

THE REAL NATURE OF PRAGMATISM AND CHICAGO SOCIOLOGY*

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It has been some time since pragmatism was examined systematically by sociologists, and in *American Sociology and Pragmatism* J. David Lewis and Richard L. Smith attempt not only to revise ideas that the philosophies of C.S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead form a continuous tradition, but also that Mead, currently the most well-known of these pragmatists among American sociologists, was in fact marginal to the Chicago school of sociology with whom he now is so closely associated. Two other notable sociological studies of pragmatism that come to mind are C. Wright Mills' posthumously published dissertation, *Sociology and Pragmatism*, and Durkheim's *Pragmatisme et Sociologie*. Mills was interested primarily in examining the social context of pragmatism in American intellectual life, not its influences on the development of Chicago sociology, and Durkheim gave a lecture course in 1913-14 later published from student notes in 1955 as *Pragmatisme et Sociologie*. In these lectures Durkheim concentrated on James, Dewey, and F.C.S. Schiller, and to a lesser extent Peirce, but Mead is not even mentioned in Durkheim's text. Similarly Mills devoted whole chapters to Peirce, James, and Dewey, and Mead is mentioned only in a few passing references, although Mills regretted his scant attention to Mead in a postscript. Though Mead may have exerted much influence on colleagues and students at the University of Chicago, these omissions suggest that he was not regarded widely as one of the major pragmatists until after the publication of his writings and lectures as books in the 1930s.

American Sociology and Pragmatism attempts to carry out two purposes: first, to show two "clearly separable" forms of pragmatism—a realist version characterized by Peirce and approximated by Mead, and a nominalist variety illustrated by James and Dewey; and second, to separate Mead from the mainstream of early Chicago sociology and from symbolic interactionism. The authors' argument hangs by a single thread, illustrated by their methodological statement that:

...the interests of science are better served by demonstrating one proposition clearly than by hinting obliquely at a multitude. As Peirce would remind us, scientific knowledge is incremental. (p.4)

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In so doing, the entire history of pragmatism (despite the authors' disclaimers that there are other perspectives in which to view the problem) is reduced to one dimension: the realist - nominalist "metatheoretical" question. Lewis and Smith divide pragmatists and Chicago sociologists into fixed realist or nominalist sides, seldom allowing that a theorist may hold different opinions on different issues, or can change and grow over time; moreover, any perspective landing on the "nominalist" side, has, according to the authors, little or no value. Such a dichotomous method is explicitly nominalistic. Peirce, whom they cite as supporting their single-visioned view of social inquiry, in fact held the opposite opinion, and argued against the idea of "demonstrating one proposition clearly" as a form of Cartesian nominalism! In the "spirit of Cartesianism," he tells us,

The multiform argumentation of the middle ages is replaced by a single thread of inference depending often upon inconspicuous premisses . . . Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premisses which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected. (Peirce, 1931-35: 5.264, 265).

Another way of stating the Peircean pragmatic method of inquiry can be found in Herbert Blumer's reply to an article by Joan Huber (who similarly called for a priori theorizing [see Huber, 1973a,b]):

The likelihood of introducing unwitting bias is much less when the problem is developed through a close, flexible and reflective examination of the empirical world than when the problem is formed by using a model not derived through such intimate, empirical examination. (Blumer, 1973: 798)

Lewis and Smith attempt to drive a wedge between Peirce and James, two life-long friends, and Dewey and Mead, two life-long friends, and then to view James and Dewey as nominalists with no merit or solid substantive contributions to social thought. The authors' commitment to an a priori a-historical metatheoretical approach forces them into an extreme nominalistic position of judging a theorist's thought by the name or label that can be attached to it, and of disregarding the untidy turns of history that may not be fitted neatly into the grand plan. Despite these serious limitations, there are some important insights to be gained from the book. The authors' discussions of Peirce's fiendishly difficult philosophy are for the most part clear, much clearer than one would find, for example, in most contemporary semiotic, and their criticisms of symbolic interactionism as over-subjectivizing Mead suggest at the least a reappraisal of what constitutes acceptable methods of inquiry and standards of objectivity. The systematic analysis of pragmatism has opened up a tradition largely unquestioned by American sociologists for serious reevaluation.

Building the history of pragmatism on the realism - nominalism issue is indeed the key to understanding its foundations, but the importance of this issue is probably not well known to most sociologists. The term "reality," like so many other terms in medieval philosophy, has been transformed into the opposite of what it originally meant. For most of us, "reality" either refers to the brute existence of the world "out there," which forms the substratum of the social world, or else it is the social world itself, which

we continually construct and reconstruct in our daily lives. The Peircean concept of reality is neither of these, yet it partakes of elements of both: reality is more than brute existence, it is a peculiar kind of social construct; but it is not something that we construct, because it is not affected by how *we* think of it, rather, it is that which “constructs” us.

Peirce considered himself a modified “scholastic realist,” influenced especially by the philosophy of John Duns Scotus, and the authors aptly describe him as such in the first chapter. He believed all modern philosophy, social thought, and even “the very flesh and blood of the average modern mind” to be dominated by nominalism, the belief that the signs and symbols constituting thought are mere arbitrary names (hence nominal) that serve to describe truly real particulars of existence. Yet reality, as originally conceived by the scholastic realists of the thirteenth century, was not something *outside* of knowledge and signs; instead, it is by its very nature a “general,” that is, a mediating sign (or in Peirce’s terminology a “thirdness”). The effect of nominalism, which displaced scholastic realism in the European centers of learning, was to drive a wedge between thought and things, and to place the real in the realm of the incognizable. Peirce’s argument for reality, and modification of scholastic realism, is that reality is not only general and therefore cognizable, but is also the ultimate goal of all cognition.

The Peircean theory of reality provides perhaps the broadest definition of community and the social yet devised. One direct sociological consequence of the realist position, discussed in various places by Lewis and Smith, is a view of human existence as fundamentally social, with no substratum of unmediated individuality. Another consequence, not explicitly mentioned by the authors, is that the Peircean realist position shifts emphasis from a priori determinants of action, such as Durkheimian “elementary forms” or Weberian “authority” or “legitimation,” to an emphasis on persons and institutions capable of continually modifying conduct in accordance with goals themselves capable of modification and growth. Elsewhere Peirce discussed this implication of his theory of reality as a theory of “concrete reasonableness.”

Peirce’s argument for reality, which forms the basis for pragmatism, is that if all thought is of the nature of a sign and is inferential, then all of our knowledge is probable, even perceptual knowledge. The only way we can “verify” our knowledge claims is through continual inquiry, because what we think to be true today may be found out to be false tomorrow. Thus even verified knowledge remains probable. Peirce took delight in pointing out that Comte’s maxim, viz., that the only way we can completely verify something is through *direct* observation, is itself not based on any direct observation but is inferential. Comte breaks his own rule in uttering it. Reality is defined as that which continual inquiry, by an unlimited community of inquirers, would find incontrovertible. In this view it is not we who “construct” reality, but reality that determines us and what we will think in the long run. Because all knowledge is probable, there can be no definite temporal limitations to inquiry, and for the same reason, reality is for us dependent on an unlimited community of inquirers and is thus intrinsically social.

What does all of this fancy footwork have to do with the concrete history of Chicago sociology? Let me be a little more pragmatic. One outcome of Peirce’s argument is Peirce’s pragmatic maxim: the meaning of any concept is its *conceivable* effects upon conduct. By “conceivable” Peirce is indicating that meaning cannot be exhausted by determinate acts of behavior. Meaning and conduct always remain general for Peirce and

are based on the same principles as his theory of reality and inquiry, because our knowledge is always probable, subject to correction, and inherently social.

In William James the pragmatic maxim was distorted into the idea that the meaning of a concept is its actual use in behavior (which caused Peirce to distinguish his own variety by calling it "pragmatism"). Lewis and Smith devote a convincing chapter to showing why James's functional psychology, with its center of gravity in the "stream of consciousness," is incompatible with Peirce's realistic pragmatism. But their commitment to their metatheoretical premiss causes them to lose sight of the rich tangle of James's thought, which not only was formulated as a response to the dichotomizing tendencies of modern thought, but which also exercised profound influence on Mead and Dewey. Lewis and Smith use James' influence on Dewey as an example of why Dewey is a hopeless nominalist, and then *deny* the overwhelming influence of James on the development of Mead's thought. They argue that Dewey's philosophy reveals the same nominalistic bias as James because of his alleged Darwinian reductionism. Mead, according to the authors, should be seen as a realist linked with Peirce, because of his emphasis on symbols and communication, and his theory of inquiry.

There are certain facts the authors should have considered regarding one of the central claims of *AS and P*, namely, that Dewey was a lifelong nominalist and biological reductionist, whereas Mead was a realist similar to Peirce. Dewey was a student of Peirce at Johns Hopkins University, and although he only claimed to be influenced by Peirce much later in his life, he did claim to be influenced by him. Mead, like Dewey, was not only heavily influenced by James, but even lived briefly at the James house while tutoring one of James's boys. One of Mead's most important distinctions for sociologists, the "I" and "me" dialogue that constitutes the self, is acquired from James (either directly or perhaps through Cooley), as is the concept of "adjustment." Perhaps even Mead's ideas about "contact experience" and "distance experience" can be traced back to James's distinction between knowledge by "direct acquaintance" and "knowledge about" or indirect acquaintance, although Mead cited Stout's idea of "manipulation" as his source (Mead, 1964: 77). Dewey seriously confronted Peirce's thought in his later work, which the authors tend not to discuss, whereas Mead in all his writings only refers to Peirce twice—and both are references to Dewey's use of Peirce's idea of a "laboratory habit of mind." It can be argued, on the one hand, as Richard Bernstein (1966) persuasively has, that Dewey became increasingly Peircean in the last phase of his philosophy, whereas, on the other hand, Mead's weakness is precisely his nominalism.

Unfortunately, there is much distortion in what the authors say about Dewey and Mead. Although they sincerely seem to have tried to untangle the complexities of Dewey's philosophy, they nevertheless present a merciless caricature of him throughout their work. They say, for example, that to understand Dewey's genetic logic one must "dissolve one's intellect into a kind of mush" (p. 100). His theory of inquiry is described as a witch's mirror that can "delight and disgust nearly any philosophical temperament" (p. 110). Dewey's later philosophy is described as "intellectual strabismus" (cross-eyed). His psychology, "was an intellectual impediment to the development of realistic sociology at Chicago" (p. 168). This kind of cartooning is uncalled for, given the authors' own poor understanding of Dewey, and they would have done better to practice the Peircean "theory of evolutionary love" they preach elsewhere. Dewey, the champion of human rights in the

inquiry into the Moscow trials, and defender of democratic political institutions and social reform, is said to have a theory of truth amounting to a “power perspective,” in which, “a person or persons with some vested interest in promoting an idea can, if they command sufficient sociopolitical power, engineer an environment in which that idea is true, i.e., its intended consequences are actualized” (p. 109). Needless to say, this statement is at odds with everything Dewey stood for and wrote.

The early Dewey, who, largely under Mead’s influence became heavily influenced by Darwin, is nominalistic, though not the crass Darwinian the authors depict. Dewey’s later philosophy and theory of inquiry moves directly toward Peirce’s realism, and yet the authors present an a-temporal picture of his philosophy, and on several occasions even use Peirce’s criticism of Dewey’s 1903 “natural history of logic” against his 1938 theory of inquiry.

In discussing the importance of Dewey’s theory of inquiry, the authors take a nominalistic spectator view of inquiry and say that the inquirer is something *apart from* the situation of inquiry—precisely what Dewey is arguing against in his definition of the situation. They say Dewey’s mistake was that he, “. . . adopted Peirce’s doubt-belief matrix, but elected to locate doubt in the situation itself rather than in the mind of a doubter” (p. 96). To illustrate how Dewey’s definition of the situation *includes* the mind of the doubter, my doubts about the authors’ interpretation exist not only in my mind. They are objectively located in the words of the book communicated to me; in other words, in the *situation* as Dewey uses this term. And if I am correct, other inquirers ultimately will see the same objective problem. The authors’ error lies in stating that Dewey saw the inquirer as being outside the situation of inquiry, or as separable from it. Actually Dewey’s position is closer to that of Peirce’s realism, whereas the authors’ position is closer to that of classical nominalism. In the same way as Dewey, Peirce would argue that the inquirer is the interpretant of that sign process called inquiry, and therefore is an organic part of the inquiry.

The authors parcel out any statements on the social by Dewey, usually claiming that he was influenced by Peirce or Mead, but that the emphasis on the social nature of experience really doesn’t fit Dewey’s theory (and likewise, whatever nominalistic undertones persisted in Mead’s theory are not his fault, they “should be attributed to the lingering influence of James and Dewey” p. 148). This tendency illustrates the danger of carrying out so-called “metathoretical” programmatic ideas unaffected by the inquiry: if Dewey says things that do not sound nominalistic, then they must not be essential to his philosophy, therefore they can be taken as mere extraneous façades, “awkwardly tacked on. . .” (p. 89). In at least one instance where the facts do not fit their ideas, Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* (1925), the authors simply bend the facts to make them fit by making the almost slanderous charge that Dewey unconsciously plagiarized from Mead! The sole evidence for this unconscious plagiarism, which they try to soften by calling it “cryptomnesia” (pp. 121-22), are a few sentences from *Experience and Nature* that “sound like” Mead. Anyone who knows what Peirce means by evidence for verification would find this sort of argument, which is repeated elsewhere, ludicrous. It is like saying that the following, which “sounds like” Mead’s *Philosophy of the Present*, could not have been written by a nominalist such as James: “In the pulse of inner life immediately present now in each of us is a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body, of each other’s persons, of these sublimities we are trying to talk about. . .” (James, 1977: 129).

Certainly Peirce or Mead would be embarrassed by this sort of extremely thin "evidence." Because of their a priori assumption that Dewey is a biological reductionist whose philosophy never grew, Lewis and Smith assume that he could not have been led to make statements on his own. They also assume Mead to be the only possible influence, when Dewey could just as well have been influenced by Ogden's and Richard's seminal work, *The Meaning of Meaning*, which appeared in 1923. Dewey acknowledged Malinowski's supplementary essay in that book to be similar to ideas he had already written in chapter five of *Experience and Nature*. One could also cite Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916), in which the essence of education as a communicative social process appears in the very first chapter. This section is cited in the landmark Park and Burgess sociology text, which originally appeared in 1921 and influenced generations of sociologists. The authors also make no mention of Dewey's theory of qualitative immediacy, which he elaborated in *Experience and Nature*, and which had a major influence on his future work, and also on Mead (see Mead, 1964: 294n; Rochberg-Halton, 1982).

The authors' preconceptions about Dewey run wild in the four pages devoted to Dewey's social philosophy and philosophy of education, arguably his central concern and presumably the area of his work that had the greatest impact on sociology. A quotation from *Reconstruction in Philosophy* on freedom as involving an active process of growth, which excludes the phrase, "ready change *when modification is required*" (my italics), leads to the authors' conclusion that Dewey is advocating untethered release from social life: "Hence, in Dewey's view, the ideal function of an educational system would be to liberate individuals from socially instilled patterns of inquiry which limit their capacity to devise new and creative ideas" (p. 111). What Dewey actually is trying to express in this section is that society is an active communicative process rather than only a lifeless organization, and it is a process to which both individual and organization are *subordinate* and in which both are *mutually dependent*. Social education is at the center of his philosophy, not crass biological individualism. On page 113 Lewis and Smith criticize Dewey for advocating the same specific and piecemeal approach to social inquiries (in other words, Dewey's concept of reconstruction) that they praise Mead for on page 147. Furthermore, they argue that Dewey could not accept the social determinism of Durkheim because "it precludes uniquely individual expressions" (p. 111). Although they mean this as a criticism of Dewey's rampant individualism, their statement is a good example of why Dewey is much closer to a realist position than Durkheim. Dewey sees the "uniquely individual" as qualitative (or what Peirce called "firstness") rather than as subjective, and as *involved in* the social (or general) rather than as opposed to it. The authors' argument in this section would lead them ultimately to that extreme form of nominalism known as socialist realism, not social realism, because it ignores character, uniqueness, potentiality, novelty, and quality, or what Peirce, James, and Mead termed the "I."

It also is worth noting that Lewis and Smith consistently refer to Durkheim as a social realist, and claim his positivism was a positive force influencing an emerging "social realism" in Chicago sociology in the 1920s. Yet how do they explain his use of the Cartesian method of seeking a "cardinal conception" or first intuition in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965: 16), his last major book. Unlike Weber, who sought the varieties of religious life in their most complex expressions, Durkheim sought an underlying "elementary form" that could provide an ultimate foundation for his scientific

study (yet even Durkheim saw that the “elementary form,” or metatheoretical idea, is arrived at through inquiry rather than a priori fiat). This is exactly the opposite of the idea of inquiry as a self-corrective process with no infallible origins shared by Peirce, Dewey, and Mead. Durkheim’s (1965:14) quest for a priori “elementary forms,” for the reality “underneath the symbol” also is diametrically opposed to Peirce’s idea of reality as the ultimate goal of human thought, sought by an unlimited community through continuous inquiry.

Dewey’s theory of inquiry, although it may have fallen short in some respects, did try to incorporate Peirce’s realistic view of science as a self-corrective process of inquiry. But what of the argument that Mead, and not Dewey, should be seen as a social realist in the tradition of Peirce? Mead (Dewey et al., 1917) wrote a chapter, “Scientific Method and the Individual Thinker,” in a book he co-edited with Dewey and others in which he repeatedly referred to the real in the modern nominalistic sense. To give one example:

The individual in his experiences is continually creating a world which becomes real through his discovery. . . (Scientific method) is a method not of knowing the unchangeable but of determining the form of the world within which we live as it changes from moment to moment. (p. 225).

It does seem queer that Mead rarely used the terms “real” or “reality” in his work, and that when he did, as in this example, he used them in the nominalistic sense criticized so well by the authors. In fact, Mead stated more than once in *The Philosophy of the Act* that the pragmatic perspective is *opposed to realism* (1938:628-629).

The idea that the Meadian “contact experience” gives us the “ultimate reality of an object,” as the authors say on the crucial page 130, and that this direct verification of reality is similar to Peirce’s realism is far-fetched. If the authors think that an inquirer gets a handle on reality by touching it, they do not at all grasp Peirce’s insistence that reality is of the nature of a general. Peirce’s whole argument against Cartesian nominalism and its descendents is that we cannot break out of the continuing sign process of interpretation to know directly an unmediated object.

In holding that Mead’s contact experience is the touchstone of reality, the authors appear to be gripped by the fallacy of the blind men in India who all touched a different part of an elephant and gave completely different descriptions of what an elephant is. But reality cannot be grasped like an immediate intuition, nor can it be manipulated; it is, like the elephant, an awesome affair larger than any single individual or experience. If the blind men had followed Peirce’s theory of reality they would have seen that an elephant is what they and anyone else, as a community of inquirers, would have *agreed upon* after sufficient inquiry, and not what they directly “grasped”;

On the one hand, reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it; . . . on the other hand, though the object of the final opinion depends on what that opinion is, yet what that opinion is does not depend on what you or I or any man thinks. (Peirce, 1931-35: Vol. 5.408.)

It is true, as the authors say, that at the time of his death Mead was groping for a more expanded view of community, but it is important to see that Mead most likely was influenced by his former teacher Josiah Royce, who Hegelianized Peirce’s notion of community, rather than directly by Peirce.

When Lewis and Smith say on page 130 that ultimately meaning must be based on the non-mental, and that this is the basis of Peirce's, as well as Mead's, realism, they are stating the very nominalism against which all of Peirce's philosophy is built! A nominalist is one who believes that the truly real exists outside of signs in individual instances, whereas a Peircean realist is one who believes that reality is of the nature of a sign or general, that it is cognizable, and that nature itself is general. In Peirce's words generality is:

... an indispensable ingredient of reality; for mere individual existence or actuality without any regularity whatever is a nullity... Accordingly, the pragmatist does not make the *summum bonum* to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be *destined*, which is what we strive to express in calling them *reasonable*. In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control, and this gives the pragmatist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general (Peirce, 1931-35: Vol.5. 431, 433).

The reality of the word "hardness" consists in the possible conceivable consequences that the meaning of the word entails, in other words, the law it describes and not just individual occurrences. It even includes untested diamonds, formed and extinguished without ever being measured to compare them with the known hardness of diamonds—without ever having an actual "contact experience"—because reality in Peirce's view is of the nature of a conditional, a "would-be," a "thirdness," a sign (Peirce, 1931-35: Vol. 5.457). Peirce's argument for this position rests on the very "infinite regress" the authors fear: there is no first cognition (or intuition, in its technical sense) but only a continuous sign process; there is no final intuition (or Heglian Absolute) but only a continuous convergence of the sign process of inquiry with the real, in other words, "concrete reasonableness." Thus although Peirce is a realist and James is a nominalist, Lewis and Smith are quite wrong about Mead, who would be a nominalist by their argument, and Dewey, whose later philosophy explicitly moves toward Peircean realism. In fact, a strong argument can be made that Mead's conception of scientific inquiry and even his philosophy of the act is heavily influenced by Dewey.

Yet it remains inaccurate to say, as the authors do, that the contact experience provides the foundation for Mead's theory of reality. If this were true he certainly would be a nominalist, but, despite a frequent lack of clarity in his writings, Mead, like Dewey, sought a philosophy in the direction of a social view of reality similar to Peirce's. Mead's touchstone for reality is not so much the "contact experience" as it is "the objective reality of perspectives." In an article of the same title he struck a very Peircean chord when he said:

What has happened in all of these instances, ... is that the rejected perspective fails to agree with that common perspective which the individual finds himself occupying as a member of the community of minds, which is constitutive of his self. This is not a case of the surrender to a vote of the majority, but the development of another self through its intercourse with others and hence with himself.

What I am suggesting is that this process, in which a perspective ceases to be objective, becomes if you like subjective, and in which new common minds and new common perspectives arise, is an instance of the organization of perspectives in nature, of the creative advance of nature. (Mead, 1964: 315-16.)

Mead's emphasis on the objective reality of perspectives, as well as his attempt to locate perspectives and possibility within nature—to view nature itself as general—together

constitute Mead's closest links to Peircean realism. He nevertheless falls short, in my opinion, in viewing reality as fully determinate rather than as conditional, that is, as involving possibility (cf. Mead, 1964: 316-319). The "conditional" view extends beyond a "social behaviorism" to include possibility itself as real, though not itself an actual "behavior." This view is exemplified by Peirce's pragmatic maxim that the meaning of a sign (i.e., thought or conduct) is not exhausted by determinate acts of behavior, but includes all possible *conceivable* effects on future conduct as well.

Throughout *AS and P* one gets the impression that accounts of human social life or psychology that make any use of biology are hopelessly doomed to the dustbin of "nominalism." Thus James and Dewey continuously are portrayed as biological reductionists who see Darwinian individualism as the core concept over which the inessential level of the social may be placed. Peirce and Mead, by contrast, appear to have no interest in biology whatsoever. Once again the dichotomous distortions enter in, making it appear that the attempt by *all* the pragmatists to develop a view of mind as continuous with nature, and a thoroughly *social* view of evolution, is merely a symptom of the wrongheadedness of James and Dewey, rather than one of the greater, and as yet not fully appreciated, contributions of pragmatism to modern thought.

Peirce did not resort to nominalistic dichotomizing in his own view of evolution. He criticized Darwinism for many of the reasons Lewis and Smith note in their book, but he also regarded the theory of evolution as a valuable contribution nonetheless. Peirce viewed Darwinism as only a partial view of evolution, one that emphasized chance, and that corresponded to his own category of "firstness." He suggested that two other contemporary theories included elements omitted in Darwin's system: Clarence King's "cataclysmal evolution," which accounted for sudden changes of environment as having dramatic effects within a relatively short time (and which corresponded to Peirce's category of brute existence or "secondness") and Lamarck's theory of acquired characteristics, which accounted for the role of habit and culture (and which corresponded to Peirce's "thirdness"). One of Peirce's major contributions to the logic of science was the introduction of what he termed "abduction"—or hypothesis formation—as a valid form of inference not reducible to deduction or induction. Not only did Peirce's theory of abduction hold that human nature is inquisitive, but that we possess an instinctive tendency to make right guesses, to perceive nature's laws. There is a clear continuity between Peirce's theory of abduction, Dewey's "problem finding" as the first stage of an inquiry, Mead's discussion of the "problematic situation," and even Blumer's "sensitizing concepts."

Despite differences, Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead stand out as critics, more or less successful, of the nominalistic "spectator" view of knowledge as something apart from living inquiry, a view so characteristic of modern thought. If there be a common theme among them, instead of the great divide alleged by Lewis and Smith, it is the shared emphasis that meaning is determined by its consequences, that these consequences are to be found within the aims of the community, and that these aims are capable of correction and growth. This broad sense of *pragmatic* is closer to Aristotle's conception of *praxis*, as the cultivation of a way of life aimed toward the good life within and for the community, than it is to the modern sense of "expedience."

Having "periodicized" the pragmatists according to the realist - nominalist distinction, the authors go on in part 2 to apply it to the Department of Sociology at the University of

Chicago, in order to determine the actual extent of Mead's influence. Although they claim throughout to be using an a-historical "metatheoretical" approach (p. 9), perhaps the latent methodological strength of the book is their willingness to use *varied methods*—philosophical analysis, textual criticism, quantitative indicators, personal reminiscences—to help them to reconstruct a detailed history. The use of these different methodologies is in theory more "realistic" than an a priori approach, because it subjects the premisses to testing and modification.

In chapter six an intellectual history of Chicago sociology is traced in which it is argued that, "a social nominalistic metatheoretical orientation predominated during the early years (1892 until roughly 1916), and that social realism emerged from certain corners of Chicago sociology from 1920 onward" (p. 154). Because primary emphasis is placed on those sociologists who shaped the theoretical orientation of the department, important contributions in the general history of Chicago sociology, such as the methodological innovations in the demography, ecology, and observation of urban life, are not considered. Yet many of those methodological innovators were also social theorists, for example, Park or Thomas, and their theories were tempered by what they observed.

Albion Small, the first chair of this first graduate department of sociology in the United States, and who remained so until his retirement in 1923, is seen as representative of the early "social forces" approach. This perspective attempted to make use of the insights of the emerging Darwinian view of human society, while avoiding purely biological reduction, by arguing that inner "social forces" shape behavior as well as purely biological forces or instincts. Small criticized Herbert Spencer's sociology for its tendency to see human beings as mere "cogs in a social machinery" or cells in an organism, and the authors in turn criticize Small for his individualism and social Darwinism. Underlying social acts are the social forces Small called interests - health, wealth, sociability, knowledge, beauty, and rightness. One can see how the view of the social as a mere combination of individual facts might ignore the inherently social nature of human communication, but it would have been interesting to see how the authors would have dealt with Peirce's idea that humans have an instinctive capacity for the last three of Small's interests—Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.

The next phase in Chicago sociology is the rise of the "psychical interactionists"—such as W.I. Thomas, C.H. Cooley (a major influence on the department, though he was at the University of Michigan), Charles Ellwood, and Herbert Blumer. The psychical interactionists represent an advance over the social forces group, because of their emphasis on interaction and communication as the locus of society, but one by one they too are dispatched by the authors for their nominalism. Cooley is no longer widely read, although his understanding of human nature remains an important insight yet to be fully utilized by sociologists. Thomas's discussions of the "situation" as the determinant of meaning have been incorporated into symbolic interactionism, and Lewis and Smith argue that this has led to unnecessary subjectivism by contemporary practitioners. Herbert Blumer, who coined the term "symbolic interaction" and championed Mead as the guiding light of this approach, is probably the most influential exponent of the psychical interactionists today.

Lately Blumer has been fair game for the "Urbana-ist" sociologists, as seen in articles by Huber (1973a,b), Lewis (1976, 1977), and McPhail and Rexroat (1979, 1980). Lewis and Smith continue the attack, criticizing Blumer for being a nominalist who has distorted,

rather than represented, Mead. Although I agree with them that Blumer is perhaps ultimately a nominalist, and that it is possible to read his own symbolic interactionism as overly subjective, it does seem to me that Lewis and Smith ignore and distort some of Blumer's valuable, and interestingly enough, realistic contributions to sociological thought. They attack Blumer's emphasis on "interpretation" by saying,

Recall that, for Mead, the meaning of a significant symbol consists in the common attitude the interactants take toward the gesture; furthermore, this taking of the attitude of the other toward one's own gesture is, for Mead, a covert, physiological, habitual response. It is thus *not* a mentalistic or conscious process. . . . Mead views this as an automatic conditioned physiological reaction, and thus does not require Blumer's "interpretative" process of taking account of goals and intentions. (pp. 171, 175.)

Unfortunately, if this were true, Mead then also would not require Peirce's "interpretant," which is an essential element of every sign, and which is certainly not an "automatic conditioned physiological reaction" to a *significant* symbol (the authors are perhaps confusing Mead's gesture, which is roughly equivalent to Peirce's "indexical sign," with Mead's level of significant symbol, which corresponds to Peirce's "symbolic sign"). In fact, the argument against interpretation presented in this section is itself a form of nominalism directly opposed to Peirce's theory of signs discussed so well in chapter 2. Moreover, this is not consistent with their own criticism that Dewey is only interested in transforming the world and *not* interpreting it (p. 101).

Another important contribution of Blumer that Lewis and Smith miss because of their effort to portray him as an individualist is his emphasis on the fact that social processes are not carried on in the abstract, but are embodied in the living, feeling, interpretive processes of responsible agents. Blumer's discussion of the social nature of individuals is certainly not significantly different from Ellsworth Faris's "The Nature of Human Nature," yet the authors claim that Faris was a social realist crying in the wilderness of nominalism at Chicago. It is an exaggeration for them to say, "There is no place in Blumer's theory for Mead's generalized other—only flesh-and-blood others figure in calculating one's actions" (p. 174)—as if the generalized other were a bloodless abstraction instead of a living presence. Perhaps Blumer's language is at times excessively individualistic, but it is obvious that his targets for criticism are the dehumanizers, the specialists without spirit, who gave to the world a view of society virtually devoid of any flesh and blood whatsoever. It is this excessive reductionism that Blumer's voice has cried out against, and yet his call is not merely against empiricism, but for a view that is *more* empirical, that includes *more* of what constitutes human experience (e.g., Blumer, 1969: 174-82). I, for one, do not see how a nominalistic physiology of meaning, which Lewis and Smith seem to be calling for, could alone accomplish this.

The mid-1920s finally signalled an intrusion of social realism at Chicago in figures such as Edward Hayes, Walter Bodenhafer, Ellsworth Faris, and especially Robert Park and his classic sociology text written with Ernest Burgess. It was not clear to me from the discussion why Hayes, Bodenhafer, and Faris should be considered realists in the Peircean sense the authors themselves propose, simply because they emphasize "relationships between structural units" (p. 181), "interwoven *activities*" (p. 182), "the normal human tendency to converse with one's self" (p. 187), or even "the swing to the social interpretation of the origin of the mind both phylogenetically and ontogenetically" (p. 183 - this last

being precisely the point Peirce criticized the early Dewey for as being nominalistic; see Peirce, 1958: 8.239-244). A relativist could believe in this kind of sociality just as well as a realist. It would appear the authors are here accepting the Park and Burgess (1970:36) discussion of the realism - nominalism issue, rather than the Peircean realism discussed earlier, in which the real is unaffected by how individuals or groups think about it, and is the ultimate end that determines all human action. Park's and Burgess's *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, which appeared in 1921, is seen as another major point in an increasing move toward social realism, despite the fact that selections from Dewey, Cooley and Thomas are used, while Mead is conspicuously absent. The main influence of social realism derives from "Park's European social realism" (p.185), meaning primarily Simmel, with whom Park studied, and Durkheim. Yet both of these philosopher-sociologists were heavily influenced by Kant, and despite the unquestioned value of their work, and the important differences between each, both stressed a radical separation of form from content that makes their sociologies decidedly nominalistic. When Simmel stresses that sociology is only concerned with the forms of social interaction, and not the contents, is this significantly different from "psychical interactionism?"

The truly strange fact that Lewis and Smith draw attention to is the relative invisibility of Mead in all this ferment. James (primarily through Cooley) and Dewey clearly had an effect on sociological thought in Chicago, but Mead, who was actually there throughout this period, seems to have been a much more marginal figure. Did Mead audit any of Simmel's classes while living in Berlin and learn from this marginal figure how not to appeal to one's sociological contemporaries?

The question of Mead's direct empirical influence on faculty and student sociologists at Chicago is taken up in two quantitatively documented chapters and another chapter devoted to recollections of former sociology graduate students. This documentation provides interesting information and disputable conclusions.

Mead was comparatively popular among sociology students, though the majority of them did not register for courses with him and those that did tended to enroll in his social psychology courses. The enrollment data indicated that Mead declined in popularity after 1920, yet one wonders how much of this might have been due to the progressive institutionalization of courses in the sociology department. Mead's social recognition, as indicated by citations in dissertations, actually began to increase after 1925, and he received more citations than any other active non-sociology faculty member at Chicago. Mead was exceeded in dissertation citations by two well-known former faculty members (who both studied with Peirce at Johns Hopkins University), John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen. Dewey's influence is attributed merely to the nominalistic leanings of the sociology department, yet again I would urge the authors to revise their revision of Dewey and his impact on Chicago sociology. The Dewey of the Park and Burgess text, to take the most prominent example, seems to me to be anything but an individualist.

Lewis and Smith try to show that Mead did not have widespread importance among sociology graduate students, although some were strongly influenced by him. This raised the question for me of whether there was something distinctive about those students who were influenced by Mead. Was it because they tended to be social psychologists, while the others were not? It would have been helpful to know more about how specialized sociology students were expected to be and what the structural requirements of the

department were at that time. Lewis and Smith also use citations of Mead in the articles and books of sociologists to show how little recognition he received. His recognition did begin to increase from 1924 onward, although they conclude that Mead only had minimal influence on American sociology during his lifetime. Statements such as C.J. Bittner's memorial article (p. 215), or Harold Lasswell's 1929 chapter on Mead (pp. 221-22), suggest to me that Mead was at least in the air, influencing sociologists, if not in print in their citations of him.

Chapter 9, which involves recollections of former graduate students, illustrates the methodological difficulty in trying to determine what constitutes "influence." "Without exception," to cite one example, all thirty-six of these former students had heard of Mead after beginning their graduate work. Thirty-seven per cent actually had enrolled in Mead's social psychology course, and another 28 percent had audited it or attended an occasional lecture, for a total of 65 per cent (by which they mean to say twenty-three persons) having at least some direct contact. From this the authors conclude: "Evidence from this research finds no support for the myths of universal enrollment and Mead's widespread popularity" (p. 238). What, then, would be an acceptable percentage for determining significant influence? Surely they do not mean "universal enrollment" in the literal sense of 100 percent, do they? This also raises the question, How does a major figure influence students? Is not the belief that they did incorporate Mead's ideas into their own sociological thinking in some ways a stronger statement than explicit enrollment or citation? Thus although the authors attempt to determine what explicit influence Mead actually had on Chicago sociology, there remains an elusive quality in some of the recollections and other materials that suggest Mead might have had considerable *implicit* influence at the least. One is left with the sense of a certain inflexibility in the indicators used, especially considering the vast amount of materials from the Mead and other archives at the University of Chicago that do not appear to have been tapped. Although the authors claim that Mead had very little contact with the sociology department, there is ample evidence of close personal and intellectual contact between Mead and Thomas (Orbach, personal communication. See Orbach's forthcoming biography of Mead).

Lewis's and Smith's history only extends until 1935, yet there is a suggestion of a future work that will extend the history of American sociology. One question I would like to see them address is whether the turn to empirical research procedures ushers in a more realistic sociology, or, as Donald Levine (1971:lvii) has suggested, a radical diminution of thought. It will be interesting to see how this history is reconstructed in light of the realism - nominalism question, especially because the authors tend not to focus on the *methods* of Chicago sociologists as reflecting their epistemological positions. Another question that never quite surfaces in the book is: Just how did Mead come to be regarded as a central figure in American sociology? One possible, and very obvious, reason why Mead was not as profound an influence on the early Chicago sociology department as is usually thought, is that he did not write clearly. Despite the importance of his ideas, Mead's own writings (not to mention the lecture notes for *Mind, Self, and Society*) are often simply opaque, and Lewis and Smith are yet another example of commentators who frequently write more clearly than Mead himself. Rightly or wrongly, they handle tough ideas in clear fashion (though the text is marred by quite a number of typographical errors and omissions).

AS and P challenges us to think deeply about an intellectual history that too often has

been accepted as merely a mythological given. Although I sympathize with Lewis's and Smith's attempt to criticize the excessive subjectivism in much of recent symbolic interactionism, I have grave reservations concerning the argument they use to revise the traditions of pragmatism and Chicago sociology. The argument seems not so much a *revision* of pragmatism's and Mead's influence as a *reaction* to the recent subjectivism of symbolic interactionism. Yet as William James said:

The real way of rescue from the abstract consequences of one name is not to fly to an opposite name, equally abstract, but rather to correct the first name by qualifying adjectives that restore some concreteness to the case. . . . Only when we know what the process of interaction literally and concretely *consists* in can we tell whether beings independent in *definite respects*, distinct, for example, in origin, separate in place, different in kind, etc., can or cannot interact. (James, 1977:32.)

The question is whether Lewis and Smith correct the subjectivist tendencies of symbolic interactionism or merely replace them with an equally subjective view of what constitutes objectivity: individual reaction with an object. *American Sociology and Pragmatism* tends to present a monistic universe hinging on a nominalistic interpretation of realism, a single-voiced view that places more emphasis on labels than on the substance and pragmatic import of a theorist's thoughts, resulting in serious distortions pro and con. Yet it also has opened up for serious questioning the whole foundations of symbolic interactionism and Mead's place within pragmatism and Chicago sociology. Though the authors claim to be "revisionists," it seems to me that they are also "fundamentalists" in safely preserving Mead at the center of a history they claim he did not significantly influence. In my opinion the ongoing controversy will result in a broader understanding of the antecedents of contemporary symbolic interactionism, one that will call for Mead's now dominating role as the sole representative of pragmatism for many American sociologists to be reevaluated and placed within the context of the quite substantial contributions of Peirce, James, and Dewey.

As David Miller (1973: xiii, n2) reports, Peirce was a candidate for a position in the new philosophy department at the University of Chicago, but unfortunately his chances were destroyed due to the pettiness of some of his contemporaries, such as G.H. Palmer, who blackballed him because of his "broken and dissolute character," perhaps referring to his divorce years earlier, or to his no-nonsense personality. One wonders at the influence Peirce might have had on Dewey and Mead, Chicago sociology, and American thought in general, had the three of them been colleagues at Chicago. One of the hidden messages of *American Sociology and Pragmatism* is that there may be as yet possibilities of pragmatic thought for contemporary sociology that we are only beginning to realize.

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