

George herbert mead
early life sociology
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Higher Education

Mead graduated from Oberlin College in 1883 and matriculated at Harvard from 1887-1888 where he studying philosophy and sociology and graduated with a Master's degree.

Although he belonged to a deeply religious family, Mead became a devout naturalist and non-believer after attending college.

After leaving Harvard, he participated in many causes and was an ardent activist of any progressive causes.

He marched in favour of the women's suffragette and took part in several civic duties in Chicago.

The Chicago Philosophers' Club

1896

Mead was influenced by Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution which is evident in his theories as a naturalist.

At Harvard, Mead studied with Josiah Royce who was a major influence in his life, and William James, whose children he tutored.

In 1888, Mead left Harvard and travelled to Germany.

There, he studied with psychologist Wilhelm Wundt who was his influence for the concept of "the gesture," which would soon be an important aspect of his work.

In 1891 he married Helen Kingsbury Castle.

He taught at the University of Michigan and then the University of California.

Mead wrote intensively over a 40-year career, however he didn't publish any books.

He published over 100 scholarly articles.

Mead died of heart failure on April 26, 1931.

Following his death, his students put together a collection of his notes, unpublished letters and lessons, and finally published a book of his thoughts and teachings.

Epistemology & Ontology

He observed that people acquired knowledge about behavior based on what they observe and acquire from society.

The principle of sociality is the ontological foundation of Mead's concept. The distinction between mind and matter and that between consciousness and the physiological organism is a distinction which is drawn between contents which may appear on either side of the line.

Mead noted that there is more than what meets in the eye in terms of human interactions. This means, that there are reasons behind certain actions, which can be brought out through micro-investigations of human interaction.

People who influenced Mead

Mead was influenced by his friend John Dewey who led him into educational theory. However Mead's thinking diverged from that of Dewey and he developed the famous psychological theories of mind, self and society.

This idea was also greatly influenced by Wilhelm Wundt; who Mead met when he went to Germany to study psychology

At Harvard, Mead studied with an American idealist philosopher Josiah Royce who also was an influence.

Mead was influenced by Adam Smith and thus identified the social act of economic exchange.

In Mead's writing " ' I ' and the ' Me ' " Mead takes William James's distinction between the ' I ' and the ' Me ' and develops it further. William James was a renowned pragmatist philosopher.

The prominent sociologist Charles Cooley (A philosopher) also influenced Mead's thinking.

People who were influenced by Mead

Herbert Blumer, a sociologist who studied at the University of Chicago was influenced by Mead. He took over Mead's lecturing responsibilities and went on to chair the Department of Sociology at the University of California Berkeley. He is often referred to as the heir of George Herbert Mead.

During the second half of the twentieth Century, Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism was separated into two distinct branches : The Chicago school

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under Herbert Blumer and the Iowa school under Manford Kuhn. Both of whom were influenced by Mead.

Norman Denzin and Sheldon Stryker also continued to develop the Symbolic Interactionism theory of Mead.

Ervin Goffman's so-called "dramaturgical sociology" is also highly influenced by Mead.

Major Publications

Mind, Self, and Society (1934)

The Philosophy of the Act (1938)

The Philosophy of the Present (1932)

Basic Sociological Concepts

Double Centre of Gravity

Taking the role of the other

Self Development

The Self

The self emerges from social experience

Individual selves are the products of social interaction and not the biological or logical preconditions of the mentioned interaction

Hence The self is not part of the body, and it does not exist at birth

Explaining further – in the absence of social interaction (i. e. isolated children) the body may grow but no self will develop.

Social experience involves communication and exchange of symbols

Dog example – A dog responds to what you do, but humans respond to what you have in mind as you do it.

Social interaction involves seeing ourselves as others see us – taking the role of the other (Mead).

Double Centre of Gravity

In Mead's concept of the self, he expressed Double Centre of Gravity by dividing the self in to the " I" and the " Me".

The I and the Me

The " I" and the " Me" are derived from the self.

The Self is the relationship between " I" and " Me"

The " Me" is the internalization of others' perspective of ourselves – the perspective we get of ourselves from how others treat and interact with us.

The " I" is the part of us that responds to these internalized attitudes.

Explaining further the " Me" is the social self that takes into account the reactions of others, while the " I" is the indistinctive part of the self which has ideas and imagination and is independent to social norms.

Taking the role of the other

Mead suggested that socialization derived primarily from people's ability to take the role of the other.

Taking the role of the other means putting yourself in another person's place to think/reflect about yourself.

Taking the role of the other helps to integrate the individual with organized social processes

By taking the role of the other, Mead meant putting oneself in the place of another individual in such a manner that one arouses the same response in both.

Self Development

According to Mead, developing the self is learning to take the role of the other

The first stage is "Prep"

Children imitate and begin to understand symbols such as languages and gestures

The Second Stage is "Play"

Children role-play and pretend to be another person. Play involves assuming roles of significant others, helping kids see the world from others' points of view.

The Third stage is "Game"

Children, at 7 or 8 begin to understand others roles and responsibilities, making games possible.

The fundamental difference between the game stage and its antecedent play stage lies in the child's ability to take the roles of multiple people at the same time

Generalized Other

The norms, values, attitudes and expectations of people “ in general;” the child's ability to take the role of generalized other is a significant step in the development of a self.

The individual defines his or her own behavior with reference to the generalized attitude of the social group(s) they occupy.

Significant other

An Individual who significantly influences someone else's life. i. e. Individuals who are most important in development of the self. (e. g. parent)

MEAD'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Mead is one of the most influential and acclaimed sociologist of the 20th Century

Praised by Critics throughout the world as a pioneer and a Stalwart

Has had several books published posthumously about his teachings

“ the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings”

(Mead 1982: 5)

CRITICISM

THE END