

In spite of numerous variations on the basic interactionist theme, it is still possible to speak of interactionism's common intellectual antecedents, for no matter what variant one practices, nearly all of interactionism's practitioners agree that George Herbert Mead is the "true originator" of symbolic interactionism. Mead's views still have a tremendous impact on the work of contemporary interactionists; hence those currents of thought that shaped Mead's ideas continue to influence theirs — no matter which strand of interactionism they adhere to.

One begins, then, with an overview of the intellectual-philosophical precursors of Mead's basic symbolic interactionism. Following this, an outline of Mead's theory is presented. Lastly, the major varieties of contemporary symbolic interactionism are discussed, and an attempt is made to assess the current state of their development.

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## Chapter 1 INTELLECTUAL ANTECEDENTS

The intellectual precursors of symbolic interactionism are both numerous and diverse. Miller (1973:x), for one, has argued that the primary impetus for interactionism springs both from Darwinism and from that revolt against introspection that he terms "objective psychology." Others have noted the impact of American pragmatic philosophy on the perspective's initial formulation. The influence of functional psychology during the early stages of symbolic interactionism's development also has been pointed out.

Perhaps the best available listing of the philosophical antecedents of symbolic interactionism in general and of the thought of George Herbert Mead in particular is provided by Jerome G. Manis and Bernard N. Meltzer. These authors specify the following antecedents:

1. Evolutionism
2. German idealism
3. The Scottish Moralists
4. Pragmatism
5. Functional psychology (1978:1-3)

As they directly affected Mead's initial social-psychological interpretation of human behavior, Manis and Meltzer, and David L. Miller would add to the listing above (1) the physiological psychology of Wilhelm Wundt (with its emphasis on the social implications of the gesture) and (2) the writings of those early sociologists who were contemporaries of Mead's and whose ideas also helped lay the foundations for symbolic interactionism (e.g., Cooley, Baldwin, and Thomas). Lastly, both the dramatic and ethnomethodological varieties of symbolic interactionism have additional philosophical roots in phenomenology and existentialism (Petras and Meltzer, 1973:1-8).

Only the briefest discussion of the European precursors of symbolic interactionism — evolutionism, the Scottish Moralists,

and German idealism — are provided here because symbolic interactionism is, in large measure, a particularly American perspective. And because it is, the American intellectual roots — pragmatism, functional psychology, and the sociologies of Cooley and Thomas — are discussed in somewhat greater detail.

### Evolution

The nineteenth-century Darwinian doctrine of evolution was a major source of ideas for the American pragmatists in general and for George Herbert Mead in particular. It was, however, only to selected aspects of Darwin's theory that the founders of interactionism were to direct their attention. Mead, for example, was critical of Darwin's argument concerning emotions and their expression by animals; and Mead, along with most of the key figures in pragmatic philosophy, rejected the one notion deriving from Darwin that Spencer and Sumner had seized on and incorporated in their sociologies — the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Mead and the pragmatists turned their backs on social Darwinism. In fact, as C. Wright Mills (1966:447) has noted, it was in the process of rejecting both instinctivist psychology and social Darwinism that American pragmatism began to move forward as an "influential variant of sociological reasoning." That strain of social Darwinism that had worked its way into sociology was rejected just as readily by Mead as it was by his pragmatic predecessors and colleagues. Leon Shaskolsky puts it this way: "not for Mead a Sumnerian jungle society favoring the fittest, but a society undergoing gradual change and held together by the emphatic understanding of interacting individuals" (1970:17).

If Mead and the pragmatists flatly rejected social Darwinism, wherein lay the attraction of Darwin's thought for their respective social theories? Stone and Farberman (1970:17) provide the clue: "For Mead, the attraction was Darwin's emphasis upon process. Indeed, he ignored the *laissez-faire* implications of Darwinism and seized the basic theoretical import: *the same process gives rise to different forms.*" More specifically, Mead was attracted to Darwin's view that a particular relationship existed between the behavior of all living organisms and their en-

vironments — namely, that behavior, all behavior, is never accidental, mysterious, or random but is a form of adaptation to the environment. Behavior is performed by organisms, human and otherwise, in the attempt to cope with their environments. Furthermore, as John Dewey (in Mills, 1966:450) noted, "... all conduct (behavior) is *interaction* between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social." In this process of interaction, organisms and environments are mutually determinative; they are codeterminants. Marris and Melzer present the case for codeterminism as follows:

... evolutionary theory conveyed the idea that each organism and its environment fit together in a dialectical relationship, each influencing the nature and impact of the other. That is, the way the environment impinges on an organism is shaped, in part, by the nature of past experiences, and current activity of the organism itself. Environments differ for different organisms, and at times even for the same organism depending upon its activity. The converse of this relationship is also true: Organisms can affect their environment, thereby altering its influence upon them. (1978:2)

Applying the insights of evolutionism discussed above to human beings, one notes that interactionism was to argue that human social life is a *process* of interaction between the person and his or her natural and social environments. As this interaction unfolds, the person's behavior is performed in adaptation to the environment, and person and environment come mutually to influence each other.

The final key formulation drawn from the evolutionary perspective that was to exert a lasting influence on interactionist thought was Henri Bergson's conception of "the reality of qualitative change, emergence, and the coming into being of new forms" (Miller, 1973:28-29). Employing a notion of evolution as a creative and emergent process, Bergson argued that evolution is not solely composed of gradual developments unfolding in a fixed, step-by-step manner. If and when new combinations of behavioral or biological components occur, then radical, abrupt departures from earlier life forms emerge.

Bergson's conception of evolution strongly influenced Mead. In fact, as Miller notes below, Mead is logically constrained to adopt Bergson's basic view:

Being a process philosopher, Mead must by implication accept the theory of evolution and, more specifically, emergent evolution, which makes room for the emergence of novel events and new biological forms. Each new form requires a new environment, which is to say new environmental characteristics and objects emerge with new forms. In this sense there is a continuous restructuring of the world or part of it. (1973:101)

It is not just Mead who embraced the Bergsonian theory of emergence, "... many symbolic interactionists employ the concept of emergence in describing the presumed unpredictability of much human conduct" (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:3). The evolutionary doctrines of process and emergence were employed by Mead and other interactionists not only to deal with overt behavior but also to deal with the phenomena of mind and self. Discussing the impact of the doctrine of evolution with respect to the topic of "mind," Charles Morris put the matter as follows:

... the implication seemed to be that not only the human organism but the entire life of the mind as well had to be interpreted within the evolutionary development, sharing in the quality of change, and arising in the interactivity of organism and environment. Mind had to appear within, and presumably to stay within conduct. (Mead, 1934:ix)

Applying the same basic reasoning to the phenomenon of self, Stone and Farberman were to argue that "social psychology must focus its inquiries on *process*, specifically the *process* of communication. Different selfs (forms) *emerge* from differential participation in the general and universal *process* of communication" (1970:17).

So the evolutionary conceptions of the processual, emergent character of life, the adaptative function of behavior, and the mutually determinative relationship between organisms and en-

vironments were to be a part of the intellectual heritage of symbolic interactionism.

### The Scottish Moralists

If evolutionism first directed symbolic interactionism's founders' attention to the possibility that minds and selfs, rather than "givens," were emergents, the Scottish Moralists directed the early interactionists toward an even more specific search of the social sources of self and mind. Selfs and minds are social products.

The principal spokesmen of the Scottish Moralists' brand of eighteenth-century philosophy were Adam Ferguson, Henry Homes, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, John Millar, Thomas Reid, and Adam Smith. The principal significance of the Scottish Moralists for the symbolic interactionists is that the former anticipated many of the key or pivotal social-psychological concepts of the latter. As Manis and Meltzer have pointed out, the Scottish Moralists' concepts of "sympathy" and of the "impartial spectator" clearly foreshadow the interactionists' working concepts of "role-taking" and the "generalized other" and in the writings of Adam Smith are to be found views anticipating the interactionist conceptions of a spontaneous, or "I," component of self, as well as the self's "me" or internalized view of others, component (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:2). Of all the Scottish Moralists, perhaps Adam Smith was the most influential as far as symbolic interactionism is concerned. Smith not only foreshadowed the "I" and "me" concepts of Mead, but his ideas also shaped Charles Horton Cooley's views on the nature of self. One author summarized Smith's influence on Cooley, and through Cooley on Mead, in the following fashion:

Though Cooley is known as a sociologist, he was definitely influenced by Adam Smith's looking-glass theory of the self. Adam Smith stressed that, in the economic world, the seller must look at himself from the point of view of the buyer, and vice versa, each must take the attitude of the other. Or as Cooley put it, in social behavior we can, through "sympathetic imagination," look at things as others in different situations do, and have the feelings

others have in circumstances actually different from our own. (Miller, 1973:xix)

Furthermore, still by way of stressing the importance of Smith's ideas for interactionism, Miller points out that "Cooley's sympathetic imagination" became, with modifications, Mead's "taking the role of the other" (Miller, 1973:xx). The Scottish Moralists, then, helped provide symbolic interactionism with some of its most indispensable concepts.

German Idealism

According to Manis and Meltzer (1978:2), the principal spokesmen of that variety of German idealism who exerted an influence on George Herbert Mead and symbolic interactionism were Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Von Schelling, and Immanuel Kant. Here one quickly concedes the correctness of Manis and Meltzer's assertion with respect to Fichte and Schelling. While Kant undoubtedly influenced the thinking of Mead and the interactionists, the nature of this influence--and whether it was, on balance, positive or negative--is not so easy to specify. On the positive side, one can, and should, note that Kant always defended the importance of the individual--clearly a characteristic to be found in the writings of most interactionists. From the Kantian perspective, the individual was never a passive recipient of, or a willing yielder to, pressure applied from a larger natural or social order. To the extent that symbolic interactionism rejected the human image contained in the social-deterministic arguments of the positivists and organicists, Kant's influence was both large and positive. One more point is worth mentioning. In speaking of Kant's theories of the social world, Don Martindale notes, "... he tried to reconcile the ideas of a free and simultaneously lawful world" (1966:230). This endeavor is indeed close to the very task that Mead, Dewey, and numerous interactionists were to set for themselves.

On the negative side, Kant assumed an unalterable structure of the mind, and because he did, he was forced to argue for the fixed nature of thought and perception. From Kant's vantage point, forms are logically prior to their objects. This conception

Mead rejected. In fact, Mead's appreciation of Fichte and Schelling derived, in large part, from the fact that they too rejected Kant's views with respect to this matter. Fichte and Schelling did not believe, as Kant did, that forms are logically prior to the rational process. Just as evolutionism had argued that biological forms had origins, so too Fichte and Schelling argued that the forms of perception and thought had their origins, that they did not, in fact, exist prior to their objects. Furthermore, another German idealist, Hegel was making this self same argument. As Hegel profoundly influenced Josiah Royce and, to a lesser extent, John Dewey, and as both Royce and Dewey directly influenced Mead, one could make a case for the argument that Hegel's influence on symbolic interaction was at least as great as Kant's. In an earlier work, Meltzer (1964) mentioned Hegel's influence, and Mead's own words here are instructive: "What the Romantic idealists, and Hegel in particular, were saying was that the world evolves, that reality is in a process of evolution" (1936:154).

The specific Romantic idealists Mead was referring to were Fichte and Schelling. Manis and Meltzer (1978:2) have shown that the influence of German idealism on symbolic interactionism lay in the fact that the idealists had argued that "... human beings construct their worlds, their realities." Clearly, Fichte and Schelling believed that human beings inhabited a self-created world. It was Fichte's concept of the "ethical self" and Schelling's discussion of artistic creativity that led each to conclude that the world in which we live was, at least in part, created by ourselves. Lastly, Fichte may have anticipated a central concept of Mead's in that "Fichte's not-self is analogous to Mead's other and especially the generalized other" (Miller, 1973:xiv-xv).

Before proceeding to a discussion of the American intellectual antecedents of symbolic interactionism, it is perhaps best to take a quick look at Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt was himself an heir to the tradition of German idealism, and his work on language and gestures was an important source of ideas for the social psychology of George Herbert Mead.

In nineteenth-century Germany, Wilhelm Wundt was one of the leading figures in the field of human psychology. Wundt's doctrines of apperception and psychophysical parallelism were

gaining influence in the intellectual community, as were his ideas on folk psychology and on the conducting of laboratory experiments concerned with the workings of basic psychological processes. He established the Psychological Institute, and noted American psychologists came to study there. William James found several of Wundt's ideas especially worthwhile. But it was his reasoning and writing on language and the gesture that was to exert a lasting impact on the perspective of symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead would turn to Wundt's conception of the nature of language and especially to Wundt's concept of the gesture. Although Mead borrowed from Wundt, he was nevertheless critical of him. Particularly displeasing to Mead was Wundt's doctrine of psychophysical parallelism, especially his concepts of mind and society. Wundt's theory of society "was based upon the presupposition of the existence of individual minds" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:31). Wundt had failed to provide an understanding of the origins of minds in the individuals constituting a society. Mead proposed ongoing activity as the prior content out of which minds emerged; it is out of communicative and interactive processes that minds are formed. But here Mead did turn to Wundt and his concept of the gesture, for "... involved in the idea of the gesture is the concept of communication as a social process" (Miller, 1973:xvii). It was in the phenomenon of the gesture that Mead sought the mechanism for the initial rise of the self. Martindale puts the matter in the following terms:

Following Wundt, Mead took the gesture as the transitional link to language from action, and also as the phenomenon establishing the continuities of human and infrahuman social life. The gesture mediates the development of language as the basic mechanism permitting the rise of the self in the course of ongoing social activity. (1960:335)

From the larger camp of German idealism, then, symbolic interactionism was to draw upon the doctrine that dictated that what Mead termed "the World that is there" was, in fact, a self-created world. People were to be seen as responding to their

own working conceptions and definitions of that self-created world and not to the world *per se*. And from Wundt would be taken the conception of the gesture as the initial phase of the social act—a phase that draws out a response made by the other party or parties in the act, a necessary response for the act's completion. A brief discussion of the American precursors of symbolic interactionism follows.

### Pragmatism

If forced to single out the one philosophical school of thought that most influenced symbolic interactionism, one would be on safe ground in concluding that pragmatism provides its primary intellectual underpinnings. It is not surprising that pragmatism, "the most influential philosophy in America [and] . . . the most distinctive and major contribution of America to the world of philosophy" should profoundly influence symbolic interactionism (Thayer, 1967:430-431). Symbolic interactionism is, after all, the most distinctively American variety of social psychology, and it is the major contribution of America to the world of sociological theory.

Pragmatism is a philosophy intimately tied to its American social context. In fact, so closely is pragmatism linked to the "American way of life" that George Novak (1975:18) has argued that the methods of pragmatism "belong among such unquestionable values as individual enterprise, monogamy, the two-party system, and big-league baseball." Ruggiero put the case still more directly: "Pragmatism was born in America, the country of 'business,' and is, *par excellence*, the philosophy of the business man" (in Martindale, 1960:297). In somewhat more sophisticated form, Ruggiero's basic argument can be seen again in the following statement:

The quest for personal material gain was the most powerful and persistent stimulus to economic and social progress [in America]. And the urge to cut down overhead expenses in order to facilitate accumulation manifested itself in all branches of bourgeois activity. This extended to the height of Philosophical thought. Just as the bour-

geoisie repudiated unproductive labor in material production, their thinkers turned away from theories which justified pursuits not immediately productive or gainful. They demanded that a philosophy prove its worth in practice. (Novak, 1975:21)

Pragmatism, of course, was the philosophy that strove to prove its worth in practice. The pragmatists were, however, always keenly aware of and sensitive to critics who alleged that their philosophy was an anti-intellectual national philosophy of the American business class. Perhaps no writer has as succinctly and eloquently summarized such criticisms as has George Herbert Mead himself:

Pragmatism is regarded as a pseudo-philosophic formulation of that most obnoxious American trait, the worship of success; as the endowment of the four-flusher with a faked philosophic passport; the contemptuous swagger of a glib and restless upstart in the company of the mighty but reverent spirit worshipping at the shrine of subsistent entities and timeless truth; a blackleg pacemaker introduced into the leisurely workshop of the spirit to speed up the process of thinking *sub-specie aeternitatis*; a Ford efficiency engineer bent on the mass production of philosophical tin lizzies. (1938:97)

As more than one author points out, pragmatism "does not completely deserve the unfriendly estimate [that it is] . . . the philosophy of the business man" (Martindale, 1960:297). As William Skidmore argues:

Some say it [pragmatism] was a peculiarly American philosophy because it took a disapproving view of pure abstraction for its own sake and because it put considerable emphasis on action, as opposed to thinking and logic, and in general, the mind. This is supposed to be an American philosophy because America was a place where there was considerable action, movement, building, and change, and where traditional philosophical concerns received little attention. But pragmatism, to its phil-

osophical adherents, did not mean simply "If it works, it's good," as is sometimes said . . . pragmatism was a movement which used the traditional concerns of philosophy as a point of departure from which to defend a somewhat novel way of looking at these problems. (1975:201)

Lest one forget why Martindale qualified his defense of pragmatism by stating that it did not *completely* deserve unfriendly estimates, one can see in the two statements below that such "unfriendly estimates" are not totally misdirected:

[Truths] have only this quality in common, that they *pay*.

—William James

A businessman proceeds by comparing today's liabilities and assets with yesterday's, and projects plans for tomorrow by a study of the movement thus indicated in conjunction with study of the conditions of the environment now existing. *It is not otherwise with the business of living.* —John Dewey

It is most difficult to offer the reader a concise yet accurate definition of pragmatism, since pragmatism does not represent "a single unified body of philosophic ideas" (Martindale, 1960:297). Furthermore, under the differing influences of Peirce, James, and Dewey, pragmatism exhibited some rather profound shifts in its basic formulations, as well as in the direction it was taking as a philosophical movement (Thayer, 1967:431). Pragmatism's critics have offered several short descriptions of pragmatism, such as the one presented here:

What is pragmatism? First pragmatism is what pragmatism does. It is the habit of acting in disregard of solidly based scientific rules and tested principles. (Novak, 1975:17)

As early as 1808, however, A. O. Lovejoy was able to distinguish between over a dozen possible forms of pragmatism, and, as H. S. Thayer points out, while pragmatism made its initial appearance in a paper titled "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," ". . . pragmatists continued to have so much trouble in doing so"

(1967:431). Perhaps we should accept Thayer's (1967:431, 435) conclusions that pragmatism is "a way of investigating problems and clarifying communication rather than a fixed system of ultimate answers and great truths . . . [hence] a single definitive statement of a single thesis is not to be hoped for."

Thayer's advice aside, one can summarize several key characteristics of American pragmatism:

1. Humans are not passive recipients of stimuli; they are creative, active agents.
2. As people inhabit a world that they themselves have helped shape, even as this self-made world limits and places constraints on the activities of its creators, the world is once again subject to planned change.
3. Subjective experience flows from behavior and does not exist prior to it. From behavior, consciousness and meaning emerge, and an object's meaning resides in the behavior directed toward it and not in the object itself (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:3).
4. The same basic assumptions that shore up and guide empirical science should also guide philosophical analysis.
5. The solution of practical problems and the analysis of social issues should be the prime focus of philosophical concern (Lauer and Handel, 1977:10).
6. It is necessary and desirable to reconcile science with idealism.
7. Action is the means for checking the accuracy of a hypothesis and hence the focus of reality (Weinberg, 1962:403).
8. The best theory of value is the interest theory of value: that is good which satisfies an impulse or an interest.

With this summary of pragmatism's characteristics in mind, it may be best to turn to a discussion of their expression in the writings of a specific set of pragmatists in order to ascertain what relevance they have for symbolic interactionism.

The key founders of pragmatic philosophy in America were Josiah Royce, Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. In terms of its impact on American sociology, the most influential variant of pragmatic philosophy was that emanating

from the Chicago school of pragmatism, whose leader was John Dewey, and whose other members included J. H. Tufts, Edward Scribner Ames, James Rowland Angell, Addison Weber Moore, and George Herbert Mead. By stretching the point, the sociologists Albion Small and W. I. Thomas and the economist Thorstein Veblen could also be considered members of the school of Chicago pragmatists. Here one is restricted to dealing with C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. These three original founders of pragmatism held ideas that directly helped shape Mead's thought, and hence, through Mead, helped shape the structure of symbolic interaction theory. In passing one should note that Royce's ideas of the social source of self and of the affinity between the individual and society (one could not be understood save in reference to the other) were also to have a substantial impact on Mead's theories of self and society. Lastly, one feels constrained to point out, as others already have, that dealing with James and Dewey as representatives of pragmatism does not conclude a treatment of them. Their role as spokesmen of functional psychology is also discussed. Furthermore, one could just as readily treat James and Dewey as "early symbolic interactionists." They are not dealt with as early interactionists, but during the course of discussion of pragmatism and functional psychology, an attempt is made to present those of their ideas that have directly affected symbolic interactionism.

#### Charles S. Peirce

C. S. Peirce (in Thayer, 1967:431) once asked of William James: "who originated the term *pragmatism*, I or you?" James responded to Peirce's inquiry as follows: "You invented 'pragmatism' for which I gave you full credit. . . ." Yet the label Peirce applied to his philosophy differed from the pragmatism of James, just as Dewey's pragmatism differed considerably from James's. In fact, Peirce became so disenchanted with the development of pragmatism at James's hands that he relabeled his own brand of philosophy *pragmaticism*. John Dewey briefly but accurately summarized the difference between Peirce's and James's varieties of pragmatism in the following terms: "Peirce wrote as a logician and James as a humanist" (Thayer, 1967:434).

Peirce was indeed a logician; and much, much more. In his work one can see in rudimentary form a methodology that transcends the limits of the then-current methodologies by developing a self-reflecting philosophy of science (Habermas, 1970:36). Charles Morris said that "the philosophical task of pragmatism [was] to reinterpret the concept of mind and intelligence in the biological, psychological, and sociological terms which post-Darwinian currents of thought have made prominent . . ." (in Mead, 1934:x). In a very real sense, C. S. Peirce took on this task with the argument that ". . . the technically exploitable knowledge that is produced and tested in the research process of the natural sciences belongs to the same category as the pragmatic knowledge of everyday life acquired through trial and error in the realm of feedback — controlled action" (Habermas, 1970:36).

Peirce began the formulation of the pragmatic criterion of truth: One searched for truth in practice. One could achieve a clear idea of any object only by subjecting that object to experimental treatment and then observing its reaction: "To say that an object is hard is to say that it will not be scratched by other substances" (Ezorsky, 1967:427). The meaning of an object adheres not in the object but in the use we would make of that object, in the practices we would engage in with respect to it, and the experimental handling to which we would subject it. From Peirce's perspective, truth was not an individual matter. Peirce was a realist, not a nominalist. Truth was something to be accepted by the community; therefore, individual judgement would not, and could not, be the real test of truth. Truth was sought in practice because, as Peirce noted, ". . . there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice" (in Ezorsky, 1967:427). This dictum was to be widely adopted in American philosophical circles, and its associated notion that the meaning of objects lies solely in the practice (behavior) we direct toward them became a core assumption of symbolic interactionism.

In addition to Peirce's conception of truth, certain other of his ideas were important for the soon-to-be-developed perspective of symbolic interactionism. In particular, Peirce's discussions of thought and language were relevant. Of greatest relevance is his assumption that thought is "a form of behavior initiated by

the irritation of doubt and proceeding to some resolution in a state of belief" (Thayer, 1967:433). Peirce's "situation of doubt" as the phenomenon giving rise to thought became Dewey's "indeterminate situation" and Mead's "problematic situation" (Eames, 1973:139). These situations of doubt, indeterminate situations, and problematic situations as existential conditions become "the focal point(s) from which pragmatists developed their method of inquiry" (Eames, 1973:139). Just as Peirce said that truth is established with the arrest of doubt, so too Mead was to say that truth is "synonymous with the solution of the problem . . . judgment must be either true or false for the problem is either solved or it is not solved" (Eames, 1973:139). Of equal importance with Peirce's notion of doubt as the trigger for thought are his ideas on language, specifically on the nature of "signs." Just as Wundt's concept of the gesture is important for interactionist reasoning, so too is the concept of the sign. A sign is a standardized way in which something stands for something else. For Peirce, ". . . the main thing was that signs are socially standardized ways in which something (a thought, word, gesture, object) refers us (a community) to something else (the interpretant — the significant effect or translation of the sign, being itself another sign)" (Thayer, 1967:431). As socially standardized items, signs assume the existence of minds in touch (communication) with one another; this in turn presupposes both the existence of a system of communicating and a human collectivity (society). Here the similarity of Peirce's reasoning to Mead's is obvious.

If it is true that Peirce's influence on symbolic interactionism has been recognized only belatedly, it is perhaps equally true that, apart from direct positive influence on Mead, his greatest influence is on that variety of symbolic interactionism known as the "Iowa school." Peirce's style of pragmatism is not half so much a theory of either truth or meaning as it is a schema, a method, a device for clarifying and unearthing the "empirically significant content of concepts by determining the roles they play in classes of empirically verifiable statements" (Thayer, 1967:433). Hence, Peirce's method clearly foreshadowed the coming of operationalism, verifiability theory, and the preferred methodological posture of Manford Kuhn and other representatives of the Iowa school of symbolic interactionism.



*William James as Pragmatist*

William James's conception of pragmatism is not only different from Peirce's view but it is so different that it seems almost senseless to classify them as proponents of the same philosophical school of thought. If it is true that pragmatism is more "a way of investigating problems and clarifying communication rather than a fixed system of ultimate answers," then the disparity between Peirce's "way" (or, for that matter, Dewey's) and James's "way" would appear to be even greater (Thayer, 1967:435). Dewey referred to Peirce as a logician and to James as a humanist. In contrasting James with Dewey, it could be said that "Dewey's outlook is scientific and his arguments are largely derived from an examination of scientific method (much like Peirce), but James is concerned primarily with religion and morals" (Martindale, 1960:298). James made pragmatism famous, however, and it was he who successfully proselytized for it as a new philosophy. In the world at large, it was the name of William James that first became synonymous with the word pragmatism.

Two of James's works served to popularize pragmatism in the intellectual community: "Philosophical Conceptions," a lecture delivered in 1898, and *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, a series of lectures delivered in 1906 and published as a book in 1907. It is useful to quickly relate Peirce's position and to contrast it with that of James. When C. S. Peirce spoke of the practical consequence of an idea, activity, or object, he meant results or consequences that the human community could openly, publicly, effectively, and experimentally ascertain. Peirce was a realist; his final court of last resort for the truth was not its being embraced by an individual but its being accepted by the collectivity. James is a nominalist: When he spoke of practical consequences, he meant consequences for the individual; and when he spoke of truth, he meant what was true for the individual. Peirce saw the function of thought as being the eradication of doubt through a clearer perception of reality. For James, thought was not primarily directed at grasping reality; rather, thought gave rise to beliefs and ideas that could satisfy the interests and wants of the individual—regardless of whether or not these beliefs and ideas corresponded to any collectively

defined "reality." Peirce's notion of "practical for the community" became in James's hands "practical for the individual"; James's term "practical" referred, and referred exclusively, to the specific impact a given brief or idea had on the life of a concrete individual. Peirce and Dewey were concerned with the generality of truth and meaning. James only with its direct importance for the individual. James is most emphatic on this point: "We cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to [the] life [of the individual] flow from it" (in Martindale, 1960:298). James pushes his argument further: "If the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily [for the individual] in the widest sense of the word, it is true [for the individual]" (in Martindale, 1960:298). What satisfies the individual's need is not only good but true. Applying James's pragmatic rule of thumb to James himself, it led him to accept as true "anything that made him happy" (Martindale, 1960:301). What manifestly did not make him happy were the systems of deterministic, scientific explanation. In Don Martindale's words: "The materialistic determinism of nineteenth-century science overwhelmed James with a sense of psychic oppression, and he resolved to make the first act of free will the abandonment of all determinism" (1960:299).

Pragmatists made the attempt to reconcile science with idealism. James was a pragmatist, and so, in spite of his aversion to deterministic science, James too made the attempt. Employing his notion that the truth is that which satisfies needs or interests, he conceded that scientific, experimental methods led to truth because they produced verified ideas. Verified ideas are true, he reasoned, because they "serve our need to predict experience and cope with our environment, scientific truth fulfills our practical interests . . . [hence] the true and the verified are one" (Thayer, 1967:430). James's reconciliation of science and idealism severely restricted both the scope and purpose of science. Ultimately he came out much stronger for idealism and indeterminacy than he did for science and determinism, just as in his social psychology the "social" was forced to take the back seat.

In the pragmatism of William James were to be found all the planks necessary to erect a platform from which to launch a full-fledged assault on those theories perpetrating what Dennis Wrong (1961) would come to call the "Over-Socialized Concep-

tion of Man." James never lost sight of either the individual or of the role of creativity in shaping social affairs, and neither did George Herbert Mead. Furthermore, James argued that people "figure out" or give meaning to their surroundings in order to formulate successful "plans of action" for coping with them. The "plans of action" conception of James came to play an important role in Mead's social psychology. It was primarily James's image of people as active and not merely reactive agents that appealed to Mead; James clearly "provided the basis for an image of humans that was congruent with the developing interactionist perspective" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:8).

### John Dewey as Pragmatist

John Dewey was the titular head of the Chicago school of pragmatism: "Central in the philosophy of this Chicago school was a concern for process, for seeing ideas as part of ongoing activity" (Schellenberg, 1978:42). For Dewey, mental activity was a process, and thought was not an entity but an instrument of response and behavior. Life is caught up with activity; activity and life are synonymous terms. Activity is naturally occurring; and its cause is set by *goals*, which emerge, reemerge, and are altered and modified as organisms constantly adjust and readjust to their environments. These goals or ends, Dewey informs us, are "foreseen consequences which arise in the course of activity and which are employed to give activity added meaning and to direct its future course. They are in no sense ends of action. In being ends of *deliberation* they are *redirecting pivots in action*" (in Stone and Farberman, 1970:52). Life is active; people are active. James said it, Dewey said it. It was, in fact, James who turned Dewey toward pragmatism and away from his Hegelian vantage point. Yet although Dewey was intellectually beholden to James, he also rejected many of his views. James had argued that truth is that which gives satisfaction to the individual. From his perspective, it was not necessary that others empirically confirm the individual's "truth." That which satisfied the individual was true; it needed no empirical validation. Dewey's brand of pragmatism dictated that one could not unearth meaning in any notion, idea, or "truth" that could never

be empirically verified (Ezorsky, 1967:428). Truth to Dewey was what he termed a "warranted assertion."

Dewey maintained, as Peirce had, that the search for truth is triggered off by doubt, or, to use Dewey's own term, by an *indeterminate situation*. In fact, thought itself starts with an indeterminate situation, with an upset of a previously balanced situation. From Dewey's perspective, every thought, every act flows out of an indeterminate situation and is carried through until such time as the situation is no longer in doubt, no longer indeterminate, no longer unbalanced. When the settlement of doubt is brought about and warranted by inquiry, then the truth is known and we have a warranted assertion. The "warranted assertion" differs from James's "truth" in that it is subject to, and produced by, collective verification—warranted assertion as truth is not an individual matter.

The thought-action process that begins with the *indeterminate situation* and terminates with a *warranted assertion* is the same process for the scientific community as it is for the human community, for, as Morris points out, pragmatism "fails to see any sharp separation or any antagonism between the activities of science and philosophy" (in Mead, 1934:ix). As Mead (1934:ix) put it, ". . . the philosophy of a period is always an attempt to interpret its most secure knowledge." If the world of science is popularly conceived of as concerned with facts while the rest of the world (philosophy included) is supposedly concerned with values, it is Dewey who demonstrates that there is a tremendous continuity between values and facts. The continuity is so great, in fact, that it is nearly impossible to distinguish between "what is objectively real, apart from any human purposes (values) . . . the former [objective reality] is not factually perceived unless it relates to human values facilitating its perception, and the latter [values] require a physical reality of some sort in order to carry meaning" (Thayer, 1967:435).

It is the aim of all thought, all inquiry, to create solutions, goods, satisfactions, and so forth in what was initially a troubled, unbalanced, nonharmonious, and discordant situation. Hence, as Thayer (1967:435) notes, "In this respect all intelligence is evaluative, and no separation of moral, scientific, practical, or theoretical experience is to be made." If we are to comprehend a scientist's use of facts and ideas, we must first understand his or

her purposes in beginning the process of inquiry. Similarly, if we are to understand any person's thought or activity, we must come to understand why that thought and activity arose in the first place. Human thought arises when the person sees his or her doubt (indeterminate situation) as a problem. An idea, a thought, is nothing more or less than a proposed solution to the problem. Ideas are plans of action; they are "proposals formed in the context of a problem as a possible solution" (Ezorsky, 1967:429). Ideas in either scientific or practical inquiries coincide with facts when they have "through action, worked out the state of things which [they] contemplated or intended" (Ezorsky, 1967:429). What this means is that Dewey does not see truth (or facts) as immutable; it is meaningless to contend that truth exists separate from or prior to the process of inquiry. From Dewey's perspective, "truth happens to an idea when it becomes a verified or warranted assertion" (Ezorsky, 1967:429). Because of the interactional character of all experience in human society, there could be no fact, no thought, no truth which was antecedent to the person as a thinking being (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:17). Dewey extended and refined James's conception of individuals as active agents; he went beyond James in elucidating the process by which both thought arises and minds develop in the context of human association. While Dewey's position remained nominalistic, he did go beyond James in demonstrating the relationship between thought, mind, and society. Mead, while drawing heavily on Dewey's work, would, as a realist, go beyond him in depicting the social origins of mind and self in society. But *pragmatism, as it was shaped especially by John Dewey, would become the primary philosophical foundation for symbolic interactionism.* John Dewey would launch the successful attack on those varieties of philosophy that the pragmatists thought little aided human beings in their practical dealings with an emerging, evolving social reality. Among the pragmatists, it was Dewey who argued that the questions posed by traditional philosophy were not worth raising in the first place. Dewey saw human beings, their thoughts, and their societies caught in a larger, interrelated whole; it was he who demonstrated the relativity of philosophical systems in showing their connection with particular kinds of social formations (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:17).

Dewey set a new task for philosophy, and it was Dewey who made of the philosophical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism the "national philosophy of America" (Novak, 1975:15).

Like Marx, the pragmatists sought to avoid, and often successfully did avoid the use of such artificial dualisms as mind and matter, theory and practice, and experience and nature (Mead, 1934:x). Just as Marx had successfully bridged the people-nature dichotomy, and in so doing proved it to be a false dichotomy, the pragmatists were laying the groundwork for the attempt to bridge the individual-society dichotomy. Pragmatism set a new standard for judging the worth of theory; theories were to be judged on the basis of the fruitfulness of the practical consequences that resulted from their adoption. Among the more significant contributions of pragmatism to the developing theory of symbolic interactionism were its arguments that it is senseless to draw hard distinctions between mind and matter or between society and the individual, as well as its theories of the existential basis of mind, intelligence, and self.

### Functional Psychology

In addition to pragmatism, functional psychology was the American-style school of thought that provided intellectual pillars for symbolic interactionism. The principal spokesmen for functional psychology in America were James Rowland Angell, John Dewey, William James, and Charles Hubbard Judd. Of the four, John Dewey and William James had, by far, the largest impact on sociology in general and interactionism in particular; hence only Dewey and James will be singled out for treatment here. But before proceeding to Dewey and James, it may prove worthwhile to specify, in outline fashion, the basic assumptions of the American school of functional psychology. These assumptions are as follows:

1. The process that makes human association (society) possible is the process of linguistic communication.
2. Language not only makes human society possible but is the thing that distinguishes humans from other species; it is a species-specific characteristic of *Homo sapiens*.

3. Humans are active beings who do not simply respond to stimuli, but select out and pay attention to those stimuli that help to further an ongoing activity.
4. A stimulus embodies no fixed quality of its own; hence the nature of sensation is dependent on the ongoing activity taking place at the time.
5. The mind is not an organ or structure; it is a function that helps the person adapt to his or her environment. Thought is adaptive behavior.
6. Social learning both inhibits and modifies instincts and their expression.
7. Action follows the course of habit until encountering a blockage that, in turn, triggers an impulse that conflicts with the habit; intelligence arbitrates between habit and impulse, thereby securing the release of action.
8. In the formation and development of the individual self, other persons play a key role.

A quick glance at this list reveals that some assumptions of functional psychology overlap with certain basic assumptions of pragmatism. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that both Dewey and James are widely regarded as being both pragmatists and functional psychologists. James Rowland Angell is also considered by some to be both functional psychologist and pragmatist. Neither should it come as a surprise if it turns out that interactionism shares many assumptions with functional psychology and pragmatism, not merely because they are its intellectual precursors, but because pragmatism is an American philosophy, functional psychology is an American psychology, and symbolic interactionism is either an American social psychology or an American sociology—depending on one's point of view (noninteractionists tend to regard interactionism as social psychological, while many interactionists are pleased to see their perspective as being sociological). I turn now to a brief discussion of the functional psychologies of James and Dewey.

#### *James as Functional Psychologist*

The functional psychology of William James is laid out in his 1890 publication, *Principles of Psychology*. In this two-

volume work, James sets forth and details the interrelationships that exist between his three pivotal, indispensable concepts: instinct, habit, and self. Now James's treatment of the instinct concept stood in marked contrast to the way in which that concept was handled by the so-called instinct theorists. For the instinct theorists, the most important thing about instincts was that "they were there"; they were essentially fixed faculties of action unmodified by experience and directed toward the production of certain ends. These instincts, if one concedes their existence in the first place, were of little concern to James. For James, the single most important feature of instincts is that they are inhibited and modified. And, most important, they are inhibited and modified by the action of another of James's key concepts: habits. Habits, in turn, are not part of one's initial biological equipment; they are socially acquired—they are learned. Instincts are socially modified in human beings because Homo sapiens possesses capabilities not characteristic of other species; most notable of these is the ability of the human brain to engage in high-level mental activities such as memory. Because of memory, repeating behavior that was at one time instinctual "can call to mind the performance of the act at that previous time" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:4). This kind of behavior, then, must "cease to be blind after being repeated, and must be accompanied with foresight of its end just so far as that end may have fallen under the animal's cognizance" (James, 1890:390).

Therefore, the complexity of a species' behavior is not necessarily related to the number of instincts in its repertoire. A species may have a large number of instincts and yet exhibit a fairly simple system of behavior. Conversely, in the case of humans, instincts are few, but behavior is enormously complex. With respect to human beings, then, "... attention should be focused upon the number of *repeated* behavioral experiences that are traceable to a particular instinct" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:4). In James's view, "... as most instincts are implanted for the sake of giving rise to habits, then, when that purpose has been realized the instincts are destined to simply fade away" (1890:402).

Habits that modify and inhibit instincts are themselves products of the individual's previous experiences, and as such

they act to further inhibit the original instinct's range of expression because, as James (1890:394) notes, "When objects of a certain class elicit a certain sort of reaction, . . . [the person] . . . becomes partial to the first specimen of the class on which [he or she] has reacted, and will not afterward react on any other specimen." Not only are humans born with fewer instincts and greater plasticity than other species, but many of the instincts humans do possess come to the fore during a certain developmental period in their lives and then disappear. It is worth noting that, from James's perspective, not only are instincts plastic, subject to inhibition, and prone to fade away, but those instincts we do possess frequently work at cross purposes, cancel each other's effect, or block each other out. Again, instincts are a part of the makeup of *Homo sapiens*—they are factors helping to determine behavior—but their most important characteristic is that, due to the action of habit, they are modifiable and can be inhibited.

The last key concept of James, at least as far as its direct relevance for symbolic interactionism is concerned, is the concept of *self*. It is most interesting to note James's working conception of self because it is held to by a sizable number of present-day interactionists, and it is flatly rejected by an equally large number of the current practitioners of that perspective. James began by noting that humans had four distinct selves: the self of pure ego, a material self, a spiritual self, and a social self. This notion is, of course, rejected by all contemporary interactionists. Nevertheless, one of James's selves, the social self, became—and pretty much the way James defined it—a key concept for numerous interactionists. In speaking of the social self, he argued as follows:

Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognized him and carry an image of him in their mind . . . but as the individuals who carry the images fall naturally into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. (1890:294)

James's *social self* became, for many symbolic interactionists, *the self*. They dropped those "separate types of selves" that were

not derived from interaction and were not products of participation in the social milieu, namely, the spiritual, material, and pure ego selves. James's conception of the social self is what has been termed "the multiple entity conception" (Reynolds et al., 1970). Numerous symbolic interactionists, but by no means all of them, would find themselves in basic agreement with James's contention that the individual has more than one self. Some would argue that it is more appropriate to state that the individual has as many selves as there are *groups to which he or she belongs*, rather than to say, as James did, that one has *as many selves as there are groups whose opinion one cares about*. Both definitions are "multiple entity conceptions" of self. Because many interactionists accept the "multiple self" notion, and because all of them agree that basic biological endowments are only seen as they have already been profoundly altered by social experience, James's functional psychology may be said to have exerted a significant impact on interactionism.

#### *Dewey as Functional Psychologist*

John Dewey's functional psychology employs a host of concepts, but three stand out as more important than the rest: impulse, habit, and intellect. Of these three, habit and intellect are central, with habit perhaps the most important. Dewey was not, of course, the first spokesman of functional psychology to employ the concept of habit as a central one. William James utilized the concept, but he did so solely for the purpose of dealing with repetitions of individual behavior. Dewey was more concerned with the role of social variables in behavior, and as this concern developed on Dewey's part, his basic concepts, habit included, were redefined to reflect that concern. When Dewey (1922:42) eventually defined habit as an acquired predisposition to "ways or modes of response, not to particular acts," he was further led to argue that conditions that constitute habit lie in the social order, not in the individual, and because they do, one cannot change habits by merely changing individuals—social conditions too must be altered.

Dewey's three concepts of habit, impulse, and intellect relate to one another in the following manner: Activity runs the path of habit until it is blocked by an obstacle. In the face of blocked activity, impulse emerges and seeks an outlet in activity. In seeking the outlet, the old (habit) and the new (impulse) collide, producing a problem. Intellect mediates between habit and impulse, "thus facilitating the release of action, which will be a projection of existent habits newly combined so as to satisfy the stymied impulse" (Mills, 1966:455). Thus Dewey (1922:30) argued that action, at least blocked action, precedes thought, or as he put it, "The act must come before the thought, and a habit before the ability to evoke the thought at will." It was through the concept of habit that Dewey came to his view on the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. He emphasized the role of social elements in shaping habits, indeed in shaping all behavior, and because he did he was led to conclude further that habits cannot be changed by merely changing individuals—social conditions must also be altered. The social conditions he most ardently sought to alter were those affecting the individual during his or her early years. Specifically, Dewey was concerned with educational institutions and educational processes. *Minds* must be shaped in such a way that they become receptive to the changes necessary if a decent society were to be wrought out of the existing social order. Dewey's conception of mind is crucial here: "Dewey proposed that the mind be viewed as function, with "minded activity" extrapolated from adaptive behavior in an ever-changing environment. This . . . view of the human mind is most congenial with attempts at intelligent social planning" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975:19).

As Dewey (1971:273) saw it, any view of mind as a fixed and frozen phenomenon stood squarely in the path of social reform because ". . . the most powerful apologetics for any arrangement or institution is the conception that it is the inevitable result of fixed conditions of human nature." In conceptualizing the mind as function, Dewey was moved to argue that the mind's social development was facilitated only through the process of communication, specifically through the use of language. Language enabled individuals to incorporate into their own selves the beliefs, sentiments, and thoughts taken from their respective social environments.

Dewey's contribution to functional psychology in terms of reconceptualizing, reworking, and rethinking its basic concepts and their relationship to one another was enormous—especially with respect to such concepts as mind, impulse, habit, and language. Dewey's other major contribution to functional psychology derives from the classic statement on the reflex-arc concept in psychology. In this work he attacked the stimulus-response conception of human behavior. Interested as he was in the role of interaction in understanding human behavior, he objected to any dualistic notions of stimulus and response in the following words:

Sensation as stimulus . . . means simply a function, and it will have its value shift according to the special work requiring to be done . . . what the sensation will be in particular at a given time, therefore, will depend entirely upon the way in which an activity is being used. It has no fixed quality of its own. The search for the stimulus is the search for the exact conditions of action; that is, for the state of things which decides how a beginning coordination should be completed. (Dewey, 1896:369)

The attack on the dualism of stimulus and response contained in the above statement paved the way for a view of the role of both individual and social elements in explaining distinctly human conduct. In the functional psychology of John Dewey, the discipline of psychology had stuck its foot in sociology's door.