

Personality Under the Light of Valency Theory: A Shift to “sociality”

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Abstract

The main purpose of the present paper was to discuss how the concept of personality can be integrated into valency theory, a psychoanalytical theory which teaches that a person is unconceivable outside a relationship. First, the author provided a brief outline of valency theory, then compared it to two most known psychoanalytical theories of personality, namely Freud's and Jung's theories. In spite of some minor similarities between the three theories, the theory of personality based on valency theory differs from Freud's and Jung's in a number of significant aspects. First, it rejects the concept of personality as based on the conception of the person as a completely independent being, proposing a new concept, namely *sociality*. Unlike personality as generally defined, sociality with all its characteristics is not what separate a person from another, but what bounds him/her to them. Sociality is defined as all the emotional, intellectual and behavioral responses a person displays towards others. It is constituted by two complementary poles one directed towards the self, and the other towards the object. Sociality is not the primary factor that determines the person's reaction. What constitutes the primary determinant factor is the subject's *valency structure*. Sociality is determined by the valency structure, especially the active valency which constitutes the most influential and determinant component.

As suggested by the title, the purpose of the present paper is to discuss the conception of personality from the perspective of valency theory (Hafsi, 2006, 2010a, 2010b), comparing it with Freud's and Jung's ones. I will first briefly attempt to present these two thinkers ideas of personality, before discussing how personality is conceived in valency theory.

I. Psychoanalytic theory of personality

1. Freudian Model of Personality

The study of personality is one of the major field of research within clinical psychology. There are numerous personality theories which can be classified into four major perspectives. These perspectives attempt to study and understand personality from different vertices, focussing thus on different patterns and aspects of the personality. Referring to all of these perspectives goes far

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beyond the purpose of the present study. Therefore, I will confine myself to the psychoanalytic perspective and the major contributions made within it.

The earliest psychoanalytically oriented theory of personality was suggested by Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. After him, there have been numerous attempts to study personality. And it is not an exaggeration to say that there are as much psychoanalytical theories as researchers. Their similarity resides in the fact that they all agree on a number of factors or aspects although they interpret them differently. Most of the psychoanalytical theories of personality emphasize the importance the influence of early childhood experiences, and the unconscious perception of these experiences on the formation and development of personality. Personality is thus conceived as the sum of the psychological qualities that bring continuity and coherence to an individual's behavior in different situations. It is generally understood as an entity evolving over time, from birth to the end of life. In other words, unlike character, personality develops progressively with the events and experiences experienced by the person throughout different developmental stages.

Moreover, Freud suggested that personality corresponds to the subject's affective organization. Additionally, personality is an organized structure for him. This means that it is composed by certain interdependent elements, namely elements that have value only in relationship to each other. Personality is also conceived by Freud as a dynamic entity because the elements that compose it are submitted to internal and external stimulations and pressure. The reader will surely recognize that these personality elements correspond to the three psychic levels of the Freudian topographic model (Freud, 1900), and to the three psychic agents of the structural model (Freud, 1920) of the *psyche*. Seen from the topographic model, personality comprises three levels, or layers of consciousness: conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, with a censorship between these layers. The conscious comprises all those aspects of the personality the subject is aware of, namely the elements he is able to recognize, describe and talk about. The preconscious corresponds to those personality elements (thoughts, emotions, experiences, etc.) that are momentarily unconscious to the subject, but are not repressed, and can therefore be easily recalled and become conscious. Finally, the unconscious is a part of the personality that goes beyond the subject's consciousness. It consists of those personality aspects (thought processes, memory, affect, and motivation) that occur automatically and are not available to introspection, because they have been unconsciously repressed by the Ego. The latter concept belongs to the structural model.

Like the topographical model, the structural model subdivises personality into three psychic components, the Id, Superego, and the Ego. The Id constitutes the instinctive and genetically inherited part of the personality. The Id is driven by the "Pleasure Principle"; it is always seeking unconditionally instant gratification of the subject's instincts and reduction of excitation to a minimum. The Ego represents the executive of the personality and is governed by the "Reality Principle". It manages decision making and planning and is the responsible, logical part of the personality. Unlike the Id, the Ego learns from experience, and is able to determine the difference

between a desire and reality (the conditions). One of its principal role is mediating between the Id and its unceasing demands for satisfaction and the Superego and its moral exigency. Freud believed that man becomes a moral being only when the Superego has emerged.

The Superego is the result of internalization by the child of the parents, especially the father and his authority. And since the father's authority is always based on social norms and values, the superego also reflects the latter. The function attributed to Superego is akin to that of an internal and unconscious moral judge which is always ready to give orders, judge and punish the Ego in case the latter gives priority to the Id and its demands for satisfaction, infringing thus the Superego's moral laws.

As previously mentioned, the formation of personality is a long process involving the infant and his caretakers, from birth to adolescence. Freud divided this process into four developmental stages: Oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, Oedipus complex and latency stage, and the genital stage. There are numerous works discussing in details these stages, therefore, I will confine myself to the following. Each stage includes an interaction between the infant and his object (the breast, then the mother, and later both the father with the mother). Freud suggests that it is on the nature of these interactions that depends the nature of the personality. If the infant was able to experience and work through these stages without or with only minimal damage, or to use Bion's (1962) expression, "psychological disaster", he is expected to have a relative healthy personality. If, on the contrary, the infant could not, due to environmental (an unstable and/or absent object) and individual unconscious factors (for instance envy as discussed by Klein, and intolerance of frustration pointed out by Bion), come out of these developmental stages relatively intact, he will be prone to have a pathologic (neurotic or psychotic) personality. In the latter case, part of the infant's libido will remain fixated to one of these stages, paving the road for later regression and consequent character disorder. Character is a notion much more narrow than personality; it corresponds to its observable aspects. For instance, people libidinally fixated to the oral stage, would be characterized by such character traits as unconsciously engaging heavily in talking, eating, smoking and drinking. They are also prone to manic-depressive mood swings and to resort to identification as a way to relate to others. They are unconsciously unable to deal with other as separate individuals; they don't relate to, they tend to create fusion with others. Following Abraham (1921), Freud developed the anal character, and briefly discussed the phallic character, but I will not discuss them here, in order to stick to the purpose of the present study. To summarise, Freud made a distinction between a pathologic and a non-pathologic type personality, but he did not propose a healthy typology of the personality. After him others, neo-Freudian psychoanalysts, have developed different personality typologies. Jung's is one of them.

2. Jung's theory of personality

Using some of Freud's concepts, Jung proposed a completely different theory of the *psyche* and

personality. He depicted *psyche* as a structure composed of three parts. The first part is the Ego, which for him corresponds to the conscious. Including any element the person is not presently aware of, and those repressed, the second element corresponds to personal unconscious. The latter seems to comprise both preconscious and unconscious elements save the Freud's instincts or drives. The second part represents what he Jung called the "collective unconscious". Unlike personal unconscious, collective unconscious is depicted as a reservoir containing our experience as human species, prenatal psychic experiences, or, as he latter called them, "archetypes".

According to Jung, these archetypes represent universal and hereditary dispositions forming the source from which emerge the basic symbols or representations of our unconscious experience. In other words, these archetypes constitutes models which act to organize our conscious and unconscious emotional and behavioural experiences. There is an unlimited number of archetypes including those important ones identified by Jung, namely the *persona*, the *shadow*, the *anima*, the *animus*, the *great mother*, the *wise old man*, the *hero*, and the *self*, which can not be discussed here.

Jung developed a personality typology which distinguishes between two dimensions, introversion and extroversion, and four basic functions. According to Jung a personality can be either introvert or extrovert. The ego of a person with introvert personality tends to be turned towards himself, or towards his inner world, namely the world of feelings, thoughts, dream and collective unconscious with its archetypes. While the ego of an extrovert personality would rather tend towards the outer or real world with its real people and activities, in a word, the *persona*.

Furthermore, Jung suggested that personality may be characterized by four mental functions, namely sensing, thinking, intuiting, and feeling. Sensing consists in gathering information relying on senses. Thinking serves to evaluate information logically or rationally. Intuiting is a type of perception which goes beyond usual conscious processes. It is subjective and irrational, but results from complex integration of a large amount of information, going thus beyond seeing and hearing. Feeling consists in evaluating information by weighing one's overall emotional response. While all people have these mental functions, there are important individual differences in terms of proportions. Each person has a *superior*, a *secondary*, a *tertiar*, and an *inferior* function. The superior function corresponds to the one that is most developed in and preferred by the subject. The secondary function is the one the subject is aware of and uses to reinforce the superior one. The tertiary function, which is only slightly less developed is not completely conscious. Finally, the inferior function which is poorly developed is unconscious, and may, therefore, be denied by the subject. Although most people develop only one or two of these functions, the goal for each person remains to acquire all four.

Combining the two tendencies described above (introversion and extroversion) with these four functions, Jung (1971) developed his famous personality typology which includes eight personality types: Extroverted Thinking, Introverted Thinking, Extroverted Feeling, Introverted Feeling, Extroverted Sensing, Introverted Sensing, Extroverted Intuitive, Introverted Intuitive,

Extroverted Intuitive, and Introverted Intuitive. These personality types have been widely discussed in a large amount of works; I will therefore confine myself here to their enumeration.

II. Personality from valency theory perspective

1. Valency theory: An Outline

Briefly defined, valency theory is a psychoanalytically-oriented object and interpersonal theory. It has as its foundation Bion's "valency" concept. Bion (1961), borrowed this concept from chemistry to explain how a person in a group combines with other members to contribute to the creation and maintenance of the prevailing phantasy, or what he calls dominant "basic assumption group". Valency theory is the result of further development and expansion of the concept (Hafsi, 2006) of valency to interpersonal relationships in general.

As a psychoanalytical theory, valency theory depicts a person and his *psyche* as fundamentally motivated by a primary need to get related to an object and its external representative, a human being. His very existence and physical and mental development depend on the possibility to have a strong enough valency to be able to get bound to that object. Metaphorically speaking, a human being is, like an atom, equipped with valency, or valency structure. This structure is constituted by four valency types (namely, fight, dependency, flight and pairing). One of the four types is dominant and referred to as "active valency", and the remaining three are complementary or auxiliary valencies. This thus constituted valency structure is regarded as "healthy", or positive. Any valency structure different from this kind of structure is considered as "pathologic", negative or "minus valency structure". The person's mental health and stability depends thus on the nature of his valency structure. For a positive valency structure is associated with health, and minus valency structure with, depending on the type, neurotic, personality, and psychotic disorders (Hafsi, 2006, 2010). Providing details about valency theory goes beyond the scope of the present work. Therefore, for further discussion, the reader should refer to the author's previous works (see references). Let us now return to what concerns us here, namely personality.

As this brief definition may suggest, the concept of personality as an individual "property", or characteristic is totally irrelevant in valency theory. For, the concept of personality seems to be based, although not explicitly, on the assumption that a person is a psychologically independent entity which goes against the conception of a person in valency theory. Both Freud and Jung, and also a number of other Neo-freudian theorists, reflect this assumption. For both of them seem to imply that personality is a structured and functional (it possesses a number of functions) entity the person owns, which determines his behavioural and psychic reactions to others and oneself, or to one's inner reality, and outer reality. For Freud this entity or personality is the outcome of the infant's libidinal development. While Jung added to this a phylogenetic component, suggesting that personality comprises a layer common to the human species, namely the "collective unconscious" and its contents or the "archetypes". In spite of their differences, Freud and Jung

seem to share the belief that once formed personality becomes an individual package or attribute which exists regardless of the other's presence. In other words, both Freud and Jung's conceptions are individualistic in the sense that they seem to imply that personality is located "in the person", and therefore, its presence and manifestation does not depend on the presence of another human being. A person has an anal or oral character, or is of the Introvert-Feeling type, or Extroverted Sensing type of personality even in the absence of the other; metaphorically speaking, personality is akin to an identity card which one carries as a means of self-identification. Hence, besides being individualistic, this vision of personality is also descriptive; it does not take into consideration the role played by the other and the influence he or she has on the activation of personality. Thus, Freud and Jung's conceptions of personality differ from the one developed based on valency theory.

2. Another definition of personality: From Personality to Sociality

Most of the personality theories, not only those introduced above, share the a common definition of personality as the totality of qualities, mental and emotional traits (or character), behaviors that are peculiar to a specific person. The model on which most of these theories seem to be based on is that of a sort of container full of specific traits. In other terms, the individual is represented as an independent entity possessing distinctive temperamental characteristics. Like facial features, these characteristics as personal are personal serving to distinguish a person from another.

On the other hand, from the perspective of to valency theory, we can say that, borrowing Winnicott's expression said concerning the child, "there is no such thing as a person"; there is only a person in connection with another person. That is, in spite of his or her undeniable physical presence, a person is psychically visible only when related to, or in the process of relating to another person. Outside a relationship a person is, as suggested by the Chinese ideogram representing Man, a "no-person" for himself and the other. A no-person is like no-breast (Bion, 1963, 1965) does not represent absence, for it is in itself a sort of presence, a negative presence associated with frustration, and mental and physical "dis-ease".

Based on this conception of a person, we can state that personality with all its characteristics is not what separates a person from another, but what bounds a person to another. From valency theory perspective personality is thus the *sine qua non* for being a person. But personality is not a personal attribute, it is the simultaneous result of the interactive presence of a least two subjects. Of course this presence is not necessary a real presence, it can be imagined and phantasized.

I am dissatisfied with the concept of personality because it is too person-centred, giving thus the impression that a person is a psychologically independent being. Therefore, I would prefer to use temporarily the term of "sociality" instead of personality, because it reflects better the conception of a person suggested by valency theory. As mentioned above a person can not exist and live without interpersonal connectedness; a person is, as suggested by the Japanese term *ningen*, a being (existing) between others. Thanks to his "betweenness", and connectedness, a person can

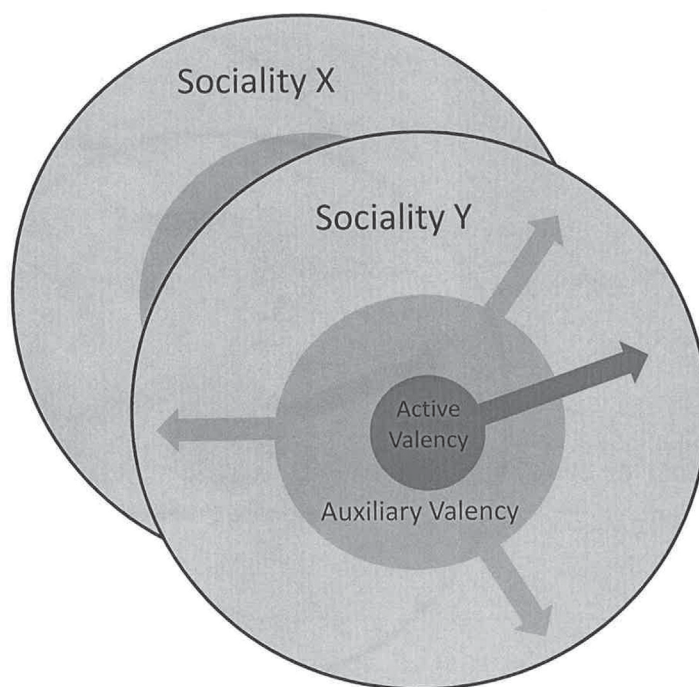


Figure 1. The relationship between valency structure and sociality.

make sense of his own and others' emotional experiences. As suggested by Bion (1962, 1963, 1965, 1970), it is his connectedness with a significant other that allows the child and the adult to give meaning to their feelings, emotions, in a word, their existences.

Sociality is thus what makes a person as defined above. It represents the way a person needs to and in reality relate to an object, a person, or the whole social environment. Sociality is determined by the means that allows the person's need for relatedness to be stimulated, and that simultaneously stimulate others' relatedness need. The reader may have guessed that the conclusion I am coming to is that the means determining sociality are the four valencies (dependency valency, fight valency, pairing valency, and flight valency), and valency structure (healthy, or positive valency structure, and pathologic, or minus valency structure) which I briefly discussed above.

As shown in Figure 1, sociality (X) is always bound to another sociality (Y). There is no such a thing as an independent sociality. Sociality represents the person's all emotional, intellectual and behavioral responses to the other. Furthermore, the person's valency structure constitutes the foundation stone of the nature and degree of his sociality. Unlike most personality theories, valency theory does not hold sociality (including personality) as the primary element determining the person's behavioral and emotional reactions. On the contrary, sociality is conceived of as an entity determined by and reflecting the nature and type of the person's valency structure with its two components, namely active valency and auxiliary valency. However, active valency remains the most influential and determinant factor.

3. The four types of sociality

As mentioned above, a valency structure can be relatively healthy (positive) or pathologic (minus). A positive valency structure comprises one active and three auxiliary valencies. The type of valency structure corresponds to the active valency. If for instance the active valency is fight, then valency structure type will be also of a fight type. There are thus four possible valency structure types (Dependency valency structure, fight valency structure, pairing valency structure, and flight valency structure) with each type of valency structure being associated with a type of sociality. There are thus four sociality types: Dependency sociality, fight sociality, pairing sociality, and flight sociality. The content of each sociality type reflects the content of the valency structure corresponding to it. Moreover, sociality is bipolar; it comprises two poles: One pole directed from oneself to the other person (the other's pole), and the other from the other person to oneself (self pole). These two poles correspond to Bion's (1961, 1990) Concepts of "Social-ism" and "narcissism". The following is a brief description of the content of each sociality type.

Dependency sociality type: This sociality type is associated with a dependency valency structure, and therefore reflects its emotional, behavioral and cognitive contents. A person characterized by a dependency sociality type manages unconsciously to establish vertical interpersonal relationships characterized by interdependency. When his need is for being nurtured, or when it is the sociality pole from the other person to oneself that is concerned, the most prominent features are unconscious self-devaluation, overevaluation and idealization of other persons interacting with him. He tends unconsciously to communicate his shortcomings, weakness, helplessness through his behavioral and non-behavioral means (gesture, posture, etc.) to them, expecting a relationship wherein he will rely on and be nurtured by these persons. However, when it is the pole from oneself to the other that is activated, the subject is attracted to the other's weakness and is sensitive to the latter's needs for help and nurturance.

The person belonging to this type of sociality has a strong emphatic ability, and an altruistic attitude towards others. He can easily identify with the weak, needy, and helpless persons, and is always ready to make efforts and personal sacrifice to meet their demand for help. He is also characterized by a strong feeling of attachment to past experiences, customs, memories, old friends, and objects, to a point that he gives the impression of living in the past. Relatively speaking he is a conservative, preferring old ways of life and interpersonal relationship. Associating rules with past and reliable authority figures, he considers them as sacred, follows them to the letter, and expects strongly others to do the same. Finally, another prominent characteristic of this type of sociality is unconditional trust. For the person belonging to this sociality type every person is basically worth of trust and reliable, even if his experience does not always confirm this belief. In spite of their differences, all these characteristics are related to and function to actualize the person's unconscious needs for interdependent interpersonal relationship.

Fight sociality type: A person of this type is characterized by a high self-evaluation, and self-

assertiveness. He believes that people have feelings, ideas, opinions good enough to be expressed and submitted to other's evaluation, criticism, or rejection. Therefore he enjoys arguing, criticism, debate and excels in this form of interpersonal interaction. He also expects others to behave in the same way towards him. A lack of reaction from others is experienced as a failure in his attempt to relate to them, and generally stirs in him disappointment, feeling of loneliness, frustration, and anger. For him, if a person has nothing to say about his idea, this does not simply mean that he is not interested, but it means that the opponent is hiding his opinion from him because he does not want to get involved with him. This in turn is experienced as his failure to establish interpersonal relation resulting from insufficient self assertiveness. And this stir in him the need to increase further his assertiveness and seek communication. For he believes that every problem can be solved through communication.

The way the person belonging to this type of sociality reacts to people around him is characterized by a paradoxical statement that "he wants the world to criticize the world" (from a song by the French singer Charles Aznavour). His self-assertiveness is grounded on a pre-conscious-unconscious belief that the more one can assert himself the higher his chance to get related to a significant other. As a result, people around him are perceived like competitors to fight with, regardless of the result of the competition. For the aim of competition is not winning but interacting to form a bond with the opponent. However the respect he holds for his opponents does not prevent him from being also highly suspicious towards them. Which leads him to take all his precautions before starting to interact with people, because he believes that "one is never too prudent". It is noteworthy that, like in the case of dependency sociality type, all the characteristics of the fight sociality are tools used unconsciously by the person of this type to appeal to the significant other to forge a bond with him.

Pairing sociality type: A person belonging to pairing sociality type behaves in a friendly and intimate manner towards people. For him people are equal, there is no superior and no follower. Unlike a person of the dependency sociality type, a person of pairing sociality type is moved by the principle of equality and equity. Therefore, he is always challenging authority. For the presence of authority contradicts his egalitarian conception of interpersonal relationship, and prevents the establishment of intimate relationships. Intimacy is considered as the sole path to real, stable and lasting interpersonal relationships. A relationship without intimacy is unconceivable for this type of sociality.

Pairing sociality type is also characterized by strong curiosity. The person is very curious about other's life; and uses every means at his disposal to stimulate their curiosity. Self-disclosure is the most common of these means. He has a strong need to know deeply the persons he is interacting with, and he is convinced that the latter share his need. That's why he tries to feed people around him with stories and experiences from his private experience, as a means to earn their friendship, and be able to secure a tie with them.

For the same reason, this person will always try unconsciously to show off, please, attract other's attention, intertain them, and please them. The person may resort to exentric attitudes and behaviours, such as wearing very provocative, sexy cloths, for instance. Being able to charm and be charmed by others is considered as an indispensable condition for the formation of interpersonal relationships.

Besides charm, this person will resort to seduction which is an important element of his interpersonal relationships. In certain cases, especially when inetracting with a person of the other sex, he will thus tend to sexualize the relationship. Sexualisation of the relationship includes behaving in such way that sex is the sole object de conversation; flirting is for this person an unconscious means to stimulate the other, and get bound to him. Sex is unconsciously perceived by people of this sociality type as having powerful and "magical" effects on the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Flight sociality type: A person belonging to this type of sociality fears, is inhibited by, and therefore tends to avoid any kind of interpersonal conflict, and any conflictual situation or interaction. Unlike the person of fight sociality type, who unconsciously stirs and relies on conflicts because he perceives them as not only indispensable for, but also unavoidable in interpersonal relations, a person with a flight sociality would make every effort to avoid interpersonal conflicts. For he feels that conflicts prevent people from having new relationships and have destructive effects on the preexisting ones.

To be able to avoid conflict the person has thus developed an ensemble of anti-conflict reactions. He avoids as often as possible intruding on others' private lives, and avoids unnecessary self-disclosure. Whenever he can, he keeps his own ideas, feelings, and opinions for himself, expressing himself only when invited or pressed to do so. When he can not avoid expressing himself, he will confine himself to ambiguous or highly rational statement deprived of any emotional elements. All this is done to avoid any conflict that might result from clearly expressing his ideas or feelings, and the imagined risk of being disliked by others and thus lose the bond with them. Hence, in other words, he refrains from self-expression and self-disclosure in order to be able to secure the vital bond with others.

To achieve this goal, and enjoy the feeling of being connected to others and its consequent feeling of mental stability, the person with this type of sociality tends to avoid positions or leadership roles wherein he is obliged to express clearly his feelings or ideas to provide directions, confront or criticize others. Therefore, he give the impression of being passive, lacking ambitions, relatively reserved, and independent. For this type of sociality, depending on someone is regarded as a selfish behavior, and may thus lead to interpersonal conflict and finally to a rupture in interpersonal relationships. However, this passivity, lack of assertiveness, and counterdependency do not constitute shortcomings in the case of sociality type. These traits allow him to secure a good enough interpersonal psychic space to think about and observe others, and when necessary

making rational decisions to save his relationships from breakdown, maintain and strengthen them.

Conclusion and discussion

The main purpose of the present paper was to discuss how the concept of personality can be integrated into valency theory (Hafsi, 2006, 2010a, 2010b). Valency is a psychoanalytic theory which strong association with, on one hand, objects relations theory as conceived especially by Klein and Bion, and, on the other hand, relational psychoanalysis (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). According to valency theory a person is unconceivable outside a relationship. Psychologically speaking a person can not exist and grow without a relationship to a significant other. In other words, there is no such a thing as a person, there is only a person bound to another. Therefore, in valency theory the ultimate purpose of man's *psyche* is not, as conceived in ego-psychology, drive (libido and aggression) satisfaction, but object and interpersonal bonding.

Seen from this perspective, the concept of personality defined as the ensemble of qualities, mental and emotional traits (or character), behaviors that are peculiar to a specific person, is too narrow. This definition is shared by most of the personality theories, including Freud's and Jung's models. However, narrow as it is the concept does not fit into valency theory. To integrate it I had to redefined it including not solely the person, but also the significant other and the resulting bond between the twos.

Although it is associated with the person, personality is not considered only as an individual attribute but as a simultaneous result of an interactive encounter between two subjects; it is thus a dyadic entity. Therefore, I abandoned using the term "personality" which is too person-centred for another which fits more into the conception of a person discussed in valency theory, namely "sociality". Unlike personality as generally defined, sociality with all its characteristics is not what separate a person from another, what what bounds them.

Sociality represents the person's all emotional, intellectual and behavioral responses to others. It comprises two poles: One pole, the other's pole, is directed from oneself to the other person, and the other, namely the self pole, is directed from the other person to oneself.

Moreover, sociality reflects the subject's valency structure. Like for valency structure, there are thus four different types of sociality: dependency sociality type, fight sociality type, pairing sociality type, and flight sociality type.

Finally, sociality is not considered as the primary factor determining the person's reaction. What constitutes the primary determinant factor is the subject's valency structure with its two components (active valency and auxiliary valency). Sociality also is determined by the valency structure, especially the active valency which constitutes the most influential and determinant component.

To conclude, what I have attempted to do in this paper is not merely comparing theories, and changing a concept for another. By abandoning the term personality for sociality, I am trying to suggest and remind the reader about something obvious neglected by most personality theories, namely the fact that a person is a person only when related to other persons.

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