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Reinterpreting Internalization and Agency through G.H. Mead's Perspectival Realism

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Agency · G.H. Mead · Internalization · Perspective taking · Social ontology

Abstract
Toward the end of his life, George Herbert Mead developed a theory of perspectives that may be used to reinterpret his social, developmental psychology. This paper attempts such a reinterpretation, leading to the emergence of a theory of perspective taking in early childhood that looks quite different from that which is assumed in most extant work in developmental psychology. Theoretical and empirical implications of Mead's perspectivism and perspective taking are also explored, with particular focus on questions of internalization and agency. In addition, important distinctions are drawn between Mead's view of human development and most contemporary theories.

Various conceptions of *internalization* and *agency* can be found in the contemporary literature of developmental psychology, but relatively little consensus has been achieved concerning their specific nature and role in the development of the minds and selves of human beings during ontogenesis [Chapman, 1999; Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998]. Broadly speaking, internalization refers to a collection of social, psychological processes whereby public linguistic and other social, relational phenomena somehow are transformed into private cognitive and other psychological phenomena [e.g., Vygotsky, 1934/1986]. In similar broad strokes, agency typically is formulated as a kind of self-determination that is itself determined by sociocultural and biophysical structures and processes, yet is not entirely reducible to such non-psychological systems [e.g., Bruner, 1990]. In recent years, a number of developmentalists have proposed theories of self-development that assume conceptions of internalization and agency that

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attempt to avoid overly strong forms of psychological constructivism on the one hand, and overly strong forms of social constructionism on the other [e.g., Bickhard, 2004; Harré, 1998, 2004; Tomasello, 1999]. These theoretical positions understand social interactivity and communication as developmentally indispensable to, and in many ways constitutive of, psychological personhood. Yet, they leave room for the exercise of rational and moral agency, whereby individuals can control (at least to some extent) and be held accountable for their actions. Such views are frequently associated with the theorizing of Vygotsky [1934/1986, 1978], sometimes with the work of Piaget [e.g., Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Chapman, 1991, 1999], and occasionally with the body of ideas articulated by George Herbert Mead [1932/2002, 1934, 1938].

In developmental psychology, especially in more recent years, Mead's interactionist view of the self-societal dialectic has been both endorsed as an early relational theory of the development of mind and consciousness through participation with others [e.g., Marková, 1987], and derided as a form of social determinism that displaces genuinely moral and rational forms of human agency [e.g., Davidson & Youniss, 1995]. More recently, Mead's work has received brief and passing mention in major volumes concerned with the social and cultural origins of human thought, mind, and selfhood [e.g., Hobson, 2002; Tomasello, 1999]. Such differential and abbreviated treatment is understandable given the well-know difficulties in interpreting Mead's oeuvre. Much of it is derived from lectures and unpublished fragments that have been preserved and published through the note taking and editing of others. Mead also seems to have championed somewhat different views in different writings. It is thus not surprising that Mead scholars have offered several interpretations of his work [e.g., Blumer, 1980; Cook, 1993; Gillespie, 2005; Joas, 1997; Wiley, 1995].

Herein, Mead is interpreted as a perspectival realist who had a great deal to say that is highly relevant to contemporary debates and questions within developmental psychology concerning internalization and agency. In what follows, it will be maintained that Mead's theory of perspective taking offers a viable, alternative account of internalization that is both theoretically progressive and empirically suggestive. Moreover, this is an account that provides a plausible compatibilist interpretation of agency as both determined and determining, in the societal-personal, co-constitutive manner seemingly desired by many developmentalists [e.g., Bruner, 1990; Rogoff, 1992; Valsiner, 1991].

Consequently, what follows, while centrally concerned with perspective taking, is not in any way intended as a review of, or detailed commentary on, the vast literature in developmental psychology that is concerned with perspective taking [for this, see recent reviews and commentaries by Chandler, 2001; Flavell, 1992; Menna & Cohen, 1997; Schober, 1998]. Rather, the central intention is to describe Mead's theory of perspectivism and perspective taking in the context of his social, developmental psychology, and to consider some of its possible theoretical and empirical implications for conceptualizing and studying internalization and agency. Unlike most contemporary developmental psychologists, Mead does not treat perspective taking primarily as a significant developmental accomplishment that marks our progress as epistemic agents. Instead, he considers perspective taking as a basic condition of our sociality and ontological constitution as agentive selves in interaction with others.

Mead's Perspective Realism and Theory of Perspectives

The term 'perspective' was not used by Mead until about 1920, when he began to articulate his mature philosophical position in opposition to traditional metaphysics. In the traditional view, for something to be objective or real, that thing cannot depend on any other thing, but must stand on its own. Mead was concerned that such an assumption relegated many important and influential social and psychological entities and processes to the realm of the illusory and imaginary, and threatened to sweep social and developmental psychology toward the twin brinks of idealism and solipsism. In developing his theory of the objective reality of perspectives [Mead, 1932/2002, pp. 153–170], Mead was at pains to put our sociocultural and psychological functioning back into the world in such a way that it might be the object of rigorous scientific study and consideration.

'In his later years, Mead often used "being in the perspective of the other" instead of "taking the role of the other"' [Miller, 1982, p. 17]. Cook [1993] has noted that Mead came to use the phrases, 'take the attitude of the other … taking the role of the other,' and 'take the perspective of the other … more or less interchangeably' (pp. 79f). For Mead, our entire human sociocultural and psychological world is real, but perspectival (i.e., dependent on us). Mead defined perspectives as orientations within a larger context that arise through, and always remain related to, human conduct in the world. 'The perspective is the world in its relationship to the individual and the individual in his relationship to the world' [Mead, 1938, p. 115]. 'The world, things and the individual are what they are because of this relation' [Mead, 1938, p. 215]. When entered into, perspectives are both perceptual and conceptual. Although they arise within particular sequences of social interactivity, they are not fixed to a particular present. As a consequence, once they are experienced, they can be used imaginatively.

Thus, a perspective is an orientation to an environment that is associated with acting within that environment. Perspectives emerge out of activity and enable increasingly complex, differentiated, and abstracted forms of activity. Because the human world is a social world, all perspectives arise and are employed within interpersonal interactivity. Even though perspectives may be elaborated imaginatively and honed reflectively, they are seeded and maintained through interactions with others. This is not to say that there is no biophysical world that constrains and also enables human interactivity. It is simply to recognize that biophysical conditions, although necessary, are in no way sufficient for perspectivity of the kind that enables the development and functioning of social-psychological phenomena like mind and self. It is important to emphasize that for Mead, the taking of perspectives is not primarily an epistemological matter through which we come to understand our world and our selves. Rather, it is an ontological matter. It is by taking perspectives that exist in the sociocultural world in which we are embedded from birth that we come to exist as self-interpreting beings at all.

Social acts are collective acts that involve two or more participating individuals, and social objects are collective objects with meanings that can be shared by participating individuals. Social objects are what they are by virtue of their embeddedness within the matrix of social acts that makes up the life of a society. Bones of animals become weapons in the experience of early human individuals engaged in social acts of conflict, and balloons become toys when bounced back and forth be-

tween a mother and her child. At a more abstract level, minds and selves also arise out of human interactive activity, especially communicative activity supported by the significant symbols of language. Mead [in Reck, 1964, pp. 134–141] maintains that communication in humans begins, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically, as a conversation of gestures that gradually becomes transformed into a conversation of significant symbols (i.e., language). Significant symbols 'call out' in the individual using them functionally similar responses to what they call out in others to whom they are directed.

Taking the perspective of the other is essential to Mead's conception of the significant symbol [Gillespie, 2005]. Most importantly for current purposes, significant symbols are not to be understood only as shared, singular perspectives (i.e., as the evocation of the same meaning in different individuals, as in Morris' introduction to Mead, 1934, p. xxi), but more importantly as simultaneously experienced, dual perspectives. 'It is through the ability to be the other at the same time that he is himself that the symbol becomes significant' [Mead, in Reck, 1964, p. 244]. For example, as I tell what I regard as an amusing anecdote to a friend, I watch his reactions for signs of enjoyment, simultaneously adjusting and embellishing my story, at least in part, on the basis of what I find there.

With this in mind, consider Miller's [1982] statement about the centrality of the significant symbol to Mead's thought.

> Mead's most profound insight consists in understanding that the significant symbol, the language symbol, consists of a gesture whose meaning is had by both the one who makes the gesture and the other to whom it is addressed. He spent most of his intellectual life unraveling this insight. (pp. 10–11)

However, as Gillespie [2005] has argued, based on Mead's later perspectivism, the true importance of the significant symbol with respect to the development of thought, consciousness, and selfhood concerns the simultaneous positioning of the individual within two or more perspectives. It is being in two perspectives at the same time, simultaneously taking multiple positions within meaningful sequences of conduct, that defines sociality for Mead. It is within this sociality that mind and self emerge.

For Mead, human conduct must be understood as an emergent unfolding of sequences of social acts within which individuals react to both others and themselves. Such a conception of social conduct makes it possible to understand Mead's theory of how consciousness and selfhood arise through a graduated, social developmental process of intersubjectivity. It is within interactions with others that infants become other to themselves. They do this by taking the perspectives of others, and then by reacting to the self and other perspectives that emerge within their ongoing interactivity.

'Internalization' and Agency within Sociality

> The self is something which has a development; it is not there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. [Mead, 1934, p. 135]

What distinguishes the forms of consciousness that can be experienced by the normal, adult human being from the more basic forms of sensitivity to the environment likely experienced by other animals and infants is the reflexivity of the self. This is a reflexivity that only can arise through interactions with others within an ongoing social process. Pre-reflective consciousness refers to a world that is there, but reflective consciousness or reflexivity refers to a world as experienced by a self that is capable of being both a subject and an object to itself. The individual becomes 'an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an organized setting of social relationships' [Mead, 1934, p. 255].

By reinterpreting Mead's social developmental psychology, as set forth in *Mind, Self, and Society* and several of his earlier essays, through his theory of perspectives within social conduct, it is possible to arrive at a detailed understanding of what is involved in achieving selfhood, self-understanding, and agency. Such an understanding highlights two features of Mead's theory of perspective taking: (1) the importance of simultaneously being in one's own and another's perspective, and (2) the importance of reacting to the multiple perspectives that one is in.

Being in Different Perspectives Simultaneously

In Vygotsky's [1978, p. 56] famous analysis of the child's internalization of the meaning of pointing, he provides a feedback theory in which the mother responds to the child's reaching by bringing an object closer to the child, thus converting the child's grasping into pointing. Although feedback theorizing of this kind moves from a dyadic, child-object to a triadic, child-object-other model of explanation, it does not deal adequately or fully with the intersubjective, subject-subject relation [Gillespie, 2005]. In this example, the feedback theory does not endow the mother with a perspective that can be taken by the child, and occupied together with the child's own initial perspective. Consequently, the feedback theory cannot explain adequately how the child becomes other to himself.

For Mead, the child displays the meaning of pointing when she is able to respond appropriately to the situational pointing of her mother as well as to stimulate herself to act as her mother would act in response to her (the child's) own pointing gestures. To understand how one might become other to oneself, Mead turned to social conduct, especially to the subject-subject relation, in a manner that brought the perspective of the other into the analysis. What he realized is that from the earliest days of life, the developing self already is engaging with the perspective of the other in rudimentary social interactions. With this realization, the key question became one of understanding how the developing child could begin to experience the position or situation of the other (parent or caregiver) within social interaction. The answer for Mead lay in the young child's repeated, and somewhat predictable sequences of interaction with others in which she has exchanged roles and positions (e.g., sometimes passing a ball and sometimes receiving it; sometimes crying and sometimes comforting; sometimes asking and sometimes receiving; sometimes disputing and sometimes placating).

Very early in development, such perspective taking is exceedingly rudimentary, amounting to little more than a pre-reflective recollection and anticipation of phases and positions within very simple gestural sequences (e.g., pushing a ball back and

forth, with some assistance from a caregiver). However, through repeated social experience of sequences of gestures, responses, and consequences, in interaction with their caretakers, infants gradually comprehend and anticipate the meanings of routine social gestures. They simultaneously build up clearer recognitions of their caregivers and other objects in their micro social environments. Through repetitively shared sequences of interactive gestural activity, young children acquire a primitive sense of gestural meanings and come to distinguish particular social objects like mother and father. They then can begin to develop awareness of their own actions and selves through interactions that use significant symbols, and eventually through more reflective forms of interpersonal and societal perspective taking [Baldwin, 1986].

As Gillespie [2005] makes clear, for Mead the way to understand perspective taking was to stay focused on the social act:

> A social act refers to a social interaction that has become an institution, with established positions (i.e., buyer/seller, teacher/student, parent/child, boss/subordinate) that are stable over time. The introduction of both time and social structure is a breakthrough. Although the perspectives of self and other within any ongoing social act are necessarily divergent, if one takes into account time and a stable social structure, then it is possible that at some previous point in time, the positions of self and other were reversed. Given this, each participant in a social act may, by virtue of previous responses while in the position of the other, already possess the attitude of the other … It is because self and other are often in the same situations, or social positions, and acting toward the same objects, that the child comes to acquire the same attitudes that others have. (pp. 27–28)

Over time, and in this manner, as the child's social interactions widen and deepen, she eventually acquires the perspectives of others common to the social processes and communities in which she participates, thus taking the attitude of what Mead calls the generalized other or generalized others [Cronk, 1973]. This more abstracted process of perspective taking eventually can be continued vicariously and imaginatively through engagements with orientations and views available in diverse media including literature and film.

Once the child has taken the perspectives of others in the way Gillespie [2005] has described, she only has to react to herself through these perspectives that she previously has engaged in interactions with others. As already hinted, the key here lies in exchanging and reversing roles within sequences of social interactivity, especially in coming to occupy two or more positions or perspectives simultaneously. One major way in which such multiple occupation of perspectives is developed is through play and games, which are characterized by positional exchange, both actual and imaginary. Gillespie [2005] points out that games encourage the simultaneous evocation of two or more perspectives by (1) providing opportunities for moving between complementary social positions (e.g., receiving and making a pass in a game of football), (2) providing rules that bridge perspectives housed in different positions and situations within the game (e.g., passing and receiving a football in ways that do not run afoul of the off-side rule), and (3) providing a context in which vocal gestures between players can serve to integrate perspectives in an immediately concrete manner (e.g., calling for a 'pass' and responding to that call). The important point is that it is through repeated and graduated participation in different positions within routine, everyday social interactions (including play and games) that the child is able to

take different perspectives, and eventually to occupy different perspectives simultaneously. Such multiple perspectivity allows the child to be other to herself, so that she is able to react to those very perspectives that now constitute her as a social being (i.e., as a 'Me').

Reacting to Perspectives

The importance of reacting to the perspectives of others that one has previously experienced in social interactions that have involved reversals of roles and positions should not be underestimated. For Mead, the activity of the self is conditioned by, but not determined by the social situations and processes within which it emerges. Human agency is conditional but free. In order for the self to become an object to itself, it is not enough to take the perspectives of others as experienced in one's past and current history of interactivity. In addition, it is necessary to react to the self that appears in current action and imagination as a consequence of such past engagement. Mead's self thus has two dimensions or phases: (1) a 'Me' that consists in the perspectives of others based on past experience, and (2) an 'I' that reacts to the 'Me' and the current situation in terms of an imagined future in which the 'Me' is restructured. Mead's distinction between the 'Me' and the 'I' brings both temporality and sociality to bear on agency. The 'Me' is an objective self that contains perspectives and possibilities for social interaction gleaned from a past history of social interactivity. The 'I,' especially in novel and problematic situations, reacts to the 'Me' in the immediate moment of action, and, in so doing, enters into a reconstructed 'Me' of the next moment, while simultaneously preparing the ground for a newly emergent future 'I.'

Mead's conception of emergence [Mead, 1932/2002] is that of a disruption in experience – an impasse in the continuity of passage from the present to the future, which anticipates a more distant future in which harmony will be restored. As Sawyer [2002, p. 9] recently has pointed out, sociality, or simultaneous positioning within different systems and perspectives, was, for Mead, an integral aspect of emergence. In particular, emergence is a consequence of occupying perspectives in ways that admit to heretofore unexperienced and unimagined possibilities. However, Mead, unlike many theorists of emergence in contemporary science and social science, insisted on a social level of reality with unique constitutive powers that was not reducible to biophysical levels of the world [also see Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1979; Martin, 2003].

For Mead, the immediate moment of action brings together a concern of the present with both recollections of relevant past activity and anticipations of a future in which the concern or problem to which the action of the present is directed is resolved or somehow made manageable. Such concerns typically are emergent in the field of activity, within the ongoing dynamic interplay of social, interpersonal, and personal perspectives. They arise in the immediate context of novel, unpredictable occurrences that constitute a change in past action sequences and perspectives. If such emergent change were not common, our minds and selves would be determined entirely by our past interactions in our biophysical and sociocultural world, and our worldly conduct would not be punctuated and experienced in temporal terms. It is precisely because of the emergence of change that our temporal experi-

ence and agency also arise. Psychological time requires markers, and change supplies them.

To summarize, Mead's theory of perspectives treats the taking of perspectives as embedded in, and emergent from, positional exchange and simultaneity within interpersonal interactivity. Mead's perspective taking arises from participation within, and experience of, different positions and orientations within intersubjective communicative sequences and contexts. It is not a matter of somehow converting social processes to psychological ones, but of coming to participate in social interactivity as self-aware psychological persons. Mead never talked about *having* a perspective on something. One is *in* a perspective and *part* of a perspective. A perspective is a relational, not a mental, entity. It is a relation of an individual or group to a situation, with respect to acting in that situation. To understand Mead's approach to perspective taking, *taking* must *not* be given a mentalistic interpretation. Moreover, the agency that is exercised by a self-aware psychological person is not determined by biophysical and/or sociocultural factors, but is a reaction of a self-interpreting being to those perspectives she is immersed in through her ongoing social interactions with herself, others, and the social, cultural communities in which she acts. In short, agency is a reaction to the situation in which one finds one's self, and that situation always is a social situation. For Mead, both selfhood and agency arise developmentally through perspective taking (positional exchange, simultaneity, and coordination) within social acts.

Perspectival Selfhood in Context

Recall that a major rationale for Mead's perspectival realism was to restore social and psychological phenomena to the world, and to forestall a rush to subjectivism, idealism, and solipsism. By treating social psychological perspectives as both real and emergent, he also hoped to resist reductive forms of social and psychological theorizing that he viewed as pseudo-scientific, in that they inappropriately reduce, and thereby distort, exactly those entities (like mind, self, and consciousness) that need to be explained. Perspectives, in Mead's sense, are always in the world. Indeed, they make up our social and cultural world. They have an objectivity that derives from the extent to which they are shared and function within our individual and collective experience [Mead, 1938].

For Mead, the reality and organization of perspectives is apparent in social conduct within which the individual and others are immersed in a cooperative process of perspective taking. If a number of others are involved, the individual is able to take the perspectives of all of them, both as individuals and as a collective. She or he is able to do this by understanding what it is that they wish to accomplish – in other words, by comprehending the problematic situation they all confront, and inferring a sense of what would constitute a resolution for all concerned. At the beginning of interactions with others in problematic circumstances, such a common element in the perspectives of all participants might be framed as nothing more than the removal of the difficulty that confronts them all. However, over time, and with accumulated interactions in the problem context through which different actions with respect to the problem are discussed and attempted, the individual is able to enter into the perspectives of others. At the same time, she enters into an emerging,

more detailed common perspective as a consequence of her participation in this overall process of problem solving, a process which in turn is nested in the overall social process.

What ultimately organizes these various perspectives is the extent to which they achieve collective support within the problem context and the social process in general. Since all perspectives are initially, at least to some extent, hypothetical, it is the development and application of perspectives within their contexts that organizes them. Perspectives that are unsuccessful in moving the group toward a resolution of the problem confronting them are discarded in favor of those that yield more success. Perspectives are organized in terms of their utility and viability across problem situations and distributed among those individuals interactive within them. Such organization and distribution result in a variety of generalized others, depending on the diversity of the social group and community in question. Mead's generalized others may be thought of as organizations of perspectives that facilitate awareness of how various attitudes and roles are coordinated within complex social acts. Perspectives are social and objectively real in that they both constrain (acting consistently with generalized others in conventional situations) and enable (acting contrary to, or extending generalized others, especially in problem situations where conventional perspectives fail).

To the extent that all emergent, hypothetical perspectives have the potential to become realized in social conduct, especially in problem situations, they are objectively in the real world that is the sum total of all perspectives. In Mead's words,

> the emergent value which the individual organism confers upon the common world belongs to that world in so far as it leads to its creative reconstruction. In so far as the world is passing into a future, there is an opportunity for that which is not objective to become objective. [Mead, 1938, p. 613]

For Mead, the relation of an organism and an environment is continuously dynamic. The natural and social world consists of a multiplicity of perspectives, any one of which may enter into an organism's field of activity. It is by virtue of the organism's ability to be several things simultaneously, in the sense of taking on (acting within) two or more different perspectives, that the organism is able to deal with emergent events or novel, unexpected occurrences. Because human persons are themselves social, their perspective taking may be enhanced greatly by communication with others through significant symbols.

It is precisely because human individuals are able to take the perspectives of others within the social process that they may acquire selves that are constituted by the perspectives available in their ongoing social encounters. Because social life is dynamically unfolding, the perspectival self is continuously emergent. Nonetheless, such a self is able to achieve sufficient stability within the larger social process of organized, and potentially objective perspectives so that it can function with some success within the problem contexts that it necessarily will face in the course of living. As a 'Me,' the self consists of perspectival understandings and orientations. As an 'I,' the self is an active agent simultaneously occupying situations that have been in one sense determined by the past, but which (because of the ever-present emergence of novel circumstances) in another sense are open to determination by the momentary activity of the 'I' in the fleeting present. By being simultaneously present

in both of these temporal perspectives, the self is a source of both the achieved wisdom of the past and the agentive cultivation of the future. Perspectives constitutive of selfhood must be coordinated sufficiently with other social and interpersonal perspectives to ensure functional levels of intelligibility and interactivity. However, such required coordination still leaves room for considerable creativity in achieving perspectival coordinations that might prove more functional and inclusive than conventionally extant organizations of perspectives [Martin, 2005].

Implications for Contemporary Theory and Research

Perspective Taking as 'Internalization'

Mead's theory of perspectives and perspective taking is a participation theory in which the functional meanings, self-other differentiations, and perspectival actualities and possibilities resident in interactivity constitute our minds and selves. On this interpretation of Mead (even though he occasionally uses the term 'internalization' himself), there is no need to think of any of these developmental processes as requiring empathic or intentional theorizing that involves simulating how one would feel, think, and act in the situations of others, including their mental states. Of course, as developed adults, we are able to do all of these things, but according to Mead, we do not initially learn to do them through developing theories of minds. Such mental feats are products of more basic developmental processes. They are not primary developmental processes themselves. To posit them as basic mechanisms of internalization is to assume exactly what needs to be explained. Thus, unlike contemporary versions of theory of mind in developmental psychology [see Carpendale & Lewis, 2004 for a recent critical review], Mead understood interpreting the actions of others as an intersubjective process that privileges action with others over introspective thought. Moreover, processes like imitation and identification, which many contemporary developmental theorists [e.g., Hobson, 2002; Tomasello, 1999] understand as basic mechanisms of internalization, are treated by Mead as developmental consequences of the kind of participatory positioning and perspective taking he endorsed.

Possible Theoretical Progress. Mead's developmental account, as interpreted through his theory of perspectives, runs counter to much contemporary developmental psychology. In particular, it does not talk about the development of general or specific theories of mind [e.g., Gopnik & Wellman, 1992], esoteric forms of introspection that might be associated with imaginatively understanding one's own or another's inner functioning [e.g., Harris, 1992], or arrays of innate capabilities that make 'mindfulness' possible [e.g., Baron-Cohen, 1995]. In Mead's approach, the mind and self are in the world as much as they are in individuals. It simply is a matter of perspective, and the taking of perspectives is first and foremost a social activity.

However, Mead's account also departs in significant ways from neo-Vygotskian accounts of internalization and from what may reasonably be regarded as neo-Meadian accounts by developmentalists like Marková [1987] and Hobson [2002]. In many ways, Mead's perspectival theorizing, when applied to his social, developmental account, yields a participation alternative to internalization that demonstrates many of the theoretical advantages that Matusov [1998] previously has pre-

sented in arguing for the participation theories of Lave and Wegner [1991] and Rogoff [1990, 2003]. Not only does Mead's theorizing seem helpful in overcoming dualisms inherent in internalization accounts, such as individual-social, inner-outer, and mind-action, it also provides a non-reductive account of the ongoing transformation of social and cultural processes through the embedded, situated activity of real human agents. Moreover, it does so with at least somewhat greater precision than the more general descriptions provided by invoking vehicles of induction and transformation such as 'legitimacy of participation' and 'communities of practice' [Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 117], as useful as such general terms may be as pointers to the important sociocultural practices to which they refer. Finally, Mead's strong emphases on position exchange and simultaneity are not found in most neo-Vygotskian, participation theories.

It is perhaps easiest to evaluate critically Mead's perspectival realism as a potential contribution to contemporary developmental theory by considering it in relation to what may be the most thoroughly Meadian of all contemporary works, Hobson's [2002] *The Cradle of Thought*. The aim of Hobson's work is to 'begin with the mental life of babies and to end up with a story of how thinking … emerges in the course of early development' (p. xiii). Hobson's account assumes a central role for perspective taking, in that, 'Thinking becomes possible because the child separates out one person's perspective from another's. More than this: thinking arises out of repeated experiences of *moving* from one psychological stance to another in relation to things and events' (p. 105). According to Hobson, 'the mechanism by which all this occurs is the process of identification … To identify with someone is to assume the other person's stance or characteristics' (p. 105). To explain how the child becomes aware of herself and others as beings who have and who can adopt perspectives, she first has to take a perspective on herself and her own attitudes. It is only by doing this, by taking a view on her own ways of construing the world, that she can begin to *think* in terms of her own and others' perspectives. This happens through a particular species of identification: the child identifies with others' attitudes towards the child's own attitudes and actions (p. 106).

In many ways, Hobson's account is amazingly similar to the perspectival rendering of Mead's developmental thought offered herein. Nonetheless, there are important theoretical disjunctions that may be explored both theoretically and empirically in ways that might prove fruitful for contemporary developmental theorizing. To make his thought more concretely accessible, Hobson [2002] employs a model consisting of a triangle of relations in which an infant relates to objects, persons, or events in the world; to herself as the other relates to her; and to the other's relation to the world [also see Chapman, 1991, 1999]. One of the theoretical purposes to which Hobson puts his relatedness triangle is to explain how the infant becomes able to understand that there is not just one (i.e., her own) but two perspectives (e.g., her own and her mother's) involved in her interactions with another concerning some aspect of the world (e.g., an object such as a toy). 'What we need to explain is how the child comes to *know* that her movement into this position of the other amounts to her taking up a new perspective' [Hobson, 2002, pp. 108–109]. Hobson's answer, making use of his relatedness triangle, is to claim that through triangulation, a given object is experienced as in receipt of two different attitudes and meanings, and that 'it is this that prompts the infant to separate out her own attitude from that of the other' (p. 109).

Like Mead, Hobson [2002] emphasizes the importance of simultaneously being in one's own and another's perspective in achieving an understanding of mind and self. Hobson also emphasizes the likely importance of taking cooperative, complementary perspectives so that a rudimentary, pre-reflective understanding of what is involved in sharing may serve as a stepping stone to experiencing connectedness with (when sharing is present), and separation from (when sharing is absent), someone else [Hobson, 2002, p. 252]. However, where Hobson departs from the perspectival theorizing of Mead is by considering the perspective taking involved in the triangulation experiences he describes to be a kind of imitation made possible by a process of identification. 'There is something about our propensity to imitate others that is as basic as our intellectual prowess … It is the capacity to identify with others' [Hobson, 2002, p. 215].

> Just as one person's expressions of feeling can move someone else to feel things in sympathy, so a person may identify with someone else in the act of imitation. This, too, involves a kind of movement into the other person's position. The person who imitates assumes something of the mental orientation of the other person. (pp. 221–222)

And, just in case there is any doubt about Hobson's intentions concerning the primacy of processes of imitation and identification with respect to perspective taking, 'Identifying with people is what leads to perspective taking' (p. 271).

On a Meadian account, Hobson's [2002] invoking of imitation and identification is both unnecessary and ill-advised. One problem is that neither imitation nor identification, in Hobson's theorizing and research, are given referential grounds or criteria other than those that define the perspective taking they are supposed to explain. Indeed, there is much in Hobson's prose to suggest that imitation and identification are identical to, or developmental consequences of, perspective taking, rather than causal or constitutive antecedents. A second problem is that in positing imitation and identification as foundational, Hobson comes dangerously close to re-introducing exactly those aspects of conventional theory of mind and simulation theory that he seems otherwise at pains to dispel with his Wittgensteinian-inspired participation theorizing – 'in relating to people we get access to minds directly, not via a convoluted route of inferences, deductions and analogies. Minds are neither so hidden nor so abstract as they seem' [Hobson, 2002, p. 251].

In fact, though, it is not a mentalistic theory of mind with which Hobson wishes to align himself, but Vygotskian internalization, exactly what the presentation of Meadian perspective taking herein is intended to replace (because of its dualism and mystery). According to Hobson, when all is said and done, we should look to Vygotsky, for his theory of internalization 'is a process that may explain what we need to explain: the newly appearing qualities of thinking and the new kinds of self and self-awareness. This is the process of interiorization described by Lev Vygotsky and central to psychoanalytic accounts of development. It is the process by which things that happen between people become things that happen within the individual's own mind' [Hobson, 2002, p. 257].

For Mead, mind is not an individual property. As stated earlier it is a relational entity distributed across and within those coordinated, intersubjective patterns of interaction with others that imbue our worldly actions with meaning. Moreover, there is no need to get behind perspectives. What are most basic are perspectives

through which we engage and share in the social process in general, as well as in its particular manifestations in our life histories of interpersonal exchanges within which we emerge as self-conscious, self-interpreting beings. This is *not* to deny that we eventually come to be able to think in private, to theorize about other minds, or to chart and plan our lives. It *is* to say that all of these and our other mental and personal activities and capabilities have their ontogenetic sources in social interactivity and participation, not in pre-existing or deeply interiorized mental capabilities and representations which afford us a detached view of the world. Although Hobson [2002] captures many of Mead's insights concerning perspective taking and offers a potentially useful extension to Mead's account by emphasizing the centrality of a social-*emotional* orientation to the development of mind, he seems at times to want to go beneath Mead's developmental bedrock of social interactivity with others. There can be little doubt that Mead would resist any such excavation.

Suggested Empirical Research. If Mead's perspectival social psychology is really to constitute a viable alternative to theories of internalization in contemporary developmental psychology, it should be possible to point to empirical implications and demonstrations and/or assessments of its central claims. First, however, it should be noted that the Meadian conception of perspectives (as action orientations in relation to a larger context or environment) is quite different from the 'in the head' conception of perspectives frequently traced to Piaget. Consequently, in addition to extant and possibly future empirical evidence, support for Mead's perspectivist interpretation of self and mental development necessarily involves appeals to scientific criteria such as parsimony, simplicity, and elegance. On such grounds, the preceding critical analysis of Hobson's [2002] work and ideas is sufficient to demonstrate that the Meadian account articulated herein makes fewer assumptions and avoids the logical circularity that besets many competitor accounts of the development of mind and self. For example, biological accounts [e.g., the nativism of Meltzoff & Brooks, 2001; the modularity of Baron-Cohen, 1995, 1999; and the evolutionary-ecological approach of Butterworth, 2003] assume many innately seeded internal mechanisms and competencies that Mead does not. More cognitive theories [e.g., the primary and secondary intersubjectivity of Trevarthan, 1993; the intentional insight approach of Tomasello, 1999] are replete with many mentalistic assumptions concerning representation and cognitive architecture that seem to suppose very early reflective and conceptual abilities that are highly arguable [cf. Carpendale & Lewis, 2004]. Even more socially sensitive theories [e.g., Hobson, 2002; Moore & Corkum, 1994] seem to posit meta-representational capacities [Penner, 1991] and/or very early forms of identification and imitation that are contestable.

By comparison, Mead's perspectival realism gives us a rather straightforward account of the psychological consequences of participation with others in routine gestural and communicative interactions sanctioned within particular sociocultural contexts. It is interactivity within these conventional social practices that enables developing infants and children to experience and occupy a variety of social and personal perspectives, and to use them in both action and imagination. Of course, it may be that Mead's approach is insufficiently replete with distinctions and mechanisms required to provide a fully satisfying theory of the development of mind and selfhood. But Mead's approach offers a comparatively lean account that contains relatively little in the way of contestable assumptions and logical difficulties. It also

fits the existing empirical record as well as its competitors. The Meadian approach suggests at least two kinds of research that have not, to date, been popular in the empirical arm of developmental psychology.

Because little is assumed in Mead's theory that is entirely hidden (i.e., all of the developmental mechanisms and events he describes may be quite readily located in sequences of social interaction), intensive longitudinal videotaping of interactions between neonates and their caregivers over the first two years of life would provide a marvelously rich source of data against which to check Mead's assertions in comparison with those of other socially oriented theorists like Hobson [2002], as well as more cognitively and/or biologically oriented theorists like Trevarthan [1993]. In particular, it would be important in such studies to construct a number of operational pointers to key processes such as identification, imitation, intersubjectivity, and perspective taking (especially multiple perspective taking, in terms of role reversals, combinations, and coordinations) that might be used to adjudicate amongst competing accounts of key developmental accomplishments and processes.

For example, indications of perspective taking in intersubjective interactional sequences could be indicated by role reversals in which a caregiver and year-old child occupy different perspectives in simple, repeated actions – a child holds out a piece of food to a mother who takes a bite and then offers the food to the child by moving it toward the child's mouth while simultaneously pointing with her other hand to the child's mouth. Completion of such a simple sequence of role reversal and intersubjective perspective taking might be indicated by the child taking a bite of the food and then offering it once again to the mother. Children's play with dolls and other toys also may be observed for instances of positional exchange and simultaneity. If such instances could be interpreted reasonably as re-enactments of previously experienced exchanges with caregivers, they would support Mead's theoretical position. In general, if perspective taking is developmentally foundational in the manner proposed by Mead, the child's occupation and simultaneous coordination of roles and phases in diverse social interactions ought to be affected by the ways in which caregivers coordinate the child's perspective with their own. This being so, it would be especially interesting to note possible differences in the quantity and quality of children's perspective taking that might be related to their interactions with those primary caregivers with whom they are most active socially.

Of course, to some extent, it remains a matter of interpretation as to whether to treat particular aspects of events like food sharing or doll play as instances of participatory role and perspective taking or identification and imitation. However, it also might be possible to train caregivers (or research assistants acting as caregivers) to take advantage of naturally occurring events of this kind, and follow them with quasi-scripted actions that are less immediately interactive in order to determine what responses, if any, the child might make to them. For example, following the food-sharing scenario just described, the caregiver or research assistant might move away from the child and begin engaging in a novel form of activity without looking at the child, or otherwise directing her movements to the child. If children consistently imitate the actions of others under these less interactive conditions, Mead's thesis concerning the necessity of relational interactivity for perspective taking would be unsupported empirically. Obviously, a great deal remains to be worked out in any such potential program of research. However, it is clear that such work would need to be conceived in considerable theoretical detail, would be methodologically

very challenging, and would demand a great commitment of time and energy from both participating families and researchers.

A second kind of research that might be especially instructive with respect to examining empirically some of Mead's central theoretical propositions could involve experimental or quasi-experimental interventions with young children in day-care centers. Mead has been interpreted [both herein and by Gillespie, 2005] as maintaining that cooperative interactions may be especially powerful bases for the development and taking of complementary perspectives, which very likely are the first kinds of perspectives to be held simultaneously. This being so, structured activities involving role-play or games within which young children (both immediately prior to and following the beginnings of language use) might be encouraged and helped to experience complementary phases or roles in structured communicative, action sequences could be arranged. The consequences of such interactivity then might be examined on subsequent tasks in which participating children are asked to demonstrate their perspective taking capability and self-understanding. By comparing such demonstrations to those of similar children who have not participated in the 'complementary perspective' interventions, it might be possible to gauge something of the likely effects of such experiences.

Of course, any such interventions would need to be of a reasonably lengthy duration, and the studies themselves would benefit greatly from intensive, longitudinal recording and analysis of a carefully planned set of gradually more demanding and sophisticated forms of perspective sharing and multiple perspective taking over the course of the interventions. It might also prove instructive in such studies to contrast Meadian and Vygotskian forms of facilitative intervention. In the former, young children might be encouraged to participate in and reverse their participation across complementary roles within different phases of interactivity. In the latter, young children might be encouraged to expand and increase their perspective taking capabilities by building on the instructional scaffolding provided by more developmentally advanced others (perhaps including modeling that emphasizes identification with, and imitation of, researcher-teachers and/or older children).

The simultaneous occupation and reactive consideration of non-complementary, even antagonistic, perspectives may be viewed as demanding greater accumulated experience of perspective taking and multiple perspectival involvement. It is an empirical question as to whether these more oppositional forms of perspective taking really can develop out of initially complementary perspective taking as Mead suggests. Certainly there are several extant theoretical perspectives [e.g., Bakhtin, 1986; Billig, 1987; Hermans, 2002; Wertsch, 1991] that might contest such a developmental sequence as too facile.

Perspective Taking and Agency

It is by means of perspectives, which are experientially occupied and available actually and imaginatively as situated resources for action, that individuals become Meadian 'Mes.' However, agency goes beyond the 'Me' in that it manifests as a reaction to the 'Me,' one which may become increasingly self-interpretive with repeated and differentiated experiences, especially in problem-solving situations. Of course, this Meadian 'I' need not be self-consciously or even consciously engaged. In many

ways, Mead seems to suggest that a basic pre-reflective, reactive agency is part of what it is to be a human being participating in social processes with other human beings. In this sense, one is an agent by acting and reacting to extant perspectives available in social situations. However, there is little doubt that Mead also is committed to a rather strong program of self-reflective rational and moral agency, especially during adulthood:

> There are no absolute values. There are only values which, on account of incomplete social organization, we cannot as yet estimate, and in face of these the first enterprise should be to complete the organization if only in thought so that some rough sort of estimate in terms of the other values involved becomes conceivable. [Mead in Reck, 1964, p. 262]

As a functional reaction to perspectives and situations, our agency is constantly emergent within those concerns and problems that we encounter in our sociocultural and biophysical world. Mead understood agency as a situated reaction to extant perspectives that goes beyond them in the act of reacting to them. His account of agency thus resists the classic dualism of free will versus determinism.

Possible Theoretical Progress

At least a few contemporary developmental theorists have formulated theories of emergent agency that may be related to aspects of Mead's thought. For example, Bidell and Fischer [1997] have presented an epigenetic account that treats our genetic make-up and sociocultural context and participation as active self-organizing systems that, together with persons as self-organizing systems, jointly determine our intellectual and agentic development. However, unlike Mead, Bidell and Fischer understand the human agent not as multiply situated, reactive, and functionally oriented to the future resolution of problems, but as actively creative in the construction, within a process of hierarchical integration, of new concepts and skills. Despite their declarations of systems-wide epigenesis, Bidell and Fischer, like many contemporary developmentalists, adopt a highly cognitive, representational, and operational framework that locks the developing agent inside her own cerebral mechanisms in interaction with her environment and genetic make-up, rather than viewing her as creatively participating in social processes and interpersonal interactions in ways that transform both her society and her self.

A more Meadian outlook may be found in the work of Mark Bickhard [1999, 2004]. To Bickhard [2004], 'An infant is a socially tuned biological creature with marvelous capacity for development into a participant in, and co-creator of, social realities' (p. 125). For Bickhard, social realities take the form of situational and institutional conventions. Some of these conventions hold across multiple times and people. Some must constantly be worked out in an ongoing process of interpersonal interactivity. Conventionalization consists in large part of common understandings and practices that contain distinctive roles and functions. Participation in social conventions constitutes the world of the individual in a deeply normative sense. Normativities themselves 'are emergent from, ontologically involved in, and function as constraints – and enabling constraints – upon individual level values and actions' (p. 119). For Bickhard [2004], ontogenetic development is the story of the emergence of

> an entirely new kind of being, one who participates in society and culture and history. And the person, in so participating, participates in the emergent creation of society in turn … The person is constituted in the multiple ways of being social that that individual has developed in that society and culture and historical time. (pp 125–126)

Bickhard's work follows the general pragmatist approach taken by Mead [1934], especially with respect to emphasizing the naturalness of the functional relations he assumes between persons and their environments. 'Interactive representation … emerges with complete naturalism out of certain sorts of functional organizations' [Bickhard, 1999, p. 450]. Note that this is not the kind of cognitive representation thought to consist of encodings of external objects and events. What is represented is not objects, things, or entities in the world, but possibilities for acting. Such 'functions' are always emerging, and differentiate the environment in ways that open up interactive possibilities. With respect to persons and their societies, Bickhard understands both as constantly emergent and co-constitutive. The sociocultural environment is constitutive of personhood

> in two senses: constructive and interactive. Constructively, *learning to engage* in the simpler social interactions of childhood provides the scaffolded resources for the eventual construction of the adult social person. Interactively, the person is *being* social insofar as he or she is interacting with or within those social realities. … Personhood, in being a socially constituted constructive emergent, is itself a social and historical ontology. [Bickhard, 1992, p. 86]

For Bickhard, the person is a socially spawned agent capable of contributing to her participation in those interactions and social processes in which she exists. Her previous social experiences have provided her with a set of functions she can use to think and act in relation to current and future contexts. This is a very Meadian understanding of agency, yet one which still does not make full use of the theoretical resources that Mead's perspectivism has to offer.

To date, no contemporary developmental psychologist, or any other contemporary psychologist for that matter, has theorized agency in a manner specifically consistent with Mead's perspectivism – as a constantly emergent reactivity to those multiple perspectives within which the socially involved and constituted person is situated and active. As already noted, in early development, such an agency is mostly pre-conceptual and non-deliberatively reactive. However, with greater experience in conventional social processes and interactions, the developing human agent is increasingly able to take and work within a multiplicity of perspectives. Such multiperspectival experience enables a much more reflective, deliberative agency that may be targeted at specific problems and concerns [Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003].

Suggested Empirical Research

To indicate ways in which a more truly Meadian conception of agency might be infused into research in developmental psychology, it is possible to extend the two lines of research suggested and developed earlier when considering research on 'internalization.' For example, the kind of naturalistic, longitudinal study outlined above might explore opportunities for children to apply their nascent ability to oc-

cupy two complimentary perspectives to novel situations. For instance, a third individual (another research assistant) might enter the room and point at what remains of the food that had been offered and received by mother and child in the earlier example, and then point to her own mouth. The ability of young children with differing experiences of complimentary perspectival exchange and coordination to respond agentically in such relatively unfamiliar interpersonal contexts would speak directly to the developmental links between perspective taking and personal agency posited by Mead. With older children who have some use of language and greater familiarity with simple picture books, toy models, and audiovisual media, more advanced forms of perspective taking might be examined. To this end, researchers might consider assisting caregivers and research assistants to sprinkle their ongoing interactions with their young charges with a diverse range of perspective taking activities. Useful ideas for such activities are readily available in the various scenarios that frequently have been used by developmental psychologists who have studied role and perspective taking over the years [e.g., Light, 1979]. Of course, a careful, longitudinal recording of instances of perspectival exchange, coordination, and application to novel circumstances would speak directly to Mead's perspectival theorizing with or without such planned, quasi-scripted extensions to ongoing, naturally occurring interactions between adults and children. Nonetheless, the deployment of such extensions would certainly increase the amount and variety of interaction directly relevant to perspective taking in Mead's terms.

The second kind of research suggested earlier consisted of experimental or quasi-experimental interventions in which cooperative interactions that encouraged the simultaneous occupation of complementary perspectives were facilitated in an attempt to expedite the perspective taking and self-understanding of young children. Such studies also could examine relationships between participation in interventions that encourage the occupation of multiple perspectives and the agentic reactivity of children to these perspectives. Once again, creative variations on a variety of extant role- and perspective-taking tasks and demonstrations might be employed to examine direct and vicarious indications of agentic capability that, according to Mead, might be expected to emerge from experiences of multiple perspectivity. Actions potentially indicative of agency might be theorized and coded within situations and tasks that are purposefully constructed to contain novel and/or problem elements not found in the contexts and tasks employed in the interventions per se. Many childhood games (e.g., hide-and-seek, I spy, and clue) are conducive to perspectival exchange, simultaneity, and coordination, and can be tailored by researchers to enhance further the various kinds of persepctivity encouraged and to introduce novel elements into routine sequences of game activity. Difficult conceptual and theoretical issues concerning what constitutes sufficient similarity and difference to warrant ascriptions of agency to children's interactive and situational actions would obviously pose significant challenges in such research. However, there is no reason to suspect that these would, at least in principle, prove any more difficult than the host of conceptual, definitional, and theoretical matters that attend extant research on perspective taking [see Chandler, 2001; Menna & Cohen, 1997; Schober, 1998].

Conclusion

In an autobiographical reflection on his then 35 years as a developmental psychologist studying perspective taking, John Flavell [1992], whose neo-Piagetian account stands as one of the major theoretical positions in this area of theory and research, states that:

> My coworkers and I get the impression when testing young 3-year-olds that most of them are simply not 'maturationally ready' to understand our questions about mental representations, and that the best we can do is just wait for them to grow a little older. … There is just not enough there yet on which to build. (p. 133)

But, if, as Flavell goes on to say, 'young children do not know that they and other people have conceptual, perceptual, and affective perspectives … [and] they do not know that people mentally represent the world' (pp. 133–134), why do so many developmental psychologists insist on describing perspective taking in terms of simulation theories and theories of mind? Such theories assume that

> young infants understand other persons as animate agents, and so share emotions and engage with them dyadically; 9-months-olds understand other persons as goal-directed agents and so share goals (and perception) and engage them triadically; and 14-month-olds understand other persons as intentional agents and so share intentions (and attention) and engage with them collaboratively (so creating, via internalization, dialogic cognitive representations). [Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, in press]

What Mead's perspectivism, as applied to his social, developmental account of children's perspective taking, reveals is that a viable theoretical option is to treat activity with others as a source of orientations toward action within routine situations (i.e., as perspectives) that may be shared and occupied in pre-reflective ways, thus creating important developmental bases for mind, self, and later forms of understanding that are more clearly representational. For Mead, theories of development that assume that infants and very young children identify with, and imitate, others as consciously self-reflective agents with unique mental perspectives and representations assume exactly what developmental theories should set out to explain. Our obviously important abilities to act reflectively, intentionally, and self-consciously grow out of our activity with others and the early forms of perspective taking that such interactivity enables. They should not be invoked to make sense of the early intersubjectivity on which they depend. Mead consistently gave developmental primacy to social interactivity as a basis for higher forms of consciousness and cognition.

It is, of course, true that Mead's definitions and conceptions of early perspective taking do not distinguish between perceptual and conceptual perspective taking [Chandler, 2001] or among a speaker's situation and identity, conceptualizations, conversational agenda, and knowledge [Schober, 1998]. Without in any way denying that such distinctions may be both important and necessary for particular theoretical and practical purposes, it nonetheless remains doubtful that they are needed to make plausible sense of perspective taking in early childhood. For Mead, perspective taking is a basic fact of sociality, which he understands as being in two or more perspectives simultaneously. This form of perspective taking is not predominately mentalistic. It is relational and positional. It constitutes the very social reality in which

we are embedded from birth, and through our ontogenetic experience it comes to constitute us as socially formed agents whose multiperspectival reactivity is a defining feature of the human condition and the ongoing self-societal dialectic. In many ways, more interactionist and participatory theories of early childhood development such as those of Bickhard [1999, 2004], Hobson [2002], and Rogoff [2003] begin to approach at least some of the Meadian ideas articulated herein, especially with respect to social, interpersonal processes related to 'internalization' and agency. However, even here, the constitutive processes most central to Mead's theorizing, multiperspectival occupation and reactivity, have not to date received the attention they deserve.

Perhaps, contemporary developmentalists have been overly influenced by the somewhat dismissive reception that Mead has been accorded by leading scholars like John Flavell. Flavell praises Mead for making 'it difficult for all subsequent theorists, both to ignore the importance of communication processes in human development, and to ignore the importance of role taking in communicative processes' [Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968, pp. 15–16]. However, he goes on to criticize Mead for an alleged inability to explain the finer details of perspective taking – 'he does not [explain] how A acquires the ability to discern B's qualities as a responder generally, and in particular how he acquires the ability to select those gestures which will, in fact, arouse the same response in B' [Flavell et al., 1968, pp. 15–16]. Hopefully, one consequence of the interpretation of Mead's theory of perspective taking offered herein (especially the joint processes of being within different perspectives simultaneously and responding agentively to them) will be to challenge such assessments of Mead's actual and potential contribution to developmental thought, theory, and research. Of course, any such reassessment of Mead's contribution must await further theoretical and empirical inquiry into his detailed hypotheses concerning the social development of mind and self. At this writing, it is by no means clear that Mead's theory of perspective taking is sufficient as a developmental account of our ascendance to self-conscious experience during ontogenesis, or that it is capable of dealing with the challenges posed by perspectives that may be much more dramatically oppositional than those available in the vast majority of his discussions and examples. However, it quite obviously is a more developed, specific, and detailed account than that assumed in much of the developmental literature that has referred to Mead's ideas [e.g. Davidson & Youniss, 1995; Flavell et al., 1968].

To date, only a very few studies exist that have investigated Mead's views empirically and theoretically in comparison with those of influential developmental theorists like Piaget and Vygotsky. One of these was concerned with the relationship between private speech and a child's awareness of the meanings of actions [Kohlberg, Yaeger, & Hjertholm, 1968]. Another [Light, 1979] dealt specifically with role taking in a manner that lends itself readily to Mead's theorizing about perspectives and perspective taking as developed herein. The authors of both of these studies speculated that Piaget's conception of egocentrism could potentially be tied to Mead's emphasis on perspective taking in a highly complementary manner. Light [1979], in particular, suggests that where

> Piaget equated the problem of centering on a particular social perspective with that of centering on a particular aspect of a situation … Mead [makes] the same equation, and [argues] that social decentration is a necessary condition for intellectual decentration. (p. 12)

However, for Mead, perspective taking serves both epistemological and ontological functions during ontogenesis. It is not only our knowing, but more fundamentally our being or existence as psychological selves and agents that is at stake. It is only by occupying and reacting to perspectives available in the social reality in which we are active that we become psychological beings for whom understanding is a concern.

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