

“Collective Representations” and the “Generalized Other”: A Review of the Evidence on the Convergence of Durkheim and Mead

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Abstract

This article is a revisitation of the investigation into of some of the scholarly points of convergence of Durkheim and Mead. A major focus is on the concepts of “collective representations” and “generalized other.” Also covered in this analysis of the major works of these French and American sociologists is their emphasis on signs and symbols, the significance of the social act, taking the role of the other, individual action and the social bond, the internalization and integration of meaning, the relevancy of the object, social pragmatism and the issue of ambiguity. The author highlights some new and classic contributions, especially Rochberg-Halton’s (1982), to the scholarly discussion on the significance of pragmatic interaction.

1. Introduction

“Interaction is the cornerstone one of the most basis processes of human social organization.” (Jenness, Smith and Stepan-Norris, 2007:3)

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) have been repeatedly studied and analyzed as classical sociological thinkers in their own right. Durkheim the macro functionalistic organicist and normative order theorist is best known for his anti-reductionism and his consideration of the “establishment of the social order *sui generis*” (Durkheim 1964:61). Mead the micro symbolic interactionist, while not a prolific writer, acquired a reputation from students’ lecture notes and his posthumous *Mind, Self and Society* ([1934] 1967) as “the most original mind in philosophy in the America of the last generation”

(Dewey, 1932:310). Mead's ideas have been recently used to study the international mind (Fischer, 2008). The real challenge, however, is not in studying these theorists separately, but comparatively. There is a very important, yet infrequently researched, congruency (Kerr, 2008) in their theories of representation.

The purpose of this analysis is to revisit some of the discussion of what Moscovici (2002:799) calls the "perilous and seductive" "collective representations" (Durkheim, 1965) and show how this overlaps with Mead's (1967) "generalized other" and the micro analysis of language use (Bergesen, 2004:396). The following is a reconstruction of the limited research on this theme; that provided by Bergesen (2004); Hinkle (1964); Kerr (2008); Lewis and Smith (1980); Parsons (1964); Perinbanayagam (1975); Rochberg-Halton (1982) and Stone and Farberman (1967). The fact that both Durkheim and Mead were original thinkers makes this comparison all the more exciting and, hopefully, makes this recapturing of the evidence of convergence a worthwhile endeavor.

Three of Mead's conceptions, (1) the linguistic symbol, (2) meaning and (3) the social act, are particularly important elements of this convergence of the "generalized other" with Durkheim's "collective representation." "Indeed, the Meadian 'verbal symbol' and the Durkheim 'collective representation' are virtually synonymous" (Hinkle, 1964:278). The two concepts share some obvious similarities. They both emphasize the generality and communicability of signs (representations). They also believe that the formation of self needs social interaction through sign internalization. Bergesen's (2004) discussion of Durkheim's mental categories provides some evidence of this. Both Durkheim and Mead share the notion that society reproduces itself through the "collective representations" and the "generalized others." In *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1964), Durkheim introduced "social facts," one of his most important contributions to social theory (Shaffer, 2006:57). These social facts have a creative power over the individual who unselfconsciously internalizes this external force (Keat and Urry, 1982:83).

The following discussion will also show how the theorists both emphasize the objectivity of signs, and in depicting this similarity, some attention will be given to the development of Durkheim's thought that some (Kerr, 2008; Stone and Farberman, 1967) believed was moving the direction of symbolic interactionism. Where Mead's ideas are mostly written in *Mind, Self and Society* ([1934] 1967), Durkheim's most elaborate theory of "collective representations" is in his last major work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1912] 1965). After this work was published, Durkheim gave a series of lectures on pragmatism and, thus, came very close before his death to making a transition from functionalism to the pragmatism of Mead.

1.1 Meaning in the Social Act

Mead's (1967) "verbal symbol" and Durkheim's (1965) "collective representation" refer to a level of phenomena that is separate and objective. Each is reinforced and maintained by commonly understood and conventionalized actions or responses. Gestures and their meanings in social acts are the Meadian prototypes of the linguistic symbol.

Meaning is indicated by the gesture of one person oriented to another, by the response of the second individual and by the subsequent conduct of these or other participants – each of whom plays a part in completing the action and among whom consensus exists. Common social participation and communication are the necessary context. (Keat and Urry, 1982:279)

For Mead, even "private thoughts are perceived as extensions of the social process of communicating with a generalized other through significant symbols" (Lewis and Smith, 1980:174). It is impossible to think without invoking significant symbols. These symbols are the key concepts in Mead's theory of meaning (Etzrodt, 2008). All objects have meaning that is based in the symbolism available to the thinker. "The person who stumbles on the footprints of the bear is not afraid of the footprints – he is afraid of the bear" (Mead, 1967:121). As to the relationship between symbols and language, Mead explained it:

Through the use of language, through the use of the significant symbol, then the individual does take the attitude of others. If, now, the individual calls out this attitude in others by a gesture, by a word which affects himself just as it affects others, then he will call out the same attitudes in himself as others would (McPhail and Rexroat, 1980:427)

But every sociological perspective implies some image of the interrelationships between society, man and communication. Durkheim was no different. Two images particularly difficult for him to work through were the image of communication as interaction and the image of society as a container of this communication. Stone and Farberman (1967:149) contended that the "development of Durkheim's sociological thought was marked by significant metaphorical changes, particularly in respect to the image of man".

For Mead in his individualistic and somewhat anthropological interpretation (Van de Walle, 2008:41), meaning was implicit in all phases of the social act. It is sometimes even explicit in terms of responses referring to or completing certain behaviors. "For Mead the individual is able to exert purposive control and organization of his/her conduct" (Keat and Urry, 1982:94). The "collective representation" of Durkheim is made clear by this Meadian interpretation. It is simply the communal meaning or symbol of a shared experience which is rooted in and maintained by common social participation. "The vocal gesture is preeminent because of the simultaneity with which speaker and hearer perceive the gesture; but similar consequences can occur with gestures we can see or feel" (McPhail and Rexroat, 1979:458). It is clear then that Mead places meaning in significant symbols, not in the interpretive activity of individuals. They do not have to give meaning to symbols because the symbols already have

meanings and they are publicly understood. The attitude taken towards these symbols is even given in advance. This is not much different than Durkheim (1966:2) who wrote, “The system of signs I use to express my thought...pay my debts, etc., function independently of my own use of them.”

1.2 Taking the Attitude of the Other

Mead’s ideas on symbols and symbolic behavior was later joined with the anthropological idea of culture that focuses on an individual’s social-cultural development (Van de Walle, 2008:40). When this fusion was made, the thesis came very close to Durkheim’s notion of ideas, meanings, social participation and social structure (Hinkle, 1964:279). The idea of “taking the attitude of the other” interested them both. Mead’s theory of meaning was triadic with the three elements being, the gesture, object or thing signified, and the response. The main principle was that public identity and consensus guaranteed that all parties would have the same attitude towards the object of the symbol. Just as Durkheim was not interested in the individual causes of suicide, Mead believed that the particular personalities of individuals were irrelevant to symbolic meanings because the meanings do not depend upon individual factors. Durkheim (1966:38) had written in the preface to *Suicide* that “the individual is dominated by a moral reality greater than himself: namely, collective reality”. “He tended to argue as if the role of psychology in the explanation of suicide would be a subordinate one” (Giddens, 1965:5).

Suicide ([1897] 1966) was Durkheim’s third major work. It followed *The Division of Labor in Society* ([1893] 1964) and *The Rules of the Sociological Method* ([1895] 1964). The originality of *Suicide* was not the empirical correlations it contained, but in the demonstration of the “existence and power of social facts in understanding the dynamics of” (Johnson, 2003:211) actions and in the advancement of previous findings “in terms of a coherent sociological theory” (Giddens, 1965:5). The importance of *Suicide* to this comparison with Mead’s “generalized other” is that the suicide rate, for Durkheim (1966:46), “is not simply a sum of independent units, a collective total, but is itself a new fact *sui generis*, with its own unity, individuality and consequently its own nature – a nature, furthermore, dominantly social.” Durkheim contended that the suicide rates depended on two variable conditions, social integration and social regulation. There were three levels for each of these independent variables and from his analysis Durkheim identified four types of suicide, (1) anomic, (2) egoistic, (3) altruistic, and (4) fatalistic. The main thesis in Durkheim’s work is that suicide rates vary inversely with the degree of social integration and regulation. In this regard, egoistic and anomic suicide are closely related.

In *The Division of Labor* (1964:237), Durkheim argued during his discussion of mechanical and organic social solidarity that the utilitarian’s rational pursuit of self-interest had not been the major factor which committed people to values and to conformity with norms (Kerr, 2008:125). It was not necessarily true that people would become collectively happier when they pursued their own interests. It was in *Suicide* (1966) that he first identified the idea of

the internalization of values and norms. He made the distinction between two types of institutionalized value-norm complexes: egoism and altruism. Concerning the internalization of values and norms, Durkheim made convincing arguments that one's economic and political behavior could be interpreted in terms of the manner in which the individual rationally adapted to the economic and political norms and sanctions.

Durkheim saw clearly that the existence and functional indispensability of the institutionalization of these norms is independent of the interests of the units, but he did not have a theory to explain, in terms of motivation, the process by which institutions are established and maintained. His sociologistic positivism prevented his formulating such a theory. (Parsons, 1964:142)

1.3 Individual Action and the Social Bond

Durkheim believed that the goal of individual action was located in the individual's personality. Social norms were exterior to the individual. "The first and most fundamental rule is: consider social facts as things" (Durkheim, 1964:14). Social norms and values were located in society and were, as previously mentioned, *sui generis*. They were connected to the independence of the group superior to the group members (Bergesen, 2004:406). Mead's theory of objectivity was similar, but discovered differently. Mead traced the development of modern science and the rejection of realism and idealism. His pragmatism was an alternative to those ontological positions and was advanced "as the logical generalization of scientific methodology and behavioral psychology" (McPhail and Rexroat, 1980:457).

For Mead, two people could not have identical sense impressions without sharing the same nervous system. Human actors could, however, consciously share common perspectives and, through the common perspectives, common objects. Individual actions, then, had "an orientation to these internalized representations" (Dennis, 2011:352). It was this insight that Mead used as the basis of his theory of objectivity.

A number of individuals may belong to a consentient set. The same objects will be at rest and in motion for all who belong to that set. The same set is food for all animals with a certain digestive apparatus. In other words, this relativity is in no sense solipsistic. It represents a certain relation between the field and individuals. In so far as this relationship is identical. A solipsistic relativity arises out of a doctrine of consciousness which identifies the object with states of experience of an individual. (Mead, 1938:258)

McPhail and Rexroat (1979:450) believed that Mead's social behaviorism was an "attempt to explain individual conduct and experience in terms of the antecedent and ongoing organized conduct of the social group". But Durkheim, too, was always concerned with the nature of society and the nature of social bonds. For him, the more he studied the fabric of society, "collective representations," the more he realized that they were man's creation (Kerr,

2008:126). When he understood this, Durkheim changed his image of man and, thus, his image of society. He saw the mechanist change to an organic transformer of society. He says in *The Division of Labor* (1964:174), “Thus, it is an historical law that mechanical solidarity which first stands alone, or nearly so, progressively loses ground, and that organic solidarity becomes, little by little, preponderant.” The cause of this movement is moral density and the division of labor.

If a bounded area (the container) is overpopulated in such a way that the enclosed moving particles cannot avoid colliding with one another, something must give – some new process must be set in motion. What occurs is a progressive differentiation of the particles and their movements in an increasing division of labor. At one time (under conditions of mechanical solidarity) particles are alike, their movements relatively undifferentiated, and they have access to all “corners” of the container’s space. They collide relatively infrequently with one another, given their small numbers and the relatively large volume of the container. With increasing numbers and density, the container, in a metaphorical sense, must expand and develop internal compartments to minimize collisions and facilitate the “existence” of the whole. (Stone and Farberman, 1967:151)

In the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965) Durkheim continued to reconcile positivism with idealism (Kerr, 2008:126). Durkheim’s concept of anomie was a formulation of his insight that the goals of the individual and the norms of society were dissociated from each other. But the goals were given meaning by society’s values. “They must, therefore, belong to the same system. If personal goals were part of the personality, then values and norms, the conscience collective, must also be a part of the personality” (Parsons, 1964:143).

Durkheim was convinced that arbitrary social conventions in the culture were not reducible to empirical conditions or individuals. He also believed that institutions were tempered by experience.

If we admit that the crude cults of the Australian tribes can help us to understand Christianity, for example, is that not supposing that this latter religion proceeds from the same mentality as the former, that it is made up of the same superstitions and rests upon the same errors?” (Durkheim, 1965:14)

Similarly, a collective representation:

presents guarantees of objectivity by the fact that it is collective: for it is not without sufficient reason that it has been able to generalize and maintain itself with persistence. If it were out of accord with the nature of things, it would never have been able to acquire an extended and prolonged empire over intellects...a collective representation is necessarily submitted to a control that is repeated indefinitely: the men who accept it verify it by their own

experience. (Durkheim, 1965:486)

Durkheim continued to hold the view that institutional norms were independent of the individual. To abandon this doctrine would have been to abandon his idea of solidarity and revert to the utilitarian position he was so vehemently against. Durkheim's very "emphasis upon the importance of constraint is evidently directed primarily against utilitarianism" (Giddens, 1971:88). He was forced to make the conception of the interpenetration of personality and social system. Norms and values were elements of the individual consciousness and simultaneously separate from the individual. Perinbanayagam (1978:146) describes the "other" as the "social psychological form of that abstraction that sociologists and anthropologists call social structure." This social theory of the mind that Durkheim proposed was very nearly the same as the social pragmatism of Mead which was "based on the psychological theory of behaviorism" (Etzrodt, 2008:159).

1.4 The Collective Representation and the Object

Mead's theory of the mind is constructed upon the assumption of an objective social world (Etzrodt, 2008:172). It has already been partially shown that this objective phase of experience was the "collective representation" for Durkheim. For Mead, it is the concept of the significant symbol. For both Durkheim and Mead, the "collective representations" or symbols are objectifications of particular experiences (Kerr, 2008:126). They were both very clear that the universalization of the symbols should not be confused with the generality of the symbols. As Durkheim (1965:482) wrote in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*:

This universality of the concept should not be confused with its generality; they are very different things. What we mean by universality is the property which the concept has of being communicable to a number of minds, and in principle, to all minds; but this communicability is wholly independent of the degree of its extension. A concept which is applied to only one object, and whose extension is consequently at the minimum, can be the same for everybody...

It is obvious then that no object could be more objective than Durkheim's "collective representation" and Mead's object. Mead (1938:359), in fact, commented once in the *Philosophy of the Act*:

What I wish to point out is that the theory of mind found itself obliged to make a place for contents which, for immediate experience, belong as definitely to the outer object as those characters which science conceives to be the nature of the things that are entirely independent of mind.

Further proof of the convergence between Mead and Durkheim is seen in the following passage from *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, where Durkheim, too, held that

thoughts were impersonal. He wrote:

In a word, there is something impersonal in us because there is something social in all of us, and since social life embraces at once both representations and practices, this impersonality naturally extends to ideas as well as to acts. (Durkheim, 1965:494)

After Mead defined objectivity as an attribute of perspective, he spent considerable time studying how it was possible for people to reach a common perspective. According to Athens (2005) Mead had some preconditions for the development and maintenance of this perspective. One was that the group of individuals must have a language consisting of significant symbols by which people recognize and label the objects that make up the perspective. Another was the ability to understand other peoples' attitudes. A third was the importance of institutions that are independently.

1.5 Internalization and Integration

The concept of the "generalized other" occurs in many places in Mead's work. In the concept of the theory of the self, the self appears thru the internalized attitudes of the community (Halton, 2004:92). The "generalized other" grows from the community (Turner, 2011:331) and controls the self. Kerr (2008:136) thought it evident that "both Mead and Durkheim believed there to be no self independent of society; that society led to self and self led to society." Durkheim saw this first in his study of suicide and later in *The Division of Labor* (1964). There was a clear connection between "moral density" and "conscience collective" (Rueschemeyer, 1982:581). Durkheim's major thesis on this theme concerned his concept of anomie: an individual commits suicide because his goals cannot be meaningfully integrated with the expectations which have been institutionalized in values and norms. Durkheim believed that the person did not commit suicide because he lacked the means to accomplish his goals. "The factors responsible for this malintegration may be social, cultural, or psychological in any combination, but the crucial point of strain concerns the meaningfulness of situations and of alternative of action" (Parsons, 1964:144). It was an important part of Durkheim's theory that norms and values were both external and part of individual beliefs. Turning again to Durkheim's latest major work, one finds:

At the foundation of all systems of beliefs and of all cults there ought necessarily to be a certain number of fundamental representations or conceptions and of ritual attitudes which, in spite of the diversity of forms which they have taken, have the same objective significance and fulfill the same functions everywhere. These are the permanent elements which constitute that which is permanent and human in religion; they form all the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of religion in general. (Durkheim, 1964:17)

For both Mead and Durkheim, then, the individual merges his or her identity with the social group, particularly in religious experiences. For Durkheim, the elementary form, seen through observation, provides the a priori foundation of meaning. As Rochberg-Halton (1982:463) says:

Durkheim stated that symbols not only represent social life (“clarifying the sentiment society has of itself”) but also create social life and shape its sentiments. Yet the action of the symbol is caused by its social form, not by its substance, in other words, by the ideal “superstructure” considered as separate from its material embodiment.

As has been previously noted, Durkheim required a social theory of mind that could explain concepts as collectively established representations that were both separate and at the same time a part of human consciousness. Pope (1975:369) believed that this notion “inevitably postulated the existence of a social, collective, or group mind.” Pope (1975:371) said emphatically, “Durkheim clearly held the concept of a group mind.” He had a notion that objects of experience were ultimately manifestations of the idea, and the idea was the basis of reality. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim (1965) showed that to live in a physical world it was necessary to use symbols, the importance of which lies in the intangibility of the superstructure.

Thus, there is one division of nature where the formula of idealism is applicable almost to the letter; this is the social kingdom. Here more than anywhere else, the idea is the reality. Even in this case, of course, idealism is not true without modification. We can never escape the duality of our nature and free ourselves completely from physical necessities; in order to express our own ideas to ourselves, it is necessary, as has been shown above, that we fix them upon material things which symbolize them. But here the part of matter is reduced to a minimum. The object serving as support for the idea is not much in comparison with the ideal superstructure, beneath which it disappears, and also, it counts for nothing in the superstructure...for the ideas thus objectified are well founded, not in the nature of the material things upon which they settle themselves, but in the nature of society. (Durkheim, 1965:260)

There has been some question as to whether Durkheim was rejecting subjective pragmatism (Rawls, 1997), but his detailed analysis of the “collective representations” had some of this position in it. He must have known that this simple position could never explain the collectively established universal. He supported his argument for the idealism of things with examples of objects that could be arbitrarily endowed sacredness. The conventional system was the origin of meaning. The state (the social ego) was the origin of novel ideas (Giddens, 1965:102).

Durkheim believed that pragmatism tried to explain truth psychologically and subjectively. In his thirteenth lecture on pragmatism and sociology, Durkheim (1964:429-430) stated:

...the nature of the individual is too limited to explain by itself alone all things human. Therefore, if we envisage individual elements alone, we are led to underestimate the amplitude of the effects that we have to account for...But men have always recognized in truth something that in certain respects imposes itself on us, something that is independent of the facts of sensitivity and individual impulse.

This idea is, of course, pervasive in Mead also. It has already been shown how Durkheim's "collective representation" compares to the significant symbol of Mead. For Durkheim, while any particular symbol objectified experience, it could be substituted with other symbols that evoked the objectified experience. He stated:

...as far as religious thought is concerned, the part is equal to the whole, it has the same powers, the same efficacy. The debris of a relic has the same virtue as a relic in good condition. The smallest drop of blood contains the same active principle as the whole thing. (Durkheim, 1965:261)

Both Durkheim and Mead agree that the symbol, per se, is irrelevant. Mead (1967:83) wrote:

...one has a nail to drive, he reaches for the hammer and finds it gone, and he does not stop to look for it, but reaches for something else he can use, a brick or a stone, anything having the necessary weight to give momentum to the blow. Anything that he can get hold of that will serve the purpose will be the hammer. That sort of response which involves the grasping of a heavy object is universal.

1.6 The Relevancy of the Object

The relevancy of the objects for Mead and Durkheim was in the responses they mobilized, not in the character of the symbols themselves. Mead claimed there was "no symbolization of objects outside of human social relationships" (Aldiabat and LeNavenec, 2011:1066). Durkheim (1965:260) wrote, "The soldier who falls while defending his flag does not believe that he sacrifices himself for a bit of cloth." He later became quite clear on this point.

The concept is universal, or at least capable of becoming so. A concept is not my concept: I hold it in common with other men, or, in any case can communicate it to them. It is impossible to make a sensation pass from my consciousness into that of another; it holds closely to my organism and personality and cannot be detached from them. All that I can do is to invite others to place themselves before the same object as myself and leave themselves to its action. (Durkheim, 1965:481-482)

Durkheim comes very close here to hitting upon Mead's notion of a universe of discourse. As can be found in *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1967:89-90):

This universe of discourse is constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process of experience and behavior, within which all these gestures or symbols have the same or common meanings for all members of that group, whether they make them to other individuals, or whether they overtly respond to them as made or addressed to them by other individuals. A universe of discourse is simply a system of common or social meanings.

1.7 Social Pragmatism

Close scrutiny will show that while Durkheim's "collective representations" and Mead's "generalized other" are virtually the same (Kerr, 2008; Rochberg-Halton, 1982), Durkheim's notion lacks Mead's role taking and transaction. For Durkheim, while the symbol is being help up, the responding action is being awaited. There is no explanation as to what the symbol holder does as he waits for the response. But this limitation in Durkheim's theory should not hide a most valuable insight. From Durkheim's perspective, "the vast array of ritual artifacts and practices of the cultures of the world are not meaningful in their own right, but only insofar as they carry out cultural beliefs that ultimately have the sole purpose of representing the ideal superstructure of society" (Rochberg-Halton, 1982:464).

Durkheim (1965:263) believed that "collective representations presuppose that minds act and react upon one another; they are the product of these actions and reactions which themselves are possible only through material intermediaries." Thus, human nature was essentially dualistic. The task of the "collective representations" was to bring the two parts of this "homo duplex" (Hynes, 1975:87) together. The biological base of man with his insatiable desires had to be brought into communion with the social man who keeps the drives in check. This sounds like an encroachment on pragmatism, but Durkheim (1964:430) said in a lecture:

This pressure that truth admittedly exercises on minds is itself a symbol that must be interpreted, even if we refuse to make of truth something absolute and extra human. Pragmatism, which levels everything, deprives itself of the means of making this interpretation by failing to recognize the duality that exists between the mentality which results from individual experiences and that which results from collective experiences. By contrast, sociology reminds us that what is social always possesses a higher dignity than what is individual.

Rawls (1997:6) claimed that Durkheim's arguments in his lectures were a major challenge to pragmatism. Stone (1967:161) contended that Durkheim could have accepted Mead's social pragmatism if it had been explicit to him. Mead's American pragmatism held that

consciousness was partially responsible for concerted conduct. The mind helps people adjust to their existence. Adjustment, for Mead, often resulted from the calculation of self-interest (Shaffer, 2006:65). For Mead, mind is never epiphenomenal. Truth emerges from the dialogue between the “I” and the “me.” For the pragmatists, the individual was already a social sign. As Rochberg-Halton (1982:465) said, “human individuality is a consequence of, not a condition prior to, collective representation.” Durkheim represented the opposite view that asocial people are synthesized into the social by “collective representations” that mediate based on social solidarity (Shaffer, 2006:65).

Durkheim’s *Suicide* (1966), which has already been shown as being inspired by the utilitarian paradox of happiness, led to an interpretation of anomie, but this was never fully resolved or clarified. It could, however, have led to a theory of social control and then possibly to a theory of motivation. But it’s enough to show that, in the final stages of his sociological thinking, Durkheim came very close to social pragmatism while at the same time denouncing that position. Stone and Farberman (1967:161) argued that Durkheim would have accepted this position “even down to the rooting of personal truth, or faith, in the internalized conversation between the “I” and the “me.” This conception of truth goes beyond the subjective perspective. “The general only exists in the particular; it is the particular simplified and impoverished” (Durkheim 1965:480).

Mead (1967:89) elaborated the same issue in the following passage from *Mind, Self and Society*.

Meaning is that which can be indicated to others while it is by the same process indicated to the indicating individual. In so far as the individual indicates it to himself in the role of the other, he is occupying his perspective, and as he is indicating it to the other from his own perspective, and as that which is so indicated is identical, it must be that which can be in different perspectives. It must therefore be a universal, at least in the identity which belongs to the different perspectives which are organized into the single perspective...

1.8 Disagreeing On the Universal

Obviously then, the universal is in the collective response, not in the stimulus. It is on this point that a major difference exists between Mead and Durkheim. Mead worked from a process orientation and Durkheim began with an entity orientation. Mead was explaining the emergence of self and mind in actual communities (Fischer, 2008:520). Durkheim was explaining the moral value of social life. He was showing how internalized norms and values, and components of goals, are connected to motivation, but are not directly controlled by reason. The mechanisms of social control are found in the internalization process and transient formal law. Rochberg-Halton (1982:465) showed that Mead:

...although sharing Durkheim's insight that sociality is fundamental to representation, argued that the individuality of a person (and even the biological body) is a social outcome and not as an a priori given, and that every sign (or sign act) has its own quality which is involved in the sign's significance to a greater or lesser degree, and which constitutes a genuinely different mode of significance from that of purely conventional accounts. Instead of seeing the "ideal superstructure" as something apart from its physical manifestations and individual members...stressed, as we see in Mead's concept of "the generalized other," that a collective representation, as well as an individual person, is a social dialogue of signs.

For Mead, there was more to significance than conventional meaning. Turner (2011:336) believed Mead implied that people took stock in the "generalized others" attached to social structures. Mead's "conversation of gestures" was a step beyond this and the "generalized other" concept was Mead's attempt to construct a social theory that could include reflective intelligence as an emergent natural element. But Mead looked at symbols rather than the language they comprise. Mind was a social communicative act. For Durkheim, the mere existence of "collective representation" did not make them social. In *The Philosophy of the Act*, Mead (1938:612) wrote:

In social conduct the individual takes the attitude of another in a cooperative process. If there are a number of persons engaged in the process, he must in some sense take the attitude of all of them. He accomplishes this in getting the attitude which assumes in relation to the common end which each has. He finds an identical element in the attitude of each, which expresses itself in the different responses of the individuals. It is his ability to go from one of these attitudes to another in so far as each calls out the other that constitutes the structure of the system which imports the group into his experience.

Bergesen (2004) shows how Durkheim worked on a sociological analysis of the socialization of children. It was in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965) that he clarified his theory of the internalization of norms and values. He did this by reworking the concept of constraint and making it exercise moral authority through the individual's conscience. This is not much different from Mead's "generalized other." For Mead, as was just mentioned, there is a communication process that constitutes the structure of the system. It has been said (Athens, 2005:309; Joas, 1997:145) there was a practical intersubjectivity involved. The individual is an element in that process and internalizes the perspectives of the others who comprise the group. This is the "inner representation of social life that is the generalized other" (Halton, 2004:93).

1.9 The Issue of Ambiguity

Durkheim (1965:484) wrote that in assimilating concepts, it was necessary that an individual:

...assimilate them to himself, for he must have them to hold intercourse with others; but the assimilation is always imperfect. Each of us sees them after his own fashion. There are some which escape us completely and remain outside of our circle of vision; there are others of which we perceive certain aspects only. There are even a great many which we pervert in holding, for as they are collective by nature, they cannot become individualized without being retouched, modified, and consequently falsified. Hence there comes the great trouble we have in understanding each other.

It can be seen clearly in this passage from Durkheim that he was referring to sources of ambiguity. The sources seem to have an external quality that places them outside the social process (Etzrodt, 2008:160). Mead had a much different notion of ambiguity. For him, ambiguity was inherent in the social process. Individuals could misinterpret the conceptual meanings of symbols. But more important is the distinction Mead makes between the “I” and the “me” (Neuner, 2004:35). The individual is always uncertain as to what his next action will be because the “I” stands for meaningless impulsivity. The “I” is “spontaneous unorganized, and never fully socialized” (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2011:1064). In order for the collective conscience to work, the individual must have an experience and formulate it.

We have to recall the experience to become aware that we have been involved as selves, to produce the self consciousness which is a constituent part of a large part of our experience. (Mead, 1978:180)

As Stone and Farberman (1967:163) wrote, “If every activity sequence contains an element of uncertainty, or unpredictability, then each act, whether in mental, verbal, or physical form, becomes a source of change. The ongoing conversation is always in motion.” In Durkheim’s scheme, when people had problems adjusting it was the rational system that needed straightening out. An emotional state of “anomie” was the result, exerting outside the individual (Kerr, 2008:125), when people became norm less and values were not sufficiently defined to place the people in meaningful posture for action. The pressure of this situation motivated people to act irrationally.

According to Etzrodt (2008:157), Mead’s interpretive sociology was an attempt to develop an objective theory of meaning. He rejected and assumed a behavioral pragmatist position. For him, reality was presumed, but events had to be observed through convergent responses. For him, “conventions, though largely arbitrary in character, are cultural habits determined not by their arbitrariness, but by the goals they represent” (Rochberg-Halton, 1982:462). Keat and Urry (1982:86) believed that Durkheim held an ambiguous position between positivism and realism.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, while Durkheim and Mead agreed on several points, their theories eventually diverged. Durkheim saw an *a priori* structure as the basis for meaning and Mead believed that meaning was a goal-directed sign process. Durkheim could not comprehend such an ontology. He never understood the essence of communication as symbolic transaction or conversation. For him, society was made up of collective representations, social facts and symbols.

Deconstructing the interplay between the macro structure of social institutions and the micro understanding of the individual requires a major consideration of interaction, one of the complexities underlying the process of human social organization (Jenness, Smith and Stepan-Norris, 2007:3). Studying the classics should never be demeaned for their heuristic value or for the purpose of expanding the sociological imagination. As Keat and Urry (1982:90) pointed out, any actual connection between Mead and Durkheim was impossible because the individualistic nature of American social science in the 1920s was incompatible with Durkheim's *sui generis* and "conscience collective."

Any discussion of how individuals share meanings and how they can take the role or attitude of others is always timely. Our world is full of conflict over religion, capital, land and power. It does not take an academic to appreciate the importance of understanding some basic principles of interaction and socialization. As stated in the opening quote for this article, human social organizations depend on it. And as Mead (1934) put it, communication is essential for social order.

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