PERSONALITY IN SOCIAL THEORY

Patricke Johns Heine

a

PERSONALITY IN SOCIAL THEORY

PERSONALITY IN SOCIAL THEORY

Patricke Johns Heine

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1971 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 2007025977

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Heine, Patricke Johns.
Personality in social theory / Patricke Johns Heine.
p. cm.
Originally published: Chicago : Aldine Pub. Co., [1971].
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-202-36165-9
1. Social psychology. 2. Social role. I. Title.

HM1033.H45 2007
302'.15—dc22 2007025977

ISBN 13: 978-0-202-36165-9 (pbk)

Contents

Foreword

It is characteristic of members of a scientific discipline to pursue their interests as if they exist in splendid isolation from any other body of knowledge. Universities have fostered this conceit by departmentalizing the faculty and, thereby, adding organizational barriers to such weak ecumenical impulses as might exist.

Despite the occasional excitement generated by members of adjacent disciplines who meet at the border to discuss common interests, the situation in the social sciences has not changed substantially since they, one by one, escaped from the embrace of philosophers. Despite Lewin's repeated assertion decades ago that $B = f(PE)$, psychologists concerned with personality have managed to avoid coming to grips with "*E*" and sociologists have given little credence to "*P*'s" role in social process.

In consequence, psychologists have an unenviable record in their attempts to demonstrate the predictive validity of their measures of personality, because individuals are remarkably responsive to their social milieu, while sociologists have found that both prediction and induction of social change often fail because individuals do not do what they are, theoretically, supposed to do.

As the author demonstrates, if the concept $B = f\ (PE)$ is realized at all, it is in the area of "social psychology." Yet even in this area of convergence of interest, endeavors are not fully collaborative. Psychologists and sociologists each endorse their own brand of social psychology and, while there are increasing numbers of double-jointed professionals who are acceptable to both camps, their influence in the heartland of the two social sciences is not conspicuous.

Therefore, one goal in publishing this book is to expand the interest of future psychologists and sociologists in a fruitful integration of the study of individual behavior and the social milieu in which behavior occurs. For example, major steps might be taken in solving the criterion problem in personality research if it were possible to adduce reliable and valid measures of role performance. On the other hand, some predictions based on sociological research might be sharpened if sampling were based on a respondent's subjective perception of his status, mobility, and of the opportunities and rewards available to him. The assessment specialist is dismayed when ascribed personality characteristics seem to lack durability across situations; the social planner is dismayed because significant numbers of individuals in a particular social category often behave in a manner seemingly contrary to their self-interest. Surely one constructive approach to the resolution of these dilemmas is a closer look at the problem of personality in sociology.

Psychologists are now venturing into the community with the view of studying (and intervening in) the effects on personality of the social environments in which individuals live, work, and play. Thus there is a clear need for a framework and a vocabulary for cogently examining the problem of the social experience in personality theory. Since it is doubtful whether any comprehensive and yet coherent review of this topic can be said to exist, perhaps this book will move some reader to undertake that difficult but necessary task.

Ralph W. Heine

Preface

The problem of personality, like many other borderline issues, falls within the province called social psychology. Presumably it is a problem neither to sociology (which functions at one level, it is said) nor to psychology (which allegedly functions at another). It is merely a problem when we try to harmonize the spheres. Then we recognize it as the only problem in social psychology, wonderfully disguised by the many shapes and forms its controversies have assumed over time. Here, therefore, the relation of the individual to the group—old territory to the social psychologist—is approached through social definititions of person and personality.

The distinctive sociological contributions to the field are usually proclaimed to be role theory, role analysis, and role research and essentially this essay is about the rise and decline of that small edifice. Part I is a summary of the milieu in which it grew; Part II is a discussion of its theory and research; Part III is a review of critical developments that make role analysis something less than eternal in time and place, and something less than fully satisfying in social thought and theory.

The present text grew out of a briefer discussion, "The Problem of Personality in Sociological Theory," published in Wepman and Heine, *Concepts of Personality*, Aldine, 1963. Now, as then, I am deeply grateful to the editor, Ralph Heine, for sugges-

tions, criticisms, and encouragement. To Robert Wesner of Aldine I should like to say special thanks for his reading of the manuscript and his intelligent guidance in certain matters of content and organization. Finally, I should like to add an appreciation of an old teacher whose influence was, as the saying goes, "formative"—Hans H. Gerth of the University of Wisconsin.

Introduction

There has long been debate about "self," "person," or "individuality" that we have come to recognize as a crisis of modern times. Since it is our fashion to call "philosophic" problems that are either poorly formulated or inadequately resolved by empirical investigation, certain inherent difficulties that beset a would-be "science of personality" may be considered philosophic. To label these as philosophic, logical, or empirical, however, hardly matters, for they may be expressed in any of these terms.

Let us begin with the last first. The exaltation of the individual and his individuality—religiously, as individual soul, politically as individual citizen, economically as rational man, psychologically as unique person—has been accompanied, in our world, by a steady increase in mere numbers of people. Even if we regard these two historic happenings as fortuitously accompanying each other in time, we cannot avoid noting a certain disharmony between the rise of the individual and the enormous growth of modern populations. Very simply: large numbers of people stand as a denial to the singularity or significance of any one person. Hence from the beginning we might well ask the naive question of where the individual comes in, what he counts for in a world steadily numbering more and more people, and what does "being individual" signify? In the modern world, we know that numbers count: actuarial truths have sup-

planted knowledge, and probability statements have replaced scientific verities.

These are quantitative matters. Simple logical difficulties enter when we grant that the individual *qua* individual stands in opposition to such quantitification and that, as an object of knowledge, he does not lend himself to the same procedures in quite the same way. What is different about the person?

We can know a great deal about him *as a person*, and it is certainly a kind of knowledge—the knowledge, for example, we call personal acquaintance or a very different sort we call clinical insight, but neither one provides us with the basis for scientific information since its validity is limited to one. Therefore, paradoxically, we have to suggest that in order to have scientific knowledge about the individual we have to ignore him as an individual and forget, for the nonce, that he is a person at all. We busy ourselves with the most various aspects of person—likes and dislikes, sociability ratio, voting preference, racial attitude, ambition and aspiration. We acquire an enormous lot of knowledge—about particular behaviors, attitudes, have-done and would-do experiences, but we do so by setting aside the idea of the person and abstracting aspects of his behavior that are quantified and quantifiable. Central tendencies are the only basis upon which any generalizations about personality rest. An exhaustive knowledge of a person gives us case history or biography from which hypotheses may be generated, but not a science of person or personality.

Science, then, and social change together contrive to derogate whatever intrinsic values we have learned to attach to individuality per se. In psychology the problem of individuality has often been construed as the measurement of individual differences with measurement as the predominant concern. But the bona fide personality theorist strives for much more than what can be measured. His claims and his interests are directed, we are told, to the "whole person"—but who can measure that? Or his concern is with the similarities as well as the dissimilarities between people—a rather long detour from person and personality, but close indeed to social psychology. Scientific generalizations, we have said, inevitably derogate the individual because, in order to achieve these at all, we have to bypass the

individual *qua* individual and concentrate on particular behaviors, attitudes, or experiences. Perhaps the first illusion to be surrendered is that the psychology of personality has, in practice, been concerned with the individual instead of bits and pieces of him.

We have alluded to the facts of social change that have contributed to the relative insignificance of any given person while, in principle, individualism was applauded. Here the sociologist is less likely to emphasize the mere demographic facts than vast institutional changes. These changes have involved the uprooting of the individual from traditional organizations, his formal freedom within a new industrial order to go on alone, and, at the same time, political struggles for "emancipation," for "rights," for "security"—all of which involved a ceaseless interplay between individual and collective aims, individual and collective action, individual and collective significance. Formally, in modern times, the individual was set free, yet individually he counted for little. He was (as it came to be phrased) part of a "lonely crowd"; a surfeit of individuality made any kind of association or solidarity compellingly attractive. From this standpoint, individuality is not so much a blessing as a pathology (Durkheim called it *anomie,* in reference to the collapse of common binding norms); but blessing or not, it has issued in clear conflict between formal cultural emphasis on individuality and concrete social experiences that belied it. The Western world in modern times has known cults of "genius," of "self-expression," of "self-realization"; more mundanely it has encouraged aggrandizement and achievement, the will to power and self-advancement. Yet in the face of objectively limited circumstances and requirements, only so much individuality is socially useful or necessary. A disproportionate amount may be variously seen as a crisis of individualism, a frustration of social opportunity or a problem of conformity. Superfluous individuality may be defined as failure or aberration, rebellion or eccentricity, but it is granted scant honor. Merton's typology of *anomie* is a reclassification of forms of social abnormality that takes account of all such forms of socially useless or disapproved individuality.

If there exist empirical and logical problems in the pursuit of

personality, the most fundamental issue remains a quite different one—one that can hardly be resolved by ambitious attempts to define away differences in perspectives and interpretations through a consensus called behavioral science. We may all agree that we have a common interest in human behavior; we may go even further and concede that acceptable formulations for a "science of behavior" must, in quite narrow terms, be defined behavioristically. To do so is merely to accentuate the problem of personality.

The human recalcitrance that is today sloganized as humanism in psychology and sociology gathers its strength not from the inadequacies of behaviorism or the insufficiencies of positivism—though these may be set forth—but from the moral affront each presents to our traditional conceptions of "person." Thus there is recurrently raised the basic philosophic question whether there can, in fact, be a science of person or personality in which the richness of subjective elaborations and the uniqueness of the individual human experience can find a place. An examination of what the personality psychologist actually does yields a rather different account than do his professed interests: far from being concerned with the "unique person" or the "study of the individual," his tasks have centered on sorting and testing procedures that group and arrange people either in accordance with prevailing typologies or by statistical distribution of particular traits. It would appear that only at the juncture of clinical and personality psychology (i.e. psychopathology) is the person, as such, focussed upon.

The conjunction of clinical and personality psychology has accentuated and confounded the types of knowledge we use, on the one hand for "knowing" a person and on the other, for the scientific sorting of persons. According to our prejudices and perspectives, knowledge of the person may be either external or internal, but in contrast to the preoccupations of behaviorism, modern prejudices stemming from the clinical field tend to equate an exhaustive knowledge of the person with knowledge of the inner, hidden, and subjective. Hence knowledge of the person is likely to be equated with explorations of subjectivity. It is true that among the strongest of distinctions to be drawn in considering personality and its relevance for all social behavior,

and one that behaviorists have never satisfactorily answered, is the experience of self. The "illusion" of self is a favorite theme, often proclaimed by the same thorough-going social behaviorists who least question the reality of others. Yet what distinguishes person and personality from other objects is precisely the ability of the person to be an object to himself, to be, as we customarily say, a self-examining, self-reflective creature. The so-called problem of introspection, which the behaviorist dismisses as dangerous and unreliable evidence and which others insist upon regarding as a uniquely human capacity, has remained a focal point of dispute. Yet the human facility to reflect about others as we do ourselves and about ourselves as we do others, is central to contemporary social psychology and serves to affirm the essential psychic and social continuity between self and society, person and others, or, as current formulations go, the inseparability of the terms "personal" and "interpersonal."

In these new formulations the old kingdom of personality is lost, and the "empirical person" remains to be defined in different ways and from different perspectives. Out of naive social experience the person was, or could be argued to be, given to us; and so the self, too. Whichever way we regard it, whether with cynicism or delight, the "illusion" of self, like person, comes upon the empirical self or person—there, like other objects, a physical embodiment with myriad attributes as well. Thus, we may see the person (and ourselves as well) in a great variety of settings, group or isolate; we perceive his shifting behaviors and postures, shapes and forms; and therefore we dabate his existence because the very terms in which we define it usually depend on general and extra-individual concerns. Among these concerns, the psychology of personality has had its share in the dispersion of the person; and so, too, has sociology despite the fact that the person remains, in society and in life, the unit we perceive, understand, or count. When we have been scientific we have had to forfeit notions of uniqueness, "whole personality," and the like, and when we have delved into one person and his history we have had to forego the usual claims of science.

Here we shall regard the person as a central point in social psychology and successive changes in conception of person as a

point of departure for theories and researches in social psychology. The notion that boundaries of self and person are somehow fixed belongs to personality theory but not to social psychology. Here the highly bounded structure of psychoanalytic personality theory may be contrasted with the removal of all such boundaries from the personal self to the social territories within which the person functions (as in Goffman's social psychology). That sense of inner-being and privacy we have customarily appropriated as our own may be seen instead as the property of conventionally defined "zones" or "regions" that elicit or require or demand certain behaviors only in terms of time or place.

The shifting boundaries of inner and outer, private and public, subjective and objective behaviors suggest the insufficiencies of older doctrines. What one generation believed as belonging like private property to the innermost self, the next upholds for public scrutiny; what one era appraised as "correct bearing" and prescribed as a code for conduct becomes mere "front" or put-on to the next. External surface behaviors have been cultivated in other times and places precisely because they gave inner support, but such conceptions are hardly understandable today. In the absence of stable or uniform criteria, prescribed or given by tradition, inner needs, feelings, or wishes acquire a validity regarded as totally irrelevant in the past. Correspondingly, duty or impersonal responsibility or objective requirements are often debunked as pious fraud.

We have no reason to doubt that new forms in social life may generally change the balance between public and private domain in subtle as well as obvious ways. But such change appears largely as a shift in content, depending on what is or is not taboo, seldom as an absolute decline in residue and reserve left to the individual. Sex, politics, and religion may all—under quite different conditions of, say, Puritanism, despotism, or theocracy—prove unable to be discussed and so driven underground or made private. These changes leave us no fixed boundaries upon which to anchor the self in comparing different epochs and different societies.

For objective reference we have had to depend on role analysis. Ironically, the very divisions role theory set out to

mend in its unified theory of mind, self, and society have rebounded in other forms. In America, its aspects of person have readily succumbed to specialization so that the exploration of the self was assimilated to psychological pursuits, the role structure to sociology, and in practice, its social behaviorism to the rather narrow exigencies of small group research.

But social psychology exists because we cannot identify psychology simply with the singular, the subjective, and "inward view" and sociology with the social, the objective, and external view—contending that the one is concerned with the self (seen from the standpoint of the self) and the other with the person (seen from the standpoint of others). For sociologists the self is always social, but this view does not preclude interest in subjective responses to that self. But emphasis varies, and it is common to view as "psychological" statements about individual motive and intention, and as "sociological" statements about social function and purpose, with social psychology representing points of convergence between the two. So-called "interaction" doctrines derive interpretations of personality and social system from a common theory of social action; the concept of person is emphatically "social" and stands in contrast to the idea of person as a psychobiological organism who happens to inhabit a thoroughly social environment. In these altogether unsettled formulations of the relation between the individual and society, the unsettling source will, from the standpoint of sociology, appear again and again as "the problem of personality"; and, from the standpoint of psychology, the "problem of the group."

It is our purpose here to set forth the sociological side of contemporary social psychology—to examine its research, its literature, its critique, all of which, at one point or another, bear upon the "problem of personality" or individuality.

Person versus group, subjectivity versus objectivity, inner and outer man are oppositions that modern social psychology fell heir to but that, as a unified field, it could not use. The recasting of its key terms of analysis—strongly sociological through role theory and role analysis—has been so thoroughly absorbed that we no longer recognize it as peculiarly sociological. For a much longer time social psychology has grouped and ungrouped itself according to simple doctrines of individual ver-

sus group dominance so that "group psychology" has remained a thoroughly ambiguous term. In Part I we review these old and lasting difficulties for an asocial social psychology. The apparent solutions to which role theory and role research seemed to point are presented in Part II. In turn, current difficulties and criticisms and discontent with role analysis are examined in Part III.

PART ONE

Individuality