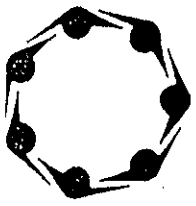

Remodeling the "As If" in Adler's Concept of the Life-Style

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> Very early in my work I found man to be a unity. The foremost task of Individual Psychology is to prove this unity in each individual—his thinking, feeling, acting, in his so-called conscious and unconscious, in every expression of his personality. This unity we call the *"life style" of the individual.* (Adler, 1956, p. 175)

The notion of the life-style is clearly a core concept in Individual Psychology. In this paper we will examine the role that Vaihinger's philosophy of the "as if" played in Adler's account of the life-style. We will argue that the "as if," rather than containing explanatory power in and of itself, serves as a promissory note for further explanation. In effect, the "as if" allows Adler to bypass the details of how the child seems to choose such a life-style and how such a choice persists through the life span. Finally, we will offer an explanation that we hope will obviate the necessity for continued use of the "as if."

The Life-Style

According to Adler (1956) the child, at age 4 or 5, assesses the conditions of his or her life and chooses a life plan or style of life. The style of life consists of a goal as well as a strategy for achieving this goal that persists throughout the life span. The life-style is not just a person's "consistent pattern" of thinking and behaving, it also "denote[s] the fundamental premises upon which a person predicates his movement through the world" (Manaster & Corsini, 1982, p. 77). These fundamental premises

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are likened by Manaster and Corsini to a pattern of reasoning with the form:

1. "I am . . ."
2. "The world is . . ."
3. "Therefore . . ."

Adler's notion of the life-style generates a number of questions. How can a choice at this age influence the rest of one's life? How can a child have the cognitive ability to make such a decision? How is it that no one remembers making such a decision? Furthermore, what is the ontological status of this choice of a life-style? What is it? How does it exist? How does it develop?

First, Adler recognized that the cognitive limitations of the child at age 4 prevent the choice of the life-style being the type of choice about which there can be later deliberation and reflection:

> [The] "style of life" is constructed by the child at a time when he has neither adequate language nor adequate concepts. As the child grows further in terms of the life style, it grows in a movement which was never formulated in words and therefore unassailable by criticism, is also withdrawn from the criticism of experience. (1956, p. 191)

Second, Adler asserted that the style of life is mostly unconscious. However, by *unconscious he did not intend Freud's dynamic unconscious,* which he explicitly rejected. For Adler the unconscious

> is nothing other than that which we have been unable to formulate in clear concepts. It is not a matter of concepts hiding away in some unconscious or subconscious recesses of our minds, but of parts of our consciousness the significance of which we have not fully understood. (1956, pp. 232–233)

To account for how a life-style can be chosen without such a choice being remembered or acknowledged, Adler appealed to Vaihinger's philosophy of the "as if." Using the "as if," Adler claimed that the child is not making an actual deliberate conscious choice; rather it is *"as if"* the child has made a choice of a life-style.

The use of the "as if" entails a bracketing, a setting aside, of the questions of the origin and nature of the style of life. Such bracketing was historically important in that it allowed Adler to break away from Freud's reductionism and avoid positing a dynamic unconscious where psychic material is repressed. For Adler the unconscious meant simply the not understood. The life-style is unconscious in that what is "not understood" is the person's core presuppositions about themselves and about life. It is not clear, however, how an individual can "choose" such a set of presuppositions that remain relatively consistent and stable across the life

span and yet not "understand" that she or he has done so. Adler applied the "as if" to suggest that these stabilities are the result of a choice the child makes—it is "as if" the child has chosen a particular life-style.

By building on Vaihinger, Adler adopts a functional perspective. In effect, through the "as if," Adler posits that we do not really know why and how such persistencies in personality develop. However, it is useful from a clinical and therapeutic perspective to consider such persistencies as the result of a choice. In other words, the supposed choice of a life-style is an acknowledged "fiction"—it is a falsehood but one that provides the psychologist with a useful heuristic for making sense of personality development. Functionally, the "choice" provides conceptual navigating tools for mapping the lives of individuals.

The "as if" functions as a promissory note for future explanation. While the "as if" was important in allowing Adler to address the subjective and teleological dimension of human beings without reducing them to epiphenomena, the "as if" bypasses the question of how the choice of a life-style could in fact occur. The bracketing provided by the "as if" suspends questions about origin, nature, and emergence. To continue developing scientific models we not only need adequate description of a phenomenon, in this case the style of life, but we also ultimately need to have a compelling explanatory model of how such a phenomenon could develop. In the rest of the paper we will offer such an explanatory model to replace Vaihinger's "as if." Our explanatory model requires (1) an interactive understanding of "representation"; (2) an understanding of "implicitness" which provides a model of how properties can be true of an individual without being actually in the individual; and finally, (3) an understanding of "variation" and "selection constructivism" to account for persistence of the style of life through the life span.

Representation

Representation is an essential, but rarely considered, aspect of the life-style. A child "chooses" a life-style after assessing her or his life situation. Such an assessment depends on the child's representation of her or his life as embedded within a family constellation. We will argue that the standard approach to representation hinders our understanding of this choice of a life-style. Interactivism provides an alternative conception of representation that is not only conceptually more satisfying but is also more consistent with Individual Psychology's emphasis on the child as an active learner within the family environment.

Representation is usually based on assumptions about structural isomorphism between the external world and our internal representations.

Visually based metaphors in which our representations are treated as mental snapshots or pictures dominate our theories of representation (Bickhard, 1980a). Rorty (1979) for example, powerfully argues that Western thought has been dominated by the assumption that the mind is a mirror whose fundamental task is to accurately reflect nature. Although our theories of representation and perception are more sophisticated than Locke's *tabula rasa*, arguably they still rely on the same basic ontological and epistemological commitments (Bickhard, in press; Bickhard & Ritchie, 1983).

We are certainly capable of having mental images and memories of such images. However, these forms of representations are not foundational. Mental images are not the building blocks of representation and cognition. They can only emerge after more basic forms of representation are developed (Tulving, 1985a; 1985b; Christopher & Bickhard, 1991; Bickhard & Christopher, 1990). We have argued elsewhere that there are different types of representation and that image-based representation is a highly developed form that only emerges with age. Such considerations are essential especially when we consider the types of representation available to the child of his or her environment, particularly the family constellation (see Bickhard, 1980a, in press; Bickhard & Ritchie, 1983; for detailed arguments against standard correspondence or isomorphism [encodingist] approaches to representation).

Given that problems exist with standard approaches to representation, what might an alternative look like? To compare the differences between interactivism and the standard approach to representation let us consider the example of a representation of a living room. The standard approach would consider our representation of the living room to be our mental image of the room and its contents much like a photograph. Interactivism, in contrast, begins with the radically different assumption that representations are functional and based on the types of interactions that we can have with our environment. In this case, our most fundamental representations differentiate the room into what types and organizations of actions are possible in the room and with the objects in the room. Such an understanding of representation takes on more meaning when we realize that the infant learns about the world by experimenting with actions, in a trial-and-error manner, to determine the nature of the world. It is through action that the child constructs knowledge of objects and what can be done with them (Bickhard, in press; Chapman, 1988; Piaget, 1977, 1985).

An intuition of an interactive representation of the living room can be provided if we imagine a mechanical robot on wheels controlled by a computer program. The program could conceivably be written in such a way that it executes wheel turns so as to move throughout the room but

not bump into any objects. Through the program the robot has information about the living room, but this program information is not a series of images or structural correspondences. The program functionally provides the robot an implicit representation of the living room that allows the robot to successfully interact with the living room (i.e., not bump into objects or walls). If the robot directed the output of the program to a mechanical plotter instead of wheels, then the robot could draw an interactive image representation of the room—i.e., the outlines of the room and the objects within it. What is crucial about this example is that the program does not need to contain stored encodings (symbols or images) but only directions that determine wheel revolutions.

The example with the robot is based on a preconstructed program. Consider now an example with a robot that can construct its own program. We will argue that such a self-constructed interactive program is analogous to the infant's development of representation.

The self-constructing robot requires inputs from sensors and outputs to effectors—wheels, in this case—and the ability to construct programs relating outputs to resultant inputs. If placed in the living room, the robot could create a program that is an interactive representation of the room—based on the feedback to the initially constructed program whether or not the robot bumps into a barrier. This representation would contain information about the type of interactions (movements) possible in the room. And again this program, if connected to a plotter, would draw an outline of the walls and the different objects in the room. Obviously, what constitutes a successful interaction for the robot is much simpler than would be the case for the child. In both cases, however, the basic principle of interactive representation and knowledge holds.

In interactivism the child comes to learn in its environment (the family) what types of interaction are successful, and it is from the accumulated experiences of what is successful and what is not that the child forms her or his life-style.

An interactive approach to representation complements the systems approach that is essential to Individual Psychology. The standard approach treats early experiences as memories that reside in the unconscious and exert an influence on later experiences (Christopher & Bickhard, 1991). Usually this influence is comprehended through metaphors of energy, either psychic energy or emotional energy, that create a charge on these memories. The interactive approach, in contrast, stresses not the specific memories of events but rather patterns of functioning in a larger environment. Interestingly, interactivism is also more consistent with Rutter's (1979) finding that "single isolated stresses in early life only rarely lead to long-term disorders" (p. 293).

Implicitness

Having offered an interactive understanding of the nature of representation available when the child chooses a life-style, we turn now to the question of how it is that such a choice is "unconscious." We will argue that the way in which a choice seems to have been made without such a choice explicitly having been made is through the notion of "implicitness" (Bickhard & Christopher, 1990).

Implicitness is an account of how something can be functionally *true* of an entity in interaction with its environment without it necessarily being existent anywhere within the entity. Through the notion of implicitness we will suggest that the life-style is implicit in children's representations of themselves and their environment. By being implicit, we will argue that the life-style no longer has to be considered either an actual choice or as something dynamically unconscious—though it may well remain not understood. This will become more clear after we offer some examples of the nature of implicitness beginning with language and moving to human beings.

If we consider the sentence, "The King of France is bald," we notice that it contains a number of presuppositions which may or may not be true. It presupposes that France has a king. Thus, the sentence can presuppose certain conditions without those conditions being present in the sentence. Furthermore, presuppositions can themselves involve presuppositions—implicitness can iterate: "France has a king" presupposes that "France is a nation."

Turning to a mechanical goal-directed device, for example a thermostat, we can notice that for it to function successfully, it must presuppose a number of conditions in its design and functioning (i.e., that the heat flow in or out of the room will not exceed a certain rate, or that the environment's temperature fluctuations will not exceed a certain frequency). In both these cases, implicit presuppositions are central to functioning, yet these presuppositions are not actually present in the sentence or the thermostat.

Implicit presuppositions exist in the infant's functioning within the family constellation. The infant learns through trial and error what she or he must do to get basic needs met. What appears to be a choice about a life-style or the construction of unconscious representations and beliefs is actually the implicit presuppositions that exist in the child's functioning in her or his environment. These implicit presuppostions are not conscious beliefs or choices; they are not present anywhere in the child's mind. Rather they are implicit properties of learned ways of interacting with and representing an environment.

A brief example of types of implicitnesses can be seen in an infant in an emotionally distant and unresponsive family. Initially employing crying as a means of getting attention and signifying discomfort, the infant soon discovers that its cries are ignored. In fact crying only aggravates the situation by causing further physical distress. As a result the infant may learn that quietude is the best response—it at least doesn't increase physiological stress. There can be several levels of implicit presuppositions involved in such a learned functional pattern. First, no one responding to the infant's cries presupposes that no one cares. No one caring in turn can presuppose that the infant is unworthy of love, has some flaw or defect that makes her or him abhorrent to others. Thus, a learned functional pattern of interaction can presuppose such things as the way I can expect the world to be, the way I can expect others to be, and the way that I am. Such presuppositions, however, are not present in the child's mind. With cognitive maturation these presuppositions may become more explicit, but they are initially implications of functional patterns of interacting.

At this point a new question arises: If a child's way of interacting with his or her environment presupposes certain things about the child such as a core sense of inadequacy, why should these presuppositions persist? How can something that is only implicit have any persistent consequences through life? Why is it that these presuppositions form a life-style? To address this issue we turn to a variation and selection constructivism.

Variation and Selection Constructivism

The infant and child's most basic mode of experiencing life is not due to influences and experiences being impressed upon the mind. Rather it is through interaction, learning which types of actions are successful and which unsuccessful, that patterns of functioning develop and form the foundation of personality. The child's understanding of the family constellation, and later the larger world, is acquired actively, not through passive imprintings.

The child, learning the dynamics of the family, cannot know in advance what actions and responses will be successful. Consequently, the child proceeds in a trial-and-error manner, or more precisely, a variation and selection constructivism. Each "trial" begins with the procedures used in other successful interactions. Should older procedures prove unsuccessful, the child will create and try modifications (variations). This process builds on past experiences through a process of differentiating what works in which type of situation and modifying past strategies to create new procedures. Patterns of successful interactions (constructions) provide the foundation for future interactions. Moreover, past constructions intrinsically

impose a built-in constraint of coherence. Past constructions form the context to which new variations must adapt. If you have a new construction that contradicts the previous basic constructions it is not likely to survive, even if such a construction is successful in other contexts. For example, if a person's most basic goal is to be liked by everyone, then a later goal such as accumulating money at all cost is inconsistent and may be abandoned when it conflicts with the person's primary goal. As a result, consistency of a new response with prior selections will be an internal selection pressure. To summarize, the stability of our personality occurs because we use responses from past experiences when we encounter a new environment; even when these past responses are unsuccessful they are nevertheless the resources from which we create new variations or new trials to deal with the current situation. These persistencies also result from the selection pressure to fit with what is already present.

The choice that it is "as if" the child has made functions within Adlerian theory to acknowledge the stability or persistence of personality patterns. To the outside observer, these personality patterns might appear to have been made through a choice; once the choice is made the life-style generally remains stable through a person's life. Adler recognized that the child at age 4 or 5 was incapable of actually making such a choice and subsequently viewed the choice as a useful fiction. Variation and selection constructivism offers an account of how personality patterns are created and maintained that does not depend on the "as if" of the child having made an actual choice.

Conclusion

In this paper we considered the limitations of Vaihinger's "as if" to address the life-style. We argued that the life-style is a true aspect of the functioning of the individual's subjectivity. However, we also indicated the manner in which the "as if" lacks explanatory power; it is a promissory note for an explanation that offers clinical utility. By considering (1) the nature of the child's representations, (2) how implicit properties can inhere in a functional system, and (3) how a variation and selection constructivism encourages the persistence and stability of the earliest responses and reactions to the environment, we have provided an explanatory account of the development and continuity of the choice of a life-style.

In this paper, we have not directly addressed the further question of the nature of psychopathology. Other work needs to examine the question of basic mistakes. In particular, how can implicit errors—basic mistakes—have any persistence through time at all, especially when they yield sometimes overwhelming negative feedback that "should" result in their being

replaced (Bickhard, 1989; Bickhard & Christopher, 1990)? In other words, why should basic mistakes continue through life? How can the tendencies toward internal consistency and persistence explicated earlier override the selection pressures of sometimes massive pathological dysfunctionality? Why does the child not learn to differentiate current environments from the initial family constellation? We believe, however, that interactive representation, implicitness, and variation and selection constructivism will be valuable conceptual tools for helping us explore these questions.

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