Araştırma Makalesi

INDIVIDUAL SPONTANEITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNITY IN MEAD'S SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Ali Özgür GÜRSOY *

Abstract[1]

The central question of the present study is how to understand the spontaneity of the social self in George H. Mead's account of the genesis and structure of the self. Its argument develops in three stages. First, I provide a brief discussion of the notion of the self in relation to social existence in Hegel in order to highlight some salient features that will prefigure some of the claims that Mead makes. Second, I discuss Mead's theory in greater detail in order to emphasize the role of communication and 'attitude-taking' in the constitution of the self. These factors comprise what is particularly original in Mead's account. Finally, I offer an evaluation of Mead's key claims in the context of certain questions concerning the relationship between the individual and community. I think that Mead provides a sound scheme by means of which we can understand the constitution of the self as a social phenomenon and communities as dynamic systems susceptible to transformation in response to individual and/or group action, i.e., without reifying communities. However, the dynamics of social change, for the most part in terms of 'adaptation' in Mead's account, needs some modification, if we want to understand those periods of social upheaval during which the continuity between the 'old' and the 'new' seems minimal.

Keywords: Mead, Self, Spontaneity, Community, Social Change.

* Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, İzmir Ekonomi Üniversitesi, ORCID: 0000-0003-3332-9921, ozgur.gursoy@ieu.edu.tr

[1] Bu makale etik kurul onayı gerektirmemektedir.

MEAD'İN TOPLUMSAL PSİKOLOJİSİNDE BİREYİN KENDİLİĞİNDENLİĞİ VE TOPLULUĞUN OLANAKLILIĞI

Öz

Bu makalenin temel sorusu George H. Mead'in kendilik/benlik oluşumu için sunduğu açıklamada, özünde toplumsal bir varlık olan benliğin kendiliğindenliğini nasıl anlayabileceğimizdir. Makalenin argümanı üç aşamada geliştirilmektedir. İlk olarak, Mead'in temel iddialarını daha netleştirmek adına, Hegel'de benlik ve toplumsallık ilişkisinin bazı hususları tartışılmaktadır. İkinci olarak, Mead'in kuramı iletişimin ve 'tavır-alma'nın önemi vurgulanarak tartışılmaktadır. Bu tartışmalar, Mead'in açıklamalarının özgün boyutunu açığa çıkarmaktadır. Son olarak, birey ve toplum arasındaki ilişki üzerinden Mead'in temel iddiaları değerlendirilmektedir. Benliğin toplumsal bir varlık olarak kurulumunu ve toplulukların bireylerin ve grupların eylemlerine göre dönüşüme açık dinamik sistemler oluşunu anlamamızda, Mead'in kuramı geçerli bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Ancak, toplumsal değişimi nihayetinde 'adaptasyon' kavramı ile açıklayan Mead, eski ve yeni arasındaki benzerliklerin asgari olduğu radikal toplumsal dönüşümleri açıklayabilmek adına geliştirilmeye ihtiyaç duymaktadır.

__Anahtar Kelimeler__: Mead, Benlik, Kendiliğindenlik, Topluluk, Toplumsal Değişim.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic problems of social philosophy is to give a systematic account of the ways in which the accounts we give of our individual experiences and actions in terms of intentions and projects relate to the more abstract accounts in terms of impersonal social forces and norms. It is possible to extract two basic approaches from the prominent theories that have offered solutions to this problem, namely, one that holds the individual human self to be primary and derives the social process from individual psychology, and one that argues for the primacy of the social process in determining individual psychology. We can discern the latter approach in George H. Mead's social psychology, in such claims he makes as: "[w]hat I want particularly to emphasize is the temporal and logical pre-existence of the social process to the self-conscious individual that arises in it" (Mead, 1967, p. 186). However, Mead also wants to retain a place in his account for the individuality, and hence spontaneity, of the social self, rather than conceive of it as a mere reflection of general social norms.

With a few exceptions, literature on Mead's account of the formation of the self by placing itself in the place of others and internalizing the general attitudes of the community has neglected the problematic status of the spontaneity and thus the

creativity of the self in relation to society. Nielsen (2000, p. 143), for instance, argues that Mead's account of reflexivity or self-consciousness has the resources to provide a basis for the dialogical nature of the political by placing creativity at the center of cultural and political action. This claim, however, tends to overstate the potential for creative transformation of society by individual actions and understate the relative inertia of the 'me' as constitutive of the individual self. Silva's account (2010), on the other hand, emphasizing as it does the paradigmatic role played by science as a problem-solving activity in Mead's theory regarding the self, overlooks the extent to which such activity may be historically conditioned. In this sense, even though it is correct to identify Mead's social psychology as serving a foundational role that connects science's problem-solving nature to democracy's deliberative character (Silva, 2007), such accounts tend to emphasize the adaptive nature of the self and thereby neglect the role conflict plays in the material reproduction and transformation of social relations. On the other hand, those accounts which object to Mead's attempt to balance the roles played by both the socially constructed self and the dimension of subjective experience by emphasizing the latter at the expense of the former (Zahavi & Zelinsky, 2023) end up losing sight of the motivation behind Mead's search for such a balance. As has been argued in the literature (Abbott, 2020; Wiley, 2021; Coté, 2023), Mead's interactionist account of the formation of the self can only be understood by keeping these two dimensions together. What is needed, then, is an account of the emergence of the social self that maintains a complex interaction between the spontaneity of the self and the possibility of community.

The question I will address in the following discussion is how to understand the spontaneity of the social self in Mead's account of the genesis and structure of the self. My argument progresses in three stages. First, I provide a brief discussion of the notion of the self in relation to social existence and practices in Hegel in order to highlight some salient features that will prefigure some of the claims that Mead makes. Recalling Mead's debt to Hegel makes visible two significant points: on the one hand, the correct insistence on intersubjectivity as a necessary condition of possibility for subjectivity, but also, on the other hand, the Hegelian acknowledgement of the role conflict plays in the emergence of subjectivity that Mead's account neglects. Second, I discuss Mead's theory in greater detail in order to emphasize the role of communication and 'attitude-taking' in the constitution of the self. These factors comprise what is particularly original in Mead's account. Finally, I offer an evaluation of Mead's key claims in the context of certain questions concerning the relationship between the individual and community. I think that Mead provides a sound scheme by means of which we can understand the constitution of the self as a social phenomenon and communities as

dynamic systems susceptible to transformation in response to individual and/or group action, i.e., without reifying communities. However, the dynamics of social change, for the most part in terms of 'adaptation' in Mead's account, needs some modification, if we want to understand those periods of social upheaval during which the continuity between the 'old' and the 'new' seems minimal.

THE SOCIAL SELF

The famous sentence from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "[s]elf-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged," (Hegel, 1979, p. 111) has given rise to many interpretations. There is basic agreement, however, on the view that this claim, which occurs in the chapter titled "Self-consciousness", entails that human freedom and self-consciousness are grounded in intersubjectivity. It is safe to claim that what is meant, at the very least, is that the self is not a self-sufficient 'entity' preexisting social relationships between individuals, but rather that it arises only on the basis of the kinds of interactions taking place between individuals. Mead makes a distinction between two types of social psychology, one that derives the selves of individuals from the social process in which they are implicated and one that derives the social process from the individual selves (Mead, 1967, p. 222). He advocates the former type and offers an account of the genesis and the structural conditions of self-consciousness that agrees, in basic outline, with the Hegelian view expressed above. He says that: "to be self-conscious is essentially to become an object to one's self in virtue of one's relations to other individuals" (Mead, 1967, p. 172).

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a narration of the forms of consciousness as alternative ways to understand the relation between knowledge claims (what a subject takes the world, broadly understood as both the natural and the historical world, to be) and the world as it really is. Insofar as this subject-object relation is problematic because of skeptical doubts concerning their adequation (correspondence, or validity), Hegel attempts to describe the various ways in which this problem could legitimately arise, and in so doing undercut the skeptical worries. In any claim to know, it is possible to doubt not only the validity of the particular claim, but also the notion of the object presupposed by this claim. Hegel's basic strategy is to show that such a basic notion is necessary for there to be an experience of objects and, since there is experience of objects, any questioning of the validity of a claim must be relative to other possible notions. Since Hegel denies that there can be an independent criterion of what an adequate notion is, any investigation of a possible notion's adequacy will have to be

immanent, in the sense that we need to find out why such a notion would come to be experienced as adequate by subjects at some point and why it would come to be seen as inadequate.[2] Conscious activity is a relation to and a distinguishing from objects, and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an examination of the subject's relation to what is other than itself.

Hence the examination of forms of consciousness in which the assessment of knowledge claims proceeds by comparison with simple givens of sense perception, apprehension of universal properties, and the laws of the understanding. In each case Hegel attempts to show that the self-understanding of the form of consciousness involved leads to certain impasses that reveal the inconsistency of the fundamental notion with which it is operating. The introduction of self-consciousness is supposed to be an improvement upon the previous forms of consciousness because here the object to which consciousness is related is itself. The introduction's location within the *Phenomenology*, namely, between consciousness and Spirit, gives us an indication that understanding the 'nature' of self-consciousness will make it possible to understand any relation to an object (and any claim-making) not in terms of the cognitive relation between a single consciousness and a transcendent object, but rather in terms of a social practice governed by a set of agreed upon norms. Spirit signifies social existence and collectively achieved practices, and its self-determination can be measured only against itself. Hence we can see the chapter "Self-consciousness," as involving, at least in part, a determination of the conditions making self-consciousness possible.

Hegel tells us that (the notion of) self-consciousness is "completed" in three moments: "(a) the pure undifferentiated 'I' is its first immediate object, (b) … this immediacy is itself an absolute mediation, it is only as a supercession of the independent object, in other words, it is Desire. The satisfaction of Desire is … the reflection of self-consciousness into itself, (c) the truth of this certainty is … the duplication of self-consciousness" (Hegel, 1979, p. 110). Thus self-consciousness involves an immediate sense of the self as an existing organism as its first moment, and the mediated relationship to otherness in general through desire as its second moment; the final moment is the relationship to another self-consciousness by means of the demand for recognition, and hence the establishment of an interpersonal relationship. Since within the Hegelian dialectical progression of moments of any notion, the third moment subsumes the first two, it can be understood as giving the necessary condition for the first two: any self-relation (individual self-consciousness) depends upon relations with others.

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[2] For a clear explication of this point, see (Pippin, 1989).

The self-determination of a living subjectivity first needs to be considered immediately; the self-certainty of this subject (and its sense of an other) is first manifested in terms of its desires. The subject so understood is a living organism whose sense of itself is revealed in desiring and the objects of this desiring are objects to be consumed and mastered—in Hegelian terms, negated. Subjects, however, do not simply live in this way, but they must also somehow determine the way in which they live. The subject understood as mere desire-satisfying organism does not involve a self-relation proper, but a sentiment or feeling of life. Genuine self-relation involves, for Hegel, self-constraint, determining oneself by accepting certain rules and following them. This capacity requires that the subject is able to distinguish between mere desiring (the occurrence of desire) and understanding oneself as desiring; or in other words, the possibility of being able to understand oneself as taking a desire as a self-conscious motive and pursuing certain objects not simply because they happen to satisfy desires but rather because they are deemed as worthy of pursuit. A subject's desire is a self-relation only in the presence of another living self-consciousness: some kind of a social experience is required for self-consciousness and self-determination to be possible. Given the dialectic of lord and bondsman, the kind of social experience at issue is oppositional and conflictual; two subjects whose desires clash are needed for the sort of dialectical movement to establish something like a mutually recognizing group of individual selves.[3]

This dimension of Hegel's account is significant for understanding both the continuity and the discontinuity with Mead's insistence of the social nature of the self. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, conflict and struggle are essential mechanisms through which self-consciousness emerges and develops. Hegel argues that self-consciousness is not an isolated or solitary experience but is fundamentally social, requiring recognition from another self-conscious being. This process, however, begins with the "struggle for recognition," where two self-conscious individuals confront each other, each desiring to be acknowledged as an independent and autonomous being. This confrontation leads to a life-and-death struggle, reflecting the intense and existential nature of this quest for recognition. The resolution of this struggle results in a dialectic. The master, having risked life and emerging victorious, achieves recognition from the slave but finds it unsatisfactory because it comes from a dependent being. Meanwhile, the slave, through the fear of death and subjugation, is forced into a position of labor. This

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[3] For an account of the way the conflictual nature of the relationship may be developed in alternative accounts, see (Baugh, 2003).

labor, while initially a sign of the slave's subordination, becomes a path to self-consciousness as the slave *transforms and shapes the material world*, thereby gaining a sense of agency and self-worth. Through this dialectical process, both master and slave undergo transformations. The master becomes aware of the limitations of recognition obtained through domination, while the slave, through labor and the development of skills and self-reliance, moves towards an independent self-consciousness. Ultimately, Hegel's account shows that self-consciousness evolves through the dynamics of conflict and reconciliation, highlighting the importance of intersubjective relationships in the formation of a fully realized self-conscious being. Even though Hegel too ultimately argues for the need for reciprocal recognition to be recognized by both parties to the conflict, the *essentially* conflictual nature of their process of emergence threatens self-division and alienation throughout the development of the historical shapes of self-relation.[4] It is this aspect of conflict as *constitutive* of the self as well as the relationship between the self and community that tends to be understated in Mead's account.

Hegel's claim is that Spirit is "the absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'we' and 'we' that is 'I'" (Hegel, 1979, p. 110). This involves the establishment of institutions and practices, and an historical memory, within which the normative force and legitimacy of various claims and actions are to be understood.[5] Hegel discards the Kantian transcendental ego as the self-determining ground, and instead claims that self-relation involves a minimal self-interpretation within the context of a set of social norms and values. This conception is similar to Mead's claim that the activity of the 'I' is possible only within the limits of the 'me', which is conditioned by the normative practices of a given community. Two problems primarily emerge from such an account: First, how are we supposed to understand the relationship between the community, which is constitutive of the self, and the individual, which can act on the very conditions that make it possible and change them? Second, if rationality is defined relative to the practices of a given community, how do we conceive of the rationality of a change introduced into the community by the individual self, that is to say, how is intelligent reform and revision of communal practices possible in the context of the ever-present possibility of conflict?

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[4] See, for example, (Farneth, 2017, especially Chapter 2; Matějčková, 2021).

[5] In other words, normative force of our various claim-making activities can only be understood if one conceives rationality itself as a social institution. See (Pippin, 2008), chapter 1.

THE ATTITUDE-TAKING SELF

Mead's account of the emergence of the self is based on a theory of communication that involves both what he calls the conversation of gestures and the ability to take on the attitude of others towards oneself. Hence, the self is constituted utterly through a process of social mediation. There is a field of gestures comprising the process of meaning. An individual's gesture indicates a subsequent behavior to another organism and this behavior constitutes the meaning of this gesture. This in itself, however, does not give rise to a self. This form of meaningful activity characterizes organisms engaged in co-operative activity. One organism's act is a stimulus to another to act in a certain way, and the response of this second organism becomes a stimulus to the first one to adjust its behavior to the oncoming response. This is merely behavior with reference to the behavior of others, but it does not call a response within the individual itself (Mead, 1967, p. 144).

The kind of communication that renders a self possible requires that the individual's action (behavior, gesture) affect the individual itself and the effect on the individual be part of the conversation with others. I say something and this calls out a response in the other. Significant speech (or any gesture involving significant symbols) is the one in which I already elicit the response of the other in myself in the process of carrying out the act. This anticipation of what the other's response would be affects what I am saying and thus checks my actions. There is no self unless the individual becomes an object to itself, and meaningful linguistic behavior is, for Mead, the paradigm of behaviors in which the individual becomes an object for itself (Mead, 1967, p. 142). A relation to the self requires that the individual is able to respond to itself as the other responds to it and, in this way, take part in one's own conversation with others. By taking the attitudes of others towards myself, I become aware of what I am saying and I use that awareness to determine what I will say thereafter: "[w]e are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself" (Mead, 1967, p. 140)

The circuit of communication invoked here as a necessary condition of selfhood resembles the conception of stimulus-response relationship described by John Dewey as a continuous process of co-ordination endowing each of its parts with functional meanings. In this case, my significant gesture is a stimulus for the other to behave in a certain way, yet I must already have an understanding of what this response will be, that is, call out the response in myself that I expect to be called out in the other, in order to know the meaning of what I am saying or doing;

this is possible only if I take the attitude of the other with respect to myself. And we may see the view that presupposes the preexistence of a ready-made self, containing 'meanings' that are then expressed and understood by other self-contained selves as involving what Dewey calls the psychological/historical fallacy: "a set of considerations which hold good only because of a completed process, is read into the content of the process which conditions this completed result" (Dewey, 1972, p. 105).

The question which Mead is addressing is the following: "how can an individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself?" (Mead, 1967, p. 138). The preceding discussion suggests that Mead's answer involves the internalization of the 'conversation of gestures' by an individual so as to be able to view itself as a whole from the perspective of others; the self arises in the process of communication when the individual takes the attitude of another and acts towards himself as others do. There are two 'stages' to this 'taking the attitude of the other': a) the self is constituted by an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward itself in particular social acts in which the individual participates, b) the self is fully constituted by an organization of the social attitudes of what Mead calls the generalized other, that is, the social group as a whole to which the individual belongs. Mead gives the example of someone who says "This is my property, I shall control it" (Mead, 1967, p. 161). This assertion calls out a set of responses in the community in which the individual is implicated and the organized attitude to property must be the same in all members.

The general other is precisely this set of responses common to all members and society is possible on the basis of the regularity and predictability this implies: "there are certain common responses which each individual has toward certain common things, and in so far as those common responses are awakened in the individual when he is affecting other persons, he arouses his own self" (Mead, 1967, p. 162). Thus the generalized other is the common structure of attitudes making self-relation possible. Mead distinguishes between consciousness, which is the field of experience in general (which is private), and self-consciousness, which is the ability to call out in ourselves a set of responses which belong to the others in the group. This ability makes it possible to bring the group attitudes into the individual's field of direct experience as constitutive of the individual's self: "the content of the other that enters into one personality is the response in the individual which his gesture calls out in the other," (Mead, 1967, p. 161) which means that the individual becomes a self to the extent that he is capable of acting with respect to his conditions just like any individual in the community would act. The field of the self extends as far as the set of social relations that constitute it, beyond the

confines of the body, since it is constituted by the set of social attitudes characterizing the community.

The distinction Mead introduces between play and game help us better understand what is involved in the appeal to the general other. In play what we have is the individual adopting a succession of roles by adopting the attitude of the other towards itself and responding to these attitudes. This succession, however, is not governed by a determinate logic, or set of rules. What the individual at play is at one moment does not determine what he is the next moment. In a game, however, there is a definite end and particular actions related to each other with reference to this end, such that they do not conflict; the individual must be able to take the attitude of everyone else involved in the game, and these attitudes (roles) must have definite relationships to each other; this organized set of responses are such that the attitude of one calls out the appropriate attitude of the others. In game, the individual takes on the attitude of the other in order to determine what he is going to do with respect to a common end. The generalized other is this organized set of group attitudes giving the individual the unity of self. Just as the team in, say, a basketball game provides this set of organized responses for the individual player—and to that extent is the general other for the player—the general other is the attitude of the whole community. It introduces regularity and predictability of behavior that constitutes the individual's self: "the self reaches its full development by organizing these individual attitudes of others into the organized social or group attitudes, and by thus becoming an individual reflection of the general systematic pattern of social or group behavior in which it and the others are all involved" (Mead, 1967, p. 158).

This account of the self suggests that the self is completely determined by the regular behavior pattern provided by the society. Mead, however, claims that the self comprises two phases, namely, the 'I' and the 'me'. Basically, the 'I' is the response of the individual to the attitudes of others and the 'me' is the set of attitudes appropriated by the individual. There is a fundamental non-coincidence of the 'I' and the 'me' because of the temporal structure of experience. At any given moment I do not know for certain what my reaction to a given situation will be; all that is given in experience is a set of attitudes which call for a particular response (due to the structure of the self constituted by the general other); however, until after I have responded in a certain way, I do not know whether or not I will perform the particular response called for. Since the 'I' is that which makes the individual's responses possible, it is never given directly in experience, but is given in memory: "if you ask … where directly in your own experience the 'I' comes in, the answer is that it comes in as a historical figure" (Mead, 1967, p. 174). The 'me'

provides the constraining elements of social control in the structure of the self, whereas the 'I' is that which can assert itself within the limits provided by a given society so as to make change and creativity possible.

It is important to note that the distinction between the 'I' and the 'me' is a functional one for Mead, and hence does not introduce the Kantian divide between the empirical self and the transcendental ego. To the extent that the 'I' is that aspect of the self that can never be given immediately in experience and makes spontaneous judgment possible (according to the a priori rules of the understanding), there are formal similarities between the two accounts; but, for Mead the rules that provide the guidelines for spontaneous behavior are given by the set of social attitudes that are internalized, through the mediation of communication, by the individual. They are subject to change and relative to (a) particular groups within which the individual is situated and (b) the general other as the most abstract level of organized attitudes given by the community in general. Moreover, Mead retains the biological basis of the self by anchoring the possibility of communication in the kind of meaningful interactions that take place between physical organisms, while arguing that these kinds of interactions are not sufficient to give rise to a self.[6] That is to say, although one organism's gestures that elicit certain responses from other organisms already comprise a field of meaningful behavior, the kind of reflexivity that is entailed by the ability to anticipate the response of the other by taking the attitude of the other towards myself ('put myself in the other's position') requires a kind of reciprocity that is different from simple action-reaction.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SPONTANEOUS ACTION

The structure of the self that comprises the 'I' and the 'me' implies that human spontaneity is possible only within a limited space of socially determined conditions that set certain limits on what can be thought and done. The 'me' is the conventional individual representing the behavioral pattern of the community at large: the kind of attitudes and responses 'everybody' has under specified conditions. A given individual is a member of the community to the extent that she incorporates these sets of attitudes into her experience and reproduces the called-for response when the occasion arises. However, whether she will so react to the attitudes of the community is an open question. In this connection Mead writes of a moral but not a mechanical necessity (Mead, 1967, p. 178). How are we supposed to understand what is involved in this possibility of spontaneous action?

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[6] An account that emphasizes this aspect of Mead argument is in (Puddephatt, 2017).

First, part of what is involved in any given individual's reaction to the internalized set of group attitudes is that no two responses are exactly similar. Recall the example of the baseball game mentioned above. In learning the game, I have learned to put myself into the possible positions comprising the game and anticipate what is expected of the one who occupies these positions. For instance, if some other player throws the ball towards me at a certain time during the game, I am expected to catch and move the ball in a certain way. I know that I have committed myself to performing such an action under such circumstances by agreeing to play the game, and my status as a player depends on living up to this commitment. I take it that when Mead mentions moral necessity, he has something similar to this situation in mind. However, I do not know how I am going to act until after I have acted. Before the fact, it is uncertain whether I will fail to catch the ball or move in a certain way. I think that this basic contingency of behavior is what Mead characterizes by 'the lack of mechanical necessity'. But something more than this is at stake in the reaction of the individual to the attitudes of the community, since in my example we could still call the person who fails to respond in the called-for fashion a bad player, if we are convinced that he has understood the game, or simply not a player, if it is clear that he has not understood the game at all; in either case, his response does not call out a change in the rules that define the game, because both success and failure are relative to those rules and nothing new occurs when the individual is still within the parameters defined by those rules. However, if the individual is to bring about something new that could potentially modify the general other, he must be spontaneous in a stronger sense.

Mead refers to the notion of emergence to explicate the kind of novelty that is rendered possible by the reaction of the individual to the internalized behavioral pattern of the community (Mead, 1967, p. 198). Emergence involves a reorganization of the already given elements in the social space that at the same time brings about something that was not given before. For instance, water is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, but new properties can be attributed to it that are not true of the separate elements. Analogously, Mead suggests that the set of organized habits that make up the 'me' do not preclude originality, because the individual can make a different response to the attitudes of the community under specific circumstances. The example Mead uses is that of the scientist who formulates a new hypothesis in order to provide a solution to a problem posed by the incongruence between a given phenomenon and a given theory hitherto upheld (Mead, 1967, p. 197). The scientist observes a phenomenon that cannot be explained by recourse to a theory that has been successful in explaining other phenomena. Although he has internalized the set of attitudes characterizing the community, in this case the scientific community, and evokes the called-for

responses on a given occasion, when he formulates a new hypothesis in order to explain the incongruent phenomenon, he formulates something new, which was not given to him before in the attitudes of the community. This constitutes the response of the 'I' with respect to the 'me': "the attitudes involved are gathered from the group, but the individual in whom they are organized has the opportunity of giving them an expression which perhaps has never taken place before" (Mead, 1967, p. 198).

It is clear that the kind of novelty that emerges in this example does not require a radical change in the fundamental rules of the relevant community. On the contrary, the scientist is able to formulate a new hypothesis precisely because she has internalized the scientific norms governing what counts as a good hypothesis, scientific reasoning and testing. To this extent, the novelty is an enrichment of the community involved. The new hypothesis becomes part of the co-operative activity that binds together the community of scientists. Mead's point is that we should think about creative activity in these terms. The response of the 'I' involves an adaptation that affects both the self and the social environment that constitutes the self. Hence, we need to see the dynamic interaction between the self and the community as a process of evolution in which the self is not a passive reflection of the conditions imposed upon it by the community, but rather changes the community through actively responding to those conditions in imaginative and original ways.

The possibility for this kind of creative activity is inscribed into the very structure of the self to the extent that each individual first adopts the general standpoint of the community and then responds to it. This response involves the adaptation of the individual to this standpoint, but at the same time it introduces changes, however small, into the social group, thereby modifying the set of common responses comprising that standpoint. Most individuals have peculiar ways in which they relate themselves to those around them and, given a sufficiently small community, these quirks of behavior acquire significance not just for the individual but also for those around him. For Mead what distinguishes the genius, the individual who makes the wider society noticeably different, is not a qualitative gap, because "they are simply carrying to the nth power this change in the community by the individual who makes himself a part of it, who belongs to it" (Mead, 1967, p. 216).

The dynamic give-and-take relationship between the community and the individual Mead articulates appears to be similar to the relation between tradition and innovation articulated by what could be broadly characterized as hermeneutic philosophy. For instance, Ricoeur defines tradition as "not the inert transmission of

some already dead deposit of material but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity" (Ricoeur, 2012, p. 68). Tradition, according to Ricoeur, is characterized by a dialectic of sedimentation and innovation defining the basic contours of a community or civilization: cultural forms come into being, make possible rule-governed interactions between individuals, and are subject to transformation as these interactions produce new forms in relation to the previous ones.[7] This view affords a sense of continuity to remain intact between the old and the new, and it renders the transformations that occur within communities intelligible by providing the common elements between the two.

Mead also establishes a continuity-within-change by discerning a universal element in the specific actions of the individual with respect to the set of attitudes comprising the community. For instance, consider his claim that "the only way in which we can react against the disapproval of the entire community is by setting up a higher sort of community which in a certain sense out-votes the one we find. A person may reach a point of going against the whole world about him . . . [b]ut to do that he has to speak with the voice of reason to himself. He has to comprehend the voices of the past and of the future. That is the only way in which the self can get a voice which is more than the voice of the community" (Mead, 1967, p. 168). His point is that, although the communal attitudes provide the basis that defines intelligible action for the individual—"the things one cannot do are what everyone would condemn"—and makes a self possible, nonetheless the individual is not completely bound by the community. In replying to the community, the individual can insist that a certain change in the communal norms take place; in fact, he claims that we are continually changing our social system in some respect, and we are doing so intelligently because we can think. Since Mead does not appear to subscribe to a notion of rationality that would transcend the order of social interactions and since the normative force of reasons, in his account, is relative to the particular practices of a given community, the rationality of the protest described above presents a problem. We can express this in the form of a paradox: either there was something wrong with the general other all along and what is wrong can be clearly established (in which case one wonders why the general other has hold on any individual), or the protesting individual is wrong, since there is nothing he can appeal to immediately.

A way out of this dilemma is provided by Mead's account of communication and the universality that characterizes it: "[r]ationality means that

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[7] The constitutive role of time in the formation of the self is discussed in (Jackson, 2010).

the type of the response which we call out in others should be so called out in ourselves, and that this response should in turn take its place in determining what further thing we are going to say and do. What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one's self what it arouses in the other individual. It must have that sort of universality to any person who finds himself in the same situation" (Mead, 1967, p. 149). Hence the field of communication, which makes the self possible within a social process, contains an essential dimension of universality. In adopting the attitude of the other towards myself, I thereby understand what it means to think and act in the way others do; and moreover, I understand the very meaning of my own thoughts and actions only because I have already imported the attitude of the community towards such thoughts and actions into the very structure of my own self. Rational society is not limited to any specific set of individuals and is, in principle, unlimited. I think that it is this feature of communication that allows Mead to be able to claim that the individual can make a rational protest against the community and insist that a reform take place: "the meaning is as universal as the community; it is necessarily involved in the rational character of [the community of universal discourse]; it is the response that the world made up out of rational beings inevitably makes to our own statement" (Mead, 1967, p. 195).

Significant symbols are universal not only because they are used by all members of the community, but also, more importantly, because they can be potentially used by anybody. I think that the kind of universality that emerges as a result is helpful in understanding the way novelty and change is introduced into a community by the particular contributions of an individual when these contributions can be incorporated within the social process without challenging the fundamental norms of the community too much. When it is clear that the interests of the individual demands do not go completely against the grain, but rather are in more or less harmony with the interests implied by the attitudes of the community, then we can see how there can be intelligent reform. However, we also need to consider the cases when there is a conflict between the demands of the individual and those of the community that appear unsurpassable. For instance, Mead refers to Jesus in order to argue that although he was stoned and put to death, he was an individual who took "the attitude of living with reference to a larger society. That larger state was one which was more or less implied in the institutions of the community in which they lived. Such an individual is divergent from the point of view of what we would call the prejudices of the community; but in another sense he expresses the principle of the community more completely than any other" (Mead, 1967, p. 217).

I suspect that 'what we would call the prejudices of the community' in this case were taken to be vital to the very existence of the community by those who stoned Jesus. He was seen as someone who was inciting son against father, neighbor against neighbor. The appeal to the universality implied by the possibility of communication serves as a good ideal which could unite the divergent claims made by individuals; but if it is not to remain a formal and abstract form of cohesion, then we need to attend to the kinds of conflicts that arise between individuals and the community, but also among different communities, due to divergent interests.[8] I think that Mead's emphasis on co-operative activities as the paradigm cases of socialization causes him to overlook the ways in which the apparent cohesion of the social process might conceal more fundamental conflicts. The social organization of labor in nineteenth century Europe achieved great productive powers, both materially and intellectually, at the expense of the working classes that were excluded from sharing any of the benefits generated by their activities. We could refer to the 'developed countries' today in order to make a case for the basic truth in Mead's claim that intelligent reform is possible. However, even if we assume that the relevant situation today contains no such conflicts, such progress was possible as a result of a hundred and fifty years of social struggle, through communication to be sure, but more often than not through violence—and it took two world wars, and the prospect of a third, for certain kinds of social and economic reforms to be taken seriously.

John Stuhr claims that "the self … arises in society, but individuals—selves with individuality—require (and in turn sustain) communities. For individuals to flourish, societies must become communities" (Stuhr, 1994, p. 15). According to him Mead fails to distinguish between society and community, and to that extent misses the insight expressed in the quotation. I do not think that the assessment is quite fair. It is true that Mead uses the terms 'group', 'community', and 'society' interchangeably most of the times. But the relevant distinctions can be made according to his general account. His distinction between play and game emphasizes precisely the role of common ends in the latter to bestow a sense of unity to the different roles and functions involved. A community requires selves who share goals and interests, and who agree on the ways in which they are to be pursued. Richard Rorty makes the same point when he says that part of what is involved in the question 'who are we?' is: "what unifying ideal can we find to make us less like a mob and more like an army, less like a people thrown together

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[8] This tendency in Mead's account to understate the role of conflict parallels his tendency to understate the affective dimension of the self's relation to others. On the latter point, see (Honneth, 2008, p. 42).

by accident and more like people who have united to accomplish a task?" (Rorty, 1996, p. 1). I think that Mead's more general account of the constitution of the self allows us to see that this is the case, while cautioning us not to take this for granted. The kind of cohesion attributed to communities is usually achieved at the expense of those who are not deemed members, and communities can easily turn into mobs (one recalls lynching sprees in southern United States). Less limited and more abstract societies allow one to remain open to the possibility of adopting different attitudes and perspectives, but they do not provide enough concrete unity for the individual. The dilemma 'society or community' is more acutely felt today under the imperatives of globalization.[9]

CONCLUSION

I think that Mead's account provides a good general framework to conceptualize the basic elements involved in the relationship between the self and the social process, and it helps us see that there may not be a dilemma. He says that there are two kinds of socially functional classes in highly organized societies, namely, concrete social classes such as political parties and clubs, in which individual members are directly related to each other, and abstract social classes such as the class of debtors and that of creditors, in which members are related to each other more indirectly (Mead, 1967, p. 157). I see no reason not to include even more concrete social units such as the family in the former type. The important point is that these are functional unities and should not be reified. An individual is a member of many communities at once, and the boundaries of the communities are not given once and for all: "the given individual's membership in several of these abstract social classes . . . makes possible his entrance into definite social relations . . . with an almost infinite number of other individuals who also belong to . . . one or another of these abstract social classes . . . cutting across functional lines of demarcation which divide different human social communities from one another, and including individual members from several . . . such communities" (Mead, 1967, p. 157).

Ultimately, what must be acknowledged is the possibility of surprising and unexpected responses by individuals, which an overemphasis on predictability and regularity may overlook. Individuals, who are partially constituted by the internalization of the attitudes of others, may nonetheless refuse to provide the called-for response. The individual in such a situation knows that s/he is supposed

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[9] For an account of interactionism that tackles the role of power in the formation of the self, see (Côté, 2019).

to behave in a certain way when acted upon, but he may come to not give the required response. Something new occurs and introduces a change into what Mead calls the general other. As Hegel noticed, the normative force of the general other is the result of a historical process and internal to the set of practices it signifies. It makes individual selves possible within a social process united by common ends. However, its force is not absolute and is susceptible to change in view of the demands individuals introduce into it. If the common ends that bring cohesion to the social process are not to remain merely formal, we need to allow for the possibility of divergent interests, since the establishment of such ends is a task to be accomplished and not to be taken for granted.

In extending Mead's account by recalling the dimension of conflict present in its Hegelian precedent, it becomes clear that the tension between individual spontaneity and social conformity is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a dynamic aspect of lived experience. The individual, while deeply embedded in a web of social relationships, continuously negotiates personal agency within the boundaries set by these social structures. This negotiation is not a passive assimilation but an active process of engagement where the individual can assert personal interpretations and responses. This perspective necessitates recognizing that the social process is inherently dialogical, wherein the individual's capacity to innovate and resist prescribed roles is fundamental to the evolution of social norms. Thus, the very fabric of society is woven from these countless interactions where individual agency challenges and reshapes collective expectations, leading to a more nuanced understanding of social order that includes the potential for transformation.

Furthermore, acknowledging the role of conflict and divergence within Mead's framework highlights the importance of pluralism in social cohesion. The presence of multiple, and at times conflicting, interests within a community does not signify a breakdown of social unity but rather its complexity and resilience. Social cohesion is sustained not by the suppression of individuality but by the accommodation of diverse perspectives that contribute to the collective good. Therefore, Mead's concept of the general other should be expanded to account for the fluid and contested nature of social norms. This approach, therefore, suggests a view of social theory which emphasizes that the stability of any social system is contingent upon its ability to adapt to the creative and often unpredictable contributions of its members. By embracing this view, we can better appreciate the dynamic interplay between individual agency and social structure, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and adaptable understanding of community life without neglecting the possibility of radical disagreement.

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