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The Extended Deliberation: Definitions of Sociology

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THE EXTENDED DELIBERATION:
DEFINITIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Michael C. Moore
July, 1971
THE EXTENDED DELIBERATION:
DEFINITIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

APPROVED  JUNE 15, 1971:
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Hart Nelsen and K. Kalab contributed both ideas, time, and friendship. Professor Kalab is also to be thanked for her advice concerning the trials and tribulations involved in such an undertaking.

Finally, I thank my partner in life, Sylvia. Her contributions are too numerous to enumerate. The greatest contribution of all, love, is hers. This contribution is both the hardest and the easiest to make.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Sylvia and the munchkins of the world. Without these people, sociology would not exist because no one would really care!
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The basic definitions of sociology represent an integral part of the language which sociologists use. Timasheff has stated that there are three conditions for adequate definitions in the social sciences: a definition must allow for easy identification, it must be couched in a logical place in the conceptual scheme of the science, and it must be commonly accepted. Of these three conditions the last is least likely to be achieved in the social sciences. Timasheff believes that: "The lack of agreement results in numerous terminological controversies . . . ."1 As for sociology, Sorokin states that it has many definitions which are vague notions. These definitions are "operational rites" based upon "dogmatic assumptions," represented by concepts imported from the natural sciences which lose their exact meaning when thus imported. "Clear ideas are usually expressed in a clear and intelligible language, while vague notions are communicated in obtuse and foggy speech."2


Standardization of definitions, however, is the most powerful defense "against lingering elements of individualism, subjectivism, and mysticism in a science."\(^3\)

If it is possible, then, to make the language of sociology more useful by re-examining the basic definitions of the field, a most important question can be raised: What definition is more basic to sociology than the definition of sociology itself? This brings us to another question: Is there agreement among sociologists as to what sociology is? If there is not, then our most basic definition does not meet the third criterion given by Timasheff for adequate definitions in the social sciences. The lack of investigations in this area is somewhat surprising. There has been only one study, since the invention of the word "sociology," on the various definitions of the term.\(^4\) In sum, this study is undertaken due to this lack of studies in this area and also because there is a need for a re-examination of our basic definitions of which none is more basic than the definition of sociology itself.

The Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study is to examine various definitions of sociology since the invention of the term. From this examination, an attempt will be made


to determine the extent of agreement among sociologists as to what sociology means.

The Procedure

Chapter II, Part A, is concerned with the early European conceptions of sociology, from Comte through Pareto. The extent of agreement among these conceptions is examined. Part B is concerned with the extent of agreement of the early American Conceptions of sociology. Part C examines definitions found in Introductory texts from 1921 through 1950. The three sections of Chapter II may be considered as a review of the literature if one views this paper in the traditional thesis-framework.

Chapter III is concerned specifically with introductory sociology texts and the extent of agreement among definitions found in a sample of the current texts (1951-1970). The importance of introductory texts in examining current definitions of sociology is explained in Chapter III along with the specific rationales for the years chosen and the sample which is used.

In Chapter IV, a comparison will be made between Furfey's study and Chapter III of the present investigation to see if there is some continuity between the two and if not the reasons for the lack of it. In this chapter further evidence will be presented concerning the extent of agreement among sociologists on the definitions of the term during the periods studied.
Chapter V will discuss briefly the extent of agreement and continuity of the definitions from Comte to the present. Any conclusions concerning the extent of agreement will be made at this time. It should be noted that this investigation is not an attempt to formulate a final definition of sociology.
CHAPTER II
EARLY EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN DEFINITIONS

In an attempt to determine the extent of agreement of the conceptions of sociology up to 1951, this chapter is divided into three parts: Part A surveys the early European conceptions of sociology from Comte through Pareto; Part B is concerned with the conceptions of the early American sociologists; and Part C is a summary of definitions found in introductory texts from 1921 through 1950.

Part A: Early European Conceptions of Sociology

Conception One: Comte

The term sociology was first used by August Comte, who felt that social phenomena are governed by laws.¹ In Comte's words,

The office of science is, not to govern, but to modify phenomena; and to do this, it is necessary to understand their laws . . . . Thus, then, we see what is the function of social science. Without extolling or condemning political facts, science regards them as subjects of observation: it contemplates each phenomena in its harmony with co-existing phenomena, and in its connection with the foregoing and the following state of

human development; it endeavors to discover, from both points of view, the general relations which connect all social phenomena; and each of them is explained, in the scientific sense of the word, when it has been connected with the whole of the preceding movement.²

Comte sees the law of human progress as the motivating force in social evolution. This law contains three stages of human evolution: the Theological state, the Metaphysical state, and the Positive state when "the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws."³ The human evolution proceeds in the following manner:

We see that our social evolution is only the final term of a progression which has continued from the simplest vegetables and most insignificant animals, up through the higher reptiles, to the birds and the mammals, and still on to the carnivorous animals and monkeys, the organic characteristics retiring, and the animal prevailing more and more, till the intellectual and moral tend towards the ascendency which can never be fully obtained, even in the highest state of human perfection that we can conceive of.⁴

Comte believes that sociology is the last of the sciences.⁵ "The order that results is this: an order which of all possible arrangements is the only one that accords with the


³Ibid., Vol. I, p. 1, 2, 3.

⁴Ibid., Vol. II, p. 299.

natural manifestation of all phenomena. Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Physiology, Social Physics."\(^6\) Comte views social physics (sociology, later in his work) as the "study of social phenomena" and "... the same character of positivity which is impressed upon all the others will be shown to belong to this."\(^7\) He divides sociology into social statics and social dynamics, and defines them in the following manner.

In short, social dynamics studies the laws of succession, while social statics inquires into those of coexistence; so that the use of the first is to furnish the true theory of progress to political practice, while the second performs the same service in regard to order, and this suitability to the needs of modern society is a strong confirmation of the philosophical character of such a combination.\(^8\)

Comte views the methods of all of the positive sciences as identical to those used by sociology. "There are three methods of proceeding: -by Observation, Experiment, and Comparison."\(^9\) As with the Positive Philosophy, these methods regard "... all phenomena as subjected to invariable natural Laws. Our business is ... to pursue an accurate discovery of these Laws, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number."\(^10\) Finally, Comte

\(^{7}\)Ibid., Vol. I, p. 8.
\(^{8}\)Ibid., Vol. II, p. 228.
\(^{9}\)Ibid., Vol. II, p. 241.
\(^{10}\)Ibid., Vol. I, p. 5.
insists that sociology take a holistic view of social phenomena: "It is no easy matter to study social phenomena in the only right way,—viewing each element in the light of the whole system." 

To this author, the fact that Comte feels there is a natural law of mankind that is directed toward the positive state makes his conception one which is based upon an unvalidated assumption. He believes that something will cause this law to happen. This assumption is founded in a supra-empirical realm rather than a scientific (empirical) one. It demands a belief in the supra-empirical force which drives the social evolution toward the positive state. He presents no evidence that such a force exists. This assumption might be explained by the philosophical training he received. Durkheim says:

In one sense, all the fundamental ideas of Comtean sociology can be found in Saint-Simon; Comte took them from his master. But he did not limit himself to insisting that they could serve as a basis of a new science; he undertook to create this science.  

Comte was not, however, the only sociologist with such a conception. Herbert Spencer's definition of sociology is

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12 [Emile Durkheim], Emile Durkheim, 1858-1917: A Collection of Essays, trans. and ed. by Kurt H. Wolff (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1960), p. 377. The reader should be aware of Durkheim's attempt to establish his own view of sociology. Hence, he may be overly critical of both Comte and Spencer.
The study of evolution in its most complex form. Using the analogy supplied by human life, we saw that just as bodily development and structure and function, furnish subject-matter for biological sciences, so, growth, and the rise of structures and functions accompanying it, furnish subject-matter for a Science of Society. It [sociology] has to explain how slight modifications of individual nature, arising under modified conditions of life, make somewhat larger aggregates possible. It has to trace out, in aggregates of some size, the genesis of the social relations, regulative and operative, into which the members fall. It has to exhibit the stronger and more prolonged social influences which, by further modifying the characters of the units, facilitate further aggregation with consequent further complexity of social structure. In every case it has for its subject-matter the growth, development, structure, and functions of the social aggregate as brought about by the mutual actions of individuals.

According to Rumney, "Sociology was to Spencer a generalizing science, concerned not with a particular society, but with all societies, and seeking to discover the laws of their growth and development." Spencer's conception of sociology, therefore, is an extension of Comte's conception.

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15 See Werner Stark, "Herbert Spencer's Three Sociologies," American Sociological Review, Vol. XXVI (August, 1961), pp. 515, 517, 519. Stark says that Spencer defines sociology in other ways. Sometimes he defines it as the study of individuals in conflict with the state. Still, at other times, he sees sociology as the study of the principles of psychology: "A sociology neither organismic nor contractual, but cultural; a sociology very different from the two others, because it makes the sociality of man the product of human forces." Given the diversity of Spencer's definitions, for the purposes of this paper, only the definition presented in the text will be discussed because this author views the other two definitions as contained within this definition.
First, Spencer and Comte both state that sociology should rely upon the methods of the natural sciences. Second, both share a belief in a fundamental law of social phenomena and call this law evolution. Third, the generalizing nature of both is an identical holistic view of social phenomena. Durkheim points out this extension in the following statement:

Comte's endeavor had been resumed in England by Herbert Spencer. In order to confirm the hypothesis that societies are natural phenomena, as Comte had held, Spencer undertook to demonstrate that the laws according to which social institutions evolve are only special forms of the more general laws that govern cosmic evolution.\(^\text{16}\)

In conclusion, these two scholars present one conception of sociology: the science which uses the methods of the natural sciences in the holistic study of the fundamental laws of social evolution.

**Conception II: Durkheim**

Conception I soon came under attack by Durkheim. Durkheim states that Comte and Spencer had only spoken in "philosophical generalities." To Durkheim, Comte's supreme law is unrealistic, and Spencer's social realm is no more than an extension of the biological realm.\(^\text{17}\)

Durkheim seeks to limit the scope of sociology so that it can be contained within certain boundaries. He sees the lack of boundaries as a threat to the scientific advancement

\(^{16}\) [Durkheim], *Emile Durkheim*, p. 379.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 578, 379.
of sociology. Durkheim feels that the task of sociology is the description of the form and content of groups. Groups are the subject matter of sociology because all social life takes place within them. Society and groups must be understood to have a nature of their own. Social phenomena are different from phenomena of an individual nature. The group is, itself, a specific subject matter that must be studied at its own level of abstraction.\textsuperscript{18} Durkheim is certain that society and group factors cannot be reduced to individual factors.

This sophism says that society is formed only of individuals, and that, since the whole can only contain what is found in the parts, all that is social can be reduced to individual factors . . . . When elements combine, a new reality derives from their combination which has entirely new characteristics; characteristics that are sometimes even opposed to those observable in the component elements.\textsuperscript{19}

Durkheim conceives sociology as divided into two distinct branches. The first of these is "social morphology." The subject-matter of which is the form of the group, which is external and visible to all. This is the structure of society. Upon observing this structure, the social morphologist then describes it. The second branch of sociology is "social physiology." The social pressure one finds within the group is caused by social facts or ideas, which,

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 360-365.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 363-364.
if studied, reveal the causes of group behavior. Sociology considers all of these factors and determines the laws by which they operate. By doing this the causes (social facts) and effects (social forms) of social life can be explained. The methods of natural science must not be used in their original form, but must be suited specifically to the sociological task. Finally, Durkheim not only sees a need for social morphology, social physiology, and other special social sciences, but, in addition, he thinks that general sociology is necessary. General sociology will, in the future, unite all of these specialties into a uniform body of knowledge.

This second conception of sociology, in contrast to the first, places the group in the forefront of sociological subject-matter. Durkheim makes no assumptions about a certain law being evident, but states that there are laws and sociologists should find what they are through methods suited for sociology. However, he agrees with Comte in his division of sociology into two distinct branches. The "social statics" can be closely allied with "social morphology," and "social physiology" is similar to "social dynamics." This conception has two distinctive elements. The first element, the reliance upon the group as the essence of social phenomena, opposed to Spencer's concern with the

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20 Ibid., pp. 361, 367, 368.
21 Ibid., pp. 369, 370.
22 Ibid., p. 370.
"social aggregate, as brought about by the mutual actions of individuals." The individual is not the ultimate reality he was thought to be, but is influenced and shaped by a higher reality—the group. The group, as seen by Durkheim, is something of and by itself, sometimes even contrary to the wishes of individuals within the group. This view of the group is used to give sociology a distinct subject matter; but it shifts the focus of sociology to a different level of abstraction as well. The second distinctive element, the specific focus on the forms of group phenomena, is not antithetical to the first conception, and might be considered a refinement of "social statics." However, the method that it implies makes it distinctive.

It might seem that Durkheim is wholly concerned with forms. We must not, however, overlook his heavy reliance upon causes (social facts) as objects of study, and the proposal that these two should be put into a uniform body of knowledge. As he presents his case, it is evident that forms are only keys to unlock social phenomena, not ends in themselves. Durkheim, in summary, sees sociology as the science of the forms and contents of groups and society.

Conception III: Simmel and Tonnies

Georg Simmel sees sociology as being composed of three distinct branches: General Sociology, Pure or Formal

23 Spencer, The Study of Sociology, p. 47.
Sociology, and Philosophical Sociology. General Sociology is the sociological investigation of historical facts: "... the whole of historical life insofar as it is formed societally." Formal or Pure Sociology is viewed in the following manner:

"... If society is conceived as interaction among individuals, the description of the forms of this interaction is the task of the science of society in its strictest and most essential sense. "pure sociology" abstracts the mere element of sociation. Social groups which are the most diverse imaginable in purpose and general significance, may nevertheless show identical forms of behavior toward one another on the part of their individual members. Simmel studies the form, which is determined by the content. This differentiates sociology from the other social sciences. Philosophical Sociology is the philosophy of sociology and it is divided into the epistemology and the metaphysics of sociology. This branch is essential to any science because of the need for each science to examine itself. General Sociology and Pure Sociology investigate the forms of society which Simmel justifies by the assertion that society is an abstraction. In studying this abstraction,


25 Ibid., pp. 16-22.

26 Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

27 Ibid., pp. 23.
the sociologist sees the "totality of social life" which is and has been transmitted throughout the life of man. Therefore, the special science of sociology views the whole of society as no other science can.\textsuperscript{28} "... [T]he interactions we have in mind when we talk about 'society' are crystallized as definable, consistent, structures such as the state and the family."\textsuperscript{29}

Simmel's conception has three distinctive elements that differentiate it from the other two conceptions. First, he sees sociology as having three distinct branches which are different from the "social statics" and "social dynamics" of Comte or "social morphology" and "social physiology" of Durkheim. He also adds one branch which was not mentioned before, a branch analogous to the meta-sociology of today.\textsuperscript{30}

Second, he is concerned primarily with the pure forms of society and not the content. Some might assume that his conception is similar to Durkheim's in this respect, but this would be an erroneous assumption. Whereas Durkheim sees forms as only keys to the causes of social phenomena, Simmel sees them as ends in themselves. In Simmel's words:

It [sociology] isolates it [sociation] inductively and psychologically from the heterogeneity of its contents and purposes, which, in themselves, are

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 9.

\textsuperscript{30}For information on Meta-sociology see: Paul Hanley Furfey, The Scope and Method of Sociology (New York: Cooper Square, 1965), pp. 1-52.
not societal. It thus proceeds like grammar, which isolates the pure forms of language from their contents through which these forms, nevertheless, come to life . . . . [N]ot only may the form in which the most divergent contents are realized be identical; but, inversely, the content, too, may persist, while its medium--the interactions of the individuals--adopts a variety of forms. We see, then, that the analysis in terms of form and content transforms the facts--which, in their immediacy, present these two categories as the indissoluble unity of social life--in such a way as to justify the sociological problem. 31

Durkheim disagreed so strongly with Simmel's reliance upon forms that he wrote this statement:

It seems that in this fashion, sociology is furnished with a clearly defined subject-matter. We think, however, that in reality such a conception serves merely to keep it tied to metaphysical ideology when it actually shows an irresistible need to emancipate itself from this sphere. We do not contest the right of sociology to constitute itself by means of abstractions because there is no science that could be established otherwise. The abstractions must be methodically disciplined, however, and must separate the facts according to their natural distinctions; otherwise, they are bound to degenerate into fantastic constructions and vain mythology. 32

He went on to criticize Simmel for doing no more than using new terminology in order to define sociology, instead of using substantive material to accomplish this task. 33

Third, Simmel's conception of sociology is distinct from the others because of his concern with society as

31[Simmel], Simmel, pp. 22, 23.

32[Durkheim], Durkheim, p. 356.

33Ibid., p. 370.
individuals in interaction, not as a specific entity as Durkheim envisioned it. This differentiates Simmel's definition from Durkheim's on another fundamental point.

It must be noted that Ferdinand Tonnies' conception is similar to Simmel's, therefore, it will be only briefly mentioned. To Tonnies, sociology is the study of the forms of social life. He attempts to show that the phenomena which draw men together and keep them together are found in these forms. "Sociology as a special science has as its subject the 'things' which result from social life." These things are "products of human thinking and exist only for such thinking." These social entities or forms are realities in themselves. As with Simmel, forms are important, however, a differentiation between forms and content is not mentioned by Tonnies. Also, as with Simmel, society is not seen as different from the individuals that make it up.

Conception IV: Max Weber

Max Weber presents the fourth conception of sociology. Weber understands sociology as

... [T]hat science which aims at the interpretive understanding of social behavior in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its course,

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36 Ibid., p. 250.
and its effects. The subject matter of sociology is "human behavior" only in so far as the person or persons involved engage in some subjectively meaningful action. Such behavior may be mental or external; it may consist in action or omission to act. The term social behavior will be reserved for activities whose intent is related by the individuals involved to the conduct of others and is oriented accordingly . . . "Meaning" is used here in two different senses. First, there is actual conduct by a specific actor in a given historical situation or the rough approximation based on a given quantity of cases involving many actors; and, second, there is the conceptually "ideal type" of subjective meaning attributed to a hypothetical actor in a given type of conduct. In neither sense can it be used as an objectively "valid" or as a metaphysically fathomable (true) meaning. Herein lies the distinction between the behavioral sciences, such as Sociology and History and the orthodox disciplines, such as Jurisprudence, Logic, Ethics, or Esthetics, whose purpose it is to determine the "true" and "valid" meaning of the objects of their analysis.37

According to Weber, the proof needed for the interpretation of social behavior can be obtained by rational, i.e., logical, or mathematical means, or by emphatic means ("complete sympathetic emotional participation"). One important rational method is the use of the ideal type. The understanding of social behavior can be accomplished either empirically or by "explanatory understanding." The latter is the way by which the behavior is explained through the observer's "grasp of the content of meaning within which the actual course of action occurs." The

sociologist, with this interpretive understanding, must understand "concrete individual cases" of behavior, also average or collective cases of behavior, and ideal types of behavior.38

When studying collectivities the sociologist should not treat them as if they were a reality in themselves. These collectivities are only the result of the behavior of individuals, because only individuals can engage in meaningful activities as representatives of the collectivities. The holistic functional approach can be used to understand the motivations of the behavior of individuals only as a foundation because "Truly empirical sociological investigation begins only with the question, what did and still does motivate the individual functionaries and members of the community to" create and maintain the community.39 Weber warns that the individualistic focus is not to be confused with the science of psychology. He believes that it is a mistake

... [T]o regard any kind of psychology as the ultimate foundation of the sociological interpretation of human behavior . . . because use of psychological data must be distinguished from any investigation of human behavior in terms of its subjective meaning. Consequently, sociology does not bear any closer logical relationship to psychology than to any other science.40

38Ibid., pp. 31, 35, 36.
39Ibid., pp. 42, 44, 49.
40Ibid., pp. 50, 51.
Any scientific laws which sociologists formulate can be no more than generalizations with a high level of probability if certain specific conditions are present. The understanding by the sociologist of the means and ends of the behavior is responsible for this high level of probability. However, man is not always rational, therefore, these generalizations are not absolute.41

The distinctive elements of Weber's sociology are its assertion of interpretive understanding of the subjective meaning of behavior, its individualistic focus, and its ommittance of any assumptions about the existence of any absolute laws of social behavior. None of the previous conceptions of sociology mention the interpretive understanding of the subjective meaning of behavior. Comte and Spencer think that behavior is as objective as the physical elements with which the physical sciences deal and they do not think that there should be more than an expansion of physical science methods to include society. Durkheim presents a method suited to the study of social phenomena but one which assumes that social facts exist. Simmel is concerned with studying the pure forms of society. To achieve such a conception, Weber seems to have different fundamental assumptions about the nature of social reality. These assumptions upon which the other conceptions are based might be characterized as realistic and Weber's assumption

41Ibid., pp. 50, 51.
might be characterized as idealistic (in the metaphysical sense). Another dichotomy might be objective and subjective. Closely aligned with this element is the second distinctive element of Weber's conception--its individualistic focus. Whereas Comte and Spencer view society on a holistic level, Durkheim views the group and society as a holistic reality, and Simmel wishes to study society as made up of individuals and to view it from a holistic level. Weber views a holistic functional approach only as a preparatory step to the individualistic approach. The third distinctive element is different from Comte and Spencer because they base their conception of sociology on the assumption that there is a fundamental law of evolution. Without this law there can be no subject matter for sociology. Durkheim makes no such assumption but does assume that there are laws which sociology can discover. Simmel, in discussing the stages of historical development and elsewhere, assumes that there are some patterns that sociologists will find. Weber, however, sees no real need for discovering certain specific laws of social behavior. He seems to think that even if there were such laws, they would be short-lived. Whereas Comte and Spencer are concerned with prediction and control, Weber's main concern is interpretive understanding.

42 [Simmel], Simmel, p. 20.
Conception V: Pareto

The fifth conception of European sociology is that of Vilfredo Pareto. To him

Human society is the object of many studies. Some of these are specialized; for example, the studies dealing with law, history, political economy, religious history, and so forth. There is also a group of studies of society which embraces categories which do not as yet have a distinct form and which, in synthesis with other studies which have already achieved a defined form, are directed to the study of human society in general. This group of studies may be termed sociology.43

Sociology's first task, then, is to classify theories or propositions about human behavior. The "experimental uniformities" which sociologists seek to establish are the scientific laws of sociology. Therefore, there is no difference between the laws of sociology and "the laws of the other sciences." Sociology is a logico-experimental science not a dogmatic one because:

Up to the present time, sociology has almost always been presented dogmatically. Let us not be deceived by Comte's attaching the label Positive to his philosophy. His sociology is . . . dogmatic . . . They are different religions, but religions they are still. The same may be said of the works of Spencer.44

Pareto does not say whether the subject matter of sociology is a society which is a reality in itself or if


44Ibid., pp. 168, 169, 171, 182.
it is made up of individuals. Instead he is mainly concerned with society in general terms and with all of the existing social science knowledge. This position is indefinite because it is saying that sociology will do whatever the other sciences have not done. The generalizing nature of sociology is first mentioned by Spencer and Comte, but it is not the primary focus of their conception, as it is with Pareto. Pareto does assume that there are certain laws of human behavior and that it is sociology's task to discover them. He does not, however, assume that there is an evolutionary law. Although this conception is not opposed to the others, it is distinct in that its primary concern is with a synthesis of the existing theories about human society from a generalizing perspective.

Conclusion: Part A

Table I presents briefly an evidence that the early European conceptions of sociology are in a state of disagreement, both as to the scientific nature of sociology and as to the subject matter of sociology. The youthful nature of sociology might be one explanation for this disagreement at this time.

45 It might be noted that all of the conceptions agree on one fundamental point--sociology should be a science. They all disagree, however, on the exact nature of this science.
## TABLE I
THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF
THE EARLY EUROPEAN CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Conception</th>
<th>Distinctive Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Conception One</strong> (Comte and Spencer)</td>
<td>The scientific discovery and study of the evolutionary laws of social phenomena. Comte divides sociology into social statics and social dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Conception Two</strong> (Durkheim)</td>
<td>The scientific explanation of the form and content of groups and society. Division of sociology into Social Morphology and Social Physiology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Conception Three</strong> (Simmel and Tonnies)</td>
<td>The scientific description of the forms of interaction in society and social life. It is divided into General Sociology, Formal Sociology, and Philosophical Sociology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Conception Four</strong> (Weber)</td>
<td>The science which aims at the interpretive understanding of meaningful social behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Conception Five</strong> (Pareto)</td>
<td>The synthesis of the general theories of human society into a scientific body of knowledge.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Part B: Early American Conceptions

The purpose of this section is to see if the disagreement found in the Early European conceptions of sociology continued in the United States. Six early American conceptions are examined.

Conception I: Sumner, Ward, and Giddings

Three of the first American sociologists, William Graham Sumner, Lester F. Ward, and Franklin Henry Giddings, have similar conceptions which are considered an extension of Conception I: Early European. Even though there are minor differences among the three, these differences are not extensive enough to warrant a distinct conception for each.

William Graham Sumner defines sociology as follows:

Sociology is the science of life in society. It investigates the forces which come into action wherever a human society exists. It studies the structure and functions of the organs of human society, and its aim is to find out the laws in subordination to which human society takes its various forms and social institutions grow and change. Its practical utility consists in deriving the rules of right social living from the facts and laws which prevail by nature in the constitution and functions of society. 46

Sumner then elaborates on his definition. Biology studies the struggle for existence in which all biological beings participate throughout their lives, whereas sociology

studies this struggle for existence in human society. In this manner sciences work together. The study of society extends from the family to the most complex form of social organization. Two laws are specifically mentioned by Sumner: The law of population, which is a biological law that determines the multiplying of the species until the species is in a state of need (because of overpopulation) and the law of diminishing returns, which indicates that the more the land is worked, the less the return comes from it. These laws produce the struggle for existence. There are two struggles apparent: the struggle of man against nature and the struggle of man against man. It is the problem of sociology to study this struggle and to find the right policy for resolving it. Sociology is "in a tentative and inchoate state. All that we can affirm is that social phenomena are subject to law." Sociology then should discover the laws which control society as physics discovers the laws that control the physical world.

Ward conceives sociology as follows:

The conception of a universal causal dependence of phenomena when transformed into an active working principle, takes the shape of a universal theory of development or evolution. The high utilitarian motive, focalizing all considerations in the good of man, can have no other


48 Ibid., pp. 28, 29.
effect than to establish as the ultimate science, for the perfection of which all other sciences exist, the science of human life, which takes the form and name sociology.49

Ward then elaborates on this definition. Dynamic sociology must first educate the members of society with the existing knowledge about society; and secondly, it must synthesize the "true relations of dependence which exist among all known truths." This makes sociology "The whole philosophy of human progress."50 Dynamic sociology must redirect man from his wasteful ways and use the existing natural forces to achieve progress. The science of society can do this with Comte's method, "Voir pour prevoir," "prevoyance, d'ou action," which according to Ward means "Predict in order to control, such is the logical history and process of all science, and, if sociology is a science such must be its destiny and function."51 Finally, as may be observed from the above, Ward divides sociology into social statics and social dynamics as Comte suggested. He feels that the latter has been neglected and that it should be the major emphasis of sociology.52


50 Ibid., p. 25.

51 Ibid., p. 81.

52 Ibid., p. 700.
Giddings defines sociology as "... an attempt to account for the origin, growth, structure, and activities of society by the operation of physical, vital, and psychical causes, working together in a process of evolution." He wants to apply the methods of natural science to the phenomena of sociology. By viewing society from an holistic perspective, sociology attempts to discover the natural laws which govern it. This is an extension of the ideas set forth first by Comte, then by Spencer. Durkheim and Tarde attempted to demarcate the essential phenomena of sociology. Giddings believes, however, that the essential phenomena are best explained by the use of the "consciousness of kind" (an awareness of others as like kind) as a fundamental sociological concept. This consciousness is in each individual's psyche. Both sociology and psychology study the psyche, but psychology studies the "association of ideas" within the individual mind and sociology studies the "association of these minds."

In summary, Sumner, Ward, and Giddings view evolution as the guiding force behind human society. Sumner added the Darwinian proposition of the struggle for existence to the Comtean and Spencerian concept of social evolution. Moreover, all three wish to extend the methods of natural

54 Ibid., pp. 1-17.
55 Ibid., pp. 23-25.
science to social phenomena, since natural phenomena and social phenomena are both governed by the same laws. Sumner and Ward are particularly concerned with the utility of the science and all three see sociology as the ultimate science. These proclamations seem to detract from the credibility of this conception by placing sociology in the position of being another philosophy of life. It is ironic that this position is presented under the guise of the methods of natural science. The holistic perspective of viewing society as an organism is common to all three, as it is common to Comte and Spencer. Finally, the distinction between psychology and sociology is important to Giddings, while Sumner and Ward do not emphasize it. This concern is explained by Giddings in the following manner: "Believing that sociology is a psychological science . . . I have endeavored to direct attention chiefly to the psychic aspects of social phenomena."56

Conception II: Ross

According to Ross, sociology is the science of social phenomena. Social phenomena cannot be explained without taking into account the actions of "one human being on another."57 Ross believes that sociologists should concentrate on social process as the cause of the effects that

56Giddings, The Principles of Sociology, p. 5.

are of utmost importance in sociology. Hence, sociologists must study groups and institutions. He regards sociology as an essential social science.

The relation of the trunk of a tree to its branches is, I believe a fit symbol of the relation of sociology to the special social sciences . . . . So far as social life is one, there will be one master science of social life.

He also believes that sociology will benefit by using Comte's divisions of social statics and social dynamics. The dynamics should not be concerned with evolution, but change. Ultimately, Ross feels that the sociologist must describe and study the history of what is described, theorize, and put all of these into specific policies which in turn can be put to practical use.

Ross differs from Sumner, Ward, and Giddings, as well as from Comte and Spencer, in that he does not see evolution as the guiding force behind society. He specifically states that there is no evolution, but change, that there is no progress, but process. This is a modification of the evolutionary view. However, Ross does not give up the concern with change. This places Ross in a position to study the same phenomena as Sumner, Ward, and Giddings, but from a less philosophical perspective. By softening

\[58\text{Ibid., pp. 90-91.}\]
\[59\text{Ibid., pp. 14-27.}\]
\[60\text{Ibid., pp. 182-184, vii-ix.}\]
the evolutionary assumption, Ross makes sociology more acceptable to the scholars of the twentieth century. Moreover, Ross joins with Ward, Sumner and Giddings in stressing the utility of sociology.

Conception III: Cooley

Charles Horton Cooley's definition of sociology is "first, last, and nearly all the time, a study of process." Cooley thinks there are two significant differences between sociology and biology:

One is that in biology essential change in types is chiefly slow and not easily perceptible. For the most part we have to deal with a moving equilibrium of species and modes of life repeating itself generation after generation . . . . In social life, on the other hand, change is obvious and urgent; so that the main practical object of our science is to understand and control it. The dramatic element, which in biology is revealed only to a titanic imagination, becomes the most familiar and intimate thing in experience . . . . I should say that it [the fact that we know our subject-matter by "sympathetic participation"] puts these studies [social sciences] in a class by themselves: whether you call them sciences or something else is of no great importance. It is their unique privilege to approach life from the point of view of a conscious and familiar partaking of it. This involves unique methods which must be worked out independently. The sooner we cease circumscribing and testing ourselves by the canons of physical and physiological science the better . . . . Exact prediction and mechanical control for the social world I believe to be a false ideal inconsiderately borrowed from the provinces of physical science. There is no real reason to think that this sort of prediction or control will ever be possible.


62Ibid., pp. 396, 397, 398.
Cooley proposes the "dramatic method" as a method for social science:

We have seen that social intelligence . . . is a dramatic vision by which we see how the agents now operating must interact upon one another and issue in a new situation. How shall we apply this idea to social science? Shall we say that that too is dramatic? . . . All science may be said to work by a dramatic method when it takes the results of minute observation and tries to build them into fresh wholes of knowledge . . . . The only instrument that can in any degree meet the test of prediction, where new problems of higher choice confront the mind, is the instructed imagination, which, by a kind of inspired intelligence, may anticipate within itself the drama of social process, and so foresee the issue . . . . I think, then, that the supreme aim of social science is to perceive the drama of life more adequately than can be done by ordinary observation . . . . [The constructive part of science is, in truth, a form of art.]

Finally, Cooley thinks that sociology should be used for social improvement:

The method of social improvement is likely to remain experimental, but sociology is one of the means by which the experimentation becomes more intelligent . . . . By observation and thought we work out generalizations which help us to understand where we are and what is going on. These are "principles of sociology."

The subject matter of Cooley's conception (social process) is identical to that used by Ross. Cooley's conception is distinct, however, because of its use of the dramatic method as the dominant method of sociology rather than the methods of the natural sciences. Sumner, Giddings,

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63Ibid., pp. 395, 400, 403.

64Ibid., pp. 402-403.
and Ward wish to extend the methods of natural science to social phenomena while Cooley wants to emphasize the dramatic method. Cooley regards sociology as an instrument for social improvement rather than a philosophy of life, as Summer, Ward, and Giddings do. This view is, therefore, a modification of the earlier philosophies of life.

Conception IV: Park and Burgess

Park and Burgess define sociology in this statement:

Sociology, so far as it can be regarded as a fundamental science and not mere congeries of social-welfare programs and practices, may be described as the science of collective behavior.\(^65\)

In discussing the nature of sociology as a science, Park and Burgess observe that Comte confuses the concept of natural laws because:

\[\ldots [I]n\] the field of the social sciences the distinction between natural and moral law has from the first been confused. Comte and the social philosophers in France after the Revolution set out with the deliberate purpose of superseding legislative enactments by laws of human nature, laws which were to be positive and "scientific." As a matter of fact, sociology, in becoming positive, so far from effacing, has rather emphasized the distinctions that Comte sought to abolish.\(^66\)

Park and Burgess believe that sociology was first, under the influence of Comte and Spencer, a philosophy of history, or a "'science' of progress." Next, different schools of


\(^66\)Ibid., p. 12.
sociological thought were "absorbed in an effort to define sociology's point of view." The third period (beginning in the 1920's) is one of investigation and research, a time when facts are to be collected to validate theories. During this period, sociology will become an experimental science and will begin to classify social problems, types, organization, and structure of social groups, studying social processes. Moreover, they indicate that before sociological ideas can be used to solve social problems, sociology is in need of "a more thoroughgoing study of the problems, systematic social research, and an experimental social science." In discussing the subject matter of sociology, Park and Burgess state that there are two perspectives from which one may view society: the individual and the collective, but sociology must primarily be concerned with collective behavior or corporate action.

... [S]ociology, speaking strictly, is a point of view and a method for investigating the processes by which individuals are inducted into and induced to co-operate in some sort of permanent corporate existence which we call society.

The way in which the group is a reality in itself by means of like-mindedness is that there is "so much of a consensus among the individuals of a group as will permit the group to act."
Park and Burgess' conception has two distinctive elements: (1) an attempt to modify the earlier speculative position regarding the natural laws of social phenomena, and (2) an attempt to synthesize the two perspectives by which different schools of sociology view society into one which emphasizes the collective but takes into account the individual. In the former distinctive element they differentiate their conception from that of Comte and Spencer and that of Sumner, Ward, and Giddings, in their views of natural laws. They also differentiate it from Cooley and Ross' view that sociology is used for social improvement. They say that sociology must first formulate its own theories before attempting to solve social problems. They see the period of experimentation as the beginning. Here, again, sociology is presented as a pure science. In the latter distinctive element, Park and Burgess are attempting to solve the disagreement over the subject matter of sociology that existed in the early European conceptions. Park and Burgess wish to synthesize the opposing views of Durkheim and Simmel and the others into a more solid approach to the subject matter with which sociology must deal.

Conception V: Sorokin

When, in 1931, Pitirim A. Sorokin was confronted with a multitude of definitions of sociology, he criticized these definitions. Sorokin writes that defining sociology as the science of culture is hardly a definition because culture is a loose term as it is studied by the special social sciences;
and if it is defined in this way, it does not give sociology a distinct subject matter. If it is defined as the science of "human relations," or "social interaction," or "social forms," or "group interpretation," or as "the science of society," it lacks precision because all of these definitions do not again differentiate sociology from the other social sciences. All social sciences study society, groups, and social relations and human relations in specific ways. Sociology must have a distinct focus which differentiates it from all of these.  

Sorokin defines sociology as follows: "Sociology is a generalizing science of socio-cultural phenomena viewed in their generic forms, types, and manifold interconnections." In substantiating this definition, he says that the other social sciences have their own special compartments, hence, they are special sciences. On the other hand, sociology looks at all social phenomena from a generalizing perspective which is unique to social science. Without sociology, these other sciences are limited in their scope. Instead of looking for the uniqueness of events, sociology looks for common characteristics. Sociology studies the whole of social phenomena. He says that:


72 Ibid., pp. 6-17.
It [sociology] has been a generalizing discipline in the conceptions of all great sociologists from Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun and Vico to August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Tarde, Durkheim, and Pareto . . . .

In his *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, Sorokín also emphasizes that

Sociology has been, is, and either will be a science of the general characteristics of all classes of social phenomena, with the relationships and correlations between them; or there will be no sociology.

As Sorokín himself admits, his definition expands a fundamental focus of Pareto, Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim. He makes no assumptions about evolution or groups, rather he assumes that sociology finds its uniqueness among the social sciences by being a general science. This is similar to Conception V: Early European. Pareto and Sorokín are concerned with the study of human society in general whereas Pareto regards this science as not yet having a distinct form. Sorokín is concerned with "socio-cultural phenomena in their generic forms, types, and manifold interconnections." In expanding and modifying Pareto, Sorokín presents a more specific and sophisticated definition than Pareto (especially if the explanations of each one are compared.) Sorokín, however, warns that

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Many people mix the above concept of general sociology with a vague synthetic philosophizing. They think that such a concept of sociology does not make out of it a special science, but makes a kind of "synthetic hodge-podge" or encyclopedia of all social sciences. I emphatically stress that such a conclusion is utterly wrong.  

Sorokin's conception differs from that of Sumner, Ward, and Giddings, and also Ross and Cooley, in that it is not concerned with policy, but with generalizing about sociocultural phenomena. This is similar to Park and Burgess and again presents sociology as a pure science.

However, Sorokin's conception is not seen as final. Stuart A. Rice, in answer to Sorokin, agrees with Sorokin's two types of sociology: a generalizing social science and the special areas included within it. Rice suggests, however, that there be a third distinct type of sociology that is concerned with "embryonic" studies of social phenomena with the other social sciences. This, of course, is not a disagreement over the basic conception of sociology, but is only an expansion of Sorokin's conception. Furthermore, Rice believes in still another type of sociology:

... [T]here is a fourth type of sociologies consisting of ethical valuations, which are not really science or philosophy, and which are ultimately beyond the reach of science. To these the scientific sociologist offers no objection so long as they are presented as ethical ideals, spiritual beliefs, or artistic preferences.

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77 Ibid., pp. 325, 326.
Here, Rice seems to be speaking of the conception of sociology held by Sumner, Ward, and Giddings. He is willing to accept this type of sociology if it does not claim to be a science.

In a rejoinder to Rice's article, Sorokin states that he is speaking of a distinct subject matter which is not as vague as Rice implies that it is in his article. He also attempts to solve the problem of the fourth type of sociology mentioned by Rice:

. . . [T]here is no conflict between sociology and ethics, if it is recognized that ethical or practical sociology is an applied art, whose main objective may be outside of sociology, but in reaching whose postulated goal the use of scientific formula and data may help.78

Conception VI: Abel

So far, then, Rice has presented no opposition to Sorokin's conception. In 1932, however, there was opposition to such a conception from Theodore Abel. First, Abel disagrees with the conception of sociology as a general science. He does not think that sociology can study society in general because of the ambiguity of the term and the problems involved in making generalizations about such an abstract phenomenon. He sees any attempt at such a task as merely philosophic speculation. He does not think that it can be a general science in a synthetic manner either, because of the impossibility of such a task, and the

fact that sociology would not then have a distinct subject matter, or because it would then become nothing more than social philosophy. He contends that such a general science already exists in the form of psychology. This, then, is justification enough for doing away with such a position since it only serves a duplicate function.

Second, Abel points out that there is no precise definition of what Sorokin calls the common characteristics of social phenomena. Every social science is individualizing as well as generalizing. Finally, he asks, why is the study of such phenomena needed when psychologists, economists, and historians constantly account for them? Abel then states that to conceive sociology with a distinct subject matter is the only way to make it a distinct social science. Sociology's distinct subject matter can be found in those "resultants" of human behavior which are the consequence of individuals' adjustment to living together.

Abel describes these phenomena as follows:

The object-matter of sociology is social positions, relationships, and groups, and its purpose is to arrive at a systematic body of demonstrable propositions about them by means of formal and historical analysis.

Abel then stresses the need for a study of the forms of these phenomena, both in the present and in the past.


80 Ibid., pp. 179, 180, 181, 182.
Abel's conception, however, is by no means new. In stressing the special nature of sociology, he is actually agreeing with Sorokin who stated that the generalizing nature of sociology made it a special social science with a distinct subject matter. Again in Abel's conception, we find the European influence and also a stress on sociology as a pure science and not a philosophy of life. Moreover, there is a replacement of the methods of the natural sciences as used by Sumner, Ward, and Giddings with formal and historical methods. However, Abel uses Simmel's formalistic conception even to the extent of placing historical sociology (or General Sociology to Simmel) in a position of importance. Abel does not mention Simmel's formulation, and attempts to leave us with the impression that this is a unique conception, when, in fact, it is not. Positions, relationships, and groups studied historically and formalistically mean the same as a "description of the forms of ... interaction."

**Conclusion: Part B**

The findings indicate that disagreement exists among the early American conceptions of sociology (see Table II). Specifically, the conceptions disagree on the subject matter of sociology. Corption I is concerned with evolution while Conceptions II and III modify this to social process. This author proposes that these two types of subject matter are enveloped under the general subject matter: social change. The social processes, which are studied as
# TABLE II

## AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS:

### EARLY AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Conception</th>
<th>Distinctive Elements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception One</strong> (Sumner, Ward, and Giddings)</td>
<td>1. Natural science methods used. 2. Sociology is an applied science. 3. Sociology is the ultimate science. 4. Evolution is the guiding force behind society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology is the scientific study of the evolution of social phenomena using the methods of the natural sciences for the betterment of mankind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Two</strong> (Ross)</td>
<td>1. Sociology is an applied science. 2. Sociology is the ultimate science. 3. The social processes of social phenomena are the subject matter of sociology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology is the scientific study of the processes of social phenomena for the betterment of mankind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Three</strong> (Cooley)</td>
<td>1. Sociology's concern with social improvement. 2. The dramatic method. 3. The subject matter is social processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology is the science of the social processes of society which emphasizes the use of the dramatic method and is concerned with social improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Four</strong> (Park and Burgess)</td>
<td>1. Sociology is a pure science. 2. Experimental method. 3. Draws distinction between natural and moral laws. 4. Attempts to synthesize the individualistic and collectivistic views of society into an approach emphasizing the collective and using the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology is the science of collective behavior concerned with experimental research directed toward clarifying its fundamental ideas.</td>
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(continued on page 43)
### TABLE II (continued)

**AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS:**
**EARLY AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Conception</th>
<th>Distinctive Elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Five</strong> (Sorokin)</td>
<td>1. Sociology is a pure science. 2. Sociology must be a generalizing science. 3. The subject matter is socio-cultural phenomena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Sociology is a generalizing science of socio-cultural phenomena viewed in their generic forms, types, and manifold interconnections.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conception Six</strong> (Abel)</td>
<td>1. Sociology is a pure science. 2. Sociology's method is formal and historical analysis. 3. It is a special rather than a general science. 4. The subject matter is the history and form of social positions, relationships, and groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology is a special social science concerned with the formal and historical analysis of social positions, relationships, and groups with the purpose of developing a &quot;systematic body of demonstrable propositions&quot; about them.</td>
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changing and dynamic aspects of society, and evolution, which is studied as an ongoing process, are simultaneously concerned with social change, with a difference in the fundamental assumptions underlying each. Thus far, this is the first time there has been such an agreement. Conceptions V and VI disagree on the subject matter of sociology. Both also disagree with Conceptions I, II, and III. Conception IV is an attempt to synthesize the individualistic and collectivistic views of society, which makes it distinct from the other conceptions.

Part C: Definitions in Introductory Texts 1921 through 1950

The purpose of this section of the chapter is to determine the extent of agreement found in the definitions of sociology in introductory textbooks from 1921 through 1950. It is felt that introductory sociology texts are most concerned with defining the field. The books are considered introductory texts if the authors state thusly either in the titles or the prefaces. The years 1921 through 1950 were chosen because this period immediately precedes the study contained in Chapter III and should serve as a source for comparison used here. The books used in this section are all that this author could find in the Western Kentucky University Library and the Vanderbilt University Library. Twenty-three introductory textbooks are used in this summary.81

81The twenty-three books used are:


Charles Horton Cooley, deceased, Robert Cooley Angell, and Lowell J. Carr, Introductory Sociology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933). This text was published with Cooley as deceased, therefore, it is not seen as interfering with his conception mentioned earlier.


It is believed that the books are representative of the introductory texts published during this time. Two aspects of the definitions will be taken into consideration: their view of the scientific nature of sociology, i.e., whether or not it is a science, and their views of the subject matter of sociology.

The Scientific Nature of Sociology

Twelve definitions (Wright and Elmer, Reuter and Hart, MacIver, Murray, Hiller, Davis and Barnes, Cooley, Angell and Carr, Duncan, Carr, Wilson and Kolb, Bernard, and Boettiger) mention that sociology is a science in their definitions. Nine (Young, Hayes, Graves and Moore, Fairchild, Dawson, Case, Pendell, Gillin and Gillin, and Odum) also mention study or scientific study. Three definitions (Hayes, Bernard, and Binder) contain an applied function for sociology within the definition.

Groups

Six definitions, (Murray, Hiller, Dawson, Davis and Barnes, Pendell, and Carr) out of twenty-three examined, contain a mention of social or human groups as the subject matter of sociology. An example is: "the study of human groups." However, three of the authors (Hiller, Dawson, and Carr) are more extensive in their formulation of the subject matter of sociology as groups. For example "the compositions, forms, structure, functions and changes of

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82 Murray, Introductory, p. 3.
human groups"\textsuperscript{83} or "the study of the forms, mechanisms, and processes of group behavior,"\textsuperscript{84} are seen as the subject matter.

**Society**

Four definitions (Odum, Case, Lumley, and Gillin and Blackmar) are similar to the following: sociology is "the systematic study of society."\textsuperscript{85} Two (Lumley and Gillan and Blackmar) define the subject matter the same. Their concern is with "the phenomena of society arising from the association of mankind."\textsuperscript{86} One definition (Case) is more extensive than the others: "the study of the associational forms, rules, and institutions of society."\textsuperscript{87} Here again there is variation within definitions. They see society as the subject matter but disagree as to the exact nature of this subject matter.

**Interaction**

Three definitions (Boettiger, Duncan, and Gillin and Gillin) of the twenty-three contain interaction as the subject matter of sociology. One (Gillin and Gillin) defines it as: "the study of interaction arising from the association

\textsuperscript{83} Carr, *Situational Analysis*, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{84} Dawson, *Introduction*, pp. 823-824.
\textsuperscript{85} Odum, *Understanding*, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{86} Lumley, *Principles*, p. 540.
\textsuperscript{87} Case, *Outlines*, p. xxii.
of living beings." Another (Boettiger) is concerned with the processes and structures: "... [T]he scientific study of social processes and social structures from the point of view of human interaction." While the third (Duncan) is more extensive: sociology is the "... [S]cientific study of the processes of interaction or persons, and the patterns these form in relation to biological, psychological, and cultural influences." Man and His Human Environment

Two definitions (Fairchild and Binder) out of the twenty-three are that sociology is the "study of man and his human environment in their relations with each other." Human Association

Two definitions (Groves and Moore, and Cooley, Angeli and Carr) place "human association" or "man in association with his fellows" as the subject matter of sociology. Social Relationships

Out of the twenty-three definitions, only one (MacIver) states "that for us the subject-matter of sociology is

88 Gillin and Gillin, Introduction, p. 3.
89 Boettiger, Fundamentals, p. 21.
90 Duncan, Backgrounds, p. 11.
91 Fairchild, General, p. 90.
93 Reuter and Hart, Introduction, p. 5.
social relationships as such."\textsuperscript{94}

**Social Processes**

Only one definition (Reuter and Hart) out of the twenty-three mentions "the processes by means of which human nature is formed and culture developed,"\textsuperscript{95} as the subject matter of sociology.

**Human Experience**

One (Hayes) views human experience as the subject matter of sociology and he also wishes to view human experience in an ethical, causal, synthetic, and non-prejudicial manner.\textsuperscript{96}

**Human Behavior in Social Situations**

One (Bernard) indicates that sociology must

\textit{... [A]ssemble all available knowledge about human behavior in social situations and reduce it to general principles which can be used for the explanation of adjustment problems and for guidance in social control.}\textsuperscript{97}

while one (Young) is concerned primarily with human behavior.

**Group, Culture, Personality, Social Organization, Social Process, and Social Control**

Finally, one definition (Wright and Elmer) is similar to that formulated by a committee of the American

\textsuperscript{94}MacIver, \textit{Society}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{95}Reuter and Hart, \textit{Introduction}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{96}Hayes, \textit{Introduction}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{97}Bernard, \textit{Introduction}, p. 8.
Sociological Society, which views sociology as

... a specialized social science dealing with the group, culture, personality, social organization, social process, and social control, and deriving its data for study from researches and special studies carried on by sociologists and others.98

It is evident that disagreement continues to exist through these definitions. This disagreement is spread over a wide spectrum of terms. The largest areas of agreement are over the subject matters of groups (six) and society (four).

Conclusion

The most significant area of agreement, in the conceptions and definitions analyzed in this chapter, is that sociology is a science. And, the most significant area of disagreement is the subject matter of sociology. Even though Comte, Spencer, Sumner, Ward, Giddings, Ross, and Cooley are all concerned with social change, there are disagreements about the fundamental assumptions underlying this change. Moreover the five early European conceptions and the six early American conceptions contain different subject matters. Furthermore, out of twenty-three definitions examined, there are twelve different types of subject matter. It seems as if the extent of disagreement over the subject matter of sociology increases in proportion to the number of sociologists surveyed.

98 Wright and Elmer, General, p. 6.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Subject Matter</th>
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<td>Human Behavior in Social Situations</td>
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<td>Social Processes</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
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</table>

Subject Matter

GROUP NAME OF DEFINITIONS: 1921-1950

TABLE III
Briefly, then, from the time of Comte's use of the term sociology until 1950, as seen in the different conceptions and definitions contained in this chapter, there is a significant amount of disagreement as to what the term sociology means.
CHAPTER III
DEFINITIONS OF SOCIOLOGY IN
INTRODUCTORY TEXTS: 1951-1970

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the extent of agreement or disagreement on the definitions of sociology between 1951 and 1970 inclusive. Introductory texts are chosen as objects of this analysis because more than any type of sociology texts, they are concerned with defining the discipline. This is obvious since introductory sociology is the major course in which general sociology is taught in the United States.

The sample consists of sixteen introductory textbooks which have more than one edition. The latest edition of each book is used. Books having more than one edition are used because of the evident wide use of such books. These books are considered introductory texts because the authors so specify either in the titles or in the prefaces of the book.

This sample is drawn from the Cumulative Book Index for the years 1951 through 1970 using only those books published in the United States. It is thought that the rationale for using introductory texts along with the manner in which the sample is drawn, in addition to making
the sample systematic, adds to the validity of this study, making the results representative of the field of general sociology in the United States for the years mentioned.

The definitions will be analyzed: 1. as to their emphases on the scientific nature of sociology; and 2. as to their view of the subject matter of sociology. In order to obtain a better view of the definitions and their agreement or disagreement both the definitions and portions of the explanations of the definitions are used.

Bogardus

Sociology is

. . . [T]he study of ways in which social experiences function in developing, maturing, and repressing human beings through interpersonal stimulation. Since these ways of making and re-making the members of social groups tend to appear in a given order they have been called social processes, and sociology has been called the study of social processes.

In this definition, there is no explicit reference to the nature of sociology. Bogardus gives social processes as the primary focus of sociology. This view is not new, it was used by Ross and Cooley.

Roucek and Warren

Sociology is

. . . [T]he study of human beings in their group relationships. As such it studies interaction within and between groups of people . . .

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Like any science, it attempts to describe its subject matter and to point out such uniformities as are found to exist.²

Roucek and Warren believe that sociology is a science and that description and formulation of uniformities are the goals of this science. In this definition they view interaction between individuals as the subject matter of sociology.

Sutherland, Woodward, and Maxwell

These sociologists ask the question "what is sociology?" but they do not answer it in formal definition. Instead, they say that sociology is one of the social sciences which cannot be specified because "the boundary lines among the social sciences have not been set up in any rigid fashion."
The emphasis of sociology can be found in the "general study of human social behavior as it occurs in groups, large and small . . . . No one of them [the social sciences] can be embalmed in a definition."³

Ogburn and Nimkoff

Sociology is "the scientific study of social life."⁴

In discussing the scientific nature of sociology they point


out that "As a general science, sociology is also especially fitted to deal with characteristics that are common to all groups and societies." This emphasis on the science of sociology is similar to that used by Sorokin in his definition, and it is the first definition in this chapter to emphasize this characteristic of sociology. In explaining the subject matter of sociology, Ogburn and Nimkoff make the following statements:

Common to the various types of social life are the interactions of individuals. Sociology in studying social life studies interactions as social organization. Sociology explains social life "... in its widest meaning by four factors; heredity, natural environment, culture, and the group," with special emphasis on the latter two.

Ogburn and Nimkoff present the most extensive explanation of the subject matter thus far. They also present a different category of subject matter. With the exception of Tonnies, this is the first time the specific term social life has been used as a subject matter within the confines of this thesis.

Bell and Sirjamaki

They define sociology as "one of the sciences which studies human behavior." In discussing the scientific

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5Ibid., p. 25.

6Ibid., pp. 22, 23, 25, and 34.

nature of sociology, the authors do not differentiate it from the other social sciences. They do say, however, that sociology attempts to "forecast behavior."

With this knowledge we will . . . be able to shape or modify behavior to the extent that we can control the operation of the forces involved because . . . human behavior is not capricious. It is the product of orderly and identifiable processes and forces.

Bell and Sirjamaki, therefore, present an applied sociology. This is the first time in this chapter that sociology is presented primarily as an applied social science. Comte also wished to modify social behavior. Sumner, Ward, Giddings, Ross, and Cooley, also wished sociology to have an applied function. Bell and Sirjamaki, however, do not attempt an explanation of the subject matter nor do they attempt to differentiate the subject matter of sociology from that of the other social sciences.

Chinoy

Chinoy presents a different view of the definition of sociology than encountered previously:

We have thus far not defined sociology, other than to identify it as a scientific study of man and society. But this statement tells us what sociology is about, not what it is or how it differs from anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, and history, all of which also study man and society. To offer a definition at this point in order to isolate the essential ingredients in sociology and to distinguish it from the other social sciences would be of little value. We might define sociology as the study of human groups,

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8Ibid., pp. 4-5, 8.
of social relationships, of social institutions . . . . But we should understand these definitions only after we had explored the meaning of the key terms or concepts . . . . In so doing we should also necessarily introduce still other terms whose meaning we should then have to define. The first step toward the understanding of sociology . . . is the mastery of its basic concepts.9

In discussing the scientific nature of sociology, Chinoy makes this statement:

The chief characteristic of both scientific analysis and observation is objectivity. The validity of any conclusion and the reliability of any observation are—or should be—indeed independent of the values and beliefs of the scientist.10

In making this value judgment Chinoy places his sociology in the realm of pure science.

Broom and Selznick

These authors define sociology in the following manner: "It explores the varieties of group structure and the ways they affect political, psychological, and economic relationships."11 The use of group structure as the subject matter of sociology is similar to Comte's social statics and Durkheim's social morphology.

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10 Ibid., p. 5.

Cuber

Sociology is "a body of scientific knowledge about human relationships," or "man's behavior in relation to other men." In explaining the scientific nature of sociology, Cuber says that sociological observations are scientific and accurate and are based on what is, not what ought to be.\(^\text{12}\) Here again, sociology is seen as a pure science.

Green

Sociology is

\[\ldots \text{[T]he synthesizing and generalizing science of man in all his social relationships}\]

\[\ldots \text{The focus of attention upon social relationships makes sociology a distinctive field.}\]\(^\text{13}\)

In explaining the scientific nature of sociology he says that

\[\ldots \text{[S]ociology seeks to determine what large classified numbers of people in a given society do in their social relationships . . . to explain why they behave in that fashion, and finally to state the significance of that behavior in terms of major social trends. Then, generalization and synthesis are achieved.}\]\(^\text{14}\)

Green presents a pure social science and his focus is similar to that used by Pareto and Sorokin. He is emphasizing the generalizing nature of sociology (i.e., the fact that sociology looks for common characteristics of social

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\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 7.
phenomena). This is significant because it also shows that Green's emphasis is similar to that of Ogburn and Nimkoff even though they use different subject matter (social relationships and social life).

In explaining the subject matter of sociology, Green points out:

For the most part, and in all social behavior, man behaves toward conceptions, not things. The intricate web of meaning is the basic stuff of man in society. . . . Action within social relationships is mainly guided by conscious intent. This intent is to keep something, gain something, or change something in terms of the meaning attached to the given something. . . . The specific meanings and intents of many people combine in action to produce events and trends that can be studied independently of the individual meanings and intents which made them up.15

Both Weber and Green are concerned with the "web of meaning" (Green) or subjective meaning (Weber).

Horton and Hunt

They define sociology "as the scientific study of social life."16 In explaining the scientific nature of sociology they quote Karl Pearson who says:

The unity of all science consists alone in its method, not in its material. The man who classifies facts of any kind whatever, who sees their mutual relation and describes their sequences; is applying the scientific method and is a man of science.17

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15 Ibid., pp. 2, 3, and 6.


Again sociology is seen as a pure science.

In explaining the subject matter of sociology, Horton and Hunt stress the study of various forms of social life found in "customs . . . , institutions . . . , values." Sociology concentrates its study upon man's group life and the products of his group living . . . . Sociology is interested in the way groups interact with one another and in the processes and institutions they develop."18 As Ogburn and Nimkoff, they attempt to fit varying types of subject matter under one term: social life.

**Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen**

They define sociology as "the systematic formulation and testing of theoretical generalizations about the forms, processes, and consequences of the behavior of human beings in relation to each other."19

In discussing the scientific nature of sociology, Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen are more explicit and their explanation is more extensive than the others. Specifically, two principles of science are given: the "principle of empiricism" and the "principle of efficient causation."

The first is explained this way:

Observation is always, directly or indirectly, the ultimate arbiter of issues in the search

18Ibid., pp. 22, 23.

for basic knowledge . . . . This principle means that a reported response to a phenomenon is objective when all qualified persons who observe the phenomenon agree with the report.

As for the principle of efficient causation, "Phenomena can be explained only by discovering uniform relations between them and antecedent or concomitant conditions."\(^{20}\) The definition of Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen includes more specific tasks for sociology to accomplish than the definitions of Pareto and Sorokin, even though all three use the term "generalizing science" within their definitions. Moreover, this is the first time that such tasks as "systematic formulation and testing of theoretical generalizations" have been mentioned within the confines of a definition.

Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen are also extensive in their explanation of the subject matter of sociology as evidenced by the following:

The basic premise is that the human being always is born into a social group . . . . The person and the group are to be understood in terms of interaction . . . . Through interpersonal and intergroup relations, social arrangements emerge, become patterned, and may undergo change. These arrangements extend in scope from family structures to international political organizations. Sociologists are concerned with the properties of these social arrangements, including positions, roles, norms, sanctions, values, and goals . . . . In analyzing the interconnection of such properties, sociologists study . . . ways in which persons and groups relate to each other.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\)Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

\(^{21}\)Ibid., p. 8.
From the definition and the explanation it is evident that the subject matter suggested by these authors is human behavior or the way human beings behave in relation to each other. Human behavior is an encompassing term used to include the various properties of social arrangements discussed above.

Mack and Young

They define sociology as "the study of the social aspects of human life."22

In discussing the scientific nature of sociology, Mack and Young make this statement: "It is a body of knowledge, compiled by use of the scientific method, about the structures of social life." This method consists of the following steps:

1. an observer gains knowledge through one or more of his senses,
2. he uses his reason to interpret his observations . . . and
3. other persons sufficiently well trained in the area being studied . . . reach the same conclusions . . . then we have a scientific fact arrived at by the scientific method.23

Mack and Young again present an extensive explanation of the scientific nature of sociology, even though the definition itself is not so extensive. Their explanation agrees with Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen's principle of objectivity


23Ibid., pp. 1, 5.
in that it is observed, interpreted, and presented to colleagues for their consensus or dissensus before it is accepted.

In explanation of the subject matter of sociology, Mack and Young make this statement:

People everywhere deal with other human beings as members of groups . . . . Every human being is born into a group and spends his lifetime in patterned social relations . . . . Social life--the way in which groups are put together and the way in which they function--is the subject matter of sociology.  

From this explanation it is evident that Mack and Young mean social life when they say the social aspects of human life. They are concerned specifically with how these groups are put together and how they function, which is analogous to social statics and social dynamics.

Merrill

According to Merrill, sociology is "the science of group interaction." In discussing the scientific nature of sociology he quotes Karl Pearson, as do Horton and Hunt. This position again sees sociology as a pure science with an emphasis upon method. In explaining the subject matter of sociology, Merrill says:

Sociology studies man as a social [group] animal . . . . [The groups of which man is a member] produce customs and behavior patterns that are handed down from generation to

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24Ibid., p. 1.

generation by learning. Society is held together by these patterns . . . . The relationships between human beings in groups are determined by these elements; together they constitute the social heritage . . . . In the broadest sense, therefore, sociology is the study of group interaction and the products of that interaction.26

Merrill's subject matter, group interaction, is the same as that used by Roucek and Warren.

Rose and Rose define sociology as "the science that studies how people interact and the effects of this interaction on human behavior."27 In discussing the scientific nature of sociology, they say:

In four major respects--an objective attitude, a set of methods for securing and analyzing facts, a goal of seeking generalized conclusions about cause-and-effect relations, and being value-free--sociology has set out to be a science. In a fifth major respect, however, it as yet lacks one of the characteristics of a developed science: it has not achieved a coherent body of theoretical generalizations accumulated by previous sociologists into which all new research is integrated.28

Rose and Rose, therefore, view sociology as a pure science, but as yet not fully developed.

After enumerating the various types of sociology's subject matter, interaction, they make this statement:

26Ibid., p. 9.


What processes lead to these interactions; what exactly occurs when they take place, and what are the short-run and the long-run consequences of them are the subjects sociologists study . . . . Actually the important and most distinctive thing about human interaction most of the time is the individuals involved are not representing merely themselves and their thoughts but rather the accumulated thoughts and ways of behaving of their whole society back through time . . . . 29

The fact that people are seen as representatives of all of the accumulated thoughts and behavior resembles what Simmel said in describing the pure forms of interaction as "the totality of social life which is and has been transmitted throughout the life of man," 30 and is similar to what Merrill calls social heritage.

Bierstedt

At the conclusion of the first chapter in his text, Bierstedt says, "One might contend, with some cogency, that this entire chapter is in a sense an extended definition of sociology." However, he thinks it is best to use a short definition. He, therefore, adopts as his own a definition contributed by P. A. Sorokin. To Sorokin, "Sociology is a generalizing science of socio-cultural phenomena viewed in their generic forms, types, and manifold interconnections."

Bierstedt goes on to say that:

This definition shares some of the imperfections of definitions in general. More particularly, it fails to distinguish between social

29 Ibid., pp. 3, 4.
30 [Simmel], Sociology of Simmel, p. 21.
and cultural phenomena and groups them together under the umbrella adjective [socio-cultural]. It has the virtue nevertheless of indicating in a brief sentence, the formal aim and purpose of the discipline.\textsuperscript{31}

First of all, the last statement is not necessarily factual as has been evidenced by this thesis thus far; there does not seem to be any formal aim and purpose of this discipline. Secondly, this is the first time in this analysis that an author has used Sorokin's definition. Thirdly, Bierstedt's definition is extensive in that it enumerates the scientific nature of the field (a generalizing science); only Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen have done this before.

In explaining the scientific nature of sociology, Bierstedt points out that sociology is "a social, a categorical, a pure, an abstract, a generalizing, both a rational and an empirical, and a general science." Science according to him "is not a body of content but a method of approach to any content." This method contains the principles of "objectivity, relativism, ethical neutrality, parsimony, skepticism, and humility."\textsuperscript{32} The extensive nature of Bierstedt's explanation of the scientific nature of sociology is similar to that of Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen.

In explanation of the subject matter of sociology, Bierstedt states that it is concerned with


\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 15.
... the nature of the groups to which individuals belong and the nature of the societies in which they live. Sociology is interested in the social forms and structures within which this behavior takes place.33

Bierstedt's explanation of the subject matter is not as extensive as that of Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen. Bierstedt's social structure (within which behavior takes place) is similar to social statics as used by Comte and social morphology as used by Durkheim.

Vander Zanden

Sociology is "the scientific study of human interaction."34 Sociology is a science because it is concerned with the "disciplined pursuit of objectivity . . . as objectively as is humanly possible."35 This is not an extensive explanation, because it emphasizes only one aspect of the scientific nature of sociology. In his explanation of the subject matter of sociology he states that human interaction is "the mutual and reciprocal influencing by two or more people of each other's feelings, attitudes, and actions . . . . In brief, the unit of sociological investigation is the human group."36

33Ibid., p. 9.
35Ibid., pp. 5, 8.
36Ibid., p. 8.
**TABLE IV**

AREAS OF SUBJECT MATTER IN DEFINITIONS: 1951-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Social or human or human relations</th>
<th>Social or human life</th>
<th>Social or human process-behaviors</th>
<th>Socio-cultural phenomena</th>
<th>Man &amp; society</th>
<th>Group structure</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Sutherland, Woodward &amp; Maxwell</td>
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Summary of Findings

The first objective of the analysis, the examination of the emphases concerning the scientific nature of sociology, reveals that only one definition (Bogardus) does not discuss the scientific nature of sociology, and only one definition (Bell and Sirjamaki) states that sociology is an applied science. Therefore, there is common agreement among the definitions that sociology is a pure science. There seems to be a tendency throughout the definitions for some sort of explanation of what the term science means. It is interesting to note that in comparing the opening chapters of a sample of introductory texts in both the physical and social sciences (economics, political science, and psychology), Kurtz and Maiolo found that sociologists rank first in explanations of the "philosophy of science," while the other fields were only briefly concerned or not concerned at all. The authors conclude that in introductory texts the purpose should be

... to indicate the nature of the discipline in terms of its subject matter, rather than to carry on a debate on the methodology of the social sciences, or to present a discussion of the philosophy of science.

because this is seen as "an attempt to defend its (sociology's) place in the world of science."37

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The definitions and explanations analyzed in this chapter reveal that there is disagreement as to the subject matter of sociology (see Table IV). Four sources (Roucek and Warren, Merrill, Rose and Rose, and Vander Zanden) use interaction as their subject matter. Two (Cuber and Green) use social relationships. Three (Ogburn and Nimkoff, Horton and Hunt, and Mack and Young) use social life, while three (Sutherland, Woodward, and Maxwell, Bell and Sirjamaki, and Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen) mention human or social behavior. Twelve of the sixteen definitions or 75 percent mention one of these four. The other 25 percent are found in the table as: processes (Bogardus), man and society (Chinoy), group structure (Broom and Selznick) and sociocultural phenomena (Bierstedt). Another major area of agreement concerning the general nature of the subject matter might also be mentioned: encompassing subject matters, e.g., this is when one general term is used to include more specific terms, of which each term might be used as the subject matter. Five definitions contain this type of subject matter (Broom and Selznick, Bierstedt, Horton and Hunt, Lundberg, Schrag and Larsen, and Ogburn and Nimkoff).

In conclusion, there is common agreement that sociology is a pure science and disagreement as to the subject matter of this science.
CHAPTER IV
A COMPARISON OF THE TWO EXISTING STUDIES OF DEFINITIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

As far as this author can determine, there has been only one published study on the definitions of sociology since the inception of the term.¹ This lack leaves a research gap and shows that this is a neglected area of sociological investigation. Assuming that the definition of sociology is basic to the field and considering the disagreement among sociologists concerning this definition found thus far in this thesis, one is led to ask why there has been only one study in this area. Whatever the reasons, the purpose of this chapter is to compare Paul Hanly Fur- fey's study with the findings in Chapter III of the present investigation to see if there is some continuity in disagreement among sociologists as to what the term "sociology" means. It is hoped that this chapter will present a synthesis of the findings of both studies.

Furfey's Study

Furfey first published his study in 1948. Its purpose was to "select a definition of sociology which will be considered final" by examining the trends of existing definitions or "to ask how much agreement already exists regarding the nature of sociology."\(^2\)

Furfey describes his sample in the following manner:

All the definitions which turned up during two or three years of intermittent search were copied. Only formal definitions were collected; no effort was made to interpret writers who did not commit themselves explicitly. The definitions were all taken from the works of recognized sociologists or from standard general or technical dictionaries . . . . The sample thus obtained was chosen too casually to be adequate. The next step, therefore, was to eliminate names from the groups that appeared to be overrepresented until the balance constituted a sample fairly well stratified by country, date, and school of thought. At least the 81 definitions in the final sample were widely scattered in these three respects. It is certainly not a scientifically designed sample, but perhaps it may suffice to indicate general trends.\(^3\)

Three books included in the sample were published before 1900, thirteen from 1900-1919, forty-two from 1920-1939, and twenty in 1940 or thereafter. Three contained no publication date. Of the total of eighty-one definitions collected, thirty-nine came from the United States, ten from France or Belgium, twelve from Germany or Austria, nine from other European countries, and eleven from

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 138, 130.

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 130, 131.
In selecting a final definition of sociology, Furfey says "it is important to keep in mind the rules for good definition which logicians traditionally give." The principal rules are as follows: (1) The definition must be coextensive with the thing defined; it must apply to all that is denoted by the defined term, and to nothing else . . . . (2) The thing defined must not in any way, directly or indirectly, be included in the definition . . . . (3) The definition should not be expressed in negative terms unless it defines a negative concept . . . . (4) The definition should be clear . . . . The type of definition which best meets the requirements of the above rules is definition per genus et differentiam, definition by giving the immediate class to which the thing defined belongs and the specific difference which distinguishes it from the other members of the class.

Furfey then presents the principles for a definition of a science:

That which a science studies is called its adequate object, its object of attribution, or simply its object. This may be defined more accurately as "that which is considered for its own sake in some discipline and to which are referred all the things which are treated in that discipline." To define a science it is merely necessary to define its adequate object. This is done most appropriately, as in the case of any definition, by stating a generic element and a specific difference.

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4 Ibid., p. 131.
5 Ibid., p. 121.
These are furnished by the material object and the formal object respectively. The material object is what a science studies, considered in itself. The formal object is the particular aspect under which it is studied by the science. The same material objects may be common to many sciences. Thus the human body is studied by anatomy, physiology, histology, pathology, and other disciplines. To define these sciences and to distinguish them one from another it is necessary to give their formal objects, the particular aspects under which they respectively consider their material. Sciences receive their final specification from their formal objects.7

In order, then, "To define sociology it is only necessary to choose a material and a formal object for the science."8

As far as the results of Furfey's study are concerned, "the agreement is far from perfect." However, "study of the sample shows enough agreement to indicate the nature of sociology in a general way," but the "final" definition must neither be too broad nor too narrow so in examining the findings of his study he will use the "central tendency" of the material and formal objects to formulate the final definition.9 In terms of the material objects or "the subject matters"10 of the definitions analyzed, Furfey says

When one analyzes the sample of definitions to discover the consensus regarding the material object of sociology, the first impression is rather discouraging. The majority of these

7Ibid., p. 123.
8Ibid., p. 129.
9Ibid., p. 132.
10Ibid., footnote, p. 9.
writers use a special, personal phraeseology and it seems hopeless to distinguish any agreement among them. On further analysis, however, certain broad categories stand out.

Categories of material objects are:

1. Society or the group .................................. 23
2. Interaction within the group .......................... 17
3. Social relationships or association .................... 12
4. Social phenomena ......................................... 11
5. Social facts ................................................ 4
6. The material object was too vague to put in one of these categories ........ 7
7. No material object was given ............................. 9

Furfey points out that the above total of material objects is eighty-three instead of eighty-one because two definitions are used twice. He concludes that in formulating the "final" definition of sociology, society is the "central tendency" of the material objects. He also claims that none of the definitions would disagree with "society in its structural and functional aspects" as the material object of sociology.11

In terms of the formal object or the "aspect under which the material object is studied," the majority (forty-seven of eighty-one) of the definitions contained none. (This implies that these definitions specified sociology as a science, only, and did not specify under what aspect this science, studies the material object.) The remaining thirty-four definitions containing a formal object reveal "a definite central tendency" of one characteristic "which sets it [sociology] off from the other social sciences."

11Ibid., pp. 134-136, 137.
This formal object is "its effort to discover laws or
generalizations broad enough to apply to all, or at least
to many, of the areas of human association." The number of
definitions seen as agreeing with this were twenty-seven
(of the thirty-four). 12

Furfey then concludes that the "central tendency" of
the majority of the definitions dictate that the "final"
definition be: "Sociology is the science which seeks the
brodest possible generalizations applicable to society in
its structural and functional aspects." He goes on to say
that

The assertion that this wording expresses the
trend of existing definitions is unavoidably
somewhat subjective. It is impossible to
demonstrate it absolutely, because personal
interpretation necessarily enters to some
extent. The present writer asserts with con-
fidence, however, that at least it does not
depart widely from the trend. This degree of
assurance suffices for the present purpose. 13

Comparison with the Present Analysis

Before comparing Furfey's findings with the findings
of the present analysis a comparison of the purposes and
procedures of each is in order. First of all, even though
both studies are in the same general area, Furfey's stated
purpose is to formulate a "final" definition of sociology
while this thesis is concerned only with the extent of
disagreement on the existing definitions. Because of this,

12 Ibid., pp. 137, 138.
13 Ibid., p. 139.
it is felt that the final results of Furfey's study do not lend themselves to comparison with the present study. On the other hand, Furfey's preliminary results do compare with the present analysis. Moreover, Furfey's procedure differs from the procedure of Chapter III of the present analysis in the following ways:

1. Furfey's sample was not limited by one or certain nationalities but is supposed to include all countries of the world, however, it does not do this, (e.g., countries of the Middle East, Africa, and the Orient are omitted.) Hence, his findings may not reflect all the countries that published books in sociology before 1948 which might tend to contradict or add more categories to his findings. Chapter III, however, is limited to a sampling of one country.

2. Furfey's sample includes a range of definitions from over a fifty-year period, (before 1900 until past 1940), while Chapter III is concerned only with a twenty-year period.

3. Furfey used any book which contained a formal definition of sociology written by "recognized" sociologists representing all "schools of thought."

Neither of these criteria are explained nor are any standards for making such judgments given. Chapter III is confined to introductory text books which are seen as representing general sociology (the area
of the discipline most concerned with this definition).

4. Furfey presents the findings of his study without exposing the reader to actual analysis of the definitions so that the reader might better understand Furfey's results. Chapter III of this thesis does provide some analysis of the selected definitions.

5. While Furfey sees the formal object as the most important aspect of the definition, the present analysis emphasizes the material object or subject matter. This is a basic disagreement between the two studies. Furfey uses logical criteria for formulating the "final" definition and applies these criteria to the definitions he analyzed. Chapter III, however, concludes with emphasis on the subject matter because of the exploratory nature of such a study. Furfey's concern with a logically "correct," "final" definition tends to obscure the actual extent of disagreement, which is the primary concern of Chapter III.

The shortcomings of Furfey's study, then, are avoided in Chapter III of this thesis. An advantage of this thesis is that it extends the findings of both studies by comparing them so that the agreement and disagreement reflected in both may be synthesized to exhibit a wider range of definitions over a longer period of time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Furfey's Study</th>
<th>Chapter III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Society or Group</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social Relationships</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interaction</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social Phenomena</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social Life</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social Facts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Subject Matter too Vague</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. No Subject Matter</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Human or Social Behavior</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Structure of Groups</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Processes</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percentages total over 100% as some authors use more than one subject matter.
The findings of the two studies indicate that there is a common agreement that sociology is a science. Moreover, Furfey found that thirty-three of the eighty-one, or 40.7 percent, of the definitions have a formal object while the present analysis (Chapter III) reports that two of the sixteen definitions or 12.5 percent have a formal object. Thus, there has been a sizable decrease in the use of formal objects from 1951-1970.

Furfey's material object is the same as the subject matter of sociology utilized in Chapter III. Social relationships was used as the subject matter in 14.8 percent and 12.5 percent of the definitions of the two studies, respectively. Interaction was used as the subject matter in 20.9 percent of the definitions in Furfey's study and in 25.0 percent during the 1951-1970 study. Society or group, however, was used less often during the second period, 1951-1970 (28.4 percent and 6.3 percent, respectively). Furfey also found that 13.6 percent of the definitions he examined dealt with social phenomena, whereas only one definition in the present study (6.3 percent) contains a similar emphasis. Five percent of Furfey's definitions dealt with social facts; this is not found in the present study. Finally, social life, human behavior, social processes, and the structure of groups were not found by Furfey in his study but were found in Chapter III. It is evident, then, that there have been changes both in the types of subject matter and in the amount of usage of the same types
of subject matter since Furfey's study.

In conclusion, a comparison of Chapter III (Definitions of Sociology in Introductory Texts: 1951-1970) with Furfey's study reveals that through the periods studied, there has been a common agreement that sociology is a science while disagreement continues to exist as to the subject matter of this science. In addition, in spite of the dissimilarities between the two studies, in purpose and procedure, the results are synthesized to add to the body of this thesis further evidence about the disagreement among sociologists on the definition of sociology.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis is an attempt to determine the extent of agreement among sociologists on the definition of sociology. The findings of this study indicate that there was, and still is, disagreement concerning this definition. This disagreement is evident in Chapter II, dealing with the conceptions and definitions in Early European and Early American sociology, and also in Chapter III, concerning such definitions in American sociology through 1970. The synthesis of Chapter III with Furfey's study (Chapter IV), provides evidence that this disagreement does not only exist in the United States but in other countries as well. It should be pointed out that throughout these chapters one finds an agreement that sociology is a science but disagreement on the subject matter of this science. A brief examination of introductory text books published in 1971 shows that this trend continues.¹

David Popeneoe, Sociology (New York: Appleton Century
Not only is there disagreement concerning the subject matter of sociology during each period studied, but the proportion of definitions which contain the same subject matter changes from period to period. An illustration of this variation, for Furfey's study and the present study (1921-1950 and 1951-1970), is presented in Table VI. It is apparent that four types of subject matter (group or society, interaction, social relationships, and human behavior) are the most frequently used throughout. However, there is a variation among the periods studied on these four types of subject matter. Approximately 28 percent of the definitions in Furfey's study emphasized group or society as the subject matter as compared to about 44 percent for the 1921-1950 period and around 6 percent during the 1951-1970 period. The use of interaction fluctuated from 21 percent in Furfey's study, to 13 percent (1921-1950), to 25 percent (1950-1970). Social relationships was found in 14.8 percent of the definitions in Furfey's study. This is compared to a small percentage (4.3) of the definitions during the 1921-1950 period

TABLE VI
THE VARIATION OF SUBJECT MATTERS
OF DEFINITIONS: FURFEY'S STUDY,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT MATTER</th>
<th>Furfey's Study</th>
<th>1921-1950</th>
<th>1951-1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Group or Society</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interaction</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Relationships</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Human Behavior</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social Processes</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Man &amp; His Environment</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Human Association</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Human Experience</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Group, Culture, Personality, Social Organization, Social Processes, Social Control</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Social Phenomena</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Social Life</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Social Facts</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Structure of Groups</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Subject Matter too vague</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. No Subject Matter Given</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 102.3* 100.0 100.3

*Some authors used more than one subject matter.
and 12.5 percent during the 1951-1970 period. Finally, human behavior was not found in any of the definitions in Furfey's study, while it comprised almost 9 percent in 1921-1950 and almost 19 percent during the 1951-1970 period.

One of the most important areas of agreement in this thesis was found in the Early European and Early American conceptions of sociology in Chapter II. Some of these conceptions contained a concern for social change and at the same time mentioned sociology as an applied or utilitarian science. Comte conceived sociology as the study of social evolution with sociologists as the priests of the positivistic society. Sumner, Giddings, and Ward's conception was similar in that social evolution was also the subject matter and sociology was viewed as sort of a "philosophy of Life" that would direct this evolution. Ross and Cooley both wished to focus on the social processes which are endemic to social change as the subject matter of sociology. Ross also wanted sociologists to plan the policy of society, and Cooley wanted sociology to aid in social improvement.

The definitions examined from 1921-1970 and in Furfey's study, however, contained little or no mention of social change and utilitarian sociology. In his study, Furfey did not find definitions mentioning either social change or sociology as a utilitarian science. During the 1921-1950 period only one definition (Reuter and Hart) mentioned the social processes of social change as the subject matter of sociology, and only three definitions (Hays, Bernard, and
Binder) indicated that sociology is an applied science. Finally, only one definition (Bell and Sirjamaki) during 1951-1970 mentioned sociology as an applied science. It is possible that the Early European and Early American sociologists might have been dissatisfied with their societies which might have led them to conceive sociology as an applied science studying social change. Thus, it might be postulated that an emphasis on social change (in relation to the subject matter of sociology) is endemic to a concern for sociology as an applied science. Only future studies, however, can validate this observation.

It is this author's opinion that the examination of the definitions of sociology is useful because it seems to indicate that little consensus has been reached among sociologists on the basic concerns of the discipline. The different terms used by the authors of the texts suggest different emphases of the social world, e.g., individual interaction as opposed to the structures and functions of society. The findings of the study also indicate that an awareness of the basic definition of the field must first develop before a synthesis of the many definitions can occur.

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2 The brief examination of introductory text books published in 1971 reveals that there is a renewed interest in sociology as an applied science and social change as the subject matter of this science because such a concern is referred to in all seven books. This focus, however, is not used in any of the definitions themselves.


Cooley, Charles Horton (deceased); Angell, Robert Cooley; and Carr, Lowell J. Introductory Sociology. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.


