SOCIETY AND THE SELF IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

by Andrew J. Reck

In the essay "The Philosophies of Royce, James, and Dewey in Their American Setting," published in 1930, George Herbert Mead wrote that culture in America—history, literature, and philosophy—

was shot through with a nostalgia for the richer and profounder spiritual experience across the Atlantic. It followed from this situation that culture in America was not an interpretation of American life. And yet the need for interpretation was present in American consciousness, and the lack of a competent native culture was recognized. I believe that there is no more striking character of American consciousness than this division between the two great currents of activity, those of politics and business on the one side, and the history, literature, and speculation which should interpret them on the other.

Mead's approach to the problem of American culture calls George Santayana to mind. In the celebrated essay "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," first published in 1911, Santayana attributed the basic problem of American culture to a radical split in the American mind. America, he observed, "is a country with two mentalities, one a survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers, the other an expression of the instincts, practices, and discoveries of the younger generation." Santayana found this division "symbolized in American architecture; a neat reproduction of the colonial mansion—with some modern comforts introduced surreptitiously—stands beside the skyscraper. The American Will inhabits the skyscraper; the American Intellect inherits the colonial mansion. The one is sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominantly, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise; the other is all genteel tradition."
Although Mead’s account of America’s inherited mentality shares features with Santayana’s, the latter neglected the economic, political, and social ideas and institutions that the former emphasized. Thus Mead noted that since a social hierarchy with a feudal aristocracy and a peasantry never burdened Americans, they were free to construct their political institutions in the republican mold and to engage in capitalist enterprises. Instead of philosophical reflection, aesthetic appreciation, and historical retrospect, the activities of individuals in communities facing immediate problems came to occupy the center of the stage of American civilization. The processes and activities themselves, rather than the ends and values they predicated or intended, drew attention, with the result that when an American sought a scheme of interpretation in history, literature, or philosophy, he looked abroad. Or at least that is what Mead claimed in 1930. Since “America’s native culture accepted the forms and standards of European culture,” Mead charged that it “was frankly imitative . . . confessedly inferior, not different . . . not indigenous. The cultivated American was a tourist even if he never left American shores.”

As the genteel tradition was Santayana’s foil, Royce was Mead’s. Yet in calling upon philosophy, along with history and literature, to interpret American life, Mead implicitly appealed to Royce’s theory of interpretation as the principle of community. But while Royce’s community is Beloved or Blessed, Mead’s is secular. Furthermore, according to Mead, Royce presented “the problem of the relation of the American individual to his universe, physical and moral, in terms of the absolute idealism that was at home in a German, almost a Prussian soil. . . . His [Royce’s] individual is American in his attitude, but he calls upon this American to realize himself in an intellectual organization of conflicting ends that is already attained in the absolute self, and there is nothing in the relation of the American to his society that provides any mechanism that even by sublimation can accomplish such a realization.” Mead concluded his criticism of Royce with a personal confession.

I can remember very vividly the fascination of the idealisms in Royce’s luminous presentation. They were a part of the great world of outrémer and exalted my imagination as did its cathedrals, its castles, and all its romantic history. It was a part of the escape from the crudity of American life, not an interpretation of it.

Like Santayana, Mead esteemed William James for ushering in a new philosophy that was an authentic expression of the integrative direction of American civilization. In language that sharpens the contrast between James and Royce, Mead stressed that James’s theory assessed the efficacy of knowledge “not by its agreement with a pre-existent reality
but by its solution of the difficulty within which the act finds itself. Here we have the soil from which pragmatism sprang." Thus James, whose philosophy starts from his own physiology and psychology rather than from foreign systems, "felt his way to an intellectual and moral world within which he could live, . . . [and] the cleavage between life and culture did not appear in his philosophy. His philosophy was a native American growth." Still Mead considered James's philosophy deficient as the American philosophy. Although James rightly heralded the scientific method in philosophy and pioneered the pragmatist theory of knowledge, he neglected the social dimension of thought. James's individual, as Mead observed,

remained a soul. . . . It entered in advance of the situation it helped to determine. It carried standards and criteria within itself. It was still the American individual that had fashioned the ecclesiastical and political community within which it lived, though James was a New Englander and no pioneer and lived in a community old enough to have its own culture, though it was a culture that was in great measure sterile in the development of the larger American community.  

Despite his strictures against the importation of European culture to interpret American life, Mead was cognizant of the superiority of this culture over its American imitations. As he admitted, "A striking difference between the spiritual lives of Europe and America, since the American revolution, is that a continuous process of revolution and reconstruction was going on in Europe while American institutions have been subject to no conscious reconstruction." In American civilization, he noted, the most important element has been the freedom of individuals "to work out immediate politics with no reverential sense of a pre-existing social order within which they must take their place and whose values they must preserve. We refer to this as individualism, perhaps uncouth, but unafraid." Writing as America was hurtling toward the Great Depression, Mead perceived that this individualism required constructive criticism so that the institutions it had spawned could be reconstructed. For Mead, moreover, individualism should be reconstructed "by bringing the individual to state his ends and purposes in terms of the social means he is using. You cannot get at him with an ethics from above, you can reach him by an ethics that is simply the development of the intelligence implicit in his act." To this implicit intelligence, Mead attributed "the steady development and social integration that has taken place in the American community, with little leadership and almost entirely without ideas." He described

John Dewey's philosophy, with its insistence upon the statement of the end in the terms of the means, . . . as the developed method of that implicit intelligence in the
mind of the American community. And for such an implicit intelligence there is no other test of moral and intellectual hypotheses except that they work. In the profoundest sense John Dewey is the philosopher of America.\(^\text{13}\)

John Dewey returned the compliment when he eulogized Mead as "the most original mind in philosophy in America of the last generation," and confessed: "I dislike to think what my own thinking might have been were it not for the seminal ideas I derived from him."\(^\text{14}\)

Mead's ideas of course emerged and fructified in their own distinctive setting. In his penetrating study of the University of Chicago during Mead's tenure, Darnell Rucker has displayed Mead's multifaceted role in the heady intellectual ferment of the period.\(^\text{15}\) At the same time the city of Chicago was undergoing unprecedented urban growth, and Mead was directly engaged in efforts to solve urban problems of politics, education, welfare, and so on. As Robert M. Barry has pointed out, Mead's practical activities in urban affairs both reflected and nurtured his theoretical philosophy. Although Mead was "aware of the intimate relationship between philosophy and the concrete life of man," and "sensitive to the fundamental role of community as well as to the importance of politics in the life of man," long "before he came to Chicago, it was in Chicago and with Chicago that the creative powers of Mead's mind emerged."\(^\text{16}\) For "the unique abilities of Mead" confronted "the unprecedented development of a city that reflected the convergence of those forms of technology and life that are typical of the twentieth century."\(^\text{17}\) As Barry writes:

A man and a city: forms of thought are related to forms of life. Though this is prevalent enough a theme in the history of American thought—the continual linking of the New England town meeting and the notion of democratic theory—the situation of the city of Chicago moves this theme to a new level of understanding. For the rapid development of Chicago occurred at the very time that new technological capabilities, new artistic forms, new forms of democratic procedure, and new conceptions of human nature were converging.\(^\text{18}\)

The relation of philosophy to society pivots on the relation of the individual to society. Few thinkers in America or elsewhere can match Mead's unflagging investigations of these topics. He examined the competing doctrines of social foundations in the history of thought and concluded that neither of the two major rivals—the contractarian and the organic theories—would suffice.

Favored by the liberal tradition, contractarian theory emphasizes the primacy of individuals. Typically it portrays individuals existing in nature as fully developed intelligent and moral selves. It attributes the genesis of society to the subsequent association of individuals who compact for
specific ends, such as the security of life, liberty, and property. As Mead remarked: "On this view societies have arisen like business corporations, by the deliberate coming-together of a group of investors, who elect their officers and constitute themselves a society. The individuals come first and the societies arise out of the mastery of certain individuals."¹⁹

Opposed to the contractarian theory is the more ancient organic theory of society. The root of this theory is biological, or in Mead's coinage, which anticipates "sociobiology," it is "socio-physiological." It is grounded in the fact that no organism can live in complete isolation from other organisms, whether of the same or of different species. The family in the human species exhibits the socio-physiological basis of social institutions; it springs from natural impulses for sexual expression, affection, child-bearing, and child-rearing. Yet better than mankind or other mammals, the invertebrates demonstrate the nature of organic societies. Insect societies of bees and ants show that their individual members are literally designed in order to perform as parts or cells within an organic whole. As Mead observed:

The degree to which insect differentiation can be carried is astonishing. Many of the products of a high social organization are carried on by these communities. They capture other minute forms whose exudations they delight in, and keep them much as we keep milk cows. They have warrior classes and they seem to carry on raids, and carry off slaves, making later use of them. They can do what the human society cannot do: they can determine the sex of the next generation, pick out and determine who the parent in the next generation will be."²⁰

For Mead neither the contractarian theory nor the organic theory adequately or correctly explains the origin and nature of human society. The organic theory fails because, while it stresses physiological differentiations among its members to support their differing social functions, human individuals display no essential difference of intelligence in spite of physiological differences of sexuality. Whereas even the physiology of ants and bees is fashioned by the societies to which they belong, human individuals, except for gender, are essentially identical as physiological organisms and are consequently relatively equal in their capacities for social functions. Hence in regard to the performance of social functions, human individuals differ radically from ants and bees. In the case of human individuals, therefore, no prior social matrix—hive or hill—appears to determine the fact of their generation and the physiological form of their constitution. This physiological identity or equality of human individuals vis à vis social functions seems to lend support to the contractarian theory. But for Mead contractarian theory fails, too, mainly because it insists that individual selves antedate social processes. Mead upheld the contrary. As he said, "the individual reaches his self only
through communication with others, only through the elaboration of social processes by means of significant communication."

In place of both the organic and the contractarian theories of society, Mead proposed his own interactional theory—one that subscribes to evolution and that underscores the genetic reciprocity and dynamic interplay between human society and the self. As Mead declared, "Human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members; but its individual members would not possess minds and selves if these had not arisen within or emerged out of the human social process in its lower stages of development." In the beginning, according to this theory, individuals within the human species grouped together, in a first sense composing rudimentary or primitive societies, which are coeval with them in their initial appearance as socio-physiological individuals. At this point, however, human individuals are not yet selves. Selfhood is a social achievement. Selfhood is subsequent to human socio-physiological individuals and their earliest social groupings. It emerges as a consequence of social processes of communication and interaction. In a second sense, then, society precedes selves. But the evolution of society from its primitive stages to civilization as it exists at present depends upon selves. So, in a third sense, the relation of society and the self is reciprocal and dynamic, each contributing to the maintenance, advance, or collapse of the other.

The emergence of the self in the social process is for Mead interlinked with the evolution of mind. In a review of Mind, Self and Society (published posthumously), Ellsworth Faris, a leading sociologist and Mead's younger contemporary at the University of Chicago, accused its editor, Charles Morris, of rearranging Mead's notes and reversing Mead's own order of thought. As Faris observed:

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. For societies exist in which neither minds nor selves are found. . . . Man, he held, is not born human; the biological accident becomes a personality through social experience."

Faris's point is well taken when qualified by the further consideration that human society is to be distinguished from the other societies in nature by the fact of mind and the activities of communication and interpretation it renders possible. Morris's edition is partly inspired by a desire to relate Mead's social psychology to Watsonian behaviorism, which was dominant in the 1920s. Another set of notes from Mead's 1927 course in social psychology, upon which Morris based his edition, more clearly relates the social psychology to the philosophy of the act."
Mead traced the origin of mind and, by consequence, of human society and of the self back to the gesture. By definition a gesture is the act of one organism in order to stimulate a response on the part of other organism(s). To illustrate the concept of the gesture, Mead often cited the example of the dog fight. Two dogs growl and walk around each other, with limbs tense, hair bristling, and teeth bared. As one dog moves, the other reacts by shifting his own position; the shift of the second dog in turn stimulates a change in the first dog, and so on. The behavior of the dogs may be explained without assuming that the dogs are conscious or that either intends by his actions to produce specific reactions on the part of the other. Need, impulse, and instinct sufficed for Mead to explain animal behavior. Still the dog fight illustrates, in his phrase, “a conversation of gestures.” Since Mead’s time, contemporary ethologists have explored at greater length the sorts of conversations of gestures to be found in the animal kingdom. To dilate on an example close to Mead’s own, wolves fighting to mate or for leadership of their pack engage in a complex pattern of behavior in order to restrict their combat short of death. The beaten wolf rolls over on his back, exposing his throat, his belly, and his genitals. The victorious wolf refrains from plunging his teeth for the kill. Instead, after stepping on the vanquished wolf, he stands back to allow the defeated to rise and walk away from the battleground with tail lowered and head bowed.

The gesture is inherently social. In the case of animal behavior, gestures are merely stimuli to performed reaction, whether impulsive or instinctive. By contrast, human conduct is subject to rational control. The reaction may be inhibited; it may be regulated by habit, which is socially acquired; and it may be innovative as a result of attention and thoughtfulness. A match between two trained fencers is the human analogue of the dog fight; it displays the difference human intelligence makes, from the use of artifacts to the acknowledgment of rules.

The development of mind and pari passu of the self and of human society begins in a particular kind of gesture—the vocal gesture. Lower animals make vocal gestures; for example, the dog growls. In the case of man, however, the vocal gesture becomes the generator of language, of meaning, and of mind. The vocal gesture is reflexive; “it reacts upon the individual who makes it in the same fashion as it reacts upon another.” It leads to consciousness of one’s self, to self-consciousness or self-awareness, to the self. The cry of an animal is heard by the animal making it as well as by the other animal(s) in the neighborhood. In the case of the human animal the vocal gesture enables a subject to become an object to herself; and becoming conscious of herself she develops language, mind, and selfhood distinguishing mankind from other animals.
Mead's theory of the distinctiveness of the human animal as alone having a self and using language involves concepts and theses that are currently under experimental investigation and embroiled in scientific controversy. Recently social psychologist Gordon Gallup has conducted experiments to show that the chimpanzee, no less than man, is conscious of himself.\textsuperscript{29} After a chimpanzee is accustomed to his mirror image, the experimenter paints a colored spot on his forehead. Gazing at his spot-altered image in the mirror, the chimpanzee raises his hand to the spot to inspect and/or remove it. Hence it is inferred that the chimpanzee is conscious of himself and so has a self. Other animals, too, may be self-conscious in this sense.

Waiving here questions of whether the researcher has unwittingly trained the chimpanzee to react in this fashion, it is pertinent to observe that even if the experiment is valid it does not show that the chimpanzee has a self in Mead's sense. Behavioral responses to one's own body are not tantamount to the possession of selfhood. A self for Mead is a social achievement. The self that arises through the reflexiveness of the vocal gesture to become an object to itself as subject is a being whose emergence is mediated by social acts of interpretation and communication. As David L. Miller has stated the issue: "When the individual is a social object to itself, it is a self."\textsuperscript{30}

In the case of man the vocal gesture is not just a cry in the jungle or a moan in the forest. It is not merely that the human vocal gesture is accompanied by an image or intention that anticipates consequences, nor that it suggests activities that are inhibited. Rather the vocal gesture becomes significant in a deeper and a broader sense. Whereas the gesture of an animal has one meaning for the agent and another for the patient—e.g., anger on the one hand and fear on the other, in the case of man the meanings become the same. Here language begins. Significant symbol is Mead's term for the basic unit of language. He defined the significant symbol as "the gesture, the sign, the word which is addressed to the self when it is addressed to another individual, and is addressed to another, in form to all other individuals, when it is addressed to the self."\textsuperscript{31}

Long before Wittgenstein, striving arduously to overcome the philosophy of language he had advocated earlier, abandoned the theory that language is primarily a logical system of names, Mead found the key to the theory of language in the social processes of human communication, human processes that hark back to animal behavior. At the base is the gesture, but the gesture is not restricted to a physical act of ostension correlating a vocal sound with a given physical object or event. On the contrary, the gesture is a social act that grows in social complexity when, in vocal form, it engenders the reflexiveness that is a source of the self.
The logic of language is, moreover, not a static abstract structure, but a deep social grammar generating an ever expanding significance. The basis of language is, therefore, not an isolable atom, but the significant symbol, emerging in a social process pervaded by a universal form applicable to all individuals. It is the Word, almost in the Biblical sense, except that it is natural and human.

On empirical grounds Mead advocated the traditional thesis that man alone among animals has and can use language. During the past decade this thesis has been under attack. Ally, Onan, Tania, Lucy, Bruno, Lana, Sherman, Austin, Sarah, Koko, and Washoe are apes who, according to the claims of researchers, have been taught to use language. Recently, however, the traditional theory has been reinstated. Herbert S. Terrace has reviewed his four-year-long record of teaching sign language to a chimpanzee named Nim Chimpsky. Terrace now denies that apes can learn language. He attributes their behavior to drill, and to the promptings and misinterpretations of the researchers. He concludes that apes lack the abilities to generalize, and to organize syntactically the signs they have been drilled to use. Thus the enthusiastic acceptance a few years ago of language-using apes is now receding in favor of the conventional thesis. Still, not all the empirical issues are finally resolved. No friend of Mead, Mortimer Adler has also defended the conventional thesis that man is the only language-using animal, but on grounds of scholastic metaphysics instead of experimental science. When once asked by a critic in his audience what he would do if a gorilla stood up to object, Adler replied, wittily if not consistently, that he would argue with it. More consistently than Adler, an adherent of Mead’s theory could adopt Adler’s retort as his own.

The vocal gesture triggers the evolution of mind, language, and the self. By means of the vocal gesture the individual comes to place himself in the position of the other, to assume the role of the other. At the same time he is aware of his own gesture and so becomes an object to himself. The self appears at the junction of two processes—the projection of the individual outside himself into the position of the other; the reflection of the individual’s own action, vocal as it is, back upon himself. Neither process singly suffices to explain selfhood as Mead conceived it. Mere projection would produce an exclusively outer-directed individual devoid of any core and abiding by a sheer ethics of social adjustment. Reflection alone would result in an entirely inner-directed individual obsessively preoccupied with his private feelings and the satisfaction of his egocentric interests.

Language is essential to the development of the self. Its origin in the vocal gesture is not grounded on the imitation of sounds. Mead considered the song of birds imitating others—e.g., the mockingbird—and
even of birds talking—e.g., parrots; and he dismissed such imitation of sounds as examples of language use. For meanings are absent in these cases. Indeed, he joined those who discredited imitation as the key to the development of a self in society. In language use we are constantly putting ourselves in the place of others and responding as they would. We choose our words in anticipation of how our audience would respond. Similarly, we are calling upon others to respond to our meanings as we would. This does not mean that we want them to behave precisely as we would. On the contrary, identity of behavior is not the same as identity of meanings. A meaning may be the same for a group of which each member responds by performing a different job that contributes to the realization of a common task. Thus the meaning of private property is the same for the owner as for the sheriff and the tax official, but each behaves differently in sharing the common meaning.

While language plays an essential role in the development of the self, Mead supplemented his account of the genesis of the self by the consideration of the educational benefits of play and games. In play the child assumes the role of another, as, for example, when playing with a doll, he "responds in tone of voice and in attitude as his parents respond to his own cries and shortles." The game with its regulated procedures and its system of rules further advances the development of the self. Playing the game requires the agent to perform in accord with the rules—that is to say, he is obligated to regard his conduct and that of each other participant from the standpoint of all others. The team distributes roles among its members, each of whom contributes to the common task by performing his particular job. The performance of any particular job, furthermore, demands that the performer conduct himself responsively to the performances of the other team players. As Mead said:

The child must not only take the role of the other, as he does in the play, but he must assume the various roles of all the participants in the game, and govern his action accordingly. If he plays first base, it is as the one to whom the ball will be thrown from the field or from the catcher. Their organized reactions to him he has embedded in his own playing of the different positions, and this organized reaction becomes what I have called the "generalized other" that accompanies and controls his conduct. And it is this generalized other in his experience which provides him with a self.

Assuming the attitude or the role of the other is reminiscent of the idea of sympathy in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. Typically sympathy was construed to be the spring of morality and society. Although eighteenth-century moralists subscribed to what has been called a "looking glass theory of self," and exhorted us to put ourselves imaginatively
in the shoes of others and see ourselves as others see us, they nonetheless postulated selves pre-existing the social processes of projection and reflection. Mead, on the contrary, maintained that the self is an achievement produced by these social processes. Despite Mead's own phraseological lapses, it is nevertheless misleading to dub his social psychology as "dramaturgic," although it is correct to esteem him as a seminal thinker who has inspired such current practitioners of dramaturgic social psychology as Erving Goffman and Anselm Strauss. Whereas dramaturgic social psychology assumes pre-existing selves whose roles are masks and who manage the impressions they make on others, Mead's social psychology does not begin with a complete self "making its way" within society; rather Mead aims to show how the self is created through its social activities of role performance.

John Dewey has suggested that "the nature of consciousness as personal and private" was the "original haunting question" that dominated all Mead's inquiries and problems. While Mead conceived the self as a product of the social process, he nonetheless regarded it to be a center of privacy, uniqueness, and creativity. From Charles Horton Cooley, his colleague at the University of Michigan from 1891 to 1893, Mead had learned that in consciousness there is "a social process going on, within which the self and others arise." Unlike Cooley, however, Mead did not erect society upon the imagined ideas people have of one another. He found its base instead in objective processes of communication beginning with gestures, which antedate the evolution of consciousness itself. As Mead repudiated the subjectivism of Cooley's social psychology, he also avoided the behaviorism of his student John Watson, the first University of Chicago doctoral graduate in psychology. Before Watson, he had anticipated behaviorism with his proposal that psychology study conduct, or overt behavior, in order to become a science. The investigation of animal communication in the gesture suited the program of a scientific behavioral psychology. Still, he condemned Watsonian behaviorism on two counts: first, it restricted psychology to the study of the behavior of individuals and so missed the central importance of society; and second, it denied the existence of consciousness.

While Mead believed that the study of behavior is requisite for an understanding of the human self, he never condoned halting inquiry there, since he recognized the centrality of consciousness. Without consciousness the self could not emerge. That a subject can be an object to itself stems from the reflexiveness of consciousness. Further, that a self can be its own object, by imaginatively adopting the standpoint of the other from which it becomes an object, is an additional social development from reflexiveness.
From William James, Mead borrowed the distinction between the "I" and the "me." Early he sided with Kant against James's empirical theory, bewailing in 1903 the "loss of dignity" suffered by the "I" in modern positivistic psychology. Later he resorted to introspection to define the self, and he showed how what appears in consciousness is always an object, so that the subject as "I" remains elusive. Still the self as object in the guise of the "me" may be understood by examining a memory image of the self acting and reacting in the past. In one sense, what is caught in memory is never an "I" but always a "me," although the self that remembers is an "I." Further, what is remembered is drained off from the past "I" into the "me." Yet behind the scenes responding to the gestures and symbols that arise in consciousness, engaging in the inner conversation that is thought, internalizing the attitudes of others, lurks, by implication, the "I." By introspection and analysis of a memory image of the self, it is observed that the "I" is active and the "me" passive. As Mead said, "If the 'I' speaks, the 'me' hears. If the 'I' strikes, the 'me' feels the blow." Moreover, the "I" that acts toward itself is seen upon analysis to be the same "I" that acts toward others, as the "me" that is affected by one's own conduct is the same "me" affected by the conduct of others. Hence a conception of the "I" as transcendent is formed. But the "I" has empirical import, evident in the analysis of the memory image of one's past self; and it exerts causal efficacy within the social process.

Mead's conceptions of the "I" and the "me" have been compared with Henri Bergson's conceptions of the dynamic self and the static self, with Freud's conceptions of the ego and the superego, and with Sartre's conceptions of the self and the situation. As a principle of agency, the "I" displays a measure of free responsiveness to its past and to the social situation. The "me," by contrast, is passive—tied to the past—and internalizes the attitudes of others, the social situation. Thus the "me" is conservative. As Mead declared: "The 'me' is a conventional, habitual individual." This conservatism is invaluable; it integrates selves and stabilizes society. When the social situation is fraught with conflicts, however, the "me" suffers the consequences; and the self disintegrates, unless the "I" creatively responds by envisioning ends and employing means to re-organize and reconstruct the social situation and the selves that dwell within it. The "I" is, then, the agent of novelty and progress. Ideally, it assures that the self be dynamic and open. Even crises of personal identity and of social disorganization occasion for the open self the challenge of higher integrations in which the contents of the former "me" are reconstructed and preserved in transmuted form by a persistently creative "I" with its gaze fixed on yet higher ends and harmonies to be attained in the future.
Mead’s leading living disciple, David L. Miller, has erected his own theory of the self on the distinction of the “I” and the “me.” But while in Mead’s thought the distinction is primarily functional, in Miller’s it invites metaphysical interpretation. Following Mead, Miller defines the ‘me’ as a system of attitudes that the self acquires from its communication with others, while it incorporates factors from the past as well as from the present. Cherished by the self, the “me” is its social component. Indeed, the danger is that the self may so completely identify with its “me” as to lose its own creativity and become static. The personal component of the self is the “I.” For Miller, it “functions as theinker, the judge, the evaluator, the decider, the willer, the creator, and the innovator, but only in relation to the other components.” The “I” is the core of the individual person. It is an emergent, unpredictable and active, and its action too is unpredictable and indeterminate. Unlike behavior and the “me,” the “I” can never be an object, since it alwaysudes observation and introspection. It is a transcending and transcendent principle in nature and in social processes. In his treatment of the I,” Miller stresses metaphysical and idealistic features that Mead neglected or adumbrated. For the “I” is metaphysical not only in the naturalistic sense that the self in its guise as “I” is an emergent itself engaged in free creation, but also in a deeper spiritual sense that the individual person, as the Judaic-Christian tradition implies and as Kant ade explicit, is an end in himself, the only vessel of intrinsic moral worth.

Mead was suspicious of values that are imported into the natural social situation from the outside, as traditional religious values egedly are. He believed that society was the source of morality; and at natural evolution, embracing man and his institutions, furnishes themic framework for the development and realization of ideal values. ithin this framework, he held, even the traditional values could be plained, recognizing of course that then they are subject to revision d reconstruction. Institutions that rigidly adhere to these inherited lues, without adapting them to the exigencies of social change, he nounced as cults.

Perhaps Mead was too sanguine about the constructiveness of the socializing processes of assuming and internalizing the attitudes of others the self. After all, if the moral value of the attitudes and roles of others is negative, to assume their attitudes and roles may be bad. For ample, suppose the others have racist attitudes and, expressive of these atudes, their roles are performed with hostility and repressiveness. The xity resulting from the processes of selves assuming the roles of others this case would hardly qualify as moral. And if one’s own race is the get of prejudice, to assume the attitudes of others is to succumb to
stigma, to indulge in self-hate. To suppose instead that the members of the society would assume the attitudes of their victims (provided of course that the victims are free of racist attitudes whether toward themselves or others) and subsequently overcome their racism is to acknowledge that the process of socializing may correct itself. But the correction is attainable only so far as morality is distinguishable from society and appreciated independently of it. Youth gangs, no less than religious communities and state legislatures, count as societies whose members assume the attitudes and roles of each other.

The generalized other is crucial to Mead's conception of the self as social and moral. It appears in the life of the self when, beyond merely internalizing the attitudes and roles of others, it assimilates the implicit system of rules governing the interplay of their roles. The generalized other becomes part of the social dimension of the self; it becomes part of the "me." The generalized other presents a moral principle reminiscent of Kant's categorical imperative, for it embodies rules implicated in a principle of generalization, and moreover, it suggests that all members, the self and others, be treated equally as ends. Yet even here Mead's theory encounters difficulties. The "I," upon whose creativity moral progress depends, is moral when it is subordinated to the generalized other, which is part of the self's "me." Hence the "I" is locked in, so to speak, by the conditions of morality when it emerges; and it can break its locks only by breaking the morality it inherits. At any given moment, after all, the generalized other may be narrow and confining. It may extend no further than the internalized rules and skills of a baseball team. Mead was not ignorant of the darker side of human nature and the blackest facts of human societies. He knew how hostility functioned as the cement of social cohesiveness, venting itself in the cult of criminal justice and in nationalistic wars. His hope was that the generalized other could be extended indefinitely to embrace an unlimited community.

Mead praised Kant for having located the form of morality in his celebrated categorical imperative. For this imperative commands that we act solely on those maxims which can be universalized—i.e., that we act only as we would have others act if they were in our position. Kant grounded the categorical imperative, the principle of generalization in ethics, in reason, and Mead concurred, with the qualification that reason is no transcendental faculty but rather the logic of the social processes of communication. Approached from the Kantian perspective as reinterpreted by Mead, morality is inherently social; and the sociality pertains to content as well as to form. No less than its antithesis, utilitarianism, Kantian ethics construed the contents of human experience hedonistically and individualistically. Kant was unable to erect morality upon the foundations of selfish pleasures sought and pains averted, which the psy-
chology of choice and action, of human impulses and motives, reveals, and so he turned away from these contents. For this neglect and derogation of the contents of human experience, Mead criticized Kant. Utilitarianism, by contrast, attended to these contents of morality. Whereas for Kant generalization pertains exclusively to the form of morality, for utilitarianism generalization applies to the contents, the impulses and motives of selves in choice and action, enunciated in the formula of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Despite its fragmentary and sketchy presentation, Mead's ethical theory subsumes and surpasses Kant and utilitarianism. It is built upon a theory of human nature. While admitting the dark side, Mead insisted that the satisfaction of every impulse is good, and he favored those impulses that reinforce and enhance other impulses in the direction of more comprehensive and harmonious satisfactions. Obligation arises naturally for a self that, placing itself in the position of another, feels it should assist the other to attain the satisfactions it seeks. Generalization in Mead's ethics is threefold. On the side of content, human motivation is expansive, as impulses grow to contain feelings of obligation toward others in a developing social order of mutual and reciprocal gratification. On the side of form, there is the standard, norm, or criterion that reflects the concrete reasonableness of harmonizing the most inclusive system of satisfactions. The third essential feature of Mead's ethics is the end or object of all moral conduct. This end or object is itself complex, at once personal and social. It is tantamount to a fully realized self within an attained ideal society wherein every member contributes to and shares in the common good.

Two institutions received special consideration from Mead for their universalizing tendencies. He claimed that they "represent the most highly universal, and, for the time being, most highly abstract society. They are attitudes which can transcend the limits of the different social groups organized about their own life-processes, and may appear even in actual hostility between groups." They are economics and religion.

Economics centers on the process of exchange. Essentially, individuals exchange goods they no longer need for goods they want or need. Exchange depends upon the possibility of communication among the individuals so engaged. While the communication may be simple, indeed primitive, it at least requires that the individuals involved be capable of taking the positions and attitudes of others, experiencing imaginatively what these others need and what they have and do not want. As Adam Smith pointed out, the successful producer or merchant is one who has imaginatively put himself in the position of the potential consumer or buyer.
Economics is more abstract and less profound than religion. The economic attitude "identifies the individual with the other only when both are engaged in a trading operation." By contrast, the religious attitude "takes you into the immediate inner attitude of the other individual; you are identifying yourself with him in so far as you are assisting him, helping him, saving his soul, aiding him in this world or the world to come—your attitude is that of the salvation of the individual. That attitude is far more profound in the identification of the individual with others."'

The root of the universal religions is lodged in human nature—in basic impulses of neighborliness and charity. As Mead explained, "The fundamental attitude of helping the other person who is down, who finds himself in sickness or other misfortune, belongs to the very structure of the individuals in a human community. . . . It is out of situations like that, out of universal co-operative activity, that the universal religions have arisen. The development of this fundamental neighborliness is expressed in the parable of the good Samaritan." The attitude of neighborliness, fed by sympathy for those in distress, practically stimulates charitable feelings and philanthropic activities. Hence obligations arise to assist those in need. When functional, these obligations, illumined by a vision of a social order in which no member is needy, instigate and sustain strategies of social reform and reconstruction. From Mead’s standpoint, religion loses its function and degenerates into a cult value when, instead of addressing itself to the actual conditions and possible goals of men and women in this world, it diverts attention to a supernatural realm, which consoles and comforts psychologically without altering the objective realities of human existence.

In two unpublished fragments on religion, Mead examined the contribution of religious emotion to the advance of humane civilization. Before men can intellectually grasp the meanings or find their bearings in concrete developing situations, religious emotion often expresses the "new line of conduct," which is then accepted on faith. Mead particularly appreciated the gospel of Jesus. For Jesus taught that the Law is fulfilled by love of God and man. He interpreted the Kingdom of Heaven as a community in which all members share an identity of interests. The gospel of Jesus proclaims that under God all men are brothers. For Mead the Christian ideal of universal brotherhood endures as the symbol of the ideal society—what Peirce called "the unlimited community" and Royce "the Beloved community." As T. V. Smith once observed, "Mead was more Christian than he intended."

As functional this ideal, first grasped religiously, became secular. Along with economics, it feeds the establishment of political self-government—the ideals of democracy to which America is professedly
committed. Within this framework the personal individual self occupies a critical position. Beyond the conflicts and problems of values besetting him and his fellows at any moment, the sagacious individual may envisage a moral order superior to the present social order. But he is compelled, by the mechanisms of communication and social interaction, to convey the import and lure of his vision to others, thereby moving society toward a more fulfilling common good. The success of these moral heroes and heroines, upon whom the progress of society rests, is a matter of science as well as sentiment.

Mead’s eloquence at the conclusion of his brilliant and concise paper, “Scientific Method and the Moral Sciences,” published in 1923, cannot be improved.

The scientific attitude contemplates our physical habitat as primarily the environment of man who is the first cousin once removed of the arboreal anthropoid ape, but it views it as being transformed first through unreflective intelligence and then by reflective intelligence into the environment of a human society, the latest species to appear on the earth. This human society, made up of social individuals that are selves, has been intermittently and slowly digging itself in, burrowing into matter to get to the immediate environment of our cellular structure, and contracting distances and collapsing times to acquire the environment that a self-conscious society of men needs for its distinctive conduct. It is a great secular adventure, that has reached some measure of success, but is still far from accomplishment. The important character of this adventure is that society gets ahead, not by fastening its vision upon a clearly outlined distant goal, but by bringing about the immediate adjustment of itself to its surroundings, which the immediate problem demands. It is the only way in which it can proceed, for with every adjustment the environment has changed, and the society and its individuals have changed in like degree. By its own struggles with its insistent difficulties, the human mind is constantly emerging from one chrysalis after another into constantly new worlds which it could not possibly previse. But there is a heartening feature of this social or moral intelligence. It is entirely the same as the intelligence evidenced in the whole upward struggle of life on the earth, with this difference, that the human social animal has acquired a mind, and can bring to bear upon the problem his own past experiences and that of others, and can test the solution that arises in his conduct. He does not know what the solution will be, but he does know the method of the solution. We, none of us, know where we are going, but we do know that we are on the way.

The order of the universe that we live in is the moral order. It has become the moral order by becoming the self-conscious method of the members of a human society. We are not pilgrims and strangers. We are at home in our own world, but it is not ours by inheritance but by conquest. The world that comes to us from the past possesses and controls us. We possess and control the world that we discover and invent. And this is the world of the moral order. It is a splendid adventure if we can rise to it. 
NOTES


3. Ibid., p. 40.


5. Ibid., pp. 381-382.

6. Ibid., p. 383.

7. Ibid., p. 384.

8. Ibid., p. 385.

9. Ibid., p. 386.

10. Ibid., p. 380.

11. Ibid., p. 390.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., pp. 390-391.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., pp. 174-175.


20. Ibid., pp. 231-232.


22. Ibid., p. 227.


24. The Act as a Basis for Understanding the Life Process and Intelligence. Class notes on Mead’s Social Psychology, Spring quarter, ending May 13, 1927. 135 pages in typescript. I wish to express my thanks to Professor David L. Miller of the University of Texas at Austin for allowing me to read his copy of these unpublished notes.


26. MSS, p. 43.


35. Ibid.


43. MSS, p. 197.


47. MSS, p. 259.

48. Ibid., p. 296.

49. Ibid., pp. 296-297.

50. Ibid., p. 258.


52. I wish to thank professor Darnell Rucker of Skidmore College, New York, for sending me a copy of Mead’s two unpublished fragments on religion. See the discussion of them in Rucker, *Chicago Pragmatists*, pp. 120-125. See also Charles Morris’s discussion of Mead’s treatment of religion in Morris, *The Pragmatic Movement in American Philosophy* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), pp. 101-105.