

84. See the first part and "afterward" of Suppe for one of the best analyses of the breakdown of logical positivism. See also Achinstein.

CHAPTER FOUR

FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF RELIGION

In this chapter I want to examine functionalist theories as explanations of religion. This examination is also intended to serve as an example of how to demonstrate what is wrong with a theory rather than simply calling those who use it "reductionists." Most of the time, such accusations are warnings to the "faithful," they are encyclicals not critiques.

The status of functionalism and the meaning of the term "function" in the history and phenomenology of religion are unclear. Some scholars, for example, seem to be both for and against functionalism. As we have already noticed, functionalist methods are called reductionistic on the one hand, and auxiliary sciences on the other. In fact, we sometimes read that religion "functions" to express *The Sacred*.

Let us recall Eliade's assertion about the proper study of religious phenomena: "To try to grasp the essence of such phenomena by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it -- the element of the sacred." We must assume that Eliade is not making a metaphorical statement, that what he is asserting is an important methodological principle. But then, what do we make of the following assertion: "I cannot conclude this chapter better than by quoting the classic passages in which Bronislaw Malinowski undertook to show the nature and function of myth in primitive societies."¹ The quote which follows this assertion is indeed the classic paragraph from Malinowski's essay "Myth in Primitive Psychology." Eliade quotes it as follows:

Studied alive, myth... is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function; it expresses,