THE INFLUENCE OF ADLER ON ROTTER'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY OF PERSONALITY[1]

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In 1950 John Dollard and Neal Miller (4) published a book on *Personality and Psychotherapy* which was heavily influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freudian concepts such as conflict, repression, transference, and the pleasure principle were related to concepts and experimental paradigms which had been developed by learning theorists who had followed the path blazed by Pavlov, Thorndike, and Hull. From this synthesis emerged a theoretical schema which has had considerable impact on American psychology. But it seems that although Dollard and Miller had made psychoanalytic theory more palatable to may psychologists, psychoanalysts responded that the new bland recipe was so drastically altered that it had omitted the essential ingredients of psychoanalytic theory (8).

In 1954 Julian B. Rotter's book, *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*, was published. In it Rotter presented "a social learning theory of personality" (9, p. 84), personality assessment, personality research, and psychotherapy. "It is a *social* learning theory because it stresses the fact that the major or basic modes of behaving are learned in social situations and are inextricably fused with needs requiring for their satisfaction the mediation of other persons" (9, p. 84). It was influenced by Adler's Individual Psychology. While many people seem to be aware of Freud's influence on Dollard and Miller, fewer are aware of Adler's influence on Rotter. Rotter did not offer his work as an effort to recast Adlerian conceptions into the language of learning theory. While the influence of Adler was heuristically powerful and pervasive, Rotter's theoretical efforts went beyond the translation of Adlerian ideas into a language which might be more acceptable to academically inclined psychologists. To depreciate social learning theory as watered-down Individual Psychology or to depreciate Individual Psychology as fatty waste in comparison to the lean, red meat of social learning theory would

be a means of safeguarding esteem that neither Adler nor Rotter would require.

The present paper proposes to examine the many striking similarities and a few real differences between Rotter and Adler. It is of some interest that this examination has not taken place before.

Influences on the Basic Postulates

When Adler was in New York City in 1936 and 1937, Rotter attended a series of Adler's clinics and demonstrations, university seminars, and informal meetings in Adler's hotel home. Adler was nearing the end of his most useful life; Rotter was a young man just at the threshold of his professional life. In addition to his early association with Adler, Rotter benefited from personal association and the teachings of J. R. Kantor and Kurt Lewin.

Rotter (9, p. 94) credits Kantor primarily with theaching him what may be called the *construct point of view*. This holds that events, including behavior, serve as the basis or referent for the theoretical abstractions from the events that are called *constructs* or *concepts*. The event is not the construct; the construct is the invention of the theorist for a particular purpose.

Rotter credits Lewin, as well as Kantor, with influencing him to adopt the basic assumption of a field theory, that "the unit . . . for the study of personality is the interaction of the individual and his meaningful environment" (9, p. 85). Also acknowledged are the influences of Lewin, Adler, Thorndike, and Hull on highlighting the value of viewing behavior as goal-directed. Rotter infers "the directional aspect of behavior . . . from the effect of reinforcing conditions" (9, p. 97). Reinforcement is defined as an event which increases or decreases the probability that movement toward a goal will occur. Skinner (13) and Meehl (7) had offered previously a similar interpretation of reinforcement which is known as the empirical law of effect. Lewin should also be credited with influencing Rotter to place stress on the importance of the psychological situation.

Rotter acknowledges the influence of Adler in his use of the widely accepted principle of the unity of personality. "A person's . . . interactions with his meaningful environment influence each other" (9, p. 94). This leads to increasing stability or unity of personality through time since new experiences are acquired within a context of previously learned meanings and interpretations. Rotter does not place an arbitrary cutting point at any age in the person's develop-

mental history where new learning ceases. Personality can potentially change throughout life, but the influence of new experiences is filtered through a system of generalized expectations developed in earlier interactions.

Adler also influenced Rotter's final postulate that "The occurrence of a behavior of a person is determined not only by the nature or importance of goals or reinforcements but also by the person's anticipation or expectancy" (9, p. 102) that these goals are contingent upon his behavior. Ansbacher summarized Adler's view as, "Actions are determined by the opinion of oneself and the world as well as by the goal" (3, p. 341). Within the learning theory tradition, Rotter's conception of expectancy was influenced, of course, by Tolman and his students.

The Major Difference Between Rotter and Adler

Adler's system is a grand theory of personality. It encompasses the whole range of human behavior, although it does focus on understanding disturbed human behavior with an eye toward changing socially useless aspects of the person's style of life. Adler's concern with helping people in distress led to the formulation of a theory of personality and a psychotherapeutic approach based upon his clinical observations. In method, Adler was a scientist. He observed his client's response to current life problems, his earliest recollections, and other behaviors to form an hypothesis about the person's goal which would enable him to predict his client's pattern of movement in light of the hypothesized goal. If the predicted outcomes were not consonant with the psychological construction, the hypothesis—not the observations—was subject to change.

Adler revised his theories in light of his observations throughout his life. Adler held the view that man strove toward perfection and overcoming, and that all of us make something of a mistake in life. Adler's solution to the problem of mistaken views of oneself and the world was to emphasize the social nature of reality—the use of common sense rather than private intelligence.

This excursion into Adler's theory has a point. It is that Adler, like all scientists, was well aware of the importance of consensual agreement based upon reliable observation to people, both as scientists and as citizens-in-general. Interpretations of Adler as a "subjective psychologist" must be read carefully to ensure that Adler's allegiance to scientific method and canons of thinking is not slighted.

Adler did not see Individual Psychology as a static statement of truth that was somehow independent of reality; rather lawful prediction of man's behavior in his social context was Adler's goal, and his theory was a vehicle to be used in such a way that it facilitated movement toward that goal.

Rotter's social learning theory is not a grand theory of personality. Theorists of the preceding generation, such as Adler, had come to grips with the problem of developing a framework useful for clinical work. Social learning theory was developed as a framework which would goad and guide research. While it is not a grand theory, neither is it a miniature theory. Miniature theories develop as a means of explaining psychological observations in a circumscribed area such as achievement motivation. Social learning theory is intermediate to either grand or miniature theories; it focuses on predicting behavior in choice situations where more than one behavior directed at more than one goal is possible. Rotter expresses his predictions in various formulas (9, pp. 108-110).

Adler's presentation of his theory is literary. He paints a verbal portrait of his patients and uses their behavior to illustrate the referents for his concepts. The *content* of Adler's theory is paramount. Rotter presents a schematic outline of his theory where *process* or interrelations of constructs takes precedence over the specification of content. Rotter provides a skeletal framework which is to be nourished to healthy development by fruitful empirical progress towards ascertaining the classes of behaviors which are functionally related by movement towards a goal.

The strategy for Adler and Rotter is the same, but Adler focuses on the individual client in a clinical context where Rotter emphasizes the measurement and prediction of goal-directed movement in a research context. This research focus leads Rotter to emphasize the development of lower-order or more specific constructs which can be defined by clear-cut operations for measurement and which can be systematically related to one another to reduce overlapping and redundancy. This is the major essential difference between the two theorists, and it is why Rotter (11) is concerned with an analysis of Adlerian psychology from a research orientation.

Related to this difference in focus is the fact that, as will be seen, there is no counterpart in Rotter's theory for Adler's concept of social interest. This is because Rotter distinguishes between a personality theory whose goal is to predict behavior, and the value

positions that one assumes as a person or as a psychotherapist. Social interest is a very broad concept which seems to contain much that is oriented toward prediction but some that is not. It is a concept that is partly psychological and partly ethical. It does more than inform; it urges a course of moral action. To say this is not to disparage the humanistic concern that led Adler to introduce within the social interest concept the values of cooperation and loving concern for others. We only wish to indicate that these values are kept distinct from the predictive constructs of social learning theory, while the values, we hope, are shared by many of its students.

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTS

Need Potential—Life Style

Behavior potential (9, p. 105) is the construct which focuses on the probability that a specific behavior directed toward a specific reinforcement in a specific situation will occur. Need potential (9, p. 184-189) is the broader conception which refers to the potentiality of a group of behaviors occurring which are functionally related in that they lead to functionally equivalent reinforcements or goals.

Style of life is a broad concept which encompasses the individual's goal, his opinion of himself and the world, and his unique way of striving for the goal in his particular situation (2, p. 172). The behavioral aspect of the style of life, the unique way of striving for the goal in a particular situation, parallels the concept of need potential or behavioral potential. Rotter holds that potential needs can have any content as long as direct or indirect behavioral referents for goal-movement are supplied.

Goals making up a need may be unique to an individual. For example, the behavior of a person in a marriage will vary if, instead of seeking love and affection from his wife, he seeks status by subjugating her so that he will feel like a king. Also, behavior used to reach the same goal or reinforcement will vary as a function of individual learning experiences. For example, to obtain love and affection from others, most people engage in loving and affectionate behavior, but a person may evolve a relatively unique behavior directed towards obtaining love and affection such as parading his misery by moping, sighing and self-belittlement. Presumably, this pattern has been learned in previous situations where affectionate rewards have followed such behaviors.

Freedom of Movement—Opinion of Self and the World

The concept of expectancy (9, p. 107) in social learning theory is concerned with the individual's subjectively held probability that a behavior will lead to a reinforcement in a situation. Freedom of movement (9, pp. 194-200) refers to a generalized expectancy for obtaining positive satisfactions.

High freedom of movement implies that the individual expects many behaviors to lead successfully to his valued goals. Such a cognitive expectation implies freedom to move in alternative pathways to reach a goal and that many and diverse goals are potentially obtainable. Such a person feels at home on this earth at this time. He has a place. In relation to social goals, he feels that he belongs. He can strive for superiority, for perfection, to overcome because he anticipates success; he has courage.

Low freedom of movement is equivalent to a feeling of inferiority in that it implies that the person feels helpless and incapable of reaching through his own efforts the goals that he values. He is discouraged.

The freedom of movement concept is an "apperceptive schema." It includes such self-reflective behavior as one's opinion of oneself, particularly when this opinion concerns the probability of obtaining one's goals. It is also concerned with one's opinion of the world.

An important example of generalized expectancy is the concept of internal versus external locus of control. The person who has an internal locus of control believes that the reinforcements that he receives are contingent upon his efforts. The person with an external locus of control views the receipt of reinforcements or goal-attainment as a matter of luck, fate, or the caprice of powerful others. Lefcourt (6) recently reviewed the empirical research and implications of the concept of belief in personal control in this *Journal*, pointing out the similarities with Adler's concepts of striving for superiority and of courage.

Need Value—Fictional Final Goal

Reinforcement value (9, p. 107) is defined as the relative preference value for obtaining alternative goals, assuming the individual has an equal subjective probability for success. *Need value* (9, p. 189) is the broader conception applied to a group of functionally related reinforcements or goals. The concepts of *need* and *goal* are used interchangeably by Rotter depending on whether he wishes to focus

on the individual or the situational aspect of the interaction sequences comprising personality.

There is, at least, a partial correspondence between the need value concept and the final goal concept of Individual Psychology. The style of life, the final goal, and the striving for superiority were concepts employed by Adler to emphasize the usefulness of viewing behavior as goal-directed. Rotter is as strongly committed to goal-directedness. However, he puts less emphasis on a single, unique, overriding goal. If all behavior in social learning theory is not viewed as leading toward a single final goal, all behavior is viewed as leading toward goals.

The creation or origin of goals in social learning theory is accounted for wholly by principles of cognitive learning, and like all its other concepts, need values are categorized on an empirical basis. In some sense of the term the person can be said "to have created a fictional goal," but his creation is not without experiential antecedents. Need values are based on past experiences as interpreted by the individual. The value of any goal is a function of the expectancy that it will lead to other goals. Subjective probabilities held by a person may not be equivalent to objective or mathematical probabilities, but this does not imply that the errors are not subject to psychological explanation.

Adler like any theorist is subject to interpretation. We view Adler as being an empiricist rather than an ontologist, but others sometimes interpret him as more of the latter than the former. Adler's emphasis on creativity in the formation of the goal can be interpreted as his means of emphasizing the extensive filtering of experiences through an apperceptive schema which contained expectations about oneself and the nature of the world. Such an emphasis on the influence of one's personality on the interpretation or psychological meaning of events does not go beyond a scientific epistemology. It is clear that Rotter is committed to such an epistemology. Given this interpretation of Adler's concept of the final goal, the concept of need value serves a similar function in social learning theory.

The Psychological Situation

The psychological situation is sometimes characterized as the fourth major variable in Rotter's theory. Following Lewin and Kantor, he defines it as the situation as it is experienced by the

person with the meaning that he gives to it. Like all the other variables it must be describable in intrasubjectively and inter-subjectively reliable terms. Since the person interacting with his environment is considered the unit of analysis, behavior potential, expectancy, and reinforcement value cannot be considered inde-pendently of the situation (10).

While Adler was less explicit in emphasizing the situation as a variable, the concept is implicit in his way of thinking. This will be apparent to the reader who will examine Adler's writings and notice the frequency with which the word "situation" occurs. Alder was very much concerned with the person's interpretation of life situations.

VIEWS ON MALADJUSTMENT AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

When we consider the clinical enterprise, the similarities between Individual Psychology and social learning theory appear to be very great. Rotter does not argue that implications for psychotherapy can be rigorously deduced from his theory. In part, this is because the "learning" aspect of the theory provides a framework of im-portant processes to be considered in predicting behavior which must be combined with the "personality" or content aspect of the theory which is to be empirically determined. This empirical work is not complete, but it has begun. Also, Rotter recognizes that psycho-therapy and even definitions of maladaptive behavior require value commitments on the part of the psychologist that are not part of the predictive ingredients of his theory. Implications from the theory for psychotherapy remain at some middle ground of specificity. Consequently, I believe one can predict what Rotter will do in psychotherapy, almost as well from a knowledge of Individual Psychology as from knowledge of social learning theory. Of course, Rotter hopes to apply his theory as directly as possible to clinical problems, rather than merely to explain techniques derived from Individual Psychology.

Model of Behavior Disorders

In Individual Psychology the individual is said to develop a pattern of movement directed toward a goal of personal superiority or self-enhancement because he fears a defeat on the useful side of life. The neurotic style of life safeguards the self-esteem of an indi-vidual who feels inadequately prepared to meet life on its own terms.

In social learning theory, the individual is said to engage in maladaptive or avoidant and "irreal" (9, p. 197) behaviors when he has a low expectancy for securing a highly valued goal. Low freedom of movement (increased feelings of inferiority) in relation to highly valued needs or goals (goal of superiority) is offered as the psychological model underlying disordered behavior.

In part the patient's low freedom of movement is due to having a high *minimal goal level*. In social learning theory the minimal goal level is defined as "the lowest goal in a continuum of potential reinforcements for some life situation . . . which will be perceived as a satisfaction" (9, p. 213). Operationally, it is the lowest goal in a continuum that is an empirically reinforcing event, that is, that increases the probability that a preceding behavior will occur.

Rotter relates his concept of high minimal goal level to Adler's concept of the unrealistic goal of superiority (9, p. 350). Rotter also indicates that child rearing practices that can be characterized as "pampering" may prepare a child for a life of dissatisfaction since the parents are providing such an overindulgent, overprotective environment that a high minimal goal level may result. Both Adler and Rotter indicate that the individual experiences difficulty because he has low expectations for reaching valued goals or because he has failed, due to his mistaken view of himself and the world, to develop the skilled behaviors that lead to successful goal attainment.

An individual with low freedom of movement will engage in avoidant behaviors (safeguarding through distance) and not approach situations where valued rewards are potentially present, or, at least, he will not forthrightly seek to obtain his valued goals. He may also engage in irreal behavior (safeguarding through distance) such as daydreaming about his personal success or what he would do if only he were not neurotic, unloved, discriminated against, or what have you. It is apparent that Rotter's concepts of low freedom of movement, high minimal goal level, and avoidance and irreal behavior correspond to the Adler's concepts of increased feeling of inferiority, exaggerated goal of superiority, and safeguarding through distance.

The Social Factor

The major difference in the views of maladjustment is that Adler is more specific about the common content of the mistaken opinions and their origin. He argues that the individual has failed

to take human relatedness into account, to develop his social interest, presumably, as a function of some overburdening childhood situation such as pampering, neglect, or organ inferiority. The individual does not feel that he belongs, has a place, is one with his fellow man, because his potential for social interest was not developed in the maternal interaction and then extended to include his fellow men. Thus, the individual cannot cope with the great tasks of life which are all actually social problems.

Rotter has not specified the content of neurotic disturbance with this exactness, but has no view which is incompatible with the Adlerian view. Although, as a scientist, he has the patience to wait until the evidence is collected, as a therapist he must observe his patient to determine the important goals, expectations, and pattern of movement that he uses. In doing that, he is not unlike the Individual Psychologist who applies the Adlerian framework to each patient as an individual in his own right.

Rotter (12) has called attention to the importance of recognizing and clarifying one's value position as it influences the conduct of psychotherapy, and his psychotherapeutic values are actually very congenieal with those of Adler. In psychotherapy or in life more generally, Rotter may reinforce cooperation, understanding others, and contributions to social welfare because he values such behaviors. He would recognize that under specific circumstances, an individual can develop a learned need to help others. Currently, Rotter is doing research on the concept of *interpersonal trust* which might be viewed as one aspect of social interest. Reinforcement is one technique for encouraging prosocial behavior, but social learning theory, per se, does not indicate that this is a class of behavior which *should* be encouraged.

Of course, it is recognized that the "should" in the last sentence could be justified by Individual Psychology in either of two ways. It could be argued that social interest is a transcendental goal to be valued for its intrinisc merit, or that social interest is an empirical given since the nature of life is such that for man to live happily or to be free of neurosis, he must strive for the ideals of personal and social progress. To the degree that the latter interpretation is empirically testable and supported by empirical evidence, an adherent to the epistemological approach accepted by social learning theory would introduce a concept like social interest into the empirically developed content of social learning theory. Regardless of the test-

ability or evidential status of such sentiments implied in the concept of social interest, they remain appealing fictions to me.

Goals of Psychotherapy

Rotter sees psychotherapeutic practices as stemming from his theoretical conceptions and value positions. These are similar to Adler's. Rotter (12) sees the purposes of psychotherapy as helping the patient to reach a greater state of happiness or comfort or pleasure *and* to lead a more constructive life, to contribute to his society, to maximize his potential for achievement, and to increase his feelings of affection for and contribution to others.

The goals that Rotter wants to accomplish early in therapy are likewise similar to Adler's. One goal is to understand the patient even to the point of being able to predict his behavior. To accomplish this, the therapist must assess the patient's important goals, expectations about goal attainment, interpretations of situations, and potential behaviors. At the same time, he will attempt to win the patient. He will attempt to develop the expectation that change is possible, and that he can help the patient find more satisfying behaviors to reach his goals. The therapist will attempt to increase his reinforcement value in other ways as well, perhaps, by expressing his genuine interest and concern for his client's welfare. Therapy is a cooperative undertaking, and it is important that both patient and therapist have their goals clearly in mind. Rotter will frequently structure and restructure psychotherapy to be sure that the patient and therapist share mutual goals and that their roles are clearly specified as they move toward these shared goals, as Dreikurs (5, p. 82) has expressed this for the Adlerian approach.

As therapy progresses, Rotter will help the patient understand contingencies between his behavior and the rewards and punishments that follow from his actions, and he will directly reinforce new effective behavior patterns as they emerge. Interpretations designed to increase insight, or to state it better, to increase freedom of movement and to alter the values of certain goals, are offered to the patient. Rotter believes that it is at least as important that the patient learn to understand the behavior of others as it is that he understand his own behavior. The specific focus of much of the interpretive comment is on the contingencies between behaviors and goal attainment in specific situations. This will include such concerns as helping the patient differentiate the goals potentially avail-

able in various social settings, understand that attaining a specific goal may conflict with attaining other valued goals in a particular situation, understand that attaining certain goals such as dominance and control of others can lead to immediate and delayed punishment from others, and understand the ways in which certain goals originated and their present day consequences. Like Adler (1), Rotter will discuss life goals with the patient in order to change immediate goals and behaviors. Expectations that are no longer appropriate will be altered, so that, to use an Adlerian term, the patient will be *encouraged* and able to try new behaviors. It is often necessary to alter expectancies before new behavior (leading to valued goals) will be tried.

Summary

Rotter places a strong emphasis on changing behavior, as does Individual Psychology. Behavior patterns that are effective and directed toward valued goals will be directly reinforced by the therapist. The therapist may also enlist other important people in the patient's life to reward certain patterns of behavior. Changing mistaken expectancies, altering the value of certain goals, or changing the means used to obtain the goals through interpretive discussion are seen as helping the patient to develop the courage to try potentially more rewarding and constructive behavior. Rotter relies quite heavily on the idea that alternative behaviors are potentially available which can bring satisfaction to the patient without infringing upon the rights of others. At times, the patient must learn social or occupational skills that he has not acquired due to low freedom of movement and consequent avoidant behavior, or, perhaps, the patient has failed to learn higher level social skills because he has never seen them modeled. Above all, Rotter wants the patient to acquire an expectancy and set of behaviors based on the conception that searching for alternative paths to goals or for alternative goals is a valuable problem-solving skill that is basic to acquiring high freedom of movement. The individual must develop the conviction that he can find solutions and can cope with the problems of life.

CONCLUDING RESERVATION

While I hope to have pointed out some similarities and a few differences between Individual Psychology and social learning theory, I have a reservation about the success of my task. It is

probably not possible to separate with any degree of assurance the influence of Adler from that of Lewin, Kantor, or the *Zeitgeist* on Rotter's social learning theory. It should be clear that Rotter offers his theory as a step in the direction of theoretical progress. In so doing, he accepts the thesis that a good theory is stated in such a way that it is fragile; as the empirical evidence is collected, social learning theory will be extended, revised and cast into new forms, or rejected in favor of more useful conceptualizations. The similarities between Individual Psychology and social learning theory offer the basis for a feeling of mutual regard, the differences can serve to stimulate critical appraisal aimed at useful overcoming.

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[2]For an excellent condensation of Rotter's theory see: Katkovsky, W. Social-learning theory and maladjustment. In Gorlow, L., & Katkovsky, W. (Eds.), *Readings in the psychology of adjustment.* 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968. Pp. 213-232. This book also contains a concise statement of Adler's theory: Ansbacher, H. L. Adler's theory of Individual Psychology. Pp. 135-148.