A REVIEW OF
PERSONALITY THEORIES

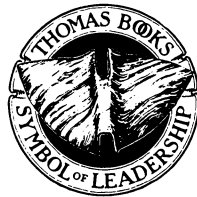# A REVIEW OF
PERSONALITY THEORIES

Second Edition

By

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With THOMAS BOOKS *careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing
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TO MY STUDENTS

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

WHEN I was in college, one of our professors used to say that our real education would be equal to what we retained after forgetting most of what we had learned from books. This aphorism, contradictory at first sight, has proven its hidden meaning in the process of my professional life. I have certainly forgotten many details about subjects covered in my formal course work. As long as I have retained the core data, however, most related issues have remained clear in my mind. If I need to check on details, I know where to look.

Over the past fifteen years, while teaching Personality Theory courses for hundreds of aspiring counseling practitioners and other helping professionals, I gradually implemented a didactic approach based on the aphorism of my college professor. I focused my efforts on facilitating retention of basic concepts by my students far beyond their graduation date. It is that approach that will explain the origin and rationale of this volume.

My students would use a standard textbook of some 700 pages for detailed study. I did not expect, however, that they would retain the entire content of the textbook beyond the end of the semester (if that far), and certainly not throughout their professional careers. To promote **learning for life** rather than **studying for exams,** I made every effort to help students identify and remember the essentials and form their own skeletal outline of every theory we covered. The long-term outcome of our classroom interaction was the student's ability to use the various personality theories for better understanding of people's internal dynamics and for more successful professional work in the real world.

Most students welcomed my approach and asked me repeatedly for typewritten outlines to help them formulate summaries of the theories we covered. Such requests led to the eventual writing of the present volume. The book may prove useful to students in counselor education and other applied psychology programs, particularly when reviewing personality theories for comprehensive or qualifying examinations. It

may also serve as a useful resource to practitioners preparing for certification or licensure tests. Additionally, the information contained in this book may be of interest to persons of many walks of life who want to better understand the many and diverse interpretations of human behavior and of the dynamic forces within personality.

I have made a conscious effort to keep the language clear and simple, avoiding unneeded technical terms. I have, however, given full recognition to the distinctive terminology developed by certain theorists. To lend a degree of concreteness to abstract ideas, explanatory drawings have been included wherever appropriate. This approach will likely benefit visual learners, who seem to be numerous in our days.

V.J.D.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

D URING THE seven years since its publication, this book has served as a study guide to many graduate students in counselor education courses. It helped them gain basic insights into various interpretations of the role that personality dynamics assume in human behavior.

The feedback by students who used the book has been very positive. They found the book especially useful for review of the material when preparing for their midterm and final semester examinations. It helped them organize the extensive subject matter into a closely linked, yet clearly differentiated framework. A parallel opinion was also voiced by some former students, working as counselors in the field, who used the book to prepare for the personality and human development sections of the exam required for state licensure.

Some users of the book felt that a more extensive explanation of certain concepts might be helpful, but they also emphasized that, while doing any revisions, I keep intact the two qualities of the book they liked best—its brevity and clarity.

I paid close attention to those comments, and the text of this second edition reflects them. I have followed the original structure of chapters and added new material only where clearly warranted. The basic character of the book has been maintained. I hope, therefore, that this new edition will be even closer attuned to the needs of students whose learning process it is meant to facilitate.

V. J. D.

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CHAPTER 1

A DYNAMIC VIEW OF PERSONALITY THEORIES

PERSONALITY DYNAMICS

TO UNDERSTAND human behavior, we have to understand the forces that shape it. In every one of us there are many such forces. Some are intrapersonal, related to internal processes within us; others are interpersonal, determining our relationships with people around us. These forces are commonly referred to as **personality dynamics.** The inner world of every person is an intricate structure of such dynamics— physiological, psychological, and social needs that serve as motivational factors. Tensions and conflicts are also present, generated by intrapersonal or environmental pressures.

We understand many of our personality dynamics but not all. Some operate beyond the reach of our awareness; nevertheless, they exert a strong influence on our behavior. Although we perceive our personality to be unified and solid, it is, in fact, in constant flux. It resembles a process rather than a completed structure, a state of ongoing development rather than permanency. Many psychologists view personality as a field or base that contains our current self-perceptions, short- and long-term goals, distinct characteristics, values, and a broad repertoire of life experiences. Continual changes occur within the field as new perceptions enter from outside and earlier incorporated elements are discarded—no longer considered useful or relevant (Combs & Snygg, 1959).

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The dynamic nature of personality was not always recognized. Modern psychology, like some other sciences, is the most recent stage of a long developmental process reaching some twenty-five centuries back. In that era and for a long time afterward, psychology was a part of philosophy, "the noble mother of wisdom," in its quest to explore the nature and meaning of the universe, and particularly of the human

species. Philosophers such as Aristotle believed that every being was composed of two substantive elements, **matter** and **form.** In humans the material component was the body (soma) and the formal elements the soul (psyche). "Psychologia" was considered the **science of the soul.**

This Aristotelian doctrine was additionally expanded and adjusted to the tenets of Christian theology by a medieval monk and scholar, Thomas Aquinas, who placed major emphasis on the spirituality (and immortality) of the soul. He described personality as an individual substance with a rational nature—a brief and philosophically accurate statement. Unfortunately, it ignored the dynamic nature of personality. It was like a still picture of a person rigidly seated on a chair rather than a videotape of a walker (or runner) that each person is. Later philosophical movements, such as those of Descartes or Kant, although sharply disagreeing with Aquinas, did not provide the dynamic dimension for the concept of personality either. It was the emergence of psychology as an independent science that eventually filled in the missing element and provided a more life-like image of man.

DEFINITIONS OF PERSONALITY

Many definitions of personality have been proposed by psychologists over the past one hundred years. When placed on a continuum, they would fall between two diametrically opposed views: (1) Self-theorists perceive personality as having a real existence and producing real outcomes. (2) Behaviorists, on the other hand, view personality as a mere inference of behavior which is the only directly observable and measurable phenomenon.

The definition proposed here approximates the viewpoint of self-theorists. Personality is defined as a **dynamic source of behavior, identity, and uniqueness** of every person. The term **behavior** covers thought processes, emotions, decision making, bodily activities, social interaction, etc. In a similar vein, Allport (1937) emphasized that "personality **is** something and **does** something" (p. 48). Conversely, Sullivan (1953) viewed personality as a mere pattern of "recurrent interpersonal situations" and Cattell (1950) considered it an aspect of the individual that permits the prediction of behavior. Some authors have been less specific or less willing to offer any substantive definition, leaving it up to the individual observer to decide what definition is most acceptable (Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Having reviewed some definitions of personality, we shall focus on the nature of theories and see how they can be applied to the study of personality. Generally speaking, a theory is a **framework** that any person can devise on the basis of certain proven facts **for interpreting** some more or less complex issue. Every one of us has been exposed to theories on various issues, from the origin of the universe to effective management styles or the etiology of a particular illness. Some of the theories have been helpful; others did little or nothing to aid us in better understanding the issue involved.

If we apply the concept of theory to the area of personality, it follows that personality theories are frameworks devised by various professionals, mostly psychologists or psychiatrists, to **interpret the interaction of dynamic forces operating in every person's life.** Theorists may focus, for instance, on the primary motivational forces in individuals. To what degree are they physiological, psychological, or social? How does goal orientation develop and how does it impact the individual's life? Theorists explain the development and maturation process of the individual in various ways. Maturity may be interpreted in terms of social adjustment or as personal adequacy devoid of a normative dimension. Some theorists focus on the individual's coping mechanisms in dealing with threat, maintaining a degree of equilibrium, compensating for deficiencies, etc.

Although all theories of personality have originated on the basis of a number of proven data, the data selected by one theorist will significantly differ from data chosen by another. This explains the high degree of variations we find among their theories.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF PERSONALITY THEORIES

To fulfill its basic function, a personality theory has to possess certain qualities. They are not always present to an optimal degree, but without at least a minimal degree of each of them a theory would not be useful. These qualities are as follows:

1. **Clarity of understanding.** If the interpretation of personality dynamics lacks clarity, the understanding of the functioning of personality is not enhanced but clouded. This defies, of course, the main purpose for which a theory is formed.

2. **Logical structure.** Internal contradictions in a theory produce con-