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CARE OF THE *S*: DYNAMICS OF THE MIND BETWEEN SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND THE DIALOGICALITY OF THE SELF

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Abstract: The paper deals predominantly with the theory of moral reconstruction in George H. Mead's thinking. It also points out certain underdeveloped aspects of Mead's social-psychological theory of the self and his moral philosophy, and attempts to develop them. Since Mead's ideas concerning ethics and moral philosophy are anchored in his social psychology, the paper begins with a description of his theory and underlines some problematic areas and tries to solve them. The most important of these, as the author argues, is the hypothesis that social conflicts should be seen as the root of reflective, discursive thinking. Unlike some of his contemporaries (such as Vygotsky), Mead failed to appreciate this aspect of the genesis of the dynamics of the self.

Key words: mind; consciousness; social conflicts; Mead.

Introduction

The era of social, economic, and cultural globalization presents us not only with multiple challenges in political and social life but also radically problematizes our image of ourselves. The good old *Lebenswelt* of seemingly stable identities is vanishing before our eyes at a bewildering speed, while the new 'globalized' world merely looms indistinctly on the horizon together with the storms of political and social unrest that are gathering from almost every visible side. Challenging as our present political and social situation may seem, it is of utmost importance to note, that this is nothing new in history. In fact, the shakiness of the epoch in which we happen to live strongly resembles George H. Mead's era. He belonged to the Chicago school of pragmatism and dedicated almost his entire professional life to investigating the process by which we become that which sets us apart from the rest of the known universe, that is, selves. Mead's philosophy is a genuine product of his historical epoch—it was formulated at a time when society was constantly being shattered by social

unrest and challenged by unprecedented technological, urban and cultural transformation. The Chicago of the late 19th and early 20th century was an emblematic example of a social reality in which old traditions and ways of thinking had lost their credibility, and that absence had left all the social classes feeling insecure *vis*-à-*vis* the new world that was only very vaguely announcing itself.

The nature of our contemporary problems seems no different. For that reason, it is worth exploring Mead's social psychology and political philosophy. In Mead's view, humans are social beings to the extent that when the social order they inhabit starts to crack, their own self-understanding increasingly comes into question. As we will see later though, Mead's belief that all human beings are radically socially conditioned does not lead him to the social determinism of the individual human psyche. The creative reconstruction of the social order must start at the level of each member of society. It is these 'landmarks' in Mead's thinking that have led me to entitle this paper "Care of the *S*". With a moderate degree of simplification one could maintain that care of the *self* is, for Mead, a non-metaphysical version of the classical term 'care of the *soul'*. Just as Plato considered thinking to be the soul speaking to itself, Mead thought the self was an aggregate of social roles interacting with each other by means of what he called significant symbols. In other words, the self can be understood as a process of reflection about the existing *social order* as it is internalized in the individual. Therefore, any reflection about the self is inconceivable without simultaneously reflecting on *society* in thoroughly *social* terms.

The pragmatist organic theory of sociality

The specificity of Mead's social psychology lies in the fact that he was bold enough to anchor his entire philosophy in a kind of Whiteheadian perspectivism, or relational metaphysics. In his 1927 article on the objective reality of perspectives, he wrote that one of the unfulfilled tasks of contemporary philosophy is that of "finding such a place for mind in nature that nature could appear in experience" (Mead, 1927/1964, p. 306). Mind and nature, in his view, are the 'results' of a social relation between perceiving an organism and its physical surroundings. Why is the relation between mind and nature *social*? Simply because neither can exist independently of the other. Although one can conceive of a physical reality with no acting, perceiving organisms, it does not exist as a world (a space of practical action) in the proper sense of the word. In fact, such a world would necessarily be a hypothetical abstraction created by perceiving minds. The mind itself, on the other hand, is always an organism's response to events in its physical *Umgebung* (environment), which necessarily becomes a meaningful *Umwelt* at the moment of action and perception. Mind and nature are, therefore, epistemologically (if not metaphysically) co-dependent and co-constitutive. In this sense, nature is always "viewed" by the perceiving mind as a set of objects and events with particular qualities. The way all organisms perceive the world and construct its objects and events is determined, first of all, by their own physiological make-up, which makes them relate to its physical environment in a specific way. In higher order-organisms (broadly speaking, those which have a central nervous system), the neurological items which are responsible for the emergence of objects are called *attitudes*. These neural pathways encode sensory stimuli in terms of practical conduct. In fact, any perceptual object "invites us to

action with reference to it, and that action leads to results which generally accomplish the act as a biological undertaking" (Mead, 1938, p. 12). The first level of sociality is, therefore, one in which an individual creature calls forth its world by practically engaging with its physical and temporal structures. In Mead's idiosyncratic understanding, it is social because the worldly objects visible to the individual in this kind of situation are the result of a relation between the organism and the physical environment.

The second level of sociality in Mead's perspectivism is attained when two individuals of the same species react to each other's attitudes. Mead liked to illustrate this seemingly abstract relation using a dog-fight as an example. Let us imagine a situation in which there are two dogs approaching each other in a hostile manner. One dog walks around the other while the other observes the first and starts to crouch low to the ground; in response, the first dog starts to growl, etc.[1] Mead highlights the fact that in such affectively charged situations the bodily attitude of one dog (say, circling in a hostile manner around the other dog) becomes a stimulus for the response of the other, which, in turn, becomes a stimulus for the first, etc., in a possibly endless reciprocal shifting of positions and movements. In this social act, one individual, intentionally or unintentionally, reveals his attitude to another by means of non-reflective bodily movements which become an impulse for an adjustive response by the other. Mead called this level of communication 'a conversation of gestures'. Gestures, being the most primitive element of communication, are non-reflective articulations of emotions and inform other participants in the social act about what the individual performing them will do next. If during a conversation of gestures, the gestures of one individual provoke a motor response in another, then these gestures bear meaning. The meaning of a gesture is always the response it stimulates. A 'conversation of gestures' is, in a sense, 'communication without communication', for neither of the interacting individuals is aware of the practical response their movements will stimulate in the other.

The inability to 'put oneself in another's shoes' and see one's conduct as others would represents the principled border between humans and other animals.[2] By the same token, any communication which takes place in the animal kingdom, Mead argues, never reaches a higher level of sophistication than that of the 'conversation of gestures.' However, the human level of communicative interaction is characterized by the ability to condition our own behavior in the same way that we condition that of others; in other words—by being able to implicitly produce in ourselves the same kind of response as we would produce in others. Mead first introduced this idea in his 1912 article, *The Mechanism of Social Consciousness,* in which he wrote: "the human animal can stimulate himself as he stimulates others and can respond to his stimulations as he responds to the stimulations of others" (Mead, 1912/1964, p. 139). Mead called our ability to condition our behavior in the same way as we condition the behavior of others 'taking the attitude (or the role) of the other.' When children develop this ability, their gestures become 'significant gestures' and the first germs of what we call 'a mind' start to appear. Moreover, the body-mind (to borrow Dewey's term) is able to take the attitudes of others and begin to *understand* its own gestures since it is able to trigger

[1] See further Mead (1934/1967, pp. 14, 42-43).
[2] See, e.g., Mead (1912/1964, pp. 137-139; 1934/1967, pp. 142).

within itself the response these gestures will trigger in others. For Mead, taking the attitude of the other is, therefore, at the same time, a *conditio sine qua non* of rationality. For minded bodies, anticipating the responses of others means being able to predict their behavior which, in turn, makes the social world around them intelligible and, ultimately, manageable as well.

We first become aware of the behavior of others before we become aware of ourselves. It is by associating the responses of others to our conduct that we become aware of the fact that this conduct bears meaning for them. Hence, awareness of others precedes self-awareness, both temporally and logically. However, as soon as a person takes the attitude of another, self-awareness immediately follows. Mead was convinced that the human voice, and more specifically vocal gestures, play a crucial role in this process, since only these gestures are perceived in the same way by both sender and receiver:

> it is one of those social stimuli which affect the form that makes it in the same fashion that it affects the form which made by another. That is, we can hear ourselves talking, and the import of what we say is the same to ourselves that it is to others (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 62).

It is, therefore, by means of vocal gestures (later to become the most sophisticated tool for communication) that we learn to associate our action with the responses of others.

Mindedness, selfhood, and taking the perspectives of others

The moment the capacity for taking the attitude of the other appears is the point at which the development of the 'self' begins. Individuals acquire a self as soon as they are able to trigger within themselves the kind of response the gesture would trigger in others. At that moment their gestures become significant for they bear the same meaning for all the participants in the social act. Unlike in animals, for whom consciousness is merely an awareness of what is happening around them, in humans selfhood is a consciousness of meaning—a qualitatively higher level of consciousness. In this 'social' account, Mead returns to the original meaning of the term 'consciousness' as used earlier in Western intellectual history. As the Swiss developmental psychologist Philippe Rochat points out, the philosophical/psychological term 'consciousness' originally came from the Greek word *syneidesis* and referred to common knowledge, or knowledge shared with others. This term was then translated into Latin as 'con-scientia'. As Rochat argues this—primarily moral—meaning was preserved through the Middle Ages until early Modernity: "Historically, prior to the seventeenth century, one could say that consciousness was primarily understood as a phenomenon that could not be conceived independently of the collective, not independently of others or some social rules or goals" (Rochat, 2009, p. 51). The moral element in Mead's social-psychological account of the development of the self is implied in the fact that if the other is the reference point of the meaning of our gestures, then almost all forms of social action imply a normative element, simply because, for acting individuals, it is always desirable for them to act as they are *supposed to* act if they want to achieve their goals. It is, therefore, no wonder that it makes good sense to maintain that we first need to figure out others before we start figuring out ourselves.

With time, a good portion of the conversation of significant gestures which initially takes place between the child and its immediate social environment gradually becomes

internalized and is transformed into an inner dialogue that we call 'thinking': "The internalization in our experience of the external conversations of gestures which we carry on with other individuals in the social process is the essence of thinking" (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 47). A dialogue which takes place in this manner is a dialogue between what Mead called an *I* and a *me*. Simply put, a 'me' represents a set of internalized social roles which are performed by the individual in various groups (one person, therefore, necessarily embodies many different *me*'s—father, policeman, uncle, voter, etc.). In an important sense, a 'me' can be understood as a representation in the individual mind of the attitude of the community towards that individual. If acting individuals wants to be regarded as competent members of a community, they have to act in accordance with the normative expectations of the group as a whole (*generalized other*). A 'me' is a self seen as an object. On the contrary, an 'I' is a self seen as an active subject. According to Mead, the *I* is the dynamic, creative component of the self which responds to the demands of particular social situations. There is a dialectical relationship between society and the individual, and this dialectic is enacted on the intra-psychic level by means of the mutual dynamics of the 'me' and the 'I.' The 'me' is the internalization of roles which derive from symbolic communicative processes, whereas the 'I' is a 'creative response' to the symbolized structures of the 'me'. In other words, the *I* is the self as experienced at any moment. Once that moment has passed, and once the action becomes the object of the individual's reflective awareness, it becomes a *me*.[3]

The inner dynamics of the mind, which we call thinking, is an internalization of the objective (public, or intersubjective) process which takes place outside of the individual. To put things a little differently, when we think about a specific (social) problem, all we do is mentally play out various scenarios of what different actors would *say* in relation to the problem. Thinking is, thus, adopting various (social) outlooks on the problem and playing them off against one another. Lev Vygotsky even went so far as to say that thinking, in the proper sense of the word (i.e., thinking which takes place by means of language), originates in social conflicts that initially take place within groups of playing children.[4] Mead never formulated this point as clearly as Vygotsky did. On one hand, for Mead as a pragmatist, all thinking originates when an organism is confronted with a problem which inhibits its action. Children can think even without language (Mead called this sort of thinking 'a reorganization of attitudes').[5] Mead thought symbolic thinking was simply identified with the ability to take on the perspectives of others and hold the internal dialogue described above. Vygotsky's hypothesis that the source of reflective thinking might be found in the processes of the internalization of social conflicts in groups of children perfectly corresponds to Mead's overall theory for two principal reasons. Firstly, just as Mead would maintain, Vygotsky's thesis implies that linguistically structured thinking is primarily a means of problem-solving. Secondly, if we phenomenologically investigate the internal dialogue which we have with ourselves, we find that this dialogue normally follows 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' dynamics. In other words, we take a certain social perspective on a

[3] For a more detailed treatment of the peculiarities of the functional division between the 'I' and the 'me', see, e.g., Mead (1934/1967, pp. 173-177), Lewis (1991, pp. 109-136).
[4] More on this subject in Vygotsky (1934/2012, pp. 50-51).
[5] See, e.g., Mead (1907/1964, pp. 73-81).

problem (thesis), then we negate it by taking the opposite perspective (antithesis) to finally arrive at a conclusion (synthesis) which may (or may not)[6] solve the problem. By playing out different social perspectives against each other, our thinking becomes profoundly dialectical, that is to say, conflict-driven.[7]

In Mead's social psychology, there are two basic steps involved in the development of a mindedness towards selfhood—*play* and *a game*. The main difference between play and games is that games have rules, whereas play does not. Although both 'play' and 'a game' involve role-taking, in play the role-taking is simple and can be mastered at an early age (e.g., playing a mother, playing at being an Indian, etc.). Through role-playing, children absorb a good portion of the social organization of the various groups around them. The developmental stage of 'play' is simply a stage of mindedness, or the ability to take the attitude of the other. Games, on the other hand, could be defined as organized play. Put differently, we cannot take part in a game if we do not understand the roles of all the other participants. In order to be able to play a game, we must be able to look at our entire social action from a quasi-objective, impersonal point of view (generalized other). The external perspective is usually that of the 'rules' of a particular game. It is in the developmental stage of 'a game' that a 'self' emerges because we can not only take on the attitude of others, but also see our own conduct from the perspective of the normative expectations of the group as a whole.

As we have seen, there are as many generalized others as there are social groups with more or less formalized rules of conduct. The various sets of rules of social conduct within various communities become progressively internalized in the individual and form a unified self. Here, paradoxically, a *unified* self is an internalized "social process involving a number of persons" (Mead, 1927/1982, pp. 163). The self is nothing more than the totality of roles that an individual is able to play. Moreover, there is an important moral element to Mead's developmental theory of the self. The point of view of the generalized other is a perspective from which individuals assess their own conduct (and the conduct of others) as conforming to the normative expectations of the group.[8] The perspective of the generalized other is, in this sense, also a perspective of reason.

Reasons, selves, and social conflicts

Mead's concept of the generalized other is multi-layered; it is the attitude of a group towards its members; second, it is a perspective of reason where the general other 'prescribes' what the right and wrong ways of conduct are; and third, it is a means of control which the group exerts upon its members. In Mead's behavioristic approach, the generalized other should not be regarded as a primarily symbolically conditioned social order but rather as a pattern of embodied social interaction which crystallized over long periods of time into what one might call an 'institution.' The identity of the institution is enabled by the fact that "the whole

[6] In which case, such a perspective becomes a new 'thesis', etc.

[7] There is also a substantial literature dealing with this question from the psychoanalytic point of view. See, e.g., Santarelli (2013).

[8] This theme has been investigated in depth by Louis Quéré (2011).

community acts toward the individual under certain circumstances in an identical way" (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 167). As opposed to many (neo-)liberal moral-philosophical theories, Mead's did not regard institutions as external impediments which obstruct the individual's freedom and autonomy. Institutions are not external to the individual at all, for they are what selves are made of. Consequently, rather than restricting our freedom, they ensure paths of social conduct that are intelligible to others and open to creative reconstruction.

The need to creatively reconstruct social roles and institutions originates the moment our social conduct is confronted with a problem. In a problematic situation, the habitual ways of conduct do not fulfill their role of smoothly advancing the social behavior of groups and individuals, and this leads to undesirable consequences. It is in this situation that social conflict arises. A social conflict is a situation in which the roles played by some members systematically lead to collisions, preventing the group from functioning properly as a whole. From Mead's perspective, social conflicts are conflicts of various normative orders as represented by various general others. The ingenuity of Mead's moral philosophy resides in the fact that various general others are always instantiated in individual selves as various '*me*'s'. This is also why social conflicts are often emotionally very charged and tend to escalate quickly—*their very existence puts into question the internal coherence of the self*.[9]

Due to its troublesome impact on the social process, the very existence of a social conflict calls for a more or less immediate resolution. From Mead's pragmatist point of view, social conflicts emerge out of the specific organizational dynamics in a social group and, therefore, usually have quite specific traits. This is why, in his 1908 article, 'The Philosophical Basis of Ethics'[10], he introduced the distinction between 'abstract external valuation' and 'concrete valuation'. In a genuinely pragmatist spirit, he discourages us from thinking that the nature of social conflicts permits us to apply *a priori* prescriptive principles (abstract external valuation) in order to solve them. Quite the contrary, due to situation-specific variables in most social conflicts, we can only solve them if we take into account the maximum of these variables (concrete valuation): "Mead asserts that moral advance can be secured only if the moral agent is able to experimentally evaluate and eventually abandon or transform old moral values. Moral growth, like scientific growth, is a creative intellectual process" (Silva, 2008, p. 99). Mead likened the process of creative social reconstruction to hypothesis creation in experimental sciences. In fact, according to pragmatists, the social sciences have failed to keep pace with the development of the natural sciences precisely because thus far they have not adopted the experimental method. Just like an experimental scientist, a moral agent (be it an individual or a group) has to take into account all the relevant aspects of the problematic situation in order to come up with a viable solution: "The only rule that an ethics can present is that an individual should rationally deal with all the values that are found in a specific problem" (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 388).

Since the creative reconstruction of a problem is likely to be situation-specific, it requires the active involvement of the group members in at least two ways. First, it is necessary to

[9] Psychoanalysis has tried to shed light on the deep entanglement between relational and social conflicts and intra-psychical conflicts. See Santarelli (2013) for more details.
[10] Mead (1908/1964, pp. 82-93).

determine which social values clash. Second, both the conflicting groups need to exercise the ability to take the perspective of the other toward their own attitudes and thus overcome their own parochial view of the subject matter. In this case, making a habit of surmounting parochiality is the same as making a habit of overcoming one's own 'selfishness', for it is exactly the inability to adopt an external outlook on one's conduct which we might call an underdeveloped sense of empathy, or simply selfishness.[11] If these conditions are met, one can proceed to the phase of genuine moral reconstruction, in which the clash of values is resolved by creating a new perspective, or a generalized other, which would include, on a higher level, all the values that clash:

> The rational solution of the conflicts … calls for the reconstruction of both habits and values, and this involves transcending the order of the community. A hypothetically different order suggests itself and becomes the end in conduct … In logical terms there is established a universe of discourse which transcends the specific order within which the members of the community may … place themselves outside of the community order as it exists, and agree upon changed habits of action and a restatement of values. Rational procedure, therefore, sets up an order within which thought operates; that abstracts in varying degrees from the actual structure of society … It is a social order that includes any rational being who is or may be in any way implicated in the situation with which thought deals … Its claim is that all the conditions of conduct and all the values which are involved in the conflict must be taken into account in abstraction from the fixed forms of habits and goods which have clashed with each other (Mead, 1930/1964, pp. 404-405).

For Mead, social communication is a process in which social individuals exchange claims and normative expectations from others. From that point of view, it is also rational and moral in nature. If the healthy development of a self entails incorporating increasingly broad generalized others into one's conduct, then it is no different for groups. The moral growth of a community consists in its ability to constantly enlarge its understanding of 'we.' At the same time, the transformation of the ultimate reference point (generalized other) of a community necessarily generates a *transformation of individual selves* in that community. This is precisely why, for Mead, care of the soul is identical to care of the self, and care of society. Once a social problem has been eradicated through the creative reconstruction of the community's conflicting attitudes, new selves necessarily emerge: selves whose interests are now more in accordance with the interests of the community as a whole.

When it comes to resolving social conflicts, Mead rejects partiality. Any self and any community which prefers to solve conflicts by favoring one set of values over another deprives itself of the possibility for moral growth. However, it is necessary to state clearly that Mead's vision of moral reconstruction can only be realized on condition that *both* the conflicting parties are willing to reconstruct some of their fixed habits and are ready to find common ground on a new level of interaction. Taking a closer look at the above-cited passage, we have to consider the difference between values and the habits whereby these values are articulated. Mead seems to argue that it is not values which normally need to be radically reconstructed but rather the habits which purportedly articulate and express them.

[11] For his treatment of 'selfishness', see also Mead (1913/1964, pp. 146-149).

Hence, it is the concrete articulation of values (i.e., a particular social habit) which causes social conflict, not the values themselves. Overcoming parochialism, in this sense, means reconstructing the habits that express the values of a community.[12]

An example of a pragmatist solution to social conflict can be found in the troubled fate of Park51. According to the initial plans from 2009, Park51 was to be a 13-story Muslim community center and mosque in Lower Manhattan.[13] The developers had hoped to promote, among other things, an interfaith dialogue within the greater community through the project. Because of its proposed location, just a couple blocks away from the World Trade Center site, it was widely and controversially referred to as the 'Ground Zero mosque'. Although Park51 was not supposed to be exclusively a mosque, the plans to build it ignited a heated debate among the American public in which various politicians adopted very adamant stances. This was because the project seemed to provoke a clash between several crucial American values and that to favor any one of them over others would irreparably damage the fundamental democratic values of America. On one hand, there was a legitimate argument regarding piety for the victims of 9/11 and their families, who, along with a group of politicians, pointed out that the religion which was to be worshipped in the building was too closely connected to the perpetrators of 9/11. On the other hand, some Democratic politicians, religious activists, and non-governmental organizations underlined the secular character of the country and the first amendment which guarantees the free exercise of religion. What we have here is a conflict of two equally important social-political principles—piety and solidarity with those who lost their lives saving fellow citizens, and religious freedom. From the Meadian point of view, any solution that ignored the other side's argument would not resolve the social conflict but deepen it, since it would exclude certain common values and thereby degrade the moral profile of the society. In May 2016 the project was cancelled and it was decided that a high-end condominium with an Islamic cultural museum would be built. However, that does not prevent us from imagining what an ideal 'Meadian' pragmatist solution to the conflict might be. Firstly, in the process of reconstructing the value clash, both the need for piety and the democratic recognition of religious freedom must be fully present. From the pragmatist point of view, an Islamic community center with full public access could have been built, which would, against the backdrop of the 9/11 tragedy, have fostered intercultural and interfaith dialogue, and would have included no areas restricted to any religious, or gender groups (Muslims, men, etc.). Such a solution would, on one hand, have done justice to the need for piety and the recognition of American democratic and liberal values, and on the other hand, it would have permitted a religious community to practice its religion, albeit in a more educational, rather than cultish manner.

Just as in the case of individual conduct (where individuals take into consideration the reactions of others toward their own actions), taking the perspective of others where

[12] In recent years, a theory of resolution of social conflicts bearing similar characteristics to those described above has been developed, e.g., by Koczanowicz (2015).

[13] Due to space limitations, it is not possible to cover the case in detail. Interested readers could take a closer look at the collected news and commentary by *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/topic/organization/muslim-community-center-in-lower-manhattan

communities are concerned means adopting an increasingly universal point of view *vis*-à-*vis* other groups. At the same time, it means acquiring new habits in which old values are articulated in a novel, more inclusive, way and which better correspond to the need to get along with other social groups. In this respect, taking the perspective of others is not only to be understood as a *method* of dealing with social conflicts but also as a *way of life* (or a way of *caring for the S*) of intellectually and morally mature individuals. It requires a constant readiness to question one's opinions and habits, and to accept the fact that none of these are eternal, or non-revisable. It is a readiness to follow rational discussion wherever it might take us. Morality, in the pragmatist sense, is not a set of external rules of action but a personal habit of being able to put one's beliefs to the test in open and rational discussion. Taking the perspective of others is, therefore, a normative model for interpersonal relations. A society which fosters in its citizens the personal characteristics that enable them to obtain a critical distance from their own point of view and help them empathize with others is a society of moral progress.

Mead believed that the best social-political system to attain this goal is democracy. In Mead's communicative understanding of rationality, democracy represents the best mechanism whereby social conflicts are channeled through its institutions into some sort of 'social communicative arena', where only the power of rational arguments, not physical violence, is decisive for the development of the entire community. This is because

> society gets ahead not by fastening its vision upon a clearly outlined distant goal, but by bringing about the immediate adjustment of itself to its surroundings … By its own struggles with its insistent difficulties, the human mind is consistently emerging from one chrysalis after another into constantly new worlds which it could not possibly previse (Mead, 1923/1964, p. 266).

As we have seen, social conflicts can be understood as the initial driving force out of which the dynamics of the mind's inner conversation with itself emerges. By gradually incorporating the responses of others into our conduct, we become more sympathetic and sophisticated individuals. On the macro-scale, the successful reconstruction of social and moral conflicts leads not only to better and more complex (moral) selves but also to a better and more complex moral and social landscape in society. In today's times, when it seems most of our cultural and intellectual certainties are crumbling, it might be worth the effort of revisiting certain of Mead's ideas for they emanate from the very same historical experience.

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