

Chapter 1

Confronting Problems in the Study of Theory in American Sociology (1915/18–1945/50)

An adequate account of how contemporary sociological theory in the United States has come to be as it is will probably elude us for some time to come. Certainly, the task becomes even more problematic, or formidable, if the usual textbook-like chronological sequence of masters/mistresses, exemplars, or chief representatives of major orientations across the years is rejected. To demand an analysis of major and minor, dominant, minority, and/or coordinate competing orientations, divided and arranged in appropriate time periods, compounds the difficulties, because this approach requires the assessment of the rise and fall, intellectual defenses and critiques, expansions and contractions, displacements and replacements, of the stances. Most emphatically, the delineation of the background period immediately preceding the present is not sufficient for present purposes. Demarcation of periods back to the beginning of theory in American sociology, along with their sequential interrelations, becomes a required task. (The possible contribution of each and every period to the present state of theory must be considered

and not excluded a priori simply because of its apparent temporal-historical "distance.") Though preparatory studies have begun, much remains to be done.

One of the more conspicuous lacunae is to be found between World Wars I and II. To be sure, the ideas of a few sociologists (e.g., Park, Thomas, Mead) have been investigated. But a comprehensive, extended, systematic analysis of general theory—beyond an isolated chapter or specialized article—simply does not exist. Precisely such an inquiry is contemplated here and holds the promise of extending knowledge about

1. the circumstances under which conflict occurred within (epistemological-) methodological theory and between it and substantive (or ontological) theory so that the two were differentiated and largely separated in the period in question;
2. what befell the legacy of social evolutionism from the pre-World War I years;
3. new theoretical orientations and their sources, especially in the 1930s and 1940s;
4. the displacement of earlier exemplars of classical European theory (e.g., Comte, Spencer, Gumplowicz) by somewhat later Europeans (e.g., Durkheim, Simmel, M. Weber) in the late 1930s and 1940s;¹ and
5. what permitted, if not facilitated, the rapid ascent and dominance of Parsonsian structural functionalism in so few years after the mid 1940s.²

Certainly, each of these questions has a major importance for the subsequent development of theory in American sociology. Each demands attention. But before inquiry can profitably begin, several major (and logically prior) problems must be recognized and addressed:

1. A critic may claim that in the above concerns, theory is merely assumed to exist. Thus, the question of evidence for a basic and continuous interest in theory in American sociology from 1915 to 1945 must be examined and assessed.
2. If such interest can be shown to exist, it must presumably be associated with one or more conceptions of theory, including their relations to present views.
3. Further, a conception may be defined abstractly or formally without a specific referent, exemplification, or content. If the latter is absent, some means of linkage must be found or devised.
4. Because the content of theory at any point in time may involve continuity with, as well as discontinuity from, the past, an analytic classifi-

category scheme that encompasses the basic problems of theory and the possible bases of answers will have to be introduced. It must become possible analytically to state comparisons and contrasts, similarities and dissimilarities, between one particular theory and another at a given time and at different points in time (e.g., between those of 1881–1915 and those of 1915–45).

5. Nevertheless, special precautions must be taken to assure that potential sources of discontinuity and dissimilarity are acknowledged and accorded their due weight. Such precaution will entail, among other things, attention to the possible intellectual influence of theoretical stances in other fields of knowledge in the United States and from Europe.

The first three problems (and a portion of the fourth) will be examined in some detail in the remainder of this chapter. Pursuit of the implications of a portion of the fourth and of the fifth, and the required analyses, will govern the organization of inquiry throughout most of the remaining chapters (except for chapter 2).

INDICATORS OF INTEREST IN THEORY

Undeniably, the most fundamental of all of the problems concerns evidence for a basic and continuous interest in theory throughout the years 1915–45 in American sociology. Fortunately, three major types of data are available for dealing with this issue.

The first type concerns the nature of the topical sessions in terms of which the annual meetings of the American Sociological Society or ASS were organized from 1921 on. Significantly, a “Social Theory and Social Evolution” division was included in 1921 but dropped in subsequent years. In 1931 a “Theory of Sociology” division was made a part of the program, but this was then omitted for two years. A “General Sociology: Sociological Theory and Social Planning” division was introduced in 1934. Finally, in 1935 a “Social Theory” division was instituted and included in the annual meetings (and in the plans for two meetings canceled during World War II) up to the end of the Second World War. Undeniably, the sporadic inclusion of the theory sessions up to 1935 in the annual American Sociological Society programs raises a basic question about the continuity of interest in the field.

The second type of data is afforded by the references to theory in the classificatory scheme for abstracting periodical literature in the *American Journal of Sociology* (AJS), beginning in 1921/22. Although the terms of reference varied, it is clear that an interest was present in 1921/22 through 1928/29, 1933/34 and 1934/35, 1939, 1939/40, 1940/41, and 1941/42 (i.e.,

until the onset of World War II). Because the years just noted are also the years in which abstracting occurred in the *AJS*, an interest in theory is thus continuous for the years indicated.

In 1929 the Census of Current Research Projects was reported in the *AJS* for the first time (based, presumably, on the categories employed in *Social Science Abstracts*). Theory appeared under "Social Theory and Its History" from this time until 1934. In 1934 and 1935 the category was "Theory and Methods," with the subdivisions "Methods of Research" and "Sociological Theory and History." In 1936, it became "Sociological Theory and History." For the next three years (1937–1939), the designation "History and Theory" was used. In 1940, the category was altered to "History and Theory of Sociology," and this persisted through 1945.

Among the sixteen categories that Ethel Shanas used in the analysis of space (by articles) in the *AJS* for 1895–1945 is "Theory and History" (i.e., not merely theory), in her article as published in that journal in May 1945. Shanas used five-year intervals, and the percentage varied from 35.9 (for 1920–24) to 7.1 (in 1935–39).³ Unfortunately, she provided no specific criteria for inclusion in the category. If the category is limited to theory only and, further, requires explicit use of the word *theory* in article titles, the number of includable articles (as I calculate it) is drastically reduced for the years 1915–44 from an overall percentage of 13.04 down to 0.04.⁴ (Indeed, no articles, so defined, could be found for the period from 1921 through 1937.)

Application of this restrictive notion of theory to the study of the *American Sociological Review* (*ASR*) yields only a bare minimum of articles for the period 1936 (when this journal began) to 1945. A total of 12 (or 1.9 percent of the 652 articles) is indicated.⁵

If the journals *Sociology and Social Research* (*S&SR*) and *Social Forces* (*SF*) are examined in terms of their contributions of theory articles (as just construed) for the time period 1915–44, only a few appear. (Seven can be identified in the former and only three for the latter.⁶)

A search of book and monograph publications employing the word *theory* in their titles or subtitles provides a third indication of interest in theory. The resulting list includes L.M. Bristol's *Social Adaptation* (via subtitle, 1915); J.P. Lichtenberger's *Development of Social Theory* (1923); H. E. Barnes's *Sociology and Political Theory* (1924); C. A. Ellwood's *The Psychology of Human Society* [1925] 1929); N. J. Spykman's *The Social Theory of Georg Simmel* (1925); P. A. Sorokin's *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (1928); F. N. House's *The Range of Social Theory* (1929); "Recent Theoretic Sociology in Europe and America," part 4 of House's *Development of Sociology* (1936); and *Contemporary Social Theory* (1940), edited by H. E. Barnes, H. P. Becker, and F. B. Becker.

Just how much is missed by requiring the explicit reference to theory

in the title or subtitle is now apparent. Certainly, E. S. Bogardus's *History of Social Thought* (1922), T. Abel's *Systematic Sociology in Germany* (1929), T. Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), H. E. Barnes's and H. P. Becker's *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (1938), and much of *Twentieth Century Sociology* (1945), edited by Gurvitch and Moore, are clearly classifiable under the rubric "theory." The use of such an "objective" criterion manifestly underestimates the extent of the interest in theory.

Accordingly, it is clearly evident that interest in sociological theory existed across the years 1915–45. Evidence for that interest can be documented in the titles of divisions or sections at the ASS annual meetings, especially from 1935 onward, as a category in the classification of abstracted literature and current research in progress, as one of the categories in the classification of articles studied by Shanas in the *AJS*, and as part of the actual titles of articles, books, and monographs. Admittedly, the evidence of interest is scarcely overwhelming, but it still constitutes at least an undeniable minimum.

CONCEPTIONS OF THEORY

Certainly, it is also basically important to know what conceptions were held of theory—and not just that sociologists were interested in theory. Eight generalizations can be drawn.

1. Actual definitions of theory, that is, social and sociological theory, are conspicuously missing over the three decades in question. No one specifically and systematically offered an actual definition—or even extended commentary—about the nature of social or sociological theory, until Merton's famous 1945 essay, "Sociological Theory," which discussed sociological theory in general. It is not that it is impossible to infer what theory meant, but that, interestingly, sociologists during these years did not feel obliged to provide definitions.

One might, of course, speculate that only with the very considerable intellectual change in the discipline throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which substantially affected the way that theory might be construed, was there a need to offer explicit definitions. The concerns about "sound" (or acceptable) sociological theory in Read Bain's "Trends in American Sociological Theory" (1929b), in Chapin's "Social Theory and Social Action" (1936), and in Lundberg's "The Thoughtways of Contemporary Sociology" (1936b) are suggestive of the importance of intellectual change in occasioning actual definitions of theory.

2. The terms *social theory* and *sociological theory* seem to have been used with about the same frequency throughout the years under consideration. *Social theory* was the designation employed in the census of current

research in the early 1930s and the term used in the annual meetings of the ASS up to and including 1945. By contrast, *sociological theory* was used in the vast majority of instances in article titles from 1936 to 1945.

Some sense of what may be involved can be gained from an examination of the meaning of the term *social theory* in Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20) at the very beginning of the period, and in Floyd H. House's *The Range of Social Theory* (1929) at about the midpoint of the period. As will become evident, the meanings seem to suggest that many sociologists and theorists apparently did not believe that a genuine, relatively complete, and independent discipline or science had as yet been achieved before the 1930s. The term *social theory* was sufficiently broad to include the intellectual resources of the other social sciences, which many sociologists wanted to be able to appropriate in the course of the changes and controversies in their discipline. Interestingly, in their "Methodological Note," Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–20 1:33) note that both social psychology and sociology are "to be embraced under the general term of social theory, as they are both concerned with the relation between the individual and the concrete social group." The "social" is apparently both attitude and "value," "subjective" and "objective," "part" and "whole," "individual" and "collective." Clearly, Thomas and Znaniecki do not want to forego the possible use of social psychology and its connections with general psychology in favor of an exclusive interest in sociology (and social structure).

House's *The Range of Social Theory* (1929) is considerably more encompassing. It envisages theory as including contributions to solving problems about people and their physical environment (e.g., human geography, population, race, and nationality); community and the organization of economic markets (economics); human nature and personality (social psychology); collective action (collective behavior); organizations, cultures, and cultural change (cultural anthropology); and social conflict, order, law, government, and politics (political science). *The Range of Social Theory* seems to reflect the importance of the contributions of other disciplines in the resolution of the controversies of the 1920s over the nature of social phenomena, the character of the instincts and original nature in the conception of social forces, the significance of culture, and the tenability of social evolution as a grand theory of social change—in all of which psychology and cultural anthropology were especially significant. Understandably, then, social theory was to be construed as encompassing and synthetic.⁷

Certainly by the mid 1930s, the professionalization of the discipline had advanced substantially, and the newer generation of sociologists, with perhaps more methodological rigor and confidence, no longer sought to avoid disciplinary self-reliance or autonomy. And so it might be conjectured that the term *sociological theory* has tended to become prevalent in the literature.

3. During the 1920s and 1930s, theory was commonly conceived to be general (or, as might more recently be said, grand, comprehensive, or macro) in nature, and was equated with general sociology. Admittedly, this view persisted from the pre-World War I era. Both Giddings at Columbia and Small at Chicago subscribed to this view differentiating a general from a special (or specialized) sociology or sociologies. Gehlke, who was one of Giddings's doctoral students, equates "sociological theory . . . [with] what is usually denominated 'general sociology'" in the preface of his 1915 doctoral dissertation (Gehlke 1915). According to Giddings (1896, 31–33), the term *general sociology* designates "the scientific study of society as a whole," social elements, first principles, essential fact, causes or laws, the fundamental phenomena of social life under its varied forms. It involves what is universal and fundamental to all societies at all times (32–33; Giddings 1901, 8). In Small's (1912, 200) view, general sociology is the "study of the conditions (physical and psychological), elements, forms, processes, results (at given stages), and implications of human association." And whether focused on structure or process in association, such a general sociology is to reveal the general, common, invariant, or universal in social life—including, presumably, its foundations.

And the association of theory with general sociology persists. At one point, Floyd House (1929, 287) refers to the "task of social theory, or general sociology." It is also evident that Becker associates his systematic theory with general sociology in his *Systematic Sociology* (1932b, 15), for he alludes to "the general sociology here expounded."

4. Theory during the period under review also came to mean the sets of explanatory ideas of the great figures of the past, the classical masters of sociology. Thus, theory came to have a historical dimension (which many sociologists in the later years of the period attempted to redefine, reject, or even extirpate; e.g., Lundberg 1945, 504). Interestingly, many of the presentations were thus temporal, historical, or developmental. Bristol's *Social Adaptation* (1915), Bogardus's *A History of Social Thought* (1922), Lichtenberger's *Development of Social Theory* (1923), Ellwood's *A History of Social Philosophy* (1938), and Barnes's and Becker's *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (1938) are illustrative.

Accordingly, a curious association between theory and historical sociology developed, with the latter being construed in part as the "history of sociology." (Howard Becker, [1934, 18] objected to this "lamentable error" of identifying "historical sociology" with the "history of sociology," but he conceded that it was one that a "great many American sociologists" have made.) This linkage is also evident in the designations used to refer to theory in the schemes for classification of abstracted periodical literature and research projects in the censuses as reported in the *AJS*.

5. The term *theory* in sociology was also invoked during the years under review to signify the general intellectual sociological orientations of sociologists. The considerable number of references in titles of articles to theories of particular sociologists (e.g., Giddings, Small, Howe, Sumner, and Tocqueville) is illustrative. Three were in *S&SR*, two in the *AJS*, and one in *SF* from 1918 to 1942.

6. In this period, too, theory was conceived to mean a coherent, logically developed, and integrated system. Both the European and the American masters of the past (i.e., before World War I) were systematists and their sociologies systems. Certainly, many American sociologists during the 1920s found it difficult to conceive of theory apart from a rational whole or a logical system. Giddings (1896) referred to his book *The Principles of Sociology* as combining "the principles of sociology in a coherent theory" that is "avowedly and without apology deductive as well as inductive" (v, xvi). One of his last graduate students, Theodore Abel, published *Systematic Sociology in Germany* in 1929.

However, Giddings's graduate students were by no means primarily responsible for the revival, in the 1930s and 1940s, of theory as general, deductive, systematic theory. Sociologists of very different intellectual persuasions were also involved, including Znaniecki, MacIver, Becker, and Parsons. Although Znaniecki and MacIver did not explicitly comment about sociological theory as being general and systematic, their works of the 1930s and 1940s indicate their adherence to that view (see Znaniecki 1934, 1936; MacIver 1931c, 1942). Becker's views as first formulated in his *Systematic Sociology* are also more implicit than explicit (Becker 1932b, 61, 62, 39).⁸ These views seem to still persist in Becker's 1945 essay.

Parsons is—irrepressibly—a systematic theorist from *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) onward. In that work, he envisages theory as a system based on a unified frame of reference. Theory is a system or a "body of interrelated 'general concepts' of empirical reference" (6). The frame of reference in terms of which the theory is to be developed is designated as the (voluntaristic) action frame of reference (by way of the unit-act). His paper "The Present Position and Prospects of Systematic Theory in Sociology" (1945) reiterates his notion of theory as a system, a "body of logically interdependent generalized concepts of empirical reference" that tend ideally "to reach a state of logical integration such that every logical implication of any combination of propositions in the system is explicitly stated in some other propositions in the same system."

Lundberg—a student of Chapin, who was a student of Giddings—regards his *Foundations of Sociology* (1939b) as a contribution to "a more comprehensive and mature system of scientific theory in terms of specific formal postulates and theories subject to rigorous test" (x). Certainly it is

predicated on the desirability of systematicity. It endeavors to begin with a frame of reference (based on Dodd's S-theory). It does seek to select out the major components of the sociological universe (116). It does contemplate the (deductive) organization of (general) scientific laws "into a system compatible with each other" (116).

Clearly, theory was also seen as ultimately being a logically integrated and closed system. Becker and Parsons, on the one hand, and Lundberg, on the other, are exemplary protagonists of the notion.

7. At least some of the views on theory also reflect the central position that scientific research methodology and epistemology had come to occupy in the 1930s and later. Such is reflected above in Lundberg's reference to "scientific theory" and Parsons's insistence that the core of theory is comprised of "logically interdependent generalized concepts of *empirical reference*" (emphasis added). It is also evident in the earlier statements of Bain (1929b, 73–74), in which acceptable or sound theory is restricted to confirmed generalizations as subjected to tests.⁹

Chapin (1936, 1–11) adopts an apparently more systematic notion of theory. But he insists that sound social theory is based on concepts that are operationally defined, and issue from an explicitly stated frame of reference. Theory involved a "logical system of relations among concepts, postulates, and hypotheses" in terms of which experience can be interpreted meaningfully. It begins with the more concrete symbolic substitutes for reality and ascends to the more abstract symbolic substitutes. Chapin would apparently agree with Bain's contention that "all theory is relative, tentative, partial."

Published in 1936 in the *ASR*, like Chapin's paper, Lundberg's article "Thoughtways of Contemporary Sociology" proposes a conception of sound theory substantially resembling Chapin's. In Lundberg's view a theory is sound if it satisfies certain requirements: (1) The definition of terms must be clear and unambiguous; (2) the postulates upon which the theory proceeds must be explicitly stated in these terms; (3) the deductions from the postulates, and their implications, must be worked out and exhibited step by step; (4) the theorems should be specifically formulated so that they can be stated as the outcome of empirical observations and experiments; and (5) the theorems must be susceptible of empirical test and not be metaphysical in nature (708). Presumably, these constitute the foundation for his natural-science theory of human society as represented by *Foundations of Sociology* (1939b).

Beginning thus with the difference between social and sociological theory, this résumé has noted the increasing use of the term *sociological* as opposed to *social theory* in American sociology after 1936. Such theory is still conceived to be general, grand, comprehensive, or macro in nature (and so is equatable with general sociology), as tending to become a coherent, logically developed, and integrated system, and as being compatible with

and responsive to the requirements of scientific method and the results of empirical research. A change in the notion of theory has thus been detected. The possible broader context or contexts in which this change and others can become meaningful now warrant examination.

THE CONTEXTS OF THEORY

On the whole, it is difficult to specify in advance just what constitutes the context or setting of social or sociological theory. It might be assumed, a priori, that the most consequential settings of theory would be the developments in the larger society, academia (or higher education), certain allied domains of knowledge (e.g., anthropology, psychology), sociology itself as a discipline and (emergent) profession, and perhaps a related more substantive or abstract field within sociology.

The Societal Setting

Certainly, it is not readily apparent that the character of general theory would be affected by details of the declining position of agriculture, the expanding and improving state of American urban and industrial life (including aspects of urban decentralization), the near cessation of legal immigration after 1924, the bureaucratization of the economy, the separation of ownership and control of businesses and industries, and the rise of a white-collar middle class. However, it does appear that World War I, on the one hand, and the Great Depression, some fifteen years later, on the other, were consequential in undermining the tenability of the idea of progress as a rationale of the discipline that theories could continue to invoke or elaborate. The massive violence of the war contradicted beliefs in progress, some argued. In the 1920s, awareness of the data of cross-cultural variability and ideas about moral relativity articulated by cultural anthropology provided further problems for proponents of progress. Younger theorists were also left to ponder the implications of the popularity of science as affirmed by research, especially the results of quantitative research. By World War II, few theorists could or would claim a justification for the discipline other than some variation of instrumentalism.

Sociology Itself As a Setting

On the whole, the fate of theory depended largely on the changing fortunes of the discipline at large, especially the state of membership in the American Sociological Society and undergraduate and graduate enrollments in academia. During 1919–29, membership of the ASS expanded from 852

to 1,812, an increase of 113 percent. Membership peaked at 1,567 in 1932, after which it declined to 997 in 1939. It increased gradually during World War II, reaching 1,651 in 1946.¹⁰

Total student enrollment in higher education in 1920 was just under 600,000. It rose markedly during the 1920s to just over 1,000,000 in 1930, with a slight further increase up to 1932. In 1934 enrollment dropped by almost 100,000 students (presumably in response to the depression). But it then expanded constantly up to 1940, when aggregate enrollment amounted to just under 1,500,000. The figures registered a slight decline in 1942 and a more precipitous drop in 1944, to just over 1,100,000—apparently under the impact of the draft and World War II.¹¹

The number of graduate students trebled in the decade 1920–1930 from 15,612 to 47,255. A decline occurred from 1932 to 1934, but a substantial increase to 106,119 was registered in 1940. During the next four years, enrollment declined sharply to just under 60,000. The total number of doctorates awarded quadrupled from 1920 to 1930 (going from 432 to 2,078) and burst upward to 3,459 in 1941, with no intervening decreases. It dropped off each year thereafter, to a low point of 1,515 in 1945, but rose slightly in 1946 and then dramatically to 4,671 in 1949.¹²

In the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, sociology had, respectively, 447 and 591 doctorates. During the 1930s, its maximum was 60 (in 1930) and its minimum was 36 (in 1935). In the 1940s, its maximum was 99 (in 1949) and its minimum 30 (in 1945).¹³

A variety of characteristics of sociology and sociologists seem to be involved, directly and indirectly, and to have implications for theory:¹⁴

1. Sociology in the United States became primarily a field or discipline in higher education and aligned with the liberal arts in the period after World War I.

2. Sociology in the United States developed as a distinctively American discipline and increasingly separated from its European precedents and counterparts.

3. Sociologists in the United States were no longer self-educated, part-time, or substantially European-trained, as were the pre-World War I generations. They did not come from elite private colleges, but, rather, had small denominational or public university backgrounds. Their graduate degrees in sociology were awarded by American universities. (During the 1930s and 1940s, Chicago, Columbia, Wisconsin, Harvard, and Ohio State Universities were among the top six institutions in the number of doctoral degrees awarded in sociology.) Theory and research methods were commonly demanded as part of their programs. Sociologists no longer knew as much about their European intellectual antecedents, or had as substantial foreign language competencies, as their predecessors did.

4. Sociologists were virtually all male, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. (But a small number of females, Jews, Southern and Eastern European ethnics, and blacks gained admittance to the field). Overwhelmingly, they became academics, for whom teaching was an important part of their lives.

5. In addition, the increasing size of undergraduate enrollments and faculty appointments presumably played some part in sociology's achievement of administrative autonomy in the 1920s and later. A study of 152 colleges and universities from 1880 to 1928 revealed that 69 departments had gained autonomy by 1928; 31 had achieved some form of recognition in a joint departmental name; 52 cases indicated no departmental recognition.¹⁵ By 1928, sociology had won some departmental autonomy in all major institutions in the Midwest, though the dates varied considerably. Sociology had increasingly detached itself from political economy and economics and was linked with anthropology.

Even in the larger institutions, the senior departmental ranks of sociologists were still numerically small. Up to the end of World War II, no more than five or six sociologists and one or two anthropologists were represented in these departments.¹⁶

6. This is also the period in which the department at the University of Chicago was preeminent. Its top position is indicated in the two published rankings of sociology departments, in the number of doctorates awarded, in the number of presidents of the ASS it provided from 1920 to 1950, and by the professional prestige of its individual faculty members.¹⁷

7. Over the years, considerable field differentiation and interest specialization occurred. By the 1930 annual meeting, nine sections were formed and accorded access to the annual program of the ASS (but theory was not one of these). Regional associations and specialized multidisciplinary organizations also developed in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸

8. Nevertheless, sociologists were also active in major national organizations involving broad interdisciplinary interests (e.g., the Social Science Research Council formed in 1923), in joint or collaborative publication enterprises on either their own or others' initiatives (e.g., *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences; An American Dilemma*), and in roundtable discussions at the ASS annual meetings.

9. Two organizations, one in New York City and the other in Chicago, set the precedents for the development of funded research and research institutions in sociology during the period. One was the Institute for Social and Religious Research (ISSR), which was created in 1922 as the successor to the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys of the Interchurch World Movement (and involved sociologists or persons who became sociologists, such as Robert Lynd). The other was the University of Chicago's Local Community Research Committee (LCRC), formed in 1923 with representa-

tives drawn from the philosophy and social science departments. Both the ISSR and the LCRC received major (or exclusive) funding from Rockefeller sources, the termination of which brought their demise.¹⁹

Academic social science research was established under similar Rockefeller arrangements, albeit with less-generous funding, at other universities (e.g., North Carolina, Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Texas, and Virginia).²⁰

10. During the years of the Great Depression and World War II, a considerable number of sociologists were employed by the federal government (by the Works Project Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of Price Administration, etc.).²¹ Such positions also brought a measure of added prestige to sociologists on their return to academia.

11. A final feature of significance both generally to sociology and particularly to theory throughout most of the thirty-year interwar period is what is loosely termed the "preoccupation with methods," including disputes over method and its relationship to theory. By the end of the 1920s, two (or, more accurately, three) fundamental stances, emerged, with rather distinctive and contrasting features. The first, and the one that eventually became predominant, accepted a qualified empiricist epistemology and neo-positivist methodology, with quantification, statistics, and measurement as hallmarks of its approach. The other two are similar in having a commitment to a qualitative case-study approach inclined to idealism. Still, it is more accurate to distinguish one as an American equivalent of German neo-idealism (with similarities to Dilthey) and another as an American equivalent of German Neo-Kantianism (with similarities to Windelband and Rickert). (See chapter 2.)

These eleven features certainly comprise the most basic and dominant aspects of the organizational, disciplinary, and intellectual contexts of general theory in American sociology. Without them, an understanding of the peculiarities of the history of theory in the approximately thirty years from 1915/18 to 1945/50 cannot be understood. Yet any explanatory or interpretive account must await a detailed inquiry into the actual content of the nature of general theory in this period. (Significantly, the shifting meanings examined just prior to the above section all entailed formal characteristics without any actual content.) "Data" or evidence is required, but there looms a basic problem about locating sources.

SOURCES OF DATA ON SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

To the careful reader, the suggestion that sources of data on the character of theory are relatively inaccessible (or even nonexistent) surely must seem to contradict my contention that an interest in theory was relatively

continuous throughout the years of the period. Certainly, no problem exists in the literature for the years after 1935. Though they are few, articles can be found in the *ASR*, *S&SR*, and *SF*. Monographs, such as Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) can be cited. *Contemporary Social Theory* (1940), edited by Barnes, Becker, and Becker, was published as a graduate text and reference work.

The problem seems to lie in the years prior to 1935. Virtually no sessions on theory were part of the annual programs of the ASS. A rigorous, restrictive criterion, requiring an occurrence of the word *theory* in title, produced no articles in the *AJS* from 1921 to 1937. Most disturbing of all, the genre of published personalized statements of theoretical stances, so common among the founding fathers prior to World War I, seemed to have disappeared. (Specifically, then: What had happened to the pre-World War I majoritarian position on social evolutionism?)

The key to the sources of data on theory was found accidentally by a scrutiny of Ellwood's *The Psychology of Human Society* (1925), the subtitle of which, "An Introduction to Sociological Theory," provoked immediate attention. In both its subtitle and its actual contents, Ellwood's book is, indeed, an "introduction" to general sociological theory or, as it was also termed (e.g., by Small and Giddings), "general sociology." Further, its format basically coincides with the major divisions of general sociological theory before World War I. Chapter 1 begins with an account of its author's conception of the nature of social science and ends with an examination of the scientific methods of studying human society (e.g., the comparative method, the historical method, the social survey method, and the method of deduction from biology and psychology). Thus, it deals rudimentarily with what might be termed social "epistemological-methodological" theory. Chapter 1 also indicates the "group" as the point of departure for the author's conception or theory of the social. The contents of chapters 2 and 3, entitled "Group Life and Organic Evolution" and "Group Life and Mental Evolution," include his theory of social genesis or origins. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 (which deal with unity of the group, the continuity of the group, and forms of human association) provide Ellwood's theory of social structure. Chapters 6 and 7, on changes within the group, contain some, though not all, of the ingredients of his theory of social change (which apparently undergoes alteration in his subsequent *Cultural Evolution*).

Put simply, the importance of the Ellwood volume resides in its revelation of the connection between general sociology, sociological theory, and an intellectually demanding level of introduction to the field as such. The volume was designed as a text and suggested the possibility of similar others, which were quick to come into print. These included: Frank H. Hankins's *An Introduction to the Study of Society* (1928), Robert M. MacIver's

Society (1931c), E. B. Reuter and C. W. Hart's *Introduction to Sociology* (1933) (and if this one is admitted, certainly one of its major antecedent inspirations cannot be ignored, i.e., Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess's *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921)), E. T. Hiller's *Principles of Sociology* (1933), Kimball Young's *Introductory Sociology* (1934 and its revision in 1942), George A. Lundberg's *Foundations of Sociology* (1939b), and L. L. Bernard's *An Introduction to Sociology* (1942). To provide additional balance, C. M. Case's *Outlines of Introductory Sociology* (1924), F. E. Lumley's *Principles of Sociology* (1928) R. L. Sutherland and J. L. Woodward's *Introductory Sociology* (1937), and W. F. Ogburn and M. F. Nimkoff's *Sociology* (1940) were also analyzed. (Illuminatingly, Hiller [1933, xix] and Bernard [1942, 8, 9, 10] both link their texts to "general sociology." Reuter and Hart [1933, v] claim that their aim "is to give an introductory, but consistent and integrated presentation of sociological theory.") Admittedly, the intellectual demands made by the texts did vary as the shift occurred in the 1920s and 1930s from primarily "general" sociology to primarily "introductory" sociology.

At the time of their authorships, Hankins was associated with Smith, Lundberg with Bennington, MacIver with Columbia, Woodward with Cornell, Nimkoff with Bucknell—all part of the East. Park and Burgess and Ogburn held positions at Chicago, Hiller at Illinois, Bernard at Washington University (St. Louis), Ellwood at Missouri, Reuter and Hart at Iowa, Young at Wisconsin, and Lumley at Ohio State—all part of the Midwest. Sutherland was at Texas in the Southwest and Case at Southern California in the Far West (or Pacific Coast).

In terms of doctorates awarded, Chicago had the largest number (seven): Burgess, Ellwood, Bernard, Reuter, Hart, Hiller, and Sutherland. Two (Hankins and Ogburn) had been awarded their doctorates by Columbia. One each (Lumley, Woodward, Lundberg, Case, Young, and Nimkoff, respectively) had taken his Ph. D. at Yale, Cornell, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Stanford, and Southern California. Park and MacIver had been awarded doctorates abroad (at Heidelberg and Edinburgh).

Considerable diversity is evident in the institutions awarding the authors' doctorates and providing employment at the time of the authorships. Thus, the chances for discovering theoretical diversity among these sociologists should be substantial. (Furthermore, it is by no means to be assumed that analysis is to be restricted exclusively to them.)

To those who might object to this list of authors as involving many who were not especially notably identified with theory, the following response is offered: (1) The list does include MacIver, Bernard, Ellwood, and Lundberg, who can strongly claim the mantle of theory, though whether all of them would have done so is another matter. Admittedly, the thirty

years from 1915 to 1945 may represent a period in which a claim to be a theorist would scarcely bring encomiums. MacIver may well have been the only president of the ASS during this period whose professional reputation was predominantly gained in theory. Virtually all others had professional reputations won substantially, and perhaps in most cases predominantly, in other fields, such as social psychology. Hence, (2) any acceptance of the desirability of an expanded range of views about theory must reckon with the possible inclusion of many who are not exclusively theorists. And (3) it must be emphasized (as above) that intellectual stances to be considered in this study are not to be limited only to the seventeen sociologists just noted.

Let us turn now, finally, to an examination of the texts themselves. It is noteworthy that they do indeed seem to exhibit considerable variation in certain basic characteristics (e.g., dates of publication, number of chapters and pages). The earliest date of publication (within the period) is the Park and Burgess text in 1921, followed by Case in 1924. The latest was the L. L. Bernard volume, which appeared in 1942 but seems to have been basically written much earlier. Most of the texts seem to have been published during the 1930s. The one with the fewest number of chapters (thirteen) was Lundberg's, and the one with the fewest number of pages (479) was Ellwood's. The text with the greatest number of chapters (forty-one) and pages (1,023) was Bernard's.

INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF TEXTS IN GENERAL SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Paradoxically, perhaps, the intellectual content and organization of the texts seem to exhibit much more similarity than dissimilarity, much more convergence in a common pattern than divergence among many. Generally, they involve an introductory overview chapter, several chapters on the major factors in human social life, some chapters on the several social processes, still others on major social institutions, and concluding chapters on social control and/or social change. Given the considerable intellectual controversy in sociology across the several decades of the period, such apparent continuity in a basic common structure is striking.

Most commonly, the introductory chapter sets forth what the distinctive object of sociology's study is, its relations to other social sciences, what kind of knowledge it aims at, or, indeed, already claims to be, and, in a few cases, the common or distinctive methods, procedures, or techniques used in inquiry, and the justifications for including the book in an academic curriculum. Each of these aspects requires preliminary comment, though the necessary detailed analysis will have to be deferred until later chapters.

Certainly no issue was of more significance initially than what sociology, as a discipline, studies. One author (MacIver) defined its subject matter as essentially inter- and/or multi personal relationships. Two others (Reuter and Hart) opted for social processes. But for the great majority in the 1920s, it had become the study of human groups—though the precise qualifications might vary. For one earlier author (Ellwood 1925, 14), sociology was the science of the origins, development, structuring, and functioning of groups. For another (Hankins 1928, 167), it was the synthetic explanation of the origins and evolutionary changes in the forms and activities of human groups. Still later authors (e.g., K. Young 1934, xiii, 6–7) endeavored to interrelate the character of interaction with group, process, culture, and personality.

Generally, too, these textbook sociologists were concerned with the interrelations of their own discipline with others. Thus, they often attempted to characterize their own field as like or unlike history, anthropology, psychology, economics, or political science. In turn, this concern raised more abstract issues, especially what kind of discipline sociology is and what kind of knowledge it aspires to. Hankins's view of sociology as a science requires the acceptance of objectivity and naturalism and the rejection of religion, theology, supernaturalism, mysticism, and parochial bias. For others (e.g., Park and Burgess), it required confronting arguments about basic classifications of the basic fields of knowledge, such as Windelband's Neo-Kantian history/science (or idiographic/nomothetic) dichotomy. History was conceived to study the nonrecurrent, unique, concrete, particular, and variable, and sited and dated, whereas science investigates the recurrent, general, uniform, or common, the nonsited and nondated in phenomena.

Some sociologists regarded the acceptance of certain requirements of a common method as central to sociology's claim to be a science or, rather, scientific. Only two texts (those of Ellwood and of Reuter and Hart) briefly reviewed the specific, distinguishing methods, procedures, or techniques of sociology. And only the texts of the two major antagonists (MacIver, along with his *Social Causation*, and Lundberg, along with his *Social Research*) actually dealt with the basic epistemological-methodological issues in connection with the debate over sociology as a science that virtually polarized the discipline at some points in time.

It is important to note here that the text, or "public" presentation of the argument for sociology's status as a science, thus almost entirely concealed the vigorous "private" (professional) controversy in the periodicals of the discipline. Perhaps such professional "reserve" in the writing of the texts might be expected, but it does point to difficulties in any unquestioning assumption that the texts will faithfully represent the state of the discipline and its assumptions.

In turning to the first major section of the texts following their introductory chapters, a reader frequently confronts several chapters that concern the main factors (or causes) in human social life. These chapters ordinarily deal with the physical, geographical environment; the hierarchy of organisms, both plants and animals; the so-called higher forms of life that evidence rudimentary consciousness, culminating in the human species, and that incorporate psychological factors; and finally societal structure and culture as factors themselves in social life. Hankins, Ellwood, Bernard, and even Ogburn and Nimkoff more or less involve and accept this kind of formulation. Without exception, the major sociologists and theorists adhering to this conception of basic factors or causes were also committed to evolution—physical, organic, psychic (or psychological), social, and cultural—as is embodied in the term *evolutionary naturalism* and expounded below.

However, the Ogburn and Nimkoff text (1940) reveals that by the time of its publication, a major intellectual alteration had already occurred. Although substantial intellectual vestiges of social and cultural evolutionism remain in their chapter on the role of culture, the other chapters on the natural environment or geography, and on the nature of the “higher” organisms and the human organism, seem to be devoid of major allusions to the processes of physical, organic, and psychic (or psychological) evolution. Most of the texts appearing in the 1920s were written by sociologists who had completed their graduate work and received their doctorates before World War I. They accepted the doctrine of parallel evolution and applied evolutionary ideas to the problems of social and cultural origins and to social and cultural structure. But professional dispute as registered in the periodicals had already begun in the 1920s. Admittedly, organic evolution does not seem to be prominent in the Park and Burgess text, though its presence can be readily detected in the subsection of chapter 8 on competition, “The Struggle for Existence,” and in the acknowledgment of the relationship of adaptation and accommodation at the beginning of chapter 10, on accommodation. But by the time Reuter and Hart had published their text (1933), which followed the basic structure of the Park and Burgess text, the authors sharply separated organic change (as selective and evolutionary) and socio-cultural change (as nonselective and accumulative). Kimball Young’s text (1934) confirms the rejection of parallel physical, organic, psychic, and sociocultural evolutionism. But by then physical environment, organisms (especially the human), the psychic (now in the form of personality), and the sociocultural had come to stand in a different and perhaps unsteady relationship. They were no longer integrated in a theoretical unity by a pervasive general evolutionism, which had been widely abandoned by younger sociologists (e.g., Young, Reuter

and Hart, Hiller, Lundberg, Sutherland and Woodward). Only Ellwood, Bernard, and Lumley were overt adherents, and Ogburn was perhaps a covert one, but these were all from the pre-World War I generation.

The next section, and perhaps the most extended major section, of the texts was devoted to the exposition of a variety of social institutions. Interestingly, the section on institutions has a direct connection with the prior one on basic factors of social life. Institutions are often conceived to have their origins in the common human-nature needs of an aggregate of human beings adapting or adjusting to the problems of a common environment. Ogburn and Nimkoff remark (1940, 555), "Social institutions are organized, established ways of satisfying" such basic needs as "security, food and shelter, sex expression, and training of the young." Most frequently discussed were the family, religion, the political state or government, and then the economic and technological. Science, recreation, social welfare, and health tend to be regarded as newly emergent institutions.

Institutions reveal just how sociologists conceive structure in relation to change. Frequently, chapters would culminate with an analysis of the particular institutions in modern (and ordinarily American) society. However, some of the texts by older authors of this period (e.g., Hankins, Ogburn and Nimkoff, Bernard) also presented institutions in terms of evolutionary stages or forms—even if the unilinear stages theory of social evolution was explicitly rejected. By contrast, younger theorists (e.g., Young, Sutherland and Woodward) tended to envisage modern institutional forms within cross-cultural perspectives.

Most of the texts also included a major section on social processes as the major forms of social interaction. Although the social processes were undoubtedly a part of the sociology of the founding fathers of the pre-World War I period, the Park and Burgess formulation provides the basic inspiration and model. Initially, Park had construed the term *social process* as "the name for all changes . . . in the life of the group" (Park and Burgess [1921] 1924, 51). He devotes an entire chapter to isolation, another to social contacts, one to social interaction, followed by one chapter each to competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Lumley, Reuter and Hart, Young, Ogburn and Nimkoff, and Sutherland and Woodward tend, more or less, to follow Park's lead in their view of the social processes. Lumley, Hiller, Young, Sutherland and Woodward, and Ogburn and Nimkoff also include a chapter (or a part of a chapter) on cooperation. Young devotes two chapters to differentiation, and Young and Ogburn and Nimkoff offer a chapter on stratification or status and classes.

Clearly, not all of those who included analyses of the social processes in their texts followed Park in construing the social processes as providing a

cyclical explanation of social change in opposition to the older unilinear sociocultural evolutionism. Such younger sociologists as Reuter and Hart, Hiller, Young (perhaps Lundberg), and the older Ogburn were less certain of the adequacy of an abstract social-process interpretation of change under the impact of the emphasis on culture and the data on cultural variation from cultural anthropology. All of these sociologists had sections on both the social processes and social change.

Manifestly, the detail in, and number of, chapters concerned with social change varied considerably. Most authors devoted more than two chapters to the subject—MacIver, Reuter and Hart, and Hiller offered six each, Bernard eight, and Young eleven in his 1942 edition. Change theory commonly began with a consideration of certain terminological distinctions, such as mere change versus social evolution, social evolution versus revolution, social evolution versus social progress. Nevertheless, the meanings attributed to the terms seemed to vary greatly.

In view of the considerable prevalence of social evolutionism as a theory of social change during the founding period, the interest of the second period in that theory is scarcely surprising. But almost unanimously, authors disagreed with the assumption of universal successive stages signifying unilinear (irreversible) directionality. Nevertheless, many of them (Ellwood, Bernard, Lumley, Hankins, MacIver, and even Ogburn to some extent) still adhered to some version of social evolutionism. Park and his students (e.g., Reuter and Hart, Hiller and K. Young) dissented. They subscribed to what might be characterized as (cyclical) "social process theory."

Nonetheless, the major ideas involved in explaining the processes of social and cultural change were basically the same and considerably more complex than those of the previous period. The impact of cultural anthropology was unmistakable. Such notions as material and nonmaterial culture, invention, discovery, diffusion or borrowing, accumulation, culture base, isolation versus accessibility, parallels, survivals, differential rates of change, (cultural) leads and lags, run of attention, disorganization and reorganization entered the terminology of change. Irrespective of whether the theory was evolutionary or nonevolutionary (e.g., a cyclical social process), the explanatory concepts were substantially the same. Indeed, a kind of eclecticism seemed evident.

Admittedly, the chapters on social change are not the only evidence of intellectual change in the texts from the 1920s to the 1930s and early 1940s. In the later years of the period, chapters appeared on the community, sometimes linked to human ecology (MacIver, Sutherland and Woodward, Ogburn and Nimkoff); population (Young, Lundberg, Ogburn and Nimkoff, Bernard); crowds, publics, and collective behavior (MacIver, Reuter and Hart, Sutherland and Woodward, Ogburn and Nimkoff); and