I A Theory of Personality

1 Personality Theory: The Three Faces of Psyche

IN AN ARTICLE on contemporary personality psychology in a recent edition of the *Annual Review of Psychology*, Ravenna Helson and Valory Mitchell note:

> Personality psychology has sometimes been seen as the domain of a little group of rational technicians who specialize in criticizing each other's measure of the insignificant, then conclude that the existence of the obvious is doubtful, then doubt whether the study of personality is worthwhile. (1978, pp. 579-80)

As psychologists since Freud have known, jokes and delusions all contain some grain of truth, and as psychologists for over a decade have known, the above quotation is neither entirely a joke nor wholly a delusion.

Personality psychology is a splintered field, for some time in the throes of a move away from global theorizing, emphasizing instead the development of second- and third-order theories and empirical research. In a rather ironic sense, psychology has always had multiple personalities: the first major theorist, Freud, had little influence on academic psychology (especially in America) until around the time of his death; and shortly thereafter the universities produced their first really comprehensive theory of personality, Skinnerian behaviorism, which split the discipline into two mutually hostile camps.[1] From the behaviorist matrix have emerged cognitive social learning approaches that focus on cognitive processes, the interaction between personality variables and specific situations, and socially mediated learning. In the 1950s a "third force" in personality theory arose, which includes existential and humanistic psychology. Research in personality psychology also includes a number of other empirical approaches, collectively known as trait psychology, which attempt the delineation and measurement of various dimensions of personality (e.g., intro-

[1] Unfortunately, the first law of academidynamics states that every simplification is an oversimplification: the twain of Freudian psychoanalysis and pre-Skinnerian (Hullian) behaviorism did, in fact, meet at Yale in the 1940s (see, for example, Miller and Dollard, 1941).

version/extroversion, perceived locus of control, Machiavellianism). In contrast to these more atomistic, trait-centered approaches, psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic/existential psychology constitute the three major traditions which attempt to provide an overall, comprehensive picture of the structure and development of human mental life. To understand the current state of personality theory thus requires a brief, if overly schematic, presentation of the basic tenets and development of these three approaches.

Psychoanalysis and Its Discontents

Philosophers have speculated about the nature of personality at least since Plato's tripartite division of the soul into a rational, an appetitive, and a spirited part, but not until Freud did personality theory begin to scale the walls of the Platonic cave. Freud's first model of the mind appeared in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), a work which he considered to include "the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make" (p. xxxii). In it he proposed, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, that much of mental life is unconscious, and that the meaning of every dream lies in unconscious, infantile wishes. The theory he proposed, known as his topographic model, distinguishes three systems within the mind: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious.

The conscious is the region of the mind of which we are immediately aware and is responsible for motor activity. The preconscious includes those thoughts that are accessible to consciousness but are not, at the moment, conscious (e.g., one's telephone number). The preconscious and the unconscious are both *descriptively* unconscious; i.e., the contents of these systems are not conscious. The difference between them is that, whereas the contents of the preconscious can become conscious at any time, the contents of the system "unconscious" are inaccessible to consciousness because they are repressed (e.g., one's ex-lover's telephone number). The contents of the unconscious are nonverbal and generally infantile. The unconscious is not organized according to the principles of rational thought; contradictory thoughts and impulses can exist side by side, and Kantian categories of time and causality are foreign to it.

The unconscious is the psychic reservoir of instinctual energies, and it knows only one kind of thought: the wish. This unorganized, illogical, wishful mode of thought Freud calls "primary process" thinking. Primary process thought pays no heed, and in fact has no access, to reality. It operates solely on the basis of the "pleasure principle," seeking pleasure and avoiding pain in the most expedient fashion. The preconscious, in contrast, utilizes rational, logical, "secondary process" thinking and is guided by the "reality principle," no longer accepting mechanisms such

as hallucination as valid modes of gratification. Somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious lies a censor responsible for repressing impulses from the unconscious that are unacceptable to the preconscious. Thus, the reality principle holds the pleasure principle in check because gratification of unconscious desires in the real world would ultimately lead to unpleasurable results. Unfulfilled unconscious wishes – and infantile sexual wishes, in particular – continue to clamor for satisfaction, and dreams, like neuroses, psychoses, and phenomena such as slips of the tongue (Freud, 1901) allow these wishes to be gratified in some form. Unlike the preconscious, the unconscious is thus *dynamic,* or energizing. Psychic conflict, a phenomenon to which Freud drew special attention, is conceived as a battle between the conscious/preconscious and the repressed unconscious.

Central to Freud's conceptualization of the psyche is the notion of drive or instinct. As countless intellectual historians and commentators on Freud's thought have noted, Freud derived his concept of drive (*Treib*) from the German physicalist tradition of Helmholtz and Brücke, his "scientific ideal father imagoes" (Holt, 1976, p. 163). Psychic energy is no different from any other type of energy in the natural world and thus obeys natural laws. Freud relied upon a drive-discharge model that proposes that psychic excitation builds up and seeks discharge. He based this view on a hydraulic metaphor that most closely resembles the accumulation of urine in the bladder (Holt, 1976). It is hydraulic also in the sense of a closed hydraulic system in physics, such that a fixed quantity of water can be converted into steam and reconverted into the same amount of water; psychic energy is fixed in quantity but can be transformed in various ways. An instinct, according to Freud, has a source (a body organ), an aim (some form of discharge), an object (e.g., a person), and an intensity.

Alongside this quantitative approach to drives, which views instinct as a quantity of excitation, is a dualistic, qualitative view which developed throughout Freud's career. (For an excellent article tracing the development of Freud's instinct theory, see Bibring, 1941.) Freud originally conceived of two instincts, sexual instincts and ego instincts, and in this he was undoubtedly influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory and Schopenhauer's philosophy (and its offspring), both of which emphasized the conflict between the good of the species (and its need for procreation) and the good of the individual (the classical notion of self-interest). Freud paid attention primarily to the sexual instinct, which he denoted by the term "libido." The first major change in this theory occurred when his study of narcissism (1914) led him to believe that part of the desire for self-preservation stems from libidinal attachment to (or "cathexis" of) the ego. Gradually the role of aggression became more prominent in Freud's thinking, and eventually he shifted from a dualism of ego and sexual instincts to a dualism of sexual and

aggressive instincts (1920). He maintained that view for the rest of his career, enlarging the theory to suggest that libido and aggression are psychic manifestations of a ubiquitous, cosmic conflict between Eros and Thanatos, life and death. In this later view, the instinct for self-preservation is conceived as a component of the erotic instinct.

While his instinct theory was always dualistic, Freud's preoccupation throughout his career was with the vicissitudes of libido. In his developmental or "genetic" model, first enunciated in 1905, Freud proposed a series of stages in the development of the libidinal drive. These stages are viewed as *psychosexual:* they are seen as stages in the development of personality, not just phases in the "organization" of libido. Thus, the ontogeny of the psyche and of the sexual drive are intertwined. Each stage is associated with a particular location on the body, or "erogenous zone." In the first phase, the oral phase, sexual gratification relates to the mouth, as hunger is a prime issue for the infant. The second, or anal stage, occurs around the age of two. During this period, conflicts over toilet training are paramount, and a conflict ensues between compliance and defiance.

The third phase is the phallic phase, and masturbatory activity begins to move to the genitals as the child discovers a new and powerful source of excitation. This is the period in which the child must come to terms with the Oedipus complex, and according to Freud, the way in which the child resolves this trauma is decisive for later personality development. The Oedipal age boy desires to "have" his mother in an exclusive relationship, and he sees his father as a powerful rival, as well as a loved object. He fears that his father will castrate him for his desires (the "castration complex"), so he relinquishes his Oedipal wishes – or rather, represses them – and identifies with his father. The girl in the Oedipal period must come to terms with her physical inferiority (lack of a penis); she blames her mother for this deprivation and turns to her father as a primary love object. In both the male and the female, matters are more complicated than this because, in fact, both boys and girls desire to some extent the same-sex parent (the "negative Oedipus complex").

The phallic phase (roughly ages three to six) is followed by a "latency" period, in which the child licks his Oedipal wounds (so to speak) and diverts his sexual aims to self-development and the acquisition of culture ("sublimation" of libido). With the emergence of adolescence, Oedipal issues resurface, repressions break down, and the serenity of the latency years dissolves. If all goes well, the child reaches the fourth and final, or genital stage. In this stage, pregenital libidinal desires (oral, anal, and phallic) become integrated with, and subordinate to the desire for heterosexual genital sex. In less than optimal development, a developmental arrest or "fixation" may occur at a particular stage, or a failure to consolidate development at one level may lead to a "regression" to a

previous one. In actuality, no one entirely transcends any of the stages. The result of a fixation or regression may be a particular character or personality organization. The oral character, for example, is needy and dependent, always trying to "take things in;" the anal character may be stingy and "withholding."

Freud maintained his drive-instinct and developmental models throughout his career, but he became dissatisfied with the topographic view by 1920 (the same year that he proposed the antinomy of sex and aggression). Three years later he began to advocate a new model, which came to be known as his structural model (1923), which received perhaps its best articulation in his *New Introductory Lectures* (1933) and the *Outline of Psycho-analysis* (1939). The structural model distinguishes three psychic "structures" or "institutions:" the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is conceived as the reservoir of the libidinal and aggressive drives, and like its conceptual predecessor, the unconscious, it is characterized as operating by the pleasure principle and utilizing primary process thought. The ego is the self-interested, executive institution of the psyche, which is under the sway of the reality principle and utilizes secondary process thought. It is responsible for perception, cognition, and motor activity, and when threatened by dangerous stimuli from within and without, it uses various "mechanisms of defense," such as repression, regression, reaction-formation (turning a desire into its opposite, e.g., "sour grapes"), and projection (ascribing one's own forbidden wishes or attributes to some external "object")[1] to protect itself.

The ego must reconcile its three masters: the id, reality, and the superego. The superego is the psychic representative of morality which the individual internalizes from parents and society. Although Freud seems never entirely to have given up the topographic model (it appears again in his last work in 1939), he developed the structural model because of his observation that many of the processes he had ascribed to the preconscious (such as repression) were, in fact, carried out unconsciously and were not accessible to consciousness. Thus, in the structural model, intrapsychic conflict occurs between the three structures; it is no longer seen as a conflict between consciousness and the unconscious.[2]

The Freudian theory of personality is powerful and complex, and while it tends to receive scant coverage in academic psychology departments in the United States in particular, it continues to be a mainstay of clinical

[1] "Objects," in psychoanalytic parlance, are psychic representations of things, people, ideas, etc., to which libido may become attached, although the term is often used to refer to the actual external reality rather than its internal representation.

[2] For the reader unacquainted with Freud, the following would provide a fairly balanced, historical view of his work: Freud, 1900, 1905, 1912, 1933, 1939. For excellent secondary material, see Arlow and Brenner, 1964; Jahoda, 1977; and Hall and Lindzey, 1978.

practice in psychology, psychiatry, and psychiatric social work. Every modern personality theorist has perforce had to engage in dialogue with Freud, whether as revisionist or adversary, and the rationalistic, nonemotive bent of much of current thinking in personality psychology reflects the problems encountered by any personality theorist who fails to grapple adequately with Freud's work. While Freud's influence on theories of personality has been nearly universal, one can isolate five "psychodynamic" traditions to which psychoanalysis has given rise.

The first offspring of psychoanalysis were its early revisionists, Adler (see 1929, 1969) and Jung (1971), who, like most critics of the orthodox Freudian position, do not find Freud's instinct theory compelling. Adler focused on the will to power, as opposed to the drive for sex, and he emphasized the importance of feelings of inferiority on personality development. Jung developed a complex and often mystical psychodynamic view which propounded the complementarity of various psychic processes and structures (such as unconscious and conscious, feeling and thinking, male and female parts of the psyche) and asserted that all human beings share a "collective unconscious" with which they must bring their lives into harmony.

The second psychodynamic tradition emphasized the social aspects of personality and the influence of culture on personality formation. Writers such as Fromm (1955), Horney (1937, 1950), and Sullivan (1953) argued that Freud failed to recognize the role of cultural and historical factors on the formation of personality, and Erik Erikson (1963, 1968), one of a handful of psychoanalysts whose work has entered mainstream (academic) psychology, has attempted to bring psychoanalytic theory closer to an understanding of the role of the "historical moment."

The third tradition is a development within psychoanalysis known as ego psychology. Whereas Freud concentrated largely on the id and only relatively late in his career began to focus on the ego, ego psychologists maintain that the ego, with its function of adaptation to reality, is central to the understanding of personality. Following Anna Freud (1936), ego psychologists have focused on the adaptive and maladaptive mechanisms of defense used by the ego, and following Hartmann (1939), they have examined "conflict-free" spheres of ego functioning, such as cognition and perception. This latter interest has brought psychoanalytic thought into some communication with academic psychology, though relatively few psychologists straddle that fence. The fourth tradition, also within psychoanalysis, is the object relations school. This approach concentrates on the internal "object world" of the individual, on her or his mental representations of social reality. In recent years, ego-psychological and object-relational approaches have begun to converge in the work of theorists such as Kernberg (1976).

Personality Theory

The final tradition derived from psychoanalysis is less a school of thought than a rubric or a set of clinicians and writers which one can loosely label "eclectic." A vast number of mental health professionals would place themselves in this category, and in large part one could say that eclectic psychodynamic psychologists find psychodynamic approaches (i.e., approaches which examine feelings, internal meanings, defenses, etc.) compelling, yet they reject Freudian theory as a general model of mental life.

Skinnerian Behaviorism and the Response to Its Stimulus

The second major theory of the psyche is behaviorism, and B.F. Skinner's version is the most comprehensive and has been the most influential. Skinnerian behaviorism rests upon an entirely different epistemology than psychodynamic approaches. It is a radical empiricism, which views internal mental states as intersubjectively unverifiable and outside the parameters of scientific investigation. Whereas psychoanalysis relies upon data from the clinic or the couch, Skinner's source of data is the laboratory, and rats, pigeons, and humans are his subjects. Skinner's viewpoint developed from the earlier behaviorist views of Pavlov (1927) and Watson (1925). His thought is a reaction against Cartesian dualism, with its separation of mind and body; introspective psychology, with its emphasis on subjective experience; and psychoanalysis.

Skinner is interested in behavior, as opposed to internal behavioral dispositions. Anathema to Skinner is the search for a psychic "deep structure," "latent content," or "metapsychology" lurking beneath observable behavior. For the behaviorist, psychology is the study of behavior and its relation to the environment, and the purpose of psychology is the prediction and control of human behavior. Skinner would not, in fact, speak of "personality" at all; for him, behavior is the result of conditioning.

Fundamentally, he distinguishes between "respondent conditioning" (the classical conditioning pioneered by Pavlov) and "operant conditioning." Respondent conditioning is the psychology of reflexes. An unconditioned stimulus (e.g., food) is paired (presented) with a conditioned stimulus (e.g., a bell), so that when an organism (e.g., a dog) responds to one, it responds to the other; in this manner the animal comes to associate the two stimuli and to respond to the conditioned stimulus in the same manner as it would respond to the unconditioned stimulus (e.g., by salivating). To give a human example, if a woman left her panties by the bed whenever she and her lover engaged in sexual activity, her lover may become aroused whenever he sees her panties. The response elicited by the unconditioned stimulus (such as arousal when the man sees his lover) is a "reflex," and the relationship between conditioned stimulus and response is a "conditioned reflex."

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Only a small percentage of human behavior is reflex, so Skinner developed the concept of operant conditioning. Whereas the stimulus in respondent conditioning temporally precedes the response, in operant conditioning the response comes before the payoff, which is called the "reinforcer." An operant is a class of behaviors emitted rather than elicited. When an operant is reinforced, the frequency of its occurrence rises. For example, if a pigeon happens to peck at a target and is rewarded with food, the probability that it will do so again increases. Pecking is an operant that is reinforced by food. If the pigeon is continually rewarded (reinforced), it will continue that action. The probability of a response (operant) is not dependent only upon rate of reinforcement: it depends, as well, upon the state of the organism, i.e., whether deprivation or satiation prevails. For example, if a pigeon is not hungry, the likelihood that it will keep pecking is reduced. In more Skinnerian parlance, one would not say that a pigeon is "hungry," only that it has not been reinforced recently with food. The crucial factor in predicting the pigeon's actions (operant behavior) is its "history of reinforcement"; by examining its feeding record and its prior reinforcement for pecking responses, one could predict the probability of its pecking at the target. When a reinforced behavior is no longer rewarded, it undergoes "extinction," which means that the response gradually disappears from the organism's repertoire of behavior.

A reinforcer is any stimulus that strengthens a behavioral response (i.e., increases the chance of its occurrence). A positive reinforcer is a stimulus which, when presented, strengthens the response. A negative reinforcer is one which, when *removed,* strengthens a response. Punishment, like negative reinforcement, involves an aversive stimulus, but a punishing stimulus is one which, when presented, *weakens* a response. For example, the food given to the pigeon pecking at the target constitutes positive reinforcement. If the pigeon had been rewarded instead by the removal of a loud sound, negative reinforcement would have been involved. If the pigeon had pecked at the experimenter, one would suspect that punishment would be the relevant principle.

Skinner adds another important case, that of "operant discrimination." In this type of learning, the operant is not emitted randomly as in operant conditioning (until being reinforced). Instead, a given stimulus increases the probability that the operant will be emitted. For example, the pigeon may learn that when a light comes on, the probability is greater that it will be reinforced for pecking. This form of conditioning is something of a hybrid between respondent and operant conditioning. Skinner summarizes the three forms of conditioning:

> (1) Certain events – like the color and taste of ripe fruit – tend to occur together. Respondent conditioning is the corresponding effect upon behavior. (2) Certain activities of the organism effect certain changes in the

> environment. Operant conditioning is the corresponding effect on behavior. (3) Certain events are occasions upon which certain actions effect certain changes in the environment. Operant discrimination is the corresponding effect upon behavior. (1953, p. 125)[1]

Skinnerian behaviorism generated voluminous research in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in America. Indeed, that many universities refer to the disciplines which study human beings as the "behavioral sciences" is largely a tribute to Skinner's enormous influence. Nevertheless, few today would accept a radical behaviorism as a theory (or alternative to the notion) of personality. (For an excellent summary of contemporary behaviorist thought, see Bolles, 1975.) The reasons for this cannot be explored here, though the reader should be aware that the difficulty in predicting a single pecking behavior of a pigeon outside of very special controlled conditions has never been overcome, which lends little hope for the idea of a behaviorist account of complex human behaviors, especially over time. Perhaps the acid test for a Skinnerian behaviorist would be the following scenario. Imagine a professor of behaviorist psychology lying in a hospital bed, paralyzed by a stroke. He is thinking, however, and realizes if he can think but cannot speak or act, he is nevertheless capable of knowledge and thought, despite his physical debility. He suddenly realizes that his view of personality must be wrong, and he longs to tell his students, but he is incapable of speech. At such a moment, is the professor still a behaviorist?

The seeds of the destruction of a radical behaviorism were sown in the late 1940s when researchers within the behaviorist paradigm began to discover latent learning. Tolman (1948) found that rats were actually learning about mazes even when they were not being reinforced. Tolman discovered that rats familiar with a maze could run it faster than unfamiliar rats when reinforced for the first time. What became clear was that the rats were forming cognitive maps of their environment, even before being reinforced.

The "cognitive revolution" in psychology in the 1960s and 1970s produced a serious challenge to orthodox behaviorism. Computer models of information processing suggested a metaphor for psychologists interested in human information storage and retrieval, and this new approach required the examination of "internal" mental connections and processes, thus challenging Skinner's antimentalist epistemology. Of course, Piaget had been talking of schemas, structures, and the mental operations which transform them for forty years, but the quest for a science of the observable had cast a shadow over many of Piaget's efforts, especially in behaviorist American psychology.

[1] The presentation of Skinner's views here is derived primarily from Skinner, 1953, 1971, 1974.