ARE PSYCHOLOGICAL SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT OUTDATED?[1]

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At first sight it almost seems futile and out of place to raise the question, are psychological schools of thought outdated? Relatively few will dissent from the opinion that we no longer need any schools of thought, that they merely cause friction and confusion and hinder scientific progress. The adherents to any one school, with their almost religious zeal, seem to discredit the whole field of psychology, making it a battleground of contrasting dogmas instead of integrating all available information into one systematic body of reliable knowledge.

Leaving aside the question of the merits of schools, it is obvious that there can only be schools—i.e., differing views and allegiances— where crucial issues are still unsettled. We do not find two or more schools of thought regarding a problem where one answer has been accepted. But many questions in psychology remain unsettled, and many which have been resolved at one time, were later again under discussion.

NEED FOR ASSUMPTIONS

All those who deal professionally with people, be it in psychotherapy, counseling, or education, operate by necessity within the framework of a definite concept of man which they have accepted for themselves. It would be ideal if the scientists could find the answers to the problems of man so that the practitioners could apply them. However, today the practitioner must apply knowledge that the scientists have not yet discovered. To fill this void, the practitioner must have his working hypotheses, his speculations, or his theories. But only if he adheres to a well established theory is he likely to be aware of his basic propositions; otherwise he usually is not.

This is true not only for the practitioner. Van Kaam has recently pointed out (17) that no one in psychology can "start without any assumptions," and he gives reasons why psychologists are inclined to deny the need for assumptions without, however, escaping them. He

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has full understanding for the particular predicament of the experimental psychologist. "Paying attention to assumptions during the experimentation itself, would make scientific work impossible. This attitude of abstraction from the assumptions involved during experimentation extends itself easily outside the laboratory and makes the experimenter blind to the very existence of the assumptions involved."

Assumptions are working hypotheses. In the field of personality theory they imply construction of a model of man. In this sense the various models of man, developed in the last century and still being developed today, are necessary to promote an understanding which could not be obtained merely by compiling the data which emerged from the experimental exploration of isolated facts.

LIMITATIONS OF PRESENT SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT

It has always been the hope of the disciples of a school of thought that scientific research would eventually permit an experimental validation of their theoretical assumptions. To date, however, scientific verification of these models has not been forthcoming because they were not formulated in testable propositions. Testable propositions which deal with "organized complexities," as Weaver (18) called them, which are the essence of personality theory and psychology in general, are not yet possible.

The situation within the social sciences is similar. Argyle (2) describes our present way of dealing with social behavior by stating that the great bulk of research in sociology and anthropology is of the descriptive survey type, with very little attempt to arrive at generalizations about the relations between variables. Although certain laws have been discovered and certain empirical variables measured, social science has not yet reached a stage where global laws can be recognized. For this reason some contemporary social methodologists, like Merton (12) prefer "theories of the middle range," while some psychologists favor "miniature theories" which cover small fields with precision.

According to Frank (6) the situation in social science is not unlike that of physical science in 1800 when isolated observations and measurements were undertaken, but could not be unified to permit the recognition of basic physical processes. Goody (8) has pointed out that even in meteorology "the familiar laboratory procedure of isolating and controlling one factor at a time is useless, for the essence of the problem lies in the conflicts of interlocking phenomena." And Ashby (3) made it clear that analysis does not solve, but avoids the problem

of complexity. Similarly, Frank (6) questions the analytic procedure, "almost exclusively used in psychological research at the present time." He does not repudiate the method as such, but its relevance and appropriateness for organized, complex wholes. In summary, the contemporary faith in reductionism is becoming considerably shaken, whereas no other reliable scientific approach, both in psychology and social science, is yet in sight.

INADEQUATE SOLUTIONS

Our present predicament is caused by the lack of scientific basis for a frame of reference in dealing with people, and the widespread antagonism to, and suspicion of, any well-defined theory. The characteristic expression of this dilemma is the increasing appeal of eclecticism. It has been considered more "scientific" and objective, and therefore more appropriate than adherence to any one system or school of thought. Some psychiatrists and psychologists try to take full advantage of the contributions of each school "without succumbing to pitfalls of dogmatism." Taking from each school and system what they consider valid, plausible, and useful, seems the ideal approach to the contradictory claims and postulates of the various schools. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it becomes obvious that every eclectic is building his own model of man out of the masonry with which each school has built its own edifice.

Another byproduct of this distrust in schools is a tendency to prove one's lack of dogmatism by proudly proclaiming how little one knows. "Knowing" is no longer fashionable in the field of interpersonal problems—particularly since the lure of psychoanalytic doctrine has diminished, and even many psychoanalists feel inclined to admit that they do not know the answers. The "true scientist" proves his scientific objectivity by modestly acknowledging his ignorance.

Henle (10) deals with the problem of the eclectics who "rise above the conflict of schools and hold that psychologists today are in happy agreement." She concludes that

eclectics tend to resolve conflicts in psychology by glossing over real differences and obscuring the issues. Such solutions achieve harmony at the price of specific theory in the area of the controversy, and thus sacrifice fruitfulness in the discovery of new facts. Closer examination often reveals implicit theories underlying such solutions; but unexpressed and unexamined theory can hardly be expected to equal explicit hypothesis, either in fruitfulness or in adequacy in dealing with known facts.

Henle suggests that "differences need to be resolved in psychology not by denying them and attempting to combine existing theories, but by

focussing on the differences and using them to get a better view of the relevant phenomena."

Scientific Progress

It is commonly assumed that scientific progress takes place through new evidence being added to previous findings, either augmenting, modifying or refuting them. To a certain extent this is true. But upon closer scrutiny, we find that this can only be done as long as research remains within the same general frame of reference. The greatest strides in scientific knowledge occur, not through an additive process, but through fundamental changes in basic assumptions. Such changes drastically alter perceptions and procedures in scientific research.

The integration of all findings into one body of knowledge is impossible at the present stage of scientific research possibilities. But progress is possible. It requires the recognition of the need for the dialectic process and its acceptance. In this way, each proposition can be contrasted with another which seemingly contradicts it. The ensuing controversy constitutes an interplay of thesis and antithesis until a new synthesis emerges which then immediately becomes a thesis for another antithesis. This procedure permits a settlement of one dialectic pair at a time, each presenting certain aspects and dimensions of the questions and problems involved. Every assumption has several dimensions, and each of its aspects may find its antithesis in another assumption. Issues become settled, at least temporarily, when a new synthesis eliminates previous contradictions. But no such settlement can be of long duration since every new "discovery" immediately is challenged by a new, and perhaps more advanced, antithesis. Boring (4) pointed many years ago to the productive role of controversy in scientific research.

The Assumptions of Adlerian Psychology

The function which schools can perform at this stage of the development of personality theories and psychotherapeutic procedures is to bring their basic assumptions into the open and to clarify them. Once these are formulated and declared, they permit recognition of their antithetical assumptions.

As an example of this procedure in the case of one school, let us take the model of man as it was developed by Adler, examine its basic assumptions, and see how they coincide with or contradict the assumptions of other theories. These assumptions all refer to certain of

the "dimensions" of personality theory noted by Hall and Lindzey (9). We can isolate five such assumptions in Adlerian psychology:

1. *The social embeddedness of man.* This is in contrast to the assumption of an hereditary or biological basis for human behavior. Society, or the group, is the field in which man moves, and which alone permits a recognition of the significance of hehavior.

2. *Self-determination and creativity.* This opposes mechanistic-deterministic concepts, be they concerned with the deterministic influence of the environment or of hereditary or organic factors.

3. *Subjectivity of perception.* This opposes the assumption of absolutes which require an authority to determine them.

4. *Teleo-analytic interpretation of behavior.* This opposes a causalistic evaluation of behavior.

5. *The holistic approach.* This opposes reductionistic efforts to explain man by any one of his partial attributes.

Comparison with other Schools

Having defined these five basic assumptions, we can clearly see their antitheses. All mechanistic, deterministic theories of personality are opposed to our concept; be they organically oriented, like the psychology of Sheldon; reductionistic, like the factor analysis of Eysenck; deterministic-instinctual, like Freud's psychoanalysis; socially deterministic, like behaviorism in all its various modifications; etc. The neo-Freudians like Horney, Sullivan, Fromm, and the Washington School have increasingly discarded biological instinctual concepts and replaced them with a social orientation. However, they have not given up Freud's basic mechanistic and reductionistic principles and, therefore, cannot perceive an holistic approach.

Traditionally Gestalt psychology has always been closest to Adlerian psychology. Both emphasize holism; but many Gestalt psychologists accept a holistic view only in regard to perception and to physiological wholes, particularly Koehler and Koffka. Lewin added the field orientation, social directedness, and the principle of contemporaneity of motives which is similar to our model. However, Lewin's concepts of vectorial summation and semi-autonomous internal entities are in contrast to it. Learning theories are moving close to our model except when they are entirely mechanistic (Miller and Dollard); or when they assume a dualism and antagonism between emotion and organism, or independent drives, as Tolman does. However, Tolman

emphasizes perception and goals as well as the significance of the learning process, which again comes close to our concepts. Cybernetics provided the concept of feedback which is essential to an understanding of the self-perpetuation of a chosen direction. It permits a clearer perception of Adler's concepts of goals and life style. The concept of the open system adds considerable clarity to that of creativity, one of the Adlerian basic assumptions. The personality theory of Kelly (11) with its emphasis on perception and concept formation, and its affirmation of self-determination and creativity as essential in personality development, is probably one of the models closest to Adlerian psychology of those developed before the advent of existential analysis on the American scene.

The Adlerian model includes all the characteristic assumptions of existential analysis which made its impact felt in America after the Barcelona conference of 1958. In comparing these two schools, Stern (15) states that "existential analysis incorporated openly or in a hidden way some of the most important concepts of Individual Psychology." Van Dusen (16) found a fundamental similarity between the two schools "which rest on a phenomenological, holistic and idiographic approach." In emphasizing the role and importance of values, man's freedom to choose, his responsibility and ability to discharge this freedom, and the need of a subjective understanding of behavior, the existentialists are siding with Adlerian psychologists on all the basic issues.

At the same time, it is already becoming obvious that within the existential group some differences of fundamental assumptions are arising. It seems that Adlerians will maintain a naturalistic orientation as opposed to some ontoanalysts who consider mystical dimensions of man as essential. The influence of Jaspers will be felt in the general assumption that freedom and self-decision are possible for man only.[2] Frankl (7) ignores society as a basis for value developments, and looks for a spiritual, transcendental dimension. However, his opposition to "psychologism" and "sociologism" is not different from Winthrop's (20) objection to "scientism" in psychology and Sorokin's (14) decrying of "quantophrenia" and "metromania." It is the mechanistic aspect of psychology and sociology which we all oppose;

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[2]The opposition to the new epistemological concept is based, to a large extent, on unfamiliarity with the concept of limited determinism. As the physicists wish to maintain the validity of quantum mechanics only for processes on the subatomic level, so do many ontoanalysts restrict the assumption of freedom of choice to human existence.

but Adlerians take the stand that in doing so, we do not have to leave the sphere of natural dimensions.

Most important will probably be the evaluation of subjectivity within the ontoanalytic field. While some here emphasize feelings, like Rogers (13), and others the irrationality in man, like Whittaker and Malone (19), we maintain logical and rational processes exist behind "irrational" behavior. Such behavior appears irrational only from the point of view of the observer. Adler's concept of "private logic" (1) and its implications coincide with the intellectual orientation of the rational psychotherapy of Ellis (5).

CONCLUSION

The fact that scientific validation of any school of personality theory and psychotherapy is presently impossible, far from discrediting schools as such, is the very reason for their existence, and should not prevent psychiatrists and psychologists from taking a stand on the basic, unsettled issues. Clarification, exemplification, and delineation of basic assumptions about man can only be accomplished within a well-defined theory. Thus, schools can contribute to the progress of knowledge and practice by permitting free comparisons about and controversy between the proponents of well-defined and declared assumptions. The emphasis of their differences is perhaps even more important than the recognition of their similarities. This would seem the most fruitful procedure until such time as scientific approaches to complex phenomena are developed, and the basic laws regulating individuals and groups in their interactions have been discovered.

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