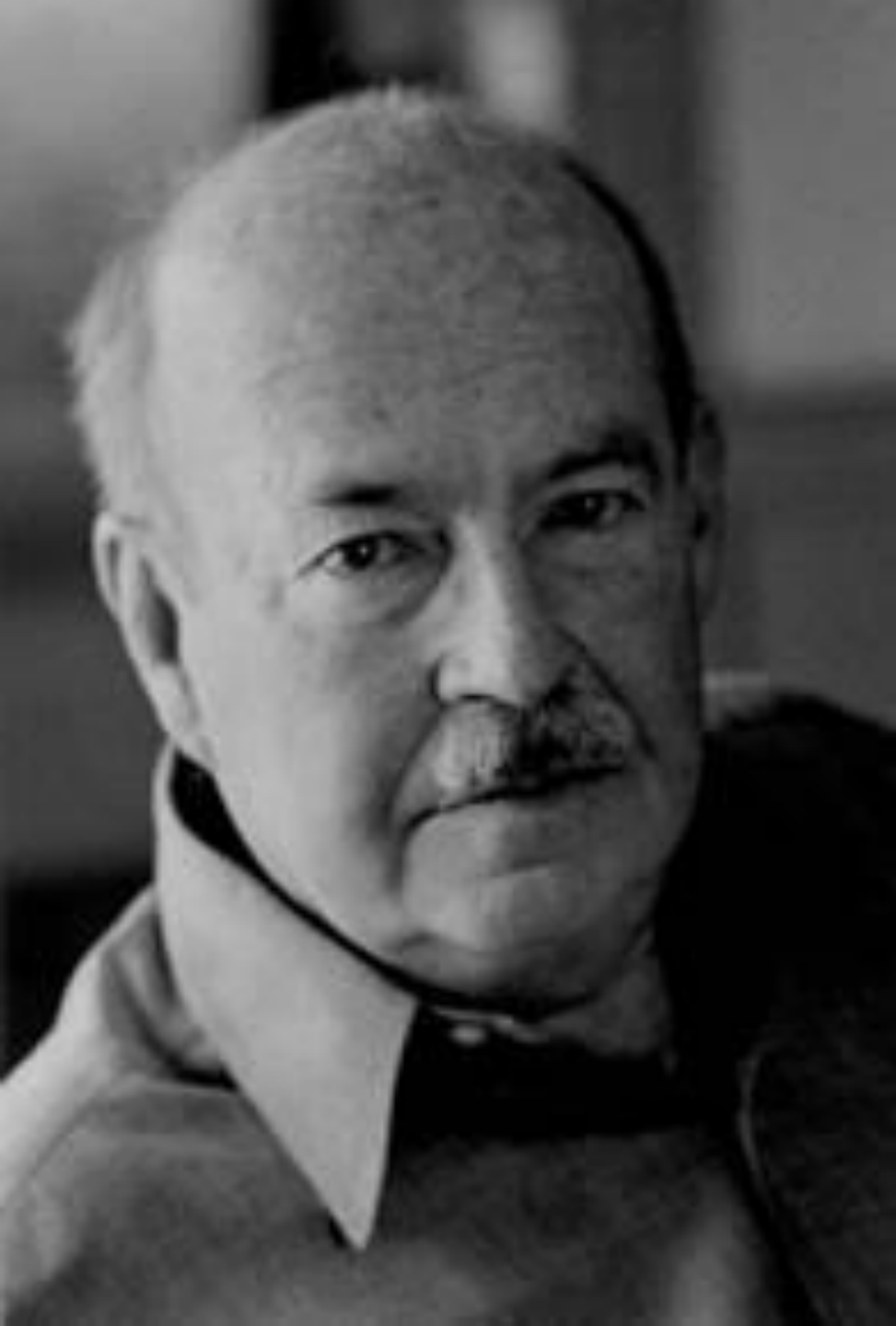
the Kula ring and the function of reciprocity rule

beginning of XXth century...



# societal functionalism

The primary concern of societal functionalism is the large-scale social structures and institutions of society, their relationships, and their constraining effects on actors.  
(Ritzer 1992: 35)



# Talcott Parsons

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- A „forgotten” sociologist, who used to be the greatest American sociologist of his time...most influential American sociologist since the WW2 till 1970s.
- *The Structure of Social Action* 1937, *The Social System* 1951
- Introduced Weber’s sociology to the American social science

<p><b>A</b></p> <p><b>Adaptation</b> <i>response to or manipulation of external environment</i></p>	<p><b>G</b></p> <p><b>Goal attainment</b> <i>definition and achievement of primary function(s)</i></p>
<p><b>L</b></p> <p><b>Latent pattern maintenance</b> <i>cultural patterns that sustain and refresh motivation for action</i></p>	<p><b>I</b></p> <p><b>Integration</b> <i>oversight and coordination of component parts or functions</i></p>

AGIL

## Structure of the General Action System

(Ritzer 2000)

<b>Cultural system (Latency Function) providing actors with the norms and values that motivate them for action</b>	<b>Social system (Integration Function) controlling its components parts</b>
Action system (Adaptation Function) adjusting to and transforming to the external world	Personality system (Goal Attainment) defining system goals and mobilizing resources to attain them

# General Action System



# Robert K. Merton

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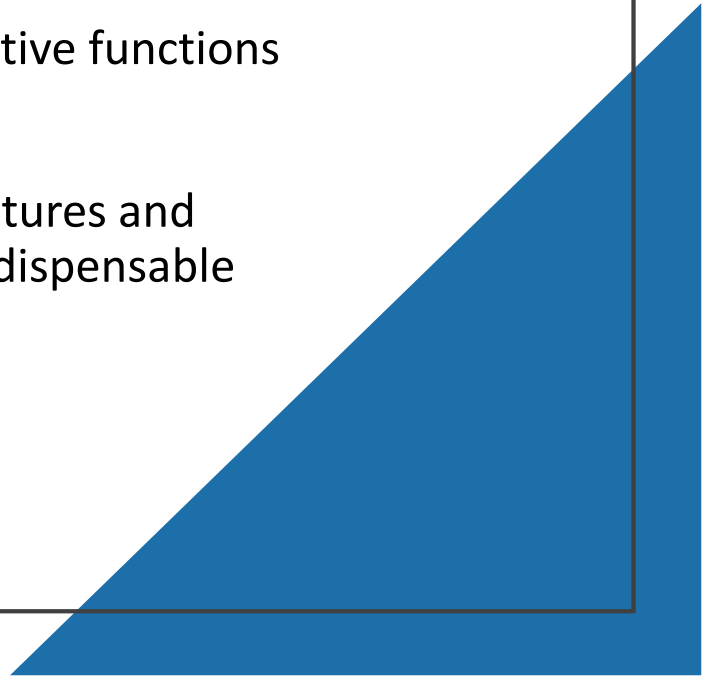
- A student of Parsons
- A son of an immigrant carpenter (Yiddish-speaking Russian Jews), professor at Columbia University, his son received a Nobel Prize in Economy
- The rise of middle-range theory



# criticisim of traditional functional paradigm

(from Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown)

- functional unity of society
- universal functionalism – positive functions
- indispensability – all the structures and functions of the society are indispensable (necessary)



# functions

„those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system“  
(Merton 1949: 104)

- DYSFUNCTIONS – could contribute both to positive and negative functions
- NONFUNCTIONS
- NET BALANCE

functions

manifest – intended  
functions

latent – unintended /  
unanticipated  
consequences

FUNCTIONS: CHEAP LABOUR, COTTON INDUSTRY, SOCIAL STATUS

MANIFEST FUNCTION: TO INCREASE THE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

NET BALANCE:  
MORE  
FUNCTIONAL  
FOR  
SLAVETRADERS



SLAVERY IN THE SOUTH OF THE UNITED STATES

DYSFUNCTIONS: TOO MUCH DEPENDENT ON AGRARIAN ECONOMY

LATENT FUNCTION: UNDERCLASS AND POVERTY

# self- fulfilling prophecy

Thomas & Thomas theorem: **If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences** – Thomas & Thomas 1928



*The first part of the theorem provides an unceasing reminder that men respond not only to the objective features of a situation, but also, and at times primarily, to the meaning this situation has for them. And once they have assigned some meaning to the situation, their consequent behavior and some of the consequences of that behavior are determined by the ascribed meaning.(...)*

*The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error*

Merton 1984, The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

EXAMPLE: the position of black workers on the labour market in US (1940s and 1950s)

# criticisim of structural functionalism

ahistorical approach

It does not deal with proces or social change – a static approach to society

it unables to deal with conflict in society

teleology and tautology

## timeline – sociology as multiparadigmatic science

beginning of the XXth century

2023



**Symbolic interactionism** – beginning of the XXth century till today

**Structural functionalism** – after the WW2 till 1970s; mostly in USA; quantitative research

**Social constructionism** – since 1967 till today; a breakthrough in sociology

