



THE
INDIVIDUAL
AND THE SOCIAL
SELF
Unpublished Work of
George Herbert Mead

Edited with an Introduction by
David L. Miller

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The Individual and the Social Self

To Mary, Valentine and Reese

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Introduction

The class notes of 1914 and 1927 were given to me in 1968 by Dr. Irene Tufts Mead, Mr. Mead's daughter-in-law. I had decided to do the book *George Herbert Mead: Self, Language, and the World* as early as 1965. I visited Dr. Mead at Chicago in 1968 and talked to her extensively about my project. Later, in 1970, we both attended the conference on Mead at Winterthur, Switzerland (directed by Walter Corti), where we met and again had long discussions about Mead. Thereafter from time to time Dr. Mead sent me many of Mr. Mead's unpublished manuscripts (now in the archives at Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago).

The persons who transcribed the notes published here are unknown. On the first page of the 1914 notes is "Philosophy 321, Social Psychology." These notes were typewritten and were not in good shape. The final draft is my third, starting from the original. I have done extensive editing in punctuation; I have also inserted words to make grammatically correct and clear sentences. In no case have I changed what I strongly believe was the actual intention and original meaning of what Mead said.

All references in these notes to the works of persons other than Mead were cryptic and for the most part incomplete; much time was spent in the library in clarifying and completing them. For example, on page 37 of the original notes one reads, "this has been the function of mating and care of the young. Cf. Craif's study of pigeons." Instead of "Craif," the author is Wallace Craig, as stated in the final draft. There were more than a few such problems. Many of the original notes were underlined. I have deleted all underlining. Also, I have furnished all subtitles, made many corrections in spelling, and I have changed the word order in several places.

The 1927 notes consist of forty lectures given in Gates Hall during the spring quarter. They are typed, single-spaced, and cover 60 pages. Here again I have deleted all underlining and furnished the subtitles.

The original copy is in much better shape than that for the 1914 class notes.

The essay by Mead on "Consciousness, Mind, the Self, and Scientific Objects," was written by him probably around 1917, prior to the influence of Whitehead's writings. It is a profound article involving problems in epistemology and metaphysics. His chief aim is to offer a philosophical justification for his theory of mind, self, and reflective intelligence. This requires a careful distinction between scientific (physical) objects and mind and selves that emerged from them—a distinction between them that does not lead to metaphysical dualism or a complete separation of mind from bodily behavior. There is a discussion of the nature of the physical thing, how we come to have a concept of it, and our experience of it in connection with the nature of physical objects treated by physical scientists.

The essays "Functional Identity of Response" and "Functional Identity of Stimulus," with several other items, were given to me in 1963 by the late Dr. John M. Brewster, to use as I deemed appropriate. I have thought much about who might have written them, but I have not reached a conviction about it. I can only suggest that it might have been W. I. Thomas or Ellsworth Faris or A. W. Moore. Of course many others come to mind, but none fit into my speculation. I judge the essays were written about 1925. They are concerned with a very important problem and I think they are among the very finest of any written about Mead. They required some, but very little, editing.

Ellsworth Faris's review of *Mind, Self, and Society* (*American Journal of Sociology*, 41 [1936]:909–13) suggested that the organization of topics in the book should have been reversed. "Not mind and then society; but society first and then minds arising within that society—such would probably have been the preference of him who spoke these words" (p. 810). All will agree with Faris that Mead propounded the thesis that selves and minds emerge in individuals from society, out of social interactions, that there can be societies without minds and selves but not the reverse. Consequently the topic-order by the editor, Charles Morris, may be somewhat misleading. However I believe that *Mind, Self, and Society*, as published, presents Mead's thinking in the order he presented it to his classes. Mead always approached his problems from the historical standpoint. For example, in his course on Hume in the fall of 1930, Mead began by saying "The Aristotelian object was an object of experience; the individual added nothing to the object in contrast to that of Galileo and Descartes" (from my own class notes). In his social psychology course in fall of 1929 Mead began by saying: "Human behavior, that is,

conduct like the behavior of lower animals, springs from impulses” (from my class notes).

On page 1 of *Mind, Self, and Society* Mead says: “The point of approach I wish to suggest is that of dealing with experience from the standpoint of society.” In the 1914 notes Mead begins by discussing the nature of the act, the primitive unit of existence, and later discusses social acts and how selves and minds emerge from them. In the 1927 notes there is a close similarity in approach to that in *Mind, Self, and Society*. Mead begins by discussing Watsonian behaviorism, and later comes to a discussion of the origin of minds and selves. We can safely conclude that Mead’s method of leading up to his basic claims and his defense of them is the historical approach. Always in the back of his mind were the writings of, especially, Darwin, Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Wundt, and the work of William James, Charles Cooley, and John Dewey.

Mead’s Chief Problems

Having taken seven courses given by Mead and having studied his works and the writings about him, including many dissertations and theses, I make bold to offer a statement of what I believe were Mead’s chief problems or, as he would say, what lay in the back of his mind as he began his work in philosophy. Also, a brief statement should be made about how these class notes fit into his overall purpose.

While at Oberlin College from 1879–1883, Mead, with his close friend, Henry Castle, rebelled against the theological claim that the mind (or the soul) is a supernatural substance, that it can exist apart from the body, and against the implications of this claim for morality and for ethical systems. Nor was he satisfied with the contention that man is born into a moral order.

At Harvard University, in 1887–88, Mead took courses with Josiah Royce and lived in William James’s home. There he learned about Hegel and absolute idealism. During his schooling at Leipzig and Berlin, 1888–91, Mead became acquainted with Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory in physiological psychology and he studied with Wilhelm Dilthey. (Mead intended to complete his dissertation at Berlin under Dilthey’s direction, but this did not happen.) Clearly, Darwin’s writings about the emotions of animals and Wundt’s theory of gestures, as well as Dilthey’s thesis that we can understand the thinking of individuals only by knowing their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds, must have influenced Mead’s social theory of the self. Still there were other factors of a more philosophic, metaphysical, and epistemological nature influencing him.

First, his revolt against the belief in a spiritual self as a substance distinct from matter was a revolt against Cartesian dualism. Hegel's absolute idealism, claiming that the essence of the real is mental or spiritual and that all relations are internal, was also distasteful, inasmuch as it assimilated the self to, and smothered the individual in, the timeless, seamless unchanging whole, the Absolute; it left no room for the creativity of the individual. Nor did it allow for an open universe nor even for an open society of open selves where evolution and advance are possible. Not only was this monistic Hegelian system unsatisfactory to Mead as an answer to Cartesian dualism, but so was the Lockean, Berkeleyan, and Humean claim that the real is built up from experienceable atomic units, each having existence apart from all others. Mead was no doubt influenced by the laboratory method of research and by James's and Dewey's claim that one must begin with experience as the basis for developing a system. To start with Hegel's abstractions and then to try to arrive at the nature of the real is to put the cart before the horse. Similarly, Humean atomic impressions are abstractions from concrete experience. "The unit of existence is the act." Selves, minds, and our knowledge about matters of fact all emerge from acts that are experienced. Mind cannot be separated from action. There can be no self apart from action, more specifically, from social action.

Here we can see some very important implications of Mead's basic commitment. (1) He has evaded the sensuous atomism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, as well as the later logical atomism of Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein and that of the early logical positivists. (2) He has rejected Cartesian dualism by making a functional, not a substantive, distinction between mental (symbolic) processes and overt bodily behavior. (3) He has rejected both Hegelian idealism and phenomenalism.

On the positive side, Mead committed himself (1) to being a pragmatist, emphasizing that mind without action is impossible, that belief, knowledge, and truth are all related to conduct.

2. He became a "process philosopher" long before the term was used extensively by philosophers. This meant for him that the temporal dimension cannot be excluded from the real; the real is not timeless but consists of acts, happenings, or events. There can be no world at an "instant," as that term is defined by mathematicians.

3. History and time do not consist simply of the instantiation of eternal Platonic forms, but gives rise to novel, emergent, unpredictable events. Thus Mead embraces Darwinism and its implications, emergent evolution and creative evolution.

4. The individual and society are continually in the process of adjustment.

5. Neither habits nor customs are adequate for meeting the demands of many (new) kinds of situations, and reflective intelligence, made possible because of the social component of minds, comes to our aid upon the breakdown of custom. The "I" component of the self is creative in proposing new hypotheses, new ideas, many of which are true because they enable us successfully to meet problems at hand; they thereby result in a satisfactory continuation of the social process.

6. Mead, with his basic commitment, is able to show how reflective intelligence, involving the manipulation of physical objects by the hand, fits perfectly the scientific method, which requires the creativity of individual thinkers. Neither the ancient Greeks nor Cartesian dualists could show how the manipulation of objects by the hand is functionally related to reason, the mental, or to reflective intelligence.

7. Inadequate attention by sociologists and psychologists, as well as therapists, has been paid to one of Mead's central doctrines, which might well be called *objective relativism*. Mead opposes the long-standing belief that if x is objective and therefore ultimately real, it must "stand on its own feet," that its existence cannot depend on any other thing. For example, Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley held that colors, sounds, and so-called secondary qualities depend upon a perceiver for their existence and therefore they are not real in themselves. They were said to be "subjective," not objective, and for the scientists they had the ontological status of being less real than such qualities as mass, figure, and resistance.

Introspective psychology treated ideas, concepts, and all mental phenomena as belonging to each individual subject, and it could not get rid of solipsism; it could not make knowledge shareable, nor could it understand the meaning of shared perspectives. Mead, in his doctrine of objective relativism, is able to relieve ideas and knowledge of their subjectivity. The individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings. If one can evoke in himself, by his gesture, the same (functionally identical) response that he evokes in the other, then the gesture's meaning is relieved of its privacy, it is objective and also real, even as an irrevocable past is real but only in relation to a present perspective. Similarly, colors, odors, sounds, tastes may exist only in relation to perceivers, but they are there, objectively; they belong to the objective world. Thus, as Mead says, "we have returned these stolen goods to the world." If it is the function of analysts to relieve the patient of the troublesome hidden subjective elements of experience, the ex-

pression of those ideas is necessary, and, according to Mead, expressing an idea is essential for both its clarity and its objectivity. A hypothesis, proposed by an individual, is relieved of its subjectivity when it is tested and when the proposal is accepted by others.

Probably one of the most important consequences of Mead's objective relativism is his claim that through language we literally construct many objects; they exist only in relation to a society which creates new meanings and makes many cuts of an otherwise disorganized, undifferentiated collocation of events. Such things as chairs, homes, knives, scholars, kings, and possibly everything that is classified depends on our doing the classifying. Much finer distinctions can be made than are made to date. This may be the basis for the sociology of knowledge. Still, items that fall under our concepts are objective and real, though relative. Our whole human environment is real and objective, but only in relation to us. So it is that lower animals and we confer many characters on the world, and these characters are by no means subjective. By this doctrine Mead is able to answer Hegel, Locke, Berkeley, the positivists, and the phenomenologists. As I see it, this doctrine was in the back of Mead's mind in all of his teaching and writing, as stated in his famous essay "The Objective Reality of Perspectives."

8. Finally, his system explains how democracy, as we have known it recently in the West, is indispensable to an open society of open selves in which there is continuous need for the reformation and enrichment of our social perspective and the generalized other. Every new idea, every innovation, according to Mead, comes from an individual.

The Class Notes and Mead's System

The 1914 notes indicate that Mead was faithful to his early commitment as stated above. He says: "We consider the act as the primitive unit." Herbert Spencer, Mead says, conceives of the act as arising, and he does not see the importance of making it primary. For Mead, the act does not itself emerge but is there as the basis for all other emergence. Both Mead's pragmatism and his commitment to process philosophy are exhibited throughout these notes. Compared to later notes they are more closely related to and conditioned by the psychologists and sociologists of that time, such as James, Hobhouse, Spencer, James R. Angell, William McDougall, and Cooley. Beginning with the impulse, which means the animal is seeking stimuli that will release an act (of pecking, say), Mead explains how, from sensing stimuli (which he calls perceptual consciousness), the human, because of conflicting stimuli and the inhi-

bition of the act, arrived at reflective consciousness, which is social in character. Reflective consciousness, involving an awareness of the consequences of behavior, requires a consciousness of meanings, which occurs prior to one's being aware of himself. In some of Mead's later still unpublished essays he is concerned with the meaning of consciousness. I believe he is driving toward the conclusion that perceptual consciousness is simply a taking into account, by way of the senses, an immediately present object, whereas in reflective consciousness we take into account some absent possible object or situation, and this requires symbols and is social in nature.

In the 1927 notes Mead's main purpose is to account for the nature and genesis of the self. He explains his behavioristic approach and contrasts it with introspectionism and Watsonian behaviorism which is, for Mead, too mechanical in that Watson treats stimuli as if they are physical forces compelling the organism to act. Although many problems treated in the notes are identical with those in *Mind, Self, and Society*, they are approached from a different point of view. Also, two topics in that work, the generalized other and the "I" and the "me," are practically overlooked in these notes. But special attention is paid to some topics in the notes that are practically ignored in *Mind, Self, and Society*. First, though Mead states there (p. 237) that language and the hand provide the mechanism for reflective intelligence, he does not explain the function of the hand in arriving at a conception of the *physical thing*. This is done in Mead's essay "Consciousness, Mind, the Self, and Scientific Objects," as well as in the present notes, and I believe that Mead, in so doing, had more than one problem he wanted to solve: (a) he had the metaphysical problem of not succumbing to the Berkeleyan-Humean claim that no distinction can be made between (Cartesian and Lockean) primary and secondary qualities. (b) He wanted to show that our concept of the physical thing arises out of the pulls and pushes we experience in the manipulation of objects, which is done through role-taking, something that is not possible for lower animals. (c) He wanted to stress the function of the hand in what he calls the manipulatory phase of the act, that phase in which reflective intelligence is most involved. (d) He wanted to show how mind and body (the symbolic process and overt behavior), though they are different phases of the act, still are necessarily functionally related.

Second, in these notes Mead emphasizes that the child's world is first a completely social world. At first the child does not have a conception of the physical thing, the physical world. By words the child can move other people to act; why not so move all other things? To

abstract the physical thing from the mental is a social accomplishment requiring language.

Third, Mead discusses how attitudes can be gestures and he states the conditions under which they are not gestures. For a lower animal without a language, an attitude of a given animal cannot also be a gesture to that animal, whereas man can be aware of the meaning of his attitude to another, and in that case it is also a gesture to him.

Fourth, in these notes Mead discusses more extensively the nature of morality and how it arises. Also, the meaning of human freedom is discussed in conjunction with rules, laws, and customs. In these notes, as in *Mind, Self, and Society*, it seems that Mead wants to furnish a theory of the self consistent with all of the latest developments in the physical sciences.

The 1914 Class Notes

These notes are from the course Social Psychology, Philosophy 321, given by Professor Mead at the University of Chicago in the winter quarter, 1914. In this course Mead was concerned mainly with the genesis of the mind and the self. Emanating from his chief concern were many other problems, such as the origin and function of language; the functions of emotion, inhibition, and gestures in the social process of adjustment; the nature of significant symbols and shared meanings of gestures; the nature of perception, conception, analysis and synthesis; conversation and communication; the relationship between attitudes and gestures; putting oneself in the "place of the other," the "I" and the "me"; the "looking glass" theory of how one becomes self-conscious, how an individual self is distinguished from the other; and the importance of frustration, emotion, and inhibition in the development of significant symbols.

These lectures are rich in suggestions about such things as the social nature of crime, the function of artists in the solution of social, economic, political, and educational problems. Behind Mead's thinking there is his strong belief in evolution, democracy, the scientific method of solving problems, and technology as a means of attaining and preserving shared values or social goals. In all of this Mead subscribes to the view that we live in an open universe, an open society in which we construct and reconstruct a moral and environmental order, and in which the individual serves as the source of new ideas, new hypotheses, leading continually to the reformation and reconstruction of social behavior. I am confident that readers will find in these notes many hints and fer-

tile suggestions about how to clarify and attack various problems encompassed by philosophy and social theory. In the following remarks I shall consider only a few of the concepts used by Mead. About some of these concepts there have been vigorous discussions and sometimes differences of interpretation by those who have been interested in Mead's philosophy.

Frustration, Inhibition, and Emotion

Mead's claim that the act is the unit of existence means, for example, that stimulus and response are actually so correlated that one cannot occur without the other occurring also. They occur as a unit and, consequently, each by itself is an abstraction from concrete reality. Mead assumes that all animals, including humans, have impulses, pre-potent responses, and thus that an animal seeks stimuli that will release them. Learning consists in the rejecting of certain stimuli and the selecting of others that are more adequate for continuing the life process. Objects in the environment serve as stimuli, but often the same object tends to evoke conflicting, incompatible responses. For example, bait in a wolf-trap may attract the wolf, but human odor on the bait may elicit the response of running away. The same object has these two properties, one signifying food, the other danger. And although the act of taking the bait is cut short of completion, is frustrated and inhibited, the wolf, in contrast to a human, does not analyze the object into its different properties (stimuli) but, rather, acts toward the object at one time as food and then immediately frustrates that act by acting toward the object as danger. But these conflicting responses (meanings) are not comprehended, internalized, or conceived of by the wolf. It does not say, "What do we have here? How can I reconcile these conflicting responses?"

Mead has an ingenious way of explaining how analysis, the thought process, emerges from conflicting responses (attitudes) and how inhibition is essential to the emergence of gestures, which serve as stimuli to animals other than those that are making the gestures. He also explains how these nonsignificant gestures (gestures whose meanings are not shared, the meaning of a gesture being the response it evokes) become significant gestures, gestures evoking in those who make them the same (functionally identical) responses that they evoke in the other. Gestures arise in connection with inhibition or frustration, and such things as grimacing, baring the teeth, ruffing the fur, crying, doubling the fist, taking certain postures, etc., result from inhibitions of acts and may be thought of as tendencies to act in certain ways or as the beginnings of

acts. If they are sensed by other animals, they may indicate to the other the oncoming phases of acts of which they are the initial phases. They are not, as Darwin supposed, attempts to express an emotion. Lower animals do not intend anything by their gestures, just as we do not when we jump from a loud noise. Still, gestures are associated with emotions and we say that a person jumped because he was afraid or that a dog bared its teeth because it was angry. Mead explains that several emotions that are very important and necessary for social control, e.g., guilt and sympathy, could not be had apart from role-taking.

Attitudes and Gestures

In these lectures Mead uses "attitude" and "gesture" almost synonymously. If looked at simply as the behavior of an animal (as bodily movement or activity, including the voice), the two things are identical, and any gesture can also be called an attitude. However, bodily posture or activity does not serve as a gesture unless it evokes a response in another. In this sense there can be attitudes that do not serve as gestures. Mead wants to define "attitude," in his early work, in purely behavioristic terms, not referring to awareness or consciousness of meaning. "Attitude" and "posture" are the same in behavioristic terms. If, however, the attitude or posture serves as a stimulus to another animal, then it is a sign indicating to the other the oncoming phase of the act of which the attitude or posture is the first phase. Used in this sense we often say "it was a good gesture on his part," "he has the right attitude," "he presents a good posture." All of these meanings involve awareness of the further implications of one's behavior. A posture or an attitude becomes a gesture when it evokes a response by the other. Also, Mead uses "attitude" to mean "a set of the organism," a readiness to carry out an act. He says "gestures are attitudes of people who are going to act" (p. 40-41). "We have the gesture representing the attitude of the individual" (p. 48).

Mead says: "A conversation of gestures consists simply in the continued readjustment of one individual to another" (p. 43). Here he is thinking of nonsignificant gestures which function apart from an awareness (a consciousness) of their meanings.

The significant symbol emerges when the one who makes it is aware of its meaning to the other, i.e. when one can anticipate the response it will evoke in the other. Mead's most profound insight consists in understanding that the significant symbol, the language symbol, consists of a gesture whose meaning is had by both the one who makes the gesture and the other to whom it is addressed. He spent most of his intellectual

life unraveling the implications of this insight. I believe the profundity of this insight is still not fully grasped. Here I can only make a few suggestions of its import.

The Significant Symbol

By means of gestures whose meanings are shared (significant symbols) we break out of a present. Thus there is not, when we communicate by language, simply a conversation of gestures, but a conversation of the meanings of gestures. One's response is not to the immediately sensed gesture but to its meaning. There is an awareness, a consciousness of the meaning of the gesture. The meaning is the distant, future, possible oncoming phase of the social act. Meanings of which we are conscious refer to both what is possible, but which may never become actual, and to what actually occurs. Hence shareable meanings are expressed in abstract terms, and concepts are required for expressing them. By concepts we can indicate possible objects and situations in their absence, as well as the kinds of responses we will make to them (later). Breaking out of a present, which is impossible apart from symbols whose meanings are shared, is essential for the existence of both minds and selves; lower animals, Mead believes, have neither. Breaking out of a present requires taking the role of the other, putting oneself in the place of the other. Awareness and self-consciousness both imply a breaking out of a present, indicating to oneself some possible phenomenon in its absence.

Apparently Mead believes lower animals have no experience corresponding to man's conception of the possible. They live in an eternal present. If the wolf could think of the meat in the trap as having alternative meanings, if it could think of it as "bait," it would have analyzed the object and it would think of alternative possible objects and the corresponding reactions to them. It would be able to indicate to itself alternative possible consequences of its behavior. It seems to me that Mead is supporting the view that an analysis of the various meanings of objects and situations depends finally on role-taking and the use of significant symbols, that analysis requires a mind having a social component which is constitutive and necessary to every individual mind. Only by symbols whose meanings are shared or shareable, can we be conscious of a past (remember) and anticipate a future. The details of these suggestions have not yet been fully worked out.

Caste and Profession

Mead considers the nature and origin of castes and holds that they first arose in societies when one group captured outsiders and used them as