

THE PERSONALITY THEORY OF J. L. MORENO

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Underlying most comprehensive theories about people and their interactions is a personality theory. The basic personality theory underlying Moreno's work has been neglected in psychological literature. Perhaps a rediscovery of his work will contribute towards filling some gaps. Moreno himself commented that the role concept which he envisaged bridged the gap between psychology and sociology. I believe that psychodramatic role theory and the sociometric view of man may bridge the gap between family systems theory and developmental psychology, behaviour-oriented research and cognitive-oriented research, and provide the basis for new developments in situational psychological testing.

This article outlines in brief the elements of Moreno's personality theory. It does not attempt to elaborate or supply illustrative clinical material which would be the task of a lengthier article on the subject.

J. L. Moreno has developed a theory of the person and his development based on the role concept. He goes beyond seeing the individual in isolation. He views the person on a much larger scale as interacting with his environment through his roles and role structures. The term "role" has been used by various theorists to mean different things. For Moreno, role is defined as "the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved." ¹ A role is therefore a unit of behaviour which is observable. It is specific to a situation and to the people or objects present in that situation. Its meaning as an act cannot be understood outside the context in which it takes place.

In the above named book, Moreno outlines his spontaneity of child development. He differentiates it from biological-evolutionary approach which relies on the study of a human being as an animal and from Freud's theory which arose from a study of syndromes of the neurotic adult, the abnormal personality. He sees the

child in terms of his potential, as having dormant capabilities and skills which are awaiting expression through enactment. It is the genius of the race maximizing his capabilities that Moreno takes as a prototype. He says "men of genius warm up with their whole organism in status nascendi to creative deeds and works."² Thus the state of being born is a spontaneity state, which men of genius attain to the highest degree. Spontaneity and creativity are primary and positive phenomena which contribute to the organization and expression of personality.

Birth provides a prototype for situations which the infant will face later, The infant is moving at birth into a totally strange set of relationships. He has no model after which he can shape his acts. He is facing, more than at any time during his subsequent life, a novel situation. We have called this response of an individual to a new situation-and the new response to an old situation-spontaneity." ³

He sees spontaneity, or the S factor, as a factor which enables the infant to reach beyond himself and to move into new situations while stimulating, arousing, and modifying his own organism. The s factor works within the framework of biological and social determinants. It can enable acts, choices and decisions which lead to inventiveness and creativity. "The s factor is the soil out of which later the spontaneous, creative matrix of personality grows." ⁴

From the initial acts of the child larger units of behaviour, called roles, become apparent. The first roles to develop are psychosomatic roles which are physiologically determined, such as the sleeper, the eater and the sexual role. Later social roles develop. These are prescribed by the culture and are taught both by the family and social institutions. Although social roles have expected behaviours, some variation in the way a role is taken by the individual is accepted. As Moreno puts it,

The (functioning) form is created by past experiences and the cultural patterns of the society in which the individual lives. Every role is a fusion of private and collective elements. ⁵

The collective aspect of the social role is prescribed on the basis of status which goes along with position in a social system. Furthermore, each position in the social system has a set of norms or commonly held behavioural expectations. These provide the

individual with rough boundaries within which The must function if his position in the social system is to be positively sanctioned. The private aspects of the social role indicate other needs in the individual.

The individual craves to embody far more roles than those he is allowed to act out in life, and even within the same role one or more varieties of it ... It is from the active pressure which these multiple individual units exert upon the manifest official role that a feeling of anxiety is often produced.⁷

Moreno further clarifies this conflict in developmental terms by introducing his concept of psychodramatic roles. At a certain point in the development of the child, fantasy and reality, which were previously undifferentiated, become divided. Social roles develop in response to reality; at the same time psychodramatic roles emerge in the realm of fantasy. Psychodramatic roles are variously defined by Moreno as the personification of imagined things, both real and unreal,"⁸ "God roles,"⁹ and "ghosts, fairies and hallucinated roles."¹⁰ Psychodramatic roles are far more *extensive and dominating* than social roles.

Moreno would see as primary to identity and the formation of the self concept the psychodramatic roles of the person, which are continually pressing for expression and may take socially useful or socially disapproved of forms. For instance a man with a psychodramatic role of suffering servant may perform at a high rate of productivity in a factory where conditions of work are poor. Where he is promoted on the basis of this productivity to floor manager over several men, he may become accident-prone and constantly suffering from a variety of ailments until he finally changes to another factory and renounces his seniority.

The self, then, in Moreno's terms is a system of roles. How does this system of roles form a structure which provided a self structure, or identity?

THE SELF AS AN INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF ROLE LINKAGES

1. *Clustering.* Moreno identifies one of the ways in which the self structure is formed by the term "clustering" of roles. Roles emerge before they are organised into wholes. Moreno postulates that the child lives in an undifferentiated universe in which there is no guiding structure. There is therefore no experience of a self. By the action of spontaneity, responsive acts emerge. Moreno states that "the roles are the embryos, the forerunners of the self; the roles strive towards clustering and unification."¹¹ Psychosomatic roles cluster, providing an experience of "body"; social roles cluster, providing an experience of "society"; and psychodramatic roles cluster forming an experience of "psyche." There is then further gradual development of operational and contact links between the social, the psychological and the physiological role clusters. When the clustering of roles takes place we can identify and experience after their unification that which we call the "me" or the "I." There are frequent imbalances in the clustering of roles in the area of psychosomatic and social roles. These imbalances produce delay in the emergence of the self or create disturbances.

2. *Operational Links.* Operational links between roles are formed as well as links between the psychosomatic, social, and psychodramatic parts of the self. A function of the operational links is to gain maximum satisfaction from the environment. While spontaneity determines the particular and individual way by which new learning will be organised, nevertheless inputs from the environment play an important part. The people in this process are termed the "social atom" by Moreno.

3. *The social atom as an organising concept.* The term social atom can be looked at from two perspectives—from the point of view of the individual or the point of view of society. From the point of view of society, which we are not concerned about here, the social atoms of individuals interact and form complex chains of interrelations. From the point of view of the individual, the social atom is a structure which provides the context in which learning takes place.

The social atom is that peculiar pattern of interpersonal relations which develops from the time of human birth. It first contains mother and child. As time goes on, it adds from the persons who come into the child's orbit such persons as are unpleasant or pleasant to him and vice versa, those to whom he is unpleasant or pleasant. Persons who do not leave any impression, positive or negative, remain outside the social atom as mere

acquaintances. The feeling which correlates two or more individuals has been called tele. The social atom is therefore a compound of the tele relationships of an individual. As positively or negatively charged persons may leave the individual's social atom and others may enter it, the social atom has a more or less ever-changing constellation.¹²

It is therefore in the context provided by the social atom that responses are learned. The material which originally contributes to the formation of learned responses is not always available to the person at a later date. In his Spontaneity Theory of Learning, Moreno outlines several principles which are presented later in this paper under the topic "Integration."

4. *The cultural atom as an organising concept.* The concept of the cultural atom is used to describe further the operational links between roles. The cultural atom may include psychodramatic roles which have not come to full expression. It may also include roles which emerged towards people no longer present in the social atom. There may also be "model" or imagined concepts, such as "the perfect housewife." Moreno says of the cultural atom:

We consider roles and relationships between roles as the most significant development within any specific culture. The pattern of the role relations around an individual as their focus is called his cultural atom. Every individual, just as he has a set of friends and a set of enemies—social atom—also has a range of roles facing a range of counter-roles. The tangible aspects of what is known as the 'ego' are the roles in which he operates.¹³

The cultural atom, therefore, provides a structure for looking at units of behaviour and the operational links between them. It also provides an internal structure of roles which may not be shown or enacted so that they are unobservable.

THE PERSON AS A TOTALITY OF INTERLOCKING SYSTEMS

In his article "Sociometry in Relation to Other Social Sciences," Moreno postulates that the psyche surrounds the body and is itself surrounded by and interwoven into the social and cultural atoms. The person is therefore linked to other persons, and it is in an interactive sense that there are stored totalities of feelings and physical and mental starters which arouse them. Dr. Moreno makes it clear that the emergence of behaviour is tied to an original context and that specific behaviours have been added to an individual's repertoire by the action of spontaneity in a specific situation at a specific

time. He also makes clear that the person is a dynamic organism connected inextricably with socius.

A social atom is thus composed of numerous tele structures; social atoms are again parts of a still larger pattern, the psychological networks which bind or separate large groups of individuals due to their tele relationships. Psychological networks are parts of a still larger unit, the psychological geography of a community. A community is again part of the largest configuration, the psychological totality of human society itself.¹⁴

It can be seen, then, that Moreno thinks in terms of interlocking systems which have a hierarchy so that the roles of an individual as mapped by the cultural atom are contained within the social atom, which is itself contained within psychological networks of groups of individuals, and so on.

A STABLE BUT CHANGING TOTAL SELF-STRUCTURE

Units of behaviour usually do not emerge without prior models. Moreno postulates that the S factor can bring about new perceptions and new behaviours, but these then become part of the cultural conserve¹⁵ of the individual and form a repertory of roles on which the person can draw. Roles have a duration—a beginning, a ripening, and a fading out. A role may vanish when it has served its purpose, but it continues as a dynamic factor in the inner life. New roles may draw strengthening support from old roles until they are established in their own right. At times new roles may emerge spontaneously, as in a crisis situation, but this is rare. Cultural atoms also change over time. But these changes do not necessarily mean that the configuration of the cultural atom at one time does not have a dynamic similarity with its configuration at another time. There is a tendency for people as important objects who leave to be replaced by others who fulfill similar role needs. It is probable that the same kind of thing happens with the role structure of an individual. New roles may replace old ones, but a total configuration with a similar equilibrium remains. It becomes clear that Moreno does not explore further and more specifically the idea of the *self-structure*. He leaves it as a homeostatic principle governing the functioning of the individual which keeps clusters of roles in a dynamic equilibrium.

THE PERSON LOOKS AT HIMSELF

As he develops an integrated self-structure, the individual begins to develop a relationship to himself. Moreno described this process as follows:

As an infant grows he not only experiences other people but also himself. This picture of himself may differ considerably from the picture others have of him, but it becomes considerably significant for him as life goes on. Finally, it appears as if he had, besides his real ego, an outside ego which he gradually extrojects. Between the ego and his extrojection a peculiar feeling relationship develops which may be called autotele.¹⁷

Just as a person has a feeling towards others, he develops a feeling towards his self-structure. Moreno does not focus on the way in which autotele assists in either the expression or the functioning of the personality. However, Moreno does place emphasis on the learning and the process of integration as central in personality development.

INTEGRATION

Although this topic is not dealt with specifically by Moreno, assumptions can be made from various references in his works.

1. *The necessity for congruity of context and content in learning.* In his formulation of the Spontaneity Theory of Learning, Moreno has emphasised that learning takes place in a context, which determines later recall. The inner life of the individual and his reactions to stimulation from the total environment will place an emotional loading on the content of material learned. A clinical example of the effects of this can often be seen in school dropouts where the context in which learning takes place and the emotional loading of learned material have prevented the expression and development of both spontaneity and learning. The goal of psychodrama in this case is to "loosen the fixed associations between states and contents as they have become established in the course of education by the traditional method."¹⁸ For integration of new learned material to take place in such a way that it will be useful, there must be congruity between context and content.

2. The integration of content and act. In further discussing integration, Moreno hypothesizes two centers of memory—an act center and a content center—which exist as two separate structures. This means that content or facts which are learned may be stored away but be unavailable to the act center because of the context in which they are learned. Knowledge learned intellectually may then not necessarily be integrated into the active personality of the individual, Moreno makes the comment that in such a case "knowledge remains undigested, unabsorbed by the personality and hinders its full influence upon activity and judgment. In actual life situations the supreme desideratum is...this facility of integration."¹⁹

3. *The concept of dynamic integration.* Psychodrama has as its goal to develop and sustain a spontaneous and flexible personality make-up. Role reversal, for example, does not produce a passive or permissive stance but rather one in which an active role is taken in relation to a number of viewpoints.

Similarly, Moreno's concept of integration is a dynamic concept rather than a static one. While forces are continually changing, adjustments are made to maintain an equilibrium in order for the system to function.

4. *Integration as a function of spontaneity.* In order for integration to occur there must initially be warm-up to states which have occurred previously in an individual's life. This may be done through action warm-up or by talking. There are various phases and degrees of spontaneity and this can be seen most clearly in protagonists on the psychodrama stage. Some are able to move relatively easily after a warm-up period to situations and memories which were previously forgotten. Spontaneity does not operate in a vacuum but in relation to cultural and social conserves of the individual. It is when several different viewpoints are experienced that a new perception takes place, which is the operational definition of spontaneity. At that moment a restructuring of the internal perceptual system takes place and a new integration is achieved.

THE CATHARSIS OF INTEGRATION

Since integration by means of the operation of spontaneity is central to growth and change, Moreno has determined that the nature of catharsis in psychodrama is a catharsis of integration. It is a catharsis for the actor as well as the group.

"The dynamic inter-relatedness of all types of learning brings to the fore the concept of mental catharsis. Mental catharsis is here defined as a process which accompanies every type of learning, not only a finding of resolution from conflict, but also a realisation of self, not only release and relief but also equilibrium and peace. It is not a catharsis of abreaction but a catharsis of integration.'²⁰

Progressive integration within the structure of the self provides for an equilibrium which is changing and yet forms a basis for action and perception at any one point in time. It is from experience of the catharsis of integration that a realisation of the self-structure and a feeling of being at peace with that self-structure comes.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. L. Moreno., *Psychodrama*, vol. 1, New York: Beacon House, 1964 p. iv.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
4. J.L. Moreno, "Mental Catharsis and the Psychodrama," *Sociometry*, vol. 3 no. 3, 1940, pp. 218-220.
5. J. L. Moreno, "The Role Concept: a Bridge Between Psychiatry and Sociology," *Am. J. Psychiatry*, Vol. 118, 1961-62, p. 519.
6. Baces F. L. "Position, Role, Status: Reformulation of Concepts," *Social Forces* (1956, Vol. 34} p. 313-321. 7. J. L. Moreno, *Psychodrama*, vol. 1, p. v,
8. Moreno, *Psychodrama*, Vol. 1, p. 77.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
10. J. L. Moreno, "Role Theory and Emergence of the Self," *Group Psychotherapy*, XV 1962, p. 114.
11. Moreno, *Psychodrama*, vol. 1, p. iii.
12. J. L. Moreno, *Psychodramatic Shock Therapy*, *Psychodrama Monographs*, No. 5, New York: Beacon House, 1939, p. 3.
- 13 J. L. Moreno, *Sociometry and the Cultural Order*, *Sociometry Monographs*,

No. 2, New York: Beacon House, 1943, p. 331.

14. J. L. Moreno, "Sociometry in Relation to Other Social Sciences," (1937) reprinted in J. L. Moreno, *Sociometry, Experimental Method and The Science of Society*, New York: Beacon House, 1951, p. 24.

15. See Moreno's theory of 'Spontaneity and the Cultural Conserve."

16. J. L. Moreno, Psychodramatic Treatment of Psychosis, Psychodrama Monographs, no.15, New York: Beacon House 1945, pp. 120-121.

17. Moreno, *Psychodramatic Shock Therapy*, p. 4

18. J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?* New York: Beacon House, 1953, p. 538.

19. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?*, p. 538.

20. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?*, p. 546,