



Allport, Aristotle and Aquinas: An interdisciplinary definition of personality

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ABSTRACT

Countless definitions of personality have been proposed throughout history. As a consequence, contemporary psychology lacks a definition that elicits broad consensus and avoids ambiguity. To overcome this difficulty it seems beneficial to draw on the field of philosophical anthropology, as an epistemologically prior and more general discipline. Understanding that a single manuscript cannot achieve consensus, an interdisciplinary contribution is proposed through a dialogue between two definitions of personality. On the one hand, that elaborated by the father of personality psychology, Gordon Allport, which is the best known and most cited of all. On the other hand, the one developed by Martín Echavarría, inspired by the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. From this interdisciplinary dialogue, a variant of Echavarría's definition and a brief definition of personality are proposed. It is expected that this contribution would not only help to the study of personality, but also to the interdisciplinary development of the discipline of psychology.

1. Introduction

Countless definitions of *personality* have been proposed throughout the history of psychology (Allport, 1961; Bergner, 2020). In fact, it can be argued that each text dedicated to this concept offers a different definition (Cervone & Pervin, 2022; Engler, 2009; Funder, 2015; Larsen & Buss, 2017). If we also consider that the concepts of *personality*, *character* and *temperament* overlap, and that they often try to account for the same thing (Allport, 1937), we can claim that there have been different attempts to put into words what is meant by *personality*. One of the consequences of this proliferation of definitions is the lack of consensus regarding the appropriate formulation (Feist et al., 2013; Mischel et al., 2007). This shows the problematic possibility that we may be understanding different things when we use this concept in multiple contexts.

The myriad of definitions and the challenge in reaching consensus underscore the magnitude of the task and, simultaneously, the importance of new proposals that attempt to accurately address the concept of personality. To achieve this, it seems beneficial to approach the realm of philosophical anthropology; indeed, as an epistemologically prior and

more general discipline, it can help identify blind spots that escape purely intradisciplinary inquiry. Attempts of this kind have been the proposal of the Greek concept of *form* to understand the whole human being (Johnson, 2013), the evaluation of the concept of personality in Allport for philosophical personalism (Jastrzebski, 2011), the reconceptualization of personality disorder from a psycho-ethical approach (Álvarez-Segura et al., 2017) and the relationship between emotional self-regulation and personality from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective (Rojas-Saffie & García-Matte, 2024).

In our view, Aristotelian-Thomistic (A-T) anthropology has much to offer contemporary psychology, because it articulates “a vision of the individual human as one complete, individual substance, but one that has many different powers and abilities. Importantly, though, those distinct powers and abilities all arise from an underlying unity, and from related and cooperating principles” (Spalding et al., 2019, p. 11). This perspective serves as a theoretical, ethical, and also theological basis for integrating diverse social sciences contributions: “the wisdom of his approach involves integrating the truth and relevance of apparently divergent positions in nuanced ways” (Titus, 2006, p. 77). The value of this approach has been recognized by several renowned psychologists,

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