

Functionalism and Transactionalism

Federalists, functionalists and transactionalists ultimately desire to develop ways of increasing the level of peace and to avoid war between countries. However, they propose going about this endeavour in different ways. This extract explains both functionalism and transactionalism, focusing firstly on functionalist aspirations to ensure that certain peace-ensuing functional tasks are achieved between states at an international level. The second part of the extract addresses the wish of transactionalists to ensure peace through an increase in the level of communication and understanding between peoples in different countries.

Functionalism

If federalism advocates the notion that “function follows form” then functionalism turns this logic on its head arguing that international organisations should not be based so much on specific forms of governance but rather should be directed towards ensuring that certain functional tasks that reflect and increase interdependence between states are carried out, ultimately ensuring more peaceful relations between peoples.

For the advocates of functionalism, the ideal form of government (federal or not) cannot and should not be brought about by designing *a priori* a political structure. Rather, functionalists assert that desired governmental forms should develop over time and in the short term the core objective of international organisations should be ensuring that functions of governance (the means to deliver prosperity, public services, welfare etc.) should be set up.

The key proponent of functionalism, David Mitrany, argued that in an interdependent world, international organisations that were designed to serve

specific economic and social functions that nation states needed would be better placed to ensure continued peace between those states (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.24). It was his contention that, over time, citizens' allegiances would shift from nation states to support for the technocratic agencies that provided the functions they needed. In turn, the competitive balance of power politics between states would be reduced and the chance of conflict lessened.

Mitrany was keen to move political thinkers away from the design of comprehensive institutions at national or regional levels. For him, regional structures, such as those advocated by federalists, would present the risk of merely replicating the same balance of power systems, at a larger regional level, that proved so destructive between states (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.24).

Transactionalism

Transactionalism differs from federalism and functionalism as it does not presume the need to establish federal bodies or functional agencies in order to ensure peace between nations. Indeed, by contrast, transactionalism seeks to ensure sufficient integration *at a social level* to make conflict unthinkable (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.29).

Transactionalism (also known as Communication Theory) holds that rather than build specific institutional structures or be concerned with the establishment of agencies that would serve particular functions, it is necessary to focus on the building of communities between peoples in different states (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.29). This concept rests on the idea that increasing interaction at a social level between people builds up feelings of trust and good will that make conflict unthinkable (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.29).



Boiled down into a simple analogy, the theory here is that if you speak to regularly, know well and understand your neighbours you are much less likely to fight with them over the garden fence.

The foremost advocate of this position, Karl Deutsch, contended that integration has two dimensions (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.29). The first is a process of *social integration* involving increased interaction, communication, movement and contact between peoples. The outcome of this, Deutsch suggested, would be the establishment of 'security communities' between peoples where the concept of war as a means of settling disputes between peoples would be unthinkable. The second stage that could follow from this is *political integration* (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.30). Indeed, having established the social base of integration it might then be possible to build political structures upon this social foundation. Indeed, Deutsch warned against building political structures before the requisite social base had been established. He suggested that moving too quickly to develop a political solution could actually increase the likelihood of conflict (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.30).

Transactionalism has been criticised however for being overly descriptive. While it is possible to map levels of social interaction and describe the presence of security communities, Transactionalism does not give much of a causal account of how this leads to political integration (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006, p.32).

Further reading:

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, M. (2006). *Debates on European Integration*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.