Alfred Adler and Gordon W. Allport: A Comparison on Certain Topics in Personality Theory*

Lewis M. K. Long, *Cambridge, Mass.*

Introduction

Gordon W. Allport is today one of the most important personality theorists on the scene of American psychology. His *Personality, A Psychological Interpretation* marked the beginning of the modern study of personality. Although in need of revision, this book still contains the essence of Allport's thinking. And even though revisions and elaborations of some of his points have appeared elsewhere (12, 13, 15), all of Allport's formulations have been developed taking into full account the current experimental research work being conducted in academic circles.

Allport—whom Ansbacher had already compared with Adler on the topic of causality and indeterminism (17)—has also received an enthusiastic review of his *Personality* by the Adlerian journal in Vienna. This review concluded that "Adler's concept of the 'style-of-life' runs all through this wonderful book" (17). Hence, Allport is already well known in Adlerian circles, where many think that the formulations of these two men have run in parallel courses. What can we say about them?

First of all, both Adler and Allport can easily be called centralists, holistic, and organismic. Both have rebelled against the atomistic and mechanical psychologies, opposed the pansexuality theory of behavior and denied the pleasure principle as guiding and governing the individual. In the thinking of both, one perceives the influence of Stern and their contact with Spranger. Both theorists could be roughly classified as purposivists—striving, creative individuals who do a great deal of intentioning and integrating and who have little use for typologies except for academic use or first approximations. One can also add that both manifest hope and optimism in their description of man.

To be more specific, we shall take up some key issues in personality theory and see how they are interpreted, first by Adler, then by Allport. Of the many topics that could be discussed, this writer has decided to

dwell on the following: the unity of personality; consistency of behavior; personality theory; the place of the ego in personality theory; and the mature personality.

The Unity of the Personality

From the beginning, the individual and his unity have been stressed, as suggested by the very name, Individual Psychology (henceforth abbreviated I.P.). Dreikurs even states that it was "the unity of the personality which gave I.P. its name . . . [for] 'individuum' means literally undivided, indivisible" (20). Ansbacher has confirmed this viewpoint: "The unity of personality receives possibly the greatest stress of all the concepts in I.P." (19).

Adler himself made many references to this concept of unity: "It is possible to analyze the homogeneous psychic life with various more or less valueless points of view . . . but in the end there can be no evading the necessity of restoring it again to its all-embracing activity, like setting a rider once more on its steed" (8). "Such traits lead in a unit direction to the goal (9); and in addition to regarding an individual's life as a unity, we must also take it together with its content of social relations" (1).

More recently, we find Allport devoting a complete chapter to this problem, Chapter 13, "The Unity of the Personality." In this chapter he states that "even though a person's life exhibits contradictory trends, even though the unity is never complete and final, it is nevertheless obvious that the number of totally independent qualities is not very great." He concludes the chapter saying that "the truth of the matter is that the total organization of personality is still a new and poorly formulated problem in psychology. It is a many-sided issue whose solution yet lies in the future" (11).

We can see, therefore, that both these men subscribe to the concept of the unity of the personality. But it must be borne in mind that Allport views the unity as not necessarily complete and the problem as open to further investigation. For Adler, however, unity is a fundamental tenet.

Closely allied to unity are the problems of uniqueness, individuality, and consistency. Inasmuch as the third will be dealt with later, let us first turn to the topics uniqueness and individuality. The very name "Individual Psychology" suggests an emphasis in the individual. Very early in his career, Adler declared that "all these phenomena [emotions,

thinking, etc.] are subject to the rule of communal life . . . [and] influenced by individual striving . . . express themselves in a specific, individual and unique pattern" (9). Adler was strongly opposed to taking "the easier but unfruitful roads of classification" (4), and stated firmly that "when we come across types in our investigations we are not exempted from the duty of discovering the uniqueness of the individual case" (8). The epitome of his position was stated in his *The Science of Living*: "Just as one cannot find two leaves on the same tree absolutely identical, so we cannot find two human beings absolutely alike" (1).

Allport, likewise, has this to say: "The outstanding characteristic of man is his individuality. He is a unique creation of the forces of nature" (11). With these lines he opens up his wellknown book, *Personality, A Psychological Interpretation*. In other places in this book, Allport states that "psychologically considered, the important fact about personality is its relatively enduring and unique organization." In a journal article, Allport says that "the motivational structure of adult lives is essentially unique" (12).

In the final chapter of *Personality,* Allport gives the intent of his previous chapters and states that "preference is given throughout to those concepts that savor of individuality." He also says that psychology should seek laws that tell how uniqueness comes about.

It must be apparent by now that these two men stand side by side on the problem of individuality and uniqueness, both agreeing that these characteristics are the essence of man.

Consistency of Behavior

Adler's style-of-life concept is the major theme in the life of the individual, and it becomes the selective factor in allowing certain perceptions to be seen, certain memories to be retained, and certain emotions to be well expressed. After this "style" is acquired, it determines a consistent path that the personality will take. It is very important to emphasize that this style of life is formed by the fifth year. Let us sample some statements Adler made on this subject: "The style of life is founded on the first four or five years of childhood . . . This period closes with the full development of the ego and the consequent fixation of its attitude to life" (2); [and] "the individual retains the same line of activity both in childhood and in maturity, leading us to deduce that his goal in life is unaltered" (9). "Very few individuals have ever

been able to change the behavior pattern of their childhood, although in adult life they have found themselves in entirely different situations" (9).

It is quite apparent that Adler sees the individual as a unified unique being whose consistency starts from the age of about five and thereafter changes little. But as Ansbacher has pointed out, Adler must have believed some change was possible or he would never have devoted as much time as he did to the educational clinics he started in Vienna. Nor would he have dwelt on therapy (18).

Allport also believes consistent behavioral actions show up early in life, but he adds that "personality is (not) fixed once and for all during the first years of life. No one's destiny is determined so early. Later circumstances affect personality profoundly" (11). Allport finds great difficulty in seeing self-consistency early in life, but expects the maturing personality to show this trait.

The concept of functional autonomy that Allport introduced into psychological theory should also remind us that the motivation behind consistent behavior may radically change from the age of five to adulthood. (The topic of motivation will be discussed more fully in the next section).

However, we find Allport firmly convinced about the consistency of behavior. First of all, he has stated, "Emprically considered, the problem of unity is the same as the problem of consistency" (11). What has he found empirically? To answer this question, we are referred to his *Personality Under Social Catastrophe: Ninety Life Histories of the Nazi Revolution* (15). Relevant to our discussion here we quote: "The most vivid impression gained by our analysts from this case-history material is the extraordinary continuity and sameness in individual personality . . . [and] persistence toward established goals, even though the familiar has become fraught with danger and the attainment of established goals is no longer possible" (15).

Allport would certainly agree with any propositions Adler advanced about the consistency of behavior, yet he would like to leave the question of early fixation open; "I would like to have more evidence," (14), he once stated on the subject.

Personality and Motivation

The motivational force in Adler's system comes from the "striving for superiority" (19) as a person tries to overcome his feeling of inferi-

46

ority. This very important motive gives rise to the twin motives of the need for self-esteem and the need for a feeling of security (16). Adler has phrased the striving aspect of man as follows: [The] fundamental law of life . . . is that of overcoming" (8); "I.P. finds the striving for success inseparably imbedded in the life structure" (7); "the concept of life as motion cannot be thought of without attributing to it the faculty of active adaptation, or as I called it first, 'aggression' " (6); and "the goal of the human soul is conquest, perfection, security, superiority" (8). The picture here is quite clear. We have an individual striving for perfection and security under the propulsion of his striving for superiority. Also, let us not forget that the individual's feelings of superiority are a reflection of his fictive goal, a part of his style of life which was crystallized around the age of five.

Allport has a great deal to say about motivation and has even introduced a new psychological concept, *functional autonomy,* which has been much discussed since its presentation. First of all, Allport accepts a biological theory in its broader outlines to explain the simpler motives in infancy. But with the unfolding and developing of hundreds of motives he refuses to look upon them as still functionally related to the primary biological drives. "Psychonanlysts (and others) . . . all favor a backward emphasis . . . They regard motives, say at the age of fifty, as elaborated . . . modified etc. . . . [from a] structure [that] 'never' changes . . .[but] historical continuity does not mean functional continuity" (12).

It is here that "functional autonomy" has been used. By it Allport means "a shorthand phrase resigned to call attention to . . . the decisive role the present ego-structure plays in directing human conduct. . . . it marks a shift of emphasis in its various forms to the present 'go' of interests that contemporaneously initiate and sustain behavior" (12). Again he has stated "motives being always contemporary should be studied in their present structure. Failure to do so is probably the chief reason why psychoanalysts meet so many defeats, as do all other thera-peutic schemes relying too exclusively upon uncovering the motives of early childhood" (12).

In sum, Allport would certainly not subscribe to Adler's genetic, monosymptomatic motivational scheme. His concept of functional autonomy is, in fact, his proposition to show how motivation develops. In this aspect of personality theory these two men do not agree. Ans-bacher (18), however, does not feel that Adler and Allport are as opposed to one another as this author makes them out to be.

Adler had some definite and interesting views on the conscious-unconscious distinction. "The unconscious . . . is nothing other than that which we have been unable to formulate in clear concepts. These are not hiding away in some unconscious . . . but are those parts of our consciousness the significance of which we have not fully understood" (5). This statement does not deny that "not-knowing" is purposive, as Way (25) has pointed out.

How much conscious behavior do we have? Here Adler posited that "human beings may be differentiated into two types: those who know more concerning their unconscious life than the average, and those who know less . . . the [latter] concentrate upon a small sphere of activity, whereas individuals of the first type are connected with a many-sided sphere, and have large interests in men, things, events, and ideas . . . They approach life without blinders . . . in an objective manner . . . [the unconscious type] approaches life with a prejudiced attitude, and sees only a small part of it" (9). To Adler this means that it is the neurotic and psychotic individuals, those who have retreated or are not being social participators, who have a big unconscious life. This view of Adler's might well be one of the reasons for Kunkel's (21) complaint about the rationalism of Adler.

Allport's view of the conscious-unconscious is similar to that of Adler: "Although the importance of conflict in the evolution of the individual personality is under no circumstances to be denied, it seems that only in exceptional cases is the psychoanalytic emphasis on the unconscious operation fully justified. Most conflicts, psychoanalysis to the contrary notwithstanding, are conscious in all essential particulars and for that very reason another less esoteric portrayal of conflict seems more adequate" (11).

In a footnote on page 324, he further adds: "Whether or not some initial repression (of a trait) took place, there have been elaborations and transformations in the focal character of the disposition until it must now be considered as rooted in the total life rather than in some recess of the unconscious" (11).

H. A. Murray, colleague and friend of Allport, has jokingly drawn on the famous ice-berg-water relation of Freud (which says that the largest portion, the unconscious, is beneath water; and smaller tip, the conscious life, is outside of the water) to classify Allport. Murray then says that Allport has inverted the figure in his theoretical system seeing

most of life in this upside-down iceberg fashion; i.e., as consciously motivated. Whether Allport would accept this interpretation of himself we do not know, but he certainly stands opposed to the iceberg analogy of the conscious-unconscious problem.

Here we find both Adler and Allport standing close together again. Although neither one specifically states how much of one's motivation is consciously directed, both definitely pronounce that a great deal of it is consciously directed. Adler adds an interesting hypothesis of the type of people in whom consciousness or unconsciousness would prevail.

The Ego in Personality Theory

Adler did not speak of the ego very often until his last book, *Social Interests: A Challenge to Mankind*. Somewhat earlier (4) he did mention that "what is frequently labeled the 'ego' is nothing more than the style of the individual." In his *Social Interest* Adler stated: "However little we know of the unity of the ego, we can never get away from it . . . it is possible to analyze it (ego) . . . but in the end there can be no evading the necessity of restoring it again to its all-embracing activity like setting a rider once more on his steed"; "even the so-called conscious, or the ego, is chock full of the unconscious, or as I have called it, the non-understood" (8); and "every recollection . . . represents the result of the elaboration of an impression by means of the ego." Here we have the ego, then, as comparable to the life-style of the individual. Since the life-style is the individual's adaptation to his milieu and an attempt to satisfy the needs of self-esteem and security, we can almost think of it as the "ego of dominance-drive" (12), one of the eight different ways Allport found that the ego is used in contemporary psychology.

Although Allport has written a great deal about the ego (11, 12) he does not seem to have spoken about it in unequivocal terms. But since he allies himself with a personalistic viewpoint, although not being a personalist himself, we could feel sure that the coordinating concept of the ego (or self, or person) would be necessary. He has pronounced, for example, that an "adequate psychology of personality will allow amply for the concept of self; but will not employ it factotum" (13). Many of Allport's articles refer to "ego-structure" and "ego-involvement"; and one gathers in reading about how these are used, that by "ego" Allport means the most-embracing aspect of the personality.

Here again, then, we have a close similarity between Adler and Allport. Both use the concept of the ego as the most embracing concept of personality. But since Adler's view of motivation revolves about two motives, his ego becomes a rather narrow administrator, for it seeks only status and recognition, and therefore, can be seen as an ego of dominance-drive. Allport's ego, however though not explicitly defined, seems to imply the greatest working unity of the personality.

The Mature Personality

So far we have spoken about sundry abstractions of the personality without tieing them into any comprehensive scheme. We should return, then, to see what both Adler and Allport have suggested as the characteristics of maturity. We will begin with Allport this time since he has written very explicitly on this topic.

Allport states that the mature personality is noted by: self-extension, self-objectification, and self-consistency. Let us briefly see what he means by each of these.

Self-extension represents the self extending himself into his environment; a variety of interests once remote become a part of him and are developed through initiating, planning, and proceeding toward definite goals; and one's ego does not remain the most important factor in guiding life. This, then, becomes the first requirement of a mature personality.

Second, we have self-objectification, or insight and humor. Insight, a knowledge of one's self, helps one to live without deception. "What insight does is to make past mistakes intelligible so that one is not condemned through ignorance to repeat them" (11). Correlated closely with insight, Allport has pointed out, is humor. True humor has been defined by Meredith as "the ability to laugh at the things one loves, including one's self . . . and to still love them" (11).

Finally, the mature individual has a unifying philosophy of life. This is the person who searches and relates the values underlying all things and embracing his schematization relates himself to his place in the scheme of life.

Although Adler did not dwell on the topic of the mature personality as such, he did speak about the type of individual we need in our society; "no adequate man can grow up without cultivating a deep sense of his fellowship in humanity and practicing the art of being a human being" (9). The meaning of life is for the greatest cooperation

50

with others. "Human beings are not normally governed by the pleasure principle, but strive for the happiness of others" (3); "but it is not enough only to recognize the bad and condemn it! One must ask one's self 'What have I done to make things better?'" (9); and "great accomplishments can occur only under the stimulus of a social feeling" (9).

This social feeling Shyne considers to be "the ability to subordinate egocentric wishes to the needs of the community, the willingness to contribute without the thought of reward" (23). Way has stated that "a good indication of social feeling is the number and quality of man's friendships' (25). Finally, Sicher has suggested that "the mentally healthy man moves expansively away from himself, thereby enlarging his actual life area" (24).

In his last book *Social Interest* (8), Adler did add some statements in the chapter "The Meaning of Life" which might be apropos here. "To live means to develop oneself"; "a movement of the individual or the mass can only be counted worthy by us as it creates values for eternity"; "every tendency should be reckoned as justified whose direction gives undeniable proof that it is guided by the goal of universal welfare. Every tenet should be held to be wrong if it is opposed to this standpoint or is vitiated by the query of Cain: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'"; and "the best conception hitherto gained for the elevation of humanity is the idea of God."

It is somewhat difficult to compare Adler and Allport here because Allport's characteristics emphasize more strongly the structural aspects of the personality (14, 22), (although implicitly they have sociological ramifications), while Adler's have a distinctively sociological orientation. Adler does speak of self-extension, a unifying philosophy of life, and self-objectivity in his own particular way. He seems to omit a sense of humor though elsewhere he said that "the good human beings ... radiate ... cheerfulness and make life more beautiful and meaningful" (9). Even though Adler has not covered this topic as adequately as Allport, he has surpassed the latter in the sociological interpretations for a mature individual.

Allport, on the other hand, has outlined a conception of the mature personality which is quite unique in its grasp of human nature at ist best. Even though the characteristics he proposes need better specifications, they certainly do serve as "values" from which some interesting empirical work could spring.

In concluding one cannot help but be impressed by the close correspondence of Adler and Allport in the foregoing concepts. This is of special interest since Adler relied upon the clincal and intuitive methods while Allport depended on empirical and experimental findings to support his position. Adler commenced his personality theorizing many years before Allport appeared on the scene. This suggests that the uncontrolled observations, experience and insights of Adler, which he built into a theoretical structure, represent thinking years ahead of his time. His conceptions still seem to be fresh and alive, ready to stand the test of further scrutiny and comparison.

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