relationships" regardless of their institutional setting.[26] This view was most clearly expressed by Weber, but was voiced by other writers in the classical tradition as well.

What Sociologists Do

If we take "what sociologists do" as our guide to what sociology is about, there are three main sources we should examine: (1) the textbooks in which sociologists attempt to sum up their field, (2) the affiliations they choose when asked to identify themselves with one or another branch of sociology, and (3) the research they undertake and the reports they present at sociological meetings or publish in books and in their scholarly journals. All three approaches perhaps tend to reflect mainly what "average" or "typical" sociologists do. There are those who would say that whatever the average sociologist is doing, he *ought* to be doing something quite different. But let us for the moment withhold evaluation, to learn what the average sociologist, for good or ill, is actually doing.

Sociological Textbooks [27]

All but a small portion of the nation's sociologists teach, and the great majority teach from textbooks. These books present a basic conception of the field, and their use presumably reflects their acceptance by the profession. Between 1952 and 1958, 24 introductory textbooks on sociology were published in the United States. The single most popular text apparently was used by only about 15 per cent of the students enrolled in introductory sociology courses, and only two others captured as much as 10 per cent or more of the audience. Considering this wide diffusion, it becomes especially important in understanding the character of the field to know whether these texts reveal substantial agreement on the subject matter of sociology, or whether the diversity of point of view was as great as so large a number of texts might suggest.

Professor Hornell Hart, who analyzed the content of these textbooks, identified 12 themes which were dealt with within at least 20—that is, in almost 85 per cent of those he examined. The 12 leaders were: scientific method in sociology; personality in society; culture; human groups; population; caste and class; race; social change; economic institutions; family; education; and religion. Certain social processes did not make the top of the list largely because of the scoring scheme used. For example, if urban and rural life had not been treated separately, it is obvious that "community life" would have been cited by at least 20 out of 24 texts. Much the same may be said of the topic "social problems." In addition, a few obvious institutions came very close to making the top of the list, such as government and politics.

There seems substantial agreement on the dozen or so subjects which should be included in any introduction to sociology. Such agreement does not necessarily extend to the relative *importance* of different themes. On this issue the disagreement among sociologists probably far exceeds that which would probably be found in any of the natural sciences. Some of the texts differ in emphasis and from the average to such a degree that they give

[26] Social acts and social relationships are defined and discussed in some detail in Chap. 5.

[27] The bulk of the factual material presented in this description of the textbooks is drawn from an unpublished study by Professor Hornell Hart, Director of the Project for Comparative Analysis of Recent Introductory Sociologies, Florida Southern College.

a markedly different impression of what sociology is about. Thus, Professor Arnold Green's text [28] fails entirely to mention the following terms in either table of contents or index: attitudes, organizations, association, social control, crowds, public opinion, and social planning. Professor George Lundberg [29] assigns three times the average space to the topic "scientific methodology" and more or less ignores the subject of social control. Professor Ronald Freedman and his associates at the University of Michigan [30] allot almost three times as much space as does the average text to the topic of human ecology and community life, but almost totally neglect the themes of social interaction and communication.

Despite these important differences, the facts indicate that sociology has more of a common core than many people—including many sociologists—had believed to be the case. Weighing all his evidence, Professor Hart concluded: "There appears to be a solid and fairly definable core of sociological subject matter which is dealt with to a greater or lesser extent by almost all the text books." [31]

Sociologists Define Their "Field of Competence"

Not everyone will be too impressed by the evidence of basic agreement on subject matter in introductory sociology textbooks. Some would argue that the texts may cover the same themes only because experience has taught that these are the subjects which students most want to hear about. That might be said of race relations, but it can hardly be said of a topic such as scientific methodology, which is also a standard theme in texts. In any event, some will feel that neither the audience of beginning students nor the authors who write textbooks for them are the best authority for deciding what a field is about. They want to know how the profession as a whole defines its subject matter. Fortunately this is relatively easy to ascertain on the basis of studies conducted by the American Sociological Association.[32]

In 1950, and then again in 1959, each member of the Sociological Association was asked to list three sociological fields in which he felt qualified to teach or to do research. Each sociologist was free to describe his competence in his own terms, so that the categories which emerged were not predetermined. The individual responses were then sorted and grouped in 33 sets which seemed effectively to encompass all the fields mentioned. To a striking degree, the topics cited by the profession as a whole coincide with the 54 themes mentioned by one third or more of sociology textbooks.

There are, nevertheless, a few instances in which the lists do not completely coincide. Thus, the textbooks may have sections on government, politics, international relations, and war, but as a rule they do not sys-

[28] Arnold Green, *Sociology—An Analysis of Life in Modern Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956).

[29] George A. Lundberg, Clarence C. Schrag, and Otto N. Larsen, *Sociology*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1958).

[30] Ronald Freeman, *et al.*, *Principles of Sociology: A Text with Readings*, rev. ed. (New York: Holt, 1956).

[31] Hornell Hart, "Comparative Coverage on Agreed on Sociological Topics," *Third Report for the Project for Comparative Analysis of Introductory Sociology Textbooks*, 1959, p. 10.

[32] Matilda White Riley, "Membership in the American Sociological Association, 1950–1959," *American Sociological Review* (1960), XXV:914–926. The membership of the Association is more fully described in Chap. 8.