

SOCIOMETRY AND THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF G. H. MEAD

Comments to McKinney's "A Comparison of the Social Psychology
of G. H. Mead and J. L. Moreno"

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I like to go to the cradle of an idea, its *status nascendi*, in order to find out what it is. The final form of an idea is often deceptive. I found this method useful in understanding others. Here I apply it to myself. (It is an illusion to think that an author knows his own works well because it is he who has written them; an author of fifty may be more distant from himself at twenty than from another man of fifty.) When I am doubtful, therefore, of whether I am on the right or wrong track with an idea which I started, I look back at the moment of my first inspiration, and when I gave it its first form, when the flame of the thought was bold and undisturbed.

I am taking the reader, therefore, to one of my first writings, a pamphlet which appeared in the spring of 1914, a few months before the outbreak of the First World War. The title contains the whole idea: "Invitation To A Meeting", or, as in the German original "Einladung zu einer Begegnung". It meant literally what it said, invitation of me (the author) to meet you (the reader). It meant to cure a false or derivative meeting, that between author and reader (the reader reading a book), by a real meeting, the person of the author meeting the person of the reader, actually. Because this plan was truly intended, before it became an experiment in action, it became an experiment in my thought; it filled the book with the reflections on what is involved in the process of one man meeting another and the preparations for this goal. The imperative expectancy of the meeting had consequences. The author was on the way to change his role, he was to be transformed into an actor, and the reader or readers, were similarly on the way to change their roles, to be transformed into actors. The author warmed up to meeting the readers and they warmed up to meet him until at last the meeting was to take place, the preliminary step towards the formation of genuine association. It appeared to me that only people who "meet" one another, or who are on the way towards a meeting of one another can form a community. The meeting was a category of realization and on a different plane from intellectualized derivations as inter-human or inter-personal relations. I tried persistently to move from a fictional

plane to a reality plane of production, without leaving out anything which the intellect could offer to enhance the spontaneity and creativity of the meeting when entering into the plane of reality. The outcome of such an approach to people and things was the development of a social method which can be called the *analytical-actor method*, in contrast to the analytical observer method.

I turned myself into an actor in order to learn more about my thoughts (choices and decisions) and my fellow men into actors in order for them to learn more about their thoughts (choices and decisions), and reversed their roles in order that they may learn more about each other. In a broad sense here is the methodological seed of what became later known as inter-personal systems, sociometry and psychodrama. It is not the unconscious human actor of old, it is not the analyst of old, it is a synthesis of both—one analytic actor meeting another. The analytic element does not interfere with the spontaneity and creativity of the actor, it is a part of him. In the course of development the analytic element can differentiate itself within the personality of the actor as an analytic self observer, a further synthesis, one between the analytic actor and the analytic observer method, takes place.

George H. Mead is a classic example of the keen analytical observer. He belonged, like other thinkers of the early twentieth century as Sigmund Freud, Henry Bergson and John Dewey, to the class of spectator-philosophers.

This is one basic difference which I see between Mead and my own work and it probably reflects throughout everything which each of us has done. There is nothing more elevating than confirmation of ideas. A great service is done to the propaganda of truth if similarities are pointed out where they exist. But differences should be equally strongly pointed out. However, disagreement in approach does not necessarily mean disagreement in goals. The next question is therefore whether Mead and I were aiming at the same goals. Yes, I believe we were both preparing for a creatively emerging and sociometrically directed society.

A comparison of Mead's "philosophy of the present" with my "philosophy of the moment" suggests another difference of opinion, perhaps more than this—of spirit. I formulated this difference at another occasion as follows: "The present is a universal, static and passive 'category', it is a correlate of every experience so to speak, automatically. As a transition of the past to the future it is always there. The present is a *formal* category in contradistinction from the moment which is a dynamic and *creative* category, it is through a spontaneous-creative process that the formal cate-

gory of the present attains dynamic meaning, when it turns into a moment. A completely automatic and purely mechanical process as for instance the repetition of a film, has just as well a 'present' as the most intensive creative experience"* but it has no "moment". Mead has refined and extended the idea of the present but in a diametrically opposed direction. He, the analytic observer, was keenly concerned with the complex relativities of presentness within the framework of scientific method. I was concerned with the creative act and the "evolution of the creator": Apparently we both have been influenced by Bergson. But whereas Mead left out the mystic element in Bergson's "durée", I digested and surpassed it by developing action and training methods which made creativity trainable as well as measurable.

Another difference does not lie as much in method as in the form of attainment. I am referring here to the point of greatest similarity between Mead and myself, the theory of roles. Mead had to struggle through a lifetime of observations in order to arrive at it, I got it effortlessly, "free of charge" from the spontaneous drama, the medium within which I began to work around 1910. Even here a significant departure should be pointed out. It appears that Mead and I have been influenced by Wundt's ideas as to the relation of gesture to speech. But for Mead the development of gesture and language occupied too large an area of the psyche, leaving little considered and unexplored the *anti-semantic* areas. According to my hypothesis there is considerable psychic resistance against the intrusion of language and even some resistance against gestural infiltration. There is no reason to assume that the language-free areas are subhuman (as Mead does). These silent areas are co-existent with the vocal ones on the human level and have great potentialities for growth. There may be forms of "social" communication without gestural involvement. It is therefore an error to reduce the tele phenomenon to a mere reflection and correspondent of the communication process via language.

Last but not least, similar efforts of trying to find points of agreement between the work of others and my own, for instance of Bergson and Freud, can be made perhaps with the same amount of justification. A Bergsonian could make it plausible that my work provides the clinical foundations for "L'Evolution Creatrice" and the "elan vital". Psychoanalysts could argue

*See "The Theatre of Spontaneity", Beacon House, New York, 1923 and 1947, pp. 110-111. It is characteristic too that I coined the phrase "evolution of the creator" to underline the contrast to Bergson's phrase "creative evolution".

that psychodrama is on the action level what psychoanalysis is on the verbal level, that the two methods have similar aims. The real and final question, however, is whether out of the social psychology of Mead, role practice and role training, psychodrama and sociodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy could ever have developed—whether out of Bergson's *durée* and Freud's libido and transference method my elaborate system of action and training methods, could ever have arisen. The answer is—in my opinion—for all three men in the negative. Their contributions were enormous and prepared the ground, but I believe that it took the theorist and practitioner in one, a theory which grew out of and with practice, a synthesis of actor and observer, to give the new methodologies the peculiar concrete shape they have.

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