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George H. Mead

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SOCIAL THOUGHT

GEORGE H. MEAD
University of Chicago

ABSTRACT

The living social reality was for Cooley the society of which he was a part, which he approached by objective introspection. Society is an affair of a consciousness that is necessarily social. The self is not a presupposition of consciousness but arises in communication and is dependent on others who are as immediate as the self. In imagination both self and other have their origin. Public consciousness is the organization of the separate individual experiences. The self is not an immediate character of the mind, for we are not first individual and then social; the mind itself arises through communication. This represents an advance on Baldwin, Tarde, and even James. A self that can reach other selves only through the interpretation of states of consciousness can never be primarily a social self. A difficulty arises when the parallelism of "ordinary psychology" is accepted by Cooley. His ethical views ignored primitive impulses and insisted on standards already established. He was not interested in the scientific study of society. But does not the self belong to an objective phase in the tendency to take the rôle of another? Cooley did not find selves and society arising in primitive processes of communication so that he could grasp their reality in early human behavior. His sociology was in a sense an account of the American community to which he belonged. The gospel of Jesus and democracy were of the essence of it. But if we carry back the social behavior to a point which antedates the psychical as distinct from an outer world, it is to this primitive behavior that one can trace the social patterns that produce society as well as to criticism and reconstruction. To this type of analysis Cooley's assumption closes the door. But Cooley's establishment of the self and others on the same plane of reality and his impressive study of the primary group are positive accomplishments for which we are profoundly indebted.

"I have often thought that, in endowment, Goethe was almost the ideal sociologist, and that one who added to the more common traits his comprehension, his disinterestedness and his sense for organic unity and movement might accomplish almost anything." Cooley wrote this at almost the end of his third book, that on *Social*

Process. It is indicative in a fundamental way of Cooley's conception of sociology and of the sort of mind which Cooley brought to his writings within this field. The men from whom he loves to quote are Thoreau, Emerson, Luther, Thomas à Kempis, and Charles Darwin. The style of his writing is that of Emerson, that is, the organization of his thought belonged rather to the felt unity of the structure that his thinking illuminated than to any closely knit concatenation of elements which analysis presented to thought. And Emersonian sentences stand out from his pages. For example, "The severely necessary can never be vulgar, while only nobleness can prevent the superfluous from being so."

It becomes then of peculiar importance to identify the living social reality which Cooley felt and upon which his thought throws light. It was, indeed, the society of which he was a part and which he could enter by way of his own human nature. No one could be less self-centered than Cooley, but it was by way of the discovery of what went on in his own living with other people that he discovered the community with which the sociologist is concerned. His approach was that of objective introspection. The community that he discovered, so to speak from the inside, was a democracy, and inevitably an American democracy. I call it a discovery, for what anyone finds for himself and by his own way of search must be a discovery. Finding it in living, it was a process. Its organization was a manner of living. Its institutions were the habits of individuals. In a sense Cooley says the same thing in his three books, that is, he illuminates the same reality in different ways.

Society, then, [says Cooley] in its immediate aspect, is a relation among personal ideas. In order to have a society it is evidently necessary that persons should get together somewhere; and they get together only as personal ideas in the mind. Where else? What other possible *locus* can be assigned for the real contacts of persons, or in what other form can they come in contact except as impressions or ideas formed in this common *locus?* Society exists in my mind as the contact and reciprocal influence of certain ideas named "I," Thomas, Henry, Susan, Bridget, and so on. It exists in your mind as a similar group, and so in every mind.[1]

I do not see how any one can hold that we know persons directly except as imaginative ideas in the mind.[2]

[1] *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 119.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

I conclude, therefore, that the imaginations which people have of one another are the *solid facts* of society, and that to observe and interpret these must be a chief aim of sociology.[3]

In saying this I hope I do not seem to question the independent reality of persons or to confuse it with personal ideas. The man is one thing and the various ideas entertained about him are another; but the latter, the personal idea, is the immediate social reality, the thing in which men exist for one another, and work directly upon one another's lives.[4]

We may view social consciousness either in a particular mind or as a co-operative activity of many minds. The social ideas that I have are closely connected with those that other people have, and act and react upon them to form a whole. This gives us public consciousness, or to use a more familiar term, public opinion, in the broad sense of a group state of mind which is more or less distinctly aware of itself. By this last phrase I mean such a mutual understanding of one another's points of view on the part of the individuals or groups concerned as naturally results from discussion. . . . .

In a congenial family life, for example, there may be a public consciousness which brings all the important thoughts and feelings of members into such a living and co-operative whole. In the mind of each member, also, this same thing exists as a social consciousness embracing a vivid sense of the personal traits and modes of thought and feeling of the other members. And finally quite inseparable from all this, is one's consciousness of himself, which is directly a reflection of the ideas about himself he attributes to the others, and is directly or indirectly altogether a product of social life. . . . .

There are, then, at least three aspects of consciousness which we may usefully distinguish; selfconsciousness, or what I think of myself; social consciousness (in its individual aspect), or what I think of other people; and public consciousness or a collective view of the foregoing as organized in a communicative group. And all three are phases of a single whole.[5]

From these passages I think we may form a definite conception of Cooley's doctrine of society. It is an affair of consciousness, and a consciousness that is necessarily social. One's consciousness of himself is directly a reflection of the ideas about himself which he attributes to the others. Others exist in his imagination of them, and only there do they affect him, and only in the imaginations which others have of him does he affect them. These ideas differ from each other as they exist in the conscious experience of different people, but they also have cores of identical content, which in public consciousness act uniformly. This identity Cooley insists upon. It is as real as the differences. But its *locus* is found in the experience

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 121.   [4] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[5] *Social Organization* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 10.

of the individuals. Furthermore its organization is that of the functional relations of the different members of the society, and its unity is that of organization, not that of a common stuff. As stuff it is psychical and as such the experience of different individuals. The advantage of this approach has been very considerable in the development of Cooley's social doctrine. The "other" lies in the same field as that of the "self." It can be recognized as quite as immediate as the self. The stream of consciousness is the carrier of both—the self and its society—and each can be seen to be dependent upon the other for its evolution in experience. The semimetaphysical problems of the individual and society, of egotism and altruism, of freedom and determinism, either disappear or remain in the form of different phases in the organization of a consciousness that is fundamentally social.

The self is no longer a Cartesian presupposition of consciousness. In conduct it is a precipitate about a fundamental impulse or instinct of appropriation and power, while the primary content appears as a feeling or sentiment, the self-feeling which defies further analysis. Here Cooley follows James very closely. Its development is wholly dependent upon another or others who are necessarily as immediate as the self. Being a resultant in experience, those objects, through relationship to which it emerges, cannot be dependent upon it for their existence in experience. The other cannot appear first as an experience of my own self, if my own self appears through the reaction of the individual to others. "A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification."[6] But the imagination cannot exist in experience as the imagination of a self, but must exist as an imagination within which both self and the other have their origin and development. Cooley thus leaves the "person" or the "man" as metaphysically antecedent to the self and the others. This problem is not, however, Cooley's problem. He is undertaking to locate and define the "solid facts of society," to observe and interpret which must be the chief aim of sociology. Ignoring the philosophical problem does give him elbowroom.

[6] *Human Nature and the Social Order*, p. 184.

On the one hand, the organic nature of society Cooley recognizes and emphasizes, and he can present it as the physical outside, so to speak, of the social consciousness which he regards as psychical, as the organization of personal ideas, which can get together only in the mind, it should be said in the *minds* of persons or men. If one were to push the analogy, there should be a public consciousness which is the psychical counterpart of the social organism.

But Cooley draws back from such a departure from direct experience. Public consciousness is the expression of communication, discussion, and resides in the common ideas of persons, and in their organization. On the other hand, Cooley can regard the relations of selves and others in this society in terms of mental processes. Ideas have definition and reality only in their relationship to other ideas. If selves and others are ideas in people's minds, then the relation of the individual to society is as little a problem as is the relation of any idea to the group of ideas that define it. Furthermore, the goods or values that attach to any idea can only be defined in terms of the values that belong to the whole ideal structure to which the idea belongs. The beauty that belongs to your presentation of an arm of a statue could not possibly be stated apart from that of the beauty of the whole figure. The values that are the expression of an economist's theory of production cannot be presented except in terms of consumption. In the same fashion, if an individual consists of the ideas in his mind which he imagines that others entertain of him, and if the others exist as members of society as the ideas which he entertains in his imagination, it is evident that they will have common goods in so far as they are organized in his imagination into some social whole, such as a family.

That which distinguishes Luther from the vulgarly ambitious and aggressive people we know is not the quality of his self-feeling, but the fact that it was identified in his imagination and endeavors with sentiments and purposes that we look upon as noble, progressive and right. No one could be more ambitious than he was, or more determined to secure the social aggrandizement of his self; but in his case the self for which he was ambitious and resentful consisted largely of certain convictions regarding justification by faith, the sacrilege of the sale of indulgences, and, more generally, of an enfranchising spirit and mode of thought fit to awaken and lead the aspirations of the time.[7]

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

In the mind this identification of the values of the individual and of the society he imagines is complete. In defining the selfish man Cooley says, "There is some essential narrowness or vulgarity of imagination which prevents him from grasping what we feel to be the true social situation, and having the sentiments which should respond to it."[8]

If you fix your attention on the individual phase of things and see life as a theatre of personal action, then the corresponding ideas of private will, responsibility, praise and blame rise before you; if you regard its total aspect you see tendency, evolution, law, and impersonal grandeur. Each of these is a half truth needing to be completed by the other; the larger truth, including both, being that life is an organic whole, presenting itself with equal reality in individual and general aspects.[9]

The fact for Cooley is that these social ideas and their organization are not presentations of a reality lying outside but the "solid facts of society." The metaphysical question as to the freedom of will of the individual apart from the social situation that exists in his imagination has no sociological meaning. So the data of the scientist's problem as they lie in his mind cannot *compel* him to present the hypothesis which his imagination evolves. He is free over against the problem. Whether his mind, dependent upon a nervous system, is compelled to think as it does in forming his hypothesis by physical and chemical causes has no bearing upon the absence of compulsion in his statement of the problem.

Mind is an organic whole made up of co-operating individualities, in somewhat the same way that the music of an orchestra is made up of divergent but related sounds. . . . . When we study the social mind we merely fix our attention on larger aspects and relations rather than on the narrower ones of ordinary psychology.[10]

By communication is here meant the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop—all the symbols of mind, together with the means of conveying them through space and preserving them in time. . . . . All these taken together, in the intricacy of their actual combination, make up an organic whole corresponding to the organic whole of human thought; and everything in the way of mental growth has an external existence therein. The more closely we consider this mechanism the more intimate will appear its relation to the inner life of mankind, and nothing will more help us to understand the latter than such consideration. . . . . Without communication the mind does not

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 214.   [10] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[9] *Social Organization,* p. 20.

develop a true human nature, but remains in an abnormal and nondescript state neither human nor properly brutal.[11]

In these passages is presented Cooley's conception of the relation of social mind to the organic structure and process of society. It is a structure and process which is particularly found in the vehicles of communication, that is, everything that interrelates the conduct of members of society, and which become therefore symbols in their minds. The structure and process are external, but they are the structure and process of a living reality, whose interrelationships make possible the social mind in the individuals. Just as the conscious processes of the mind of "ordinary psychology" correspond to the living processes of the physiological individual, so the social processes of the mind answer to the living processes of society. However, there is an essential difference betwen the two. Our physical and biological observation presents us with the objects that make up society and its mechanisms, which can be stated and defined without recourse to a living social process. It is in fact necessary to endue these physiological and physical objects with the meanings which, for Cooley, reside in the mind before life can be breathed into the social organism. I will recur to this later, but it is of first importance to recognize the value for social psychology which flows from Cooley's finding of the solid facts of sociology in the mind.

It can be most sharply stated in Cooley's recognition that the self is not an immediate character of the mind but arises through the imagination of the ideas which others entertain of the individual, which has as its counterpart the organization of our ideas of others into their selves. It is out of this bi-polar process that social individuals appear. We do not discover others as individuals like ourselves. The mind is not first individual and then social. The mind itself in the individual arises through communication. This places Cooley's doctrine in advance of Baldwin's and Tarde's and even of James's. Tarde looked for a psychological mechanism which determined the individual through the attitudes and manners of the community, and found this in imitation. As a mechanism, imitation proves hopelessly inadequate. It becomes simply a covering term for the likeness of the characters of the individual and of the group. Baldwin sought to work out, in a so-called circular reaction that re-

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

instated the favored impulse, a possible psychological mechanism, but without success. While James recognized early the influence of the social environment upon the individual in the formation of the personality, his psychological contribution to the social character of the self was rather in showing the spread of the self over its social environment than in the structure of the self through social interactions. The superiority of Cooley's position lies in his freedom to find in consciousness a social process going on, within which the self and the others arise. By placing both phases of this social process in the same consciousness, by regarding the self as the ideas entertained by others of the self, and the other as the ideas entertained of him by the self, the action of the others upon the self and of the self upon the others becomes simply the interaction of ideas upon each other within mind. In this process the oppositions as well as the accords can be recognized and both can be placed upon the same plane.

It is then to a process of social growth and integration, exhibited both in the individual consciousness and in society, that Cooley directs attention. The forming influence of the group takes place through the ideas which are aroused in mind, and these ideas are not primarily ideas that belong to a self. This study of the social growth of the self and the others Cooley carried out in the observation of his own children, and it was the same process which he could trace in the relation of the individual and society. It was the same social process that was going on, looked at now from the inside and now from the outside. Rivalries and conformity operating on the same level could be stated in terms of the interaction of ideas and in terms of social forces. It was Cooley's firm belief that the process was the same—the growth or decay of the social organism. He was peculiarly successful in analyzing the phase of social degeneration. He could show that unhealthful social conditions reflected themselves in degenerate selves, and he could indicate the responsibility of the environment for the degeneration, at the same time recognizing the responsibility that belonged to the self. He could study traits of character as they appeared in the personality and as they appeared in the social forces which these personalities embodied. He could exhibit the social habits within consciousness and in the institutions

of the community. He could present the culture of the community as it informed and refined the mind of the individual and as it existed in the literature, art, and history of the nations. In general, just as Cooley, following a psycho-physical psychology, recognized the same life-process exhibiting itself in the sensitivity and motor process of the organism and in the consciousness of the organism, so he could relate the social consciousness of the same individual to the social organism to which it belonged. The social process was the same. It was viewed simply from two different standpoints, from without and from within. Such a view would have been impossible if all experience is lodged in a pre-existent self that must reach other selves through conscious or subconscious inference, and if the influence which selves exercise upon each other must take place through mechanisms which operate through the physiological and psychological apparatus of "ordinary psychology." These presupposed an individual that is in its experience pre-existent, and attains acquaintance with other objects through its inner experience. Tarde and Baldwin were after all operating with such psychological mechanisms. A self that can reach other selves only through the interpretation of states of consciousness that are primarily states of itself, can never be primarily a social self, no matter how social the group may be within which as a living organism it has its being. The question then arises whether the consciousness that belongs to Cooley's "person" or "man" within which the self and the other arise can serve as the inside of the social process of which the life of society is the outside. I am not raising a metaphysical question. The question is whether the "solid facts of society" can be found in such a consciousness. I think that Cooley was Emersonian in finding the individual self in an overself, but he does not depend upon such a doctrine for his sociology. He comes back to what he calls "ordinary psychology" for his interpretation of what goes on in the mind.

I have already indicated a serious difficulty that arises if we carry over the method of psychophysical parallelism into social psychology, accepting Cooley's interpretation of psychophysical parallelism. His interpretation is that consciousness is an inside experience of the life of the external organism. In "ordinary psychology" this sets up a parallelism between sensations, percepts, emo-

tions, volitions, and so forth, and physiological processes; and
Cooley seems to be committed to this "ordinary psychology." This
implies that we can give a scientific account of the physiological
process without introducing the parallel states of consciousness. But
for Cooley selves and others lie inside of the consciousness of "ordi-
nary psychology," and yet they also are the "solid facts" of sociolo-
gy, that is, they are the field of the external social organism. Now, I
have no interest in pressing a point of logical or terminological con-
flict. Cooley has in a sense met such a criticism by his assurance that
his parallelism connotes an outside and an inside view of the same
reality, not a parallelism between states or processes in two different
realms of metaphysical being. The only pertinent question is
whether he succeeds in presenting adequately the "solid facts of
society" by means of his apparatus of social psychology.

In the first place it follows from Cooley's lodging of the self and
the others in consciousness, while he accepts the parallelism of or-
dinary psychology, that he cannot and does not wish to identify the
self with the physical organism. Now, while Cooley slips out of this
segregation of the animal organism from social and so moral expe-
rience by merging the life-process and the social process in a uni-
versal onward evolution in which he had a profound faith, the actual
effect was to take the mental organization of society as it lay in his
own liberal and wholesome view as the standard by which primitive
impulses must be tested. What impresses one in reading his chapter
on "The Social Aspects of Conscience," in *Human Nature and the
Social Order,* is that it is an admirable ethical treatise rather than a
scientific analysis of the situation within which lie moral judgments
and the whole apparatus of impulses. The healthful social order is
mental, not in the sense that there have appeared there the intellec-
tual processes of reflection, but in the sense of a developing culture
which carries all the values of society which are the standards and
tests of social theory and conduct. Such a culture has a *locus* in
minds. It is not true that Cooley conceived of the best culture of his
time as the final culture of mankind. He recognized that it is in a
constant process of evolution, but it was true that Cooley was pre-
scribing for society in so far as it was sick in terms of processes and
standards that were for the time being established in minds, which

could be distinguished from what was merely physical, animal, and brutal. He did not feel it to be his primary task to state the whole of human behavior in scientific terms which would be equally applicable to primitive impulses and to the so-called higher processes and cultural expressions. It followed that the beginnings of behavioristic and Freudian psychology did not attract him or suggest new avenues of approach.

In the second place, the problem of the application of scientific method to the study of society did not interest him. The importance of statistical methods he recognized, and those of community surveys, but the question as to the form in which social experience could be stated so as to be amenable to exact definition and formulation seemed to him unimportant. He rejected the economic interpretation of history, and presented his organic view of history in which all factors must be recognized as phases of a unitary life-process whose primary category was that of growth. In this sense evolution was for Cooley the conception that brought society within the realm of science, but evolution was for him a philosophy and a faith rather than a method. He made use of primitive society to illustrate his striking conception of primary groups and their face-to-face association and co-operation, but he made no attempt after the fashion of the French school to analyze primitive mind, nor did he undertake to understand human society through its development from its earlier forms. His method was that of an introspection which recognized the mind as the *locus* of the selves that act upon each other, but the methodological problem of the objectification of this mind he pushed aside as metaphysical. His method was therefore psychological. For him society was a psychical whole.[12]

The question that this method presents is this: Does Cooley's psychological account of the self lying in the mind serve as an adequate account of the social individual in the objective life of society? The crucial point, I think, is found in Cooley's assumption that the form which the self takes in the experience of the individual is that of the imaginative ideas which he finds in his mind that others have of him. And the others are the imaginative ideas which he entertains of them. Now we do make a distinction between selves—our own

[12] See *ibid.*, p. 31.

and those of others—and our ideas of ourselves and of others, and we assume that these selves and our ideas of them exist in our experience. Our ideas of others and of our own selves are frequently mistaken, while we assume that the real selves were there in experience. We correct our errors and reach the genuine personalities which were there all the time. The stuff of these selves social psychologists have found in impulses, fundamental wishes, and the like, especially as these appear in crises in social experience. The question which Cooley's approach raises is whether the form of a self belongs to this level of human experience, or whether this is reached only in the imagination or idea of the other and of the self. Are selves psychical, or do they belong to an objective phase of experience which we set off against a psychical phase? I think it can be shown that selves do belong to that objective experience, which, for example, we use to test all scientific hypotheses, and which we distinguish from our imaginations and our ideas, that is, from what we term psychical. The evidence for this is found in the fact that the human organism, in advance of the psychical experiences to which Cooley refers, assumes the attitude of another which it addresses by vocal gesture, and in this attitude addresses itself, thus giving rise to its own self and to the other.[18] In the process of communication there appears a social world of selves standing on the same level of immediate reality as that of the physical world that surrounds us. It is out of this social world that the inner experiences arise which we term psychical, and they serve largely in interpretation of this social world as psychical sensations and percepts serve to interpret the physical objects of our environment. If this is true, social groups are not psychical but are immediately given, though inner experiences are essential for their interpretation. The *locus* of society is not in the mind, in the sense in which Cooley uses the term, and the approach to it is not by introspection, though what goes on in the inner forum of our experience is essential to meaningful communication.

Whether this account of the appearance of selves be correct or not, it is evident that the acceptance by the sociologist of a society of selves in advance of inner experiences opens the door to

[18] G. H. Mead, "The Genesis of Self and Social Control," *International Journal of Ethics,* Vol. XXXV, No. 3 (1925).

an analysis which is behavioristic. I refer to such analyses as those of W. I. Thomas, Park and Burgess, and Faris. In many respects Cooley's analyses are of this type, but they always presuppose a certain normal social order and process as given. It is the organization and process which his introspection revealed. One misses perhaps the neutral attitude of the scientist, and one feels that the door is closed to a more profound analysis. In other words, Cooley did not find selves and society arising in primitive processes of communication, so that he could grasp their reality in early human behavior. He felt that he grasped this reality when he found them within what was for him the normal social process. His sociology was in a sense an account of the American community to which he belonged, and pre-supposed its normal healthful process. This process was that of the primary group with its face-to-face organization and co-operation. Given the process, its healthful growth and its degenerations could be identified and described. Institutions and valuations were implicit within it. The gospel of Jesus and democracy were of the essence of it, and more fundamentally still it was the life of the spirit. Cooley never sought for the reality of this in the dim beginnings of human behavior.

If we can carry back the social behavior within which selves and others arise to a situation that antedates the appearance of the psychical as distinguished from an outer world, it will be to this primitive behavior that we can trace back the origins of the social patterns which are responsible not only for the structure of society but also for the criticism of that structure and for its evolution. The social pattern is always larger than the group that it makes possible. It includes the enemy and the guest and the morale of behavior toward him. Its mechanism of communication carries with it the possibility of conversation with others who are not members of the group. It has in it the implication of the logical universe of discourse. If symbolization can be stated in terms of the behavior of primitive communication, then every distinctively human being belongs to a possibly larger society than that within which he actually finds himself. It is this, indeed, which is implied in the rational character of the human animal. And these larger patterns afford a basis for the criticism of existing conditions and in an even uncon-

scious way tend to realize themselves in social conduct. For social theory a great deal hinges upon the answer to the question whether society is itself psychical or whether the form of the psychical is a sort of communication which arises within primitive human behavior. Do the self and others lie within mind, or is mind itself, as psychical, a phase of experience that is an outgrowth of primitive human communication? Whether the question is stated in this form or not, it is evident that a great deal of recent social psychology has been occupied with an analysis of selves and their minds into more primitive forms of behavior. To this type of analysis Cooley's assumption of the psychical nature of society closes the door. And it commits him to a conception of society which is mental rather than scientific.

But I am unwilling to conclude a discussion of Cooley's social psychology upon a note of criticism. His successful establishment of the self and the others upon the same plane of reality in experience and his impressive study of society as the outgrowth of the association and co-operation of the primary group in its face-to-face organization are positive accomplishments for which we are profoundly indebted to his insight and constructive thought.