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Anthony Smith's important work on the concept of social change, first published in 1973, puts forward the paradigm of historical change as an alternative to the functionalist theory of evolutionary change. He shows that, in attempting to provide a theory of social change, functionalism reveals itself as a species of 'frozen' evolutionism.

Functionalism, he argues, is unable to cope with the mechanisms of historical transitions or account for novelty and emergence; it confuses classification of variations with explanation of processes; and its endogenous view of change prevents it from coming to grips with the real events and transformations of the historical record. In his assessment of functionalism, Dr Smith traces its explanatory failures in its accounts of the developments of civilisation, modernisation and revolution. He concludes that the study of 'evolution' is largely irrelevant to the investigation of social change. He proposes instead an exogenous paradigm of social change, which places the study of contingent historical events at its centre.