

**Art and science cannot exist but in
minutely organized particulars.**

William Blake (1820)

Parts and Wholes: Goffman and Cooley

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Abstract: This essay begins with an outline of the part-whole method, a way of relating particular instances to general concepts or propositions. This method is illustrated by seven propositions extracted from Cooley's work that seem to be illustrated by concrete examples from Goffman's writing. This method weds qualitative study with theory in a preliminary way, and ultimately, qualitative and quantitative methods. Since Goffman's examples breath life into our enterprise, it may be fruitful to use every one of them, connecting them not only with Cooley's theses, but generating others as well. (4800 words)

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A recurring theme in Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) philosophy of science has been traced by Sacksteder (1992): humans are so complex that they can be understood only by relating "the least parts to the greatest wholes." In a fit of insight, William Blake captured a similar idea in the single sentence quoted above. Wholes (abstract concepts and propositions) help organize particular instances, and instances help build relevant wholes, equally.

For example, in conversation, each word and gesture is a particular, and the complete dialogue is also a particular. However, stating that the conversation is friendly characterizes the parts as a whole. One aspect of the problem is that friendly is a vernacular word whose meaning is not crystal clear. To begin a scientific study of friendliness, one would need to define it with only a single meaning, so its presence or absence could be detected in the words and gestures.

The sociologist Helen Lynd (1958) proposed a method quite similar to the one suggested by Spinoza, but without knowing about his approach. She called her method "parts-to-whole," (1958, 126-139) rather than parts and wholes. The slight difference in terminology is significant, however, since she put more emphasis on the empirical side, the parts, than on theory, the whole.

Spinoza made clear that his method requires rapid shuttling back and forth between the least parts and the greatest wholes, giving equal attention to both sides.

Spinoza's method brings out the central meaning of Peirce's notion of abduction (1878), which involves induction and deduction in equal measure. Induction is the empirical part, deduction the imaginative part, of seeing wholeness in a collection of particular parts. In one of his responses to questioning about the meaning of abduction, he emphasized the imaginative part of science with his answer: "Guessing!" This answer is a one-word rebuke to the vast army of researchers who think they are being scientific when they merely follow what they conceive of as the rigid rules of science. Science equally involves both rigidity and flexibility.

Following Spinoza's method, my 1997 book proposed a part/whole method for social/behavioral studies. We are not a science, because we have few genuine concepts (terms that are so clearly defined that they have a single meaning.) Instead, most ideas are expressed in vernacular words. The corresponding part of the problem is that our theories seldom reference particulars. G. H. Mead's important theoretical work (1934) provides an example, as do most social and behavioral theories.

One section of the 1997 book proposed that the emotional origins of war involve secret shame and anger that propel vengefulness. These emotions are defined conceptually, and long lists of verbal indicators of shame and anger (Retzinger 1995) used to identify instances. The proposition was illustrated with the French desire for revenge because of their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1871) as a cause of World War I. The book also proposes that in turn, the German desire for revenge against the French for the German defeat in 1918 led to the rise of Hitler.

The emotion indicators by Retzinger (1995) suggest how the French media 1871-1914, in political discourse, popular novels and books of poetry, reflected and generated feelings of revenge against Germany. Her shame and anger indicators were also used to illustrate the revenge theme in Hitler's life, writing, and speeches.

These exercises didn't prove anything, but suggested that collective emotions may be a cause of war, as much or more than political/economic ones. The cost of most wars is vastly greater than any possible gain. Historians are still puzzling over this problem, especially in their studies of

WWI, where there were no meetings between the powers beforehand to try to negotiate their differences. Surely a negotiated agreement could have been reached which would have saved the combatants millions of lives and billions of dollars.

Some Exceptional Studies

Descriptive studies focus on parts, as in history and linguistics, and ethnography, social/behavioral theories, on wholes. Three exceptions are instructive, since they approach balance between parts and wholes. Elias (1994) found evidence supporting his theory of the civilizing process from 1500 to 1900 in five European languages by examining many books of etiquette, frequently quoting particular passages.

Retzinger (1991) assembled evidence supporting her theory of conflict by analyzing emotions indicators in videotapes of four married couples' quarrels, second by second. Billig (1999) finally, derived a social theory of psychological repression by word by word analysis of Freud's writings, both his cases and his own personal letters. All three studies attempt to define their main concepts, and gather evidence that illustrate the potential usefulness of their definitions and propositions.

A Part/Whole Method

We need methods that will help develop key concepts. For example, the term alienation, in some ways central to all of social science, has many meanings in the literature (Seeman 1975; Schacht 1994). The word love, according to unabridged dictionaries, has about two dozen. Yet studies of alienation and of love, like most other studies, seldom define their key terms. When these terms go undefined, neither writer nor reader knows what is being discussed.

Attempts at operational definitions have so far had little success because they usually are not defined conceptually, and therefore have turned out to be invalid. The study of self-esteem offers an extraordinary example (Scheff, in press). There are about two hundred operational definitions (scales), but no conceptual ones. It is mainly for that reason, I believe, that there have been some twenty thousand studies with essentially no findings. The scales confound cognitive and emotional dimensions, so that two separate scales may be needed.

Moving rapidly up and down on what I call the part/whole ladder (1997, 53-55) could help us to develop concepts, since the wholes can assist in understanding parts, and the parts, the wholes. Because Blake's sentence was just an aside in a discussion of another topic, with little further explication, it fell out of history.

Cooley's Theses

Charles Horton Cooley (1869-1933) was an early U.S. sociologist. The same fate was to befall Cooley as Blake's one-line capsule. Cooley provided brief or no explication for each of seven theses (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. See Table I, below) implied in two brief passages. The first passage was a single sentence, "We live in the minds of others without knowing it" (1922). It implies three theses. His brief discussion (1922, 184-5) of the three steps of the "looking glass self" implies four more. Cooley was not wordy, but like Blake, his words cut directly into the quick of things.

Cooley did offer some brief explication, as in this passage that introduces his thesis that we usually don't know that we are living in the minds of others. We only realize it, he states, in extreme or unusual situations:

Many people of balanced mind...scarcely know that they care what others think of them, and will deny, perhaps with indignation, that such care is an important factor in what they are and do. But this is an illusion. If failure or disgrace arrives, if one suddenly finds that the faces of men show coldness or contempt instead of the kindness and deference that he is used to, he will perceive from the shock, the fear, and the sense of being outcast and helpless, that he was living in the minds of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up. (1922, 208).

In the following passage, Cooley explains how the looking glass self generates shame:

The comparison with a looking-glass hardly suggests the second element, the imagined judgment, which is quite essential. The thing that moves us to *pride or shame* is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind. This is evident from the fact that the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling. We are

ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind. A man will boast to one person of an action—say some sharp transaction in trade—which he would be *ashamed* to own to another. (1922, 184-85, emphasis added).

This discussion suggests less abstract situations a few steps down the part/whole ladder. In the following passage, Cooley refers to particular, though fictional, events in novels, but without quoting any of them in detail:

In most of [George Eliot's] novels there is some character like Mr. Bulstrode in Middlemarch... whose respectable and long established social image of himself is shattered by the coming to light of hidden truth (1922, 208).

Cooley's statement, since it is abstract, gives only a slight sense of how catastrophic the shattering of the social image is, and how far it reaches. In this novel, Bulstrode's wife, Dorothea, although blameless, stands by her disgraced husband. The novel provides detailed particulars so that the reader is alerted to the full force of public humiliation. Using Bulstrode's instance to make his point is somewhat of a departure from Cooley's tendency to abstain from description. However, he doesn't go so far as to quote the passage and comment on how the details in it relate to his thesis, as Goffman does¹.

Here for example, is a quotation showing that Bulstrode's disgrace reaches to his wife. Cooley could have used to illustrate the particulars of his thesis:

When she had resolved to [stand by her husband], she prepared herself by some little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of

¹ Near the beginning of PSEL (1959, pp 4-5), Goffman has fun with a four paragraph quote from a novel (Sansom 1956) showing how Preedy, an Englishman vacationing in Spain, tries to manage the impressions he makes on others. Further discussed below.

wearing her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down and put on a plain bonnet... (Eliot, 1900, 338).

Dorothea prepares for a public stripping of her dignity by discarding her socially acceptable appearance, replacing it with what might have been prison or funeral clothing. By only referring to events like this one, rather than quoting them, Cooley used too few words to be able to describe particulars.

Goffman's Focus on Particulars

Goffman, on the other hand, freely used a great multitude of words. His words also cut to the quick, but in the opposite way than Cooley's. Goffman's wealth of detailed particular events may be the key to his popularity and his importance. They remind readers of their own instances: "That's like me!" They can also be used to illustrate many of Cooley's theses.

Here is an example of a Goffman instance that illustrates Cooley's themes, with numbers added randomly to help the reader keep track:

Knowing that his audiences are capable of forming bad impressions of him [1], the individual may come to feel ashamed [2] of a well-intentioned honest act merely because the context of its performance provides false impressions that are bad. Feeling this unwarranted shame, he may feel that his feelings can be seen [3]; feeling that he is thus seen, he may feel that his appearance confirms [4] these false conclusions concerning him. He may then add to the precariousness of his position by engaging in just those defensive maneuvers [impression management] that he would employ were he really guilty. In this way it is possible for all of us to become fleetingly for ourselves the worst person we can imagine that others might imagine us to be. (1959, p. 236, numbering added)

This instance is somewhat difficult to understand because it is so complex. It would have helped if Goffman had been even more detailed about the particulars. Suppose one of your colleagues at the office, a jokester, creates a forbidden sound by pressing a whoopee cushion just as you sit down at your desk. You are embarrassed (2), because you imagine that your colleagues think it was you who made the sound (1). Even though you are not the culprit, you blush (3) because you imagine the

others in the office think it was your inappropriate action (4).

In this paragraph, Goffman suggested 4 very brief internal steps, three of which involve living in the mind of the other. Perhaps it was examples like these that led Bourdieu (1983) to call Goffman “the discoverer of the infinitely small.” The minuteness about Goffman’s particulars like this one is the time scale: perhaps quarters of a second for each event that is described.

Goffman also added a further thesis to the looking glass self, a fourth step to the three proposed by Cooley: managing (such as hiding) shame that could not be avoided. Furthermore, there is a fifth step barely hinted at by Goffman: hiding shame during the fourth step can generate a fifth step in the form of behavior. The work of Retzinger (1991), the psychiatrist Gilligan (1998), and Websdale (2010) suggests that the escalation of anger, and even violence, is caused by hidden shame.

The emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence... The different forms of violence, whether toward individuals or entire populations, are motivated (caused) by **secret** shame (1998, pp.110-111).

Gilligan’s theory is of great interest, since it proposes an emotional cause for both interpersonal and mass violence. Websdale’s (2010) study of 211 cases of familicide found strong support for Gilligan’s thesis. A finding of particular interest in his study was the sizeable minority of perpetrators who had what he calls a civic-respectable style, in contrast to the majority whose style was angry and aggressive.

The C-R killers had no history of violence and little evidence even of anger. For example, there were several middle class men who had lost their jobs. They hid the fact by continuing to leave the house every weekday as if going to work. What they did during their absence was to plan in detail the killing of their family, and often, themselves. Proud of their abilities as a breadwinner, they apparently couldn’t bear the humiliation of being jobless.

This C-R style of violence, it seems to me, has deep parallels to the preparation of nations for wars of revenge, as was the case of France preparing to make war on Germany in the period 1871-1914 (Scheff 1997). Especially for the leaders, both shame and anger are carefully hidden behind a veil of rationality. The Bush administration were deeply embarrassed by the 9/11 attack during their watch, and their helplessness to find and punish the attackers. The invasion of Iraq on the basis of false premises may have served to hide their shame and anger. The idea of the looking glass self,

especially when it is expanded to at least five steps, can serve to generate a large group of general propositions about both interpersonal and collective behavior.

Goffman seldom provided clear general propositions that could serve as a framework for understanding his teeming host of particulars. For example, Presentation of Self (1959) offers two somewhat contradictory theses. The early part of the book and the last chapter promote dramaturgy: people follow a social script, even when thinking or feeling. On the other hand, later chapters disagree, since they mostly describe particular kinds of struggles within individual consciousness.

Goffman's penchant for detailed particulars took a surprising turn in the first paragraph of his article on embarrassment:

An individual may recognize extreme embarrassment in others and even in himself by the objective signs of emotional disturbance: blushing, fumbling, stuttering, an unusually low- or high-pitched voice, quavering speech or breaking of the voice, sweating, blanching, blinking, tremor of the hand, hesitating or vacillating movement, absent-mindedness, and malapropisms. As Mark Baldwin (1902, p. 212) remarked about shyness, there may be "a lowering of the eyes, bowing of the head, putting of hands behind the back, nervous fingering of the clothing or twisting of the fingers together, and stammering, with some incoherence of idea as expressed in speech." There are also symptoms of a subjective kind: constriction of the diaphragm, a feeling of wobbliness, consciousness of strained and unnatural gestures, a dazed sensation, dryness of the mouth, and tenseness of the muscles. In cases of mild discomfiture these visible and invisible flusterings occur but in less perceptible form. (1956, p. 264; reprinted in Goffman, 1967, pp 97-112).

Surely inadvertent, in this paragraph Goffman produced an operational definition of the emotion he wished to discuss, an unusual step even today, fifty-four years later. Particularly unusual, perhaps even unique, his definition contains both external and internal indicators. The current physical and social/behavioral sciences of emotion could learn from his example.

Linking Goffman and Cooley

If Cooley provides wholes, but only a few parts, and Goffman parts, and only a few wholes, perhaps it would be instructive to integrate their work. The following table is a first step in that direction. The column on the left lists the seven propositions implied in two passages in Cooley's 1922 book. The eighth proposition is Goffman's addition to the looking glass self, how shame that cannot be avoided will usually be managed in some way, such as hiding it from others and from self.

The right-hand column lists studies that are relevant to the propositions on the left. Together the two columns give an overview of the relationship between Cooley's work and Goffman's, and others as well.

TABLE I

In regard to Cooley 1st and 2nd theses, there are many studies on conditions under which mindreading is accurate, inaccurate or non-existent. There are sizable literatures on false consensus (reviewed by Marks and Miller, 1987) and pluralistic ignorance (reviewed by Miller et al, 2000). Ellis and Bjorklund (2008) review experiments suggesting the situations under which mindreading is accurate or inaccurate.

Zerubavel (2003) and Rosenblatt (2009) go a step further, suggesting situations in everyday life and in the family in which mindreading is not inaccurate, but non-existent. Rosenblatt's idea of "shared obliviousness" is particularly emphatic on this point. Goffman (1959, 4-5) used the quotation about Preedy from Samson's novel (1950), cited above, to suggest how Preedy was oblivious of what those around him actually thought and felt, and, more subtly, how they were equally oblivious toward him.

But in any case he took care to avoid catching anyone's eye. First of all, he had to make it clear to those potential companions of his holiday that they were of no concern to him whatsoever. He stared through them, round them, over them-eyes lost in space. The beach might have been empty. If by chance a ball was thrown his way, he looked surprised; then let a smile of amusement lighten his face (Kindly Preedy), looked round dazed to see that there were people on the beach, tossed it back with a smile to himself and not a smile at the people, and then resumed carelessly his nonchalant survey of space.

But it was time to institute a little parade, the parade of the Ideal Preedy. By devious handlings he gave any who wanted to look a chance to see the title of his book a Spanish translation of Homer, classic thus, but not daring, cosmopolitan too-and then gathered

together his beach-wrap and bag into a neat sand-resistant pile (Methodical and Sensible Preedy), rose slowly to stretch at ease his huge frame (Big-Cat Preedy), and tossed aside his sandals (Carefree Preedy, after all).

The marriage of Preedy and the sea! There were alternative rituals. The first involved the stroll that turns into a run and a dive straight into the water, thereafter smoothing into a strong splashless crawl towards the horizon. But of course not really to the horizon. Quite suddenly he would turn on to his back and thrash great white splashes with his legs, somehow thus showing that he could have swum further had he wanted to, and then would stand up a quarter out of water for all to see who it was.

The alternative course was simpler, it avoided the cold-water shock and it avoided the risk of appearing too high-spirited. The point was to appear to be so used to the sea, the Mediterranean, and this particular beach, that one might as well be in the sea as out of it. It involved a slow stroll down and into the edge of the water-not even noticing his toes were wet, land and water all the same to him - with his eyes up at the sky gravely surveying portents, invisible to others, of the weather (Local Fisherman Preedy).

This instance of obliviousness is fictional to the point of farce, but it makes Goffman's point indelibly. Mindreading is only a possibility. Note that Cooley didn't provide a general term, such as mindreading, for the process his sentence described, nor did Goffman. Mead, however, did: role-taking.

With respect to thesis #6, Neither Cooley nor Goffman dealt with the idea of justified pride, nor have many others. Cooley discussed pride and vanity (1922, 230-237), but his version of pride confounds it with egotism, which is often the case in vernacular English. Tracy et al (2009) have recently noted this confound, distinguishing between what they call authentic (justified) and hubristic pride (egotism).

It is striking that in his four sizeable volumes on emotions, Tomkins (1962-92), the founding father of modern studies of emotion, has hundreds of pages on shame, more than all the other emotions combined, but has less than one page on pride. Tomkins seemed to understand the

importance of pride as the opposite of shame, but he made no attempt to define or even describe it. Nathanson (1987) wrote at article length about the shame/pride axis, but didn't define either emotion.

Helen Lynd (1958, 250-258) sought to define justified pride in terms of self-respect, clearly differentiating it from egotism, and distinguishing shame from guilt. Lewis (1971) took up Lynd's approach, and by using dictionary definitions of pride, shame, and guilt, cleared a space allowing for more precise and more social definitions of these emotions. Like Lynd, she showed that in English, pride has two distinct and opposite meanings (1971, 67). If one follows the implications, and the detailed distinctions she made between shame and guilt, new definitions can be made: shame is a signal of threat to the social bond, justified pride is a signal of a secure bond. In terms of these definitions, pride and shame are equally psychological and social.

What would be a plausible reason for the lack of attention to justified pride? It may be that modern societies are so individualized and alienated that shame/embarrassment or its anticipation is virtually ubiquitous, and moments of justified pride, rare. In one of many devices that serve to hide justified, there is a fatal ambiguity in the English word pride, as already mentioned: false pride (egotism) is confounded with justified pride. The word pride, even when referring to a justified instance, is tainted by this confound.

Part/whole Ladder

Cooley's writing implies seven propositions (wholes), as shown in Table 1, but there are too few less abstract concepts, moving down the part/whole ladder, and too few particulars. Goffman wrote about particulars and intermediate terms, but with too few theses. For these reasons, Cooley's work has been more or less ignored (except Mead, 1934), and Goffman's particulars have been read and enjoyed, but with little attention to their larger implications (For the necessity of particulars in the social/behavioral sciences, see Wrong 2005).

Mead's writing on "role-taking" (1934) provided less abstract concepts developed from Cooley's first thesis, but virtually no particulars in the manner of Goffman. Goffman invented many intermediate abstract terms, but so far only "impression management" has caught on..

Cooley wrote long before Goffman, and Goffman didn't acknowledge his indebtedness to Cooley. Nor did Mead acknowledge his indebtedness, even though he must have been aware of it (Jacobs 2006). By fitting Goffman's detailed particulars and intermediate terms to Cooley's abstract propositions, perhaps a new social psychology could be written, linking parts and wholes. Fitting Goffman's examples to all Cooley's and other's theses might enliven both Cooley and Goffman, and generate new theses that they didn't consider. Such a study would be laborious, since it would mean collecting and analyzing all of Goffman's examples, but it might well be worthwhile.

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