

SELF-CONSTRUCTION AND SELF-AWARENESS: WHICH ONE COMES FIRST?

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ABSTRACT: *On the background of George H. Mead's philosophy of subjectivity, the paper tries to constructively question the classical pragmatist idea that self and self-awareness are products of social interaction all the way down. This critique is based predominantly on some contemporary interpretations of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of self-awareness (Dan Zahavi, Evan Thompson). The paper tries to argue that Mead's notion of the self as an emergent event out of the process of symbolic interaction conceptually presupposes a level of primitive bodily self-awareness which cannot be a product of such interaction but makes it possible in the first place. Simultaneously with pointing to the necessity of taking this elementary self-awareness into consideration, the paper shows what it might consist in. Subsequently, it points to several places in Mead's own texts where he seems to be contemplating the possibility of the existence of such primitive self-awareness but never fully develops it. In the final step, the paper enumerates and refutes the most obvious possible critiques of the proposed position.*

Introduction

Except for William James, for pragmatic thinkers, the human selfhood and self-awareness are outcomes of inference. As Charles S. Peirce's texts show, pragmatism itself originated and, to a considerable extent, gained its very intellectual momentum from a rebellion against the Cartesian idea of the human selfhood as something with which we can be directly acquainted prior to interaction with our social environment (see *CP*, 5.225-237). John Dewey's (1922) theory of selfhood unfolds along similar lines, with a greater emphasis on the role of communication and cooperative action. Also for Dewey, the self is something that we can meaningfully talk about no sooner than within the matrix of social relationships between human conspecifics. Dewey, however, took over his theory of communication and selfhood from George H. Mead – a thinker, who (despite the fact of never having published a single philosophical monograph) introduced the most complete and systematic pragmatist theory of the self. For Mead, the

beginnings of selfhood are to be traced back to the process of gestural communication within which two or more organisms adjustively react to each other's movements by means of what he called "taking the attitude of the other". In this rendition, selfhood (in the most basic sense of self-awareness) appears on stage when one organism, performing certain bodily movement, can anticipate the adjustive response of another organism within a social act. Hence, also in Mead's perspective, selfhood is a product of inference.

The following text is going to challenge the straightforward pragmatist (and neo-pragmatist) view, according to which the self is a product of social interaction all the way down. More precisely, it is going to argue that social construction of the self requires a level of non-derived, affective self-awareness which makes the emergence of the cognitive (reflective) side of the self possible. Being fully aware of the fact that by doing so, one is treading on a very thin ice, it should be stated right at the outset that the intention behind the argument, which is going to be proposed below, is not to negate the idea of the self as a product of social interaction. Rather, on the example of Mead's theory of the self, the paper will endeavor to demonstrate that the notion of socially constituted selfhood, even in Mead's case, requires another level – a primitive level of non-inferential and non-thematic self-awareness which is *not* a product of social interaction or any kind of inference.

The paper is going to proceed as follows. First, it is going to briefly introduce Mead's theory of the emergence of symbolic communication and selfhood and, thus, put in place the conceptual framework which is going to be needed for further discussion. This will be done in the form of a discussion with one of the most innovative papers on Mead's concept of the self and taking the attitude of the other which have appeared in the recent years (Booth, 2013). In the second step, a critique of Mead's concept of the self will be introduced. This critique will be based predominantly on some contemporary readings of Edmund Husserl's

phenomenology of self-awareness (Dan Zahavi, Evan Thompson). In other words, it will be demonstrated that Mead's notion of the self as an event emergent out of the process of symbolic interaction conceptually presupposes a level of primitive self-awareness which cannot be a product of such interaction but, in fact, enables its existence in the first place. Simultaneously with pointing to the necessity of taking this elementary self-awareness into serious consideration, the paper will show what it might consist in. Subsequently, it will point to several passages in Mead's own texts where he seems to be contemplating the possibility of the existence of such primitive self-awareness but never fully develops it. In the final step, the paper enumerates and refutes the most obvious possible critiques of the proposed position.

The embodied self

The crucial role which the body plays in the constitution of human selfhood was recognized already by Peirce. According to his view, we do not possess anything which could be called intuitive self-consciousness since all our knowledge is a product of inference. In the case of human selfhood, children become gradually aware of themselves due to the growing awareness of the role played by their bodies in the process of affecting their physical and social environments (CP 5.231-233). Mead, for whom the place of human consciousness in nature was the central theme at least till around 1921, took a more naturalistic stance in this regard and began to think of human selfhood as a late evolutionary phenomenon which appeared as a response of the human body to the growing need of organizing its social relations with others. In the authorized biography of her father, Jane M. Dewey writes the following about Mead's approach to the study of human mind:

The psychologists and philosophers who, up to that time, had recognized any connection between psychological phenomena and the human body had found the physical basis of

mind in the brain alone or at most in the nervous system isolated from the whole organism, and thus from the relations of the organism to its environment. Mead, on the contrary, started from the idea of the organism acting and reacting in an environment; in this view the nervous system, brain included, is an organ for regulating the relations of the organism as a whole with objective conditions of life. (Dewey in Schilpp 1939, p. 25-26)

The Darwinian and Spencerian heuristic picture of an organism regulating its bodily relations with the environment was the leading idea of behaviorism of the early 20th century. Hence, there is no wonder that in *The Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Mead claims that one of the two main intellectual sources of pragmatism is to be found precisely in the behaviorist¹ doctrine (see 1936, p. 351). Mead's social psychology (labeled as 'social behaviorism' by Charles W. Morris²) is, to a critical extent, based on his theory of action understanding, as we could call it nowadays. Mind and self, which, for that matter, should better be called – mindedness³ and selfhood, are not static objects or things in our heads that make us intelligent and socialized beings but much rather should be viewed as

¹ At this point, it ought to be pointed out that in the first decades of the 20th century, almost all American psychologists would refer to themselves as 'behaviorists.' We, thus, have to distinguish between for instance Mead's and Watson's version of behaviorism. In short, for Mead, behaviorism signified a *methodological* (as opposed to, for instance, an ontological) stance, according to which psychologists should be examining mental phenomena from an external point of view, i.e., from the standpoint of observable bodily activities of the examined subjects in social groups. Mead was highly critical of Watson's approach which seems to completely deny that certain inner dimensions of experience could become an object of scientific inquiry (for Mead such 'inner' items were attitudes, see below). For closer examination of the relations between Mead's and Watson's version of behaviorism, see: Baldwin (1986/2002, p. 46-48), Joas (1985, pp. 65-66), Mead (1934/1967, pp. 2-8), Waal (2002, pp. 10-15).

² See Morris in Mead (1934/1967, p. xvi).

³ Although Mead himself refers to the bodies which are capable of taking the attitude of the other as having a 'mind', it would have been more accurate for him to refer to them as 'minded'. 'Mindedness' (being a property or skill), as opposed to 'mind', seems to bear significantly less substantialist a burden.

specific *skills* that are achieved by bodies which can systematically make sense of the actions of others and cooperate with them in a certain manner in the course of social interaction. Mead would undoubtedly agree with Richard Rorty (1979) when he wrote: "If the body had been easier to understand, no one would have thought that we had a mind" (p. 239). Mind ought to be explained from the perspective of bodily action, not the other way around. From the very first article in which he expressed his conviction about close interrelatedness between symbolic thinking and mindedness, Mead (1904) emphasized the motor and bodily dimension of social interaction: "Articulation, as a muscular process, is explained in the same way that movements of the face, of the hands, of the whole body are accounted for under the influence of emotional tension. Instead, therefore, of having to assume unknown or exceptional conditions as the antecedents of the origin of speech, we can find the conditions, present in our own movements" (p. 380). According to Mead, action understanding, as well as the most sophisticated forms of social interaction are not primarily intellectual, but above all bodily and motor processes.⁴

Elaborating on the above-mentioned premises, Mead developed a thoroughgoing theory of development of the human self. Although he took over the embodiment principle from the work of thinkers like Charles Darwin and Wilhelm Wundt, he remained more true to them than any of the former two.⁵ Also for that reason we can undoubtedly agree with Kelvin J. Booth's (2013)

contention that "Mead may have been the first to advance an embodied theory of social mind" (p. 137). Booth finds two fundamental concepts of Mead's theory of action understanding which are fully embodied, namely attitudes and gestures. Attitudes are neurologically realized bodily dispositions encoding perceived objects in terms of possible reactions toward them. "Living is sense-making" as Evan Thompson (2007, p. 158) aptly put it. Attitudes are, for Mead, teleological (i.e., goal-directed) items by means of which organisms with complex central nervous systems make sense of their worlds. When I decide to do something, for instance, when I place my palms on a piano keyboard in order to start playing the first tones of the particularly demanding Ferenc Liszt's *La Campanella*, my entire bodily attitude and fingers already subtly anticipate the set of movements that has to be performed in order to play the initial tones. Since the earlier phases of the particular act already presupposes its later phases, the attitude enables a temporally stretched and coordinated bodily action aiming at a particular goal. It is actually the goal that directs and controls the entire act since its very beginning till the successful completion (or consummation, as Mead would call it).

In Mead's work, gestures and attitudes have the same definition, both are specified as incipient bodily movements whose initial phases already contain an information about their consummatory phase. On several occasions, Mead even uses these two terms interchangeably (e.g. 1910/1964, pp. 124, 136; 1934/1967, p. 43). The difference between attitudes and gestures does not lie in their own structure but in the context in which they are situated. Whereas attitudes, in the proper sense of the word, attune the organic body to the world of inanimate physical objects, gestures are attitudes to which certain class of physical objects, other living bodies, adjustively react. Gestures are, thus, attitudes situated in a social context. There would be no gestures in a world inhabited just by one (no matter how sophisticated) organism.

⁴ For the analysis of this heuristic outlook of Mead's and its impact on contemporary sciences of the mind, see Franks (2010, pp. 90-91).

⁵ Mead's theory of symbolic communication, and consequently also his theory of the self was crucially influenced by Darwin's theory of emotions and Wundt's anthropological theory of gestures. However, as Hans Joas demonstrates in great detail, both these theories of interaction tacitly presuppose mentalist and intentionalist vocabulary which they intend to explain. Mead was able to diagnose those errors and correct them in his own embodied theory of gestures. See Joas (1985, pp. 101-104).

Gestures and attitudes, similarly to another key pragmatist term – habit, are neither purely physical, nor mental; they belong to the realm of behavior, or sense-making bodily action in the world, from which all our analyses must commence. Being well aware of this, Mead took precisely the concept of ‘gesture’, which he, at the same time, deemed to be the most primitive item of social interaction, to be the starting point of his theory of action understanding (and thus also of his social psychology and philosophy of language). Since gestures are attitudes, which necessarily contain information about their consummatory phase; gestures inform other participants about what a particular actor is ‘up to’ in the social act. For the purposes of our discussion here, Booth (2013) underlines a very important point. Namely, Mead’s usage of the word gesture is different from the ordinary understanding of that term, which conceives of gestures as intentionally guided discrete bodily movements. Any movement can become a gesture insofar as it is responded to by another organism. It is not important whether an organism makes a movement with an awareness of it being subsequently reacted to or not. It is the response of the other that makes a certain bodily act a gesture, not the actor’s own intention.

The lack of awareness that my movement is going to instigate a certain response on the side of the other is precisely what distinguishes ‘conversation of gestures’ on the one hand, and ‘conversation of significant gestures’ or symbols (Mead, 1934/1967, pp. 42-50). In the case of conversation of gestures – which Mead had a liking to present on the background of his (by now well-known) example of a dog-fight – each dog’s movement is responded to by an adjustive motor response on the side of the other without awareness of any of the dogs that it is their own bodily movement that is the cause of the other’s response in the first place (Mead, 1934/1967, 42-43). In other words, in the conversation of gestures, the acting body does not respond to its own movement, it is fully immersed in the perception of its social

environment and reacts to it without awareness of its own position within the social act. There is no distinction between subject and object, the mutually responding bodies form “a single dynamic system. Instead of a conversation, we could liken this relationship to a dance where partners are continually adjusting to each other’s movements” (Booth, 2013, p. 140). Conversation of gestures is not a process where the partakers take turns – it is one continuum which more resembles Dewey’s late term of ‘transaction’ (1949), i.e., a continuous process of doing and undergoing which lacks any hard-and-fast boundaries between one and the other.

The conversation of gestures takes up a form of such a dynamic continuum because none of the acting bodies is capable of realizing what sort of response its movement is going to bring about from the other. Once we move a step further in Mead’s theory of action understanding, we move to the level of significant communication. The conversation of gestures becomes significant in the moment when the bodies participating in the social act become aware of the sort of response that their movement is going to call out in the other. Mead named this capacity ‘taking the attitude of the other’. An organism takes the attitude of the other as soon as it is aware of the *meaning* of its own movements within a social act, that is to say, as soon as it calls out in itself the same sort of response its bodily movement is going to call out in the other (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 76). In that moment, a gesture becomes significant because it bears functionally identical meaning for both participants of the social act.⁶ The moment when an organism is capable of deploying the ability of taking the attitude of the other is, at the same time, a moment of emergence of mindedness, which, in turn is the initial phase of selfhood.⁷

⁶ For the distinction between functional and existential identity of meaning in Mead, see Miller (1973a, pp. 12-17; 1973b, pp. 89-96).

⁷ It is important to distinguish between the concept of ‘mind’ and ‘self’ in Mead’s writings. For instance, in the

What takes the attitude of the other?

The crucial role which the concept of taking the attitude of the other plays in Mead's entire project astonishingly contrasts with vagueness of its detailed definition. In his texts, Mead seems to simply presuppose this ability by human beings without explaining what this process specifically looks like. Moreover, as Booth (2013) remarks, neither does he "provide an adequate explanation as to why humans have this ability to take the position of the other toward our own gestures while other animals do not" (p. 141). On several occasions, Mead attempted to explain the process of taking the attitude of the other in more detail. However, these accounts remain unsatisfactory as to the question of how this human ability should lead to self-awareness. For instance, in his important paper "The Genesis of Self and Social Control" (1925) Mead states that the infant is particularly sensitive to the relation between its own social stimuli and the responses of others toward them. The ability to correlate one's own gestures with the responses of others, however, does not explain how this dyadic relation could lead to the child's self-stimulation, necessarily implied in the concept of taking the attitude of the other. In a similar manner, also calling out the memory images of the child's initially instinctive responses toward the gestures of others (Mead,

paper "Social-Psychological Externalism and the Coupling/Constitution Fallacy" (2013), Tom Burke and Stephen W. Everett mistakenly contend that "Selves predate minds. Selfhood predates mentality" (p. 114). Such a rendition, however, does not accord with what we can find in Mead's writings. Mind, according to Mead, is the ability to take the attitude of the other and operate with significant symbols, e.g., in the form of holding an internal conversation of significant symbols. Self always presupposes the mind as its earliest phase (e.g. Mead, 1924-1925/1964, p. 278) and only appears later as the individual internalizes the social process as a whole. We can agree with Filipe da Silva's (2007) contention that "the unity of mind is a part of ... the larger unity of the self: the internalization of the conversation of significant gestures which is the mind leaves out many aspects of the pattern of social interactions reflected in the structure of the self" (p. 47). Self, therefore, cannot predate the mind.

1912/1964, p. 137) does not explain why we become an object to ourselves in the first place. As Booth (2013) shows in sufficient detail, also Mead's explanations of taking the attitude of the other, which are based on inhibition are not entirely satisfactory (p. 142). The incompleteness of Mead's concept of taking the attitude of the other has become a subject of numerous inspiring analyses (e.g., Joas, 1985; Cook, 1993; Gergen, 1999; Grant, 2004; Gillespie, 2005). None of them, however, posed the question which—from the perspective advocated in this paper—logically predates taking the attitude of the other; namely – what is it about our bodily experience that enables us to realize that it is *our* gestures towards which others respond? In the remainder of this paper, it will be argued that the awareness of the specific kind of ownership of gestures, towards which others respond, cannot come from the outside but must be a result of passive and pre-reflective bodily self-awareness, which is fully embodied and which, in turn, is the condition of possibility of the very process of taking the attitude of the other.

In his endeavors to come up with a complete and coherent conceptual landscape of the development of selfhood, Mead grappled with theories of self-consciousness based on imitation on multiple occasions (Mead 1909/1964; 1982, pp. 65-72; 1934/1967, pp. 51-61, etc.). I will not go into the issue of imitation with respect to the main claim of this paper for two reasons: i) this problem has been dealt with in sufficient length and precision elsewhere (see Joas, 1985, pp. 115-117; Cook, 1993, p. 84-92; Madzia, 2013, pp. 204-211); ii) and perhaps more importantly, the problem of the role of imitation in taking the attitude of the other is logically independent of the question whether the process of taking the attitude of the other could be preceded by some sort of self-awareness. Before a more comprehensive analysis of the problem of self-awareness is proposed, we will now, shortly, concentrate on Booth's account of the origin of taking the attitude of the other, based on what he calls 'mimesis'.

According to Booth (2013), taking the attitude of the other is a composite human ability resulting out of human inborn tendency of 'getting in synch' with others (mimesis). Mimesis, in Booth's rendition, consists of human tendency of *repetition* (an individual's re-enactment of her own previous action), *declarative pointing* (mutual enactment where bodies undergo similar experiences by directing their attention toward a common object), and *imitation* (bodies being synchronized with each other in simultaneous activity). The reason humans have developed mimesis (and, hence, also the ability to take the attitude of the other) is the lack of structure of the human neocortex, logically resulting in the lack of structure of the infant's behavior. Humans are, therefore, always ready to take over behavioral patterns of others and it is via the desire of mimesis that this process takes place. Further, Booth makes a distinction between subject-body (the body we are) and object-body (the body we have) and claims that it is the subject body that takes the attitude of the other. Subject-body, according to Booth, is a felt bodily unity from which things in the world are perceived and engaged. Object-body, on the other hand, is our own body perceived as one of the worldly objects. Booth likens his understanding of subject-body to Shaun Gallagher's (1986; 2005) body-schema which is a system of sensori-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring. Body-schema is a system of habits and abilities that attune us to the world. According to Booth, it is precisely the subject-body or body schema that takes the attitude of the other. By means of our desire of getting in synch with others, our subject-body takes over their attitudes and gradually builds an object-body which is the content of our self-conscious reflective experience.

Booth's solution to the problem of the emergence of self-awareness is surprisingly Peircean. Booth contends that our own bodies become an object to ourselves (more precisely – to our subject-bodies) via the human desire to pay attention to the same things others pay

attention to. Hence our self-awareness is a product of inference:

One of the things that the adult is attending is the child herself. But adults are not just paying attention to the child's object-body; they are attending something else—the child as a center of experience. Thus, the child as a subject-body mimetically learns to pay attention to herself, to objectify herself through the attention of others. The child not only objectifies her own body but also her center of experience. In so doing, this center of experience actually becomes a self... (Booth, 2013, p. 145)

There are two problems to Booth's, otherwise very interesting, overall account. First of all, if he likens his concept of subject-body to Gallagher's body schema, it is difficult to see how a motor system of capacities, abilities and habits which just constrains movement and operates entirely on a sub-personal and non-conscious level, could 'attend' to anything (see Gallagher, 1986, p. 549; 2005, p. 17-24). Body-schema is not the sort of process that even marginally enters perceptual awareness; it is, by definition, just a sensorimotor organization of the body. Hence, if Booth compares the subject-body (as a 'felt' unity that attends to things in the environment), to body-schema, there is a danger of inconsistency in this key term of his.

Second, and probably more importantly, we can ask, how exactly self-awareness is to emerge as a result of joint attention. Here, again, it seems that the only way for something to become an object of joint attention, it 'always already' has to be placed in the perceptual field of both partakers in the act. That being said, only an object-body can possibly become an object of joint attention. How do we proceed from there and infer to subject-body? Booth (2013) is aware of this difficulty and claims, that adults refer not only to the object-body but primarily "to the child as a center of experience" (p. 145), in other words, to its subject-body. However, how can anyone refer to the subject-body from the third-person perspective if it is defined as bodily 'felt' unity? If we define the subject-body in this way, than the only

manner of meaningfully referring to it is from the first-person perspective. It seems, then, that also Booth's account must presuppose a certain level of, however minimalistic, self-awareness from the outset – in order to get it off the ground. In what follows, it will be demonstrated that Mead's own account is subject to a similar deficiency. Subsequently, it will be shown that this deficiency can be relatively easily eliminated by admitting the existence of a pre-reflective bodily self-awareness which Mead himself might have been at times considering.

According to Mead's theory of action understanding, gestures become significant once the individual making them is aware of the sort of motor response they are going to elicit in the other. In other words, we become an object to ourselves once we become aware of the meaning (response of the other) toward our own movements. However, how do we become aware of the fact that it is *our* gestures that is the cause of this response in the first place? Mead never thematized this issue properly. If I need to correlate my gestures with the response of the other (necessary condition for taking the attitude of the other), then I first need to be aware of those bodily movements as 'my own'. In other words, I need to be aware that it is *me* and *my movement*, which instigated the adaptive motor response in the other. My motor action toward the other (a gesture) can become an object of my attention only on the condition, that it is given in my experience as 'my own', that is – if I am able to perceive myself as the source of this movement. This is something animals obviously lack, as we can observe in the dog-fight example.

Logically speaking, in order to perceive my bodily movements as being the cause of the adaptive behavior of others, I first have to set myself as a bodily unity over against the environment. The gist of the presented argument is, thus, the following: *not the capability of taking the attitude of the other but a specific feeling of body-ownership is the necessary starting point of human*

reflectivity and (probably) the main physiological property, which distinguishes human beings from other animals. I propose to call this property the **primal self-awareness**, which is an affective, non-relational and non-intentional feature of the human body, which is not a product of inference (and, hence, also not a product of social interaction). The primal self-awareness does not possess a subject-object structure, it is not-object directed, it is a feeling of being a bodily unity, of being the source of movement – in other words, a feeling of being an agent. Mead described non-human animals which lack self-awareness in the following way:

The individual organism does not set itself as a whole over against its environment; it does not as a whole become an object to itself (and hence is not self-conscious)... On the contrary, it responds to parts or separate aspects of itself, and regards them, not as parts or aspects of itself at all, but simply as parts or aspects of its environment in general. (1934/1967, p. 172)

Booth has called this state of the animal mind, as the state of "qualitative immediacy" in which: "Animal mind throws itself into animated relationships with the things of its world with no distance between itself and other things" (2011). From the phenomenological point of view, the animal consciousness is radically open to the world – it is constantly fully consumed by what is going on in the environment without the reference to its own position in it as a distinct entity. The situation of qualitative immediacy, in which animals lack the awareness of their own movements as causes of the movements of others, is precisely the situation of the conversation of gestures. Mead was skeptical about the possibility that animals, on the present level of evolution, ever reach the level of taking the attitude of the other (e.g., 1924-1925/1964, p. 139; 1934/1967, pp. 92-93). He was convinced that animals lack self-awareness because they cannot take the attitude of the other. Doesn't it, nonetheless, make more sense to claim that it is, rather, the other way around? In other words, it is not the case that animals lack self-awareness (in the sense of being able to set themselves, as a unity, over

against the environment) because they cannot take the attitude of the other. They do not take the attitude of the other, because they cannot set themselves, as a unity, over against the environment. Animals are not aware that it is *them* and *their* bodily gestures towards which others react and, therefore, they are steadily fully consumed just by what others do without being aware of their bodies which they treat as a part of the environment.

How can an awareness of ourselves come from the outside? Cook (1993) speculates that, according to Mead, it is through correlating our movements with the memory images of the responses of others toward them (p. 88). On this basis, so the story goes, we gradually build awareness of ourselves as a distinct entity in the social group. This probably is a sound articulation of Mead's position. It is, however, insufficient for it does not explain on what basis we come to individuate our own movements as something toward which others respond. Zahavi (2003) makes this point quite clearly, when he writes: "If the reflecting experience is to encounter something as itself, if it is to recognize or identify something different as itself, it needs a prior acquaintance with itself" (p. 159). We cannot correlate our movements with the responses of others unless we are already pre-reflectively aware that it is *our* movements others respond to. Hence, before taking the attitude of the other, there necessarily must be a non-inferential awareness of body-ownership, an awareness of being the source of action, in other words – there must be primal self-awareness. Mead neglected this point, which makes his theory of the self incomplete.

Let us unpack the notion of primal self-awareness a little bit further. Namely, let us address the question, to what extent does the introduction of the concept of primal self-awareness undermine Mead's own theory of the self? As a matter of fact, this concept is not meant to undermine Mead's position altogether, but rather supplement it, for it is a precondition of the human

ability to take the attitude of the other. As noted above, the primal self-awareness does not possess a dyadic structure, it is not a subject-object relation (therefore, it also isn't intentional), it is not directed at anything. Rather, it is an affective state of the body, which must be (logically as well as temporally) presupposed before taking the attitude of the other (and, hence, becoming an object to oneself) takes place. Primal self-awareness is not a reflective property because reflectivity presupposes it.

In his quest against inwardness, Mead seems to have greatly neglected the affective basis of the self. In turn, this neglect has two quite unwelcome consequences: i) his concept of the self is overly intellectualist (reflection-based): "Self-consciousness rather than affective experience ... provides the core and primary structure of the self, which is thus a cognitive rather than an emotional phenomenon" (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 173).⁸ ii) Because of this intellectualist flavor, it fails to establish a balanced relation between non-reflective and reflective dimensions of human experience. In other words, we can agree with Mead that the propositional, contentful level of the self is entirely a product of reflective inference. Nonetheless, if he had intended to stay true to the pragmatist *principle of continuity*,⁹ Mead would have been better advised to take into account that the reflective (contentful) level of selfhood is an emergent outcome of a process of social interaction between individuals with certain unique affective properties that

⁸ See also Miller (1973a, p. 156).

⁹ Mark Johnson (2007, p. 122-123) describes this principle, which both Mead and Dewey endorsed, in terms of two main characteristics: i) higher-lower continuity is a twofold thesis that so called "higher" organisms are not the result of some additional ontological kind emerging in the history of the world, and also that our higher cognitive capacities (such as reason, will or empathy) are not distinct in nature from the lower ones (perception, emotion etc.); ii) inner-outer continuity, on the other hand, is the denial that what is "inner" (the mental) needs ontological principles for its explanation different from those used to explain the outer (the physical).

make reflection possible. As this paper is trying to argue, the primal self-awareness might be a necessary part of such a story.¹⁰

Unless an individual is able to recognize that it is *her* movement that is being responded to, the process of taking the attitude of the other does not take place. As has been demonstrated, this sort of awareness cannot consistently be claimed to come from the outside (i.e., to be a product of social interaction). On the contrary, it is a condition of possibility of significant social interaction and of every inference to the content (meaning) of one's actions. To maintain otherwise seems to be begging the question. We can, thus, agree with Dan Zahavi (2009) in contending that any account of the self which disregards this primitive form of self-referentiality, mineness or form-ness of experience is a non-starter, and that any description of the experiential dimension of the self must do justice to the primitive bodily awareness of the sort, described above.

Mead never made up his mind about how exactly the process of taking the attitude of the other takes place. This is visible quite clearly in Mead's wobbly treatment of the concept of imitation¹¹ as well as in his not entirely satisfying attempt to explain the process of taking the attitude of the other via vocal gestures (see below). Nonetheless, at several places of his writings, he seems to be entertaining the idea that the origin of the self might be found in bodily states. In *Mind, Self, and Society* (henceforth *MSS*), for instance, he admits that we could talk of a single self if we identified the self with a certain feeling-consciousness, and that previous thinkers such as James and Cooley have tried to find the basis of selfhood in affective experiences. Mead even admits

that there is some truth in this sort of treatment, but then denies that it is the whole story and maintains that the core of the self is cognitive (Mead 1934/1967 pp. 164, 169, 173; Reck 1964, p. xxxi).¹²

Second example, that is definitely worth mentioning, is to be found in Mead's article "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness" (1912/1964). It was in this text, where he introduced the peculiar importance of vocal gestures for the process of taking the attitude of the other. Mead was convinced that in the case of vocal gestures we can perceive our action in the same way others do, and hence, can we also respond to it as others do.¹³ Mead's understanding concept of the vocal gesture brings us, however, very little with respect to the key issue, i.e., explaining the emergence of self-awareness. It is true that, on the one hand, in case of vocal gestures it is easier to correlate our action (making a sound) with responses of others toward it. Nevertheless, if that correlation is to take place, we have to be aware that it is *our* sound that others are responding to in the first place. This is far from trivial. Other animals can make vocal gestures that are systematically responded to by others in a certain manner. Yet, since they seem to lack the awareness of a peculiar sort of *ownership* of those gestures, they do not develop the ability to take the attitude of the other. Also vocal gestures, therefore, presuppose some sort of pre-reflective self-awareness and any account of self-awareness in terms of vocal gestures *alone* would be a circular explanation.

The extent to which Mead emphasized the role of vocal gestures in the process of taking the attitude of the other in *MSS* has led several Mead commentators to argue that interaction by means of vocal gestures is the

¹⁰ Apart from phenomena like inhibition, which, nevertheless, does not explain the emergence of self-awareness either. See Booth (2013, p. 142).

¹¹ See Mead (1909/1964, pp. 99-104; 1914/1982 pp. 54-58, 144; 1934/1967, pp. 51-61). For detailed analyses of Mead's outlook on imitation see Cook (1993, pp. 84-92), Booth (2013), Madzia (2013).

¹² Zahavi (2009) rightly remarks that what at first sight looked like a substantial disagreement between Mead and his predecessors might in the end be more of a verbal dispute regarding the appropriate use of the term 'self' (p. 568).

¹³ See Mead (1922/1964, p. 243; 1924-1925/1964, p. 287, 1934/1967, pp. 61-68, etc.).

necessary precondition of becoming self-aware in the process of social interaction (see Baldwin, 1986/2002, p. 76-77; Thayer, 1981, p. 252; de Waal, 2002, p. 61). This contention is, nevertheless, quite problematic. Already in "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness" Mead holds that also the deaf-mutes can develop relatively normal personality: "the vocal gesture is not the only form which can serve for the building-up of a 'me', as is abundantly evident from the building-up gestures of deaf-mutes" (1912/1964, p. 140). In such a case, it is clear that something other, more basic, than vocal gestures is presupposed in order for the process of taking the attitude of the other to take place. Unfortunately, Mead does not elaborate on this point any further in terms of answering the question of what it could be about the human experience that enables even the deaf-mutes to become self-aware.

Lastly, in "The Social Self" (Mead, 1913/1964, pp. 143-144) he speaks that we have a running current of awareness of what we do, which he likens to an observer that accompanies all our self-conscious conduct.¹⁴ He further says that this element of our conscious life is to be identified with the response which we make to our own conduct. Why is this important? In the aforementioned passages Mead seems to be realizing that some sort of self-awareness might accompany our everyday conduct virtually through the entire course of our waking, conscious lives. This is not a position Mead (but also Dewey) would normally defend. According to them, consciousness does not automatically imply self-awareness (e.g., Mead 1934/1967, pp. 135-136). In fact, in their rendition, we spend most of our waking lives in a state of what we could call a 'self-oblivion', in which we encounter objects and events of our ordinary experience in a purely habitual way without making distinction between subject and object of our experience. Self-awareness appears as a result of a problematic situation,

which blocks our 'flow' of action and makes us realize the lack of attunement between our bodies and the environment. Phenomenologically speaking, this is not quite the case. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly true that most of the time we do not *reflect* on what we are doing, since much of our action takes place in a habitual form with no need for reflection. On the other hand, the lack of reflection does not automatically imply that we are not conscious (i.e., pre-reflectively aware) of ourselves as acting agents.¹⁵ Exactly this same point has been made by Evan Thompson in his critique of Hubert Dreyfus' phenomenology of skillful expertise; and applies to Dreyfus' reading of Heidegger just as much as to Dewey's and Mead's phenomenology of everyday experience:

The basic problem is that Dreyfus seems to think that the only kind of self-awareness is reflective self-awareness and hence that there is no prereflective self-awareness in skillful coping ... If skillful coping were not prereflectively self-aware, then it would not be different from unconscious automaticity and would have no experiential character whatsoever. And if it had no experiential character, then there could be no genuine phenomenology of skillful coping but only a logical reconstruction of it. (Thompson, 2007, p. 315)

Although we spend a fair amount of our waking lives in the 'flow' of our skillful coping, which is devoid of deliberate reflection, it is the case that we can bring our past actions to our conscious, reflective attention when we need to; and we are capable of doing this precisely because of the fact that at the time when we performed our actions we were pre-reflectively aware of what we were doing.¹⁶ The primal self-awareness accompanies the predominant portion of our waking lives since we are unthematically conscious of ourselves as agents, although we do not deliberate about everything at all times: "Reflective self-awareness is often taken to be a thematic, articulated and intensified self-awareness, and

¹⁴ For another analysis of this issue, see Booth (2013, p. 138).

¹⁵ Similar criticism of this pragmatist contention in Lewis (1991, p. 126).

¹⁶ See also Kilpinen (2012).

it is normally initiated in order to bring the primary intentional act into focus. However, in order to explain the occurrence of reflection it is necessary that that which is to be disclosed and thematized is (unthematically) present" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 163). Mead might have been wrong in his 'all or nothing' approach toward the question of self-awareness; more precisely, in thinking that the only kind of self-awareness there is, is the reflective one.

Mead's concept of the self was above all motivated by his anti-Cartesian (anti-internalist, anti-dualist and anti-intellectualist) sentiment in which he probably went a little too far by neglecting the necessary properties of an *individual* human organism that enable it to enter into sophisticated forms of action understanding called taking the attitude or role of the other. At this point the following question suggests itself: Isn't the concept of primal self-awareness just a disguised Cartesianism? Not by any means. Any approach that could reasonably be labelled as Cartesianism would define the mind (or self) as i) detached; ii) contemplative; iii) immaterial and iv) reflective. In this regard, the primal self-awareness, as described above, is a negation of such a picture. As to the first point, the primal self-awareness is an entirely bodily property. It could be described as a model of the body for itself. It is a mode of experience, in which the body, as a totality, is present to itself. It has no existence outside of the bodily experience. In his 'pattern theory of the self', Shaun Gallagher (2013) has called this experiential dimension the "minimally experiential aspect of the self" in which the body is pre-reflectively aware of the mine-ness of the body and experiences itself as being an initiator or a source of action (pp. 3-4). Second, as opposed to the contemplative model of the mind, the primal self-awareness is affective in nature. It could be best described as 'feeling the body from the inside' as a totality, a feeling of being the source of action. Third, since the primal self-awareness is entirely physiologically conditioned, it is also a bodily property, hence, it is material. Finally, it should be emphasized –

the primal self-awareness is not reflective. It does not relate to anything outside itself, nor does it make an object of itself. It is involuntary and not object-directed. It does not have any propositional content. For all those reasons, it is not a Cartesian term in any meaningful sense of that word.

What role, then does the concept of primal self-awareness play in the process of rethinking Mead's concept of the self? First of all, it should be viewed as a bodily property which enables significant communication to take place. We cannot condition our conduct in the same way others do unless we are pre-reflectively aware that it is our own movements that is the cause of the responses of others. This sort of awareness, as the article was at pains to demonstrate, cannot be a result of inference. It is important to point out, however, that primal self-awareness does not, by any means, disprove the social construction of the *reflective* side of the self. As far as its *content* goes, we have no reason to question Mead's claim that the self is entirely a product of inference, in other words – that it is socially constructed all the way down. But the reflective always emerges out of the affective as well as the contentful arises out of the content-less. In his treatment of the development of the self, Mead overemphasized the former at the expense of the latter which resulted in his inability to properly explain what is so unique about human bodies that enables them to take the attitude of other. As this article has argued, the notion of primal self-awareness could be a candidate worth considering.

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