

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GEORGE HERBERT MEAD (1863-1931) *

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I. CONSTRUCTIVE PRAGMATISM

Among the group of thinkers who gathered at the University of Chicago at the turn of the century and who soon came to be known as "the Chicago School," George Herbert Mead, after John Dewey, stands out most prominently. Though omitted from the list of the "canonical six" who make up "classic American" philosophy,¹ and excluded even from scholarly studies of American pragmatic thought,² Mead is widely recognized as the thinker who, next to Dewey, contributed most to the development of pragmatism during the period immediately after the first World War. Curiously Mead, like Peirce before him, accomplished his unique contribution on the basis of scanty publications for a restricted audience, since, during his life, he published articles destined solely for a small group of professional readers. But he lectured, and his lectures both in his classes and before the American Philosophical Association added to his influence upon the subsequent history of ideas in America. Mead's achievement, while apparent in those writings published during his life, is further evident in all its scope and depth in the four posthumously published books based upon his lectures and papers: 1) his Carus lectures published as *The Philosophy of the Present*,³ 2) notes from his lectures in his course in Social

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¹ Max Fisch, ed.: *Classic American Philosophers* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951).

² Edward Carter Moore, *American Pragmatism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

³ George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, edited by Arthur E.

Psychology published as *Mind, Self and Society*,¹ 3) notes from his lectures in his course in "Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century" published under the same title,² and 4) unpublished papers, supplemented by notes from lectures, published as *The Philosophy of Act*.³ The style of these lectures, as that of the published articles, is often forbiddingly obscure. Partly, the obscurity is due, as Kenneth Burke remarked, to Mead's tendency to write in paragraphs rather than in sentences.⁴ Partly also it is due to the fact that the writing reflects the method of lecturing, Mead seated, conversational in tone yet preoccupied wholly with developing his subject-matter, tirelessly recapitulating and repeating before moving on to new ground. As a former student aptly put it, Mead's method of presentation "resembled a sort of spiral advance."⁵ Paucity of publication and obscurity of style are not, however, the only reasons for Mead's failure to reach a large audience during his life. Here perhaps Dewey has pinpointed the major cause when he wrote:

While Mr. Mead was an original thinker, he had no sense of being original. Or if he had such a feeling he kept it under. Instead of bringing to the front as novelties the problems which were occupying his own mind (which they were even as problems), he chose to link them to ideas and movements already current (PP, xxxvi).

Despite obstacles of style and publication, Mead's reputation as an original thinker worthy of serious study has survived. Elegiacally, Dewey has described Mead as "... the most original mind in philosophy in America of the last

Murphy with prefatory remarks by John Dewey (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1932). Hereafter "PP."

¹ George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, edited, with introduction, by Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934). Hereafter "MSS."

² George Herbert Mead, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, edited, with introduction, by Merritt H. Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936). Hereafter "MT."

³ George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act*, edited, with introduction, by Charles W. Morris in collaboration with John M. Brewster, Albert M. Dunham, and David L. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938). Hereafter "PA."

⁴ Kenneth Burke, "George Herbert Mead," *The New Republic*, XC VII (1938-39), 293.

⁵ Ellsworth Faris, "The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead," *The American Journal of Sociology*, XLIII (1937-1938), 391.

generation," adding: "... I dislike to think what my own thinking might have been were it not for the seminal ideas which I derived from him."¹ And Mead, in turn, has placed the philosophy of Dewey, along with those of his predecessors, Royce and James, in their American setting, esteeming that the most striking character of American consciousness prior to the advent of pragmatism was the split between the directive currents of politics and business on the one hand and the interpretive activities of history, literature and speculation on the other. The idealism of his teacher Josiah Royce, whose vision "of freedom of mind, and of dominance of thought in the universe, of a clear unclouded landscape of spiritual reality where we sat like gods together," followed him for many years,² Mead judged alien to American civilization, since it "... was part of the escape from the crudity of American life, not an interpretation of it."³ But, Mead continued, where Royce had failed to articulate the implicit intelligence of the American community, Dewey, with his insistence upon the statement of the ends in terms of the means, had succeeded. "In the profoundest sense John Dewey is the philosopher of America."⁴ Overshadowed by Dewey, whose ascendancy he acknowledged, Mead was nonetheless never unappreciated. One of his editors and independently a prominent philosopher, Charles Morris has remarked, "If Dewey gives range and vision, Mead gave analytical depth and scientific precision. If Dewey is at once the rolling rim and many of the radiating spokes of the contemporary pragmatist wheel, Mead is the hub" (MSS xi). In rendering pragmatism scientifically precise and in imparting to it philosophical depth, Mead was concerned with what Arthur Murphy has called "constructive pragmatism" (PP xiii). Instead of dissipating itself in polemics against traditional doctrines, "constructive pragmatism," buoyed by its "en-

¹ John Dewey, "George Herbert Mead," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XXVIII (1931), 310-311.

² George Herbert Mead, "Josiah Royce - A Personal Impression," *International Journal of Ethics*, XXVII (1917), 170.

³ George Herbert Mead, "The Philosophies of Royce, James and Dewey in their American Setting," *Ibid.*, XL (1929-1930), 223.

⁴ *Id.*, 231. See also George Herbert Mead, "The Philosophy of John Dewey," *International Journal of Ethics*, XLVI (1935-1936), 64-81.

thusiasm for experience," has succeeded in detailed elucidation of the processes of knowing and of the structures of its objects.

Mead's "constructive pragmatism" is based upon a theory of the act and of social experience. As one of the most perceptive American historians of ideas of his generation, Mead grasped the meaning of pragmatism within its historical setting and social milieu. Noting that "...what philosophy has been doing, especially since the time of the Renaissance, is to interpret the results of science" (MT 343), Mead ascribed pragmatism to the conjunction of two scientific developments: behavioristic psychology and scientific methodology (MT 351). The behavioristic foundation of pragmatism stems from Darwin's theory of biological evolution. Viewing the living organism as engaged in an endless struggle for control over its environment, Darwin's theory entails a naturalistic conception of mind which radically redefines thinking or intelligence. "Thinking is an elaborate process of selecting, an elaborate process of presenting the world so that it will be favorable for conduct... (T)he test of intelligence is found in action" (MT 345). The methodological foundation of pragmatism is rooted in research science, which is "... only the evolutionary process grown self-conscious..." (MT 364). For it, too, is essentially a problem-solving activity. And the problematic situations with which scientific method copes are similar to the obstacles with which animals struggle. Both sets of problems obstruct activity, whether it be the activity of intelligence or the muscular-motor activities of organisms, and the aim of the scientist in his laboratory, like that of the beast in the jungle, is to control facts, to cope with the environment, so as to keep up the on-going activity. As Mead said: "The animal is doing the same thing the scientist is doing" (MT 346).

Springing from the peculiar confluence of two scientific developments, the behavioristic and the methodological, pragmatism concentrates both upon behavior or conduct and upon the verification of ideas by means of experience. The concern with conduct implies a theory of action, but except for Dewey's suggestions, including his paper on the reflex arc

concept, no one attempted to advance a philosophy of action on a large scale on pragmatic principles until Mead did so. As regards the empirical demand of pragmatism that ideas be subjected to the tests of experience, it is important to note that the pragmatic conception of experience, in Peirce, Dewey and Mead, excludes the subjectivism usually associated with traditional empiricism. Not only is experience conceived in terms of verbs, in terms of doing rather than of passively receiving, but also it is understood to be a social process.

Mead's "constructive pragmatism," then, includes a social theory of the mind and of the self. This theory, called "social behaviorism," has been considerably influential in the field of social psychology. As one social psychologist said at the time of Mead's death, and prior to the publication of any of Mead's material in book form: "Few books in social psychology of real merit have appeared in which Dr. Mead is not quoted."¹ Here Mead's basic ideas go back to the early days of the Chicago School, to the earliest articles he published and to the course in social psychology which he introduced at the University of Chicago in 1900. Despite the interval of six decades of rapid change in the behavioral sciences, Mead's ideas have proved durable.² Indeed, they remain significant for thinkers far removed in spirit as well as in place and time from the seminars and lecture halls at the University of Chicago in the first quarter of this century, where, as Charles Morris declared: "...the heavily charged psychological air precipitated itself into functional and behavioristic forms" (MSS xii), since recently they have been revived in phenomenological and existential contexts. In the past decade Mead's philosophy has confronted Husserlian phenomenology

¹ C. J. Bittner, "G. H. Mead's Social Concept of the Self," *Sociology and Social Research*, XVI (1931-1932), 6.

² A recent paperback selection of Mead's writings contains the following remarks in its introduction: "Mead's place as a historical figure in pragmatism itself is secure, while his reputation as a philosopher rests ultimately upon the relative status of the movement as a whole. His place in social psychology is much less secure, but paradoxically his work there is perhaps more original... Should there be a swing back to emphases upon rationality and the subtler aspects of communication in behavior, then there certainly will be a more extensive rereading and reinterpretation of Mead's contributions to social psychology." Anselm Strauss, editor: *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1956), p. vi.

through the writings of Maurice Natanson,¹ Buber's social anthropology through the works of Paul Pfoetz,² and Sartre's existentialism and Zen Buddhism through the articles of Van Meter Ames,³ while a Frenchman, David Victoroff, has published the most sensitive and balanced study of Mead's philosophy to appear so far. Victoroff contends that Mead's thought spreads out from the social psychology to general philosophical principles, that, in effect, Mead's cosmology is built in the image of his sociology.⁴

Though social psychology would have sufficed to make for Mead a lasting reputation, he undertook far more, since he sought to expand his philosophy into a cosmology, or, to employ a synonym, a metaphysics. To find a speculative genius, operating upon pragmatic principles to equal the daring of Mead,⁵ it is necessary to go back to Charles Peirce.

¹ Maurice Natanson, *The Social Dynamics of George H. Mead* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1956).

² Paul E. Pfoetz, *The Social Self* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1954); reprinted as *Self, Society, Existence* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

³ Van Meter Ames, "Mead and Sartre on Man," *Journal of Philosophy*, LIII (1956), 205-219, and "Zen to Mead," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* (1959-1960), pp. 27-42.

⁴ David Victoroff, *G. H. Mead: Sociologue et Philosophe* (Paris: PUF, 1953), p. 6.

⁵ In "Peirce, Mead and Pragmatism," *Philosophical Review*, XLVII (1938), 109-127, Charles Morris investigates the connection between Peirce and Mead, and while recognizing similarities in their theories of signs, he denies the operation of direct influence from Peirce to Mead. Morris, in effect, accentuates the differences, contending that while Peirce approached the theory of signs from the standpoint of a logician and offered a metaphysical (i.e., idealistic) theory, Mead utilized the genetic method of the social psychologist and offered a scientific (i.e., naturalistic) theory. An opposite tack is taken by Maurice Natanson, who argues that Mead's latest work was breaking through the limits of naturalism to some sort of phenomenological position, and that Mead's editors, with Charles Morris especially singled out, have done Mead a disservice by imposing upon him the tag "social behaviorist" (op. cit., 2). Natanson is right in perceiving that Mead's thought possesses more metaphysical complexity than the kind of pragmatic, scientific naturalism which Morris hoped to marry to logical positivism, but he is unclear about his main thesis. When Natanson writes about Mead's development, he hedges, meaning by development not chronological progression but rather "the characterization of distinctively variant directions" (p. 6). At least this much can be reported: it is difficult to read Mead's published articles, going back to the very beginning of the century, without appreciating the functionalist character of his theories and the metaphysical terminology in which they are stated. Here John Dewey is perhaps the best guide, and Dewey has written: "When I first came to know Mr. Mead, well over forty years ago, the dominant problem in his mind concerned the nature of consciousness as personal and private . . . I fancy that if one had a sufficiently consecutive knowledge of Mr. Mead's intellectual biography during the intervening years, one could discover

Of course, more often than not, the terms "metaphysics" and "metaphysical" in Mead's writings bear pejorative connotations, because like Dewey, he was critical of traditional metaphysics for focussing on static values which transcend experience, for bifurcating mind from nature, and for seeking a finality alien to the scientist's method of "...continued reconstruction in the face of events emerging in ceaseless novelty" (PP 102). However, Mead recognized yet another, more positive, significance of the terms. In a posthumously published fragment he asked: "...is there a type of metaphysical thought that may be in some sense descriptive of the world so far as it comes within the range of our thought? Can we find out the essential characters of the world as they enter into our experience without attempting to present the universe as a whole?" (PA 626). His answer seems to have been affirmative. By first discovering the essential natures of the objects about us, we could, he wrote, "...try to bring them into our actual conduct, our actual life, thus presenting a less transcendental view. That is, our philosophy has ceased to be other worldly in character; it is something that can be found in experience" (PA 627).

But how is a metaphysics based upon the principles of pragmatism possible? Does not metaphysics, except as a neo-Kantian critique of categories, always lead to transcendental leaps beyond experience, beyond this world? Though Mead never put the question quite so bluntly, it is possible to ferret out of his writings the direction of an answer. Philosophy, he said, is "at home in the world in which we live and move and have our being" only so far as it "...enables us, who are parts of this evolving universe, to capture the meaning which it has for us because its evolutionary process appears in us as intelligence" (PA 515). In three "capsules" he administered a system of philosophy in accord with this conception of its office, and within this system he assigned metaphysics a cardinal position. He wrote:

Metaphysically, things are their meanings, and the forms they take on are the outcome of interactions which are responsible for the

how practically all his inquiries and problems developed out of his original haunting question" (PP, xxxvi-xxxvii).

appearance of new forms, i.e. new meanings. In a single phrase, the world is ceaselessly becoming what it means. This is true in thinking because thought is simply the communication to ourselves or others of what is.

Logically, i.e. in conduct of which thought is a phase, meanings become means. In an intelligent being there is such a selection of meanings that the consequence is already involved in the means. Psychologically, the perspective of the individual exists in nature, not in the individual. Physical science has recently discovered this and enunciated it in the doctrine of relativity. (PA 515).

Cognizant of his temerity in this brief endeavor to sum up a system of philosophy, Mead confessed his sober intention: "I have merely wished to indicate that it is the technical function of philosophy so to state the universe that what we call our conscious life can be recognized as a phase of its creative advance" (PA 515). Writing before the publication of Dewey's *Quest for Certainty* and Whitehead's *Process and Reality* Mead cited three treatises as outstanding illustrations of the office of philosophy, in that they view the world as unfractured and construe experience as "both the starting-point and goal of research science and the field of all our values and our meanings" (PA 517). These treatises are: Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, S. Alexander's *Space, Time, and Deity*, and Dewey's *Experience and Nature*. Hence Mead sought a cosmological philosophy, a metaphysics "...concerned ... with the import of the appearance and presence in the universe of human reflective intelligence – that intelligence which transforms causes and effects into means and consequences, reactions into responses, and termini of natural processes into ends-in-view" (PA 517).

According to pragmatism, scientific methodology is a problem solving activity; its problems are specific, restricted to partial regions of a world which the scientist takes for granted; and its purpose is to find solutions that effectuate the ongoing activity. On the whole it would appear that knowledge is too self-interested and too narrow to allow room for the kind of investigations required by a cosmological philosophy. Mead's "constructive pragmatism," while operating within the framework of the pragmatic conception of inquiry as a problem solving activity, nevertheless found a

place for metaphysics, the concern with the most general conceptions of the world and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. As Mead has written:

The conception of a world of existence . . . is the result of the determination of the moment of the conditions of the solution of the given problems. These problems constitute the conditions of conduct, and the ends of conduct can only be determined as we realize the possibilities which changing conditions carry with them. Our world of reality thus becomes independent of any special ends or purposes and we reach an entirely disinterested knowledge. And yet the value and import of this knowledge is found in our conduct and in our continually changing conditions. Knowledge for its own sake is the slogan of freedom, for it alone makes possible the continual reconstruction and enlargement of the ends of conduct.¹

As problem-solving yet disinterested, the metaphysics deals with problems of heightened generality – problems, for example, which stem from the discrepancy between the world views fostered by scientific conceptual systems and common experience, between scientific objects and the perceptual objects of ordinary experience, or from the theory of causal determinism postulated by scientific investigation and the doctrine of emergence favored by the scientific theory of evolution. In his first published philosophical article, where, setting out from Dewey's concept of the reflex arc, Mead attempted to outline a theory of the philosophical disciplines based upon a dialectic of the act, he identified metaphysics as the discipline which makes "the statement of the problem." Viewing a "metaphysical situation" as that which involves a persistent problem that cannot be ignored, such as the affirmation of the reality of one type of experience at the price of the allegation of the unreality of another equally valid type, e.g., the theological claim for a teleological interpretation of nature at the expense of the mechanical interpretation required by science, or the Platonic insistence on the idea at the cost of sensuous experience, Mead defined metaphysics as "... a statement of an essential problem in permanent form, in terms of the reality of an idea or system of ideas and the

¹ George Herbert Mead, "Scientific Method and Individual Thinker," *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1917), p. 225. Hereafter "CI."

unreality of that which conflicts with it. The solution of the problem," he continued, "carries with it the disappearance of the problem and the metaphysical system at the same time."¹ In this fundamental sense, metaphysics is reconstructive.

Mead's "constructive pragmatism," with metaphysics as a reconstructive activity addressed to those problems of greatest generality, had to face up to the revolutions in physics wrought by relativity theory and quantum mechanics. Because alone among pragmatists Mead did so, his thought belongs, as Arthur Murphy has observed, to that *genre* of the philosophy of nature which flourished in the 1920's and which culminated in Whitehead's *Process and Reality* as the striking "summary of the fashion" (PP xv). Whereas the other practitioners of the type were interested simply to describe reality and the stages of its genesis and to propose categorial schemes of explanation, Mead as a pragmatist philosopher was motivated always by the need to find solutions to problems, and consequently, his philosophical efforts are scattered in essays, lectures and incomplete fragments. Because the main problems with which he dealt and the solutions he offered sketch the outlines of a major unfinished system of philosophy, it is our aim in this paper, in order to recover the significance and structure of Mead's thought, to place these problems and their solutions in focus.

II. THEORY OF THE ACT

The concept of the act is the key to Mead's "constructive pragmatism." Historically this concept derived its philosophical significance from the impact of the theory of evolution upon psychology, strongly evident in William James' *Principles of Psychology* (1889) and further extended in John Dewey's article, "The Reflex Arc Concept" (1896).² Dewey had contended that the stimulus provided by the environment

¹ George Herbert Mead, "Suggestions toward a Theory of the Philosophical Disciplines," *The Philosophical Review*, IX (Jan. 1900), 2-4.

² John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review* III (1896), 357-370.

depends upon the implicit responsiveness or interest of the organism, that, in other words, the existence and the nature of an environmental stimulus is a function of the existence and nature of the organism just as much as the existence and nature of the response of the organism is a function of the existence and nature of the environmental stimulus. No longer a static field in which an organism dwells, the environment has its texture and quality determined by the peculiar sensitivity of the organism. Continuous interaction prevails between organism and environment, each reciprocally determining the other. In his last years Dewey introduced the term "transaction" to designate this interaction.¹ A transaction is a situational process in which each element possesses a nature and performs a role, not intrinsically, but by virtue of its context, its relatedness to other elements with natures and roles similarly affected. For example, a commercial transaction between buyer and seller is a situational process in which there is a buyer only because there is a seller and conversely. Now Mead's conception of the relation between organism and environment owes much to the functionalist psychology of James and Dewey, and in his appreciation of the metaphysical potentialities of this dynamic conception, he went beyond them. "Act" is Mead's term for the relation between organism and environment. He wrote: "Our primary adjustment to an environment lies in an act which determines the relation between the individual and the environment. An act is an ongoing event that consists of stimulation and response and the results of the response" (PA 364).

Since acts comprise situations whereby the characteristics of the environmental stimuli and the organic responses are determined, Mead's philosophy of the act exemplifies that species of metaphysics which A. E. Murphy has aptly called "objective relativism."² Consider Mead's discussion of food:

There was, to be sure, no such thing as food where there were no organisms capable of ingesting, digesting, and assimilating it. It

¹ John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), pp. 67-69.

² A. E. Murphy, "Objective Relativism in Dewey and Whitehead," *Philosophical Review* XXXIV (1927), 121-144.

is equally true that there is no food when in the presence of such organisms there is no nutriment present. Food as an object exists in a certain biological situation, in which are found both the organic forms and the environment in adaptation to each other. (PA 71).

This transaction between organism and environment, at first restricted to stimuli and responses having to do with the life of the organism and the qualities of that life, is generalized to bear upon all the categories of reality. In this respect Mead was profoundly affected by Whitehead's "philosophy of organism." Whereas prior to Whitehead it was possible to regard the environment, at least in its categorial features of space, time and causality, as independent of the organism, after Whitehead, who had assumed that the organism and the environment are inseparable, neither having the quality and structure it has without the other (PA 542), it was no longer possible to do so.

Like Whitehead's "philosophy of the organism," Mead's "philosophy of the act" is an essay in metaphysics, but the essay is clearly grounded upon pragmatic principles. Stephen Pepper has properly named this type of metaphysics "contextualism" and he has isolated the concept of "historic event" as "the root metaphor" of the theory, amplifying that by the term "historic event" is meant the event alive in its present. As Pepper has said:

The real historic event, the event in its actuality, is when it is going on *now*, the dynamic dramatic active event. We may call it an "act," if we like, and if we take care of our use of the term. But it is not an act conceived as alone or cut off that we mean; it is an act in and with its setting, an act in its context.¹

In this brief passage, Pepper has underscored the major significant features of the act: 1) that it is a process going on; 2) that it is temporal, being an historic event in the sense of being alive; and 3) that it is social in the sense of always being in context. *Prima facie* it would appear that such a concept would prove sturdy enough upon which to build an

¹ Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses, A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942), p. 232. For a discussion of Mead's philosophy in terms of Pepper's account of contextualism, see William C. Tremmel, "The Social Concepts of George Herbert Mead," *The Emporia State Research Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1957), pp. 6-11.

adequate metaphysics. But where Pepper has found a concept that illuminates and inspires such philosophies as that of Mead, Murphy has detected only confusion. On the occasion of the publication of *The Philosophy of Act* Murphy, in a long critical article published in the *Journal of Philosophy*, maintained: "The 'act' is an impressive philosophical pretender, but it is an extremely unsatisfactory contextual referent. The fact appears to be that there is no 'basic' activity in terms of which all meaning can be defined, and the attempt to construct one is a source not of philosophical enlightenment but of analytic confusion."¹ Only a consideration of Mead's analysis of the act and the philosophy which radiates therefrom can rightly answer Murphy's charge.

A. *The Stages of the Act*

According to Mead, an act unfolds in three general stages: perception, manipulation and consummation.

1. *Perception*

Perception is defined as "... a relation between a highly developed physiological organism and an object, or an environment in which selection emphasizes certain elements" (PA 8). Perception is a temporal process pervaded by activity. There is the action through the media which stimulates the senses; there is the action of the organism selecting this stimulus; and there is the total perceptual response to this interaction. Thus the first phase of the act has "... all the elements of an act – the stimulation, the response represented by the attitude, and the ultimate experience which follows upon the reaction, represented by the imagery arising out of past reactions" (PA 3).²

Besides "an immediate sensuous stimulation," there is

¹ A. E. Murphy, "Concerning Mead's *The Philosophy of the Act*," *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXVI (1939), 91.

² So conspicuous is activity in the perceptual process that Mead's editors of *The Philosophy of the Act* divide the act into four stages, introducing the term "impulse" to denote the first stage. If by "impulse" is meant the predisposition of the organism to respond to a given stimulus, rooted in its physiological structure, then strictly speaking impulse is anterior to the act of perception.

present in perception what Mead called "an attitude toward this stimulation" (PA 3). The term "attitude" refers to "the beginnings of acts" which lie within the organism (MSS 5); it designates "... those processes in the upper reaches of the central nervous system in which the co-ordinations take place which make complex reactions possible" (PA 130). Accompanying the response to the stimulation, a response determined by attitudes, is imagery taken from past experiences of similar stimulations, with their responses and their outcomes. In this sense, the first stage of the "act" is itself a process, involving stimulus, attitude, and response.

The process of perceiving is subjectively experienced as sensing. Sensing is no passive presentation of content; rather it is an activity or complex of processes and activities. Each type of sensing requires specific bodily acts on the part of the organism - e.g., the focusing of eyes, etc. The activity of sensing, furthermore, proceeds according to the sensitivity and the selectivity of the organism. For example: without eyes capable of perceiving colors, there are no colors.

Before the perceiving organism stands the perceptual object. This object, while in part originating in the world in independence of this particular organism, is also in part a product of the physiological structure, responsiveness and selectivity of the organism. It is perceived to be colored, to emit sounds and odors, etc. Furthermore, it is perceived to be out there, at a distance from the perceiving organism. "The object in perception is a distant object" (PA 12). As a distant object, it invites not only action, but questions as to whether or not it actually possesses the properties it is perceived to have. Such questions, of course, arise "... only when the conduct which the characters of the object call out does or does not reach a successful conclusion" (PA 11).

Perception, then, leads directly to the next stage of the act. "Sense perception is an outgrowth of the behavior by which organisms relate themselves to what is spatio-temporally away from them. This relation is a form of conduct that leads the organism toward or farther away from the object according as the act predicates contact or the absence of contact" (PA 141).

2. *Manipulation*

As the second stage of the act, manipulation involves contact with the object. Inasmuch as the organism is a physical thing, descriptive in terms of physical mechanisms that condition its act, such as the muscular contractions, the nervous irritations connected with these contractions, the nervous centers affected thereby, the motor paths traversed (PA 451), the manipulatory stage of act involves it in a line of conduct which brings it in contact with the object or which avoids such contact. "Contact is the test of the success of the act..." and also the test of the reality of the object of perception (PA 141).

3. *Consummation*

As perception presents an object at a distance which stimulates the organism, and as manipulation is a mediate activity which brings the exterior of the organism into contact with the object, consummation is final; it completes the act. Though Mead described the perceptual and manipulatory phases of the act behavioristically and physiologically, he employed the language of values to depict the consummatory stage. Of course, the physical thing performs a role in consummation, but only an instrumental one. As Mead said:

Every act... is moving on from its physical objects to some consummation. Within the field of consummation all the adjectives of value obtain immediately. There objects are possessed, are good, bad, and indifferent, beautiful or ugly, and lovely or noxious. In the physical things these characters are only mediately present. (PA 25).

The values of consummation, "... are all ultimates in the different parts of the whole act. They are want, effort, and satisfaction. They are all values" (PA 451).

B. Temporality of the Act

The act has duration and is temporal. "The unit of existence is the act, not the moment. And the act stretches beyond the stimulus to the response" (PA 65). The act is an event going on in a present but it has a past reference and a future reference. The past is in the act, in the sense that the familiarity

with the perceptual object evinced in recognition and the facility with which the organism manipulates the contact object are "products of past reactions" (PA 25). Similarly "the future is already in the act" (PA 25). The perceptual object at a distance lies in the future of the organism which moves forward to manipulate it, just as consummation is future for the organism engaged in its perception and manipulation. Both the past and the future qualify the present in which the act is.

C. Sociality of the Act

The act is a transaction between organism and environment. The organism's course of action, i.e., its conduct, gives the framework within which objects of perception arise. Different kinds of conduct give rise to different fields with different objects. Among the genus of acts, there is a class of social acts. A social act is one "... in which the occasion or stimulus which sets free an impulse is found in the character or conduct of a living form that belongs to the proper environment of the living form whose impulse it is" (PP 180).¹ Mead tended to restrict the term "social act" to acts which involved cooperation among different individuals and to characterize it by reference to a "social object" (PP 180).

D. Reflection

Frustrated action is the cause of thought. "Reflective thinking arises in testing the means which are presented for carrying out some hypothetical way of continuing action which has been checked" (PA 79). At one with the other pragmatists and heavily influenced by Dewey, Mead has outlined the experimental method of inquiry in five steps: 1) the presence of a problem, 2) the statement of the problem in terms of the conditions of its possible solutions, 3) the getting of ideas, or the forming of hypotheses, 4) the mental testing of the hypothesis, and 5) the experimental test of the hypothesis

¹ George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," *International Journal of Ethics* XXXV (1925). Reprinted in *Philosophy of the Present*.

(PA 82).¹ "Truth is . . . synonymous with the solution of the problem."² Such solution involves reconstruction of the situation to allow action to go on. Into the problematic situation in which action has been checked, "(t)he judgment comes with healing in its wings" (PT 82).

III. THEORY OF MIND

In social psychology Mead sought to solve two problems. Both problems testify to the failure of idealism and to the impact of the theory of biological evolution upon psychology. The first problem has to do with "... finding such a place for mind in nature that nature could appear in experience" (PP 161) and the second with the existence and the development of the personal self. Because Mead regarded the act as the ultimate unit of existence, of experience, he approached these problems from the standpoint of acts, or of conduct, and his method is, therefore, a kind of behaviorism.

A. The Method of Social Behaviorism

Mead has said: "Our behaviorism is a social behaviorism" (MSS 6).³ By "social behaviorism" he meant "... an approach to the study of the experience of the individual from the point of view of his conduct, particularly, but not exclusively, the conduct as it is observable by others" (MSS 2). Mead's "social behaviorism" may be defined by contrast with the social psychology of Cooley and with the psychological behaviorism of Watson. From Cooley, whose colleague at Michigan Mead had been in his early professional years, he learned the fundamental thesis that in consciousness there is "a social process going on, within which the self and others arise."⁴ As regards Watson, Mead expounded his own method

¹ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1910), pp. 70-78.

² George Herbert Mead, "A Pragmatic Theory of Truth," *Studies in the Nature of Truth* (University of California Publications in Philosophy, Volume 11, 1929), 73. Hereafter "PT."

³ Charles Morris, who has claimed that Mead never used the term "social behaviorism" (MSS, xvi), must have overlooked this sentence.

⁴ George Herbert Mead, "Cooley's Contribution to American Social Thought," *The American Journal of Sociology* (March, 1930), XXXV, 700.

explicitly by means of expanded criticisms of Watsonian behaviorism.

For Mead social psychology must supplement the findings of a scientific psychology which attends to the organic and physiological constitution of mind, availing itself of the most adequate and accurate scientific methods. Consequently, he found Watsonian behaviorism both interesting and useful. In a capsule summary of the history of psychology Mead said: "Psychology became in turn associational, motor, functional, and finally behavioristic" (MSS 21). Watson, then, was essentially right when he sought to make psychology the science of overt behavior; he was wrong, however, when he confined psychology to the study of the behavior of individuals and when he denied the existence of consciousness on the grounds that it could be detected only by means of the dubious method of introspection. Against the individualistic behaviorism of Watson, Mead maintained: "Social psychology studies the activity or behavior of the individual as it lies within the social process; the behavior of an individual can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the whole social group of which he is a member, since his individual acts are involved in larger, social acts which go beyond himself and which implicate the other members of that group" (MSS 6-7). As regards the existence of subjective consciousness, Mead was too much of a functionalist in psychology to embrace the identity materialism implicit in Watsonian behaviorism. According to functionalism, mind, or consciousness, emerging at a late stage in the history of biological evolution, performs a distinctive function in the life of the organism.¹ Although mental behavior can be explained in terms of non-mental behavior, it "... is not reducible to non-mental behavior" (MSS 11). There is, then, a private irreducible side to mind; this individual subjectivity, however, does not for Mead establish another world apart from the physical organism. Rather it is a function of this organism, integral to this natural world. Mead long acknowledged its

¹ See George Herbert Mead, "The Definition of the Psychical," *The Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago*, First Series, III (1903), 77-112. Hereafter "DP."

role in knowledge. "The experience of the individual in its exceptional character," he wrote, "is the growing-point of science, first of all in the recognition of data upon which the older theories break, and second in the hypothesis which arises in the individual and is tested by the experiment which reconstructs the world" (CI 221). Subjectivity, moreover, is the inner counterpart and, indeed, the source of overt behavior (MSS 5). Unlike Watson's behaviorism, which neglects the inner side of behavior, that "part of the act" which "... lies within the organism and only comes to expression later" (MSS 6), Mead's social behaviorism acknowledges the existence of the inside, the inner, the private. "It simply works from the outside to the inside instead of from the inside to the outside, so to speak, in its endeavor to determine how such experience does arise within the process. The act, then, and not the tract, is the fundamental datum in both social and individual psychology when behavioristically conceived, and it has both an inner and an outer phase, an internal and an external aspect" (MSS 8).

B. Mind

Mead traced the genesis of mind back to a primitive situation constituted by social acts. Indebted to Wundt, whose work he critically appreciated yet whose influence he adapted to functionalist and instrumentalist contexts,¹ Mead seized upon and exploited the concept of the gesture as the key to the evolution of mind.²

I. Gesture

Gesture is effectively illustrated by the example of the dog fight, wherein "(t)he act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response" (MSS 42). And it is defined as "... that part of the act which is responsible for its influence upon other forms" (MSS 53). Of all gestures the vocal

¹ See George Herbert Mead, "The Relations of Psychology and Philology," *The Psychological Bulletin* I (1904), 375-391, and "The Imagination in Wundt's Treatment of Myth and Religion," *Ibid.*, III (1906), 393-399.

² See George Herbert Mead, "Social Psychology as Counterpart to Physiological Psychology," *Ibid.*, VI (1909), 401-408.

gesture is singled out since the agent organism can be aware of and respond to his own vocal gesture and so can more easily control it. "One hears himself when he is irritated using a tone that is of an irritable quality, and so catches himself" (MSS 65). Among vocal gestures some constitute what Mead called "the significant symbol." "Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed. . . ." (MSS 47).

2. *Meaning*

Meaning has its logical foundation in the significant symbol. In the definition of meaning Mead utilized the triadic relational theory. Although he probably derived this theory from his teacher, Josiah Royce, he restated it within the context of experimental naturalism, thereby putting it in closer accord with the theory of its original author, C. S. Peirce.¹ Consider Mead's statements:

A gesture by one organism, the resultant of the social act in which the gesture is an early phase, and the response of another organism to the gesture, are the relata in a triple or threefold relationship of gesture to first organism, of gesture to second organism, and of gesture to subsequent phases of the given social act; and this threefold relationship constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises, or which develops into the field of meaning (MSS 76). (T)he existence of meaning depends upon the fact that the adjustive response of the second organism is directed toward the resultant of the given social act as initiated and indicated by the gesture of the first organism. The basis of meaning is thus objectively there in social conduct, or in nature in its relation to such conduct (MSS 80). Meaning is thus not to be conceived, fundamentally, as a state of consciousness, or as a set of organized relations existing or subsisting mentally outside the field of experience into which they enter; on the contrary, it should be conceived objectively, as having its existence entirely within this field itself (MSS 78).

This behavioristic conception of meaning fixes meaning in the

¹ For Mead's acknowledgment of indebtedness to Royce as regards theory of meaning, see "Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning," *The Psychological Bulletin* VII (1910), 399. Charles Morris has explored the Peirce-Mead relation on theory of signs. See Charles Morris, "Peirce, Mead, and Pragmatism," op. cit., See also Charles Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior*. (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1946), pp. 39-49.

social conduct of organisms within nature. "(T)he meanings of things, our ideas of them, answer to the structure of the organism in its conduct with reference to things" (MSS 117). There is a reciprocal relation between language and the evolution of mind, since meaning is dependent upon capacities within the individual. As Mead said: "It is through the ability to be the other at the same time that he is himself that the symbol becomes significant." Universal meaning arises "... through the individual generalizing himself in his attitude of the other."¹ This capacity is rooted in the organic structure of "the central nervous system" (MSS 117). Thus the meaning of an object is dependent on the organism's responsiveness toward it mediated by his capacity to adopt the standpoint of others. "The meaning of a chair is sitting down in it, the meaning of the hammer is to drive a nail – and these responses can be innervated even though not carried out" (MSS 104).

An extraordinary application of Mead's behavioristic theory of meaning is found in his treatment of universals. Universals are indispensable to thought: "Our symbols are all universal" (MSS 146). What enables us to group things together in a class? Is it that they possess some common character? Mead's answer avoids the metaphysics of objective essences without succumbing to nominalism. "The universality is reflected in behavioristic terms in the identity of the response, although the stimuli that call out this response are all different" (MSS 125).

3. *Language*

Defining language as a set of symbolically significant gestures, Mead joined Watson in regarding mind as linguistic behavior, differing, however, in his emphasis upon the social process. He ascribed the origin of mind to language: "Out of language emerges the field of mind" (MSS 133). As Mead put it: "Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience – not communication through mind" (MSS 50).

¹ George Herbert Mead, "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol," *Journal of Philosophy*, XIX (1922), 161.

4. *Social Process*

While Mead held that linguistic behavior accounts in large part for the genesis of mind, he nevertheless refrained from reducing mind to a language process going on within the brain of the isolated individual. "Consciousness," he said, "is functional, not substantive; and in either of the main senses of the term it must be located in the objective world rather than in the brain – it belongs to, or is a characteristic of, the environment in which we find ourselves" (MSS 112). Mind and its natural environment are grounded in the social process. "The whole content of mind and of nature, in so far as it takes on the character of meaning, is dependent upon this triadic relation within the social process and among the component phases of the social act, which the existence of meaning presupposes" (MSS 112).

5. *Reflexiveness*

In addition to linguistic behavior an "essential condition for the development of mind" within the social process is reflexiveness. By reflexiveness Mead meant "the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself" (MSS 134). Through reflexiveness, "... the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it" (MSS 134).

C. *Self*

Minds evolve in a social process. Yet, as Mead held, "... only selves have minds..." (PP 178). What, then, is a self? It is, Mead taught, an organization of social experience (MSS 91). Furthermore, it is not to be confused with either the body or consciousness, indispensable to the self, the body is not the self, although it is the locus of consciousness. Nor is consciousness, which Mead at one point described as "... the private or subjective thereness of the characters of objects"

(MSS 169), the same as the self. The essence of the self consists in the capacity to be an object to itself. "This characteristic is represented in the word 'self,' which is reflexive, and indicates that which can be both subject and object" (MSS 136).

1. The Genesis of the Self

Despite the distinction of the self from the physical organism, Mead never minimized the biological foundation of the self. As he put it, the "essential psychological problem of selfhood" is to explain how an object, a physical organism, can become an object to itself. The solution of the problem resides, of course, in social experience. "The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs" (MSS 138). Three social activities especially promote the genesis of the self. Most fundamental of all is language, since in the use of language one responds in the same way to his vocal gestures as he expects others to respond. But alongside linguistic behavior as causal factors in the emergence of selves stand play and organized game behavior. In play one assumes various roles and so organizes his conduct from the standpoint of others. In the organized game the individual acts according to rules which require him to regard his conduct and that of each other participant from the standpoint of all others. Mead has termed this new standpoint that of "the generalized other." He wrote:

The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called "the generalized other." The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters – as an organized process or social activity – into the experience of any one of the individual members of it (MSS 154).

Thus there are two stages in the evolution of the self: (1) the constitution of the individual self "... simply by an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward

himself and toward one another in the specific social acts in which he participates with them," and (2) at a higher level of development, the constitution of the self "... by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he belongs" (MSS 158).

The primacy of the social process in the genesis of selfhood should be underscored. "The process out of which the self arises is a social process which implies interaction of individuals in the group, implies the pre-existence of the group" (MSS 164). This pre-existence of the group vis-a-vis the self is both logical and temporal (MSS 186). "A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct" (MSS 162). And at one point Mead went so far as to assert: "The relation of individual organisms to the social whole of which they are members is analogous to the relation of individual cells of a multicellular organism to the organism as a whole" (MSS 164).

2. *The Structure of the Self: The "I" and the "Me"*

The self is a social structure that emerges from the social process; yet, it is individual. Its individuality is paradoxically implicated in its sociality.¹ The individual self is individual only because of its relation to others. The essence of the self is reflexiveness: its ability to take itself as an object from the standpoint of others. This reflexiveness, moreover, is not affective; rather it is cognitive. Basically, then, the self "... is cognitive; it (the self's essence) lies in the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking, or in terms of which thought or reflection proceeds" (MSS 173).

By viewing the self as essentially cognitive Mead placed himself on the side of Kant against such empirical theories of the self as that of William James. In an early paper Mead distinguished two aspects of the self: the "I" and the "me", and commented on "the loss of dignity" suffered by the "I" in modern positivistic psychology (DP 104). And in his paper

¹ See Grace Chin Lee, *George Herbert Mead: Philosopher of the Social Individual* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1945), pp. 35, 50, 77. For an excellent discussion of Mead's conception of the self see also Paul E. Pfeutze, op. cit., esp. pp. 89-96.

on "The Social Self" Mead approached the task of defining the self by means of introspection. The self, he reported, cannot appear in consciousness as an "I". What appears in consciousness is always an object, i.e., a "me". The "me", however, is inconceivable without an "I", a subject for which it can be an object. But since this "I" cannot be a presentation of consciousness, it must be a presupposition.¹

Despite noticeable alterations of phraseology in later years, Mead's distinction between the "I" and the "me" crops up in all of his subsequent discussions of the self. Recently it has spurred considerable comment, with Mead's conceptions of the "I" and the "me" compared with Bergson's conceptions of the dynamic self and of the static self, or with Sartre's conceptions of the self and the situation. Mead himself wished to avert a metaphysical explanation of the distinction and to elucidate its significance strictly "from the point of view of conduct itself" (MSS 173).

In as much as Mead's distinction between "I" and "me" is meant to be functional rather than metaphysical, memory illustrates the interchangeable roles of these two phases of the self. For "... in memory ... the 'I' is constantly present in experience" (MSS 174). The "I" remembers; but the self it remembers is always a "me". Consequently, the "I" that is remembered is drained off into the "me" that another "I" remembers now. This fact alone affords the present "I" with a measure of free responsiveness toward the "me" and hence toward its past. In like manner the "I" is free as regards the social situation of the self, although it is the "me" which internalizes that situation within the self (MSS 182). As Mead said: "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me', and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'", (MSS 175). Hence the "me" is both the past and the social situation to which the "I" responds, and its response may be an action which is more than an adjustment to the passive "me", since the "I" is often motivated by the recognition of ends which lie in the future. Thus

¹ George Herbert Mead, "The Social Self" in *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*, Vol. X (1913), p.p. 374-375.

it is the "me" that is conservative: "The 'me' is a conventional, habitual individual" (MSS 197). And while this conservatism is invaluable to the social self and to society, guaranteeing integration and stability; its equally invaluable complement is novelty and progress. This the "I" supplies.

IV. THE THEORY OF TIME

The problem Mead undertook to solve by means of his theory of time is so grave that he called it "the task of philosophy today" – namely, "... to bring into congruence with each other this universality of determination which is the text of modern science, and the emergence of the novel which belongs not only to the experience of human social organisms, but is found also in a nature which science and the philosophy that has followed it have separated from human nature" (PP 14). On the one hand, science posits emergence, the occurrence of novel elements in the evolutionary process. On the other hand, the rationalistic procedure of scientific method is deterministic, postulating that every event can be causally explained by its antecedent conditions. Hence a serious antinomy arises between the principle of emergence and the principle of causation, both espoused by science and scientific philosophy, and this antinomy illustrates the nature of a metaphysical problem, since the assertion of the reality of one side seems to entail the allegation of the unreality of the other. Its solution, Mead held, rests upon an adequate theory of time, which, by reconciling emergent novelty with causal conditioning, eliminates the problem and the types of metaphysics entailed therein.

In the course of constructing a theory of time Mead examined those theories associated with the metaphysics of relativity. In each case his reaction was negative. He alleged that the Minkowski space-time continuum, central to such theories, ruled out emergence and novelty. He emphasized that "Eddington's phrase that our experience is an adventuring of the mind into the ordered geometry of space-time" entailed "a pre-existent landscape," and he charged Whitehead with

a similar failure, since, he argued, "An ordered space-time involves . . . a metaphysical necessity" (PP 10).

The key to Mead's construction of a theory of time, as in the case of his theory of mind, is his theory of the act, and it is within the context of the philosophy of the act that Mead incorporated those insights into the nature of time which he borrowed from the process philosophy of Bergson and Whitehead and upon which he heavily leaned. Time is linked to change (PA 638). But since time consists in a whole of past, present, and future, and change does not: time is not identified with change. "(T)he continual slipping of one present into another, which is always taking place in experience, does not itself involve a temporal order, though it does involve change" (PA 638). Besides change, human intelligence is necessary to produce time (PA 263). The ultimate source of time, like that of space, resides in the structure of the act on the part of intelligent organisms. As Mead wrote:

This passing of the present is not time, for time is a passage that is a whole which is broken up into parts and abstracted from those dimensions that persist when action is inhibited. It is out of this abstraction that these dimensions appear as space. In the immediacy of action all dimensions, spatial as well as temporal, vary with passage. Two characters, then, are involved in a temporal whole, which is time. One is the stoppage of the action toward or away from the spatio-temporally distant object which controls the action. The other is the extension of the whole passage of the whole act over the passage of the different stages in the act, in the relation which we call that of whole and part . . . Time and space, then, appear in the situations of organic forms . . . (PA 262).

A. Present

Mead's theory of time is a "philosophy of the present," for, as the opening sentence of his Carus lectures declared, "... reality exists in a present" (PP 1), or, as this statement is later modified somewhat, "... a reality that transcends the present must exhibit itself in the present" (PP 11). As the locus of reality, a present is an occurrence of existence, an act, or an emergent event. Yet no present is a totally islanded existent; it refers beyond itself. "The present," Mead said, "implies a past and a future," but he immediately added:

"to these both we deny existence . . . Existence involves non-existence; it does take place" (PP 1).

What is the meaning of the concept of the present?

First of all, Mead denied that the present is a knife-edged moment devoid of content, because, like Bergson, he looked upon the knife-edge present as "a useful fiction" which "the exact physical sciences have set up as the ideal of measurements" (PA 225). All the contents of existence are contained in the present.

Yet, in the second place, the concept of the present is not synonymous with the concept of duration. Since duration is "... a continual sliding of presents into each other" (PP 28), constituted by an interpenetration of moments which may be extended indefinitely, it differs fundamentally from the present, which belongs to a temporal order of events that entails "the exclusion of one event by another . . ." (PA 638). Further, since Mead indicted Bergson for failing "... to see that the flow, the freedom, the novelty, the interpenetration, the creativity, upon which he sets such store, are not necessarily limited to the interpenetration of experiences in the inner flow of consciousness" (MM 325), Bergsonian duration is too psychological an entity to equal the present.

Nor, in the third place, is the present equivalent to the specious present, for the specious present, a duration and not a knife-edged moment, is psychological, too. It is explicitly specious rather than real: "... its duration is not that of the completion of the act within which the object is there, but that of reflection" (PA 220).

Consequently, in the fourth place, the present is not the same as the contemporaneous, because contemporaneity is an "affair of the specious present"; it "... involves at least a momentary pause in ongoing action and the relation of different objects in the landscape with reference to continued action" (PA 227-228). Outside the world of action, contemporaneity characterizes the background of the situation in which action occurs; it is a sort of quiescent condition of the field in which the act takes place. The "now" perhaps comes closer to the meaning of the present than any of the candidates so far scrutinized: "To reach a 'now,' the result of the act must

be present as a part of the activity which excites it" (PA 146).

In spite of its proximateness to the present, the "now", in the fifth place, is not equivalent to the present. The "now", which is tantamount to the arrest of passage and which Mead described as the "... achievement of the human animal, or rather of human social conduct..." (PA 161), is, on the side of the intelligent organism, the counterpart to the contemporaneity on the side of the object.

By having apprehended what the present is not, we can understand better what Mead meant when he stated what it is. As he said, "... that which marks a present is its becoming and its disappearing. While the flash of a meteor is passing in our own specious presents it is all there if only for a fraction of a minute" (PP 1). A present therefore is an event – an act, however long it may take. When Mead rejected Bergsonian duration because of its psychological limitations, he praised that "... correction of the Bergsonian philosophy which," it seemed to him, "Mr. Whitehead has most effectively made, up to the present at least" (MM 325). Unfortunately Mead never lived to know Whitehead's last works, such as *Process and Reality* and *Adventures of Ideas*. Undoubtedly he would have found in them suggestions and principles in closer agreement with his own thinking than in those earlier Whiteheadian writings, *The Concept of Nature* and *The Principle of Relativity*, from which he drew so much, but not without pointed criticism. In making the present the locus of reality and in describing it as a becoming and a disappearing, Mead was in his own way formulating a concept akin to Whitehead's actual entity, or actual occasion. For, according to Mead, what is seated in the present, the content essentially identical with the present, is the emergent event. He said: "A present, then, as contrasted with the abstraction of mere passage, is not a piece cut out anywhere from the temporal dimension of uniformly passing reality. Its chief reference is to the emergent event, that is, to the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance, or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed" (PP 23). It is this emergent event, moreover, which is the basis of the

temporal structure of present, past and future. "Past, present and future belong to a passage which attains temporal structure through the event, and they may be considered long or short as they are compared with other such passages. But as existing in nature, so far as such a statement has existence, the past and the future are the boundaries of what we term the present, and are determined by the conditioning relationships of the event to its situation" (PP 24).

B. Past

In quest of the solution of the antinomy between the universal conditioning of the present by the past in consonance with the causal principle of science and the emergence of novelty in the present as posited by the theory of evolution, Mead proceeded to define the past in a manner which is open to the charge of equivocation. Although he began *The Philosophy of the Present* with the denial of existence to the past, yet he later credited the past with "... producing all the reality that there is" (PP 26). "The past is there," he claimed, "conditioning the present and its passage into the future..." (PP 17). The line of argument seems to lead inescapably to an absolute causal determinism, disallowing any possibility of novelty: "Everything that is taking place takes place under necessary conditions" (PP 16). Furthermore, Mead ascribed utter irrevocability to the past: "That which has happened is gone beyond recall... There is a finality that goes with the passing of every event" (PP 3). Now if the past is irrevocable and if it absolutely conditions what is present, the conclusion would seem logical that there is no room whatever for an emergent event characterized by novelty. In Mead's case, however, this conclusion turns out to be unwarranted.

While expounding his own conception of the past, Mead took care to repudiate another conception, although he conceded that it is "... perhaps the common background of thinking" (PP 9), cropping up in the metaphysics of the Minkowski space-time continuum and in certain uncritical methodological assumptions of research in history and

science. According to this rejected conception, the past exists in-itself, independent of and unaffected by what is going on in a present. It supposes "... that there is behind us a scroll of elapsed presents, to which our constructions of the past refer, though without the possibility of ever reaching it, and without the anticipation that our continual reconstructions will approach it with increasing exactness" (PP 30). Against this scroll concept of the past, Mead's fundamental objection is not that it contradicts by implication the possibility of novel emergent events, but rather that it does not meet the methodological requirements of the past in historical or scientific research.

Such a scroll, if attained, is not the account that our pasts desiderate. If we could bring back the present that has elapsed in the reality which belonged to it, it would not serve us. It would be that present and would lack just that character which we demand in the past, that is, that construction of the conditioning nature of now present passage which enables us to interpret what is arising in the future that belongs to this present ... A string of presents conceivably existing as presents would never constitute a past (PP 30).

Mead's conception of the past, clearly distinguished from a pre-existent scroll, is nevertheless the conception of a reality that is real in the sense that anything is real; it is somehow in the present, which is the locus of all reality. Otherwise it could not condition the present. As Mead said: "(I)n passage the conditioning of that which is taking place by that which has taken place, of the present by the past, is *there*. The past in that sense is in the present" (PP 17). It "... lies with all its characters within that present" (PP 26). Such a past refers also to "... that conditioning phase of the passing present which enables us to determine conduct with reference to the future which is also arising in the present" (PP 28-29). Thus past and future are somehow both in the present; they qualify it. This does not mean that the present, as Bergson suggested, accumulates all the past, for Mead argued: "The present does not carry any such burden with it."¹ But it does mean a continuity of the past with the present. As the condition of the present the past lies within

¹ George Herbert Mead, "The Nature of the Past," *Essays in Honor of John Dewey* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), p. 238. Hereafter "NP."

the present and hence is not an external fixity. "The actual passage of reality is in the passage of one present into another, where alone is reality, and a present which has merged in another is not a past. Its reality is always that of a present" (NP 235).

The appearance of the past in the present assumes the form of memory images and historical records. Here the past is conceived as the meaning of what has transpired for the present. In this connection Mead has alluded to two different senses of the past discernible upon consideration of the methods of historical research. First, there is the past "... when we are at grips with a problem and are seeking its solution... (I)t takes on now one sense and now another. We analyze it into one set of factors and then into another; we are seeking its meaning, endeavoring to find in it the course we should follow" (PA 507). But once we have formed a solution to the problem, "... the whole falls into a single story that we read in terms of a causal series ... (W)e build up a hypothesis which we test and perhaps act successfully upon, and then the problem takes the interpretation which our hypothesis places upon it..." (PA 507). Here what we touch upon is not the mere occurrences that have been but the meaning of the past for what is now. Because with every present the meaning is revisable, it follows that the past, though real as the conditioning within the present, is fundamentally hypothetical. As Mead said: "Our reconstructions of the past vary in their extensiveness, but they never contemplate the finality of their findings. They are always subject to conceivable reformulations, on the discovery of later evidence..." (PP 29). Now this account of the past, consistent with scientific methodology, yet supports emergence. For the past as the meaning of the condition of the present is subject to change as the present changes. Just as an absolute determinism of the past over the present excluding emergent novelty is ruled out, similarly the irrevocable character of the past is attenuated.

We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so, if we take it as the pictured extension which each generation has spread behind itself. One past displaces and abrogates another as inexorably as the rising generation buries the old. How many different Caesars have crossed the Rubicon since 1800? (PA 95).

Although Mead solved the problem with which he began, it may seem that his solution pushed the antinomy back one step into the nature of the past, since, instead of mollifying, it accentuated the paradoxical character of the past. This paradoxical character is sharply sketched in three sentences quoted from a single paragraph:

The past is an overflow of the present. It is oriented from the present . . . The past is what must have been before it is present in experience as a past. (NP 238).

C. The Emergent Event

The burden of resolving the noted equivocation on the meaning of the past is borne somewhat by Mead's conception of the emergent event. An emergent event is an event containing novel features not wholly derived from antecedent presents; at the same time it exists in a present and is conditioned by the past. In Mead's words: "The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears it does not, by definition, follow from the past" (PP 2). As the source of novelty in life and in nature (PP 35), the emergent event is not a deduction from what took place prior to its appearance; nevertheless, it is conditioned by the past, but only according to that sense of the past which, as real, is located in the present. Although every emergent event is produced by the past, since production, or causation, is, according to Mead, "the relation of any event to the conditions under which it occurs," and since this relation is established by the emergent event itself in the present; no emergent event can be reduced to what preceded it (PP 33). Fundamentally but not absolutely the past of every emergent event is a past of its own making or choosing. Thus the novelty of the emergent event in the present is matched by the novelty of the past that it reconstructs.

The emergent event is, then, an act which both adds novelty to the world and also socially establishes a relation to this world through adjustment and reconstruction. As unique and novel, the emergent event appears under the guise of discreteness, and seemingly disrupts the social process with

discontinuity. As produced by the past, the emergent event appears as a member of the social process, further buttressing its continuity. Mead stressed that the present, the emergent event, the act is social. "Sociality," he wrote, "is the capacity of being several things at once" (PP 49). Since the "novel event is in both the old order and the new which its advent herald," it exemplifies sociality par excellence.

V. THEORY OF REALITY

The discrepancy between objects as they are presented in experience, perceptual objects, and objects as they are conceived by science, scientific objects, led Mead to work on a theory of objects with metaphysical suggestions for a general theory of reality based upon the philosophy of the act. This discrepancy, like the antinomy between emergent novelty and causal conditioning, is properly a metaphysical problem, since the assertion of the reality of one type of objects seems to entail the allegation of the unreality of the other. If perceptual objects alone are real, then scientific objects are merely mental constructs. If scientific objects alone are real, then perceptual objects are merely appearances. The classic form of this problem has to do with the distinction between objects composed merely of primary qualities as required by science and objects enriched with secondary qualities as they appear in ordinary experience. The most recent form of the problem, and perhaps the gravest, has to do with the nature of objects as conceived by relativity physics and quantum mechanics, the ultimate wavular packets of energy in relative space-time, and the ordinary objects of common experience. Mead faced both forms of the problem and offered solutions based upon his theory of the act.

A. The Perceptual Object and the Act

The perceptual object ¹ is for Mead the object of ordinary

¹ George Herbert Mead, "The Social Self," *Journal of Philosophy* X (1913), 374. The term "perceptual object" as employed in the present essay and also by Mead refers to the object of ordinary experience, not to the object of perception alone.

experience. It is an object that emerges within the social process, its qualities and contours determined by the act. In other words, objects are reified, i.e., become real, within a process involving the interaction of organism and environment. In spite of multiple usages of the term "object," the primary meaning of this term in Mead's writings is "... an expression of a peculiar relation between itself and the individual..." the relation itself being "objective" (PA 7). So awkward a formulation serves to underscore the reciprocity of object and organism. The situation which consists in the interaction of organism and environment exhibits elements which are denotable as "objects". These elements depend, of course, upon the biological constitution of the organism and its particular selectivity, while the organism within the situation is also an object when it is so regarded. Requisite to the existence and the nature of objects are the acts of organisms.

Now the act has three stages, with which the properties of the object of the act may be correlated. The object of the perceptual phase of the act is the object at a distance; it is made up of secondary qualities: color, sound, odor, etc. The object of the manipulatory phase is the contact object; it is comprised of the primary qualities of mass, solidity, figure, motion. The object of the consummatory phase is the value; it is constituted by the satisfactions and dissatisfactions registered in immediate experience. According to Mead, to assign any of the properties of the object to subjective status and other properties an objective status is an error which, in fact, the traditional doctrine of primary and secondary qualities conspicuously exemplifies.

No set of properties is exclusively subjective. All properties are functions of their contexts, or in the phrase of Arthur Murphy, "objectively relative." Mead said: "As grass is food in the situation constituted by its relation to the ox and is not food in the situation constituted by the tiger, so the distant object is colored in the perceptual situation constituted by its relation to an individual with our visual apparatus but is not colored over against an angleworm" (PA 76-77). For

The object of perception is subsumed under the term "perceptual object" but actually is identical with only one aspect of the total signification of this term.

support Mead appealed to experimental science, since it "recognizes objects as existing, and arising in situations . . . When a new situation arises, new objects arise" (PA 77). And he added: "If plesiosaurs and rhododendras can arise in the organic situation, surely all the colors of the spectrum may arise, and all the odors of Araby" (PA 78).

Since the perceptual object, i.e., the object of ordinary experience, evolves along with the human organism, its properties, even its so-called primary qualities, exist within a context determined in part by the organism. The primary qualities, including the physical causality of the thing, arise primarily when resistance is offered to the organism by the contact object in the manipulatory phase of the act (PA 143). As it appears in the manipulatory stage of the act, the perceptual object is identical with the physical thing. The explanation of the genesis of the physical thing in contact experience consists in the transference of the pressures of bodily surfaces against each other, pre-eminently of one hand against the other, to the object (PP 121). By virtue of this transference, which is facilitated by the principle of sociality enabling the organism to adopt the role of the other and to assume the attitude of the other, the thing acquires an inside (PP 122). Thus what the thing is, its essence or matter, the inside of the thing, the cluster of primary qualities, is equated with the resistance which the organism has transferred to the thing.

The resistance of the thing is, however, not a passive event; it is an action on the part of the thing (PA 144). Though "... the resistance is there only over against effort or the action of other things," "(t)he resistance is in the thing as much as the effort is in the organism" (PP 123-124). Indeed, our perception of the physical thing within experience is causally grounded in its action over against the organism's effort. "This action of things," Mead remarked, "gets into our experience, into our perspective, as the inside of perceptual things, and these perceptual things in the perceptual environment serve to define the organism as a perceptual thing" (PA 144). Yet instead of isolating the thing from the organism, resistance actually establishes their relatedness, since, as an activity,

it "... is a fundamental character which is common to all physical objects, including the organism" (PA 145). Furthermore, when the organism encounters the resistance of the thing, it is engaged in a cooperative process with the thing. As Mead said:

We are seeking the sort of resistance that we ourselves offer in grasping and manipulating things. We seek support, leverage, and assistance. The mediate act is completed in the resistance of the thing. It is the sort of resistance which one hand offers to the other. The inside of the thing is the same stuff as the inside of the organism. (PA 143-144).

The object of the act, then, has its primary and its secondary qualities as objective but relative to the perceptual and manipulatory phases of the act. What remains is to ascertain whether it also has values, which occur only in the consummatory stage of the act. Although the physical thing has only instrumental value, restricting intrinsic value only to context of immediate experiences of enjoyment, such as eating; values are no more subjective than the other properties of the object; they are objective as relative to consummation. "The values of the world ... are there in the world" (PA 316).

Mead's analysis of the perceptual, physical, and value properties of the object of ordinary experience carefully avoids any ontological discrimination among these properties. Each set of properties has its reality in relation to a specifiable phase of the act. If the question is raised: How is the unity of the object possible?, the answer can only be: The unity of the object is guaranteed by the unity of the act in all its stages toward it.

B. The Scientific Object and the Metaphysics of Relativity

Whereas the philosophy of the act saves the properties of the perceptual object from the erroneous ontological discrimination instigated by the doctrine of primary and secondary qualities, the metaphysics of relativity, the congeries of philosophical conceptions, such as the Minkowski space-time continuum, inspired by the scientific theories of relativity, proffers a yet more critical challenge to this object. The philosophies of classical Newtonian physics, with their

distinction between the primary and secondary qualities, provided an object which, so far as it was composed of primary qualities, resembled the object of ordinary experience in the manipulatory stage of the act. The metaphysics of relativity, however, posits objects wholly different from the objects of ordinary experience. These scientific objects have apparently nothing at all in common with perceptual objects. Expatriating on the profound change relativity introduced in the scientific conceptions of objects, Mead noted the disappearance of motion in Minkowski geometry, the abandonment of ether, the substitution of events for physical things, the fusion of space and time, the curvature of space and time, the concept of perspectives and shifting frames of reference.

The result is to carry the whole world of perception and perceptual imagination into perspectives that exhibit only a logical correlation between patterns affected with transformation formulae and events in a four dimensional space-time and intervals between them. By definition both events and intervals here lie outside of any experience . . . This hypostasized structure of logical entities satisfies our desire for an absolute reality to which our confessedly relative experience shall refer (PP 153-154).

In addition to the postulation of scientific objects wholly beyond experience by the metaphysics of relativity, the science of relativity theory, when applied to perceptual objects, impugns the integrity of these objects. Whatever perceptual objects may be, at least it would seem that they have fixed characteristics of volume, mass, weight, length, etc. determinable by standard units of measurement. However, relativity gives:

. . . different values to the fundamental units of measurement, spatial, temporal, and energetic, if they are regarded from the standpoint of the time system within which they are at rest, or if they are regarded from the standpoint of other systems. . . The result of this is that objects have different natures in so far as they exist in different environments. The question then arises: By what right are they considered the same objects when they have this different nature in the different environments or time systems? (PA 543).

Now this is a serious question which philosophers of relativity in due time must face,¹ for it cuts at the heart of physical

¹ See A. P. Ushenko, *The Philosophy of Relativity* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937).

See my "The Philosophy of Andrew Ushenko," *The Review of Metaphysics* XI (1958), 479-485.

thinghood. Lack of an answer puts in jeopardy the whole physical world of objects, the study of which is the proper domain of the science of physics, of which one part is the theory of relativity.

Mead met the challenge of relativity in three ways. First, he maintained the methodological indispensability of the perceptual object. Second, while he upheld relativity as a scientific theory, he subjected the metaphysics of relativity to critical scrutiny and sought to demonstrate its invalidity. Third, he proposed a philosophical interpretation of relativity which would organize perspectives yet preserve the integrity of the perceptual object.

C. Scientific Method and the Perceptual Object

In the "Introduction" the editors of *The Philosophy of the Act* clearly delineated Mead's defense of the perceptual object in terms of the requirements of scientific method. This defense, as they rightly point out, is based upon wholly practical considerations. As they state, "... when reason acts as a problem-solving procedure (as in scientific method), our total behavior, reflective and overt, unquestionably accepts as real the contact things of the laboratory" (PA xxxvii). Helpfully they have marshalled Mead's reasons for contending that the practice of scientific reasoning posits the reality of perceptual objects.¹ First, science as reflective behavior, at its outset, accepts the reality of perceptual things (PP 140). Second, the scientist returns to the perceptual world of perceptual things for verification of his hypotheses, a world he never questions (PP 140). Third, the scientific method of measurement, although its results are not statable in terms of physical things, nonetheless makes use of physical things, i.e., the instruments of measurement, and so presupposes their reality (PP 150). Fourth, the "exception" which instigates the scientific investigation depends upon the acceptance of the reality of perceptual things in the manipulatory area of the

¹ Compare Mead with Dewey. See John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1929), pp. 237-253.

act (PP 149). Despite the discrepancy between perceptual and scientific objects, scientific methodology assumes the function of reality of the former. The research scientist, moreover, abstains from the dogmatic metaphysics of relativity. His goal in the pursuit of knowledge, Mead insisted, "... is not a final world but the solution of his problem in the world that is there" (PA 60). The conclusions of experimental science, the scientific objects, instead of enjoying final metaphysical reality, are socially developed symbols referring to characters in the world which the problematic situation has rendered prominent and science has abstracted (PA 61). The analyzed elements of science cannot be more real than experience: "... whatever breath of reality these elements possess has been breathed into them by some unanalyzed experience." "(T)he ultimate touchstone of reality" in scientific investigation is, Mead said, "... a piece of experience found in an unanalyzed world" (PA 32).

D. The Critique of the Metaphysics of Relativity

While Mead defended the reality of the perceptual object on methodological grounds, he attacked the metaphysics of relativity from the standpoint of the philosophy of the act. The positive consequence of this attack is a set of suggestions for a unique cosmology which reconciles the rival claims of substance and process interpreted in terms of the act. Within the scattered repetitive texture of Mead's writings six principal objections against the metaphysics of relativity may be discerned.

First, in proposing a four-dimensional geometry, the metaphysics of relativity obscures the difference between space and time, and destroys their separateness, a difference and a separateness which experience of perceptual objects sustains. "(T)he separation of space and time," argued Mead, "is essential to the perceptual fact of motion. There must be a timeless space within which motion takes place" (PP 155). Of course Mead never denied the limited validity of the Minkowski space-time within the philosophy of the act. On

the contrary, "Minkowski brings us back to a type of experience which the whole character of our training has pushed into those infrequent corners of action, when we cannot stop to think even for an instant" (PA 179). Action has space-time as its field; the distant object is also temporally future; in this sense space and time are combined. The fusion of space and time, however, while experienced within thoughtless action, is obdurate to reflection. "One cannot think in a perceptual world of space-time. Its geometry can only be constructed by abstract symbols" (PA 180).

Second, the metaphysics of relativity confuses change with passage. Pure passage is an abstraction totally separated from anything that is permanent as well as from any content. As "... a passage which is not the passage of anything...", it is "abstract time," a string of moments without content (PA 178). But something passes, and "... what passes is," at least in the Whiteheadian version of relativity, "an event which has no other character except that it passes and may be the seat of a contingent quality as well as of a timeless object which does not pass" (PA 67). Mead's opposition to Whitehead's doctrine of eternal objects somehow intruding into the evolving world from a timeless Platonic heaven, was adamant, because he was convinced it undermined development, change, evolution as the fundamental fact of nature. While real change, unquestionably, involves passage (PA 66), it involves another element – substantial endurance. "Motion, or change of position, is a change of that which in certain respects remains without change, while change of quality involves that whose substantial character remains unchanged ..." (PA 66). Mead, then, not only ruled out the equation of change with pure passage composed of mathematical instants devoid of content; he also repudiated the attempts to interpret nature as a process emptied of abiding elements. He wrote: "... we cannot really reduce things to processes, for it is not possible that processes should go on that are not processes of things, and measurements can only be made in a situation within which something abides irrelevant to time" (PP 144). By implication a theory of process entails reference to substantial or permanent factors.

Third, the metaphysics of relativity, as we have previously noted, is, according to Mead, incompatible with the conceptions of novelty and creative emergence commonly associated with process philosophy. "The assimilation of time to space ... divests reality of the character of novelty inherent in change. It relegates change, including motion, to subjective experience, and substitutes for it a geometry of space-time within which every event is inexorably charted" (PP 159).

Fourth, the metaphysics of relativity takes the event to be its ultimate entity (PA 321). This thesis of the ultimacy of events in the perceptual world, Mead characteristically denied.

An event always happens to something ... In the perceptual world and in the world of masses in motion events happen to things. Over against change there are unchanged things which are the conditions of change (PA 143).

Now a basic inconsistency seems to break out here, since Mead once declared: "The world is a world of events" (PP 1). Certainly the ultimate unit of existence is the act, the emergent event in the present. Perhaps the contradiction is mollified when, from the social process of which acts are the units of reality, it is seen that the perceptual world of physical things, just like the individual reflective selves, is a result of evolution. Within this perceptual world substantial things have a reality which no theory of events can undermine, especially since all such theories must begin with this world and return to it for verification.

Fifth, the metaphysics of relativity, in describing its ultimate entities, employs concepts, such as space-time or energy, which, despite their origin in the perceptual world, are extended to constitute objects which can never be experienced. As Mead illustrated the point: "Energy, like space-time, is a transformation value. We select a process in the manipulatory field – the amount of work done – as the measure of energy; but what is measured is not stated as a function of the mass of the body, on the contrary mass itself is stated in terms of energy" (PP 146–147).

Sixth, the metaphysics of relativity conceives all the properties of the thing, including its contact properties, in terms of distance properties. "While all of our distance

experience – predominantly the world of vision – points to a reality of contact, though this is placed and ordered in a structure in which eye and hand mutually control each other; the universe of relativity is entirely visual, fashioned by the mechanism of light signals” (PP 112). This procedure, Mead held, has “... reversed the fundamental order of our behavior, and ... (has) made the ‘what a thing is’ a distance experience instead of a contact experience” (PP 144–145). Now Mead’s stand on this reversal is grounded firmly in his theory of the act, which, as we have already noted, explains the properties of the thing and their interconnection by reference to the different stages of the act. To subordinate the properties relative to the manipulatory stage of the act to those relative to the perceptual stage would be a grave mistake. For it tends to shatter things into complexes of properties which are as variable as the perspectives from which they are perceived, thereby instigating the disturbing question: “(C)an a thing with changing spatio-temporal and energy dimensions be the same thing with different dimensions, when we have seemingly only these dimensions by which to define the thing?” (PP 79). Mead’s answer to this question in defense of the unity of the thing led him to formulate a theory of the insides of things. As previously remarked, the inside of the thing, its essence, emerges in contact experience and is definable as resistance. In emphasizing the definition of the essence of things by reference to contact, Mead abstained from a metaphysics of energy which assigns matter a secondary role in nature. Rather he retained the concept of matter to designate the internal nature of things and offered a behavioristic definition of its character, construed to be “... identical with the response it calls out” (PP 122). Neither dead, inert, alien to the activity of organisms portrayed by the sciences of life, nor standing over against organisms as obstructions to their action, matter turns out to be a bridge between organism and thing – a bridge of action and response, in which both sides tender resistances which sustain the act in its manipulatory phase. As Mead said: “The substantial reality of our perceptual world lies in this area of manipulation and its extensions, and the other characters of things inhere in this substantial reality” (PA 141).

E. Relativity and the Reality of Perspectives

Mead's repudiation of the metaphysics of relativity solved the contradiction between perceptual objects and scientific objects by discarding those notions which prevent assigning both types of objects a functional reality as defined by the act in its stages. Thus Mead dismissed the metaphysics of relativity but vigorously upheld the scientific achievement of relativity. Aware that as a scientific achievement relativity presents problems inviting philosophical interpretation which rival those the theory of biological evolution raised in the last century, Mead undertook to frame such an interpretation. Unfortunately, he never lived to complete this work, but it is possible to discern preoccupation with and projected elaboration of a perspectival theory of reality grounded upon the principle of sociality¹ and upon the theory of the act as an emergent event in the present.

Mead regarded the concepts of perspective and of emergence as equally significant points of orientation for contemporary philosophy (PA 640). With consideration of Mead's concept of emergence accomplished, it is proper to turn here to the concept of perspective. The rising importance of this concept, no doubt, is due to the coincidence of the advocacy of realistic epistemologies and the advance of relativity physics. Etymologically linked to the perceptual situation, "perspective" denotes that basic situation of which Mead declared: "The perceptual object is there over against the organism as a physical object" (PA 151). Its "most unambiguous instance" is the relation between organism and environment. "The perspective is the world in its relationship to the individual and the individual in his relationship to the world" (PA 115). Perspectives, moreover, are objective. "The perspective emerges out of the relation of the percipient and the perceived and is as objectively there as anything can be" (PA 281). A perspective is rooted in the constitution of the organism and its relation to its environment. "The conception of a

¹ For a treatment of Mead's principle of sociality as a root metaphor, see Frank M. Doan, "Notations on G. H. Mead's Principle of Sociality with Special Reference to Transformations," *The Journal of Philosophy* LIII (1956), 607-615.

world that is independent of any organism is one that is without perspectives. There would be no environments" (PA 165).

Whereas classical Newtonian physics interpreted perspectives as loci in absolute space, relativity physics with its spatio-temporal continuum construes perspectives as spatio-temporal. Further, for relativity, since spatio-temporal characteristics vary with the events to which they pertain, the world of events divides into an indefinite multiplicity of perspectives. Unless the world is to be shattered into a plurality of perspectives without unity or community, the philosopher of relativity is confronted with the necessity of finding some principles for their organization. In quest of such principles Mead emphatically rejected the solution of absolute idealism. Readily admitting that "there are an infinite number of perspectives," he denied that any one of these perspectives is "the right one metaphysically," and he unstintingly condemned the idealistic procedure of "... a mystical engulfing of all the perspectives and ourselves with them in the Absolute." And he added: "... the Absolute answers no queries. It provides emotional aspirations at the price of intellectual immolation" (PA 99). For reasons already outlined Mead rejected also the solutions offered by the Minkowski space-time continuum and by Whitehead, although of course, he credited Whitehead with having contributed the conception of nature as an organization of objective perspectives (PP 163).

The task, according to Mead, was not merely to assert the organization of perspectives within nature, but foremost to explain the mechanism of such an organization. In a fragment Mead recognized three systems of organizing perspectives.

The first is that of mechanical causality, which lies, however, within a system, such as is indicated by the principle of action and reaction, or the principle of least action. The second is that of life, or of living organisms, which also lies within a system, that of form and environment. The third is that of human intelligence, usually called that of consciousness (PA 606).

Despite the fact that this fragment was never amply elucidated, we can, supported by other passages in Mead's writings,

detect the direction of his thought and ascertain the form of his principle for the organization of perspectives. Each system, it should be clear, assists in the performance of the task, but in its severe form, having to do with "... the perspectives in relativity (which) are mutually exclusive" (PA 608), only the third system of human intelligence, interpreted as social acts, will work.

Mead cited Whitehead's filiation with Leibnizian monadology as a recent philosophical expression of the severity of the problem of perspectives bequeathed to philosophy by relativity, and he accepted Whitehead's formulation of the problem without adopting his solution. Instead, Mead appealed to the principle of sociality as this principle was elucidated in his theory of mind. Accordingly, human individuals are able to view objects with themselves as stationary points of reference or, for that matter, they can project themselves into objects, i.e., assume the attitudes of these objects, converting them into stationary points of reference. So he asked: "Is this capacity for placing ourselves in the plane when we are on the earth, or on the earth when we are in the plane ... due to some power that belongs to thought as such, or is this power of thought due to the capacity to place ourselves in the attitude of the object which presents itself in experience?" (PA 545). Mead's answer was, of course, the latter: - namely, "... that meaning as such, i.e., the object of thought, arises in experience through the individual stimulating himself to take the attitude of the other in his reaction toward the object" (PA 545). The thinking individual is the key to the organization of perspectives because the very structure of meaning enables him to occupy the perspectives of others as well as his own. Mead has referred to this character of meaning as "... a perspective which is the organization of different perspectives"; he has concluded that "(i)t must ... be a universal, at least in the identity which belongs to the different perspectives which are organized in the single perspective", and further, he has described this universality as one which "... may logically be indefinitely extended" (PA 545-546).

In the social acts of intelligent organisms Mead located

the principle for the organization of perspectives in nature. Founded upon acts, the principle of sociality undergirds the structure of the cosmos. The counterpart of this image of a social cosmos in the making is a cosmic society in the making. Nature and human society both witness a process which socializes as it individuates. Here, indeed, is the inspiration of Mead's naturalization of Royce's "blessed community." "(T)he human social ideal – the ideal or ultimate goal of human social progress . . . is the attainment of a universal human society in which all human individuals would possess a perfected social intelligence, such that all social meanings would each be similarly reflected in their respective individual consciousnesses. . . ." (MSS 310).