
Beyond the Social Mind: New Perspectives on the Philosophy of George Herbert Mead

Roman Madzia*¹, Guido Baggio*², Filipe Silva*³, and Lenart škof*⁴

¹Universität Koblenz * Landau [Koblenz] – Universitätsstraße 1 56070 Koblenz Postfach 201602 56016
Koblenz, Germany

²Università Pontificia Salesiana – Italy

³Universidade de Lisboa – Portugal

⁴University of Primorska – Slovenia

Abstract

General abstract:

George Herbert Mead is, arguably, one of the most underappreciated American philosophers of the last century. Along with Peirce, James, and Dewey – Mead belongs to the canon of American pragmatism, especially due to his work in social psychology and theory of symbolic communication. In his philosophy and social psychology, Mead tried to come up with a naturalist account of how human beings acquire minds (and selfhood) in the process of bodily gestural communication. Since Mead's death in 1931, his works deeply influenced the research in disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociology, symbolic anthropology and behavioral sciences. During his lifetime, Mead (similarly to Peirce) had not published any philosophical monograph. What we have from his legacy is a number of journal articles, an unfinished book (*Philosophy of the Present*) and students' notes from the university lectures that he gave (most notably *Mind, Self, and Society*). Because of its novelty, depth and, at the same time, openness for different interpretations – Mead's intellectual legacy has been developed in the abovementioned disciplines in multiple creative ways (e.g. symbolic interactionism in sociology, development of the sense of self in social psychology, etc.). Since, as mentioned above, many of these once novel approaches, have made it to the standard conceptual apparatus of the individual disciplines, the panelists do not want to focus on those, but, to the contrary – they would like to offer *new, fruitful perspectives* and areas of research in which Mead's work can be creatively applied. Thus, remaining firmly anchored in the conceptual landscape of Mead's philosophy, the panelists are going to present innovative ways of applying Mead in fields as diverse as philosophy of mind, economics, moral theory, and sociology of material culture.

In this regard, the presentation of **Roman Madzia** is going to focus on the relevance of Mead's naturalist philosophy of the act' to the contemporary debate in cognitive sciences (embodied cognition). In his paper, Madzia will use Mead's theory of the emergence of language in embodied social activities (supported by latest developments in cognitive science), to debunk the neo-pragmatist intellectualist contention according to which the world is cognitively accessible only as mediated by means of language. In effect, Madzia's discussion of the abovementioned subject-matters will be an empirically-informed pragmatist critique of neo-pragmatism.

*Speaker

Empirical research in cognitive sciences (and the new credibility it gives to numerous Mead's theories) will also be one of the central point of interest of **Guido Baggio's** presentation – this time over, in the area emerging field of the so-called neuroeconomics'. Baggio's primary interest will be challenging the classical intellectualist (rationality-based and individual-oriented) concept of economic behavior in favor of a model, which necessarily always takes into account others in making its reflective decisions. On a host of examples, Baggio will venture to demonstrate the extent to which current empirical research into real economic behavior of socially-situated agents accords with Mead's theories pertaining to the nature of social behavior and cooperation of human beings. Thus, Mead's concept of empathy will become a general theoretical underpinning, explaining the empirical data we have been obtaining in the area of neuro-economics.

In **Filipe da Silva's** paper, his previous extensive work on Mead will be used to deal with the problem of canon-creation in sociology. In his treatment of canon-creation, da Silva will refuse to follow the classical path focusing either on abstract concepts (e.g. 'class', etc.), theoretical constructions (functionalist sociology), or external historical and economic factors influencing the work of sociologists. Central to the practice of theorizing, as he will argue, will be the documents in which the concepts and theories are inscribed and made publicly available. In sociology, the central documents tend not to be short-lived journal articles, but certain research monographs. Da Silva is going to propose to address the sociological canon as a sort of inverted utopia, a projection into the past of the discipline of each generation's future aspirations. This process will be demonstrated on the example of Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* (ed. by Ch. W. Morris). On that note and from the point of view of Mead-studies, Da Silva's presentation, is of high actuality as a new critical edition of *Mind, Self, and Society* is currently being prepared by Hans Joas and Daniel Huebner (on Mead and material culture, see also Huebner's *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge*, Chicago University Press 2014).

In turn, **Lenart Škof's** presentation takes a novel perspective on Mead from the point of view of contemporary ethics and politics. His presentation titled "Space, Epistemology, Touch: Three Meadian Meditations", Skof is going to creatively confront different facets of Mead's philosophy with phenomenological conceptions of intersubjectivity by thinkers like Louis Chrétien and Watsuji Tetsurō. Further, he is going to build on these reflections by analyzing Mead's accentuation of the importance of haptic experience for the construction of an intersubjective space, in which humans, as embodied beings, interact with one another. From this common ground, Skof is going to present interesting points of intersection between the Western and the Eastern conceptions of ethical intersubjectivity based on the concept of touch.

The panel, as a whole, has the common aim of presenting new perspectives on Mead's philosophy and psychology in very diverse areas of research. Taking a firm stance in Mead's naturalist philosophy of action and meaning creation, it takes Mead's seminal ideas in very different directions and shows the immense and, thus far, undiscovered potential which Mead's unfinished work can bear for dealing with the problems of our present.

Words and Worlds: Revisiting the Relation between Language and Experience

Dr. Roman Madzia

Affiliation: University of Koblenz-Landau, GER

Sympathy and Empathy. Mead and the pragmatist basis of Neuroeconomics

Dr. Guido Baggio

Affiliation: Pontifical Salesian University, Rome, IT

Exploring the materiality of meaning production: The case of G.H. Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society*

Dr. Filipe Carreira da Silva

Affiliation: University of Lisbon, PT

Space, Epistemology, Touch: Three Meadian Meditations

Dr. Lenart Škof

Affiliation: University of Primorska, SLO

Keywords: Goerge Herbert Mead, pragmatism, embodiment, intersubjectivity