

PEIRCE, MEAD, AND THE OBJECTIVITY OF MEANING\*

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This paper shows parallelisms between the philosophies of George H. Mead and Charles S. Peirce. Because they both view cognition from the social realist's perspective, they independently developed equivalent triadic theories of meaning. It is further argued that their pragmatic account of meaning logically leads to belief in the objectivity and communality of truth and scientific knowledge. This reveals their opposition to the nominalistic and individualistic view of truth and knowledge sometimes embraced in contemporary sociology of knowledge.

In his introduction to Mead's Selected Writings, Andrew Reck (1964:xlili) observed that it is necessary to go back to Charles Peirce to find a speculative genius, working from pragmatic principles, who equals the daring of Mead. <sup>1</sup>As far as I have been able to determine, regrettably few have taken that journey. <sup>1</sup>Morris (1938:110-111), in one of the better known attempts to relate the thoughts of Peirce and Mead, noted that because Peirce approached his problems as a logician while Mead approached his as a social psychologist, coupled with the fact that no obvious influence of Peirce on Mead is discernible, their convergences and their differences are more significant. Morris emphasized their differences more than their convergences; consequently, in dwelling on their divergences, Morris might lead one to overlook the similarities between their philosophies.

The purpose of this paper will be to reverse that focus because their convergences are at least as instructive as their differences. Most sociologists read Mead and ignore Peirce, and many philosophers do the opposite. This is understandable, given Peirce's and Mead's difference in approach; however, because their writings complement each other, one can, by seeing the same points presented in a different way, broaden his understanding of Mead by reading Peirce and vice versa.

Gallie (1966:31) suggests that Mead and others working in the pragmatic tradition have been following, consciously or unconsciously, in the steps of Peirce. The fact that Mead's writings virtually never referred to Peirce implies that whatever influence Peirce had on Mead's thought must have been indirect and unknown to Mead. It seems likely that much of this influence came through James. Mead was James' student, and James and Peirce were life-long friends (Reck, 1964:lviii).

I shall claim that, despite the clear differences stated by Morris, there remain significant parallelisms between the philosophies of Peirce and Mead. The analysis will center upon their views of truth, meaning, and scientific knowledge. Finally, these views will be related to the question of the relativity of truth, raised by the sociology of knowledge. Specifically, it is a common thesis of the sociology of knowledge that since one views the world within the con-

finer of some particular Weltanschauung, he can never know that what appears as truth within that framework (of which he is a prisoner) is the truth as it really is. Consequently, all truth claims are relative to the socio-historical context they presuppose and are meaningless outside that situation.

Signification is the communication of ideas. Peirce and Mead argue that signification is possible only when both interactants attach the same meaning to their symbols. This is a common sense observation, and yet the mere fact that men are able to effectively communicate through signs and symbols carries with it profound epistemological implications. Such communication requires that both communicants share similar perceptual experiences; otherwise, it would be impossible for them to consistently associate the same object to a common symbol. This, in turn, implies that, since people of divergent social origins can communicate effectively on a broad range of topics, they can agree upon perceptual judgments (e.g., that the top of the desk is brown) even though they may occupy radically different social positions. This shared basis for perceptual judgments provides the foundation which makes language possible; furthermore, it makes the scientific method possible and creates the objectivity of the scientific perspective (see Mead, 1964:306-319). All of this may appear to be common sense, but it is important to make it explicit whenever philosophers (for example, Winch, 1958) import philosophy's 'other minds' problem into sociology, thereby arguing in favor of the a priori impossibility of nomothetic social science. Such philosophers need to be reminded that although epistemology may call percepts into question, science must necessarily postulate the reality of what is perceptually given. Equally important, if the thoughts of other minds could never be inferred from what is given in perception, the skeptic, Peirce and Mead would argue, could not give expression to his contentions because language is impossible without having a community of minds capable of signifying the same object to each other. This is the heart of the triadic theory of meaning shared by Peirce and Mead.

Peirce developed the realist thesis further by contending that because the scientific community bases its beliefs on perceptual judgments whose content is beyond human control, it logically follows that the scientific community would, if given an indefinite amount of time, reach complete consensus, and their beliefs would be true without reservation. This final step in Peirce's argument against relativism seems to leave Mead behind, though possibly not far behind.

#### The Problem of Meaning

Peirce and Mead took, as a common point of departure, the question: how is language possible? While Peirce was concerned to lay bare the whole logical substructure of symbolic communication, Mead was more crucially interested in the social and psychological processes which mediate symbolic behavior. Consequently in presenting Peirce, I shall limit myself to those aspects of his philosophy which bear direct relevance to Mead's interests. This is necessary because, although Peirce and Mead had many of the same insights, Peirce's theory of meaning was far more developed conceptually and terminologically than Mead's theories.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation of Peirce's philosophy was his logic, the formal doctrine of signs. Peirce (2.228)<sup>3</sup> stated that a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. In a more detailed definition, he (2.303) characterizes a sign as being "anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in

the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum." By this, Peirce meant that the interpreter's response to a sign is directed toward the same object as is the sign of which it is the interpretant.

This relation will be further amplified in a latter section, but let us consider an example which, for illustrative purposes, is somewhat oversimplified. If someone comments that it is about to rain, one hearing that statement might go outside and raise the windows of his car. This action is the interpretant of the sign (i.e., the statement that it is going to rain), and both the sign and interpretant refer to the same object--namely, the existing atmospheric conditions. Also, the action of raising the car's windows might cause another person to notice the weather conditions. This demonstrates Peirce's principle that every interpretant can serve as a sign having the same object as has the sign of which it is the interpretant. Thus, in principle, the sign-interpretant chain may proceed indefinitely.

As stated, the interpretant is the response of the interpreter to the sign (5.475), or, as Mead (1934:78) notes, ". . . the response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given social act is the meaning of that gesture." Mead also realized the distinction between the object of the sign and the interpretant of the sign. He observes that signification has a double reference, one to the thing indicated (Peirce's 'object') and the other to the response (Peirce's 'interpretant') (Mead, 1964:246).

One of the problems of this doctrine is that if the sign-interpretant process is conceived as being a continuing and indefinite progression (i.e., every sign, by definition, must have an interpretant, and every interpretant must serve as a sign for a subsequent interpretant), then the theory is incapable of explaining the origins of 'consciousness' or 'mind' since Peirce's thought-sign and Mead's significant symbol presuppose the existence of reflective intelligence. Peirce and Mead were both aware of the problem. Peirce argued that the sign-interpretant chain is analogous to a certain type of mathematical series which contains no first term or last term. This defense seems inadequate since the sign-interpretant process necessarily operates within the spatial and temporal limits of the human condition whereas no such limits are involved in purely mathematical sequences. Mead's solution is somewhat less dependent upon analogy.

According to Mead, gestures are distinguishable on the basis of whether they require symbolic convention. Clearly, the human race existed long before people developed the ability to communicate with significant symbols. Yet, as Mead implies, humans did have the ability to communicate through more primitive methods (non-significant gestures). Mead concludes that if we regard these non-linguistic forms of communication as prior to the emergence of 'mind,' then the development of reflective intelligence, by the human race, as well as by the individual, can be explained in terms of a gradual movement from the "rudimentary form" of social experience to understanding and communication through significant symbols. Thus, the development of 'mind' or 'consciousness' can be seen as a natural stage in the evolution of the interaction process rather than as an ontologically inexplicable presupposition of symbolic communication (Mead, 1934:50).

Actually, Peirce's logic implicitly contained all of the conceptual apparatus necessary to give a full account of Mead's theory of the evolution of consciousness. In order to develop this point, it will unfortunately be necessary to review some of Peirce's neologisms. Since signs involve a triadic relationship between sign, object, and interpretant, it is possible to characterize a sign

in three different ways:

1. According to the nature of the sign itself.
2. According to the way the sign denotes its object.
3. According to the relationship between the sign and its interpreter. (Since these relations are purely logical and have no direct relevance to Mead, they will not be analyzed.)

By the first of the trichotomies of signs (as Peirce called them), a sign is either a qualisign, a sinsign, or a legisign. A qualisign is a "quality which is sign" (2.244). The feeling of any particular color is an example of a qualisign. A sinsign is "an actual event or existent thing which is a sign (2.245). A sinsign can act as a sign only through its qualities; hence, sinsigns require qualisigns. However, these qualisigns have no significance individually, but collectively function as a sign in virtue of being embodied in the same object or event. For example, we identify a particular type of bird by attending to a number of its qualities (size, color, shape) none of which may be individually sufficient to signify that particular type of bird but which collectively have that capacity. Finally, a legisign is a type of rule or law which can only denote its object by means of some agreed upon convention; consequently, every legisign can function only through what Peirce called its "replica": a special type of sinsign which would not be significant "if it were not for the law which renders it so" (2.246). Peirce cites the word "the" as an example of a legisign. It can be employed through a variety of sinsigns (e.g., it can be spoken, printed, carved in stone, et cetera). In any case, all of these sinsigns are replicas of the same legisign and would be meaningless without their connection to it.

There exists, therefore, a hierarchy of dependence between legisigns, sinsigns, and qualisigns since legisigns require sinsigns in order to denote their objects and sinsigns require qualisigns. However, ordinary sinsigns and qualisigns function as signs without recourse to legisigns. Primitive man learned to recognize horses long before he developed legisigns; indeed, this type of non-verbal experience is, as Mead (1934:50ff.) noted, a prerequisite to the emergence of language.

Peirce's second trichotomy (icon, index, symbol) affords a further indication of the distinction between verbal and non-verbal modes of signification. As was noted, the first trichotomy characterized signs simply on the basis of their form of appearance. The second trichotomy distinguishes signs according to the means by which they refer to their objects. "An icon is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own . . ." (2.247). Thus, an icon acts as a sign simply because its qualities resemble its object. For example, a portrait is an icon of the person it represents. Note that the sign-object relation of resemblance exists even if no interpreter perceives it as such, but of course the icon can only function as a sign when it is interpreted as denoting its object.

A second type of sign-object relation is the index, which Peirce defines as "a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object" (2.248). That is, there is an actual physical connection between an index and its object. Peirce gives the example of a weathervane, which is an index because there is a direct physical relation between the direction the weathervane points and the direction that the wind is blowing (2.286). Another example of an index is a rap on the door since there is a causal connection between the knock on the door (the index) and the presence of someone outside (its object). Again, notice that, like the icon, the index's sign-object relation exists even

though it may not be interpreted.

The third type of sign of the second trichotomy is the symbol, which Peirce (2.249) describes as a sign which "refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object." It is the counterpart of the legisign. Thus, a word denotes its object simply by virtue of its agreed upon identification with it. Consequently, the symbol, unlike the index or icon, requires an interpretant; otherwise, it not only fails to be a sign, it also has no object. As Mead (1934:181) writes, "A symbol is nothing but the stimulus whose response is given in advance." The capacity to compel the interpreter to respond to its object is the distinguishing mark of the symbol.

From this, it is clear that of the icon, index, and symbol, only the symbol presumes language. This again suggests the hypothesis that man may have developed the capacity for reflective thought (and, hence, the significant symbol) only after experiencing the more "rudimentary forms" of the social process through icons (e.g., hieroglyphics) and indices (e.g., facial and bodily gestures) (cf. 2.338). Mead never tired of insisting that the self is not given antecedent to all experience, but rather that it emerges from the initial stages of interaction in the social process. It is only when one can recognize an external object as external that it becomes possible to represent objects to himself. As Peirce (1.324) likewise recognized, "We become aware of ourself in becoming aware of the not-self."

It is unfortunate that Peirce never extended the elements of his logic in a more completed theory of the emergence of consciousness as did Mead. Perhaps, as Morris (1938:110-111) noted, it was Peirce's preoccupation with logic and Mead's stress on social psychology which caused them to pursue different implications of their basically shared analysis of meaning structures.

#### Truth, Community, and Science

Peirce and Mead agreed that signification occurs only when each interactant attaches the same meaning to every symbol and that this requires a language community. Thus, the object of a sign or significant symbol is necessarily open to public agreement. These considerations led Peirce to the conclusion that since the determination of scientific knowledge involves propositions, it must also be a communal action. Furthermore, because science is a pragmatic and communal practice, the ultimate beliefs of the scientific community would necessarily be true. Although Mead did not share Peirce's boundless optimism in the potential of science, he did agree that truth and knowledge are inextricably bound to the notion of community--with many of the same consequences seen by Peirce.

One can approach their conception of the role of community in science and knowledge by analyzing what Peirce would call the interpretants of a sign or what Mead would term the response of the second organism to the gesture of the first. Peirce divided the interpretant into four elements: the emotional interpretant, the energetic interpretant, the logical interpretant, and the ultimate logical interpretant. As I will show, although Mead was not as systematic as Peirce, he did recognize these distinctions.

As noted, the interpretant is the response of the interpreter to a sign, but upon closer examination, it can be seen to have a number of possible components. The emotional interpretant is "a feeling which we come to interpret as evidence

that we comprehend the proper effect of the sign . . ." (5.475). Peirce adds that in some cases such as a musical performance, the emotional interpretant is the only "proper significant effect" produced by the sign. Mead (1934:75) makes essentially the same point by referring to poetry as an illustration of the ". . . difference between the purely intellectual character of a symbol and its emotional character." If the sign is to produce any effect other than the emotional interpretant, it can only do so through some effort of the interpreter. This energetic interpretant, as Peirce called it, may simply consist of muscular responses such as "clenching of fists, grinding of teeth, . . . or else outflows of nervous energy" (Mead, 1964:109). However, the effort of the energetic interpretant is more often mental than physical. This mental effort may produce what Peirce (5.476) called the logical interpretant, which is "closely related" to the meaning of a general concept. For example, if upon hearing thunder, one thinks of rain, that thought is the logical interpretant of the sign (thunder). Yet many times we do not consciously think about the sign--especially if it is quite familiar and expected. Mead (1934:72) tells the story of the absent-minded college professor who started to dress for dinner, but finally found himself in his pajamas in bed because ". . . he did not think about what he was doing. The later action was not a stimulus to his response but just carried itself out when it was once started." [emphasis mine] The logical interpretant can only occur when one conceptualizes the potential consequences of the sign. "The meaning can appear only in imagining the consequences of the gesture" (Mead, 1964:111).

But the thought which is the logical interpretant cannot be the last effect produced by the sign because the logical interpretant is "a single act," but the intellectual concept with which it is closely reflected is "of a general nature" (5.475; 5.467). Mead (1964:245) likewise writes that ". . . signification is not confined to the particular situation within which an indication is given. It acquires universal meaning." One source of this generality of reference in concepts is that signification ". . . takes place through the individual generalizing himself in the attitude of the other,"<sup>4</sup> or, when the concept is represented to oneself rather than another, its indication occurs through the interplay of the 'I' and the 'me.'

There is another and perhaps more fundamental explanation of the general nature of intellectual concepts. Most signs one encounters are perceptual objects. We relate to physical objects in our environment nearly all of the time that we are awake. Because we experience millions of percepts, we are only rarely aware of the inferential character of perception. Peirce (2.141) states that percepts are "mental constructions, not the first impressions of sense", and, consequently, we know them "inferentially and most imperfectly." We perceive in terms of categories created out of past experience; that is, to perceive an object in the environment as being an 'x' is to perceive it as having the sensible qualities remembered as characteristic of an 'x.' This inference usually functions as a conditioned subconscious response component in perception. We only become conscious of this element when perceiving an unfamiliar object or event. For example, when one notices a rare bird, he probably first perceives a bird (in the generalized sense), but later perceives it as a bird of a specific type. Again, Mead is very close to Peirce on this point. He writes, "A physical object or percept is a construct in which the sensuous stimulation is merged with imagery which comes from past experience" (1964:134).

The meaning of a concept is, therefore, constituted by all that one has learned to associate with its object. This Peirce (5.491) called the ultimate logical interpretant:

The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit---self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it--- is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce.

Mead seems to follow Peirce very closely in the assertion that the final interpretant consists of one's habits of response toward the object of the concept. "The general habit of reacting to objects of a certain class, such as a book, must be got before the mind's eye before a recognition of the meaning of a book can appear. . . Furthermore the contents in consciousness which answer to the meaning of objects are our generalized habitual responses to them" (Mead, 1964:129). Mead cites an example that is very illustrative because it clearly displays Peirce's four elements of the interpretant. When someone observes the footprint of a bear in the snow, the footprint is a sign (more technically, it is an index), and the bear is its object. The person's response (interpretant) consists of a feeling of fear (emotional interpretant) along with various physiological changes (energetic interpretant). At the same time, there is the thought of a bear (the logical interpretant) or, as Mead succinctly puts it, "The footprint means a bear." The person then runs away, furthers the hunt, or performs some other action consistent with his set of behavioral habits toward bears under the conditions he perceives, and the habit which this experience creates or strengthens is the ultimate logical interpretant of the concept 'bear' (cf. Mead, 1934:121).

From this pragmatic theory of meaning, both Peirce and Mead went on to develop a correspondingly pragmatic definition of truth quite unlike that of some other pragmatists, particularly James and Schiller. Peirce (5.552) remarked, "Mr. Ferdinand C. S. Schiller informs us that he and James have made up their minds that the true is simply the satisfactory. No doubt, but to say 'satisfactory' is not to complete any predicate whatever. Satisfactory to what end?"

To define truth in such a way makes its determination dependent upon human values. On this account, truth may ultimately depend upon the values of any organized group which has sufficient social and political power to enforce consensus on those values (cf. Huber, 1972; Mead, 1964:328). Peirce, horrified by such prospects, desired to rest truth upon a reality "independent of the vagaries of you and me." Such a reality must be a world which exists independent of mind and which has the capacity to compel our sensations to take a particular form. Our perceptual judgments, according to Peirce, answer to this condition. We cannot voluntarily control the contents of perception (e.g., we cannot see as blue an object which appears red).

Mead's philosophy of science is also based on this premise. Feyerabend and other recent philosophers of science contend that competing scientific theories may be, and sometimes are, "incommensurable." That is, each theory presumes a different vocabulary by which experimental observations are described, and these vocabularies rest upon mutually exclusive epistemological postulates. Consequently, it is impossible to translate from one theory to the other; therefore, one cannot rationally evaluate them in terms of how closely they approximate the truth. This, of course, would return us to the thesis that truth is relative and subjective. Although two scientists observe through different theories, Mead holds that there remains a core content to their perceptions which make cumulative

science possible. He observes,

For each there was a different world that was there, but in these worlds there were actual or identical observations of individuals which connect these worlds with one another and enable the latter thinker to take up into his own the worlds that have preceded his. The common content of these observations, by means of which different worlds are strung together in human history, depends upon the assumption that different individuals have had or would have the same experiences (Mead, 1950:61-62).

This core consists in what Peirce (5.157) called 'perceptual judgments'---judgment absolutely forced upon my acceptance, and that by a process which I am utterly unable to control and consequently unable to criticize." Hence, these judgments form the ultimate basis for all factual beliefs. Peirce held that the truth of a factual proposition consists in a correspondence between the sign which is the subject of the proposition and the predicate which is its object. To state the relation more accurately, albeit confusingly, truth is the correspondence of the asserted correspondence between the subject and predicate of a proposition to the actual state of affairs (its object) which the proposition purports to represent. This seems to be the type of relation Peirce had in mind when he emphatically uttered, "Truth is the conformity of a representamen [sign] to its object, its object, ITS object, mind you" (5.554). Mead (1964:339) made an equivalent claim:

Having anatomized reality into relata and the relations, truth of the judgment is found in a correlation between these and the cognitions which answer to them in the mind. We find a new set of relations and relata, that lying between things and the awareness of the mind. If these relations offer the same pattern of structure as that which they answer to in nature, we have the test of the truth of the logical pattern as it appears in the judgment.

An understanding of the analysis of truth defended by Peirce and Mead is necessary in order to grasp their view of the nature and purpose of scientific inquiry. They held that the quest for scientific knowledge begins when one experiences doubt and ends when one establishes belief through experimentation. Peirce notes, "The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. . . . With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends" (5.375). Thus, Peirce maintains that the purpose of science is to replace doubt with belief. One might object that it is not belief which science seeks, but true belief. Peirce counters that such a position is groundless because once belief is established on any question we are entirely satisfied regardless whether that belief is true or false. "When doubt ceases, mental action on the subject comes to an end; and, if it did go on, it would be without a purpose" (5.376). Peirce adds that it might be granted that we seek beliefs which we "think to be true" (5.375), but this is a simple tautology because we think all of our beliefs to be true. We may recall that Peirce contended that the preferred method of establishing beliefs is the scientific method because it determines our beliefs by perceptual judgments, and our thinking has no effect upon the content or permanency of these judgments. Or, as Peirce (5.384) noted:

There are Real things [which] affect our senses according to regular laws, and, through our sensations are as different as are our



relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain how things really and truly are.

Mead's view of the purpose and course of scientific inquiry is, in some important respects, quite similar to Peirce's. First, he insists that inquiry, necessarily begins with doubt and continues for the sole purpose of resolving conflicting hypotheses. "Thinking . . . is always the solution of a problem" (1964:129). And again, "[Judgment]. . . does not attain truth until experience can proceed where it was inhibited" (1964:338). Finally, "The test of truth which I have presented is the ongoing of conduct, which has been stopped by a conflict of meaning. . ." (1964:328). Mead also agreed with Peirce that scientific method must rest upon perceptual judgments and that such a method ". . . can only be applied where a reality which is not called into question sets the conditions to which any hypothetical solution must conform" (1964:333). Third, Mead wholeheartedly accepted Peirce's 'fallibilism' -- the position that no factual proposition can be known with absolute certainty (cf. 1.152ff). For example, Mead cautions that "there is no such thing as Truth at large. . . nor does the scientist. . . endow his data with the logical form of such final meanings" (1964:325).

However, Mead's fallibilism arises from a different source than does Peirce's, and this difference reveals what seems to be a point of divergence between Peirce and Mead on the question of the relativity of truth. As previously quoted passages suggest, Mead identified truth with the solution of a problem-- an inner conflict between behavioral dispositions (cf. 1964:129-130). He clearly stated, "Truth is then synonymous with the solution of a problem" (1964:328). Obviously, since there can be no such thing as a problem in general, there can be no truth in general given Mead's definition of truth. All truth, then, must be relative to a specific problematic context. This leaves open a serious ambiguity. It fails to specify any temporal requirements that a problem solution must meet in order to be called true. Certainly Newtonian physics allowed conduct to proceed in an 'uninhibited' manner for many years. Yet we certainly would not say that it is true or even that it was true. Using Mead's truth formula, one might be forced to hold that it was true until its practice was seen to create problems. But this states the relation backwards. Newtonian physics created problems because it was (in part) false rather than, being false, because it created problems. In other words, its falsity was not constituted by the fact that it created problems, but rather, it created problems as a consequence of its falsity. A similar line of reasoning can, of course, be applied to true propositions and their consequences.

If Mead is given a more sympathetic interpretation or if we assume that he was simply confused, the above criticism can be avoided without giving up the notion that the doubt-belief dialectic is the prime mover of science. Such an interpretation would construe the problem solution as the test of true propositions rather than as the defining feature of them and would re-establish, as the definition of truth, the correspondence of a propositional sign to its object. This would bring us closer to Peirce's position. For Peirce, the existence of an ongoing community is as crucial to the establishment of truth as it is to the development of symbols. Individually, we are all subject to a multitude of idiosyncrasies which may interfere with assuming the objectivity of the idealized scientific observer. To a lesser extent, the whole scientific community at any particular time is itself influenced by the social and political pressures of the times, and, consequently, its activities and findings reflect somewhat the interests represented by those pressures. Peirce held that science can therefore discover truth only if we assume the scientific community to be extended

indefinitely into the future, thereby transcending the limitations of composition and spatio-temporal location. Peirce believed that, given this notion of the extended community, science would necessarily discover truth. This derives from the self-correcting method of subjecting hypotheses to the test of perceptual judgments. Since perceptual judgments are independent of human opinion, Peirce felt that, if science persists indefinitely in its method, it will be led inexorably toward truth; therefore, the beliefs which the scientific community would ultimately hold must be true. Conversely, any proposition which is false must ultimately come into conflict with perceptual judgment, and this would cause the scientific community to cease believing it. In the short run, we can never know any proposition about the world with certainty because, as Hume would remind us, it is always conceivably possible that future experience will prove it false (cf. 5.311). Peirce admits that there is no reason to suppose that the community will continue forever, but "there is nothing in the facts to forbid our having a hope, or calm and cheerful wish, that the community may last beyond any assignable date" (2.654). It can be added that, even if Peirce's wish is destined to go unfulfilled, that outcome would have no bearing on his identification of the real with the scientific community's ultimate beliefs because that argument is expressed in conditional terms.<sup>5</sup>

Although Mead apparently never identified reality with the beliefs of a projected community, he did share Peirce's belief that science and scientific knowledge are necessarily communal: ". . . I shall claim that the analysis of experimental science . . . never operates in a mind or an experience that is not social" (1964:53). And again, "In the field of any social science the objective data are those experiences of the individuals in which they take the attitude of the community. . ." (1964:310). He also suggests that it is its experimental method that accounts for the universality of the perspective of the scientific community. There is even some indication that he shared the Peircean thesis that there is no truth which is, in principle, unknowable. For example, he declared ". . .there is no nature that can be closed to mind" (1964:310-311).

### Conclusion

One can summarize that Peirce and Mead were united in their opposition to the epistemological individualism, popularized in modern philosophy by Descartes, which reduces the epistemic relation to a dualistic association between a socially isolated mind and its sensations. Peirce and Mead contend that this obfuscates the fact that meanings develop and function in the social context of past experience and future expectations. This renders them analyzable only in terms of a triadic relation between a symbol, object signified, and the socially objectified response to it. Moreover, since meaning necessarily involves community, knowledge and truth, being propositional, must also be the object of a community rather than of insulated individuals. Peirce pushes the position further by arguing that although the beliefs of the scientific community are fallible in the short run, its method ensures that, given the extension of the community indefinitely into the future, the community would reach consensus, and those beliefs would be the truth. There seems to be little evidence that Mead reached Peirce's conclusion, but there is ample indication that he did (inconsistently) support Peirce's premises. It is indeed clear that Peirce's pragmatic doctrine of truth and meaning can provide much of the foundation for Mead's social psychology. Unfortunately, Peirce is only beginning to receive recognition for his profound contributions.

## Footnotes

\*I am indebted to Joan Huber for her valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>1</sup>Rosenthal's (1969) essay is one of the more noteworthy exceptions, and there may be others which my efforts have failed to locate.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Peirce developed ten basic classes of signs (with such forbidding names as Rhematic Indexical Legisign) which he later expanded to sixty-six. These classifications become redundant and therefore add little to the original divisions.

<sup>3</sup>This reference is to Volume II, paragraph 228 of the Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce. All references to Peirce will be in this format, following the style of the editors.

<sup>4</sup>Peirce, incidentally, antedated Mead on the notion of the 'generalized other' which he termed 'retroconsciousness' (5.586).

<sup>5</sup>There are, however, a number of possible objections to Peirce's arguments. I will not develop them here. By the 1890's, Peirce became aware of these defects, and made substantial changes in his position.

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## FROM "LEGITIMACY" TO "LEGITIMATIONS"\*

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In this essay two conceptions of social order maintenance have been examined in the light of Mannheim's argument that concept use reveals the perspectivistic base of all knowledge. The perspectives from within which Weber evolved the concept of legitimacy and Berger and Luckmann the concept of legitimations have been "imputed" from these concepts' idiosyncratic use. It has been found that legitimacy only has meaning within an "ideological" perspective which values the stabilization of existing institutions while legitimations has meaning within a "utopian" perspective which values the transformation of existing institutions. The concepts of order maintenance examined in this essay have a political function. They not only illuminate order, they seek to alter order by stabilizing or transforming it.

Karl Mannheim (1936) has argued that knowledge is perspectivistic. The way men conceptualize their understanding of the world is prescribed by the social setting within which they act. Every concept emphasizes and stabilizes those aspects of phenomena which are relevant to activity and covers up, in the interest of collective action, the perpetually fluid process underlying all things. Accordingly, a concept represents a taboo against other possible configurations of meaning which do not serve its conceivers' socio-historical interests.

In this essay we shall examine two different sociological conceptions of social order maintenance in the light of Mannheim's argument. Specifically, we shall attempt to impute the perspectives from within which Weber evolved the concept of legitimacy and Berger and Luckmann the concept of legitimations in order to reveal the social and political implications of these conceptions. To this end we shall indicate the concepts' definition and use as found in their authors' theoretical formulations, and then attempt to extract the concepts' perspectivistic base from an analysis of their idiosyncratic use.

### The Concept of "Legitimacy"

One of the earliest attempts to provide a systematic analysis of social order maintenance was made by Max Weber. In The Theory of Economic and Social Organization (1947)<sup>1</sup> Weber stressed that the maintenance of a social order ultimately depended upon the continuity of its members' belief in the legitimacy of that order. The centrality which Weber assigned the concept of legitimacy in his analysis of order maintenance is well documented by the following passage:

It is an induction from experience that no system of authority voluntarily limits itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal motives as the basis for guaranteeing its continuance. In addition, every system of authority attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its "legitimacy" (Weber, 1947:325).

In other words, Weber held that a social order or system of authority does not rest upon the self interests or public spirit of its members, but rather upon their acceptance of the fact that that order is binding upon them, that it legitimately has the right to compel them to behave in certain prescribed ways. Accordingly, order maintenance implies continuity of members' acceptance of an order's legitimacy.

We shall soon see the degree to which belief in the legitimacy of a social order was equated with Weber's conception of social order. First, however, we shall review Weber's methodological conception of sociological analysis. Weber's definition of sociology informs his use of legitimacy. The meaning of legitimacy is prescribed by his methodological orientation.

According to Weber (1947:88), sociology is a: "science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects". Sociological analysis studies the intended actions of individuals which take account of and are oriented to the behavior of others. It must grasp the meaning of social action. As social action intends some consequence, its interpretation requires the specification of its orientation (Weber, 1947:96). Any adequate analysis of social action, however, must not only reveal the subjective meaning of behavior, but demonstrate the regularity of action as well. One's orientation must be shown to have predictable consequences. In Weber's own words: "the interpretation of a sequence of events will, on the other hand, be called causally adequate insofar as, according to established generalizations from experience, there is a probability that it will always occur in the same way" (Weber, 1947:99). Any sociological interpretation must be verified by establishing the empirical regularity of the action consequences of its actors' orientations.

For Weber then, the ultimate task of the sociologist is to show the regularized patterns of social action which exist in society. The demonstration of regularity allows causal explanation. But regularity is a function of social order. A system of authority constitutes a social order to the extent that the probability exists that action will follow a regularized course (Weber, 1947:124). Accordingly, social order maintenance was a significant substantive concern for Weber precisely because its study yielded data which validated his conception of sociological work.

We have been arguing that Weber's analysis of order maintenance is specified by his methodological stance. It remains to be shown how the meaning of the concept of legitimacy is related to his general sociological concern. Weber developed the concept of legitimacy as a way of characterizing social orders. We shall quote from this passage in some length:

Action, especially social action which involves social relationships, may be oriented by the actors to a belief (emphasis Weber's) in the existence of a "legitimate order". The probability that action will actually empirically be so oriented will be called the "validity" of the order in question.

Thus, orientation to the validity of an order means more than the mere existence of uniformity of social action determined by custom or self-interest...

The subjective meaning of a social relationship will be called an order only if action is approximately or on the average oriented to certain determinate "maxims" or rules. Furthermore, such an order

will be called "valid" if the orientation to such maxims includes, no matter to what extent, the recognition that they are binding on the actor... (Weber, 1947:124-125).

Thus it can be seen that an order is defined in terms of its members' compliance with normative regulations. When members feel obliged to adhere to an order's imperatives, behavior has a predictable course. In turn, it is the regularity of behavior which defines and ultimately validates the order. Belief in the legitimacy of a system of authority is, by definition, the prime characteristic of a social order. Where there is a social order, members do in fact accept the legitimacy of that order as their behavioral compliance would indicate. On the other hand, where there is belief in the legitimacy of a system of authority a social order does in fact exist.<sup>2</sup>

Weber's tautological characterization of legitimacy/compliance is also found in the directives he gave those who might choose to investigate the legitimacy of a social order:

Naturally, the legitimacy of a system of authority may be treated sociologically only as the probability that to a relevant degree, the appropriate attitudes will exist, and the corresponding practical conduct ensue (Weber, 1947:326).

As he maintained that the task of the sociologist was to determine the empirical regularity of intended action, Weber's conception of belief entailed behavioral consequences. For this reason, belief in the binding quality of an order's normative structure could only be analyzed in terms of the actual probability that a given belief will have measureable consequences for those who hold it. But the measureable consequence of belief in the legitimacy of an order is compliance. Accordingly, legitimacy and compliance come to mean the same thing for Weber.

In conclusion, Weber's referent for the concept of legitimacy was members' belief in and compliance with recognized maxims. Significantly, the concept only has meaning within an established social order. The concept can be used to classify variations in the form of members' belief, but it cannot illuminate the process of belief formation itself. To study how members come to accept the legitimacy of a social order requires a conceptual apparatus which does not tautologically equate legitimacy with compliance. Further, to study the formation of members' belief requires a conceptual apparatus which focuses attention upon the inculcators of belief as well as its recipients.

### The Concept of "Legitimations"

Many years after Weber formulated the concept of legitimacy, Berger and Luckmann developed another conception of the maintenance of social order. The contrast between these theoretical systems allows us to inquire into the social and historical conditions which gave birth to these divergent conceptions.

In The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (1967) Berger and Luckmann have stressed that the social order consists of the ongoing interplay between the externalization of human endeavor in which socially constructed forms are created and the stabilization of existing practice in which current institutions are legitimized. The dialectic between growth and stability provides the foundation for their analysis of order maintenance and ultimately their conception of legitimations.

Specifically, the authors have argued that the social order evolved out of the habitualization of conduct. In the course of seeking practical solutions to recurrent everyday life problems, individuals developed habitual behavior sets. The habitualization of conduct allowed its own objectivication. As recurrent conduct was apprehended as typical behavior in typical situations, the social world became available to others as an objective reality, that is to say, as an external and coercive fact (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:58). But as this "objective reality" was only one of many such realities which could have been constructed out of varying solutions to everyday problems, society is continually threatened by realities which are meaningless within its own terms (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:103). This threat is counteracted by the legitimation of the objectivated order. The maintenance of a socially constructed reality requires that a social order be explained and justified in such a way that members accept its legitimacy.

Berger and Luckmann have called the process of inculcating belief in the legitimacy of a socially constructed reality the legitimation of that reality. Legitimations serve to maintain the existing institutional tradition:

...legitimation is not necessary in the first phase of institution-  
alization, when the institution is simply a fact that requires no  
further support... the problem of legitimation inevitably arises when  
objectivations of the (now historic) institutional order are to be  
transmitted to a new generation. At that point, the self evident  
character of the institutions can no longer be maintained by means  
of the individual's own recollection and habitualization. The unity  
of history and biography are broken. In order to restore it, and thus  
make intelligible both aspects of it, there must be explanations and  
justifications of the salient aspects of the institutional tradition.  
Legitimation is the process of "explaining" and "justifying" (Berger  
and Luckmann, 1967:93).

Thus it can be seen that while both Weber and Berger and Luckmann stressed that maintenance was a function of members' belief in the legitimacy of a social order, they significantly differed in their formulations of how such maintenance was to be studied. For Weber maintenance was to be studied in terms of the types of existing beliefs in the legitimacy of a social order and the forms of social organization characteristic of those belief patterns. On the other hand, for Berger and Luckmann maintenance was to be studied as the process of belief formation as such. We shall now look at Berger and Luckmann's conception of this process in some detail.

Possibly the best indication of the authors' conception of the legitimizing process is found in their discussion of conceptual machineries of symbolic universe maintenance. Therapy and nihilation are types of legitimations which seek conceptually to manipulate members' taken for granted understanding of the reality they inhabit. Such legitimations maintain existing institutionalized interpretations of reality:

Therapy entails the application of conceptual machinery to insure that actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definition of reality... It does this by applying the legitimizing apparatus to individual "cases"... Since therapy must concern itself with deviations from the "official" definition of reality, it must develop a conceptual machinery to account for such deviations and thus maintain the realities thus challenged. This required a body of know-



ledge which includes a theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the cure of souls (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 112-113).

While therapy uses conceptual machinery to keep everyone within the universe in question, nihilism uses similar devices to conceptually liquidate everything outside the same universe:

Nihilism denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretation of phenomena do not fit that universe. This may be done in one of two ways. First deviant phenomena may be given a negative ontological status....

Second, nihilism involves the more ambitious attempt to account for all deviant definitions of reality in terms (Berger and Luckmann's emphasis) of concepts belonging to one's own universe.... The pre-supposition is always that the negator does not really know what he is saying. His statements become more meaningful only as they are translated into more "correct" terms, that is to say terms derived from the universe he negates (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:114).

Thus, symbolic universes, the theoretical traditions which integrate different provinces of meaning into a symbolic totality, are themselves legitimized by the conceptual manipulations they make possible. Any phenomena which cannot be directly understood within institutionalized meanings is reconceptualized into terms which are intelligible to members of that potentially threatened meaning order. This redefinition of the meaning of an event, in turn, requires that the credibility of the meaning imputed to that event by a deviant person be discounted, and that new meaning be imputed according to pre-established "theory". Of course, what is accomplished by this procedure is that the meaning of an institutional order and the base from which it emerges are not questioned by the members of that order. Acts which are potentially threatening to that order, because they posit a different understanding of events from that which prevails within the order, are made to appear as a part of the order they threaten.

Finally, one further point should be brought out by way of clarifying Berger and Luckmann's conception of legitimations. According to the authors, legitimations only have meaning within some specific social context. They are acts committed by particular individuals for definable social ends:

It is important to stress that the conceptual machineries of universe maintenance are themselves products of social activity, as are all forms of legitimation, and can only be rarely understood apart from the other activities of the collective in question. Specifically, the success of particular conceptual machineries is related to the power possessed by those who operate them (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:108-9).

In other words, the inculcator of belief in the legitimacy of a social order is the symbolic "expert", the authority figure within the order in question. He who has the most to gain from the maintenance of an existing order is he who most actively seeks to perpetuate that order by offering legitimations of it. The success of his endeavor is related to the actual amount of power he possesses over its members.

In conclusion, Berger and Luckmann's referent for the concept of legitimations was the acts of powerful individuals which fostered members' belief in the legitimacy of the order they dominated. Significantly, the concept has meaning

within an emerging social order where tradition has not yet stabilized members' taken for granted understanding of their world or within an established order where tradition has already been weakened by the growth of deviant interpretations of social reality. The concept has greatest utility in indicating the form of struggle between those who seek to create or maintain a social system they may dominate and those who serve as potentially compliant members of such an order. The concept facilitates the examination of the maintenance process. It does not lead to the classification of types of belief which serve to maintain an existing social order.

As can be seen from this brief review, legitimacy and legitimations facilitate different types of investigation of order maintenance. We shall now attempt to extract what implications these divergent conceptualizations contain for an understanding of the socio-historical circumstances surrounding their creation.

#### The Imputation of Perspective

In the conclusion to the classic Ideology and Utopia, Karl Mannheim (1947:307) suggested that the basic task of research in the sociology of knowledge is to determine the various socio-historical perspectives which characterize man's acting orientation to the world. He felt that a social setting determines perspective and perspective determines the content of thought. The influence of social setting upon thought could be successfully investigated by focusing on the mediating function of perspective. Accordingly one approach to research in the sociology of knowledge would be to specify what particular perspectives are used by whom in what circumstances.

Mannheim called the procedure he derived for specifying a perspective "imputation." He defined imputation as the process which:

reconstructs integral styles of thought and perspective, tracing single expressions and records of thought which are related back to a central Weltanschauung which they express. It makes explicit the whole of the system which is implicit in the discrete segments of a system of thought (Mannheim, 1936:307).

Imputation uncovers the underlying unity of outlook by showing how particular expressions of thought reflect a world view. Significantly, the way concepts are used explicates unity of outlook. As concepts organize what is to be known in terms of what is relevant for collective action, their implicit choice of referent reveals the action orientation of their conceivers. A concept stabilizes and emphasizes those aspects of the world, which being known support the interests of its conceivers. Additionally, a concept directs attention away from other aspects of the world, which if known might undermine the interests of its conceivers. Thus it can be seen that imputation implies conceptual analysis. Particular socio-historical perspective are specified by revealing the idiosyncratic use of their conceptual elements.

We have already seen that conceptually, legitimacy and legitimations emphasize different aspects of order maintenance. We shall now attempt to extract what difference in perspective is entailed by this conceptual distinction.

Mannheim has provided one hint as to Weber's idiosyncratic use of legitimacy. In characterizing the perspectivistic differences between various categories of thought, he noted:

Only that appears configuratively or morphologically which we are prepared to accept without further ado, and which, fundamentally, we do not wish to change. Still further, by means of the configurative conception, it is intended to stabilize precisely those elements which are in flux, and at the same time to invoke sanctions for what exists because it is as it is (Mannheim, 1936:275).

Thus Mannheim would argue that any analysis of social structure which classifies the form of adherence to that structure is a political act. Such an analysis arrests potential comprehension of the constantly changing character of any social order by making it appear as though the present form of members' orientation to that order has extraordinary significance and duration. It values things as they are and serves the interests of those who wish to have things remain as they are.

According to Mannheim then, it is significant that Weber made the classification of the form of members' compliance the referent for legitimacy. The use of the concept reveals its ideological perspective.<sup>3</sup> The concept has meaning within a world view which accentuates the value of existing institutions and which, in turn, is relatively oblivious to any flaws in a given order.

By extension the use Berger and Luckmann made of legitimations reveals a different perspective. While the classification of belief lends itself to the maintenance of order, the analysis of the maintenance process lends itself to order transformation. Specifically, it could be argued that any analysis of social structure which presupposes an analytic difference between the interests of variously situated members of a social order is also a political act. Such an analysis stimulates an examination of the oppression of those members of society whose interests of variously situated members of a social order is also a political act. Such an analysis stimulates an examination of the oppression of those members of society whose interests are not served by the present organization of the social order. It values things as they could be and serves the interests of those who wish to have things change.

Thus the fact that Berger and Luckmann made the manipulative acts of powerful individuals the referent for their conception of legitimations is also not without significance. The use of the concept reveals its utopian perspective.<sup>4</sup> The concept has meaning within a world view which accentuates the need to transform the social order and which in turn is relatively oblivious to the value of existing institutions.

An examination of the idiosyncratic application of these concepts also supports the contention that legitimacy is an ideological concept while legitimations is a utopian concept. We have already argued that legitimacy can illuminate the form which the maintenance of an established order takes. The concept facilitates the study of established societies precisely because it only has meaning within existing social orders which are actually normatively compelling. The study of the legitimacy of a social order presupposes compliance. On the other hand, the study of legitimations presupposes normative disruption. The concept facilitates the study of actual attempts to maintain order precisely because it focuses upon situations where order is threatened. In short, legitimacy directs attention toward the stability of existing order, while legitimations directs attention toward the disruption within existing order. The theoretical use of both concepts is grounded in political interests. The study of stability reflects interests in continuity. The study of disruption reflects interest in change.

Finally, perspective can be imputed from what a concept diverts attention from as well as from what it accentuates. While legitimations contain explicit reference to potential deviations from existing interpretations of reality, legitimacy contains no reference to deviance. Weber's formulation of legitimacy does not concede the possibility that there are degrees of allegiance to a social order let alone that there are persons within a social order who have no allegiance to that order. Additionally, the formulation of legitimacy does not sanction the investigation of those persons who might mount an attack upon the established order. The investigation is not sanctioned because, conceptually, such persons do not exist. It is difficult to analyze change when the efficient cause of change is not examined. On the other hand, the formulation of legitimations glosses the content of belief in favor of an extended analysis of the process of belief maintenance. Depiction of the content of belief attests to the duration of its present form. Depiction of the process of belief maintenance attests to the changing content of belief.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusions

In this essay we have tried to extract the social and political implications of two theoretical conceptions of order maintenance. We have argued that the concepts of legitimacy and legitimations are expressions of particular world views which serve the interests of differentially situated individuals. In support of this contention we have shown that the concepts' analytic form, that their idiosyncratic pattern of substantive accentuation and neglect all suggest their situated usage. In short, legitimacy entails an ideological perspective while legitimation entails a utopian perspective. An analysis of the legitimacy of a social order values stability. It serves the interests of those who would seek to maintain belief as a way of maintaining their elevated position within a social order supported by such belief. An analysis of the legitimations of a social order values change. It serves the interests of those who would seek to transform the social order as a way of improving their position within it.

Thus the conceptualizations of order maintenance examined in this essay have two distinct functions. They illuminate order, but they also seek to alter order by stabilizing or transforming it.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>This volume is an English translation of Part I of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft originally published in 1925.

<sup>2</sup>It is no mere coincidence that Weber based his oft cited classification of types of authority upon a differentiation in their claims to legitimacy. The differing grounds for claims to the legitimacy of a system of authority provide the basis for the classification of types of authority because legitimacy is the conceptual foundation of Weber's analysis of order maintenance.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed exposition on the defining characteristics of an ideological perspective see the second part of Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia.

<sup>4</sup>Similarly, for a more detailed exposition on the defining characteristics of a utopian perspective see the fourth part of Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia.

<sup>5</sup>The value of Mannheim's analysis of the political foundations of thought does not rest exclusively upon its ability to specify the social implications of concept use. In addition Mannheim attempted to place changes in concept use and the perspectives they entailed within historical perspective. He argued that over time each new perspective increasingly approximates a world view in which every product of thought is judged to be a function of a defineable social position. Accordingly, a theoretical perspective can be "dated" by its historically unique epistemology. Conceptions of the world which attempt to validate knowledge by showing the stability and predictability of its objects of knowledge predate conceptions which do not depend upon an epistemology which presupposes that knowledge is absolutely determinable irrespective of perspective. Using this scheme to date the concepts of legitimacy and legitimation, it follows that legitimacy is epistemologically prior to legitimations. Weber attempted to validate sociological knowledge by tautologically equating legitimacy with compliance thus stabilizing the referent for his concept. Berger and Luckmann, on the other hand, were not bound by the need to document the stability of the referent for their concept as the relativization of thought had already discredited traditional epistemological concerns. In their own words: "To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge in the sociology of knowledge is somewhat like trying to push a bus in which one is riding" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:13).

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