

With this revision we are back to a notion of indispensable conditions which are necessary for explaining the presence of ritual in a society. As we have seen, this claim is indeed more plausible since it asserts that some one of a class of items is necessary for z -- if not ritual, then something else. This seems plausible, but it is simply not informative.

Most, if not all, functional arguments do not take the task of specifying an item or unit (religion) as a necessary condition. How could they? Instead they agree with Spiro who asserts that it is a class of structural units which are the sufficient conditions for satisfying the functional requirements of a society. Thus, most functional explanations assert that "it is highly likely," or "it is highly probable," that religion fulfills the requirement. Such conclusions are not only trivial, they are also impossible to confirm or disconfirm. Moreover, this conclusion seems to be invalid given my correction of Hempel's analysis.

It seems to be almost self-evident that religion is what it does until we actually examine the premises which support such a doctrine. If the above analysis is accurate, functionalism fails as a well-formed methodological procedure for explaining religion. It would seem that we are left with heuristic devices and "scholarly guesses" once again.

In an interesting essay on "Religion and the Irrational," Spiro seems to recognize the problem of explaining a religion as included in a class which is the sufficient condition for satisfying a requirement of society. Although his argument is an attempt to show the rationality of religion, the basic theory is functionalist. In arguing for the rationality of religious beliefs and their persistence in a society, Spiro concludes that "Their tenacity in the face of rival scientific beliefs may be simply explained -- scientific beliefs may be functional alternatives for religious beliefs, but they are not their functional equivalents. Religious beliefs have no functional equivalents; being less satisfying, alternative beliefs are rejected as less convincing."<sup>15</sup>

What is of interest to us in the above quotation is the assertion that there are no functional equivalents to religious beliefs. To make this claim is of course to argue for the function of religious beliefs as a necessary condition for satisfying the functional requirements of a society or the maintenance or integration of personality or both.

Spiro argues that religious beliefs have a cognitive basis. If religious beliefs are attempts at explaining the world, this need not in itself lead us to the conclusion that such beliefs are irrational because they are false. All we need to remember is that there are many scientific

theories which have turned out to be false and have been discarded. No one would conclude from this history of science that the falsified theories were, therefore, irrational.

The problem with religious beliefs, according to Spiro is somewhat different. Instead of discarding a religious belief in the face of new discoveries and explanations, it seems that people hold onto their religious beliefs in spite of scientific progress in our knowledge of the world. The question then is not, are religious beliefs irrational, but, why do people continue to persist in holding onto them? This is a problem that most historians and phenomenologists have abandoned long ago. In doing so, we have not solved the problem; in fact, we have left it to be solved by disciplines such as anthropology, clinical psychology and philosophy. Since we claim to be specialists in the study of religion, this is most unfortunate.

Spiro solves the problem by setting both scientific and religious beliefs in the context of systems which satisfy our intellectual needs. Where the two sets or systems differ is on the satisfaction of emotional needs. According to Spiro, religious beliefs satisfy both intellectual and emotional needs. The emotional or motivational basis of religious beliefs thus becomes a partial explanation of their persistence. Religious beliefs, however, cannot be explained as a function of motivation. After all, Spiro notes, there are many religious beliefs which are anything but satisfying. Thus, although it is the case that some religious beliefs are both intellectually and emotionally satisfying and that some religious beliefs may indeed involve empirical support, we must add the importance of "perceptual sets," formed in early childhood, as a strong contributor to the quality of religious conviction and the persistence of the belief system.<sup>16</sup>

Let us assume that religious beliefs are indeed necessary conditions for the satisfaction of individual and social needs and that "religious beliefs are held not merely from a craving to satisfy intellectual needs, but also from a craving to satisfy emotional needs."<sup>17</sup> The additional argument that there are no functional equivalents for religious beliefs is important here. In contrast to what Spiro has written about social units jointly providing the sufficient condition for a functional requirement, we now have one social unit, a religious belief system, can be substituted. Scientific beliefs may well take the place of religious beliefs, but they are not to be understood as providing the identical effects of religious beliefs. If this is not what is meant, then it