
Alternatives to Psychoanalytic Psychobiography

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The bulk of work in psychobiography has, unquestionably, been done from a psychoanalytic point of view. Originally, this was true by definition, as early workers in the field were psychoanalysts and regarded the interpretation of historical figures as an exercise in "applied psychoanalysis." In recent years, however, many (Anderson, 1981b; Glad, 1973; Tucker, 1977; and others) have argued that the field of psychobiography should be defined by the explicit use of any branch of psychology in biography. Thus psychoanalytic psychobiography could be complemented by phenomenological psychobiography, behavioral psychobiography, cognitive psychobiography, and so on.

The task I have undertaken here is to explore several of the possible alternatives to psychoanalytic psychobiography. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first section examines several common criticisms of psychoanalytic psychobiography, indicating some of the reasons for wanting to consider alternatives to psychoanalytic approaches. The second section outlines the contributions of different areas of personality, social, and developmental psychology to psychobiography, while the concluding section contains some personal speculations about the relative promise of psychoanalytic and nonpsychoanalytic approaches to the field of psychobiography.

Methodological Problems in Psychoanalytic Psychobiography

One extreme point of view is taken by David Stannard in his book *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (1980),

in which he argues that not only are individual psychohistorical works flawed, but "the best possible psychohistory would still be bad history because of the limitations imposed by the weaknesses of the underlying theoretical structure" (p. 21). He says that psychoanalytic theory provides the strongest foundation for psychohistory, claims that psychoanalytic theory "suffers from problems of illogic, experimental nonconfirmation, and cultural parochialism" (p. 30), and concludes that psychoanalytic theory is so defective that psychohistorical work should be abandoned.

A number of reviewers (Adelson, 1981; Basch, 1980; Crosby, 1980) have pointed out the flaws and limitations in Stannard's argument. For one thing, to say that psychohistory is necessarily psychoanalytic is incorrect. Second, the research evidence supporting psychoanalytic theory (reviewed in Fisher and Greenberg, 1977; Kline, 1972) is both more complex and more positive than indicated by his polemical and one-sided review. Finally, the examples of cultural parochialism and historical naïveté that he identifies do not mean that such problems have not been adequately handled by some practicing psychohistorians, much less that they never could be. In short, Stannard's attack on the psychoanalytic foundations of psychohistory is largely unpersuasive. There are, however, a number of problems in psychoanalysis and in psychoanalytic psychobiography that make it worthwhile to at least explore the potential contributions of other approaches.

The Question of Inadequate Evidence

One of the most frequent criticisms of psychoanalytic psychobiography is that interpretations are based on inadequate evidence. "The historian's most serious objection to psychohistory is that sweeping declarations about actions or personalities are based on sparse evidence" (Anderson, 1978, p. 11). The issue of inadequate evidence is frequently raised in regard to psychoanalytic biography in the form: "You can't put the person on the couch." Kohut (1960) notes that applied psychoanalysis "must proceed without the central instrument for the investigation of the unconscious: free association" (p. 571). Finally, there is the criticism that if early childhood experience is particularly influential, this is just the period about which the psychohistorian is likely to have the least information. "Freudian psychology has not been much use to the historian, who is usually unable to penetrate the bedroom, the bathroom or the nursery. If Freud is right, and if these are the places where the action is, there is not much the historian can do about it" (Stone, 1981, p. 53).

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There are, in sum, claims of insufficient evidence, of evidence of the wrong kind (not enough free associations or dream reports), and of not enough evidence from the right period (that is, childhood). These are criticisms which need to be taken more seriously than they have been. Both Freud in his study of Leonardo and Erikson in his analysis of Luther have been severely criticized for having developed psychological interpretations from inadequate data about early experience.

What are the implications of problems of evidence for the psychobiographical enterprise? They do not mean that psychobiography is impossible, as has sometimes been suggested, but that attention is best devoted to historical figures about whom there is sufficient evidence to develop and test psychological explanations. Also, in the absence of evidence about childhood experience, some types of early developmental explanations are best avoided, as psychological theory is often not sufficiently determinate to permit accurate retrodictions or reconstructions (see Runyan, 1982). The problems of evidence mean that some types of questions cannot be answered about some individuals, but this in no way impairs the possibility of developing psychological interpretations of the many aspects of behavior and experience of historical individuals for which there is adequate evidence. On a comparative basis, the problems of evidence are not as severe as they may first appear, since there are also a number of evidential advantages that the psychobiographer has over the psychotherapist.

It seems undeniable that the psychobiographer typically has less access to material such as free associations, dreams, and transference reactions than does the psychoanalyst. On the other hand, the psychobiographer often has the advantage of having information about a person who has lived his or her entire life. The average patient in psychoanalysis is relatively young, and has often not yet lived through such important life experiences as the rearing of children, the peak of his or her career, or the death of parents. Reactions to these experiences, which may be revelatory of personality, are thus not available for interpretation. But the usual subject of psychobiography "has lived his entire life and has met death. Not only the development and mid-stages of his life are available for inspection but also its ultimate unfolding and final resolution. This means that in discovering the dominant psychological themes of his subject's emotional evolution the psychoanalytic biographer has at his disposal a broader spectrum of behavior through more decades of life than has the analyst with a living patient" (Cody, 1971, p. 5).

Second, the psychobiographer is not limited to information coming

from the subject alone, but may draw heavily on "outside sources" (Hoffing, 1976, p. 229). He or she is able to learn how a variety of other informants perceived the situations the subject was in, and their reactions to the individual's personality (Anderson, 1981a).

Third, if the subject is a literary or creative person, the psychobiographer has a wealth of creative material, perhaps expressing inner psychological states and conflicts, that may, with caution, be drawn on in interpretation of the subject's personality.

Fourth, there are sometimes substitutes for a person's dreams or free associations (Anderson, 1981a). For example, Davis (1975) analyzes drawings and caricatures made by Theodore Roosevelt in adolescence when he portrayed himself and members of his family turning into animals. Equivalents to free associations have been found in the "language exercises" of archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, in which he revealed dreams and unconscious wishes, and in the conversation books written by Beethoven to cope with his deafness (Bergmann, 1973, p. 842).

A fifth advantage is that the evidence used in psychobiography is available to all, so that original interpretations may be critically examined and alternatives may be proposed and tested. In psychoanalysis, the data are typically not publicly available, which makes it less likely that such a corrective process can take place. In sum, the psychobiographer often has access to information not available to the psychotherapist, such as information about the person's whole life span, from associates of the individual, and from the analysis of expressive or creative activities.

Reconstruction

In response to the paucity of evidence on childhood experience and the importance of such experience within psychoanalytic theory, psychobiographers have sometimes used psychoanalytic theory to reconstruct or postdict what must have happened to their subjects in childhood. Greenacre (1955), for example, argues that childhood wants can be "reconstructed from known characteristics, problems, and repetitive actions supported by memory traces." Indeed, "the experienced psychoanalyst knows just as definitely as the internist observing later sequelae of tuberculosis . . . that the deformity is the result of specific acts upon the growing organism" (p. 107). Such reconstructions have, however, not gone uncriticized, even when executed with considerable sophistication. Erikson, for example, has been criticized for having re-

constructed Luther's relationship to his mother on the basis of adult behavior: "In his study of the young Luther, Erikson literally invents little Martin's relation to his mother using as a basis (as a "document") the behavior of Luther the man. . . . Erikson does not interpret a repetitive behavior on young Luther's part in terms of an unconscious dynamic; he jumps from a presumed characteristic of the Reformer to the inferential reconstruction of essential data about the latter's family environment" (Friedländer, 1978, p. 27).

The reconstruction of specific life events is not as extreme as the practice of hagiographers, who sometimes reconstructed entire lives if information was not available. Agnellus, a bishop of Ravenna in the ninth century, while completing a series of lives of his predecessors in that position, confessed that "in order that there might not be a break in the series, I have composed the life myself, with the help of God and the prayers of the brethren" (quoted in Clifford, 1962, p. x). Some historians are outraged at the more limited psychobiographical practice of reconstructing particular events or relationships and feel that it is no more acceptable than the reconstructive techniques of the bishop. The practice of retrodiction is especially troubling when an earlier event is retrodicted, and then later assumed to have been firmly established.

Is retrodiction always to be avoided? Perhaps there are a few cases in which extensive evidence is available and in which a clear and well-supported theoretical structure exists that would justify the tentative reconstruction of the gross features of an unknown event. Even so, biographical reconstruction is extremely risky, and in most cases unjustified. In light of the uncertainties in developmental theory, the lack of empirical support for psychoanalytic genetic theory, and the many possible processes leading to any given outcome, the case for banning reconstruction altogether in psychobiography is a fairly strong one. But if retrodiction is to be practiced at all, it is essential that reconstructions be clearly labeled as such and kept distinct from events for which there is documentary evidence.

Reductionism

Another common charge against psychobiography is that of "reductionism." One form of the reductionist critique is that psychological factors are overemphasized at the expense of external social and historical factors. "In turning to Freud, historians interested in the psychological aspect of their discipline have concentrated upon the internal biogra-

phies of individuals to the almost complete exclusion of the society in which the lives of their subjects take place" (Hundert, 1972, pp. 467-468).

A second version of the reductionist criticism is that psychobiography focuses excessively on psychopathological processes and gives insufficient attention to normality and creativity. Particularly in the early history of psychobiography, works were sometimes called pathographies, "thereby emphasizing the basic concern with abnormality and leading to the conclusion that what psychoanalysis had to offer to an understanding of the lives of great men consisted mainly in a documentation and explication of their foibles and follies" (Meyer, 1972, p. 373).

A third type of reductionism is to explain adult character and behavior exclusively in terms of early childhood experience while neglecting later formative processes and influences. "What is chiefly wrong with the conventional psychoanalytic biography is its crude unilateralism. It suggests a one-to-one relationship, arguing that the protagonist did this or that because of some painful experience in early childhood" (Hughes, 1964, p. 58). Erikson (1969) identified this form of reductionism as "originology," or "the habitual effort to find the 'causes' of a man's whole development in his childhood conflicts" (p. 98). Two other reductive fallacies are "the critical period fallacy," which attempts to build a study of a man's life around a certain 'key' period of development, and 'eventism,' the discovery in some important episode in a man's life of not only the prototype of his behavior but *the* turning point in his life from which all subsequent events and work are derived. Both these oversimplifications lend artistic grace to a biographical study, but also impose unnatural order, shape, and direction to the often rather amorphous nature and fitful course of a human life, even that of a great man" (Mack, 1971, p. 156).

In response to these charges of reductionism, it must be acknowledged that too many psychobiographies have suffered from flaws such as overemphasizing the psychological, the pathological, and the influence of childhood conflicts. A number of contemporary psychobiographers (for example, Bate, 1977; Erikson, 1969; Mack, 1976; Tucker, 1973) are, however, aware of such dangers and are avoiding them by integrating the psychological with the social and historical, by analyzing not just pathology but also strengths and adaptive capacities, and by studying formative influences not just in childhood but throughout the life span.

The Relationship of Childhood Experience to Adult Behavior

One of the most complex and difficult issues in the field of psychobiography is that of assessing the influence of childhood experience on adult character and behavior. In psychoanalytically oriented psychobiographies, aspects of adult behavior are often attributed to circumstances and experiences in childhood. In the worst cases, "hypotheses about early developments are speculatively deduced from adult events and then used to explain those events" (Izenberg, 1975, p. 139). In more fortunate cases, available evidence about childhood experience is interpreted as an important causal determinant of adult personality and behavior.

This practice of interpreting the whole life in terms of early childhood experience has, however, come under attack from a number of different directions. Historians have challenged the causal interpretations provided for particular cases: "I just do not think that such things as the extermination of six million Jews can be explained by the alleged fact that Hitler's mother was killed by treatment given her by a Jewish doctor in an attempt to cure her cancer of the breast; or that Luther's defiance of the Roman Church can be explained by the brutal way he was treated by his father or by his chronic constipation" (Stone, 1981, p. 220). Stone's statement exaggerates the issues, though, as there is an important difference between claiming that childhood experience is *the* cause of later events and arguing that it is a partial or contributing cause of individual behavior.

From another direction, empirical tests of Freudian theory, reviewed in Kline (1972) and by Fisher and Greenberg (1977), raise serious questions about aspects of Freud's theories of psychosexual development. Although there is some evidence about clusters of traits consistent with Freud's conception of oral character, and substantial evidence about orderliness, obstinancy, and parsimony clustering together as Freud suggested in the anal or obsessive character, the bulk of quantitative empirical studies do not demonstrate connections between character types and specific childhood experiences associated with feeding or toilet training. Whether more methodologically sophisticated studies done in the future will provide more support for these theories is an open question, but at present, a substantial number of studies do not support them and provide little reason for believing them to be valid.

The study of childhood experience may be of some importance in psychobiography, but perhaps not in the way suggested by classical Freudian theory. There has, in recent years, been a widespread shift in

thinking within developmental and personality psychology about the influence of early childhood experience. In contrast to earlier beliefs about the crucial impact of childhood experience on adult behavior (Bloom, 1964; Bowlby, 1952; Kelly, 1955), there is a growing belief that the effects of early deprivation can be substantially modified by later experience and that behavior and personality are shaped and changed throughout the life course (Brim and Kagan, 1980; Clarke and Clarke, 1976; Mischel, 1968; Rutter, 1979). The argument is not that early childhood experiences have no effects, but that the effects of such experiences are mediated by intervening experiences and contingencies, and that personality and behavior are continually shaped throughout the life cycle.

Early experience, of whatever form, rarely has a direct impact on adult personality, but early experience shapes early personality, which influences the kinds of environments one is likely to encounter, which, in turn, influence later experience, which affects personality, and so on in an interactive cycle (Wachtel, 1977). The effects of early experiences are mediated through a chain of behavior-determining, person-determining, and situation-determining processes throughout the life course (Runyan, 1978). Thus any given event or experience can have a variety of possible effects and meanings, depending on initial personality structure, initial environment, and the causal structure of subsequently encountered environments and experiences (Runyan, 1984).

The study of formative influences throughout the life cycle makes analysis more complicated, but it also has certain advantages for psychobiography in that early childhood experience, for which evidence is usually unavailable, is no longer so predominantly important. Attention can then be directed to those formative periods and processes for which adequate evidence is more often available. One of the advantages of Eriksonian theory, in which character and identity are importantly shaped at later ages, is that the psychobiographer is more likely to have usable evidence on these periods of the subject's life (Stone, 1981, p. 53).

Psychology can be used in psychobiography for many purposes other than drawing causal connections between childhood experience and adult behavior. It can be useful for identifying patterns in current behavior, for providing concepts and categories for analyzing experience, for suggesting hypotheses about the meaning of circumstances or events for an individual, for providing normative or comparative data about phenomena of interest, for providing methods to use in analyzing biographical evidence, and so on. It may be that the greatest contributions

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of psychology to biography lie in just such areas, in the conceptualization and interpretation of biographical evidence, without always attempting to relate adult behavior to childhood experience.

The Problem of Alternative Explanations

One final criticism is that psychoanalytic theory can be used to generate an excessive number of different interpretations of the same events. Consider, for example, the question of why Vincent Van Gogh, then thirty-five years old, cut off the lower half of his left ear and took it to a brothel, where he asked for a prostitute named Rachel and handed the ear to her, asking her to "keep this object carefully." How is this extraordinary event to be explained? Over the years, more than a dozen psychodynamic explanations have been proposed (Runyan, 1981).

One explanation is that Van Gogh was frustrated by two recent events: the engagement of his brother Theo, to whom he was very attached, and the failure of an attempt to establish a working and living relationship with Paul Gauguin. The aggressive impulses aroused by these frustrations first were directed at Gauguin, but then were turned against himself.

A second interpretation is that the self-mutilation resulted from a conflict over homosexual impulses aroused by the presence of Gauguin. According to this account, the ear was a phallic symbol (the Dutch slang for "penis," *lul*, resembles the Dutch word for "ear," *lel*), and the act was a symbolic self-castration.

A third explanation is in terms of Oedipal themes. Van Gogh was sharing a house with Gauguin, who reported that Van Gogh had previously threatened him with a razor. According to this interpretation, Gauguin represented Van Gogh's hated father, and that "in giving the ear to a prostitute, Vincent fulfilled an unconscious wish to possess his mother following the fantasied assault upon a father-substitute, Gauguin" (Lubin, 1972, pp. 157-158).

A fourth interpretation is that Van Gogh was influenced by bullfights he had seen in Arles. In such events, the matador is given the ear of the bull as an award, displays his prize to the crowd, and then gives it to the lady of his choice. The proponent of this interpretation suggests that Van Gogh was deeply impressed by this practice, confused himself in a psychotic state with the bull and the matador, and then presented the ear to a lady of his choice.

Fifth, in the months preceding Van Gogh's self-mutilation, there were fifteen articles in the local paper about Jack the Ripper, who mutilated

the bodies of prostitutes he had killed, sometimes cutting off their ears. "These crimes gave rise to emulators, and Vincent may have been one of them. As a masochist instead of a sadist, however, it is conceivable that he would reverse Jack's act by mutilating himself and bringing the ear to a prostitute" (Lubin, 1972, p. 159).

Sixth, Van Gogh was emotionally and financially dependent on his brother Theo, and usually spent the Christmas holidays with him. This year, however, Vincent learned that Theo would spend the holidays with his new fiancée and her family. This interpretation suggests that Van Gogh's self-mutilation was an unconscious strategy for holding on to his brother's attention, and a way of getting Theo to come and care for him rather than spend the holidays with his fiancée.

What is one to make of such a variety of psychodynamic interpretations of the same event? One point of view is that these various explanations constitute a richly woven tapestry, connecting this single event to many themes, conflicts, and unconscious wishes and processes in Van Gogh's life. According to the psychoanalytic principle of "overdetermination," which suggests that actions typically have multiple causes and meanings, this material can be seen as a complex set of interrelated explanations of Van Gogh's behavior (Lubin, 1972).

Another possible response is to think that all this symbolic and psychodynamic interpretation is somewhat arbitrary, perhaps even hopelessly arbitrary. If interpretations can be generated merely by noting psychological similarities between the event in question and earlier events and experiences, then connections are "embarrassingly easy to find," and "the number of possible (and plausible) explanations is infinite" (Spence, 1976, pp. 377, 379). A skeptic could argue that the process of psychodynamic interpretation is so arbitrary, leading to so many different possible interpretations, that the whole enterprise should be viewed with suspicion. A milder version of this criticism would maintain that the process of psychodynamic interpretation is perfectly legitimate, but that it has been used with insufficient constraint in this particular example.

The problem of alternative explanations and how to choose among them must be faced within any theoretical orientation, but seems particularly acute in psychoanalysis. One of the glories of psychoanalysis as a theoretical system is that it can be used to provide several explanations of almost any human behavior, but the corresponding liability is that it is not certain how much faith should be put in any of the particular explanations.

Psychobiographical interpretations need to be critically evaluated (in

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a way that often does not happen) in terms of such criteria as (1) their comprehensiveness in accounting for a number of puzzling aspects of the events in question, (2) their survival of tests of attempted falsification, (3) their consistency not just with fragments of evidence, but also with the full range of available evidence, and (4) their credibility relative to other explanatory hypotheses. Applying these criteria, perhaps the single most strongly supported explanatory factor in Van Gogh's breakdown was the perceived loss of his brother's care. Specifically, the ear-cutting incident and two later mental breakdowns coincided with learning of Theo's engagement, his marriage, and the birth of his first child. In each case, Van Gogh was threatened by the prospect of losing his main source of emotional and financial support, as it seemed that Theo might redirect his love and money toward his new family (Runyan, 1981).

There are, in short, a variety of problems encountered in psychoanalytic approaches to psychobiography, including issues such as the limitations of available evidence, problems of historical reconstruction and reductionism, and criticisms of the process of psychoanalytic interpretation. These problems, along with a more general interest in the relationships between psychology and biography, led me to the topic of this paper: What are the alternatives to psychoanalytic psychobiography? What has been done, and what could be done, in applying other branches of psychology to the interpretation of historical figures?

Nonpsychoanalytic Approaches to Psychobiography

Psychobiography may be defined as the explicit use of systematic or formal psychology in biography (Runyan, 1982). Three aspects of this definition should be noted. First, the field is defined by the use of psychology, which may or may not be psychoanalytic. Second, the use must be explicit, or visible, in order to distinguish psychobiography from all those biographies that make implicit use of common-sense psychology. Third, the definition refers not solely to the application of personality theory, but also to the use of psychology, which is intended to include within psychobiography those works drawing on the full range of resources of the field of psychology, including psychological concepts, data, and methods, as well as theory, from developmental, abnormal, social, and personality psychology.

It seems that each of these branches of psychology *should* have some-

thing to contribute to the psychological understanding of individual historical figures. What though, has actually been done in using non-psychoanalytic contributions from personality, social, and developmental psychology?

Personality Psychology

The field of personality psychology can be conceived as being organized around several major theoretical orientations: the psychodynamic; behavioral, or social learning; trait-factor and psychometric approaches; and phenomenological, or humanistic, psychology. In this survey, I will not discuss the many contributions of psychoanalytic theory and its more recent developments in ego psychology, object relations theory, and self psychology, which have been reviewed elsewhere (Loewenberg, 1982; Strozier, 1980), or the related psychodynamic systems of Jung and Adler, which have also been used in psychobiography (for example, Ansbacher, 1966; Brink, 1975; Progoff, 1966; Ward, 1961).

Since behavioral or learning theory is a general theory of human behavior, it could, in principle, provide a foundation for psychobiographical interpretation. What, in fact, has been done with it?

In the clinical literature, perhaps the best known example of a learning theory interpretation of historical material is Wolpe and Rachman's (1960) reinterpretation of the case of Little Hans. Little Hans was a five-year-old son of one of Freud's followers who was afraid of going out into the street out of fear that a horse would bite him. Freud's (1909/1963) interpretation of Little Hans's horse phobia is that it stemmed from oedipal conflicts, which erupted during a period of intensified sexual attraction toward his mother. "Hans was really a little Oedipus who wanted to have his father 'out of the way,' to get rid of him, so that he might be alone with his handsome mother and sleep with her" (p. 148). Little Hans experienced

hostile and jealous feelings against his father, and sadistic impulses (premonitions, as it were, of copulation) towards his mother. These early suppressions perhaps have gone to form the predispositions for his subsequent illness. These aggressive propensities of Hans's found no outlet, and as soon as there came a time of privation and of intensified sexual excitement, they tried to break their way out with reinforced strength. It was then that the battle which we call his 'phobia' burst out. (pp. 173-174)

Freud argued that Little Hans transposed his fear of his father onto horses and that he was most afraid of horses with muzzles and blinkers,

which may have resembled his father's moustache and eyeglasses. The phobia served to keep Little Hans at home with his beloved mother, and thus was successful in attaining his libidinal aims. This is necessarily an abbreviated account of the psychoanalytic interpretation, and cannot substitute for Freud's compelling presentation of the original case.

Wolpe and Rachman (1960) argue that "there is no scientifically acceptable evidence showing any connection" (p. 135) between Little Hans's sexual life and his phobia for horses. They claim that Freud's interpretation of this case is not supported in whole or in part by the available evidence. More specifically, they argue that there are no adequate grounds for believing that Little Hans had sexual impulses toward his mother, that he hated and feared his father, that his fear of horses was symbolic of his fear of his father, or that his phobia disappeared because he resolved his oedipus complex.

Wolpe and Rachman suggest that the origin and course of Little Hans's phobia can more plausibly be interpreted in terms of learning theory. Phobias are seen as conditioned fear reactions that can arise through the pairing of any neutral stimulus with a fear-producing situation. They argue that such a conditioning process may well have been the source of Little Hans's fear of horses, and that what Freud saw as "merely the exciting cause of Hans's phobia was in fact the cause of the entire disorder. Hans actually says, 'No, I only got it [the phobia] then. When the horse in the bus fell down, it gave me such a fright, really.' That was when I got the nonsense" (Wolpe and Rachman, 1960, p. 146). The fact that the anxiety broke out immediately afterward was confirmed by Hans's mother. Two other incidents may also have sensitized or "partially conditioned" Hans to fear horses. One was a warning from a father of one of his friends to avoid a horse so that he would not get bitten, and in a second incident, one of Hans's friends fell and cut himself while playing horse.

Wolpe and Rachman say that the actual mechanism responsible for Hans's recovery cannot be identified because of the absence of relevant information, but that remission may have been due to repeated exposure to the phobic stimulus in a nonthreatening context, so that the aroused anxiety responses were weak enough to be inhibited by other concurrently aroused emotional responses. They suggest that the gradualness of Little Hans's recovery is consistent with an explanation of this type.

A second example of a behavioral approach to psychobiography is provided by the article "Ben Franklin the Protobehaviorist . . ."

(Mountjoy and Sundberg, 1981). The authors argue that Benjamin Franklin's efforts to arrive at moral perfection can be seen as an early example of behavioral self-management. Franklin made a list of thirteen virtues—including temperance, frugality, industry, chastity, and humility—and attempted to make his practice of each of these virtues habitual. He drew up a chart on which he recorded on a daily basis his failure to practice any of the thirteen virtues. For a week at a time, he would concentrate on practicing one of the virtues, and then, once the practice of that virtue became more habitual, he would move on to concentrate on the next virtue on his list. Described in behavioral terms, Franklin identified response classes that he wanted to change, recorded a baseline of the frequency of different classes of behavior, recorded data on his performance at the end of each day, and was reinforced by seeing the frequency of undesirable behaviors decrease over time as he repeatedly worked his way through the chart.

Probably the most extensively developed behavioral interpretation of a life history is in the three volumes of B. F. Skinner's autobiography: *Particulars of My Life* (1976), *The Shaping of a Behaviorist* (1979), and *A Matter of Consequences* (1983). Skinner (1967) states that "whether from narcissism or scientific curiosity, I have been as much interested in myself as in rats and pigeons. I have applied the same formulation, I have looked for the same kinds of causal relations, and I have manipulated behavior in the same way and sometimes with comparable success" (p. 407). A goal of his autobiography is to provide a case history of human behavior analyzed from an operant point of view. The focus is on changes in the external environment and their effect on his overt behavior, without referring to inner experiences or feelings.

One of the more dramatic examples is Skinner's description of the end of a love relationship. Nedda, the woman he was in love with, told him at dinner that they should break it off, as she was going back to a former fiancée. "It was a reasonable decision, but it hit me very hard. As we walked back to her apartment from the subway, I found myself moving very slowly. It was not a pose; I simply could not move faster. For a week I was in almost physical pain, and one day I bent a wire in the shape of an N, heated it in a Bunsen burner, and branded my left arm" (Skinner, 1979, p. 137). This dramatic description of environmental events and his behavioral response is not accompanied by a description of his thoughts and feelings about the incident. Skinner's work illustrates that a behavioral approach to psychobiography is pos-

sible, although there may be disagreement about whether this approach illuminates or obscures our understanding of a life.

The possibilities for applying trait-factor and psychometric approaches to the lives of historical figures are suggested by the work of Kenneth Craik in applying standard personality assessment procedures such as the adjective checklist, trait-rating scales, and Q-sort personality descriptions to figures such as Adolf Hitler, Woodrow Wilson, and other American presidents (Historical Figures Assessment Collaborative, 1977). Techniques of intraindividual correlational analysis developed by Raymond Cattell have been applied to individual clinical cases (Bath, Daly, and Nesselrode, 1976; Cattell, 1966; Luborsky and Mintz, 1972) and might in some instances be applicable to historical figures. It could be argued, however, that such approaches are concerned primarily with describing the personalities of individuals, which is one facet of biography, but do not provide a foundation for interpreting or explaining an entire life history.

Another influential theoretical orientation in personality psychology is phenomenological—existential, or humanistic, psychology, represented by the works of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Charlotte Bühler, and Rollo May. How extensively has humanistic psychology been used in psychobiography? As one example, Carl Rogers (1980) reinterpreted the case of Ellen West (originally described by Binswanger), a young woman with anorexia nervosa who eventually committed suicide. A second example is a study of Clarence Darrow presented in terms of Charlotte Bühler's theory of stages of goal seeking (Horner, 1968). A third example is a book by Nancy Clinch, *The Kennedy Neurosis* (1973), which claims to rely in part on humanistic psychology, although the book has often been criticized as a psychological hatchet job.

The most extensive use of existential theory in psychobiography is in the work of Sartre, with his biographical studies of Baudelaire, Genêt, and Flaubert. In his magnum opus on Flaubert, Sartre (1981) says that the question he wants to address is, "What at this point in time, can we know about a man? It seemed to me that this question could only be answered by studying a specific case. What do we know, for example, about Gustave Flaubert?" (p. ix). This complex book might best be described, though, as an example of an eclectic work, drawing on psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Sartre's own version of existentialism (Barnes, 1981).

Social Psychology

The field of social psychology tends to be organized around the study of particular kinds of events or processes, such as person perception, interpersonal attraction, persuasion and influence, obedience to authority, prejudice and discrimination, socialization, self-concept and self-esteem, attitude change, and so on. In principle, research and theory on any of these specific processes could be drawn on to interpret related events in a psychobiography. For example, research on obedience to authority (Milgram, 1974) could be used in analyzing the behavior of Lieutenant Calley during the My Lai massacre in Vietnam or the behavior of Adolf Eichman and other Nazis during World War II, or research on group influences on judgment and decision making could be used in studying the decisions of President Kennedy in planning the Bay of Pigs invasion (Janis, 1972).

One increasingly influential part of social psychology is concerned with processes of social cognition, or the cognitive processes by which individuals perceive, interpret, and attribute causes to the behavior of others. Research on social cognition and the common biases in everyday cognitive processes (Nisbett and Ross, 1980) may well be drawn on in studying the attitudes, belief systems, and decision-making processes of individual historical figures, issues of particular importance in the lives of political leaders. An extensive review of the use of theories of social perception and cognition is provided in Jervis's *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976) and Janis and Mann's *Decision Making* (1977).

In sum, social psychology seems to have significant promise in psychobiography, not as a foundation or organizing principle for the study of an entire life, but as a resource to draw on in understanding particular events or processes.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology, which is concerned with the description and explanation of age-related changes in behavior and psychological structures, would seem to have a special relevance to psychobiography. The field of developmental psychology can be seen as being organized around (1) major theoretical orientations, such as the Piagetian-cognitive, psychodynamic, or behavioral; (2) the growth of particular systems, such as motor behavior, sensory processes, linguistic ability, or personality; (3) particular classes or types of behavior, such as

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aggression, altruism, or creativity; (4) particular periods or stages of the life cycle, such as infancy, childhood, and adolescence; and (5) in adult developmental psychology, particular events or transitions, such as leaving home, becoming a parent, or getting divorced.

Each of these components of the field of developmental psychology could at times be used in psychobiography. Since major theoretical orientations were discussed in the section on personality psychology, I will not repeat this topic, except to note the use of some aspects of Piagetian concepts in Gruber's (1981) study of intellectual growth and change in the career of Charles Darwin. Studies of the development of particular classes of behavior or of particular life transitions (such as choosing a marriage partner, establishing a career, retiring, or grieving at the loss of a spouse) could be drawn on as needed.

Within developmental psychology, some of the most relevant theory may come from work in adult developmental psychology and life-span developmental psychology. One theoretical framework that appears particularly promising for psychobiographical purposes is presented in Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (Levinson, with Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee, 1978; also Levinson, 1981). Levinson argues that the course of adult development can be understood not as the development of personality, but as the development or evolution of the life structure, with life structure defined as the pattern or fit between self and world in areas such as occupation, relationships, and leisure activities. In every period of adulthood, a man must make certain key choices, form a structure around them, and pursue his goals and values within this structure. Adult life alternates between a sequence of stable, or structure-building, periods and one of transitional, or structure-changing, periods, in which individuals assess and reevaluate their existing life structure, and may make new choices in regard to career, marriage, family, or other aspects of life.

Two components of the life structure that Levinson discusses are "The Dream" and mentor relationships. The Dream is an imagined vision of oneself in the world that generates excitement and vitality. The mentor, typically a person of greater experience and seniority, facilitates realization of the life dream by serving as teacher, model, guide, and sponsor. One of Levinson's students has drawn on this framework to examine two important mentoring relationships in the career of Willy Brandt before he became chancellor of West Germany (Kellerman, 1978).

A more comprehensive application of Levinson's theory is in a study of Jung by Staude (1981). Staude looks at Jung's relationship to Freud

as an example of a mentor relationship, and analyzes Jung's midlife transition in terms of Levinson's conception of a structure-changing period. After considerable success in the tasks of early adulthood—as indicated by scientific accomplishments, a happy marriage and family life, a successful private practice, and international recognition in the psychoanalytic movement—Jung entered a period of profound questioning of his previous life structure. With the advent of this midlife re-examination, Jung saw “his early adult life structure crumble and fall apart before his eyes” (Staude, 1981, p. 47) and was forced to forge a new life structure that took greater account of his mystical and archetypal inner experience.

Additional Examples

In addition to the studies already mentioned, there are, of course, a substantial number of psychobiographical works that are at least partly nonpsychoanalytic, such as (1) Barber's (1977) fourfold typological analysis of presidential personalities; (2) an application of Tomkins's theory of affect and motivation to the lives of four American abolitionists (Tomkins, 1965); (3) an investigation of medical or biological pathology in political leaders (L'Étang, 1970), and a medicopsychological study of King George III (Macalpine and Hunter, 1969); (4) a study of Winston Churchill that draws on Sheldon's theory of somatypes, Jungian psychology, and descriptive psychiatry, as well as psychoanalysis (Storr, 1968); and (5) a variety of forms of content analysis applied to biography, such as “value analysis” (White, 1947), “personal structure analysis” (Baldwin, 1942), application of the computerized “General Inquirer” system to personal documents (Paige, 1966), and a content analytic study by Robert Sears et al. (1978) of longitudinal changes in indications of separation anxiety or fear of loss of love in Mark Twain's novels and letters.

Further examples are discussed in the Winter 1979 issue of the *Psychohistory Review*, on “Non-Psychoanalytic Ventures in Psychohistory,” with two bibliographies on this topic by Gilmore (1979a, 1979b), although most of the examples are more broadly psychohistorical rather than specifically psychobiographical.¹

1. Additional examples of nonpsychoanalytic approaches have come to my attention since the Stanford conference, including a notable one by an audience member at the Stanford conference, Elisabeth Griffith (1984), who used Bandura's social learning theory in a psychobiography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. A recent study of unusual methodological sophistication analyzes Henry Kissinger's implicit personality theory through a quantitative analysis of 3,759 trait descriptions of political leaders that he provided in *White*

The Relative Contributions of Psychoanalytic and Nonpsychoanalytic Approaches

What can one conclude from this attempt to survey nonpsychoanalytic approaches to psychobiography? Work in nonpsychoanalytic psychobiography does exist, but it is scattered and disorganized, appearing in discrete bits and pieces, and has not developed anything like the cumulative tradition of work in psychoanalytic psychobiography. It is, in fact, difficult to identify more than a handful of psychobiographies which rely primarily on nonpsychodynamic theory.

I began this search with an expectation that it would be relatively easy to uncover a substantial number of effective uses of other psychological theories and approaches in psychobiography. After searching the literature, corresponding with individuals I thought might have leads on the topic, and pestering my friends and colleagues to come up with examples, the yield has been frustratingly meager. I have the feeling of a hunter going out looking for bear, but coming back with a few quail.

In short, the field seems clearly dominated by psychoanalytic approaches to psychobiography. In light of the many criticisms of psychoanalytic theory and interpretation, particularly in academic psychology, how is one to account for the preeminence of psychoanalytic approaches to psychobiography and the relative lack of development of other approaches?

A number of possible explanations come to mind. First, perhaps psychoanalytic theory has a special relevance to the kinds of explanatory problems encountered in psychobiography in that it seems effective in explaining just those kinds of odd or irrational patterns of behavior that the psychobiographer feels are most in need of explanation.

Second, perhaps psychoanalytically oriented theorists are able or willing to speculate from the fragments of evidence available about historical figures, while adherents of other theoretical orientations, more accustomed to quantitative or experimental methods, are unable or unwilling to do so.

Third, perhaps the explanation lies in *how* psychoanalytic theory is used. It may be that psychoanalysis provides a set of conceptual tools that can be employed in a flexible and partially idiographic way; they are

House Years (Swede and Tetlock, 1986). Further examples are in Gilmore's (1984) bibliographic survey of the field, and in a forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Personality* (March 1988) edited by Dan McAdams and Richard Ochbergon "Psychobiography and Life Narratives."

flexible enough to be used to construct interpretations of a wide range of patterns of human behavior. This characteristic of the theoretical system may be a liability for theory-testing purposes (Popper, 1962), but a virtue for interpretive purposes. The theory identifies a large number of mechanisms and processes, which can then be used in constructing interpretations of the particular patterns found within an individual case.

Fourth, perhaps historians and biographers are just not familiar with other psychological theories, and have not tried them. Or if they have been tried, they have not been found very useful.

A fifth possibility is that psychobiographers who believe that psychoanalysis has been helpful in their interpretive tasks have been mistaken. While having the subjective experience of gaining insight, they may actually have been led into errors or false interpretations. Perhaps psychoanalytic theory satisfies a human need to find pattern or meaning, but such patterns can be found in biographical material even where none actually exist, or at least not the ones suggested by the theory.

Finally, perhaps psychodynamic theory is profoundly true in some ways, not necessarily all of it, but at least parts of it. Perhaps working intensively with biographical data leads writers to find that psychoanalytic theory repeatedly proves itself more illuminating or more useful than any other body of psychological theory, just as many clinicians find it useful in clinical situations. Personally, this search for alternatives has led me to have increased respect for the utility of psychoanalytic theory in psychobiography. While some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, such as a belief in the primary causal importance of early psychosexual experience, should probably be modified or abandoned, other aspects of the theory, such as the concept of unconscious motives and conflicts, or the operation of defense mechanisms, may prove of fundamental utility for psychobiographers. Psychoanalytic theory also has the heuristic value of leading investigators to explore a range of hypotheses that might not otherwise have occurred to them.

In conclusion, what do nonpsychoanalytic approaches have to contribute to psychobiography? There does not seem to be any serious contender looming on the horizon, threatening to challenge the position of psychoanalysis as the dominant theoretical orientation in the field. My search, though, inevitably missed important examples, and I would greatly appreciate hearing of other examples of nonpsychoanalytic psychobiography.

The *potential* contributions of nonpsychoanalytic personality, social, and developmental psychology to psychobiography seem substantial,

even if accomplishments to date are limited. The direction in which I would look for the most progress in nonpsychoanalytic approaches to psychobiography is not as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of an entire life, but rather as a pool of theory and research to be drawn from in an eclectic manner for interpreting particular events, dispositions, processes, or life transitions.

One recent example of such targeted and specific use of nonpsychoanalytic theory is in the controversy over psychological interpretations of Woodrow Wilson. A remarkable feature of Wilson's childhood is that he did not learn his letters until he was nine, and could not read until he was eleven. Alexander and Juliette George originally suggested that Wilson as a boy was filled with rage at his demanding and perfectionist father, which he could not openly acknowledge or express, and perhaps, this "failing—refusing—to learn was the one way in which the boy dared to express his resentment against his father" (George and George, 1956/1964, p. 7). In response, Weinstein, Anderson, and Link (1978) argued that Wilson's delay in reading was not due to emotional difficulties, but to developmental dyslexia, caused by a delay in the establishment of the dominance of one cerebral hemisphere (usually the left) for language.

In rebuttal, the Georges (1981) draw on details of the recent professional literature on dyslexia. In particular, they argue that it is not established that the absence of cerebral dominance is responsible for dyslexia, that many specialists continue to believe that emotional factors are responsible for some reading disorders, and that details of Wilson's life—such as the amount of his reading, the neatness of his handwriting, and his excellent spelling—are inconsistent with a diagnosis of developmental dyslexia. In this debate, they draw on a specialized body of psychological theory and research in order to critique an alternative explanation and to argue that the bulk of the evidence is consistent with their original interpretation.²

The possibilities for using particular theories and bodies of research from nonpsychoanalytic psychology seem vast, although relatively underdeveloped. One optimistic view of the future of nonpsychoanalytic approaches is that "a likely prospect would see the emergence of academic psychology as the central treasury upon which thoughtful researchers and an intelligent public would draw" (Schoenwald, 1973, p. 17). To date, however, this promise is largely unfulfilled. Academic psychology can be extremely valuable in shedding light on particular

2. The debate over psychological and medical interpretations of Woodrow Wilson has continued in extensive detail (references cited in Link et al., 1986).

processes, classes of behavior, and life transitions, and can provide a useful corrective to excesses and errors in psychodynamic interpretations. It remains to be seen, though, if adherents of nonpsychoanalytic approaches can be equally or more effective in interpreting lives than the best practitioners of psychodynamic psychobiography.

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