EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PRAGMATISM AND AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

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Towards a social externalism: Pragmatism and ethnomethodology

Abstract. Ethnomethodologists have very often distorted G. H. Mead's works, partly because they have read them through H. Blumer's interpretations.Therefore they have undervalued many similarities existing between Mead's and Garfinkel's thoughts. Of course there are lots of ambiguities and problems in Mead's writings, and ethomethodologists are right when they criticize them. But they are wrong when they misread Mead. This paper examines two points. The first one is one about which Mead has often been misread: his use of the internal-exernal distinction with regard to mind and action. This use doesn't aim at maintaining a pychological interiority, but at grasping motricity as a kind of intentionality. The second point is about Garfinkel's respecification of one of Mead's main leitmotiv: "taking the attitude of the generalized other". Garfinkel's respecification is done in A. Schütz's terms : the attitude of the generalized other is internal to the "attitude of everyday life", and the generalized other takes the form of that which is normal, i. e. of that which is "in accordance with the mores".

Ethnomethodologists have long held an ambivalent attitude towards pragmatism, and especially towards George Herbert Mead, the most widely-read pragmatist author in the social sciences. On the one hand, they have seen in Mead's work a precursor of the type of analysis that they have later referred to as "Mind in Action," to take up the title of a not-so-recent book by Jeff Coulter (1989). On the other hand, they consider that Mead never entirely broke from a Cartesian conception of the mind, and has not managed to provide a correct analysis of the concept of "mentality". However, these positions are evolving, as proven by a recent paper by Mustapha Emirbayer and Doug Maynard in *Qualitative Sociology* (Emirbayer & Maynard 2011). While ethnomethodology is in a position to provide an effective set of tools for pragmatism's radical empiricism, the latter can, in the field of social-scientific inquiry, allow ethnomethodology to be something more than simply a further program for the study of social interaction and spare it from the technical tendencies that presently threaten it[1].

In what follows I will not tackle a subject as vast as this. I will simply attempt to shed light on an analytic orientation of ethnomethodology that it seems to share with pragmatism, which I propose to call "social externalism". In order to do this, I will begin by discussing a critique of Mead's work by the ethnomethodologists Jeff Coulter and Rod Watson, which does not seem to me to do full justice to Mead's externalism. I will then go on to explain and highlight the social dimension of this externalism and compare it to that of Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology.

[1] On the current state of ethnomethodology, see Livingston 2008; also the dossier published by Enrico Caniglia and Andrea Spreafico in *Quaderni di Teoria Soziale*, 11, 2011; On Garfinkel's reading of the Pragmatists, see Rawls 2002; Emirbayer & Maynard 2011; Quéré &Terzi, 2011; Rawls 2011. For a general overview of ethnomethodology, see, among others, Heritage 1984; Livingston 1987; Button 1991; Lynch 1993.

Mead's vulnerability

In their introductory article for a recent issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* on cognitivism, Jeff Coulter and Rod Watson (2008) criticize researchers who treat our "mental vocabulary" as if it provided labels for inner, un-observable phenomena (states of mind, activities, processes, etc.), and those who view "normative practices" such as interpreting, anticipating, and controlling as if they were operations or processes which are analyzable independently from their relation to the specific context by which they are occasioned. Drawing support from Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology, they recall that mental predicates are not names for processes in the mind or the brain, but person-level predicates. It is persons, and not parts that are internal to them such as the brain or the mind, who think, reason, understand, intend, etc. Furthermore, introducing categories such as 'act', 'activity', 'process', and 'experience' in order to account for these mental predicates takes us down the wrong path from the very beginning, because these are not the appropriate categories. Thus, "to understand" is not a verb of activity but of ability. In the same way, talking about the 'mind' is equivalent to talking about various human capacities and their exercise, which are observable, and especially about capacities which enable self-consciousness and self-reflection (see Bennett & Hacker, 2003).

> Once we manage to expurgate the mentalistic characterization of much of our vocabulary of personal predication, we can begin then truly to grasp how it actually works. In cases where we can tell (e.g.) what someone thinks, how he has understood something, what he intends to do or what his motive is, we do so on the basis of scenic criteria of conduct and circumstances. In those cases in everyday life where we *cannot* tell what someone thinks, etc., we need, not access to anything "inner," but rather, as Wittgenstein reminds us, to "more of the *outer*" (Watson & Coulter, 2008: 13).

In passing, Coulter and Watson attack Herbert Blumer, whose symbolic interactionist program, inspired by Mead, seems to them to be based upon a mentalist conception of human behavior, as suggested by the following quotation from Blumer's book.

Symbolic Interactionism

> The term "symbolic interaction" refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or "define" each other's actions. Their "response" is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior (Blumer, 1967: 78-79).

To introduce in this way an interpretation, qua mental operation, as a mediator of action is a problematic move, as is inserting an interpretation of the rule into the act of following that rule, as Wittgenstein has shown.

However, for Coulter and Watson, the problem stems not only from Blumer's subjectivist and mentalist interpretation of Mead, but also from Mead himself:

> Mead did much to open up "mind" to the warp and weft of ordinary social practice, and certainly made important moves towards the position whereby mind was conceived praxiologically, in terms of its publicity and transparency in action rather than in terms of its "privacy," "interiority" or "indwelling" within individuals. He did, however, on occasion, continue to conceive of mind in the latter terms: again, his position is not entirely stabilized. Not only is there a continuing concern in his work with evolved biological bases, but also with a psychological interiority. Thus he wrote of an "inner conversation" or "inner dialogue" between the "I" and the "Me," of "Self-indication," the imaginative "taking the role of the other" (…) We see here in Mead's work (…) a range of problems attendant upon the failure to entirely abolish the internal-external distinction with regard to mind (Watson & Coulter, 2008: 7-8).

Is this diagnosis correct? Mead unquestionably made abundant use of the internal/external distinction. But did he do so in order to uphold a mentalist conception of the mind? Unquestionably, he conceived of thought as an inner conversation. But is it between the *I* and the *Me*, and is it to explain behavior in terms of some "psychological interiority"? For example, in his theory of the act, Mead distinguished between an "inner phase" and an "external phase" of behavior, and indeed, he did not resist the temptation to anchor the former in the brain. But did he conceive of the act as being controlled from the inside by some subjectivity? Finally, does he see the adoption of another's attitude as an operation of the imagination?

Unquestionably, Mead's position on these issues is far from being clear and stable in all its points. For example, when he defines thought as an "inner conversation", he presents thinking as talking to oneself while assuming the role of the other, or of the community as a whole. In doing this, he fails to analyze the phenomenon properly: thinking is not 'talking' to oneself, we do not need to talk to ourselves when we think; however, we can only think what we can also express in words or through other media (for example through art). But this is not the center of Mead's argument. His main idea is that thought, like reflective intelligence, results from the internalization of a mechanism of organizing behavior which is situated in the social process as a whole, more particularly in communication, and not in the individual's psychological interior. It is the mechanism of assuming the attitudes of others, those of the "generalized other" or of the common perspective, in the coordination of acts, gestures, and words. These, then, are the processes of an "external social organism" that lend their structure to human thought. Furthermore, contrary to the assumption of Coulter and Watson, adopting others' attitudes is not taken as an operation of the imagination, because in Mead's conception, this process is anterior to the emergence of thought and imagination. It is this process that permits the development of the 'self' and the 'mind'. The questions that we may well ask, however, when confronted with this kind of explanation are these: Should we trace our mental capabilities, which involve the mastery of techniques, back to mechanisms? Furthermore, doesn't Mead introduce, in his theoretical explanations, shadowy entities that often just push back the problems that they are supposed to solve?

The same difficulties arise in the analysis of 'self-consciousness', a problem that haunted Mead throughout his life. Being self-conscious does not imply being conscious of one's 'self' as a carrier, subject, or owner of the experience. Neither does it mean to dispose of an image or concept of oneself. These are interpretations that Mead rules out from the very beginning. Rather, it means to respond to one's "generalized habitual responses", or to the attitudes and impulses on which they depend, which means being conscious of the fact of standing ready to react in a such and such a way to such and such a stimulus. But the idea of self-consciousness remains ambiguous, and to consider, as Mead seems to do, that

self-consciousness can arise before language has been acquired, presents some difficulties. Indeed, according to Mead, the individual acquires a first form of self-consciousness as soon as the self appears in its experience as a conduct-organizing mechanism. The individual acquires a self when relating and reacting to himself as if it were an object in the environment, via the mechanism of self-affection (affecting oneself through gestures that are addressed to others) and via the assumption of the attitude of the other. This explanation still seems to be entirely informed by the notion of 'self-reflection'.

In the following I would like to accomplish two tasks. The first is to correct Coulter and Watson's interpretation of Mead's supposed "internalism", and the second is to reestablish links between Mead's thought and ethnomethodology. Too often, ethnomethodologists have identified Mead with Blumer and symbolic interactionism, which they struggled against, usually with good reason. However, they have not done justice to Mead's work, and have thus closed themselves off from certain insights, for example concerning the nature of the social act or the primacy of the social process – two points that I will discuss when bringing the approaches of Garfinkel and Mead into contact.

Mead's externalist "internalism"

Coulter and Watson are right to underline the pregnancy of Mead's distinction between 'internal' and 'external', as well as its ambiguities. However, what they don't notice is that Mead's "internalism" is a crucial component of his "externalism" and a centerpiece of his "social behaviorism," which makes it all the more significant. This is very apparent in his analysis of the internal and external phases of the act.

Mead's starting point is a criticism of John B. Watson's behaviorist psychology. His main criticism is that Watsonian behaviorism makes an important part of the act disappear under the pretext that it is not observable, and psychologizes it in order to get rid of it. What Watson causes to disappear is the "internal phase" of the act. For Mead, however, this phase is not psychological, although it happens inside of the organism: it is not different in nature from the external phase. In short, Mead proposes to consider the act in its entirety, and to show how most external, observable processes are prepared in the organism, or rather how they originate in the organism:

> What the behaviorist does, or ought to do, is to take the complete act, the whole process of conduct, as the unit of conduct. In doing that he has to take into account not simply the nervous system but also the rest of the organism (Mead, 1934: 111).

There are multiple aspects to the Meadian problem of the "complete act". At least four can be discerned. The first concerns the distribution of the act over the interior and exterior of the organism. The second aspect is the role played by the interruption of the act – which is not completed – in perception and in the emergence of thought, reflection, and choice as means of controlling behavior. The third aspect corresponds to the distribution of the social act among multiple agents, and the fourth to the participation of objects, especially physical objects, in the completion of the act. (In order for an act to be successfully completed, the "resistance of things" is necessary, which resistance involves an activity in the object which is of the same nature as the one that takes place in the organism. The organism produces the response in the object that its act tends to call up, and adopts its attitude in order to produce its own future responses to the object).

It is necessary to first deal with the possible misinterpretations of the terms 'act' and 'internal phase'. 'Act' calls to mind a punctual event. When we speak of an act, it generally means that we have converted a course of action or an activity, which is an event including other events, into an object of thought, which is discursive in nature – "an event-with-meanings", as Dewey would say. Yet for Mead, as for all pragmatists, experience is not structured by discourse; it is not primarily cognitive/discursive, but "behavioral", that is it is a matter of conduct or behavior in an environment. An act is also

> an ongoing event that consists of stimulation and response and the results of the response. Back of these lie the attitudes and impulses of the individual which are responsible for his sensitiveness to the particular stimulus and for the adequacy of the response (Mead, 1938: 364).

It is in the act that the relation between organism and environment, as well as the nature of their transactions, are determined.

In addition, the expression 'internal phase' of the act makes us think spontaneously of anything that motivates and directs the act, and which is usually situated in the category of the 'mental' or 'states of mind' – from beliefs, desires, intentions and volitions, through ideas, images, reasoning, exploration and deliberation, to consciousness and self-consciousness. This is not at all what Mead situates in the internal phase of the act. He does not include intentions and volitions, consciousness and reflection, reasoning and deliberation. In fact, for him, even in immediate experience – that is to say experience that does not involve consciousness, thought, or reflection – the act necessarily also has an internal phase.

Of course there are processes in the organism which take place in the "central nervous system" and which are not observable. However, if they are supports, those processes are not on the same level as that which constitutes the matter of the internal phase of the act. The latter can be called psychological, but only in a very limited sense of that term:

> The psychological datum is best defined, therefore, in terms of accessibility. That which is accessible, in the experience of the individual, only to the individual himself, is peculiarly psychological. I want to point out, however, that even when we come to the discussion of such "inner" experience, we can approach it from the point of view of the behavior, provided that we do not too narrowly conceive this point of view. What one must insist upon is that objectively observable behavior finds expression within the individual, not in the sense of being in another world, a subjective world, but in the sense of being within his organism (Mead, 1934: 5).

So what are we dealing with, if it is neither psychological states or events, nor neurophysiological processes? How to conceive the "internal phase" of the act without making it either something mental or subjective, or something purely psychological? The answer can be found in the passage that follows the previous quotation:

> Something of this [objectively observable] behavior appears in what we term "attitudes", the beginning of acts. Now, if we come back to such attitudes we find them giving rise to all sorts of responses. The telescope in the hands of a novice is not a telescope in the sense that it is to those on top of Mount Wilson. If we want to trace the responses of the astronomer, we have to go back into his central nervous system, back to a whole series of neurons; and we find something there that answers to the exact way in which the astronomer approaches the instrument under certain conditions. That is the beginning of the

> act; it is a part of the act. The external act which we do observe is a part of the process which has started within; the values which we say the instrument has are values through the relationship of the object to the pers0n who has that sort of attitude (*ibid.*: 5).

This passage reveals a recurrent and very problematic confusion in Mead's writing, which has been pointed out very accurately by Coulter and Watson. Mead equates what is going on in the organism to what is going on in the "central nervous system", and places the organization of the act in the latter. While it is undeniable that the act in its totality involves neural processes, it is obvious that Mead is trying to describe something other than these when talking about the "internal phase" of the act. The description of this phase requires a different vocabulary, as is shown by the usage of concepts such as 'attitude', which does not pertain to the vocabulary of neurophysiology. While attitude is not a neurophysiological process, it is not a psychological state either. The nature of attitude is "behavioral", because attitude is the beginning of an act. To assume a certain attitude therefore means to be poised to act in a certain way, to be poised to do various things, or to execute various acts, or parts of acts, in relation to objects that are to be handled, or when confronted with situations to resolve. We thus order and arrange the various awakened attitudes in a way so that they do not conflict with each other. An attitude is not observable the way a concrete behavior is, but if the attitude is the beginning of an act, which determines what will follow after what immediately happens, the attitude, as it is present in behavior, is of the same nature as observable conduct.

Mead offers various examples to illustrate what he means by 'attitude' and "beginning of an act". One of these is the previous example of the astronomer on Mount Wilson who, when approaching the telescope, is poised to act very differently than the novice who has not yet acquired the skills to use the instrument properly. Another example appearing in many of Mead's writings is the example of the hammer:

> If one approaches a distant object he approaches it with reference to what he is going to do when he arrives there. If one approaches a hammer he is muscularly all ready to seize the handle of the hammer. The later stages of the act are present in the early stages – not simply in the sense that they are all ready to go off, but in the sense that they serve to control the process itself. They determine how we are going to approach the object, and the steps in our early manipulation of it. (…) The act as a whole can be there determining the process (*ibid.*: 11).

The same example is taken up again in *Philosophy of the Act* in order to illustrate what an attitude is (unfortunately, with the same tendency to associate it with the brain):

> Thus in reaching a hammer we already have in the organism the attitude of striking with the hammer. If now there are present in the experience not only the visual stimulus to reach for the object but also the characters of the object which initiate the response of striking with the object, we have excited those nervous elements which are responsible for the beginning of this later act in its co-ordination with the earlier phase of reaching for the object. Also there enters into the experience what is called the imagery of the result of the response. We feel the hardness of the hammer handle and something of its balance in the hand before we actually get it into the hand (Mead, 1938: 130).

Assuming an attitude means to initiate a movement, to begin an act while tacitly projecting its totality, especially its last phases, its final point, and to use this tacit projection in order to control the accomplishment of the gestures. 'Attitude', as conceived by Mead, thus

presents the characteristics of projection, operativity, and effectiveness, which Dewey, in *Human Nature and Conduct*, attributes to 'habit'. The attitude can take various forms, notably include ideas, under the condition that a pragmatic definition of the idea is adopted. This is what Mead explains in one of his last published texts, "A pragmatist theory of truth":

> Symbols are in truth the appropriate stimuli of our attitudes. Attitudes are the responses which are present in our behavior either in advance of the stimulation of things, or, already aroused, yet await the occasion for their full expression. In the first case they may appear as ideas or concepts, in the second as the meanings which constitute things. The concept of a book is the organization of attitudes, which, given the stimulus, will express themselves in reading, writing, borrowing, drawing, buying or selling the book. They are all there in the dispositions of men, as forms of conduct which await the appropriate spring to call them out (Mead, 1929: 336).

Four observations can be made about this citation. First, this time, the attitudes are located in conduct, and not in the central nervous system. Second, there is a plurality of attitudes: we are poised to act in different ways, to do a series of things, to produce various responses in relation to an object – this preparation is included in every phase of the various acts. A selection is therefore necessary. Third, there is a difference between attitudes and effective responses: the latter are manifest, while the former are not; it is necessary to select stimuli in order to pass from the former to the latter. Finally, the fourth observation concerns the assimilation of ideas, concepts and significations/meanings into habitual responses to an object and into dispositions to act in different ways towards it. Ideas enter into conscious experience in the form of organized attitudes to which the organism responds, that is to say

> as attitudes or organized responses selecting characters of things when they can be detached from the situations within which they take place. Particularly do our habitual responses to familiar objects constitute for us the ideas of these objects (Mead, 1932: 97).

This is why ideas constitute an important part of the human environment.

Where does this lead us? Mead's internalism appears as the centerpiece of the behaviorist psychology that Mead sought to set in opposition to that of Watson. As we have seen, this internalism has its ambiguities, especially when it comes to simultaneously using two mutually untranslatable vocabularies: that of the description of action in ordinary language, which is the basis of the concept of attitude, even in its redefined form; and that of neurophysiology. It is possible to partially dissolve these ambiguities if we reformulate Mead's intuitions from a more phenomenological perspective: what Mead discovers in his analysis of the internal phase of the act are the phenomenon of "motor intentionality" and the projection capabilities of the lived body ("corps propre"), and here especially the way in which the body actively addresses itself to objects and events. From this point of view, a number of Mead's intuitions actually anticipate those that Merleau-Ponty would later develop in his analysis of the dynamism of the body, as has sometimes been noted. Far from designating neural processes alone, this dynamism involves an original intentionality, namely motricity, which gives things a motor meaning and generates a type of practical knowledge that Merleau-Ponty calls *praktognosie* ('practognosis'). The goal of Mead's reflection is to bring out this dynamism of the body and this form of intentionality in the analysis of the act. Of special importance is the inclusion of a kind of non-representational projection of the act in its

entirety which allows the control of its progressive accomplishment (on this subject see Joas, 1996, Chapter 3).

Is "taking the role of the other" imaginative?

A second correction of Coulter and Watson's proposition seems necessary: to talk of "the imaginative 'taking the role of the other'" suggests that Mead has the imagination acting as a mediator of interaction and communication, just as Blumer has interpretation acting as mediator of the organization of behavior. Here, too, Mead's way of putting things is a source of confusion, as could be seen in one of the citations above, where he includes "the imagery of the results of the response" as a component of the attitude. But if, as Mead postulates, the mechanism of adoption of another's attitude is located in behavior, it does not possess the mental character that it would possess if it required imagination. This mechanism appears well before the emergence of mental processes.

For Mead, this mechanism has its origin in a very early phase of social communication: he supposes that vocal gestures arose within the conversation of gestures. In his theory, it is thanks to the vocal gesture, through which the utterer affects himself in the same way that he affects the recipient, that individuals are able to begin reacting to their own acts just as recipients react, to stimulate themselves while also stimulating the other, and to project into their environment their own tendencies to respond or their organized responses. From the moment when the responses provoked from both sides have converged, the conversation of gestures was able to advance to a level where the gestures acquire a shared meaning. In Mead's conception these processes are anything but mental: the conversation of gestures can do without representation, reflection, and imagination. The explanation for this is similar to that given in the case of attitudes. A gesture is the beginning of an act that calls for and indicates a possible continuation in another gesture, the second responding to the first by projecting the accomplishment of the act, as well as its result. As soon as a gesture indicates to someone how to continue, this gesture has meaning, which in turn is provided by the response that interprets it in the form of an act.

Here is how Mead explains the objective nature and threefold character of meaning:

> Meaning is (…) a development of something objectively there as a relation between certain phases of the social act; it is not a psychical addition to that act and it is not an "idea" as traditionally conceived. A gesture by an organism, the resultant of the social act in which the gesture is an early phase, and the responses of the organism to the gesture, are the relata in a triple or threefold relationship of gesture to the first organism, of gesture to second organism and of gesture to subsequent phases of the given act; and this threefold relationship constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises, or which develops into the field of meaning (Mead, 1934: 76).

As shown here, nothing indicates that Mead considers the assumption of the attitude of the other as a mental phenomenon which requires imagination, much to the contrary:

> I think it can be shown that selves do belong to [an objective phase of experience which we set off against a psychical phase] (…), which we distinguish from our imaginations and our ideas, that is, from what we term psychical. The evidence for this is found in the fact that the human organism, in advance of the psychical experiences to which Cooley refers, assumes the attitude of another which it addresses by vocal gesture, and in this attitude addresses itself, thus giving rise to its own self and to the other (Mead, 1930a: 704).

This "operation" takes place in behavior, more precisely in communication, which is partly a social process. It is in communication where society, selves, minds, and what Mead calls the "psychical", come into existence:

> In the process of communication there appears a social world of selves standing on the same level of immediate reality as that of the physical world that surrounds us. It is out of this social world that the inner experiences arise which we term psychical, and they serve largely in interpretation of this social world as psychical sensations and percepts serve to interpret the physical objects of our environment (*ibid.*).

In an earlier text Mead evokes two major phases in the development of communication:

> Communication is a social process whose natural history shows that it arises of cooperative activities, such as those involved in sex, parenthood, fighting, herding, and the like, in which some phase of the act of the form, which may be called a gesture, acts as stimulus to others to carry on their parts of the social act. It does not become communication in the full sense, i.e., the stimulus does not become a significant symbol, until the gesture tends to arouse the same response in the individual who makes it that it arouses in the others. The history of the growth of language shows that in its earlier stages the vocal gestures addressed to another awakens in the individual who makes the gesture not simply the tendency to the response which it calls forth in the other, such as the seizing of a weapon or the avoiding of a danger, but primarily the social role which the other plays in the cooperative act (Mead, 1927: 76).

Here we witness the appearance of the "social role", a term Mead used frequently. However, he does not distinguish between "taking on the role of the other" and assuming his attitude. This is why, in addition to the many undesirable connotations of the concept of role in sociology, it is preferable to use the second expression. Assuming the attitude of the other means activating in one's behavior a tendency to respond to a certain kind of stimulus as the other would respond. Gary A. Cook reminds us that Mead considers this "operation" to be very productive:

> (1) it underlies the acquisition of significant symbols; (2) it makes possible the inner dialogue of human thought; (3) it is the behavioral mechanism by means of which the individual achieves self-consciousness; (4) it is responsible for the development of the social structure of the human self or personality; (5) it provides the principle of distinctively human social organization; (6) it enables the human individual to participate in a world of public or shared objects; (7) it is responsible for our everyday perceptual experience of distant objects as entities having "insides" and as existing contemporaneously with those objects that are within our grasp; (8) it yields the capacity to occupy and compare in thought different spatio-temporal perspectives (Cook, 1993: 92).

If Coulter and Watson's judgment on Mead's errors is therefore in part justified, it still does not do justice to Mead's externalism, a component of which is the motor intentionality of the body. Mead often underlined the corporeal character of the selves, and gave an important place to contact and touch in his theory of perception. However he never extended his analysis of the internal phase of the act to an explanation of the nature of the relation of the lived body ("corps propre") to the world, maybe because of his tendency as a psychologist to place the organization of conduct in the central nervous system.

The sense of "normality" as common perspective

I will now focus on pointing out the social character of Mead's externalism, the central idea of which is that the self, the mind, the mental and self-consciousness are given rise to by the social process. As this social externalism is also an essential aspect of ethnomethodological "doctrine", it seems pertinent to bring the approaches of Garfinkel and Mead into perspective – not, however, without taking certain precautions. In his early writings, Garfinkel defined his externalism in the following terms:

> I shall exercise a theorist's preference and say that meaningful events are entirely and exclusively events in a person's behavioral environment, with this defined in accordance with Hallowell's usage. Hence there is no reason to look under the skull since nothing of interest is to be found there but brains. The "skin" of the person will be left intact. Instead questions will be confined to the operations that can be performed upon events that are "scenic" to the person (Garfinkel, 1963: 190).

If there is one point where Mead and the ethnomethodological approach converge, it is in the affirmation of the primacy of society and the fundamentally social character of human conduct (the logical order of Mead's argument is: Society, Self and Mind, and not the reverse). Coulter and Watson base their critique on a Wittgensteinian interpretation of ethnomethodology, which focuses on dissipating conceptual ambiguities and on correcting category errors that underlie questioning and analysis in the humanities and social sciences, notably as concerns the study of mind and cognition, and the use of a "mental vocabulary". It must be admitted that, viewed from this perspective, Mead's undertaking seems eminently vulnerable in multiple respects.

However, while justified, a Wittgensteinian reading of ethnomethodology is not the only conceivable reading. It is also possible to consider that ethnomethodology has indirectly reformulated certain of Mead's intuitions, rendering them more plausible and transforming them into objects of empirical study. I say "indirectly" because Garfinkel, if he read Mead at all, did not reference him – much to the contrary. Initially, Garfinkel attempted to find a solution to problems that he found in Parsons' action theory, while drawing on insights from various phenomenological perspectives (Husserl, Gurwitsch, Schütz, Merleau-Ponty).

From Garfinkel's point of view, the Meadian enterprise seems without a doubt an immense but unjustified theoretical construction, populated with ghostly entities and processes that were produced by a fertile imagination but that are ultimately incapable of describing social phenomena in their radical concreteness. Garfinkel's objective is neither to naturalize the mind, the senses, or the form of social organization that we live in, nor to explain the formation of self-consciousness. He thus stands much closer to William James than to Mead, especially when explaining why it is necessary to avoid the venerated practices of theorization, establishing models and constructing 'ideal types,' or when criticizing the substitution of concrete phenomena with abstract, imagined entities when trying to talk about them. Nevertheless, Garfinkel tacitly takes up and reformulates a number of Mead's intuitions, for example when describing the functioning of practical reasoning or of common sense knowledge of social structures. This is not entirely surprising when one considers that he had initially been influenced by Alfred Schütz, who had incorporated various pragmatist analyses into his social phenomenology. Garfinkel neither talks about assuming the attitude of a generalized other, nor about adopting the common perspective, but he describes similar processes when explaining the functioning of the ordinary grasping of

events, when describing the role of reference to normality in common-sense judgments, or when describing the functioning of Durkheimian social objects.

There exists, in the ordinary grasping of objects and events in the environment, or in the ordinary grasping of situations, as Garfinkel describes it, an adjustment to the anonymous point of view of "everyone," without this being the bringing into play of an underlying mechanism of attitude assumption. Relying on Schütz, Garfinkel shows that the condition for an event to belong to a "known-in-the-manner-of-common-sense-environment" is that "its features are not assigned as matters of personal preference but are to be seen by anyone" (Garfinkel, 1967: 56) (the "are to be seen" designating a quasi-moral obligation). In addition to "the determinations" attributed to the event (and to the immediate reactions that it evokes), the preferences, expectations, orientations, or values offended by the event, required as a matter of "objective necessity," are considered as attributable to everyone who is a "*bona fide* member" of the same community of language and practices. Therefore, the reactions that the event evokes are endowed with a character of normality, and thereby also with a character of obligation.

For Garfinkel, the sense of normality designates the form that the social perspective takes in the organization of conduct. "Sense of normality" is to be read not only as the way that things usually happen in relations and in the factual dimension of social life, but also as a sense of how things should and must happen (the normative and axiological dimension). In particular, the sense of normality with regard to situations, practices and social relations comprises a moral sense of the reasons for facts, norms, and values that underlie this normality, that is to say a sense of how they are justified. It is therefore tied closely to a determinate conception of the social and moral order. This sense of normality and the corresponding vision of social and moral order are at the same time prescriptive and hermeneutic: they are prescriptive in the sense that they establish obligations; they are hermeneutic insofar as they serve to identify and interpret reality.

This sense of normality implies that conduct and practices are animated and directed by ideas, conceptions and beliefs – after all, people understand at least a minimum of what they are doing and what they see others do, and this understanding involves ideas, or more precisely a particular type of ideas, namely anonymous and impersonal ideas that pertain to practices and social institutions. It is precisely *because* certain impersonal ideas are constitutive of practices and institutions that these ones make sense for their "members". C. Castoriadis and C. Taylor call this the "social imaginary." While Garfinkel does not use the term "social imaginary," what he describes as "a legitimate order of beliefs about life in society seen 'from within' the society" (Garfinkel, 1967: 54) corresponds quite well to Castoriadis and Taylor's expression.

Building on Schütz's analytical sketches of the structures of the *Lebenswelt*, and especially on the opposition that he established between the "attitude of daily life" and the "attitude of scientific theorizing", Garfinkel described the functioning of the sense of normality in a relatively precise manner in chapters 2, 3 and 5 of *Studies in ethnomethodology*. For the ordinary man, the social and moral order primarily manifests itself in the normal character of situations of everyday life, that is to say in their conformity to normative background expectations and legitimate beliefs about social life. Where we find order, we find behavior appearing as familiar forms that are normatively expected and identifiable for what they are, because they are endowed with organization, they are standardized, and they correspond to what everyone could or would do under the same circumstances, and so on. From this point of view, members don't meet society as an object of thought – as a represented or imagined order, a conceptualized totality, a personality of higher hierarchical order, or as a

discursively asserted collectivity of belonging – but, much more prosaically, as the standardized, reproducible and normal character of concrete figures drawn in conduct and in activities of ordinary scenes of social life. The "normality", which cannot be grasped from outside of a situation of committment, is therefore essentially a morally motivated conformity to an assumed order which is defined by mores and institutions, habits and customs: "For the *bona fide* member 'normal' means 'in accordance with the mores'". Normality functions simultaneously as an interpretive pattern, as the content of normative background expectations, as guide when configuring behavior (in production as well as in reception), as regulator of social affects, and as a linchpin for the construction of justifications.

Here is how Garfinkel introduces this perspective in chapter 2 of his work, which is devoted to the routines of everyday life:

> A society's members encounter and know the moral order as perceivedly normal courses of action – familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life known in common with others and with others taken for granted. They refer to this world as the "the natural facts of life" which, for members, are through and through moral facts of life. For members not only are matters so about familiar scenes, but they are so because it is morally right or wrong that they are so. Familiar scenes of everyday activities, treated by members as "the natural facts of life," are massive facts of the members' daily existence both as a real world and as the product of activities in a real world (Garfinkel, 1967: 35).

In the organization of their activities and exchanges social actors shape their conduct according to the constitutive expectations of the "attitude of everyday life" as a morality. The "attitude of everyday life" pertains to "morality" insofar as it implies a morally motivated adherence to the "natural facts of life in society," that is to say, an adherence to current beliefs, mores, habits, and customs. This is why it is possible to say that members of society act and interact in a situation of commitment. Their commitment is not only a bias in favor of certain facts, definitions, standards, norms, values, or beliefs, but also a concession of authority and validity: the members accept the jurisdiction of these facts, norms, etc., over themselves, and over what they do – but also over what they see – because they are convinced, for reasons that are exempt from doubt, that they merit their adherence. Thus, the "natural facts of life" are "socially-sanctioned-facts-of-life-in-society-that-any-bona-fide-member-of-the-society-knows" (*ibid.*: 76). This means that they are not only valid for members directly engaged in the production of an activity, but for *anyone*. Adherence to these facts expresses itself in phrases such as "this is how we do it," "this is how we usually do it," "this is how it's done," "you can do that", "you don't do that", "this is how things are normally done, how they ought to be done, or how they must be done", etc.

Obviously, the adherence in question is not the result of a deliberation on the member's part, and most certainly not the result of a critical examination of what Habermas calls "claims to validity" that are put forward for factual or normative propositions, or that are laid by traditions. The presuppositions on the basis of which we make sense of situations that we are experiencing are not, strictly speaking, objects of knowledge or objects of discourse. As M. Polyani says, "we may be said to dwell in them" (Polyani, 1958: 60).

The sense of "normality" thus appears as an essential element of mediation in the constitution of the behavioral environment which is society. In fact, the determination of the basis of inference and required action to deal with a situation, to coordinate with others, to adjust to circumstances, or to compose with the objective conditions of the environment is precisely based on the "motivated" admission of these "natural facts of life in society" (life

in society viewed "from the inside of society"), as assumed to be known and admitted by everyone.

The social order that the members of society experience is therefore inseparably cognitive and normative at the same time. The social order, as experienced by the agents, provides them with cognitive resources, that is to say at the same time with ideas, conceptions, definitions, beliefs and knowledge (the "common sense knowledge of the facts of social life"), and with means to understand, interpret, explain, justify, and describe reality. But cognition is not separated either from normativity or from morality. If it is true that people refer to "common sense knowledge of the facts of social life" as a set of "natural facts of life," and if they understand, interpret, describe, explain the events and situations on the basis of such a reference, it is fair to say there is indeed a "morality of cognition" (Heritage, 1984). Yet, this morality is not only valid for agents who are carrying out an activity, but also for those who observe it and who are compelled to recognize it for what it is. In addition to this, common sense knowledge does not separate facts and values – much to the contrary. In cognition, not only intellectual certainties are at work, but also moral commitments that attribute value, price and authority to the "natural facts of life", to taken for granted definitions of reality, and to the "common sense knowledge of social structures".

Using a vocabulary essentially borrowed from social phenomenology, Garfinkel expresses the idea that social agents perceive, feel, think, interpret, reason, and so on, in terms of an institutionalized social reality:

> Common sense knowledge of the facts of social life for the members of the society is institutionalized knowledge of the real world. Not only does common sense knowledge portray a real society for members, but in the manner of self-fulfilling prophecy the features of the real society are produced by persons' motivated compliance with these background expectancies (…). Seen from the person's point of view, his commitments to motivated compliance consist of his grasp of and subscription to the "natural facts of life in society" (Garfinkel, 1967: 53-54).

Garfinkel provides various illustrations of this socially instituted character of knowledge of the world. One of these deals with the use of "institutionalized features of the collectivity as a scheme of interpretation." In an experiment that simulates the situation of asking, giving and receiving advice, people were invited to make sense of the "yes"/"no" answers (which in fact were determined in advance) given to the questions that they asked. "Make sense" here essentially means to attribute a "reasonable" character, to assign "perceivedly normal values" while referring to "institutionalized features of the collectivity as a scheme of interpretation". The argument is also more generally valid for most ordinary interactions:

> Subjects made specific reference to various social structures in deciding the sensible and warranted character of the adviser's advice. Such references, however, were not made to any social structures whatever. In the eyes of the subject, if the adviser was to know and demonstrate to the subject that he knew what he was talking about, and if the subject was to consider seriously the adviser's descriptions of his circumstances as grounds of the subject's further thoughts and management of these circumstances, the subject did not permit the adviser, nor was the subject willing to entertain, any model of the social structures. References that the subject supplied, were to social structures which he treated as actually or potentially known in common with the adviser. And then, not to any social structures known in common, but to normatively valued social structures which the subject accepted as conditions that his decisions, with respect to his own sensible and realistic grasp of his

> circumstances and the "good" character of the adviser's advice, had to satisfy. These social structures consisted of normative features of the social system seen from within, which, for the subject, were definitive of his memberships in the various collectivities that were referred to (*ibid.*: 92-93).

Another enlightening illustration is Garfinkel's study of the practical accomplishment of gender in the case of a transsexual, Agnes. In the chapter of *Studies in Ethnomethodology* accounting for this study, Garfinkel describes the functioning of the "common sense knowledge of the facts of social life" in relation to the question of gender. From the common sense perspective, the population is divided into two types of individuals when viewed from the angle of sexual composition: on one side, natural males and females, on the other side, persons who are morally different – the "incompetent, criminal, sick and sinful" (*ibid.*: 122). Garfinkel specifies that this is the definition of "a real world of sexed persons," a world that is viewed as a "legitimate order", "as a matter of objective, institutionalized facts, i. e. moral facts" (in the sense that these facts give rise to moral, and not only intellectual, convictions). According to such a definition, to which everyone is expected to adhere as a matter of course when dealing with others, "the presence in the environment of sexed objects has the feature of a 'natural matter of fact'":

> This naturalness carries along with it, as a constituent part of its meaning, the sense of its being right and correct, i.e., morally proper that it be that way (…). Hence the *bona fide* member of the society, within what he subscribes to as well as what he expects others to subscribe to as committed beliefs about "natural matters of fact" regarding distribution of sexed persons in the society, finds the claims of the sciences like zoology, biology and psychiatry strange. These sciences argue that decisions about sexuality are problematic matters. (…) I have stressed several times that for the *bona fide* member "normal" means "in accordance with the mores." Sexuality as a natural fact of life means therefore sexuality as a natural and *moral* fact of life (*ibid.*: 123-124).

There is thus, from the perspective of ethnomethodology, not only an immediate manifestness of the social order and social structures to be found in familiar scenes of everyday life and in their "social settings" – it is not necessary to wait for them to be rendered visible by scientific objectification – but also an immediate availability of this order and these structures as practical resources, for both identification, comprehension and description of these scenes, and for the structuring of practical accomplishments. This immediate availability is in a way conditioned by the specific filter of the constitutive requirements of common sense knowledge. However, this availability is only immediate in situations where operations that actively organize behavior are taking place, which makes it different from that which society shows as an object of discourse or of scientific observation. It means that society operates, when engaged in such active operations, as a medium, or more precisely as a purveyor of schemes of interpretation and organization, orientations and norms, models and standards, with the instituted ideas and meanings that are part of it. This availability also shows that society is not to be distinguished from these operations – hence the validity of the expression that Garfinkel occasionally used: the "workings of immortal ordinary society".

The primacy of the social in Mead's writings

Mead conceptualized the primacy of the social very differently: he presents both an observation and a theoretical construction. An observation: no living organism can exist alone and isolated from others: "All living organisms are bound up in a general social environment or situation, in a complex of social interrelations and interactions upon which their continued existence depends" (Mead, 1934: 228). The bulk stimulation of behavior is provided by reciprocal actions of the members of these groups. The development of the "vital process" of society as organism (as Mead occasionally puts it) requires "social acts" involving multiple individuals, and the organization of social cooperation brings into play very different mechanisms, depending on the type of society. In short, the social process is first of all factual. Any behavior is inevitably social because it takes place in a context of coexistence, association and interdependence, and because individual acts are but one phase in a more wider behavior, that of the social whole. This means that to be complete, the acts of individuals require the acts of other individuals.

However, for Mead the primacy of the social is simultaneously a theoretical construction: it is in the social nature of experience in a group, and in the structure of the social act that results – a social act which varies depending on the social forms of cooperation and coordination – that the mechanism which, through communication, enabled the rise of the higher form of organization of behavior which is the reflective control of behaviors. This is the mechanism of assuming the attitude of a generalized other:

> I have my own doctrine for this social character of experience (…) What it amounts to in a very summary formulation is that society exists in the social nature of its members, and the social nature of its members exists in their assumption of the organized attitudes of others who are involved with them in cooperative activities, and that this assumption of organized attitudes has arisen through communication (Mead, 1929: 341).

The primacy of the social is therefore not only the primacy of the "social act," but also the primacy of social and institutional habits, since, as Mead writes, it is in institutions that individuals "find the organization of their own social responses." In fact, institutions essentially are established organizations of responses, or "complexes of social habits." Among society's institutions, language is the most fundamental one. Like any other institution, language can be characterized as an organization of responses or attitudes that are specific to a society, to the extent that it is a means to produce the different parts of an integrated social act:

> The significant symbol is nothing but part of the act which serves as gesture to call out the other part of the process, the response of the other, in the experience of the form that makes the gesture. (…)The symbols as such are simply ways of calling out responses. They are not bare words, but words that do answer to certain responses; and when we combine a certain sort of symbols, we inevitably combine a certain set of responses (Mead, 1934: 269).

As we have seen, Garfinkel approaches the primacy of the social from a completely different perspective. While he attributes the same function to institutions, and the same role to the implantation of the social perspective into behavior in the form of a sense of normality, Garfinkel's conception of the primacy of the social is much more durkheimian. He conceives of sociality as tightly interwoven with morality. (It could also be added that his de-

scription of the self-organization of "social settings" develops a motif which is very similar to that of pragmatism: the operational contribution of the environment to the organization of experience.) At the same time, it is the operations and accomplishments of the members of society that Garfinkel sees as the foundations of the edifice of the social and moral order.

In his early writings, Garfinkel took up Schütz's question of intersubjectivity as well as his analysis of the structures of the *Lebenswelt*: the "stability of concerted actions" is produced through intersubjective operations between the individuals, with the operations being normatively regulated and socially organized. In a later phase he proposed a different version of the primacy of the social, namely viewed from the angle of the "social object".

In the context of this last point, too, a connection can be made between Mead and Garfinkel. Mead used and abused the term "social object," at times ascribing very different meanings to it. For Mead, the self is a social object, partly because it arises through interaction and because it incorporates the attitudes of others, especially the perspective of the group. Institutions such as property are also "social objects," as are shared values and meanings, or as are persons. The only instance where Mead uses the term somewhat more precisely is in his theory of the social act. The social object is the meaningful whole that controls the execution of a complex act distributed over multiple agents. It is therefore, in a certain way, the form of the act as a whole (Mead uses examples such as team plays or economic exchanges). The form is an entity of order and meaning. It organizes and binds together the different parts and corresponding roles of the complete act, thereby also giving a direction to the whole. At the same time, the form transcends the participants of the act and their individual performances, and gives the whole a normative and objective character, in part because the form corresponds to an institution or an instituted practice. Mead says of this "social object" that it has to be present in the experience of every participant of a social act in order to produce the proper responses, which are connected to the responses of the others, and to control their performances. In this sense it has also a structuring effect on the situation. The modality of its appearance is not clearly stated. In certain instances, the social object refers to society as a whole: it is the common object generated by the presence of all in the experience of everyone, the object that ensures social control in a society of selves.

Garfinkel's social object is just as transcendental and objective, and it also controls the situation and conduct of individuals, albeit in a different manner, namely through normativity and morality – two aspects that Mead rarely speaks of. It is through the individuals' operations and accomplishments, which are supported by legitimate beliefs as well as habits and customs, that the social object acquires the status of being simultaneously transcendental as well as objective, authoritative, and obligatory.

For Garfinkel, the paradigmatic example for the social object is the "formatted queue". When lining up in order to wait to gain access to a service, the participants generate, through their effective conduct and reasoning – finding, taking, and keeping their place in line, maintaining the direction of the line, advancing, staying at the right distance, etc. – not only a physically observable order but also a normative environment to which they submit themselves. They are exteriorizing the normative reference and thereby giving it an independent existence. By assigning it a transcendental status, they attribute a regulatory and obligatory power to an order that they themselves create and make visible (as well as being accountable, and able to be cited in support of an evaluation, complaint, incrimination, etc.) through their attitudes and conduct. The constraints of this order are directly felt by the people who create it. By displaying attitudes and conduct that are in conformity to the relatively vague normative expectancies which the physical order generates, the individuals are attesting their conformity to something that they do not consider as depending on them-

selves. Nevertheless, they are its very source, but they identify it as being exterior to themselves, and recognize it as obligatory and having authority, based on legitimacy or moral desirability. On the other hand, it is through this social object that, on the basis of established and socially approved practices, they are able to produce things together, and to control their actions and contributions to the whole. It is the prime example of what Garfinkel (2002) calls a "Durkheimian social object":

> The social object seems to stand above, or to be greater than, the actions of its production cohort. (…) And that object is a moral object through and through; it is right and proper that the object – the formatted queue, for example – is the way that it is. It is a moral fact of life and the actions of its local production cohort are moral or immoral actions, like butting-in-line (…). The actions of a social object's production cohort are constrained by the object that that cohort is itself accountably producing (Livingston, 1987: 82).

To conclude

Ethnomethodology has much surpassed Mead's intuitions on a number of points, and, from the point of view of the social sciences, fleshed them out in a much more satisfying manner. Is this a reason to send Mead's works to the shelves of second-hand bookstores? Can his work still guide our inquiries? Obviously, it all depends on what we are looking for. If, for example, we want to retrace the natural history of the mind, communication or human society, we will find in Mead's works a wide spectrum of stimulating conjectures that will fuel our investigations. The same is true when trying to fend off the subjectivist narrowing-down of the concept of experience in modernity as recalled by R. Koselleck (1988).

In relation to ethnomethodology, Mead's argument carries a potential that deserves to be underlined. The functioning of common sense under the aspect of normality, as Garfinkel has described it, seems to be immune to all innovation, contestation or transformation: it never transcends the order of the membership collectivity. It is a decidedly conservative version of common sense, and quite opposed to the very spirit of a democratic society, if the latter is understood as opening up the possibility of never-ending questioning and as the removal of the landmarks of certainty. Mead's common sense is not closed in this way; the common perspective introduced in conduct, in order to organize and control it, is not limited to a particular group or collective. This common perspective is by definition more open to a more universal generality, built on the intersecting of unrealized possibilities in the present order:

> A human being is a member of a community and is thereby an expression of its customs and the carrier of its values. These customs appear in the individual as habits, and the values appear as his goods, and these habits and goods come into conflict with each other. Out of the conflict arise in human social experience the meanings of things and the rational solution of the conflicts. The rational solution of the conflicts, however, calls for the reconstruction of both habits and values, and this involves transcending the order of the community. A hypothetically different order suggests itself and becomes the end in conduct. It is a social end and must appeal to others in the community. In logical terms there is established a universe of discourse which transcends the specific order within which the members of the community may, in a specific conflict, place themselves outside of the community order as it exists, and agree upon changed habits of action and a restatement of values (Mead, 1930 b: 404).

Mead thus presents us with an analytical hold on the political dimension of social experience that ethnomethodology has never managed to provide.

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