Review
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George Herbert Mead: the Making of a Social Pragmatist
Gary A. Cook
Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993
xix + 231 pp.

Of the founding fathers of American Pragmatism, Mead remains the least known or appreciated. For this state of affairs, Mead himself is to blame. Mead never composed, let alone published a systematic statement of his theories of mind, language, knowledge, and nature. Thus his views must be stitched together from a handful of published papers, the recollections of his colleagues, and the stenographic notes of class-room lectures made by his students. Suggestive as these sources are, they provide no more than glimmerings of the originality and power of Mead's thought to which his students and colleagues attested. Whether rightly or wrongly (for we shall never know which), Mead's philosophy and the scope of his contribution to the development of American pragmatism generally or to the various 'Chicago Schools' of philosophy, psychology, and sociology will remain obscure. But if Mead's work must remain inaccessible in its full detail, Gary A. Cook's new book provides a valuable introduction to its central issues.

In chapters 1 and 2, Cook records Mead's early life and education: his college acquaintance with philosophy in the form of orthodox Scottish Realism, his post-baccalaureate struggle to settle on a profession, and the steps that led to Mead's eventual career; a year of philosophy at Harvard University, followed by two years of physiological psychology in Germany.

Mead's acquaintance with absolute idealism, made at Harvard, was reinforced by his two years in Germany and by subsequent three years in the University of Michigan's Philosophy Department, working alongside John Dewey and Alfred Lloyd. Mead's early interest in Hegelianism was to have lasting effects on his philosophical development, inclining him towards organic conceptions of human nature, knowledge, and society, and against the reductionism of traditional empiricism, positivism, neo-realism, and their descen-

dants. Chapter 3 briefly recounts the process by which, after his removal to the University of Chicago, Mead gradually dismantled his early Hegelianism, rebuilding his accounts of human nature and its development on a naturalistic basis, a basis that preserved the spirit of Hegelian organicism without the burden of its unwieldy metaphysics. But in contrast to Dewey, who spent their years together at Chicago reconstructing his idealist theories of knowledge (moral and scientific), education, mind, and metaphysics, Mead spent the same time more narrowly focused on psychological questions, in particular, reconstructing idealist solutions to the problem of the relations of subject and object, of consciousness to self-consciousness, of the public and private worlds of perception, and of self to society. Social psychology came to seem the route by which the reconstruction he sought was to be achieved. Following this path, Mead not only developed new accounts of these objects and their relationships, but also novel treatments of meaning, language, and the construction of temporal experience.

Chapters 4 through 6 form the philosophical core of Cook's text. Here Cook describes the evolution of Mead's social psychology from its joint roots in Hegelianism and functionalist psychology toward the mature "social behaviorism" for which Mead is best remembered. Mead, like Dewey, spent his first years at Chicago encouraging his psychologist colleagues in their efforts to give scientific and philosophic respectability to their commitment to functionalist psychology by clearing the ground of traditional metaphysical and epistemological objections. In so doing, each man encouraged himself to adopt more naturalistic, functionalist formulations of their earlier idealist positions. Mead's early efforts in this vein complimented Dewey's better known work on the 'reflex arc.' Reworking absolute idealist accounts of perceptual objects as ideal constructs developed by discrimination of elements from the chaotic whole of given experience (rather than, say, composed of discrete, individual sense data), Mead relocated the process of the construction of perceptual objects from inner to outer experience, specifically, to interactions with an environment. Perceptual objects,

he suggested, might be thought of as 'collapsed acts,' produced by the merging of sensations of 'distant' sources of stimulation together with memories and anticipations of past and future action ("contact experiences") involving them. These interactions determine the qualities and boundaries of the 'object' subsequently 'perceived.' Similarly, Mead reworked the idealist doctrine that the absolute comes to consciousness of its self (universal spirit) through becoming conscious of itself as an object (the objective universe), as a theory of the development of individual self-consciousness. A necessary condition of human self-consciousness, Mead argues, is prior consciousness of ourselves as objects, achieved by our taking the 'attitude' or the 'role' of 'the other' upon ourselves. Only after we have learned to see ourselves as others see us (an object represented to ourselves as 'me'), can we become conscious of what there is to us that others never fully grasp (the 'subject' represented to ourselves as 'I'.)

Mead came to see language, i.e. social interaction via 'significant symbols,' as fundamental to the development both of the human consciousness and selfhood. Lacking both the capacity for symbolic interaction and even the capacity for the construction of more than rudimentary perceptual 'objects,' Mead argued that non-human animals may have experience of themselves and others, but can neither be conscious of the sources of their experience as objects nor 'take the attitude' of others on their own activities or experience. However, non-human animals do exhibit a progenitor of language according to Mead, an instinctive symbolic interaction which he called a 'conversation of gestures.'

A conversation of gestures occurs whenever two (or more) members of a species interact by means of instinctive signalling 'gestures' in place of physical engagement. For example, strange dogs meeting go through a 'conversation of gestures,' the successive performances of neck-stiffening, stalking, sniffing, cringing, etc, by which dominance may be established without either dog actually performing the acts of attacking and/or fleeing which their 'gestures' signal. Human beings, by contrast, Mead held, have devel-

oped vocal gestures which, unlike a dog's 'gestures' to another dog, are simultaneously observable by both the sender and receiver. Because among human beings, both sender and receiver share (to a degree) the same response to the same signal, the sender has the material available to it for recognizing in itself the traits the other responds to ***and sharing that response***. Having made the leap, a human being thus comes into possession of a 'significant symbol,' by which it may manipulate and even communicate with others.

A small child, for example, accustomed to the reaction its tearful cries induce in its parents, hugs and cooing, may begin to respond to its own cries by hugging or cooing to itself, and eventually crying deliberately when it wants to be hugged and cooed to by others. The anticipation and attempted manipulation of others' acts by such means is presumably no more than a necessary condition of being able to take the attitude of the other. To take the attitude of the other is not simply to define particular gestures in terms of others' responses to them, but to define one's physical and active self in terms of the roles one plays in others' networks of activities. The complex object constructed out of the collapsing of others' interactions with oneself constitutes the 'me,' the self as object. And the gradual recognition of the perpetual 'emergence' of novel relationships between 'me' and others gives rise to the consciousness of the individual as a subject, 'I,' who perpetually transcends the settled boundaries of previously constituted 'me' and who constitutes the second voice in our inner dialogues.

Cook's three concluding chapters sketch Mead's involvement with Chicago civic reform organizations; the philosophical implications of Mead's accounts of human psychology Mead himself seems to have seen (but never fully developed) for moral and social thought and action; the role of A.N. Whitehead's work in Mead's later thought, in particular Mead's interpretation of temporality in human experience. Cook closes his text with an epilogue recounting the break-up of the Chicago University Department of Philosophy in which Mead had spent almost his entire professional career.

Cook describes his approach to Mead as "essentially that of an intellectual historian: I am primarily concerned to elucidate the meaning and coherence of Mead's key ideas," which Cook attempts to do by "locating the ideas within a well-documented account of his development as both a thinker and a practitioner of educational reform" [p. xiv]. It would be more accurate to say that Cook's approach is that of an intellectual biographer, since it is within the context of Mead's life and career struggles that Cook locates his ideas, rather than the broader context of the philosophical and social thought of the period. From a historical perspective, this would seem the chief draw-back of the book. Understanding Mead's youthful crises of faith, personal relationships with colleagues, involvement with civic reform is undoubtedly helpful for identifying and elucidating recurring themes in Mead's work. But understanding the intellectual landscape in which Mead operated, in particular competing philosophical, psychological, and sociological schools of thought, would be equally helpful. Mead's thought must of necessity have been influenced by his need to distinguish and defend his own social psychological theories against those of contemporary rivals, including positivists, neo-realists, neo-Hegelians, and logical positivists on the one hand, Marxists, Freudians, social Darwinists, on the other (to name just a few.) Although Cook does not entirely ignore the existence of these intellectual competitors, they are not given the attention they are due.

From a less historical perspective, Cook's failure to elucidate Mead's ideas in light of contemporary theories of language, perception, and psychology is a serious draw-back. To take just one example, much of Mead's speculation about the development of (self-) consciousness out of non-conscious organisms now looks naive at best. Mead argued that most animals do not even perceive objects because they did not engage in sufficiently complex interactions with things in their environments which may be 'collapsed' into their sensory experience of those things—interactions human beings are able to have, according to Mead, because of their possession of ***hands***. Ignoring the fact that animals burrow dens, build

lodges, weave nests, sit on eggs, nurse their young, use tools, and maneuver through challenging physical environments, Mead apparently considered the paradigm case of an animal's interaction with an object to take the form of chasing, fighting and/or swallowing external sources of sensation.

Since animals are supposed to be unable even to construct and be conscious of perceptual objects, it follows that animals can not construct *themselves* as objects. If it happened that some particular non-human species should actually have this ability to construct and be conscious of perceptual objects, despite its lack of hands, according to Mead, it still could not develop significant symbols among its kind with which it could ultimately 'take the attitude of the other,' unless its gestures are largely *vocal*. Thus tracing the development of human self-consciousness to social instincts and to physical organs unique to human beings (hands and human vocal chords), Mead believed he had accounted for the evolution of (self-) consciousness from non-conscious beings. But the matter is surely more complicated. The claim that animals can not be conscious of or perceive objects in their environment because they lack opposable thumbs is simply not credible. Furthermore, the capacity to recognize the effect of one's own gestures on others and thus for possessing and using 'significant symbols' is widespread among higher, social animals, including domestic pets (parrots, dogs, etc.) Certain primates are capable of developing large vocabularies of such symbols. Surely such animals are conscious of perceptual objects and many may in addition be self-conscious. If so, vocalization and opposable thumbs are probably not even necessary for consciousness let alone sufficient. Social behavior is presumably a necessary condition for *self*-consciousness. But no reason is given for supposing solitary creatures must necessarily lack consciousness. At least this suggests that Mead was less comfortable with the implications of Darwinian evolutionary theory than Cook suggests. At worst, it could mean that Mead's ideas on this and other subjects are obsolete. The reader is given little help in distinguishing those portions of Mead's theories that re-

main viable and important and those that do not (or, at least, not without significant reinterpretation).

Which ever perspective is taken, Cook's text remains a noteworthy addition to Mead scholarship. While an intellectual history of Mead's life and letters is still wanted, an intellectual biography of this quality is an important advance. And if Cook has not produced the definitive analysis of Mead's work, he has produced a thoughtful introduction for which many will be grateful.

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The Peirce Seminar Papers: An Annual of Semiotic Analysis, Vol. I
Michael Shapiro, Editor
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141 pp.

The participants in this volume, according to its editor, began their study of semiotics under his direction in one of several Summer Seminars for College Teachers, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, in 1979, 1984, 1990. The thirty-five alumni of the seminars have reunited at the annual meetings of the Semiotic Society of America. Indeed, the essays in this volume, with one exception, are revised papers read at the College Park (MD) meeting in 1991.

In his seminars, Michael Shapiro's laudable goal was to teach C.S. Peirce's theory of signs in "the hope of revealing and fostering links of method and aim among the humanities, the arts, and the sciences" (p. 2). He hoped that Peirce's semeiosis might help bridge C.P. Snow's gap between two cultures. Furthermore, he followed Clifford Geertz's call for a more active relation between sign sys-