

An Early System of Attitudes and Behaviors

Progress in science, or in any other field, requires systematic critique. This view, held by outstanding philosophers of science as Sir Karl Popper (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*) and Han Kuhn (*Contemporary Readings on Philosophy of Sciences*) is also shared by Erwin Roth. His early critical analysis of personality and human behaviors found many of the existing approaches wanting.

Roth considered the idea of traits or dispositions to imply consistencies of behavior under varying circumstances. His early argument that the independence of behavior from situations, did not correspond to his observations. The notion of habits, formed through learning on the basis of responses to stimuli, over emphasizes environmental determinants. Another questionable approach to the study of behavior, according to Roth was the factor-analytic one. His claim was that factor analysis was based on too many assumptions derived from pure mathematics, which is not justified in psychology.

The shortcomings of motives as a core concept in personality theories are that motives are usually poorly defined and they often require the introduction of psychic energy (as it is the case of leadership approaches with a huge buffet of attributes), a notion that conflicts with profound of science. Also, Roth made the strong point that role theories of personality dealt exclusively with social aspects of personality and do not allow sufficiently for individual differences in role playing and limiting to a vulgar list of behaviors to be elicited by a role! Another critique was that the self-concept could be investigated by others to a limited extent and thus raised methodological problems when used as a central or operational concept.

Roth defined personality as the sum total of the conditions for individual behavior. He found that useful aspects of traditional concepts in personality could be preserved (and their disadvantages avoided) by introducing the concept of attitudes from social psychology. He regarded attitudes as hypothetical construct based on the consistency of observed behavior. ATTITUDES ARE SYSTEMS CONSITING OF COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE SUBSYSTEMS, AND THEY FORM HIGHER-ORDER SYSTEMS WITH THE OBJECTS TOWARD WHICH THEY ARE DIRECTED. Both momentary and lasting attitudes are acquired through learning, experience and interaction with the environment. The interesting

elaboration was that Roth interpreted attitudes as system that involve feedback and thus feed forward.

Research on attitudes has been very prolific, but usually has been limited to study their direction (positive or negative) and intensity.

Roth made statement that phenomenal analysis of attitudes pointed to three inter-related dimensions: 1) Specificity or generality with respect to given objects; 2)Universality or singularity, that is, the number of individuals who hold certain attitudes; 3) The subjective importance of attitude object in the life of an individual.

Following Roth formulations it was possible to distinguish among momentary, occasional, frequent, and habitual attitudes, between stable and easily changing attitudes, and between more or less complex, differentiated, and internally consistent attitudes.

Attitudes also differ in terms of their internal structure, and the researcher had to be very careful with the tools for measurement used to the come to an empirical statement about the attitude architecture of a single or a group of individuals.

What it is interesting of Erwing Roth is that he used a systems approach to personality and to the study of human behavior. He combined the useful aspects of the structural approach to psychology, the process or dynamic perspective in psychoanalytic theory used by the distinguished Gordon Allport, and the field-theoretical approach used by Kurt Lewin.

Roth was heavily influenced by Kurt Lewin (one of the fathers of Industrial Psychology) whose work was arounded in Gestalt psychology, needs, personality and social factors. The field theory was a methodology applied to psychology, which considered a person's psychological activities to occur in a kind of psychological field or life space.

According to Roth personality can be understood as a complex and dynamic system of attitudes and behaviors!

The concept of attitudes enables the researcher to express both the interactions of the person with its environments and that person's individuality.

Since attitudes are directed toward aspects of the environment and formed by experience with the environment, they present a unique basis for the study of people and their interactions with the environment.

Since attitudes also result, in part, from unique human endowments and experiences (and from the interaction of these two factors), it is possible to study each individual in his or her uniqueness through the study of attitudes. By using the systems approach, the unity of the individual is preserved.

Rather than being a bundle of unrelated attitudes, personality is presented as their integration.

Considering the human architecture as a system of attitudes and behaviors permits a fine integration without destroying its psychological complexity.