



G.H. Mead

Filipe Carreira da Silva

LAST MODIFIED: 30 SEPTEMBER 2013

DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199756384-0141

Introduction

George Herbert Mead was born on 27 February 1863, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, the son of a clergyman, Hiram Mead. In 1869, the family moved to Oberlin, Ohio, where his father took a chair at the Theological Seminary of Oberlin College. Between 1880 and 1883, Mead studied in Oberlin College where he met two students from Hawaii, Henry and Helen Castle. In 1887, after brief work experience as a railway surveyor and a private tutor, Mead followed Henry Castle into Harvard University to study philosophy. His stay at Harvard, however, did not last. In the autumn of 1888, Mead travelled to Germany, where he first studied at the University of Leipzig and subsequently at prestigious Humboldt University, Berlin, where he studied under Wilhelm Dilthey, his prospective PhD supervisor. Mead, however, never completed his PhD project. In the summer of 1891, John Dewey offered him a post as instructor in psychology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In 1891, Mead married Henry's sister Helen. A year later, their only child, Henry Castle Albert Mead, was born. In 1894, Mead followed Dewey to the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago, where he would remain until his death in 1931. One of the most influential American thinkers of the 20th century, Mead is studied for his contributions to social psychology, philosophical pragmatism, and social theory, in particular to symbolic interactionism and pragmatic sociology.

General Overviews

This section includes the key introductory texts to Mead's life and work. It comprehends both specialized collected volumes and introductions oriented to a more general public. In Early Introductions to Mead, the late 1960s intellectual histories Rucker 1969 and Thayer 1968 exerted a much more pronounced influence than the collected volumes Corti 1973 and Aboulafia 1991, cited under Collected Volumes. Textbooks encompasses more recent and accessible works, such as Baldwin 1986, De Waal 2002, and Silva 2007, mainly oriented to an undergraduate audience. Taken together, and despite their different natures and goals, these works are a crucial entry point to Mead's thought.

Early Introductions to Mead

In this section, one finds introductory texts on Mead, including Rucker 1969 and Thayer 1968, both of which were widely in use throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Rucker, Darnell. 1969. *The Chicago pragmatists*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Rucker's intellectual history of Chicago-style pragmatism provides a multi-layered portrait of Mead and his contributions alongside other contemporary figures such as John Dewey, James T. Tufts, James Rowland Angell, and W. I. Thomas. Its balanced combination of theoretical reflection with historical analysis proves a valuable precursor for later Mead scholarship (see Major Book-Length Studies and Collections).

Thayer, H. S. 1968. *Meaning and action: A critical history of pragmatism*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.

Mead figures as one of the key figures of American pragmatism in this pragmatist-oriented intellectual history. Thayer's treatment of Mead is fair and sympathetic. By now largely outdated, this volume exerted significant influence in the 1970s and 1980s (see Major Book-Length Studies and Collections).

Collected Volumes

By contrast to Rucker 1969 and Thayer 1968 (both cited under Early Introductions to Mead), Aboulafia 1991 and especially Corti 1973 only reached a very specialized audience.

Aboulafia, Mitchell, ed. 1991. *Philosophy, social theory and the thought of George Herbert Mead*. Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press.

Aboulafia's efforts to put together the best collection ever assembled of essays on Mead bore fruit. This volume gathers previously published pieces by key Continental European and North American social thinkers, including among others Habermas, Tugendhat, Joas, Cook, and Aboulafia himself. It remains of great interest to both students and Mead scholars alike.

Corti, Walter Robert, ed. 1973. *The philosophy of George Herbert Mead*. Amriswil, Switzerland: Amriswiler Bücherei.

The first collected volume on Mead's thinking includes the proceedings of a seminar held by the "Archiv für genetische Philosophie," in the summer of 1970 at the Academy of Philosophy at Winterthur, Switzerland. The most relevant papers are by Van Meter Ames and David L. Miller. Includes a bibliography of Mead's writings by John Albin Broyer. Of limited interest for readers today.

Textbooks

As far as undergraduate textbooks are concerned, Baldwin 1986 and de Waal 2002 currently dominate the North American market, whereas Silva 2007 is the preferred choice in Britain and Continental Europe. See Hannan 2008 for a journal article that offers an accessible introduction to the life and work of Mead. In short, there is no lack of good introductions to Mead's ideas.

Baldwin, John D. 1986. *George Herbert Mead. A unifying theory for sociology*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Accessible yet comprehensive summary of Mead's ideas in context. Particular emphasis is given to Mead's pragmatist lineage. Doing justice to the book's subtitle, the systematic character of Mead's theorizing (with overemphasis on his behaviorism) is firmly asserted and copiously illustrated. Good, solid introduction.

De Waal, Cornelis. 2002. *On Mead*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

In fewer than ninety pages, De Waal manages to synthesize the entirety of Mead's philosophical system in a readable, rigorous way. Drawbacks include an over-reliance upon the posthumously published volumes in the 1930s (see Mead's Works) at the expense of Mead's published writings. Of interest to undergraduate students.

Hannan, Jason. 2008. The intellectual legacy of George Herbert Mead. *Intellectual History Review* 18.2: 207–224.

A review of the main findings of the existing literature on Mead, Hannan's article offers an accessible introduction to Mead's biography and contemporary influence. Useful and reliable.

Silva, Filipe Carreira da. 2007. *G. H. Mead. A critical introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Not merely a summary of Mead's ideas, this book proposes an original interpretation by drawing upon both published and unpublished sources. It provides a comprehensive yet accessible introduction to Mead's life and work. The current standard textbook on Mead.

Data Sources

This section includes the most relevant online sources on Mead. *The Guide to the George Herbert Mead Papers* (University of Chicago Library 2006, only the finding aid is online) and the Mead Project 2.0 are the most important. Other sources include online encyclopedia entries *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Aboulafia 2012) and *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Cronk 2005), as well as online discussion platforms (Pragmatism Cybrary and the George Herbert Mead Discussion List).

Aboulafia, Mitchell. 2012. George Herbert Mead. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta.

Consistent and reliable, a useful online entry on Mead's life and work.

Cronk, George. 2005. George Herbert Mead. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden.

Long, detailed, and competent entry.

George Herbert Mead Discussion List.

For Mead enthusiasts only.

Mead Project 2.0.

Last updated in October 2007. The most complete online repository of Mead's writings.

Pragmatism Cybrary.

The online meeting point for all pragmatist inclined scholars, Mead enthusiasts included

University of Chicago Library. 2006. *Guide to the George Herbert Mead Papers*.

The pilgrimage site for Mead scholars since its creation in the 1970s, the George Herbert Mead Papers Archive is held at the Special Collections Research Center of the Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago. Its online finding aid remains an indispensable tool for the Mead scholar, at least until a complete edition of Mead's papers is published.

Mead's Works

Despite the lasting influence of his ideas, Mead never published a book in his lifetime. All book-length studies by Mead were

published posthumously. Mead 1967a is composed of stenographic transcriptions of his lectures; Mead 1972 and Mead 1967b comprise student notes and/or miscellaneous pieces; Mead 1959 is an assemblage of conference notes; and Mead 1964, Mead 2008, and Mead 2010 are collections of articles. Mead and Castle 2013 is notable exception to this—a private edition by Mead and his wife of the correspondence of Henry Castle, his best friend at Oberlin College and brother-in-law. Mead Project 2.0 (cited under Data Sources) is an online source for the complete bibliography of works published by Mead, currently including over one hundred items. A collection of papers by Mead, both published and unpublished, as well as lecture notes and personal correspondence, is available at the Special Collections Department of the Regenstein Library, at the University of Chicago (University of Chicago Library 2006, cited under Data Sources). Joas 1985, Cook 1993 and Silva 2008 (all cited under Major Book-Length Studies and Collections) include previous complete lists of Mead's works.

Mead, George Herbert. 1959. *The philosophy of the present*. Edited by Arthur E. Murphy, with prefatory remarks by John Dewey. New York: Open Court.

In this volume, Murphy assembles the Carus Lectures Mead delivered in California in December 1930 (chapters 1 through 4), two preliminary drafts of those same lectures (the first three of the Supplementary Essays), and two previously published pieces. Despite its unrevised nature, this volume is of central importance for a clear understanding of Mead's philosophy of time. Originally published in 1932.

Mead, George Herbert. 1964. *Selected writings. George Herbert Mead*. Edited by Andrew Reck. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

In this volume, Reck assembled twenty-five of Mead's most important journal articles and wrote an authoritative introductory essay. After *Mind, Self, and Society*, this has rightly been the entry point for generations of students to Mead's thinking.

Mead, George Herbert. 1967a. *Mind, self, and society: from the perspective of a social behaviorist*. Edited with an Introduction by Charles Morris. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Contrary to popular belief, the bulk of the material used to compose this volume is not from student notes but from a verbatim record of a 1928 offering of the "Social Psychology" course at the University of Chicago taken by a professional stenographer hired by former students. Creatively edited by Morris, this volume has nonetheless served as the basic introduction to Mead's thinking for generations of students. Originally published in 1934.

Mead, George Herbert. 1967b. *The philosophy of the act*. Edited by Charles W. Morris with John M. Brewster, Albert M. Dunham and David L. Miller. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

The last of the series of posthumous editions of Mead's writings published in the 1930s. Composed almost entirely of "unpublished papers which George H. Mead left at his death in 1931," of uneven quality. To think of this volume as a book, with the implied authorship claim, can be misleading. Of historical interest only. Originally published in 1938.

Mead, George Herbert. 1972. *Movements of thought in the nineteenth century*. Edited by Merritt H. Moore. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

The book's material derives from stenographic notes taken from a course Mead offered at the University of Chicago with the same title. As a work of intellectual history, its interest is arguably limited. Originally published in 1936.

Mead, George Herbert. 2008. *Self, war, and society. George Herbert Mead's macrosociology*. Edited by Mary Jo Deegan. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

This is a collection of writings by Mead, with comments, on warfare. Highly pedagogical, the volume is divided into five parts that

follow America's involvement in World War I. Each part is illustrated with several pieces by Mead, some of which are published here for the first time. Deegan's commentary is sound and helpful.

Mead, George Herbert. 2010. *G.H. Mead. A reader*. Edited by Filipe Carreira da Silva. London: Routledge.

This collection of Mead's writing includes thirty pieces, ten of which are published here for the first time, divided into three main parts—social psychology, experimental science and epistemology, and democratic politics. It includes an introduction by the editor and a chronology of Mead's writings.

Mead, George Herbert and Castle, Helen, eds. 2013. *The collected letters of Henry Northrup Castle*. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press.

The only book Mead set out to publish during his lifetime. This facsimile edition of the original Mead text includes the correspondence exchanged between Henry Northrup Castle and his friends, including Mead, between the 1870s and the time of his death in 1895. It includes an informative introduction by Alfred L. Castle, the great-nephew of G.H. Mead and Henry Castle. It contains valuable information on Mead's intellectual biography. Originally published in 1902.

Major Book-Length Studies and Collections

Mead's relatively late inclusion in the sociological canon means that virtually all of the sources cited in this section have been published since 1970. One of the earliest book-length studies of note is Miller 1973, but it was not until 1980 (German original) that Mead's work was the object of a first-rate commentary by Joas 1985. Hanson 1986 was published around the same time but it is less historically informed. Cook 1993, on the other hand, is first and foremost an exercise in intellectual history. All of them, including Aboulafia 1986 and Aboulafia 2001, are part of a generation of commentators that have revolutionized Mead scholarship, placing it on a par with that of other sociological classics, such as Simmel or de Tocqueville. A new generation, including Silva 2008, is now attempting to further consolidate and expand Mead scholarship. Despite the unfortunate lack of companions (there is still no Cambridge Companion to Mead, for example), Hamilton 1992 made a significant contribution to establish the field of Mead studies.

Aboulafia, Mitchell. 1986. *The mediating self: Mead, Sartre and self-determination*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

Aboulafia's first book-length study on Mead systematically confronts Mead's theory of the self with Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of consciousness. It remains one of the central philosophical works on the relation between Mead and the phenomenological tradition.

Aboulafia, Mitchell. 2001. *The cosmopolitan self: George Herbert Mead and continental philosophy*. Urbana-Champaign, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press.

In this study, Aboulafia provides an illuminating philosophical discussion of Mead's work vis-à-vis that of Continental philosophers Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Emmanuel Levinas. It performed an important role in bringing Mead into the early 21st century debate on globalization and cosmopolitanism.

Cook, Gary A. 1993. *George Herbert Mead. The making of a social pragmatist*. Urbana-Champaign, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press.

Historically meticulous, this is one of the best studies of Mead's social psychology ever written. It also covers Mead's moral and political thinking and philosophy of nature. The listing of primary and secondary sources was the best at the time of publication. An essential text.

Hamilton, Peter, ed. 1992. *George Herbert Mead: critical assessments*. 4 vols. London: Routledge.

First published in 1992, this is the most comprehensive collection of critical assessments ever published on Mead. It is divided into four sections: biography and intellectual context, symbolic interactionism, behaviorism, and theory of mind. Although dated, it remains essential for anyone interested in undertaking research on Mead.

Hanson, Karen. 1986. *The self imagined: Philosophical reflections on the social character of the psyche*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

One of the best philosophical works exploring Mead's relation to phenomenology, Hanson's study contrasts Mead's theory of the self with those of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilbert Ryle, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Hanson's emphasis on human imagination enables her to provide an original reading of Mead's notions of play and game.

Joas, Hans. 1985. *G.H. Mead. A contemporary re-examination of his thought*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

The first historically sensitive yet philosophically sophisticated study of Mead's contributions to contemporary social theory, Joas's book brought into the limelight the formative influence of German idealism upon American pragmatism in general and upon Mead's thinking in particular. Includes an extensive listing of primary and secondary sources. A classic. Originally published in 1980.

Miller, David L. 1973. *George Herbert Mead. Self, language, and the world*. Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press.

Miller's study of Mead's system of thinking is developed from the perspective of Mead's mature writings on epistemology and philosophy of science. Contains a listing of primary and secondary sources. Despite not furnishing an adequate grasp of the substantial evolution of Mead's ideas over time, it is an important study of Mead's key contribution to classical American philosophical pragmatism.

Silva, Filipe Carreira da. 2008. *Mead and modernity. Science, selfhood, and democratic politics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Aimed at a sociological audience, this study provides a historically minded yet theoretically sophisticated re-examination of Mead's social pragmatism. It suggests Mead's system of thinking has a triadic structure covering epistemology, social psychology, and political philosophy.

Standard Translations

By far, Mead's most translated work is Mead 1967a (cited under Mead's Works), partly due to its conversational style. The first translation occurred in 1953, into Spanish, through the initiative of Gino Germani (Mead 1999). Others followed in the 1960s, the heyday of symbolic interactionism as the loyal opposition in sociology, into French in Mead 1963, into Italian in 1966 (Mead 2010a), and into German in 1968 (Mead 2010b, on Habermas' suggestion). Also in German, Joas has edited the translation of a 2-volume collection of writings in the mid-1980s (Mead 2003). A similar undertaking took place in Italy a decade later (Mead 1996). More recently, a new French translation appeared (Mead 2006), and Mead 1967b (cited under Mead's Works) was translated into Spanish the following year by Yncera, himself a Mead expert (Mead 2008).

Mead, George Herbert. 1963. *L'esprit, le soi et la société*. Translated by Jean Cazeneuve, Eugène Kaelin and Georges Thibault, with a preface by Georges Gurvitch. Paris: Presses Univ. de France.

The great French sociologist Georges Gurvitch introduced this first French translation of Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* as the

“unique classic of American social psychology.” Widely respected, this translation introduced the ideas of Mead to French-speaking audiences for almost forty years.

Mead, George Herbert. 1996. *La voce della coscienza. George Herbert Mead*. Edited and translated by Chiara Bombarda. Milan: Jaca Book.

Editor and translator Chiara Bombarda has filled a significant gap in the Italian social sciences by collecting six of Mead’s most important essays—“Philosophical Basis of Ethics,” “Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning,” “The Mechanism of Social Consciousness,” “Scientific Method and Individual Thinker,” “The Genesis of the Self and Social Control,” and “The Nature of the Past”—in this first Italian edition of Mead’s published writings.

Mead, George Herbert. 1999. *Espíritu, persona, y sociedad: desde el punto de vista del conductivismo social*. Introduced by Gino Germani. Translated by Florial Mazía. Barcelona: Paidós.

The product of the editorial activity of the “founding father” of Argentinean sociology, the Italian émigré Gino Germani, this was the first ever translation of *Mind, Self, and Society*. It proved pivotal in introducing post-war Spanish-speaking social scientists to the ideas of Mead. Originally published in 1953.

Mead, George Herbert. 2003. *George Herbert Mead. Gesammelte Aufsätze. 2 vols*. Edited by Hans Joas, translated by Klaus Laermann and Hans Günter Holl. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Hans Joas edited this two-volume collection of Mead’s most important writings. It is generally considered to be the most authoritative German translation available. The first volume was originally published in 1980, and the second in 1983.

Mead, George Herbert. 2006. *L’esprit, le soi et la société*. Translated and edited, with an introduction, by Daniel Cefaï and Louis Quéré. Paris: Presses Univ. de France.

First published in 2006, this second French translation of *Mind, Self, and Society* rapidly established itself as the new standard edition. Drawing upon the most recent Meadian scholarship, editors and translators Daniel Cefaï and Louis Quéré have produced a first-rate work. Their introduction offers a complete yet accessible account of Mead’s ideas. Originally published in 1934.

Mead, George Herbert. 2008. *La filosofía del presente*. Edited, introduced and translated by Ignacio Sánchez de la Yncera. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Boletín Oficial del Estado

This Spanish translation of *The Philosophy of the Present* is the latest contribution to Meadian scholarship by Ignacio Sánchez de la Yncera, a leading authority on Mead. It has the particularity of being available online.

Mead, George Herbert. 2010a. *Mente, sé e società*. Translated by Roberto Tettucci. Florence: Giunti.

One of the 1960s translations of *Mind, Self, and Society*, Roberto Tettucci’s Italian rendering of Mead’s work remains the basic entry point for students and scholars alike in Italy today. Originally published in 1966.

Mead, George Herbert. 2010b. *Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft aus der Sicht des Sozialbehaviorismus*. Translated by Ulf Pacher. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

The first German translation of Mead’s *Mind, Self, and Society*, published by Suhrkamp at the suggestion of Habermas. Despite criticisms of the translator’s choices (for example, “self” was translated as “identity” [*Identität*], even though there is a German word for “self” [*Selbst*]), it remains the point of entry for German-speaking social scientists to Mead’s ideas. Originally published in 1968.

The Mead-Blumer Controversy

This section covers items dealing with the Mead-Blumer controversy of the 1970s, in which a new generation of Mead scholars, represented in McPhail and Rexroat 1979 and Lewis 1976, questioned Blumer's role as official heir and interpreter of Mead in sociology. Fisher and Strauss 1979, Blumer 1979, Lewis and Smith 1980, and Campbell 1983 present one important aspect of this debate—a historical revision of Mead's role in the formation of the Chicago School of sociology. Another, subsequent aspect, as presented in Fine and Kleinman 1986 and Silva and Vieira 2011, refers to the process of inclusion of Mead in the canon of founding thinkers in sociology. All sources cited here played a role in that canonization process, either as first-order intellectual interventions (in the case of Blumer) or by way of commentary (all the others).

Blumer, Herbert. 1979. Comment on “George Herbert Mead and the Chicago tradition of sociology.” *Symbolic Interaction* 2: 21–22.

Blumer's reply to Fisher and Strauss's controversial article. Vintage Blumer, the response is blunt, even dismissive. Good illustration of Blumer's role in the canonization of Mead in sociology.

Campbell, James. 1983. Mead and pragmatism. *Symbolic Interaction* 6: 383–392.

With verve and theoretical sophistication, Campbell critically examines Lewis and Smith's *American Sociology and Pragmatism*. His critique is harsh but fair: Lewis and Smith's dichotomous reconstruction of pragmatism into two clear-cut branches (realism vs. nominalism) contradicts one of the central tenets of that philosophical tradition, namely its antidualistic Cartesian stance.

Fine, Gary Alan, and Sherryl Kleinman. 1986. Interpreting the sociological classics: Can there be a “true” meaning of Mead? *Symbolic Interaction* 9: 129–146.

Written in the heyday of the canon-formation debate of the late 1980s, authors Fine and Kleinman make a persuasive case for an interactionist approach to the analysis of Mead's inclusion in the sociological canon. The argument is illustrated by *Mind, Self, and Society*.

Fisher, Berenice M., and Anselm L. Strauss. 1979. George Herbert Mead and the Chicago tradition of sociology. In *Symbolic Interaction* 2(1/2): 9–26.

One of the earliest attempts to critically re-examine the founding myth of symbolic interactionism and the Chicago tradition of sociology. Deriving its inspiration from the new history of science of the 1960s, leading Mead scholar Anselm Strauss and Berenice Fisher helped set the stage for the more historically minded Mead scholarship of subsequent decades. Meticulous, sophisticated, and disruptive, it remains an important piece of scholarship. Part 2 of this article can be found in *Symbolic Interaction* 2(2): 9–20.

Lewis, J. David, 1976. The classical American pragmatists as forerunners to symbolic interactionism. *Sociological Quarterly* 17: 347–359.

This article (controversially) divides American pragmatism into two branches, with Mead falling in the social realist Peircean branch, as opposed to the social nominalist branch of James and Dewey. The controversy worked, as it contributed to undermine the until-then uncontested position of symbolic interactionists as the sole legitimate heirs of Mead in sociology. Still worth reading today.

Lewis, J. David and Richard L. Smith. 1980. *American sociology and pragmatism: Mead, Chicago sociology and symbolic interaction*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

The most elaborate attempt at debunking what authors Lewis and Smith see as the founding myth of Chicago style sociology. Mead's influence on his sociology colleagues and students is carefully documented and deconstructed. A fine example of the new history of science of the 1960s and 1970s, it remains mandatory reading for the Mead specialist.

McPhail, Clark and Cynthia Rexroat. 1979. Mead vs. Blumer: The divergent methodological perspectives of social behaviorism and symbolic interactionism. *American Sociological Review* 44: 449–467.

One of the most important articles on the methodological inconsistencies of Blumer's appropriation of Mead. Authors McPhail and Rexroat convincingly show the extent to which, besides that of hermeneutically inclined Blumerian symbolic interactionism, other methodological lessons can be drawn from Mead. Judiciously researched and tightly argued, it remains a central statement in the Mead-Blumer controversy of the late 1970s.

Silva, Filipe Carreira da and Mónica Brito Vieira. 2011. Books and canon building in sociology: The case of *Mind, Self, and Society*. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 11: 356–377.

Focusing on the history of the book *Mind, Self, and Society*, from its production through its multiple iterations in sociology, this article shows the extent to which social sciences are constituted by material objects such as books. Reintroduces Mead as a founding father of pragmatic sociology.

Symbolic Interactionism

Items included in this section deal with Mead's relationship with symbolic interactionism, the strand of sociology most closely associated with his work.

The Debate between the Chicago and the Iowa Schools of Symbolic Interactionism

Mead's association with symbolic interactionism dates back to 1937, the year in which Blumer coined the term. Only in the 1960s did this relation gain traction, and Mead begins to be seen as a source of inspiration for micro-sociological studies of face-to-face interaction, as examined in Shibutani 1961 and Blumer 1986. The Chicago school of symbolic interactionism was not alone in making this claim, with the behaviorist Iowa School trying to develop an alternative as put forth in Kuhn 1964. The Chicago-Iowa debate marked the 1960s as far as the reception of Mead's ideas in sociology is concerned.

Blumer, Herbert. 1986. *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

The centerpiece of Blumer's strategy to present symbolic interactionism as the loyal opposition in post-war American sociology. At the heart of this strategy is Mead's social pragmatism. In this collection of articles, Mead provides both the theoretical insights and the methodological tenets of the nascent symbolic interactionist program. A key intellectual intervention in the process of Mead's canonization in sociology. Originally published in 1969.

Kuhn, Manford H. 1964. Major trends in symbolic interaction Theory in the past twenty-five years. *Sociological Quarterly* 5: 61–84.

The manifesto of the so-called "Iowa school" of symbolic interactionism. Kuhn's intellectual testament (he died the year before), this widely cited article puts together an alternative neo-Meadian research program for the scientific study of society through the meticulous empirical observation and analysis of face-to-face interaction. It has never attained the degree of intellectual notoriety of the Chicago School.

Shibutani, Tamotsu. 1961. Society and personality: An interactionist approach to social psychology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

The most influential example of Meadian-inspired interactionism in the social psychology of the 1960s. Long, dense, and covering a broad range of phenomena, Tamotsu Shibutani's book aims to accomplish in social psychology what Blumer was trying to do in post-war American sociology—to use Mead's work to propose an alternative theoretical and methodological approach to the dominant paradigm in their respective disciplines.

Symbolic Interactionism Today

Today, symbolic interactionist literature dealing with Mead is either historically minded, as in Farberman 1985, or tries to set itself apart, in Denzin 2003 and Ezzy 1998, from contemporary postmodern and poststructuralist alternatives. See Warshay and Warshay 1986 for a criticism of symbolic interactionism's subjectivist appropriation of Mead and its sociological implications. Fine 1993 remains a useful survey article of the symbolic interactionist approach.

Denzin, Norman K. 2003. The call to performance. *Symbolic Interaction* 26: 187–207.

Denzin's "manifesto" for a performative turn in symbolic interactionist sociology. His anti-essentialist agenda, inspired by the work of gender theorist Judith Butler, involves a conception of identity as something that can be unsettled and recreated rather than interpreted in light of a reductive or totalizing narrative. Good example of how Mead's social theory of the self can inspire a postmodern theory of the performative self.

Ezzy, Douglas. 1998. Theorizing narrative identity: Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics. *Sociological Quarterly* 39: 239–252.

The prime example of how to use Mead's intersubjective conception of time and the self to build a narrative sociology (the sociological assertion that social phenomena are narrated phenomena). Douglas Ezzy's proposal involves synthesizing Mead with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of narrative identity. Genuinely innovative, this article has brought Mead back to the cutting edge of symbolic interactionist theory.

Farberman, Harvey A. 1985. The foundations of symbolic interaction: James, Cooley, and Mead. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* Supplement 1: 13–27.

Overview of the three main intellectual influences behind symbolic interactionist theory. Mead's treatment is fair yet critical. Useful for the philosophically fine-grained connections it draws between Mead, James, and Cooley.

Fine, Gary A. 1993. The sad demise, mysterious disappearance, and glorious triumph of symbolic interactionism. *Annual Review of Sociology* 19: 61–87.

Mead is portrayed as the central intellectual source of the symbolic interactionist approach in sociology, which Fine examines from the angle of four different processes: fragmentation, expansion, incorporation, and adoption. Includes the contributions of the interactionist approach to a number of social theoretical debates and a helpful overview of the most important empirical lines of research.

Warshay, Leon H. and Diana W. Warshay. 1986. The individualizing and subjectivizing of George Herbert Mead. A sociology of knowledge interpretation. *Sociological Focus* 19: 177–188.

Critical piece on the systematically partial nature of symbolic interactionist interpretations of Mead. The article's main point is that Blumer's reading of Mead is essentially subjectivistic and anti-structural, something that authors Warshay and Warshay (rightly)

consider a mistake. Worth reading as an illustration of the 1980s and 1990s wave of criticisms of symbolic interactionism's difficulties in dealing with social structure.

Politics

In its initial phase, Mead's inclusion in the sociological canon was the work of symbolic interactionists in the United States. The second phase took place across the Atlantic, and is the work of a single theorist—Jürgen Habermas. Although influential, Habermas 1987 is partial; Mead is portrayed as an “idealist,” despite his life-long interest on politics and warfare. Sources included in this section have contributed to documenting this crucial yet much neglected aspect of Mead's life and work. Burger and Deegan 1981 is one of the first works to explore Mead's ideas on warfare and international affairs, establishing a line of research that continues to generate important results. Mead's prolific civic life has also been the object of much interest in Deegan and Burger 1978, Shalin 1988, and Feffer 1993. Of note also is Mead's moral and political thinking, in particular his approach to human rights, as presented in Betz 1974 and Singer 1999. Neither an idealist nor a materialist, Fischer 2008 describes Mead as a social pragmatist philosopher whose political ideas were not immune to the political context of the 1920s.

Betz, Joseph. 1974. George Herbert Mead on human rights. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 10: 199–223.

The first article to work out a neo-Meadian theory of rights. Betz's claim is that, implicit in Mead's social theory, is a systematic account of rights. Mead's theory of rights is portrayed as holistic and closely associated with the social reform and radical democracy of the Progressive Era. Still worth reading today.

Burger, John S. and Mary Jo Deegan. 1981. George Herbert Mead on internationalism, democracy, and war. *Wisconsin Sociologist* 18: 72–83.

One of the earliest attempts at drawing macro-sociological implications from Mead's thought beyond Blumer's symbolic interactionist reading. Special emphasis is placed on Mead's accounts of war, peace, citizenship, and democratic politics. Worth reading today for the way it anticipates some themes and approaches of current Mead scholarship.

Deegan, Mary Jo and Burger, John S. 1978. George Herbert Mead and social reform: His work and writings. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14: 362–373.

One of the earliest accounts of Mead's civic activities as an application of his pragmatist belief in intelligent social reconstruction. Combining archival research, historical inquiry, and theoretical reflection, this article marks a transition in Mead scholarship toward the more historically minded research of today. Surpassed by subsequent work, it is by now of little interest to contemporary readers.

Feffer, Andrew. 1993. *The Chicago pragmatists and American progressivism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press.

One of the best books ever published on Chicago-style pragmatism. A study of ideas in context, American philosophical pragmatism is carefully placed against the backdrop of the social history of Chicago at the turn of the century. Seldom has a better portrait of Mead's civic activities been provided.

Fischer, Marilyn. 2008. Mead and the international mind. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 44: 508–531.

A meticulous historical study of Mead's political ideas on international affairs. Mead's writings on war and international relations are portrayed not so much as an outgrowth of his own social theorizing as an incorporation of the “conservative internationalist” strand of contemporary political discourse (U.S. foreign policy should be pro-active in cultural and economic terms only, but not military ones). Questions Aboutafia's construction of Mead's cosmopolitan self.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The theory of communicative action*. Vol. 2. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

In this second volume (originally published in 1981) of Habermas' magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Mead's canonization in sociology enters a new stage. From founding father of the symbolic interactionist tradition, Mead is now deemed responsible for the paradigmatic shift from instrumental to communicative reason. His central place in the sociological canon was achieved at a high price, however. Habermas' accusation of "idealism"—Mead is said to be unable to address the material reproduction of societies, including industrialization and warfare—proved influential, even if it was hardly original (not to mention fair). Hugely influential, this is compulsory reading for both novices and experts.

Shalin, Dmitri N. 1988. G.H. Mead, socialism and the progressive agenda. *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 913–951.

Carefully argued and meticulously researched, this is Shalin at its absolute best. Following the German Idealism line of research inaugurated by Joas in the late-1970s, Shalin explores the left-wing, progressive character of Mead's political views, civic involvement and broader philosophical stance.

Singer, Beth J. 1999. Mead: The nature of rights. In *Classical American Pragmatism: Its Contemporary Vitality*. Edited by Sandra B. Rosenthal, 174–189. Urbana-Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press.

This ambitiously conceived and carefully argued paper contrasts Mead's approach to rights with natural rights theories (described as a priori, essentialist, adversarialist, and universalist). Mead's alternative approach involves emphasizing mutual recognition as central to rights. Of interest to anyone interested in exploring Mead's moral and political philosophy.

Social Psychology

Social psychology is of central importance in Mead's thinking. Valsiner and van der Veer 1988 and Holland and Lachicotte 2007 discuss the striking parallels between Mead's social psychology with those of the Russian contemporary Lev Vygotsky, despite the fact that neither ever cited the other. A further dimension represented here is Mead's relation to behaviorism. Cook 1972 offers a balanced and critical appraisal whereas (behaviorist) Baldwin 1985 and Baldwin 1988 find in Mead a distinct predecessor. Some of the best work by psychologists interested in Mead are recent—Gillespie 2005, Dodds, et al. 1997, and Martin and Gillespie 2010. These include theoretically sophisticated yet historically rigorous reappraisals of Mead's contributions to that discipline—contributions that deserve more attention from sociologists in the future.

Baldwin, John D. 1985. Social behaviorism on emotions: Mead and modern behaviorism compared. *Symbolic Interaction* 8: 263–289.

Baldwin operates with Mead's "social behaviorism" as if this was Mead's expression, and not a term introduced by editor Charles Morris. Following this initial misunderstanding, a number of similarities are identified connecting Mead with modern behavioral analysis of emotions. Its utility for a clear understanding of Mead's social psychology is arguably limited.

Baldwin, John D. 1988. Mead and Skinner: agency and determinism. *Behaviorism* 16: 109–127.

Mead's alleged "behavioral theory" is here contrasted with B.F. Skinner's strand of behaviorism. Mead's chief contribution to contemporary behaviorism is (convincingly) said to lie in resolving the agency-versus-determinism dualism. Of little interest beyond a behaviorist readership.

Cook, Gary A. 1972. The development of G.H. Mead's social psychology. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 8: 167–186.

Cook's first substantive contribution to Mead scholarship. It provides a refreshingly original account of the historical development of Mead's social psychology by looking beyond *Mind, Self, and Society* to Mead's published articles. An early blend of impeccable historical research with theoretical sophistication from one of today's leading authorities on Mead.

Dodds, Agnes E., Jeanette A. Lawrence, and Jaan Valsiner. 1997. The personal and the social: Mead's theory of the "generalized other." *Theory and Psychology* 7: 483–503.

Using both Mead's published and unpublished work, psychologists Dodds, Lawrence, and Valsiner painstakingly reconstruct Mead's concept of the "generalized other." The main finding is a social psychological concept that reconciles the social origin of self-consciousness with the transformative power of the personal. Definitely worth an attentive reading.

Gillespie, Alex. 2005. G.H. Mead: Theorist of the social act. *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35: 19–39.

This article argues that Mead's greatest contribution is a development of Dewey's functionalist theory of the act. Gillespie designates it as "theory of the social act." It is the social act, and not the act, that provides a means to escape Cartesian solipsism. A solid, innovative paper by one of the new voices of Mead scholarship.

Holland, Dorothy and William Lachicotte. 2007. Vygotsky, Mead and the new sociocultural studies of identity. *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*. Edited by Harry Daniels, Michael Cole and James V. Wertsch, 101–135. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.

In this chapter focusing on the socio-cultural perspective on identity, a comparison is drawn between Mead's account of the self and Vygotsky's. A number of commonalities between Mead and Vygotsky are explored. Discussion of empirical studies on identity follows. Of interest to social psychologists and cognitive scientists keen to learn more about Mead's role in the formation and development of their disciplines.

Martin, Jack, and Alex Gillespie. 2010. A neo-Meadian approach to human agency: Relating the social and the psychological in the ontogenesis of perspective coordinating persons. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 44: 252–272.

Psychologists Martin and Gillespie suggest Mead's social pragmatist account of ontogenesis to provide a solution to the long-standing debate between determinism and agency. Their neo-Meadian proposal points to a compatibilist conception of agency as the "determined" self-determination of persons. A fine example of the enduring resonance of Mead's ideas in psychology.

Valsiner, Jaan and René van der Veer. 1988. On the social nature of human cognition: An analysis of the shared intellectual roots of George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 18: 117–136.

Social psychologists Valsiner and van der Veer discuss Mead as a precursor of the "social cognition" approach in tandem with Russian contemporary Lev Vygotsky. Famously, Mead and Vygotsky never cited each other. Yet this article tracks down their shared common predecessors in North American social psychology (especially Baldwin and Royce) at the turn of the 20th century.

Pragmatic Sociology and Neo-Pragmatism

Publications in this section pertain to neo-pragmatist/pragmatic sociology directly inspired by Mead's work. Durbin 1978, Durbin

1992, and Puddephatt 2005 cover social studies of science literature, Wiley 1994 and Joas 1996 examine social theory treatises, and Dunn 1997, Schubert 2006, and Konings 2010 review articles. These works provide an overview of some of the most exciting and cutting edge work currently being done on Mead in sociology. Of note is the special relation between Mead and French pragmatic sociology. Though seldom cited (see the introduction to the new French translation of *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead 2006, cited under Standard Translations), Mead's ideas resonate in important ways with some of the central claims of both Latour's "Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)" approach and Boltanski and Thevenot's work.

Dunn, Robert G. 1997. *Self, identity and difference: Mead and the poststructuralists. Sociological Quarterly, 38: 687–705.*

Fascinating article on the relation between Mead's social pragmatism and contemporary post-structuralist approaches. Dunn uses Mead to level a criticism at leading gender theorist, Judith Butler.. Mead seems refreshingly original and of continued relevance.

Durbin, Paul T. 1978. *Toward a social philosophy of technology. In Research in Philosophy and Technology, Vol. 1. Edited by Paul Durbin, 67–97. Greenwich, CT: JAI.*

Sociologist of science Paul T. Durbin draws on Mead (and Dewey) to articulate a social action approach to the philosophy of technology. Durbin's neo-Meadian sociology of science points to interdisciplinary, expert-laymen alliances as a response to techno-social problems. One of the earliest neo-pragmatist contributions to (now mainstream) science and technology studies.

Durbin, Paul T. 1992. *Social responsibility in science, technology, and medicine. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh Univ. Press.*

The book in which Mead's contributions to sociology and philosophy of science can be felt in all their force. Durbin's "progressive activism" involves an ethics of social responsibility toward the solution of techno-social problems (with striking parallels with Michel Callon's ANT approach). Original and insightful, deserves more attention from science and technology audience.

Joas, Hans. 1996. *The creativity of action. Translated by Jeremy Ganes and Paul Keast. Chicago, IL: Chicago Univ. Press.*

The most ambitiously conceived social theory treatise drawing upon American pragmatism to appear in a generation. Mead figures prominently, alongside James, Dewey, and Peirce. The empirical applicability of the new model of action was limited, assisting Joas' progress from Mead commentator to major social theorist.

Konings, Martijn. 2010. *The pragmatic sources of modern power. European Journal of Sociology 51: 55–91.*

One of the most interesting contemporary empirically oriented appropriations of Mead. Konings shows the extent to which Mead's ideas are relevant to the social scientific study of economic and political organizations. Exemplary in the way it reconnects social theorizing with empirical research. Neo-pragmatic sociology at its best.

Puddephatt, Anthony J. 2005. *Mead has never been modern: Using Meadian theory to extend the constructionist study of technology. Social Epistemology 19: 357–380.*

This article claims social studies of technology have much to gain from Mead's nondualistic social theory. Mead's "I" and "Me" concepts, the focus on temporality, and the notion of "emergence" in the generation of meaning provide valuable correctives to dominant constructionist approaches to technology.

Schubert, Hans-Joachim. 2006. *The foundation of pragmatic sociology: Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. Journal of Classical Sociology 6: 51–74.*

Intellectual history meets theory building in this sophisticated discussion of classical pragmatist contributions to contemporary

pragmatic sociology. Begins with Mead's criticism of Cooley, moves on to consider Peirce, and concludes with a theoretical synthesis of their contributions.

Wiley, Norbert. 1994. *The semiotic self*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

One of the finest examples of neopragmatist social theory drawing centrally on Mead, which helped establish Norbert Wiley as one of the major interpreters of Mead. Wiley complements Mead's "I-me" with Peirce's "I-you," to propose a new model: the triologue "I-me-you." Densely argued, this book will suit both the graduate student and the expert.

[back to top](#)

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 2015. All rights reserved.