



*Personality Theory:  
A Biosocial Approach  
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I believe that we are getting to the point where we might be ready for a unified theory of personality. This online book is my attempt to look at the study of personality in terms of issues rather than individual (and often contradictory) theories.

Those of you who have read some of my other online work will recognize many bits and pieces of it, but I have reorganized the material in a more thematic way so that, while you will see some of the historically significant theories and research, you will also see more clearly how these are leading to something more integrated.

There are also many places where I have added my own ideas regarding where I think the field is headed. The goal here is not to convince you of one theory or another, but rather to help you sort through the work of others and formulate your own best understanding of what it means to be a person.

I hope that you find this book interesting and helpful!

This is dedicated to the spirit of **Gardner Murphy**, whose book *Personality: A Biosocial Approach* was my introduction to psychology.

- George Boeree

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# 1. Introduction

Personality psychology is the study of the *person*, that is, the whole human individual. Most people, when they think of personality, are actually thinking of personality *differences* – types and traits and the like. This is certainly an important part of personality psychology, since one of the outstanding characteristics of persons is that they can differ from each other quite a bit. But the main part of personality psychology addresses the broader question: "What is it to be a person?"

Personality psychologists view their field of study as being at the top (of course) of a pyramid of other fields in psychology, each more detailed and precise than the ones above. Practically speaking, that means that personality psychologists must take into consideration biology (especially neurology), evolution and genetics, sensation and perception, motivation and emotion, learning and memory, culture and society, developmental psychology, psychopathology, psychotherapy, and whatever else might fall between the cracks.

Since this is quite an undertaking, personality psychology may also be seen as the least scientific (and most philosophical) field in psychology. It is for this reason that most personality courses in colleges still teach the field in terms of *theories*. We have dozens and dozens of theories, each emphasizing different aspects of personhood, using different methods, sometimes agreeing with other theories, sometimes disagreeing.

Like all psychologists – and all scientists – personality psychologists yearn for a *unified* theory, one we can all agree on, one that is firmly rooted in solid scientific evidence. Unfortunately, that is easier said than done. People are very hard to study. We are looking at an enormously complicated organism (one with "mind," whatever that is), embedded in not only a physical environment, but in a social one made up of more of these enormously complicated organisms. Too much is going on for us to easily simplify the situation without making it totally meaningless by doing so!

## 1.1 Science

*It is a mistake to believe that a science consists in nothing but conclusively proved propositions, and it is unjust to demand that it should. It is a demand only made by those who feel a craving for authority in some form and a need to replace the religious catechism by something else, even if it be a scientific one. Science in its catechism has but few apodictic precepts; it consists mainly of statements which it has developed to varying degrees of probability. The capacity to be content with these approximations to certainty and the ability to carry on constructive work despite the lack of final confirmation are actually a mark of the scientific habit of mind. – Sigmund Freud*

The traditional, idealized picture of science looks like this: Let's start with a theory about how the world works. From this theory we *deduce*, using our best logic, a hypothesis, a guess, regarding what we will find in the world of our senses, moving from the general to the specific. This is rationalism. Then, when we observe what happens in the world of our senses, we take that information and *inductively* support or alter our theory, moving from the specific to the general. This is empiricism. And then we start again around the circle. So science combines empiricism and rationalism into a cycle of progressive knowledge.

Now notice some of the problems science runs into: If my theory is true then my hypothesis will be supported by observation and/or experiment. But notice: If my hypothesis *is* supported that does *not* mean that my theory is true. It just means that my theory is not necessarily wrong! On the other hand, if my hypothesis is *not* supported, that *does* in fact mean that my theory is wrong (assuming everything else is right and proper). So, in science, we never have a theory we can say is unequivocally true. We only have theories that have stood the test of time. They haven't been shown to be false... yet!

This is one of the things that most people don't seem to understand about science. For example, people who prefer creationism over evolution will say that, since evolution is "only a theory," then creationism is just as legitimate. But evolution has been tested again and again and again, and the observations scientists have made since Darwin have held up tremendously well. It's like saying that a thoroughbred race horse is "just a horse," and therefore any old nag is just as good!

On the other hand, creationism fails quickly and easily. Carbon dating shows that the world is far older than creationists suggest. There are fossils of species that no longer exist. There is a notable lack of fossils of human beings during the dinosaur age. There are intermediate fossils that show connections between species. There are examples of species changing right before our eyes. There is a vast body of related knowledge concerning genetics. But with every piece of evidence shown to the creationists, they respond with what the logicians call an ad hoc argument.

An ad hoc argument is one that is created after the fact, in an attempt to deal with an unforeseen problem, instead of being a part of the theory from the beginning. So, if there is a rock that is too old, or a fossil that shouldn't be, the creationist might respond with "well, God put that there in order to test our faith," or "the days in Genesis were actually millions of years long" or "mysterious are the ways of the Lord." Obviously, creationism is based on faith, not science.

Science is always a work in progress. No one *believes* in evolution, or the theory of relativity, or the laws of thermodynamics, the same way that someone believes in God, angels, or the Bible. Rather, we *accept* evolution (etc.) as the best explanation available for now, the one that has the best reasoning working for it, the one that fits best with the evidence we have. Science is not a matter of faith.

Science is, of course, embedded in society and influenced by culture and, like any human endeavor, it can be warped by greed and pride and simple incompetence. Scientists may be corrupt, scientific organizations may be dominated by some special interest group or another, experimental results may be falsified, studies may be poorly constructed, scientific results may be used to support bad policy decisions, and on and on. But science is really just this method of gaining knowledge – not knowledge we can necessarily be certain about, but knowledge that we can rely upon and use with some confidence. For all the negatives, it has been the most successful method we have tried.

### 1.2 Methods

If you take two different forms of measurement – such as a measuring tape and a weight scale – and we measure the height and weight of a few hundred of our nearest and dearest friends, we can examine whether the two measures relate to each other somehow. This is called *correlation*. And, as you might expect, people's heights and weights do tend to correlate: The taller you are, generally speaking the heavier you are. Of course, there will be some folks who are tall but quite light and some who are short but quite heavy, and lots of variation in between, but there will indeed be a modest, but significant, correlation.

You might be able to do the same thing with something involving personality. For example, you might want to see if people who are shy are also more intelligent than people who are outgoing. So develop a way to measure shyness-outgoingness and a way to measure intelligence (an IQ test!), and measure a few thousand people. Compare the measures and see if they correlate. In the case of this example, you would likely find little correlation, despite our stereotypes. Correlation is a popular technique in psychology, including personality.

What correlation can't help you with is finding what causes what. Does height somehow cause weight? Or is it the other way around? Does being shy cause you to be smarter, or does being smarter cause you to be shy? You can't say. It could be one way or the other, or in fact there could be some other variable that is the cause of both.

That's where *experimentation* comes in. Experiments are the "gold standard" of science, and all of us personality psychologists wish we had an easier time doing them. In the prototypical experiment, we actually manipulate one of the variables (the independent one) and then measure a second variable (the dependent one).

So, for example, you can measure the degree of rotation of the volume knob on your radio, and then measure the actual volume of the music that comes out of the speakers. What you would find, obviously, is that the further you turn the knob, the louder the volume. They correlate, but this time, because the knob was actually manipulated (literally in this case) and the volume measured after, you know that the rotation of the knob is in some way a cause of the volume.

Taking this idea into the world of personality, we could show people scary movies that have been rated as to how scary they are. Then we could measure their anxiety (with an instrument that measures how sweaty our hands get, for example, or with a simple test where we ask them to rate how frightened they are). Then we can see if they correlate. And, of course, they would to some degree. Plus we now know that the scarier the movie, the more scared we get. A breakthrough in psychological science!

There are several things that make measurement, correlation, and experiments difficult for personality psychologists. First, it isn't always easy to measure the kinds of things we are interested in in any meaningful way. Even the examples of shyness-easygoingness and intelligence and anxiety are iffy at best. How well do people recognize their own anxiety? How well does a sweat-test relate to anxiety? Can a paper-and-pencil test really tell you if you are smart or shy?

When we get to some of the most important ideas in personality – ideas like consciousness, anger, love, motivations, neurosis – the problem looks at present to be insurmountable.

Another difficulty is the problem of *control*. In experiments, especially, you need to control all the irrelevant variables in order to see whether the independent variable actually affects the dependent variable. But there are millions of variables impacting us at every moment. Even our whole history as a person is right there, influencing the outcome. No sterile lab will ever control those!

Even if you could control many of the variables – the psychological version of a sterile lab – could you now generalize beyond that situation? People act differently in a lab than at home. They act differently when they are being observed than when they do in private. Experiments are actually social situations, and they are different from other social situations. Realism might be the answer, but how does one accomplish realism at the same time as one keeps control?

Then there's the problem of *samples*. If a chemist works with a certain rock, he or she can be pretty confident that other samples of the same rock will respond similarly to any chemicals applied. Even a biologist observing a rat can feel pretty comfortable that this rat is similar to most rats (although that has been debated!). This is certainly not true for people.

In psychology, we often use college freshmen as subjects for our research. They are convenient – easily available, easy to coax into participation (with promises of "points"), passive, docile.... But whatever results you get with college freshmen, can you generalize them to people in factories? to people on the other side of the world? to people 100 years ago or 100 years in the future? Can you even generalize to college seniors? This problem transcends the issues for quantitative methods to qualitative methods as well.

What about *qualitative methods*, then? Qualitative methods basically involve careful observation of people, followed by careful description, followed by careful analysis. The problem with qualitative methods is clear: How can we be certain that the researcher is indeed being careful? Or, indeed, that the researcher is even being honest? Only by replicating the studies.

There are as many qualitative methods as there are quantitative methods. In some, the researcher actually introspects – looks into his own experiences – for evidence. This sounds weak, but in fact it is ultimately the only way for a researcher to directly access the kinds of things that go on in the privacy of his or her own mind! This method is common among existential psychologists.

Other researchers observe people "in the wild," sort of like ethologists watch birds or chimps or lions, and describe their behavior. The good thing here is that it is certainly easier to replicate observations than introspections. Anthropologists typically rely on this method, as do many sociologists.

One of the most common qualitative method in personality is the *interview*. We ask questions, sometimes prearranged ones, sometimes by the seat of our pants, of a variety of people who have had a certain experience (such as being abducted by a UFO) or fall into a certain category (such as being diagnosed as having schizophrenia). The case study is a version of this that focusses on gaining a rather complete understanding of a single individual, and is the basis for a great deal of personality theory.

### 1.3 Phenomenology

*Anyone who wants to know the human psyche will learn next to nothing from experimental psychology. He would be better advised to abandon exact science, put away his scholar's gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling-hells, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text-books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with a real knowledge of the human soul. – Carl Jung*

Phenomenology is the careful and complete study of phenomena, and is basically the invention of the philosopher Edmund Husserl. Phenomena are the contents of consciousness, the things, qualities, relationships, events, thoughts, images, memories, fantasies, feelings, acts, and so on, which we experience. Phenomenology is an attempt to allow these experiences to speak to us, to reveal themselves to us, so we might describe them in as unbiased a fashion as possible.

If you've been studying experimental psychology, this might seem like another way of talking about objectivity. In experimental psychology, as in science generally, we try to get rid of our nasty subjectivity and see things as they truly are. But the phenomenologist would suggest that you can't get rid of subjectivity, no matter how hard you try. The very attempt to be scientific means approaching things from a certain viewpoint – the scientific viewpoint. You can't get rid of subjectivity because it isn't something separate from objectivity at all.

Most of modern philosophy, including the philosophy of science, is dualistic. This means that it separates the world into two parts, the objective part, usually conceived of as material, and the subjective part, consciousness. Our experiences are then the interaction of this objective and subjective part. Modern science has added to this by emphasizing the objective, material part, and de-emphasizing the subjective part. Some call consciousness an "epiphenomenon," meaning an unimportant by-product of brain chemistry and other material processes, something that is, at best, a nuisance. Others, such as B. F. Skinner, see consciousness as nothing at all.

Phenomenologists suggest that this is a mistake. Everything the scientist deals with comes "through" consciousness. Everything we experience is colored by "the subjective." But a better way to put it is that there is no experience that does not involve both something which is experienced, and something which is experiencing. This idea is called *intentionality*.

So phenomenology asks us to let whatever we are studying – whether it be a thing out there, or a feeling or thought inside us, or another person, or human existence itself – to reveal itself to us. We can do this by being open to the experience, by not denying what is there because it doesn't fit our philosophy or psychological theory or religious beliefs. It especially asks us to *bracket* or put aside the question of the objective reality of an experience – what it "really" is. Although what we study is always likely to be more than what we experience, it is not something other than what we experience.

Phenomenology is also an interpersonal undertaking. While experimental psychology may use a group of subjects so that the subjectivity can be removed from their experiences statistically, phenomenology may use a group of co-researchers so that their perspectives can be added together to form a fuller, richer understanding of the phenomenon. This is called *intersubjectivity*.

This method, and adaptations of this method, have been used to study different emotions, psychopathologies, things like separation, loneliness, and solidarity, the artistic experience, the religious experience, silence and speech, perception and behavior, and so on. It has also been used to study human existence itself, most notably by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

### 1.4 Beware!

Ultimately, science is just careful observation plus careful thinking. So we personality psychologists do the best we can with our research methods. That does leave us to consider the business of careful thinking, though, and there are a couple of particulars there to consider as well.

First, we must always be on guard against *ethnocentrism*. Ethnocentrism is (for our purposes) the tendency we all have to see things from the perspective of our own culture. We are born into our culture, and most of us never truly leave it. We learn it so young and so thoroughly that it becomes "second nature."

Sigmund Freud, for example, was born in 1856 in Moravia (part of what is now the Czech Republic). His culture – central European, German speaking, Victorian era, Jewish... – was quite different from our own (whatever that might be). One thing his culture taught was that sex was a very bad thing, an animal thing, a sinful thing. Masturbation was thought to lead to criminality, retardation, and mental illness. Women who were capable of orgasms were assumed to be nymphomaniacs, unlikely to make good wives and mothers, and possibly destined for prostitution.

Freud is to be respected in that he was able to rise above his cultural attitudes about sex and suggest that sexuality – even female sexuality – was a natural (if animalistic) aspect of being human, and that repressing one's sexuality could lead to debilitating psychological disorders. On the other hand, he didn't quite see the possibility of a new western culture – our own – wherein sexuality was not only accepted as normal but as something we should all be actively engaged in at every opportunity.

A second thing to be on guard against is *egocentrism*. Again, for our purposes, we are talking about the tendency to see our experiences, our lives, as being the standard for all people. Freud was very close to his mother. She was 21 when she had him, while his father was 40. She stayed home to raise him, while his father was working the usual 16 hour days of the time. Little Freud was a child genius who could talk about adult matters by the time he was five. He was, as his mother once put it, her "golden Siggy."

These circumstances are unusual, even for his time and place. Yet, as he developed his theory, he took it for granted that the mother-son connection was at the center of psychology for one and all! That, of course, was a mistake: egocentrism.

Last, we need to be on guard against *dogmatism*. A dogma is a set of ideas that the person who holds those ideas will not permit to be criticized. Do you have evidence against my beliefs? I don't want to hear them. Do you notice some logical flaws in my arguments? They are irrelevant. Dogmas are common in the worlds of religion and politics, but they have absolutely no place in science! Science should always be open to new evidence and criticism. Science isn't "Truth;" it is just a movement in the general direction of truth. When someone claims they have "Truth," science comes to a grinding halt.

Well, sadly, Freud was guilty of dogmatism. He became so attached to his ideas that he refused to accept disagreement from his "disciples." (Notice the religious term here!) Some, like Jung and Adler, would eventually go on to develop their own theories. If only Freud had not been dogmatic, if only he had been open to new ideas and new evidence and allowed his theory to evolve openly, we might all be "Freudians" today – and "Freudian" would mean something quite different and much grander.

## 2. Consciousness

"What is consciousness" is not a single question, but a whole set of questions. Here are just a few:

- Why do we experience certain sensations not as information, but as qualities? Why, for example, do we experience a wavelength of light as blue, rather than as a colorless piece of data?
- How do we manage to experience things in the absence of sensations, such as in imagination and dreams?
- Why do our experience of things cohere as things, rather than as a distribution of points? Why, for example, do we see the world as we do, rather than as something like a pointillist painting?
- And why do our experiences seem connected over time, rather than as discrete events? Why do we hear a melody, and not a series of notes?
- How do things develop meaning? Why do they develop a coherence in the sense that we respond to them in a purposive fashion?
- Why do we experience ourselves as selves? How do we find a coherence that separates us from other aspects of our experiencing?
- Where do we get the sense of self as subject or ego? Why doesn't the information simply pass through us, as we assume it does in machines or very primitive creatures?

The list could go on, and each question analyzed into more detailed questions, but this is more than enough to start with. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a coherent set of general answers to these questions from a naturalistic perspective.

### 2.1 Qualities

Science, in order to go beyond the subjective, is forced to deal with reality via measurement. If I have a meter stick and you have a meter stick, our judgements of some event are more likely to be "objective." And so we have measured everything in sight and claimed understanding. What is "blue?" It is a wavelength of light, in the neighborhood of 475 nm.

The error we make is to believe that the measurement *explains* the quality. Instead, the wavelength is actually no more than a measurement of the quality. Blue is first, then we describe the blue as having a characteristic: If approached in a certain way (the measurement), it appears to involve light waves that measure 475 nm. 475 nm is an abstraction from the quality of blue and does not exhaust the phenomenon.

To borrow one of J. J. Gibson's (1979) famous phrases, the experiential quality we call blue is "in the light." There is no need to wonder how we turn wavelengths into blue. And, again following Gibson, there is no need to wonder how we "bind" the "dots" of sensory information together in time and space: We are only perceiving what is, in fact, already there for us, in the light, the sound, the touch, and so on. Perceptual consciousness is external to us, and a better way to approach it is to say that we are "open" to certain real qualities (and, of course, closed to many more).

I believe the world is composed of nothing but qualities – colors, sounds, temperatures, shapes, textures, movements, images, feelings, and so on, all of them simply there, ready for someone to perceive.

Unlike materialists, I do not reduce these qualities to atoms or energies or anything "physical". To me, these atoms and such are just explanatory devices, good for helping us to predict and control, especially when we can't see what's going on. But they are nothing without the qualities they refer to.

However, when a tree falls in the forest, the sound happens, whether there is someone there to hear it or not. Unlike philosophers like Bishop Berkeley, I don't think that all of these qualities require the presence of a mind (even God's) to exist; some do, but others don't. Further, I believe there are plenty of qualities – an infinity of them, perhaps – that we do not and cannot perceive at all. Some animals, for example, can hear sounds and see colors we cannot. These sounds and colors are every bit as real and rich as a high C or blue-green. Neither does it require that there be representations of things "in" our minds or brains: There are no "blue" neural firings or "C major" neurotransmitters, and neither are there such mysterious entities as "qualia" in our heads.

Although the question of how or why we experience qualities is sometimes referred to as the "hard problem" of consciousness studies (Chalmers, 1995), it is only difficult if one insists on taking a strong materialistic approach. Although materialism is usually associated with empirical science, the existence of matter is in fact not empirically demonstrable. As Bishop Berkeley (1710) and later David Hume (1748) and others argued so well, we never "see" matter; we only experience various forms and qualities which, due to consistency, we choose to *label* matter. We then take a giant leap to the idea that this matter is fundamental to everything else.

Nevertheless, we call some of these qualities "matter" and some we call "mind." "Matter" includes the ones that emphasize form, resistance, and especially separateness from mind. The ones we call "mind" include those qualities that are more elusive, more personal, harder to share. Both are real, neither is superior in some way. There are as well qualities of time, space, number, causality, value, and so on, that are hard to place in either category.

I do think that mental qualities came into existence later in the course of the universe's history than material qualities. I believe they emerged from the special organizations of matter we call life. But saying that doesn't dismiss the reality of mental qualities, anymore than water is less for being made of hydrogen and oxygen.

### 2.2 The senses

It is a mistake, of course, to view consciousness as a thing inhabiting a place. Consciousness is a process, a verb, if you like, and an active and transitive one at that. It is better to say something like "I 'touch' the world," rather than "the world is in my consciousness." So let us take touch as the archetypal sense, and take shape as the archetypal quality. Then let us define form as a set of structural relationships extended over time and space – i.e. a Gestalt.

Feeling (and seeing) shapes is the most "primary" (in Galileo's sense) of experiences. Curvature, angularity, circularity, rectilinearly.... Why do we have fewer epistemological problems with these than with other qualities? Because they can be measured, recorded, and reconstructed... and then experienced by someone else. The Gestalt or form is maintained, even if the form has to be "deconstructed" and "reconstructed." Forms are communicable. I would like to suggest that "secondary" qualities, even flavors and colors, can be understood in the same fashion – they are just less communicable.

Look at taste and smell: These primitive senses allow us to experience the shapes of certain molecules. Could we say that sweet is round? Bitter jagged? Are pungent odors hairy? Florals soft? These are just similes, but they suggest a very useful way of conceiving of flavors and scents.

Or hearing: Hair cells "touch" the physical vibrations conducted through air, bone, membranes, and fluids, vibrations which maintain their forms through all these changes. Rhythm is very "primary" – a form over time. Is a high C really that different from a rhythm? Is a C major chord? I recall as a kid making rulers vibrate on the edge of my school desk: I liked hearing the rhythmical tapping of wood on wood and the "overtones" at various pitches! We only need to remember that forms can be temporal as well as spatial to admit hearing into the class of primary senses.

And colors: The cones in our retinas "touch" the light waves. Try some "synesthetic" analogies on for size: The sound of blue as electromagnetic vibrations; The taste of blue, the light waves experienced like the shapes of molecules are experienced in taste and smell; Or the shape of blue in analogy to the shapes of things we touch – blue's "roundness" or "angularity"....

Again, it is the communicability of shapes that leads us to view them as somehow more "primary" than tastes, scents, sounds, and colors. And, although some of these qualities remain difficult to communicate, we can indeed communicate a high C or a C major chord (deconstructing and reconstructing the Gestalts) quite easily, with our voices or our instruments. The difficulty is a practical one, not a philosophical one.

Frank Jackson's famous color scientist Mary, if she knew everything there is to know about blue, could indeed recreate blue from the descriptions she has, assuming that she is "open" to blue (capable of seeing it) at all. But that means she will have actually experienced blue prior to anyone finally showing it to her! The thought experiment is actually a pretty poor one.

### 2.3 Neediness

A better way to approach the idea of consciousness is to say that we are "open" to certain real qualities (and, of course, closed to many more). The interaction of a conscious creature and these qualities *is* conscious experience. Consciousness happens when an organism is "interested" in its environment (where there is *Sorge*, as Heidegger put it). This "interest" is based on an organism's neediness (desire, libido). We open ourselves to qualities in that we have evolved (and learned) to find certain qualities relevant (meaningful) to us as organisms which must constantly adapt in order to continue in existence.

To be conscious, I must be separate from the world, yet open to it; I must be capable of changing the world and being changed by it, while maintaining a degree of integrity and continuity. And I must desire my integrity and continuity. Without desire, the qualities of the world merely pass through me, like information through a computer. It is desire that makes that information relevant, meaningful.

What do I desire? First, I desire to maintain myself. This means more than physical survival; It means maintaining the integrity and continuity of my differentiation from the world and other consciousnesses. That is, I desire to maintain my *self*.

Consciousness beyond simple sentience is a matter of perceiving both the world and the self simultaneously. One could say that an organism looks out at the world "through" itself (analogously to how the rods and cones receive light that has passed through layers of capillaries, bipolar neurons, supporting cells....) from the perspective of its needs. But there is no absolute "ego" behind consciousness: There is only need and the layers of sedimented life experience.

The self is not a simple thing. It includes the ego, which is the point from which we experience the world, the limiting perspective, the "I." It also includes my body, the object "out there" in the world which "carries" the ego, and through which the ego relates to the world. And finally, it includes my mind, my skills and memories, the accumulated "residue" of my experiences, with which the ego relates to the world. We desire to maintain all three of these things – ego, body, and mind – even though doing so may conflict.

At least in higher animals, we can also speak of a *self-consciousness*, not just in the sense that an animal is aware of, say, its paw, but in the sense that we place ourselves in our perception of the world. It is as if we had to look at reality "through" the totality of who we are, mind and body.

Finally, I am capable of reflection. I can take as the object of my attention not only what is "out there," but the processes of my own mind. This double-mindedness – having both "immediate consciousness" and "reflective consciousness" – may be unique to human beings.

Concern for integrity and continuity requires that I be "in time," that is, that I perceive and affect the *direction* of events. This in turn requires that I be able to make use of past experience to anticipate possible futures. The ability to anticipate requires the ability to perceive something in its absence – i.e. to imagine. This "second sight" is also the root of remembering and thinking, and it gives us a degree of freedom from the stream of events around us.

Being able to anticipate means anticipating threats to the maintenance of integrity and continuity, and effecting responses to those threats. I thereby come to desire not only maintenance but enhancement of my self. The desire to maintain and enhance the integrity and continuity of self is commonly called *actualization*.

As a desiring being, I cannot be indifferent to the world. I relate to it passionately. Interactions which prevent my actualization I experience negatively, as pain and distress. Those which promote my actualization I experience positively, as pleasure and delight. The intensity of the feeling is the measure of the degree of relevance or meaning the interaction has for me.

My understanding of the world and myself is continually tested through my anticipations and actions. When my understanding is inadequate, I feel distress, and I attempt to repair the inadequacy through further anticipation and action. As these responses return me to adequate understanding, I feel delight.

Physical pain and pleasure are cyclical breakdowns and restorations of integrity that mimic distress and delight. They do not in themselves improve understanding, but they can and do reinforce the impact of otherwise distressful or delightful events. Pain and pleasure are my experiences of maintenance and enhancement developed *evolutionarily* rather than through refinement of understanding.

Ironically, pain and distress are what we feel when our neediness is most evident and our awareness brightest. Pleasure and delight are what we feel as we move towards unconsciousness! When there are *no* problems or problems-being-solved, there is no emotion. Only in unconsciousness is the differentiation of self and world obliterated and we are, for a while, truly at peace. But then, we aren't able to enjoy it! When there is no emotion, there is no consciousness.

My capacity for anticipation permits certain emotions that are at a remove from the immediate situation. Anxiety, for example, is the distressful anticipation of distress. I also experience the delightful anticipation of delight, which we could call hope or eagerness, depending on the details. Anger is distress tempered by the expectation that the distress may be lifted through action upon the world. Sadness is distress that acknowledges the need for continued efforts at changing myself. And so on.

Some inadequacies are actually included in understanding, and therefore cause no distress or effort at refinement. Others are dealt with through avoidance and other defensive maneuvers. However, actualization ultimately requires that I not avoid facing my inadequacies. In fact, I should actively seek them out. This requires a capacity for getting through pain, distress, and anxiety commonly called *will*.

The world offers the mind an endless selection of potential distinctions. Desire leads us to discover distinctions and make differentiations. Understanding is improved through the increasingly fine differentiations we are required to make.

While differentiations are being laid down, I am conscious of them. Once they are in place, they become unconscious. When they fail, however, I am once again conscious of them. When I sit on a chair, I do so without conscious attention to the process; When I expect a chair but it is not there, I become aware of my understanding regarding chairs and sitting, though the chair is absent and I remain standing. I am likewise conscious of differentiations when I use them in the absence of or with disregard for the world. I then experience them as memories, thoughts, images, and so on.

### 2.4 The I and the me

Whether I am observing reality or pondering mental images, there always seems to be a perspective from which I am experiencing. G. H. Mead (1934) referred to this as the "I." It is not actually a very powerful presence: Most of my experiencing is still outwardly directed, a parade of images and sounds, even when I am imagining or dreaming.

But there are aspects of my perception itself that appear to always be with me. When I am perceiving visually, there is an occasional awareness that I am looking out through my eyes. I notice the bony structures around my eyes, especially my nose. My view is always framed with the fuzzy outline of my glasses. I notice my body flowing out from underneath my cheekbones. There is a physical point-of-view.

I mentioned earlier that temporal coherence is given to us by the contents of consciousness themselves: There is a sense that each moment leads to a future moment, which is in part actually present in each moment. The past, especially the immediate past of seconds or minutes before, is also somewhat present. The now has a certain thickness to it; it is never truly only the present moment, but rather a minute or two thick.

But a part of this temporal coherence seems to be something that I have added to the picture: There are occasions when more distant past events arise to make the present meaningful, and when imagined futures do the same. My past experiences and my plans for the immediate and distant future are actually present to one degree or another, and my experiencing is thereby infused with "me."

It is as if I were looking at the world through myself, through all the sediment that has collected around my idea of who I am over the years. The metaphor that strikes me is the way our rods and cones receive light that must actually pass through the interneurons to which they will send their messages and the capillaries from which they get their sustenance.

The experiencing is also colored by mood and emotion. I find myself, for example, annoyed at a distracting noise and irritated at the difficulty of finding the right word. It seems that there is always an emotional color to my experiences, even when things are rather peaceful. The moods are clearly an expression of myself: They are perceptions of my relationship to my environment, perceptions of how events are meaningful to me, how they are valued or devalued.

Ultimately, consciousness happens when an organism is "interested" in its environment. This "interest" is based on an organism's neediness (desire, libido). We open ourselves to qualities in that we have evolved and learned to find certain qualities relevant (meaningful) to us as organisms which must constantly adapt in order to continue in existence.

It is these various things – the physical embodiment, the temporal coherence, the sedimentation of my life's experiences, the coloring of mood and emotion – that constitute what James called the "me." And it is "me" that comes before the perspectival "I."

### 2.5 Perspectives

A conscious entity can only be conscious of some small portion of total reality. It is limited by its position in space, by the variety of its sense organs, by the sensitivity of those organs, by its access to its own processes, and more besides. In other words, each person has his or her own perspective on and understanding of the world.

One consequence of perspectivity is that the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity is no longer terribly meaningful: All you can ever have is a perspective, and although some perspectives are no doubt better than others, none qualifies as the ultimate perspective.

If you want to understand the entirety of reality, you will need to add all possible perspectives together. This is, of course, impossible, so we can only do our best to comprehend the infinite. And in order to move towards comprehension, we must have a great respect for the variety of perspectives we come across, because each can and will contribute to our understanding of the whole.

The differentiations that are meaningful for you may not be meaningful for me. Yet they both refer to the same reality. We are therefore ultimately capable of understanding each other.

## 3. Perception

Perception – seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, feeling the positions of joints and the tension of muscles, balance, temperature, pain... – begins with the stimulation of sensory neurons. Each sense involves highly evolved cells which are sensitive to a particular stimulus: Pain receptors respond to certain chemicals produced when tissues are damaged; Touch receptors involve cells with hairs which, when bent, cause signals to travel down the cell's axon; Balance, movement, and even hearing involve similar hair cells; Temperature sensitive neurons have hairs that expand and contract in response to heat and cold; Taste and smell receptors respond to environmental molecules in the same way that other neurons respond to neurotransmitters; And the neurons of the retina respond to the presence of light or the specific frequency ranges of light we perceive as color.

But perception is more than just passive reception of information. Perception is an *active* process: Touch, for example, requires movement – something that nowadays we call "scanning." Touch includes information about you (e.g. your muscles, joints) as well as about what you are touching. We can say the same about hearing. We should really call it listening! The sound itself is intrinsically moving, of course – it is constantly changing. If it didn't, we would stop hearing it!

And the same is true about vision. Vision involves constant movement – of our eyes, head, and body, or of the things we see or all of the above. The outer parts of our retina are particularly sensitive to motion – so when something comes into our field of vision, our attention is drawn to it. If we kept our eyes and the scene we are looking at perfectly still, everything would all become white!

We should also keep in mind that perception is not something done with the eyes or the ears or any specific sense organ. It is a multi-sensory, full bodied thing, totally involving: "A one-year-old child standing on the floor of a room will fall down if the walls are silently and suddenly moved forward a few inches, although nothing touches him." (Neisser, p. 116, referring to Lee and Aronson, 1974)

### 3.1 The "raw material" of perception

The perceptual process has a lot to work with from the very beginning: We are not in the position of having to make sense of a mosaic of meaningless dots of light or disconnected sounds or smells. Even as far back as the 1890's, William James pointed out that we not only perceive *things* but *relationships* such as "and" and "or" as well.

Take your hands and hold them up in front of you, separated by a few inches. You see your hands, of course, and it isn't hard to imagine that perceiving them is a matter of certain patterns of light followed by similar patterns of neural firings. But notice that you are also perceiving your hands as "next to each other," while in fact that perception is not directly presented to you as a stimulus in the way your hands themselves are.

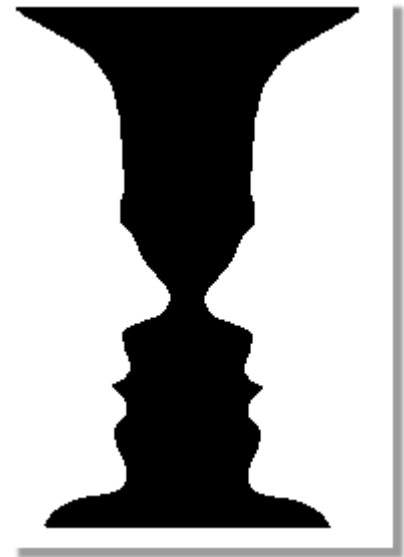
Much of what we experience comes "pre-packaged," ready for our consumption. Nature provides "edges" – *changes* in light patterns, *transitions* of sounds – for us to use to pick objects out from their environment. For example, we see things as standing out from their background, something called the *figure-ground* phenomenon, introduced by the Danish phenomenologist Edgar Rubin (1886-1951).

The Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin demonstrated the phenomenon by creating his classic example of an ambiguous figure-ground situation:

Basically, we perceive one aspect of an event as the *figure* and the other as the *ground*. In Rubin's figure, there is no *true* figure and ground. It is a drawing that *pretends* to be an object. We are forced by the ambiguity of it to use the shifting attention we give the vase or the faces to see one thing or the other.

Depth is a major example of something we experience directly, without the need for anticipatory interpretation. Traditionally, it has been assumed that we *construct* depth from such clues as perspective and relative size, as well as the slightly different images we get with binocular vision. But we only need to use such clues when we are looking at pictures that are *faking* depth! Actually, we see *true* depth because it is there to see.

Again, it is the fact that vision involves movement that shows us the truth of the matter. For example, things that are closer to us change position more quickly than things that are farther away, and distant objects form the backgrounds for the closer ones. Remember from childhood how the moon seemed to follow you as you drive along, while telephone poles whipped by at a million miles an hour?



Eleanor Gibson won her place in the history of psychology books with her *visual cliff* experiment. She built a special table: One half had plexiglass with a checkerboard pattern stuck beneath it. The other half also had plexiglass, but the checkerboard pattern was a couple of feet below, on the floor. In between was a board. Infants were then placed on the board, and their mothers were asked to coax them to crawl over one side or the other. Guess which side they didn't want to try? Apparently, babies are quite capable of seeing depth with very little, if any, experience with "cliffs."

### 3.2 Gestalts

The Gestalt psychologists (Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler) discovered many other ways in which what we perceive is already organized.

Gestalt psychology is based on the observation that we often experience things that are not a part of our simple sensations. The original observation was Wertheimer's, when he noted that we perceive motion where there is nothing more than a rapid sequence of individual sensory events. This is what he saw in a toy stroboscope he bought at the Frankfurt train station, and what he saw in his laboratory when he experimented with lights flashing in rapid succession (like the Christmas lights that appear to course around the tree, or the fancy neon signs in Las Vegas that seem to move). The effect is called *apparent motion*, and it is actually the basic principle of motion pictures and television.

If we see what is not there, what is it that we are seeing? You could call it an illusion, but it's not an hallucination. Wertheimer explained that you are seeing an effect of the whole event, not contained in the sum of the parts. We see a coursing string of lights, even though only one light lights at a time, because the whole event contains relationships among the individual lights that we experience as well.

We are built to experience the structured whole as well as the individual sensations. That is what *gestalt* means: a structured whole. And not only do we have the ability to do so, we have a strong tendency to do so. We even add structure to events which do not have gestalt structural qualities.

In perception, there are many organizing principles called *gestalt laws*. The most general is called the *law of pragnanz*. *Prägnanz* is German for pregnant, but in the sense of pregnant with meaning, rather than pregnant with child. This law says that we are innately driven to experience things in as *good* a gestalt as possible. "Good" can mean many things here, such regularity, orderliness, simplicity, symmetry, and so on, which then refer to specific gestalt laws.

For example, a set of dots outlining the shape of a star is likely to be perceived as a star, not as a set of dots. We tend to complete the figure, make it the way it "should" be, finish it. Like we somehow manage to see this as a "B"...



The law of *closure* says that, if something is missing in an otherwise complete figure, we will tend to add it. A triangle, for example, with a small part of its edge missing, will still be seen as a triangle. We will "close" the gap.

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The law of *similarity* says that we will tend to group similar items together, to see them as forming a gestalt, within a larger form. Here is a simple typographic example.

It is just natural for us to see the o's as a line within a field of x's.

Another law is the law of *proximity*. Things that are close together as seen as belonging together. For example...

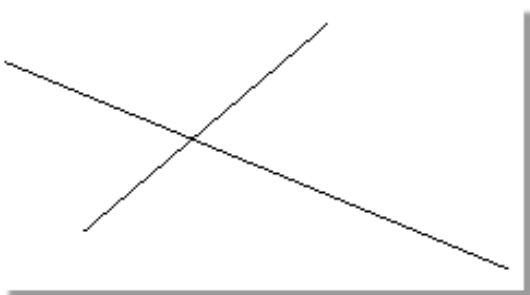
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You are much more likely to see three lines of close-together \*'s than 14 vertical collections of 3 \*'s each.

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[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
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Next, there's the law of *symmetry*. Take a look at this example:

Despite the pressure of proximity to group the brackets nearest each other together, symmetry overwhelms our perception and makes us see them as pairs of symmetrical brackets.



Another law is the law of *continuity*. When we can see a line, for example, as continuing through another line, rather than stopping and starting, we will do so, as in this example, which we see as composed of two lines, not as a combination of two angles...:

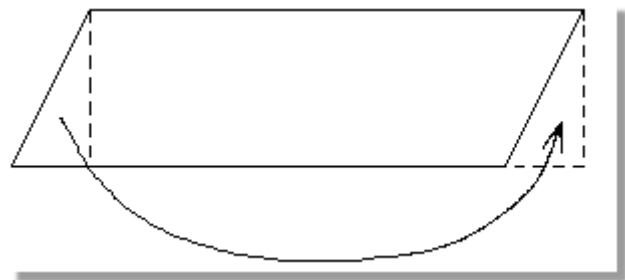
The gestalt psychologists also pointed out that, when we see a duck and an elephant, there is little in their natures that would cause us to perceive them as belonging together. But if they are both walking together in the same direction across a field, their common path is immediately perceived as a connection between them.

But the gestalt principles are by no means restricted to perception – that's just where they were first noticed. Take, for example, memory. That too seems to work by these laws. If you see an irregular figure, such as a badly written name, it is likely that your memory will straighten it out for you a bit. Or, if you experience something that doesn't quite make sense to you, you will tend to remember it as having meaning that may not have been there. A good example is dreams: Watch yourself the next time you tell someone a dream and see if you don't notice yourself modifying the dream a little to force it to make sense!

Gestalt theory is well known for its concept of *insight learning*. People tend to misunderstand what is being suggested here: The Gestalt psychologists are not so much talking about flashes of intuition, but rather solving a problem by means of the recognition of a gestalt or organizing principle.

The most famous example of insight learning involved a chimp named Sultan. He was presented with many different practical problems (most involving getting a hard-to-reach banana). When, for example, he had been allowed to play with sticks that could be put together like a fishing pole, he appeared to consider in a very human fashion the situation of the out-of-reach banana thoughtfully – and then rather suddenly jump up, assemble the poles, and reach the banana.

A similar example involved a five year old girl, presented with a geometry problem way over her head: How do you figure the area of a parallelogram? She considered, then excitedly asked for a pair of scissors. She cut off a triangle from one end, and moved it around to the other side, turning the parallelogram into a simple rectangle. Wertheimer called this *productive thinking*.



### 3.3 The perception of utility

Many psychologists, including phenomenologists and Gestalt psychologists, talk about the direct perception of the use of objects. Some things "afford various possibilities for action, carry implications about what has happened or will happen, belong coherently to a larger context, possess an identity that transcends their simple physical properties." (Neisser, p. 71)

Rubin called it *utility determination*: "We see immediately that a hammer is meant for hammering, a pencil for writing, a pipe for smoking." (From, p. 15) Koffka called this *demand character*: "Each thing says what it is...a fruit says 'Eat me;' water says 'Drink me;' thunder says 'Fear me...'" (Koffka, p. 7)

J.J. Gibson calls them *affordances*: "The affordances of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill.... the 'values' and 'meanings' of things in the environment can be directly perceived." (Gibson, p. 127)

"An elongated object of moderate size and weight affords wielding. If used to hit or strike, it is a *club* or *hammer*. If used by a chimpanzee behind bars to pull in a banana beyond its reach, it is a sort of *rake*. In either case, it is an extension of the arm. A rigid staff also affords leverage and that use is a *lever*. A pointed elongated object affords piercing – if large it is a *spear*, if small a *needle* or *awl*." (Gibson p. 128)

And likewise for objects that afford cutting (knives) or throwing (balls) or binding (rope) or "trace making" (a pen, brush, pencil...).

"The different places of a habitat may have different affordances. Some are places where food is usually found and others where it is not. There are places of danger, such as the brink of a cliff and the regions where predators lurk. There are places of refuge from predators. Among these is the place where mate and young are, the home, which is usually a partial enclosure. Animals are skilled at what the psychologist calls place-learning. They can find their way to significant places." (Gibson, p. 136)

"The medium, substances, surfaces, places, and other animals have affordances for a given animal. They offer benefit or injury, life or death. This is why they need to be perceived." (Gibson, p. 143)

"The different substances of the environment have different affordances for nutrition and for manufacture. The different objects of the environment have different affordances for manipulation. The other animals afford, above all, a rich and complex set of interactions, sexual, predatory, nurturing, fighting, playing, cooperating, and communicating. What other persons afford, comprises the whole realm of social significance for human beings." (Gibson, p. 128)

We will certainly get back to this in later chapters!

## 4. Interaction

Perception, of course, does not only involve that-which-is-given. We participate in it. We add to it.

The great American psychologist George Kelly had a philosophy he called constructive alternativism. Constructive alternativism is the idea that, while there is only one true reality, reality is always experienced from one or another perspective, or alternative construction. I have a construction, you have one, a person on the other side of the planet has one, someone living long ago had one, a primitive person has one, a modern scientist has one, every child has one, even someone who is seriously mentally ill has one.

Some constructions are better than others. Mine, I hope, is better than that of someone who is seriously mentally ill. My physician's construction of my ills is better, I trust, than the construction of the local faith healer. Yet no-one's construction is ever complete – the world is just too complicated, too big, for anyone to have the perfect perspective. And no-one's perspective is ever to be completely ignored. Each perspective is, in fact, a perspective on the ultimate reality, and has some value to that person in that time and place.

In fact, Kelly says, there are an infinite number of alternative constructions one may take towards the world, and if ours is not doing a very good job, we can take another!

Take a look at this photograph. You probably see a young girl playing chess. If you are familiar with the game, you will know the names of the various pieces, such as knights (not horses) and rooks (not castles). You may "see" the potential moves of the pieces – which others would not notice. You might note that she must be playing black, so that the piece in her hand has been captured (a knight – not a bad catch!). You may notice what a novice might not: She has castled (a move involving both king and rook). I, as a chess player, notice that she could probably beat the pants off of me!

If a baby were looking at the chess set, he or she might respond by attempting to eat the pieces. A young child may see the pieces as little people. A chess master may see weaknesses in her position, or traps she may develop. It all depends on who is doing the looking! Perception, although it begins "out there," quickly involves the person, his or her mind, his or her knowledge, based on his or her previous experiences, and so on. Nothing in psychology is ever as simple as it seems!

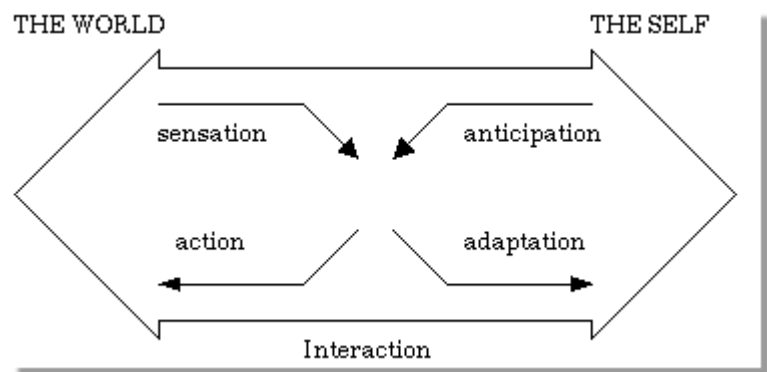


Kelly began his theorizing with what he called his "fruitful metaphor." He had noticed long before that scientists and therapists often displayed a peculiar attitude towards people: While they thought quite well of themselves, they tended to look down on their subjects or clients. While they saw themselves as engaged in the fine arts of reason and empiricism, they tended to see ordinary people as the victims of their sexual energies or conditioning histories. But Kelly, with his experience teaching Kansas college students and counseling Kansas farm people, noted that these ordinary people, too, were engaged in science, and they, too, were trying to understand what was going on.

So people – ordinary people – are scientists, too. They have their constructions of reality, like scientists have theories. They have anticipations or expectations, like scientists have hypotheses. They engage in behaviors that test those expectations, like scientists do experiments. They improve their understandings of reality on the bases of their experiences, like scientists adjust their theories to fit the facts. From this metaphor comes Kelly's entire theory.

### 4.1 Anticipation

Here is a highly simplified model of the interaction between ourselves and the world around us. At its simplest, the world gives us events; we in turn give those events meaning by interpreting and acting upon them. There are some obvious details here: sensations (input from the world, stimuli) and actions (output to the world, responses). There was a time when psychologists thought this was enough. Now we know better, and we add two more details, which I will call anticipation and adaptation.



Anticipation is a little difficult to explain. We have a certain knowledge of the world, a "model" of it. This model includes everything from little details like which shoe you put on first to complex things like how you feel about yourself and your life. We use this model to anticipate – expect, predict – what will happen in the next moment or in the next ten years.

If I close my eyes, I expect that when I open them the room will still be there, I will still be there, and so on. If it were to all disappear on me, I would be seriously surprised.

If I keep my eyes closed and focus on the expectation, rather than on the world "out there," I can imagine it. We can understand images and thoughts as anticipations temporarily detached from the stream of events!

We also anticipate on a more long term basis: We have expectations about what college will and won't do for us, about love being forever, and the sun rising, and so on.

Anticipation is particularly significant in understanding language: from moment to moment, we anticipate which sounds are likely to come next, which grammatical constructions, which meaningful combinations... We can make sense even of a fuzzy, somewhat jumbled conversation.

Anticipation also helps us to understand how we manage to pay attention to some things and not others. How is it we can be listening to a friend in a noisy bar and manage to somehow "filter out" all the other conversations and yet "let in" our friend's voice? We don't perceive *everything* that stimulates our senses. How do we "filter out" the unimportant (less meaningful) stuff? We don't: We just don't select it! We select things by means of anticipation. We hear the conversation that we are busily involved in, the one we are anticipating moment to moment. The rest is just noise. Likewise with the other senses: We see what we are looking for, we don't see what we are not looking for.

There are, of course, a few exceptions: certain built-in attention-getters, e.g. loud noises, flashes of light, painful stimuli, sudden movements. These involve inborn responses!

Adaptation is also more difficult to explain. Sometimes, we don't anticipate well. For example, you think you see a friend coming at you and you prepare to give a hearty "hi!" but just as you raise your arm to wave and begin to open your mouth, you realize it's not your friend at all but a complete stranger. (If possible, you convert the raised arm into a back-scratch, and the open mouth into a yawn. If it's too late and you've already said hi, just pretend you know them. This will drive them crazy.)

Whenever you make mistakes, you need to figure out what went wrong, what to do about it, how to make sense of it. As you do, you are improving your understanding of the world and your relation to it; you are improving your "model." This is adaptation. In our example, you may now have a model of the world that includes look-alikes, embarrassing mistakes, and a tendency to hold-off a little in the future before being so exuberant with your hello's. Adaptation is learning.

This additional layer to interaction of anticipation and adaptation is crucial: It means that our behaviors and experiences are not just a function of some common reality. We, ourselves, our understandings of reality, are inevitably and intrinsically a part of our behaviors and experiences. Without "self," reality would be meaningless.

Kelly organized his theory into a fundamental postulate and 11 corollaries. His fundamental postulate says this: "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events." (This and all subsequent quotations are from Kelly's 1955 *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*.) This is the central movement in the scientific process: from hypothesis to experiment or observation, i.e. from anticipation to experience and behavior.

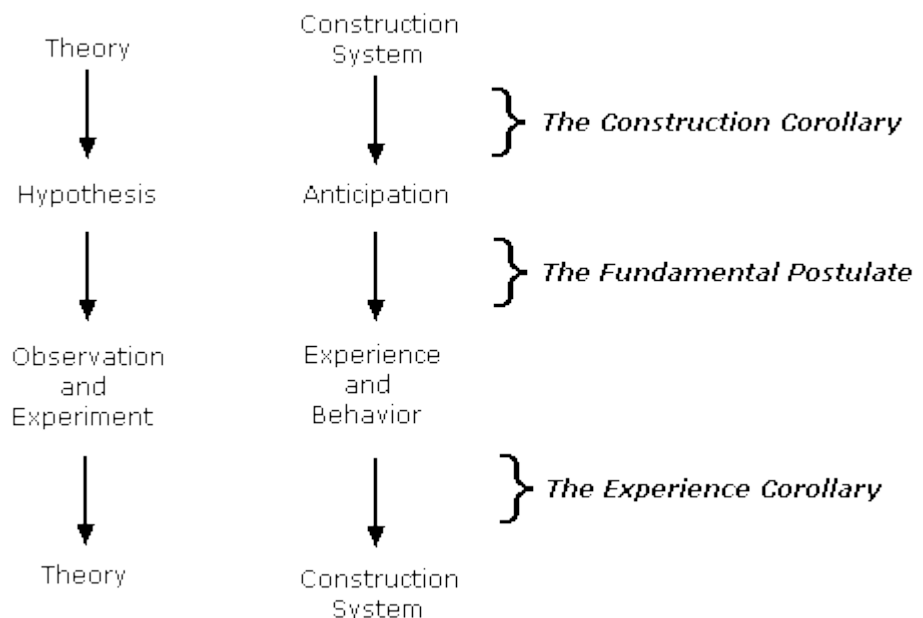
By processes, Kelly means your experiences, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and whatever might be left over. All these things are determined, not just by the reality out there, but by your efforts to anticipate the world, other people, and yourself, from moment to moment as well as day-to-day and year-to-year.

So, when I look out of my window to find the source of some high-pitched noises, I don't just see exactly and completely what is out there. I see that which is in keeping with my expectations. I am ready for birds, perhaps, or children laughing and playing. I am not prepared for a bulldozer that operates with a squeal rather than the usual rumbling, or for a flying saucer landing in my yard. If a UFO were in fact the source of the high-pitched noises, I would not truly perceive it at first. I'd perceive something. I'd be confused and frightened. I'd try to figure out what I'm looking at. I'd engage in all sorts of behaviors to help me figure it out, or to get me away from the source of my anxiety! Only after a bit would I be able to find the right anticipation, the right hypothesis: "Oh my God, it's a UFO!"

If, of course, UFO's were a common place occurrence in my world, upon hearing high-pitched noises I would anticipate birds, kids, or a UFO, an anticipation that could then be quickly refined with a glance out of the window.

The construction corollary:  
"A person anticipates events by construing their replications."

That is, we construct our anticipations using our past experience. We are fundamentally conservative creatures; we expect things to happen as they've happened before. We look for the patterns, the consistencies, in our experiences. If I set my alarm clock, I expect it to ring at the right time, as it has done since time immemorial. If I behave nicely to someone, I expect them to behave nicely back.



This is the step from theory to hypothesis, i.e. from construction system (knowledge, understanding) to anticipation.

The experience corollary: "A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events."

When things don't happen the way they have in the past, we have to adapt, to reconstruct. This new experience alters our future anticipations. We learn.

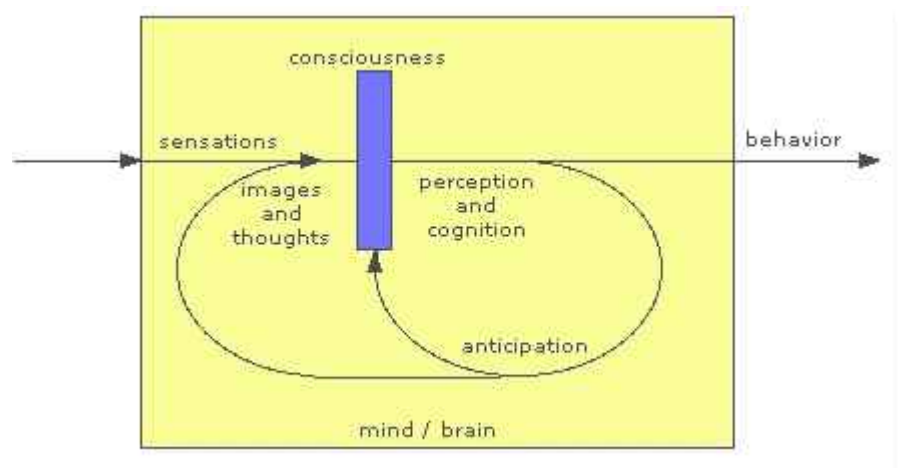
This is the step from experiment and observation to validation or reconstruction: Based on the results of our experiment – the behaviors we engage in – or our observation – the experiences we have – we either continue our faith in our theory of reality, or we change the theory.

## 4.2 Images and ideas

If I close my eyes, I expect that when I open them you will still be there, the room will still be there, I will still be there, and so on. If all of you were to disappear on me I would be seriously surprised. We also anticipate on a more long term basis: We have expectations about what college will and won't do for us, about love being forever, and the sun rising, and so on.

If I keep my eyes closed and focus on the expectation, rather than on you and the world "out there," I can imagine you. We can understand images and thoughts as anticipations temporarily detached from the stream of events! The father of cognitive psychology, Ulric Neisser, said that "Images are not pictures in the head, but plans for obtaining information from potential environments.... When you have an image of a unicorn at your elbow – while quite certain that unicorns are purely mythical animals – you are making ready to pick up the visual information that the unicorn would provide, despite being fully aware that your preparations are in vain." (Neisser pp. 131-132)

A mental image is a blend of anticipation and a kind of scanning for the information that makes images more a matter of "drawing" the image than passively receiving it. Researchers are even talking about us having a "visuo-spatial sketchpad", probably in the frontal lobe! The same thing with imagining a song: I feel the muscles in my throat loosening and tightening as if I were singing or humming the tune. I am not suggesting that the image is reducible to motor movements. Rather, the presence of motor movements suggests that images are anticipatory.



It follows that images are more a matter of unrealized looking than internalized seeing. When we imagine the unicorn, we "draw" the horse's head with a goat's beard and single horn with our anticipations. In the same way, we listen for the song, rather than hear it "in our heads", or explore with restrained movement an imaginary surface rather than experience faint sensations of touch.

However, people also experience some rather striking mental images. Some things do seem to pop into my awareness with amazing clarity. And, at the opposite extreme, we quite often anticipate in a more "generic" fashion, as when we anticipate a human being – any human being – and not some specific one. That is to say, sometimes we anticipate with an idea more than with an image. The sudden complete image and the generic idea require a somewhat richer conception of anticipation.

Imagine that the signals coming from our sensory neurons are met by neurons that have been "primed" by our anticipation of those sensations. That is, based on the events of the prior moments of interaction between the neural structures that are the result of our lifetime of learning, neurons or neural nets are activated, and when the sensory circumstances that they predict are confirmed by incoming sensory signals, these neurons or neural nets pass that information deeper into (let us assume) association cortex, where they lead to the next set of anticipations. If the anticipations are not confirmed by incoming sensory information (say within a certain time span), signals indicating that non-confirmation are sent on to trigger new anticipations that attempt to correct the mistaken anticipations (along with actions and emotional experiences as well, one presumes). This latter effect could be considered the basis of learning.

Now imagine a situation where we detach ourselves from incoming sensory information: We are asleep and dreaming, perhaps, or have closed our eyes or are staring at a blank page. We can nevertheless generate anticipations, and set neurons or neural nets into that anticipatory mode. But, instead of having them send signals only when confirmed by sensory information, our new state allows these anticipatory neurons to pass on their signals deeper into association cortex without confirmation. They may even have further repercussions by triggering new anticipations, actions, emotions, and even learning.

In the usual perceptual interaction with the world, all the neurons that are primed to receive incoming information from the senses at a particular time could be considered our total anticipation for that moment. In the restricted mode, retracted from interaction with the senses, all the primed neurons would be an image or an idea.

Now consider the difference between images and ideas: Images may be understood as the activity of anticipatory neurons nearer the sensory end of our mental structure. A strong image is the anticipation of a highly specific set of sensations.

Given a "white" sensory field (white light or white noise, for examples), strong image anticipation will select from that field the expected qualities, giving us a visual or auditory experience that, in circumstances of minimal or unusual information, could be mistaken for an actual event. Perhaps you have had the experience of thinking that someone called your name while you were in the shower. The "white noise" of the water provides a blank slate for you to project your expectations. The complete or near-complete absence of sensory input of sleep also gives a kind of empty surface to "project" image anticipations onto. In the absence of actual sensory information to compare it to, the image will be perceived as more-or-less vivid.

Ideas, on the other hand, reflect the activity of anticipatory neurons deeper in the mind's structure which are the main ingredients of imageless thought. The idea of "horse" may manifest itself at any moment in the image of some particular horse, but need not. Ideas should not, therefore, be confused with "fuzzy" perceptions. Ideas are the "purer" meanings of our anticipations, experienced at a greater distance from sensation.

### 4.3 Thinking

Thinking, says Ulric Neisser, is also a matter of imagery: "The ability to divide, detach, and manipulate our own anticipations is immensely important. It is, I believe, the fundamental operation in all so-called higher mental processes." (Neisser, p. 133) He goes even further by suggesting that perception, imagery, learning, memory, behavior... are all of a piece, which he refers to as cognition: "Cognition is the activity of knowing; the acquisition, organization, and use of knowledge." (Neisser, p. 1)

Many teachers make an attempt at teaching their students to think, but eventually conclude that only a small portion of them have any potential for it. After looking carefully – phenomenologically – at the act of thinking, I have come to believe that their despair is rooted in a misconception: They see thinking as something that happens only in our heads. It is this limitation that in turn limits their view of their students' potentials.

But let's start with that traditional, internal kind of thinking. Take a look at your own thought processes: What do you find? Muffled words in your own voice, perhaps accompanied by throat and tongue movements? Pale images, cartoon-like, seen only a portion at a time and then fleetingly? Unexpressed actions and unfulfilled perceptions? It doesn't seem like much to work with, does it?

The words and images are "pale" because we are not looking at the sights and sounds themselves but at our *readiness* for them. When we are ready for a sight or sound or act, that readiness becomes the background that reveals the absent figure. We are set, prepared physically and mentally, for a certain word or image and, though it doesn't arrive, it feels as if it did.

The most robust aspect of thought, oddly, is *affect*. Feelings mark our presence, our involvement, in our own experiences. They are there in our thoughts as well. It is these feelings that we usually refer to as the *meaning* of an experience: If we imagine a blue sky, we don't so much see a blue sky in our minds as "see" the feelings we have on a crisp autumn day or at a midsummer picnic – what a blue sky *means* to us.

Some might object and mention that their images are quite intense and detailed, and I would have to acknowledge that readiness and feelings can be extraordinary. But only when we cannot or will not compare our thoughts with fuller experiences do we mistake them for fuller experiences. Otherwise, thinking – at least the kind that goes on in our heads – seems a rather introverted, inhibited, incomplete thing.

Incomplete though it may be, thinking is something most of us teachers are quite good at. As kids, we could "do things" in our heads, silently, remaining seated and disturbing no one. This quality endeared us to our teachers. They valued it, so we valued it. Now that we are teachers ourselves, we value it in our students. When we don't find it, we are disappointed and complain about motivation or intelligence or prior teachers.

*But thinking doesn't have to be silent and still.* Readiness and feelings are part of all our experiences. So, in a sense, thought is a part of all our experiences. It's a little harder to see it when it's blended into perceptions and behaviors, but I suggest it is much more powerful this way.

For example, most people, even ones who aren't good at silent thinking, can and do talk. In fact – isn't it amazing? – when I talk, I don't usually put the words together carefully, grammatically, beforehand in my mind. They come out of my mouth already so arranged! Speech is not preceded by thought; *speech is thinking out loud.*

And others can hear me when I talk. Instead of having to take both sides of an argument myself, I can engage someone else to take a side. We can have a *dialog*, a conversation. Conversations are much more entertaining – and have much more creative potential – than any solitary cogitation.

The same thing with images: We can draw, diagram, graph, paint, sculpt, and otherwise turn our "readinesses" into realities. They are clearer then; they hold still longer and can be pondered; we can interact with them. We can show them to others.

We can also turn our images into *actions*. As human beings, it's no surprise that most of our images are human ones. And, as human beings, we are equipped to demonstrate these images with our own bodies. In elementary and secondary school, we're always trying to keep children from "acting out" their problems; perhaps we should *encourage* it. Perhaps they're just thinking!

And we can let go of some of those unexpressed actions mentioned earlier. There's a great advantage to doing that: The world responds to our actions as it will, not as we want it to. In other words, the world, too, can be engaged in a dialog, with all the potential for creativity inherent in any conversation.

The feelings, of course, will still be there, at least if these perceptions and behaviors and dialogs have any meaning. Beware: If there are no feelings – positive or negative – there is very little thinking of *any* sort!

When my parents taught us kids how to play a card game, we always played the first few hands with our cards face up on the table. We do this when we teach people how to think, too. But with thinking, it doesn't really matter if you ever learn to keep your cards to yourself. Real thinking can and does occur in our interaction with the world and others. So let's drop this notion of thinking as something inside our heads. Perhaps there really isn't that much going on in there.

### 4.4 Person perception

Philosophers sometimes talk about the "problem of the other:" How is it that we know that another person is in fact another person, like us, conscious, capable of thought and feeling? Do we notice that there are similarities to how we ourselves behave, and somehow reason our way to that conclusion? Or is it that we just *see* their person-hood? I believe the latter.

Franz From had people look at a variety of movies and describe what they saw. He discovered that "When we have to describe a behavior sequence, we generally do so by indicating a perception of some psychological state in the behaving person." (From, p. 7) "...(W)hen we perceive human behavior as action...implicit in the perceived material sequence there is a certain *sens*. By this, I mean that we are perceiving the behavior as being governed by a mental factor." (From, p. 69) This mental factor is also called intention, purpose, or meaning.

We can see *sens* in the behavior of animals, even insects: I can't tell you how impressed I've been with praying mantises and garden spiders. They really look at you, follow your movements, respond with great care... even though their brains are as small as a grain of rice!

This even applies to things that aren't really alive at all – i.e. we can be quite mistaken about *sens*! Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel did an experiment involving a film of triangles moving about in "purposeful" ways: People saw the triangles as having intentions! Rubin referred to other people, animals, and even apparently purposeful triangle as psychoid entities.

When we observe people, the *absence* of meaning is actually the special case! From tells this story:

One afternoon when Professor Rubin and I had already put on our overcoats, ready to go home from the laboratory, Rubin said: 'See here, From.' At the same moment he sat down at his desk and looked straight ahead while he made short abrupt horizontal movements right and left in the air in front of him with his right hand, keeping the index finger and the thumb closely together. I just managed to think something like 'What on earth has happened to Rubin,' when he got hold of a pencil and a piece of paper, drew a system of small arrows and pushed the paper across to me, saying: 'Here is the code to the safety lock on my bicycle. Would you mind riding the bike home for me?' The earlier perception of something completely incomprehensible was immediately replaced, and the purpose of his behavior, i.e., to note down the code which he 'had in his fingers,' became quite apparent.... (From, p. 13)

Often we treat people exactly as we treat other events: abusing them, ignoring them, taking them for granted.... You've all felt it, I'm sure: being treated like a thing instead of a person. But more often, I like to believe, we treat people as something more: We treat them as meaning-giving creatures like ourselves, as people. This is the basis of social interaction.

An odd addendum: Since we give the world meaning, we can give it social meaning when it suits us. This means we wind up engaging in social interaction in the absence of other people! We obey traffic signals (some of us) on empty streets in the middle of the night; we laugh or cry with characters in books or figures on a screen; we respond to the works of artists hundreds, even thousands of years dead.... In other words, social interaction includes behavior and experience in the implied or symbolic presence of others, as well as in their actual presence.

### 4.5 Social interaction

George Kelly uses four of his corollaries to elaborate:

First, there's the *individuality corollary*: "Persons differ from each other in their construction of events." Since everyone has different experiences, everyone's construction of reality is different. One reality, many perspectives. If you have read any of the preceding chapters, you are way ahead. But if we are all so very unique, how can we relate to others?

That where the *commonality corollary* comes in: "To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to the other person." Just because we are all different doesn't mean we can't be similar. If our construction system – our understanding of reality – is similar, so will be our experiences, our behaviors, and our feelings. For example, if we share the same culture, we'll see things in a similar way, and the closer we are, the more similar we'll be.

In fact, Kelly says that we spend a great deal of our time seeking validation from other people. A man sitting himself down at the local bar and sighing "women!" does so with the expectation that his neighbor at the bar will respond with the support of his world view he is at that moment desperately in need of: "Yeah, women! You can't live with 'em and you can't live without 'em." The same scenario, with minor modifications, can be found among women. And similar scenarios apply as well to kindergarten children, adolescent gangs, the klan, political parties, scientific conferences, and so on. We look for support from those who are similar to ourselves. Only they can know how we truly feel!

Then the *fragmentation corollary* says "A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other." It says that we can be inconsistent within ourselves. It is, in fact, a rare person who "has it all together" and functions, at all times in all places, as a unified personality. Nearly all of us, for example, have different roles that we play in life: I am a man, a husband, a father, a son, a professor; I am someone with certain ethnic, religious, political, and philosophical identifications; sometimes I'm a patient, or a guest, or a host, or a customer. And I am not quite the same in these various roles.

Often the roles are separated by circumstances. A man might be a cop at night, and act tough, authoritarian, efficient. But in the daytime, he might be a father, and act gentle, tender, affectionate. Since the circumstances are kept apart, the roles don't come into conflict. But heaven forbid the man finds himself in the situation of having to arrest his own child! Or a parent may be seen treating a child like an adult one minute, scolding her the next, and hugging her like a baby the following minute. An observer might frown at the inconsistency. Yet, for most people, these inconsistencies are integrated at higher levels: The parent may be in each case expressing his or her love and concern for the child's well-being.

Some of Kelly's followers have reintroduced an old idea to the study of personality, that each of us is a *community of selves*, rather than just one simple self. This may be true. However, other theorists would suggest that a more unified personality might be healthier, and a "community of selves" is a little too close to multiple personalities for comfort!

Finally, how do we interact with people with whom we have very little in common? This is addressed by the *sociality corollary*: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person." Even if you are not really similar to another person, you can still relate to them. You can, in fact, construe how another construes – "get inside his head," and "know what she means." In other words, I can set aside a portion of myself (made possible through the fragmentation corollary) to "be" someone else.

Think about what this means: I have to operate not only in my own "meaning system," but in yours as well, and you have to operate in mine. In order to deal with you, I have to know a little about your mind as well as my own, and you have to know a little about mine. We recognize this every time we talk about "psyching each other out" or when we say "I see where you're coming from!"

### 4.6 The phenomenal field

George Kelly based much of his thinking on the work of two American psychologists named Donald Snygg and Arthur Combs, who said that "all behavior, without exception, is completely determined by and pertinent to the phenomenal field of the behaving organism." The phenomenal field is our subjective reality, the world we are aware of, including physical objects and people, and our behaviors, thoughts, images, fantasies, feelings, and ideas like justice, freedom, equality, and so on. It is, if you like, the inside of that big arrow between World and Self in the diagram at the start of this chapter. Snygg and Combs emphasize, above all else, that it is this phenomenal field that is the true subject-matter for psychology.

And so, if we wish to understand and predict people's behavior, we need to get at their phenomenal field. Since we can't observe it directly, we need to infer it from the things we can observe. We can record behavior, give various tests, talk to the person, and so on – Snygg and Combs are open to a variety of methods. If we have a variety of observers as well, we will eventually come to understand the person's phenomenal field.

And then you are set to understand and predict the person's behavior, since, as the quote above says, all their behavior will follow as a reasonable, meaningful, purposeful response to the person's phenomenal field.

Jean Piaget, the famous Swiss developmental psychologist, began his career as a biologist – specifically, a malacologist, someone who studies molluscs! But his interest in science and the history of science soon overtook his interest in snails and clams. As he delved deeper into the thought-processes of doing science, he became interested in the nature of thought itself, especially in the development of thinking. Finding relatively little work done in the area, he had the opportunity to give it a label. He called it *genetic epistemology*, meaning the study of the development of knowledge.

He noticed, for example, that even infants have certain skills in regard to objects in their environment. These skills were certainly simple ones, sensori-motor skills, but they directed the way in which the infant explored his or her environment and so how they gained more knowledge of the world and more sophisticated exploratory skills. These skills he called schemas.

For example, an infant knows how to grab his favorite rattle and thrust it into his mouth. He's got that schema down pat. When he comes across some other object – say daddy's expensive watch, he easily learns to transfer his "grab and thrust" schema to the new object. This Piaget called assimilation, specifically assimilating a new object into an old schema.

When our infant comes across another object again – say a beach ball – he will try his old schema of grab and thrust. This of course works poorly with the new object. So the schema will adapt to the new object: Perhaps, in this example, "squeeze and drool" would be an appropriate title for the new schema. This is called accommodation, specifically accommodating an old schema to a new object.

Assimilation and accommodation are the two sides of adaptation, Piaget's term for what most of us would call learning. Piaget saw adaptation, however, as a good deal broader than the kind of learning that Behaviorists in the US and Russia were talking about. He saw it as a fundamentally biological process. Even one's grip has to accommodate to a stone, while clay is assimilated into our grip. All living things adapt, even without a nervous system or brain.

### 5.1 Learning

All learning ultimately boils down to *association* and *differentiation*. These are the two basic mechanisms of learning (and memory) that have been proposed over the centuries. Association is learning that two somethings go together. for example, we learn that spoons go with knives, cups go with saucers, thunder follows lightning, pain follows injury, and so on. Ivan Pavlov's famous classical conditioning is a simple example: When a dog hears a bell each time he is fed, he will begin to salivate just upon hearing the bell, because food (and the salivation it reflexively evokes) has become associated with the sound of the bell.

Differentiation is learning to distinguish one something from another, or pulling a figure out of a background. We learn that green, not red, means go, that cats, not dogs, have sharp claws, that soft speech, not yelling, is approved of by one's elders, that birds have feathers but reptiles don't. Differentiation is a matter of improving the quality of one's phenomenal field by extracting some detail from the confusion, because that detail is important, is meaningful, to the person. This is, of course, the same thing as George Kelly's idea of constructs: As a child, the color of someone's skin may be irrelevant; later, others show the child that color is important. Color comes out of the background; black is differentiated from white; the contrast is learned. Why? Not, in this case, because the child has been shown a connection between color and the quality of someone's character, but because a child cannot afford to ignore the differentiations his or her "significant others" make.

It is clear that association and differentiation are two sides of the same coin, but sometimes one is more obvious, and sometimes the it's the other.

We learn from our environment simply by being in it. This is what E. C. Tolman labelled latent learning. But there are several things that help us to retain associations and differentiations: The first is obvious: *Repetition* or rehearsal. Practice makes perfect! Then there are things like *vividness* and *intensity*: We are more likely to remember someone's name if they are loud and colorful than if they are quiet and ordinary. And finally we have *conditioning*, that is, associating the whole association or differentiation with something that motivates us, whether it be food, companionship, money, a sense of pride, a fear of pain, or whatever.

Learning is also enhanced when the differentiations or associations involved have direct relevance to the individual's needs, that is, when learning is *meaningful* to that individual. As long as teachers insist on forcing material that, from the students' perspective, has no relevance to them or their lives, education will be a arduous process. It is curious that a boy who can't remember the times tables can remember baseball statistics back to the stone age, or a girl who can't write a coherent paragraph can tell stories that would make Chaucer proud. If calculus or Shakespeare or any number of subjects we feel children should learn seem to be so difficult for them, it is not necessarily because the children are dumb. It is because they don't see any reason for learning them. Teachers must get to know their students, because the motivation to learn is "inside" them, in their phenomenal fields and phenomenal selves.

The simplest kind of learning, which we share with all animals, we could call *environmental*: On the basis of your present understanding or knowledge, you anticipate certain things or act in a certain way – but the world doesn't meet with your expectations. So, after various other anticipations and actions, you adapt, develop a new understanding, gain new knowledge. *Environmental conditioning* adds a positive or negative consequence to the learning that stamps it in: You run, expecting a 100 yards of open field, when you suddenly smack into a tree you hadn't noticed. You will be more careful in the future!

For a social animal, much of this learning comes from others – i.e. it is *social conditioning*, also known as rewards and punishments. So, instead of learning not to run across streets by getting run-over, you learn by getting punished as you begin to run across the street. Or, instead of learning sex roles by accident (!), you are gently shaped by signs of social approval: "My, aren't you pretty!" or "Here's my little man!"

For example, if every time your run into a tree your head hurts, you will stop running into the tree. On the other hand, if every time you say "shit!" your dad hits you upside the head, you may stop... or you may avoid dad, say shit under your breath, begin to hate your father and authority in general, start beating up little kids after school, and so on, until prison effectively stops the behavior. These kind of things seldom happen with trees.

Social learning includes *vicarious learning* (noticing and recalling the kinds of environmental feedback and social conditioning other people get) and *imitation* (or what Albert Bandura called modeling). This kind of learning is probably the most significant for the development of personality. It can be either conscious, as when we are watching an artist to learn their technique, or unconscious, as when we grow up to be disconcertingly like our parents.

Of the hundreds of studies Albert Bandura was responsible for, one group stands out above the others – the *bobo doll* studies. He made of film of one of his students, a young woman, essentially beating up a bobo doll. In case you don't know, a bobo doll is an inflatable, egg-shape balloon creature with a weight in the bottom that makes it bob back up when you knock him down. Nowadays, it might have Darth Vader painted on it, but back then it was simply "Bobo" the clown.

The woman punched the clown, shouting "sockeroo!" She kicked it, sat on it, hit with a little hammer, and so on, shouting various aggressive phrases. Bandura showed his film to groups of kindergartners who, as you might predict, liked it a lot. They then were let out to play. In the play room, of course, were several observers with pens and clipboards in hand, a brand new bobo doll, and a few little hammers.

And you might predict as well what the observers recorded: A lot of little kids beating the daylight out of the bobo doll. They punched it and shouted "sockeroo," kicked it, sat on it, hit it with the little hammers, and so on. In other words, they imitated the young lady in the film, and quite precisely at that.

Finally, there's *verbal learning* – learning not from the environment or the behavior of others, but from words. Culturally, this is, of course, a highly significant form of learning. Most of the learning we do in our many many years of schooling is verbal. And yet we don't know that much about it at all!

One thing is certain: The old models of the rat with his conditioned and shaped behavior, and of the computer with its programming, are not very good ones. If you really need a simple metaphor for human learning, you are better off thinking of people – especially children – as sponges!

### 5.2 Remembering and forgetting

Remembering (often called retrieval in research literature) comes in two forms: *recall* and *recognition*. Recognition is the easier one: We recognize our friend when we see him coming down the road. Recall is more effortful, and involves mentally rebuilding the experience. It is a myth that we have everything in our heads like a motion picture. Really, we only have a certain amount of "information" in the form of neural connections, which we use to reconstruct our memories.

There is a degree to which we tend to forget things as we get older, and there is some loss of neurons as we age. And there are drugs (such as alcohol) and diseases (such as Alzheimer's) that can speed that loss along. *Amnesia* is what we call the more sudden losses of memory, whether temporary or permanent. The most dramatic examples occur after serious trauma to the head such as sometimes occur with car accidents or gun shots to the head. The usual kind of amnesia is called *retrograde* amnesia, where you can't remember past events. It is usually episodic memory (memories of events in your life, or even of your identity). We seem to retain things like our skills, the ability to speak, definitions of words, and so on.

*Anterograde* amnesia, on the other hand, means you can't make new memories. This is a rare condition and is due to damage to the hippocampus, a part of the limbic system that is found on both sides of the thalamus, underneath the temporal lobes of the cerebrum. A person with anterograde amnesia remembers their past, but will lose his or her experience of all new events in a matter of minutes. If you introduce yourself and have a nice conversation with such a person, then leave and come back ten minutes later, they will act as if they had never met you. In their minds, they never have! A good movie that plays on this is *Memento*. But there is nothing amusing about this disorder. Most of these people wind up in an institution, living each day as if it were the first since their accident.

Most of our day-to-day forgetting seems to be a matter of interference. In other words, there is so much stuff in your head that it is hard to separate one thing from another. It's like trying to find something in a particularly messy attic: It's not that the stuff isn't there somewhere, it's just that you can't access it, sort of like how its hard to find things when your hard-drive is stuffed full of files, or your room is filled with junk.

One of the biggest controversies in psychology today concerns *repression*. Repression is the idea, promoted by Sigmund Freud, that we push painful memories out of our awareness and into a deep, dark place called "the unconscious mind." This is why traditionally we talk about going to a therapist to try to recover these traumatic memories so we can deal with them. There have even been some therapists who use hypnosis to recover repressed memories.

Unfortunately, some of the people who remembered terrible things like being abused as children were discovered to have created these memories under pressure (unintentional, we hope) from their therapists! Some parents were even sent to jail because of their adult children's "recovered memories." But research indicates that not only is there very little evidence of repressed traumatic memories, but trauma – with its emotional intensity – actually makes memories harder to forget!

Of course, people really do get abused, and other traumatic things do happen to people. There have been people who have recovered memories and whose memories have been confirmed. So it is a difficult issue that has yet to be decided.

Memories are not like the recordings you might make with a video camera. Outside information may alter our memories as we reconstruct them. Some people are easily manipulated, and everyone can be manipulated to some degree. This happens, for example, when a lawyer asks you what happened when you saw the accused's car "crash" into his client's car – when in fact it merely bumped into it. Hearing the word "crash" tends to subtly alter your recollection in the direction the lawyer wants it to. Hypnosis is especially powerful when it comes to altering memories. So are drugs. And children are very susceptible to manipulation. This is why children's testimony in court is rarely accepted.

### 5.3 Constructs

A number of psychologists, most notably Gestalt psychologists, suggest that we begin life with differentiation. First you see a lot of undifferentiated "stuff" going on (a "buzzing, blooming confusion," as William James called it). Then you learn to pick out of that "stuff" the things that are important, that make a difference, that have meaning for you. This approach was also taken by George Kelly. He starts with what he called *dichotomy corollary*: "A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs."

Kelly called the basic building blocks of meaning *constructs*: We cut up the world into little pieces, we separate this from that, we make differentiations. There are many other names we could use: contrasts, concepts, percepts, categories, dimensions, and so on, all with slightly differing meanings. Kelly also referred to them as "useful concepts," "convenient fictions," and "transparent templates." You "place" these "templates" on the world, and they guide your perceptions and behaviors. But they all ultimately refer to this process of making one into two: more or less; it's this or it's that; there are two kinds of people in the world; it's them or us; it's got to be one or the other; it's black or white; please answer, yes or no; what goes up must come down.

He often calls them *personal* constructs, emphasizing the fact that they are yours and yours alone, unique to you and no-one else. A construct is not some label or pigeon-hole or dimension that I, as a psychologist, lay on you with my fancy personality tests. It is a small bit of how you see the world.

He also calls them *bipolar* constructs, to emphasize their dichotomous nature. They have two ends, or poles: Where there is thin, there must be fat, where there is tall, there must be short, where there is up, there must be down, and so on. If everyone were fat, then fat would become meaningless, or identical in meaning to "everyone." Some people must be skinny in order for fat to have any meaning, and vice versa!

This is actually a very old insight. In ancient China, for example, philosophers made much of yin and yang, the opposites that together make the whole. More recently, Carl Jung talked about it a great deal. Linguists and anthropologists accept it as a given part of language and culture.

Most of the time, we use only one end or the other of a contrast at a time. These ends are called characteristics or, especially in reference to the characteristics of people, *traits*. But the other end is always there, lurking in the background.

Many constructs have names or are easily nameable: good-bad, happy-sad, introvert-extravert, fluorescent-incandescent.... But they need not be verbal: My cat knows the difference between the expensive cat food and the cheap stuff, yet can't tell you about it; an infant contrasts between mommy and non-mommy; wild animals contrast safe areas and dangerous ones, etc.

Probably, most of our constructs are non-verbal. Even adult humans sometimes "just know" without being about to say – unconscious contrasts, if you like: Think of all the habits that you have that you don't name, such as the detailed movements involved in driving a car. Think about the things you recognize but don't name, such as the formation just beneath your nose? (It's called a "philtrum".) Or what is it about that person that you like or dislike? Or think about all the subtleties of a feeling like "falling in love." Constructs with names are more easily thought about. They are certainly more easily talked about! It's as if a name is a handle by which you can grab onto a construct, move it around, show it to others, and so on. And yet a construct that has no name is still "there," and can have every bit as great an effect on your life!

One more differentiation Kelly makes in regards to constructs is between *peripheral* and *core* constructs. Peripheral constructs are most constructs about the world, others, and even one's self. Core constructs, on the other hand, are the constructs that are most significant to you, that to one extent or another actually define who you are. Write down the first 10 or 20 adjectives that occur to you about yourself – these may very well represent core constructs. Core constructs is the closest Kelly comes to talking about a self.

### 5.4 Mental structures

Constructs don't just float around independently, either. We interrelate and organize them. For example, we can define a category: "Women are adult female human beings." Or we can go a step further and organize things into taxonomies, those tree-like structures we come across in biology: A Siamese is a kind of cat, which is a kind of carnivore, which is a kind of mammal, which is a kind of vertebrate....

Kelly has the *organization corollary*: "Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs." Constructs are not just floating around unconnected. If they were, you wouldn't be able to use one piece of information to get to another – you wouldn't be able to anticipate! When you are talked into a blind date, and your friend spends a great deal of energy trying to convince you that the person you will be going out with has a "great personality", you know, you just know, that they will turn out to look like Quasimodo. How do you get from "great personality" to "Quasimodo?" Organization!

Some constructs are *subordinate* to, or "under," other constructs. There are two versions of this. First, there's a taxonomic kind of subordination, like the "trees" of animal or plant life you learned in high school biology. There are living things vs. non-living things, for example; subordinate to living things are, say, plants vs. animals; under plants, there might be trees vs. flowers; under trees, there might be conifers vs. deciduous trees; and so on.

```

animals – plants
|
flowers – trees
      |
deciduous – conifers
      |
Christmas trees – others

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Mind you, these are personal constructs, not scientific constructs, and so this is a personal taxonomy as well. It may be the same as the scientific one in your biology textbook, or it might not be. I still tend to have a species of conifer called "Christmas trees".

There is also a definitional kind of subordination, called *constellation*. This involves stacks of constructs, with all their poles aligned. For example, beneath the construct conifers vs. deciduous trees, we may find soft-wood vs. hard-wood, needle-bearing vs. leaf-bearing, cone-bearing vs. flower-bearing, and so on.

```

conifers – deciduous
| |
soft-wood – hard-wood
| |
needle-bearing – leaf-bearing
| |
cone-bearing – flower-bearing

```

This is also the basis for stereotyping: "We" are good, clean, smart, moral, etc., while "they" are bad, dirty, dumb, immoral, etc.

Many constructs, of course, are independent of each other. Plants-animals is independent of fluorescent-incandescent, to give an obvious example.

We can also put constructs into more temporal structures, like *rules*. These are often called *schemas* or *scripts*. You can find explicit examples in books about card games, etiquette, or grammar; but you know quite a few rule systems yourself, even if they have become so automatic as to be unconscious!

There are also *narratives* – the stories we have in our minds. These are temporal, like rules, but are amazingly flexible. They can be a matter of remembered personal experiences, or memorized history lessons, or pure fiction. I have a suspicion that these contribute greatly to our sense of identity, and that animals don't have them to the degree we do.

Sometimes, the relationship between two constructs is very *tight*. If one construct is consistently used to predict another, you have tight construction. Prejudice would be an example: As soon as you have a label for someone, you automatically assume other things about that person as well. You "jump to conclusions."

When we "do" science, we need to use tight construction. We call this "rigorous thinking," and it is a good thing. Who, after all, would want an engineer to build bridges using scientific rules that only maybe work. People who think of themselves as realistic often prefer tight construction.

But it is a small step from rigorous and realistic to rigid. And this rigidity can become pathological, so that an obsessive-compulsive person has to do things "just so" or break out in anxiety.

On the other hand, sometimes the relationship between constructs is left *loose*: There is a connection, but it is not absolute, not quite necessary. Loose construction is a more flexible way of using constructs. When we go to another country, for example, we might have some preconceptions about the people. These preconceptions would be prejudicial stereotypes, if we construed them tightly. But if we use them loosely, they merely help us to behave more appropriately in their culture.

One example of loose construction is when describe something: "Women are delicate." As the example is intended to suggest, descriptions, as opposed to definitions, need not be true! Beliefs are similar to, but looser than, taxonomies. Whereas birds definitely (i.e. by definition) are vertebrates and have feathers, it is only my belief that they all fly – I could be wrong! Stereotypes are examples of beliefs; so are opinions. But some beliefs are so strongly held that we see them as definite.

We use loose construction when we fantasize and dream, when anticipations are broken freely and odd combinations are permitted. However, if we use loose construction too often and inappropriately, we appear flaky rather than flexible. Taken far enough, loose construction will land you in an institution.

The *creativity cycle* makes use of these ideas. When we are being creative, we first loosen our constructions – fantasizing and brainstorming alternative constructions. When we find a novel construction that looks like it has some potential, we focus on it and tighten it up. We use the creativity cycle (obviously) in the arts. First we loosen up and get creative in the simplest sense; then tighten things up and give our creations substance. We conceive the idea, then give it form.

We use the creativity cycle in therapy, too. We let go of our unsuccessful models of reality, let our constructs drift, find a novel configuration, pull it into more rigorous shape, and try it out!

The *range corollary* tell us that "A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only." No construct is useful for everything. The gender construct (male-female) is, for most of us, something of importance only with people and a few higher animals such as our pets and cattle. Few of us care what sex flies are, or lizards, or even armadillos. And no-one, I think, applies gender to geological formations or political parties. These things are beyond the range of convenience of the gender construct.

Some constructs are very *comprehensive*, or broad in application. Good-bad is perhaps the most comprehensive construct of all, being applicable to nearly anything. Other constructs are very *incidental*, or narrow. Flourescent-incandescent is fairly narrow, applicable only to light bulbs.

But notice that what is relatively narrow for you might be relatively broad for me. A biologist will be interested in the gender of flies, lizards, armadillos, apple trees, philodendra, and so on. Or a philosopher may restrict his or her use of good-bad to specifically moral behaviors, rather than to all kinds of things, people, or beliefs.

The *modulation corollary* says "The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie. Some constructs are "springy," they "modulate," they are *permeable*, which means that they are open to increased range. Other constructs are relatively *impermeable*.

For example, good-bad is generally quite permeable for most of us. We are always adding new elements: We may never have seen a computer before, or an iPod, or a thumb drive, but as soon as we have, we want to know the best brand to buy. Likewise, a person who will look around for a rock if a hammer is not available uses the construct concerning "things to hammer with" in a permeable fashion.

On the other hand, flourescent-incandescent is relatively impermeable: It can be used for lighting, but little else is likely to ever be admitted. And people who won't let you sit on tables are keeping their sit-upon constructs quite impermeable.

In case this seems like another way of talking about incidental vs. comprehensive constructs, note that you can have comprehensive but impermeable constructs, such as the one expressed by the person who says "Whatever happened to the good old days? There just don't seem to be any honest people around anymore." In other words, honesty, though broad, is now closed. And there are incidental constructs used permeably, such as when you say "my, but you're looking incandescent today!" Permeability is the very soul of poetry!

When there is no more "stretch," no more "give" in the range of the constructs you are using, you may have to resort to more drastic measures. *Dilation* is when you broaden the range of your constructs. Let's say you don't believe in ESP. You walk into a party and suddenly you hear a voice in your head and notice someone smiling knowingly at you from across the room! You would have to rather quickly stretch the range of the constructs involving ESP, which had been filled, up to now, with nothing but a few hoaxes.

On the other hand, sometimes events force you to narrow the range of your constructs equally dramatically. This is called *constriction*. An example might be when, after a lifetime of believing that people were moral creatures, you experience the realities of war. The construct including "moral" may shrink out of existence.

Notice that dilation and constriction are rather emotional things. You can easily understand depression and manic states this way. The manic person has dilated a set of constructs about his or her happiness enormously, and shouts "I've never imagined that life could be like this before!" Someone who is depressed, on the other hand, has taken the constructs that relate to life and good things to do with it and constricted them down to sitting alone in the dark.

Finally, there's the *choice corollary*: "A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system." With all these constructs, and all these poles, how do we choose our behaviors? Kelly says that we will choose to do what we anticipate will most likely elaborate our construction system, that is, improve our understanding, our ability to anticipate. Reality places limits on what we can experience or do, but we choose how to construe, or interpret, that reality. And we choose to interpret that reality in whatever way we believe will help us the most.

Commonly, our choices are between an adventurous alternative and a safe one. We could try to extend our understanding of, say, human social interaction ("partying") by making the *adventurous choice* of going to more parties, getting to know more people, developing more relationships, and so on.

On the other hand, we might prefer to define our understanding by making the *security choice*: staying home, pondering what might have gone wrong with that last unsuccessful relationship, or getting to know one person better. Which one you choose will depend on which one you think you need.

With all this choosing going on, you might expect that Kelly has had something to say about free will vs. determinism. He has, and what he has to say is very interesting: He sees freedom as being a relative concept. We are not "free" or "unfree;" Some of us are free-er than others; We are free-er in some situations than in others; We are free-er from some forces than from others; And we are free-er under some constructions than under others. We will look into the idea of freedom later.

### 5.5 Inferences

One example of how we actually use constructs – at least those that have words attached to them – is describe a person to someone. We then begin to deal with them socially before we actually meet them! They, in fact, could be long dead, and yet we can get to know them to some degree. Each word or phrase we give or hear narrows the range of possible expectations a little more. "He's male." So what. "He's male, in his 50s, chubby, a professor of psychology, kinda odd..." Oh, I think know who you mean. "He wears jeans with suspenders." Bingo! The more that is said, the more precise the anticipations.

Just like any other constructs, our social constructs are organized to some degree so that we can make inferences from one construct to another. Usually, this means going from a fairly obvious characteristic to one that is more "abstract," hidden, or uncertain. For example, when you see a person in a lab coat with a stethoscope around her neck and a certain kind of diploma on the wall, you might infer that this person is a physician. Or if you see someone being rude to someone else, you might infer that she is obnoxious, that is, has some inner trait that will lead her to be rude in other situations and might involve other behaviors as well.

Note that some of our inferences are more a matter of definitions, and others are more a matter of beliefs. Certain college degrees, for example, are crucial to who is or isn't a doctor; their manner of dress, or their bedside manners, might be important, but are not crucial.

There are several different bases for the inferences we make:

(1) A smile is usually correctly understood as an indication of happiness because smiles seem to be a part of our *biology*. There is no culture in the world that does not understand the smile, though many misuse and pervert that understanding.

(2) "The finger" is understood, in our culture, as an indication of contempt, because it is a part of our *cultural communications system*. Language, gestures, clothing, social ritual, occupation, and much of body language is cultural.

(3) Being female has been, in our culture, traditionally assumed to imply poor mechanical ability. This assumption, of course, has lead parents to discourage the development of mechanical abilities in their daughters: Why bother? The inference is, therefore, a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. The expectation creates itself!

(4) Finally, many of our inferences don't really work at all. They are perpetuated because we often ignore or deny contradictions – perhaps they are threatening to us – or the contradictions simply don't show up well, as when we have little contact with some category of people. We could call these *superstitious inferences*.

In linguistics, it is said that language is *generative*. That means that, with a small set of words and a small set of rules of grammar, you can create (generate) a potentially infinite set of meaningful sentences. Well, this generativity is characteristic of all human activity. This means that, no matter how many contrasts you can relate about a chubby professor or whatever, there are still an infinite number of possible characteristics or behaviors that the 50-ish professor can generate. That professor, in other words, can still surprise you!

Since we are still "built" to try to anticipate him, we try one more thing: We try to anticipate others by putting ourselves into our anticipations! We make the assumption that they will do what we would do if we were in their situation and in the kinds of pigeon-holes we have placed them in. I call this "the assumption of empathic understanding."

This seems to be such a strong tendency in human beings that we often do it when we are trying to anticipate non-human beings and things. We tend to be anthropomorphic in our dealings with animals, for example. I tend to see my cat as being manipulative, Machiavellian, even sociopathic when, in fact, she doesn't have the I.Q. of a bean sprout. We even attribute "souls" to non-living things, which is called *animism*. So our ancestors attempted to appease angry volcanoes, or give thanks for the generosity of the earth, and so on.

When all else fails, we expect others to be like us.

Ludwig Binswanger, often considered the "father" of existential psychology, adopted the terms and concepts introduced by the existential philosopher Martin Heidegger. The first and foremost term is *Dasein*, which many existentialists use to refer to human existence. Literally, it means "being there," but it carries quite a few more subtle connotations: The ordinary German use of the word suggests continuing existence, persistence, survival. Also, the emphasis is on the "da" or "there," and so has the sense of being in the middle of it all, in the thick of things. The "da" also carries the sense of being there as opposed to being here, as if we were not quite where we belonged, and were straining towards somewhere else.

Although no precise translation exists, many people use the word existence, or human existence. Existence derives from the Latin *ex-sistere*, meaning to come, step, or stand out or forth. As you can see, that carries some of the same subtle meanings as *Dasein*: being different, moving beyond oneself, becoming.

There are still other names for *Dasein*. Heidegger referred to *Dasein* as an openness (*Lichtung*), such as a meadow, an openness in the forest, since it is *Dasein* that permits the world to reveal itself. Sartre also acknowledges this sense of openness, by referring to human existence as nothingness. Like a hole can only exist in contrast to something solid, *Dasein* stands out in sharp contrast to the "thickness" of everything else.

The main quality of *Dasein*, according to Heidegger, is care (*Sorge*). "Being there" is never a matter of indifference. We are involved in the world, in others, and in ourselves. We are committed to or engaged in life. Just one more thing should be noted: It appears that, where there is consciousness, there is emotion – at very least an emotional tone or mood. As the existentialists point out, we just cannot *not* care. Care is the root of emotions.

The enlightenment philosopher Benedict Spinoza was thinking along these lines many centuries ago:

*i. Desire is the essence of man insofar as it is conceived as determined to any action by any one of its modifications.* [I.e., when there is change, we become motivated, and that is called desire.]

*ii. Joy is man's passage from a less to a greater perfection.* [We feel joy when we improve our abilities to deal with what life hands us.]

*iii. Sorrow is man's passage from a greater to a less perfection.* [We feel sorrow when we find we are not able to deal with life.]

Emotions or feelings have always been a key point of interest in personality theories. At the lowest level, we have pain and pleasure, which are really more like sensations than feelings.

Pain leads to a confrontation of view and viewpoint: It emphasizes the dualism of your "you-ness" over against the world's "other-ness" by *threatening* that "you-ness." Pain attacks you or invades you, and you desire less consciousness of it, or less presence of self to it. Other irritations – itching, hunger, thirst, sexual appetite – although more complex, share a similar essence: You are highly conscious of yourself-in-need.

Physical pleasure, on the other hand, is the *diminishing* of this self-consciousness, a release from the confrontation. As implied by the two points above, we never completely lose our desire, but when the "distance" and "speed" of the release are great – as in orgasm – we come very close! Watch yourself during those moments: Do you look at the walls and think about new wallpaper? Or do you roll up your eyes and become "one with the moment?" The latter, I sincerely hope.

With physical pleasure, you begin to lose your desiring, your perspective, your self.

There is also psychological pain and pleasure – call them distress and delight – which may be the root of all other emotions.

Imagine this: In the middle of the night, you get a bad case of the munchies. So you leave your bed and head for the fridge. It's very dark, but you know your apartment like the back of your hand, so you don't bother with the lights. The coffee table is in the middle of the room and you anticipate its presence and maneuver around it. Perhaps you reach out your hand to touch the edge to confirm your anticipation. You're almost there – five more feet to the fridge – when WHAM! you walk into a solid six foot...something: The unanticipated!

What do you feel at that moment? Perhaps fear, surprise, perhaps sheer terror. Whatever it is, it is rather unpleasant. Let's call it distress.

You are, at the same time, busy "generating anticipations" – making guesses about the nature of the beast, taking actions that might alleviate some of your fears, dashing for the light switch. The lights come on... you're expecting a sex-crazed psycho-killer....

And lo and behold, it's the fridge. You cleaned behind it for the first time in 30 years and left it pulled out. Now how do you feel?

Perhaps you feel relief, a sensation of pleasant resolution. You heave a great sigh, perhaps laugh. Things make sense again. Life is on the right path again. Let's call it delight.

(Note that you might still feel some negative emotion as well, as soon as the initial relief is behind you – like annoyance at your own stupidity. That problem has yet to be resolved!)

Another example: Notice the people coming off one of the "sooper-doooper" roller coasters. Notice their frozen smiles. That's their way of saying "yes! I am alive!"

Let's be more precise: When interaction is problematic, we feel distress. For example, (1) when we fail to anticipate something—like the fridge in our face—we are distressed.

We also feel distress when (2) we anticipate more than one thing at the same time: conflicting anticipations. Which of your roommates is actually the chain-saw killer? Each time you are alone with one of them, you don't know whether to feel secure or to run like the blazes.

And (3) we also feel it when we are faced by general uncertainty: Which way is that cockroach, or rat, or snake going to move next? Perhaps this is the root of our common phobias of these delightful creatures.

Distress can be mild, an irritation or annoyance: When your pen runs out of ink just as you sign a check at the local supermarket.

It can be a bit more intense: The frustration of your car breaking down; the fear as your car careens out of control on the highway; the disgust you feel when you discover that your lover bites the heads off of live chickens.

Delight is the resolution of our distressful problems. We are, actually, developing or elaborating our understanding of the world when we feel delight. Delight is the emotional side of adaptation, of (believe it or not!) learning.

It too can be mild: The pleasant feeling of finishing a crossword puzzle or winning at a game or sport. Or it can be a bit more intense, like the relief you feel when you realize that the roller-coaster only felt like it was leaving the tracks; or the joy of scientific discovery, artistic creation, or mystical experience.

Notice that since solving problems requires having problems, delight depends on distress. Even physical pleasure seems to work like this: You enjoy it more after doing without it for a while, whether "it" is food, drink, or sex! Too much of it, and it doesn't seem to satisfy quite so well. (Note that our response to this is often to try doing it even more! Hence some of our neurotic attitudes towards sex, food, gambling, attention....)

Facing a problem doesn't cause distress – it is distress. The distress is just the feeling-side of the situation. The same points apply to delight. It isn't caused by problem-resolution, it is problem-resolution. And distress and delight don't cause you to seek a solution; they are not "motivating forces."

But there's no doubt that the situations in which you feel distress may be ones that you avoid in the future. Or, if they resulted in delight, they may be ones you seek out in the future. It is the anticipation of distress or delight that is motivating.

One question that is asked repeatedly is "what are the basic emotions." There have been dozens of answers to this, none of which have been completely satisfying. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that emotional response is complex to begin with, and is made even more complex by the fact that we add our thoughts and interpretations to them as well as just "experiencing" them as they are. I suggest that we can organize emotions into seven families:

### 6.1 The surprise family

*surprise, startle, astonishment  
bewilderment, confusion, shock*

What you and I would call emotions (or affect, or feelings) George Kelly called constructs of transition, because they refer to the experiences we have when we move from one way of looking at the world or ourselves to another. At the very beginning of these transitions, we have yet to "decide" whether we should be afraid, or angry, or even happy. These transitional experiences are encompassed by the surprise family of emotions.

At the end of a long day at work, you come home to your apartment, unlock the door, reach for the light switch and... a dozen people jump up from behind couches and chairs! Surprise! they shout. At that moment, you are fundamentally confused. You might even wet yourself! Fortunately, you quickly recognize your friends and family, and enjoy your "surprise" party. But note that many people really hate surprise parties, or surprises of any sort. That is because surprise is essentially a distressful emotion.

It is possible to stretch surprise well beyond its usual brief nature. Take for example that famous experiment the army (supposedly) conducted, where they gave unsuspecting soldiers LSD. When the room starts to melt around you and your friends grow tentacles and everything has a rainbow around it, you will be (assuming you are not an old hand at hallucinogenics) seriously confused, and your distress will escalate to fear and even terror.

Even more confusing than an LSD experience is the experience of finding yourself in the middle of a culture very different from your own. At first, things may seem to be going okay, being oblivious to the fact that you are behaving like a barbarian. But over time, you will find yourself increasingly confused by the fact that you cannot seem to understand these people, and they certainly seem to misunderstand all your good intentions. This is called "culture shock," and is a big part of what lies at the root of homesickness.

## 6.2 The fear family

*vii. Fear is a sorrow not constant, arising from the idea of something future or past about the issue of which we sometimes doubt.* [When we detect the possibility of sorrow in an uncertain situation, we feel fear.]

*fear, threat, terror*

*anxiety, doubt, caution, suspicion*

When you are suddenly aware that your constructs aren't functioning well, you feel anxiety. You are (as Kelly said) "caught with your constructs down." It can be anything from your checkbook not balancing, to forgetting someone's name during introductions, to an unexpected hallucinogenic trip, to forgetting your own name. When anticipations fail, you feel anxiety. If you've taken a social psychology course, you might recognize the concept as being very similar to cognitive dissonance.

Although many definitions have been proposed for anxiety, they tend to revolve around unnecessary or inappropriate fear. Kelly notes that it is actually the anticipation of a fearful situation, accurately or not. Fear, in turn, is usually understood as involving the perception of imminent harm, physical or psychological. These definitions serve well for most circumstances.

Snygg and Combs address clinical concerns by adding the concept of threat. Threat is "the awareness of menace to the phenomenal self". Ideally, the threat is met with appropriate actions and new differentiations that enhance the person's ability to deal with similar threats in the future.

If the person doesn't have the organization to deal with the threat in this way, he or she may resort to stop-gap, sand-bag measures that, while they may remove the threat for the moment, don't actually serve the self in the long-run. Defenses, neurotic and psychotic symptoms, and even criminal behavior is explained in this way.

When we see a problem coming, we may give in to our anxiety and run away, physically or psychologically – a response we call avoidance. With avoidance, we are really trying to get out of an emotional situation and back into a peaceful state. Unfortunately, if you avoid problems and their distress, you also avoid the delight of solutions. Think of some of the common "psychological" ways we avoid life's problems: Alcohol, drugs, television. The goal of avoidance is to be unconscious, or at least unconscious of problems. But too often, the problems are just there waiting for you.

When the anxiety involves anticipations of great changes coming to your core constructs – the ones of greatest importance to you – it becomes a threat. For example, you are not feeling well. You think it might be something serious. You go to the doctor. He looks. He shakes his head. He looks again. He gets solemn. He calls in a colleague.... This is "threat." We also feel it when we graduate, get married, become parents for the first time, when roller coasters leave the track, and during therapy.

The existentialists have some interesting things to add to the idea of anxiety:

Being free means making choices. In fact, we are "condemned to choose," as Sartre put it, and the only thing we can't choose is not to choose. We have to choose even though, as Kierkegaard pointed out, we are in fact ignorant, powerless, and mortal, that is, you never have enough information to make a good decision, you often can't make it happen when you do, and you may die before you get it done anyway!

Heidegger and other existentialists use the word *Angst*, anxiety, to refer to the apprehension we feel as we move into the uncertainty of our future. It is sometimes translated as dread to emphasize the anguish and despair that may come with the need to choose, but anxiety better conveys the generality of it. Anxiety, unlike fear or dread, doesn't have as well-defined an object. It is more a state of being than anything more specific.

Existentialists often talk about nothingness in association with anxiety: Because we are not, like tables, angels, and woodchucks, nicely determined, it sometimes feels as if we are about to slip off into nothingness. We would like to be rocks – solid, simple, eternal – but we find we are whirlwinds. Anxiety is not some temporary inconvenience to be removed by your friendly therapist; it is a part of being human.

### 6.3 The anger family

*xxv. Anger is the desire by which we are impelled, through hatred, to injure those whom we hate.* [Anger is the emotion behind aggression. It includes the desire for revenge.]

*v. Hatred is sorrow with the accompanying idea of an external cause.* [When something, or someone, gives us sorrow, we feel hatred towards that thing or person.]

*xvi. Envy is hatred in so far as it affects a man so that he is sad at the good fortune of another person and is glad when any evil happens to him.* [Envy may include jealousy and lead to spitefulness.]

*anger, rage, frustration*  
*hatred, hostility*  
*envy, jealousy*  
*disgust, contempt, annoyance, indignation*

Anger is our response to a violation of what we perceive to be the rules of reality when we additionally perceive that we cannot and should not adapt to that violation, that its source is out there and should be changed. Anger includes the physical build-up of energy needed to solve the problem at its root. Just try to hold back a baby from crawling, and see what you get. When we act on our anger, it becomes aggression. If someone insults my tie, I can punch his lights out, in which case I can wear my tie in peace. Anger and aggression are not necessarily bad: It also includes things we might today prefer to call assertiveness: Sometimes things are not as they should be, and we should change them to fit our ideals. It includes our anger at social injustices, for example, and aggressive action to correct them. Without assertiveness, there would be no social progress!

Unrealistic anger, the kind we hang on to despite the suffering it causes us and the people around us, could be labelled hostility. Hostility is a matter of insisting that your constructs are valid, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Examples might include an elderly boxer still claiming to be "the greatest," a nerd who truly believes he's a Don Juan, or a person in therapy who desperately resists acknowledging that there even is a problem. Often, what he really needs to do is change himself, adapt. But for some reason – his culture, for example – giving-in is taboo. Like physical pleasures, when it doesn't work right, we do what we always do, only more!

### 6.4 The sadness family

*ix. Despair is sorrow arising from the idea of a past or future object from which cause for doubting is removed.* [Despair happens when fear overwhelms hope.]

*xi. Remorse is sorrow with the accompanying idea of something past which, un hoped for, has happened.* [Remorse is the recognition that things have gone wrong. It might include regret and even guilt, if we had some responsibility in the matter.]

*xix. Humility is the sorrow which is produced by contemplating our impotence or helplessness.* [Although humility sounds negative, it involves a realistic understanding of our limitations.]

*xxiii. Shame is sorrow with the accompanying idea of some action which we imagine people blame.* [Like humility, but based on others' opinions of particular behaviors. We call it guilt if it is entirely internalized.]

*xxi. Despondency is thinking too little of ourselves through sorrow.* [This corresponds to that unrealistic sense of guilt that plagues so many people.]

*sadness, sorrow, depression*  
*anguish, despair*  
*grief, loneliness*  
*shame, embarrassment, humiliation*  
*guilt, remorse, regret*

Sadness is the experience of the world not being as it should be, with the added notion that we have no power to alter the situation. Instead, there is a need to alter ourselves – something we are innately reluctant to do! Grief would be the obvious extreme example: You can't get them back; you can only learn to live with their absence. Many of our major learning experiences involve sadness, such as coming to understand our own limitations, or the limitations of our loved ones, for example. Depression could be defined as unrealistic sadness that continues long after the original situation.

Notice that anger is a little more hopeful; sadness is a little harder to take. People tend to be angry at things before they settle down to accept what they can't change. That says something very important about us: We resist major changes in the self; if we can, we try to make the world fit our expectations. A person who is always trying to make himself fit the world – and especially others' expectations – we call compliant and his emotional state is commonly depressed. He is always trying to adjust himself to others, when often what he needs is to get angry.

Guilt is another key emotion. Related to shame, it is usually understood as the feelings aroused when one contravenes internalized social rules. Kelly provides a useful elaboration: He defines it as the feeling we get when we contravene our own self-definition (which may or may not involve those standard social rules!). This is a novel and useful definition of guilt, because it includes situations that people know to be guilt-ridden and yet don't meet the usual criterion of being in some way immoral. If your child falls into a manhole, it may not be your fault, but you will feel guilty, because it violates your belief that it is your duty as a parent to prevent accidents like this. Similarly, children often feel guilty when a parent gets sick, or when parents divorce. And when a criminal does something out of character, something the rest of the world might consider good, he feels guilty about it!

Heidegger used the German word *Schuld* to refer to our responsibility to ourselves. *Schuld* means both guilt and debt. If we do not do what we know we should, we feel guilt. We have incurred a debt to Dasein. And since Dasein is always in the process of development, never quite finished, we are always dealing with incompleteness, in the same sense that we are always confronted by uncertainty.

Another word that fits in well here is regret. Guilt is certainly a matter of regret over the things we have done – or left undone – that have harmed others. But we also feel regret over past decisions that don't harm anyone but ourselves. When we have chosen the easy way out, or chosen not to commit ourselves or not to get involved, or have chosen to do less rather than more, when we have lost our nerve, we feel regret.

### 6.5 The eagerness family

*vi. Hope is a joy not constant, arising from the idea of something future or past about the issue of which we sometimes doubt. [When we detect the possibility of joy in an otherwise uncertain situation, we feel hope.]*

*viii. Confidence is a joy arising from the idea of a past or future object from which cause for doubting is removed. [Confidence happens when hope conquers fear.]*

*eagerness, anticipation, excitement, confidence  
hopefulness, trust  
curiosity, interest*

Anxiety is the distressful anticipation of distress. From experience, you expect that the situation before you will be unpleasant. This expectation is itself unpleasant: it conflicts with your desire to be a happy, carefree individual. And, often, you try to avoid the situation. Hope is the delightful anticipation of delight. From experience, the problem before you will be resolved, and this is a happy thought. Depending on details, we could also call this eagerness, or even anxiety, as in "I'm anxious to get started!"

Now, the "basic" distress and delight don't usually happen at the same time—since one is the problem and the other the solution. But anticipatory distress and delight – that is, anxiety and hope – often happen at the same time: We call this "mixed emotions." Skimming across deep water on little sticks at 30 miles per hour can make you nervous; water-skiing, on the other hand, sounds like fun. You feel both anxiety and eagerness. Your decision whether to try it will be based on how these two balance out for you. Notice I said "for you." The decision is very much a subjective one, based on what makes you anxious and eager.

More mature people tend to take on problems with an eye towards a solution: They face distress and anxiety with hope and eagerness. This takes a little something—an ability to focus on your goals, and to ignore the pains of getting there. This has been called will-power, self-discipline, need for achievement, delay-of-gratification, and emotional intelligence. I just call it will.

### 6.6 The happiness family

*x. Gladness is joy with the accompanying idea of something past which, un hoped for, has happened. [Gladness is the recognition that things have gone well.]*

*iv. Love is joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause. [When something, or someone, gives us joy, we feel love towards that thing or person.]*

*xvii. Compassion is love in so far as it affects a man so that he is glad at the prosperity of another person and is sad when any evil happens to him. [This, which many would call love, is no doubt the most worthy emotion.]*

*xviii. Self-satisfaction is the joy which is produced by contemplating ourselves and our own power of action. [Today, we might refer to this as self-esteem or self-worth.]*

*happiness, elation, joy, gladness  
contentment, satisfaction  
self-satisfaction, pride  
love, affection, compassion  
amusement, humor, laughter*

Delight is, perhaps, less complex than distress. It is based on the solution to problems, a return to smooth anticipation, and the pleasurable retreat towards a near-unconscious state. Think of the satisfaction one feels when one finishes some task or solves some puzzle, however large or small. If you think about the varieties of distress, you can perhaps see as well the varieties of delight: The relief of escaping the fearful situation; The satisfaction of eliminating the source of your anger; Even the slow return to acceptance after a long stretch of grief.

Love is perhaps the deepest positive emotion most of us ever have the pleasure of experiencing. When we love someone, we find that our own well-being depends on the well-being of our beloved. "Well-being" is a major concept for me, but let's just focus on pleasure for now: If I love you then (among other things) I am pleased by your pleasure. Yet my own pains or needs are not being dealt with. In fact, I may actually undergo further pain or deprivation in order that you may have pleasure!

Without the "release from confrontation" of physical pleasure, I nevertheless experience a pleasure, when gazing deeply into the eyes of my beloved, that takes me "out" of myself.

My favorite example of delight is humor. Humor is the sudden awareness of an alternative construction (i.e. solution) of a distressful situation which dissipates (to some degree) that distress.

Children's humor seems to fit the definition quite well if we understand "alternative construction" to include dissipation of distress not under the control of the child itself, i.e., provided by another. The archetype for children's humor (and, I would argue, of all humor) is "peek-a-boo." First the infant is uncertain, slightly frightened; then the fear is shown to be illusory. Humor is the discovery of safety within fear, just like laughter, humor's physical counterpoint, is relaxation within stress.

If laughter is relatively easy to explain, smiles are more difficult. The smile is certainly not "showing teeth," as some early theorists suggested. If you look at animals doing so, or if you do so yourself, you can see the difference clearly. In its fullest, least inhibited form, i.e. in infants, the smile does involve opening the mouth, but it is to breathe, after having suspended breathing for a moment or two before. This resumption of breathing is related to the sigh of relief and, of course, to the strange spasmodic breathing of the laugh, and it comes only after the "safety" has been revealed.

The most characteristic aspect of the smile is the upturned lips, or rather, if you look closely, the twinkling of the eyes and "popping" of cheeks. The smile is the opposite of the fearful face, just like the sigh of relief is the opposite of the shallow or still breathing of fear. Perhaps the smile is an "over-release" of the fear-face, a reversal of certain muscle tensions past relaxation. (Please notice that fear is not the same, physically or mentally, as anger, i.e., fight and flight, whatever their commonalities in the sympathetic nervous system, are quite distinguishable!) A reasonable hypothesis is that the smile is a sign-stimulus communicating relief from fear or discomfort.

Young children seem especially fond of simple incongruity viewed in safety: Expectations are violated, yet something in the scenario tells the child that the violation need not be feared, e.g. the presence of a parent, distance, the fact that the violation is on television or only in a story, i.e. is not "real," etc. Later, we see more so-called "aggressive" humor, which is not based on aggression at all, but rather, like other humor, on relief from fear: A very young child may cry when another child falls; an older child has learned to more clearly differentiate himself from others and will laugh at another's fall – not out of malice, but out of a relief that it was, in fact, not himself who fell.

The idea that much humor is aggressive in a truly malicious sense comes from the fact that the smile and the laugh may also be generated voluntarily or become associated with things other than humor. Most people have little difficulty differentiating the smirk from the smile or the bark from the laugh. Likewise, we can, without too much practice, differentiate the nervous laugh and the social laugh from a genuine one, and so on. That some humor hurts some people, and that, in fact, there may be at least a malicious component to some humor is, of course, undeniable. Nevertheless, such humor is humor to those people in whom some degree of fear is elicited and then relieved. In addition, such humor may contain something more universally funny.

Note that the nervous smile and laugh reflect a desired or hoped-for resolution, so we may smile when someone gives us bad news, or laugh when we are in difficulty. The fact that we are capable of imagining ourselves out of the situation we are in may be a component of a lot more than just nervous laughter.

To return to children's humor, in older children, many jokes are made at the expense of the adult world. At a certain age, demands are made on the child to live up to the standards of the adult world. This can be quite frustrating and, especially when punishments are involved, quite frightening. Even without punishment, adult standards are often presented as an ideal to which the child must aspire, and the child, by adults or by himself, is shown to be lacking. Fear of unworthiness – i.e. inferiority – becomes a central theme for children, and anything that relieves that fear in a sudden, perspective-changing way is found humorous. When adults make mistakes, even simple ones such as mistakes in speech or forgetting a name, the child's tension are, for a while, relieved.

Again, this is not to say that humor is basically a reflection of power, mastery, or status-demonstration. These things tend to be accompanied by the same kinds of smirks and barks that characterize aggressive "humor," and, in fact, are just variations on that theme. As I pointed out above, hostile laughter is a gesture of superiority which says "you are laughable." That it isn't really so funny is revealed by the fact that, when we say something is "ridiculous," we seldom laugh! Nevertheless, some genuine humor may contain "power" components, and whoever finds status a fearful issue will find such humor amusing.

We also find, in later childhood, the emergence of the "jokester" or comedian. One way to discover safety within a fearful situation is to have someone else attack that situation, especially if that someone has voluntarily taken on the role, accepts the dangers associated with it, finds the laughter of others rewarding, or in other ways manages to circumnavigate the consequences of his actions. Historically, of course, the clown, because he is not "taken seriously," is permitted to attack the powers that be, and others are permitted to laugh as long as they maintain the pretense that they laugh at the clown, not at the butts of his humor. It is generally safer to be in the audience.

Adult humor is a little more difficult to understand. It is clear that the intensity of enjoyment usually greatly exceeds the intensity of the relief-from-confusion intrinsic to the humorous event itself. The little bit of incongruity within a joke, for example, is hardly enough to be responsible for the laughter that follows; yet there are rarely the clear examples of fearfulness we find in children. The obvious response to this dilemma is to seek a source of tension within the adult, a source that may be less-than-fully-available to consciousness.

Edmund Bergler, building on Freud's work, said "the joke – every joke – is on the superego." His theory of humor makes heavy use of Freudian preconceptions, which we must bracket, but the basic idea is born out by experience: We are compelled by our upbringing and the culture that upbringing reflects to behave ourselves, to live by the rules, to aspire to certain ideals, to put away childish things, to deny certain needs, etc. These things provide a social order that supplements the natural order (which may be very disorderly to say the least!). When these rules are violated, by ourselves or others, we feel anxiety and guilt. Humor violates these rules, then immediately relieves us of our distress at those violations by presenting an alternative construction of the violation.

Three very-pregnant women are waiting to see their doctor. The first says "I'm sure I'm having a boy this time, because my husband was on top, and I always have boys when he's on top." The second one says "That's interesting; I guess I'll have a girl, then, because I was on top. The third woman begins to cry, and the other two ask her why she's crying, and she says "I think I'm having puppies!"

We desire an orderly world – i.e. one we are capable of comprehending and anticipating. We are, however, constantly aware of the limits of our comprehension, and many of us live in a rather constant, if modest, state of anxiety, that is, of expecting the unexpected. Humor is a major part of an understanding and acceptance of these facts: I desire order; I will never have it in any complete form; anxiety is a part of life. Then add the fact that the surprises are seldom as great as our anxiety about them!

Another way of looking at it is to see humor as a short, quick version of phenomena like trust and optimism, other things that the humorless call foolish. Note that word, foolish: In the archetypal humor situation – peek-a-boo – mom fools us; and the fool is the person who walks into danger (where wise men fear to tread) with a smile on his face. This also brings to mind the use of humorous stories in mystical traditions such as Zen and Sufism: One might say that the goal of these traditions is to turn the adherent into a fool – God's fool, perhaps, but a fool nonetheless. The same may be said for certain forms of therapy. Such "deep" humor seems to involve the stripping away of layers of conditioning (conditions of worth? the social unconscious? Maya?) so that our lives may be guided by more profound forces (morality? reason? actualization? the Tao?).

It is worthwhile to try to distinguish "higher" from "lower" forms of humor. Lower forms are based on relief of distress without adaptation, by means of some kind of avoidance or other external change. Someone else intervenes and shows us that the object of fear is safe, as in peek-a-boo, or we laugh at the stranger's display of weakness, or we observe the object of fear attacked in safety, by a comedian or in a comic strip or in some way not likely to lead to retribution. At the "peek-a-boo" level it is quite passive; at other levels it shares some qualities with anger. Anger is a response to fear that musters our energies and directs them toward changing the world to fit our expectations of it (thus "correcting" our "misunderstanding"). It is active and may be the source of great positive change. It may also serve as a conservative function in that it protects the "status quo" of our beliefs and values by manipulating dissonant information or beating-up disagreeable others.

Higher humor is based on relief of distress through true adaptation or learning. Our fear is shown to be baseless through a higher reconstruction of the situation. Instead of saying to oneself "I'm glad it's him and not me!" we say "there go I!" i.e. I laugh not at him but at the humanity we share, at the me in him. Again, safety plays a part, even at this level, since, if it actually were me, I would need to defend myself; the fact that it is him allows me to accept the lesson. So higher humor involves real learning, a miniature "aha!" experience. But it is also associated, therefore, with some sadness, inasmuch as sadness is the emotional tone of our need to change ourselves in response to undeniable realities. When we rise above our illusions, we become "disillusioned," and we grieve for our past selves.

The "me-in-him" idea is, I believe, a lot more important in most humor than is implied here. We fail to differentiate ourselves from others as well as we like to think we do (especially unconsciously, or pre-reflectively), so that empathy is not so much a higher function placed on top of lower, more selfish ones, as it is a basic sense of identity with the other. So a great deal of the tension developed in humorous situations is based on a partial identification with the comedian, the perpetrator in a joke, or the butt of the joke, followed by anything from "I'm glad it wasn't me" to "there but for the grace of God go I." Again, this serves to emphasize the fact that "hostile" humor and humor that reveals universals of human nature are actually cut from the same cloth.

Last, I would like to point out that in much, even most, humor, there are likely to be several lines of tension-building and tension-relief operating simultaneously and consequentially. A simple joke, for example, may include several incongruities, poke fun at "adult" social conventions, play with linguistic conventions and double-meanings, introduce taboo sexual topics, toy with socially unacceptable aggressiveness, establish a degree of superiority, be told by someone taking the comic role, and reveal universals of human nature all at the same time. Add such "external" factors as setting, mood, contagion, etc., and analysis becomes even more challenging. Humor reminds me of cooking, in that we have been doing it so long that even a "simple" dish involves many ingredients and complex preparations.

### 6.7 The Boredom Family

*boredom, ennui*

What can I say about boredom? Many would not even consider it to be an emotion at all. But no one I know enjoys being bored. It is a negative emotion, if a rather dull one. If you have come to believe that your life should be fun, entertaining, busy, full of people, full of interesting activities – as so many of us in the modern world have come to believe – then you would find the lack of these things disconcerting. You will be bored.

I have read (I can't remember where) that some tribal people don't seem to be bothered by boredom. When work is done and conversation flags, and the last pig-roast is just a vague memory, they will simply sit, stare at the horizon, perhaps take a little nap. You begin reading about boredom only when you get to spoiled aristocrats in Rome or the Renaissance, and of course when you get to the modern age, where we fill our lives with entertainment. Interesting, if, well, a bit boring.

## 7. Motivation

The word "motivation" (like the word "emotion") derives from the Latin word "movere", meaning "to move". The question every theory of personality asks is "what moves us?" What causes us to do what we do? And, of course, every theory has an answer.

Early psychologists – behaviorists and the Freudians – tended to look to our physiology for motivations. It is clear that when we are hungry, we are motivated to eat; when we are thirsty, we are motivated to drink; and so on. These motivations are traditionally called drives, and they include, besides hunger and thirst, the need for air, sexual desire, the need for physical activity, the need for rest and sleep, and the avoidance of pain.

Each one of these is very complicated, involving a network of homeostatic systems. For example, hunger as a psychological experience is in part based on the levels of glucose, insulin, CCK, leptin, and other substances in the blood that are detected by the hypothalamus. Increased levels of glucose (released by the liver) and insulin (released by the pancreas) indicate that your cells are in need of energy, and lead you to feel hunger. Increased levels of CCK (released by the small intestines as food moves from the stomach) and leptin (released by the fat cells) lead you to feel satiated.

On top of this, we also feel various forms of discomfort in the stomach: The pangs and rumblings of hunger, the comfort of satiety, and the bloatedness of excess.

All this interacts with your culture and individual upbringing: Even when hungry, we are loath to eat things that we have learned are not to be eaten. What those things are can vary enormously. I personally like a juicy hamburger, but my vegetarian daughters get nauseous at the thought. But I get queezy at the thought of eating, say, live baby squid or fried tarantula, which are in fact eaten in some locals.

When and how much we eat also interact with our more physiological mechanisms: Most of us in the modern world eat more because it is simply time to eat than because we are truly hungry. We eat three meals, or two, or six, depending on our background. We clean our plate, or make sure to leave much of our meal behind. We eat alone, or in groups, quickly on the run, or lounging for hours....

And that's only one of our drives! Similar complications exist for thirst and drinking, and the complexity of sexuality, both physiologically and culturally, is simply, well, exhausting. Only our need for air seems pretty simple.

What's more, we are also capable of over-riding some of these needs. One can starve oneself for a political cause, for supposed health concerns, or because of a psychological disorder. One can go for constant sex, make a living with it, or give it up entirely. One can intentionally cause oneself pain, for any number of reasons, reasonable or not. Some people even stop their breathing in a bizarre and highly risky effort to enhance their sexual pleasure.

### 7.1 Play and curiosity

Perhaps survival and sex completely describe the motivation of "lower" animals (though I doubt it very much). But "higher" animals have certain extra desires – such as curiosity and play – that encourage them to learn about potential problems before any serious mistakes happen. Kittens and puppies and human children are notorious for this kind of "enhancement." It is sometimes referred to as competence motivation.

Kittens (and cats generally) are notorious for their curiosity. On the surface, poking your nose into everything might seem counter to survival. You could get seriously hurt or even killed! But by being curious, the kitten gets to know more about its environment – where the good places to hide might be, or where the mice like to hang out – than if it remained in the safety of its mother's presence.

Likewise, puppies are notorious for their playfulness. Again, on the surface, jumping off of rocks, digging after insects, wrestling with your siblings all seem like they might be causes for harm. But by playing, the puppy gets to explore its own body, its limits as well as its strengths, in relative safety. The puppy that spends more time pouncing on frogs is the one that is likely to be more apt at hunting in later years.

But again, humans outdo other species: Our curiosity has become our desire to tinker and explore and discover and invent. It is at the root of science. And our playfulness – continuing well into adulthood – has become art, literature, music, and sport. It is likely that our curiosity and need to play is at the root of most of our advances as a species.

### 7.2 Social motivation

Social creatures such as ourselves rely on each other for much of their "maintenance and enhancement." One thing we need, especially early in our lives, is positive regard, Carl Rogers's term for attention, affection, respect, acceptance. At first, it's a matter of physical survival; later in life, it's a sign that we have support around us.

Dogs are very social mammals. They are relatively helpless as puppies, and depend a great deal on the "good will" of their elders (which their elders provide, of course, because of strong instincts to nurture their young). But later, as they develop, they don't lose this dependence on others in the way that many other animals do. They continue to desire contact with their pack. They look for approval from those more experienced than they. They jockey for position in the pack hierarchy. They attempt to appeal to potential mates. In fact, a dog will not survive long outside of the social cocoon. Dogs, having evolved in the context of millenia of interaction with humans, seem to have transferred those social motivations to the people around them – and many humans, to the dogs they own.

Humans are equally, if not more, social than dogs. We are even more helpless as infants, and for a far longer period. Without the attention and, preferably, affection from others, infants fail to thrive, as has occurred in many overcrowded and poorly staffed orphanages around the world. As older children, they are more likely to survive, but usually develop significant psychological problems. In adolescence, the need for friends and, ultimately, a special someone, becomes paramount. As many of us know from sad experience, the isolated teenager is nearly always an unhappy one, one who may well sink into the depths of clinical depression.

I will go out on a limb here: The single, most compelling motive in human life is our need for affection. Related to this is our need for respect. And at the very least we crave attention. The child who is always "acting up" may be a child who is getting little affection or respect from adults or other children. We will discuss this more when we talk about social instincts, the social unconscious, and the roots of mental illness.

Human beings take this need for affection a step further: Because we have an internal mental life (thanks to anticipation, etc.), we can internalize both the need and its satisfaction or non-satisfaction. In other words, we have a desire and need for positive self-regard, also known as self-respect, self-worth, or self-esteem.

Poor self-esteem – the inferiority complex – is one of the most common sources for psychological problems a therapist finds. Most of us have these complexes about one thing or another: looks, intelligence, strength, social skills, etc. Even the bully, the beauty, and the braggart – people with superiority complexes – can be understood as people with poor self-esteem!

### 7.3 Habit

Another aspect of motivation that is hard to overestimate is habit. If you think about it, nearly all of the things we've been talking about involve returning to a unstressed state. When we talk about physical needs, for example, we often talk about homeostasis: like a thermostat that controls a furnace, we eat when we are low on nutrients, we stop eating when we have enough.

The same thing applies to psychological phenomena: When our understanding of things is lacking and we fail to anticipate, we scramble to improve our understanding; once we understand something, and our anticipations are right on target, we are satisfied. In fact, it almost seems that we spend our lives trying to be unconscious! After all, we feel distress when things go wrong and delight when things improve, but neither when things are going just right.

Habits are things that are so thoroughly learned, that work so smoothly, with so little distress or delight, that they are unconscious.

When habits concern social behaviors, we call them rituals. Coronations, marriage ceremonies, funerals, standing on line, taking turns when talking, saying "hello, how are you," whether you want to know or not – all are examples of rituals.

There are also ways of thinking and perceiving that are so thoroughly learned we tend not to be conscious of them: attitudes, mind-sets, norms, prejudices, defenses, and so on.

The key to identifying habits and rituals is that the acts are essentially emotionless and unconscious. Remember when you first learned how to drive. You had so many things to think about. Which peddle is the gas and which is the brake (not to even mention the clutch!)? How fast and how far do you turn the steering wheel? Odds are you took a few curbs with you, if not a garbage can or two! But after a while, all these things became "second nature:" so well learned that you don't need to think about them anymore. Now, you can pay attention to the other cars, to the exit you need, or even to the conversation around you. Some people even think they can drive so well that they can talk on their cellphones! (They are mistaken, of course.) It has all become rather automatic – until things go wrong!

When that happens, you experience some kind of distress. In the case of driving a car, you relive your early experiences when the automatic steering suddenly fails, or you blow a tire. Or your brakes cease to function! Or consider the social rituals: Go ahead, tell someone who asks "how are you" all about how you really are! Or stand the wrong way in an elevator. Or interrupt the smooth flow of a restaurant (e.g. by taking peoples' orders or bussing your own table). This is called Garfinkling, after Harold Garfinkle, who invented it. It will reveal rules of behavior that are so ritualized that we've forgotten they exist.

Anyway, maintaining things the way they are, keeping social "law and order," is an extremely powerful motivation. In its most positive form, it's our desire for peace and contentment. In its most negative form, it is our resistance to anything new or different.

### 7.4 The hierarchy and the daimonic

Abraham Maslow is famous for his *hierarchy of needs*. Working originally with rhesus monkeys, he noticed that if a monkey that was both thirsty and hungry were offered both water and food simultaneously, the monkey would choose the water first. After all, you can live without food for weeks, but without water for only days. If a hungry, horny monkey were offered food and sex simultaneously, it would tend to go for the food first. You can only live without food for weeks, but you can do without sex your whole life – not that you would want to. Clearly, a monkey deprived of oxygen would desire air before anything. The need for air is prepotent over the need for water, which in turn is prepotent over the need for food, which is prepotent over the need for sex. A hierarchy of needs.

Maslow extended this idea. Given that your physiological needs are more-or-less taken care of, he theorized that you would become increasingly concerned with safety and security. When those were more-or-less taken care of, you would become interested in social satisfactions. Then, you would become increasingly interested in satisfying your need for self-esteem. Finally, you become more and more interested in certain "higher motivations" he liked to call self-actualization. We will discuss the latter later.

You can also look at it from a "negative" perspective: hunger, thirst, and sexual desire trump anxiety; anxiety trumps loneliness; loneliness trumps the sense of inferiority. Unfortunately, Maslow's hierarchy has far too many exceptions and reversals to serve as a mainstay of personality theory.

Instead of a hierarchy, it might be more helpful if we see motivation as a complicated web of motives. All these motivations – from hunger and sex to curiosity and play to social acceptance – are real and relevant to understanding people. And we can differ with each other in regards to what motivates each of us: Some of us "live to eat;" others are "sex fiends;" others are curious to a fault; others are "people people;" and others still are driven by ego; and so on!

Rollo May's basic motivational construct is the *daimonic*. The daimonic is the entire system of motives, different for each individual. It is composed of a collection of specific motives May called *daimons*. The word daimon is from the Greek, and means little god. It comes down to English as demon, with a very negative connotation. But originally, a daimon could be bad or good. May's daimons include lower needs, such as food and sex, as well as higher needs, such as love. Basically, he says, a daimon is anything that can take over the person, a situation he refers to as *daimonic possession*. It is then, when the balance among daimons is disrupted, that they should be considered "evil" – as the phrase implies! But May's basic idea is that there are many, many motivations which different people may or may not have, and to different degrees as well. I like this idea.

### 7.5 Actualization

It is, however, also possible to summarize all these many and various motives under the umbrella of a single overarching motive. Alfred Adler was the earliest to make this suggestion. He postulates a single motivating force behind all our behavior and experience. By the time his theory had gelled into its most mature form, he called that motivating force the *striving for perfection*. It is the desire we all have to fulfill our potentials, to come closer and closer to our ideal.

"Perfection" and "ideal" are troublesome words, though. On the one hand, they are very positive goals. Shouldn't we all be striving for the ideal? And yet, in psychology, they are often given a rather negative connotation. Perfection and ideals are, practically by definition, things you can't reach. Many people, in fact, live very sad and painful lives trying to be perfect!

Striving for perfection was not the first phrase Adler used to refer to his single motivating force. His earliest phrase was the *aggression drive*, referring to the reaction we have when other drives, such as our need to eat, be sexually satisfied, get things done, or be loved, are frustrated. It might be better called the *assertiveness drive*, since we tend to think of aggression as physical and negative. But it was Adler's idea of the aggression drive that first caused friction between him and Freud. Freud was afraid that it would detract from the crucial position of the sex drive in psychoanalytic theory. Despite Freud's dislike for the idea, he himself introduced something very similar much later in his life: the death instinct.

Another word Adler used to refer to basic motivation was *compensation*, or striving to overcome. Since we all have problems, short-comings, inferiorities of one sort or another, Adler felt, earlier in his writing, that our personalities could be accounted for by the ways in which we do – or don't – compensate or overcome those problems. The idea still plays an important role in his theory, as you will see, but he rejected it as a label for the basic motive because it makes it sound as if it is your problems that cause you to be what you are.

The last term he used, before switching to striving for perfection, was *striving for superiority*. His use of this phrase reflects one of the philosophical roots of his ideas: Friederich Nietzsche developed a philosophy that considered the will to power the basic motive of human life. Although striving for superiority does refer to the desire to be better, it also contains the idea that we want to be better than others, rather than better in our own right. Adler later tended to use striving for superiority more in reference to unhealthy or neurotic striving.

The biologist Kurt Golstein developed a holistic view of brain function, based on research that showed that people with brain damage learned to use other parts of their brains in compensation. He extended his holism to the entire organism, and postulated that there was only one drive in human functioning, and coined the term *self-actualization*. Self-preservation, the usual postulated central motive, he said, is actually pathological!

The American psychologists Snygg and Combs adopted this idea and defined it so: "The basic need of everyone is to preserve and enhance the phenomenal self, and the characteristics of all parts of the field are governed by this need." The *phenomenal self* is the person's own view of him- or herself. This view is developed over a lifetime, and is based on the person's physical characteristics (as he or she sees them), cultural upbringing (as he or she experiences it), and other, more personal, experiences.

Note that it is the phenomenal self we try to maintain and enhance. This is more than mere physical survival or the satisfaction of basic needs. The body and its needs are a likely part of the self, but not an inevitable one. Teenagers who attempt suicide, soldiers seeking martyrdom, or prisoners on a hunger strike are not serving their bodies well. But they are maintaining, perhaps even enhancing, their own images of who they are. Their physical existences no longer hold the same meanings to them as they might to us.

And note that we are talking not only about maintaining, but about enhancing the self. We don't just want to be what we *are*. We often want to be *more*. Snygg and Combs' basic motivational principle contains within it Alfred Adler's ideas about compensation of inferiority and striving for superiority, May's daimonic, and all sorts of related concepts.

The American psychologist Carl Rogers has a clinical theory, based on years of experience dealing with his clients. Unlike Freud and many of the early personality theorists, Rogers sees people as basically good or healthy – or at very least, not bad or ill. In other words, he sees mental health as the normal progression of life, and he sees mental illness, criminality, and other human problems, as distortions of that natural tendency.

Also not in common with Freud is the fact that Rogers' theory is a relatively simple one, and Goldstein's self-actualization is the reason. Rogers see it as the life-force, the built-in motivation present in every life-form to develop its potentials to the fullest extent possible. Again, we're not just talking about survival: Rogers believes that all creatures strive to make the very best of their existence. If they fail to do so, it is not for a lack of desire.

He asks us, why do we want air and water and food? Why do we seek safety, love, and a sense of competence? Why, indeed, do we seek to discover new medicines, invent new power sources, or create new works of art? Because, he answers, it is in our nature as living things to do the very best we can!

Rogers applies it to all living creatures. Some of his earliest examples, in fact, include seaweed and mushrooms! Think about it: Doesn't it sometimes amaze you the way weeds will grow through the sidewalk, or saplings crack boulders, or animals survive desert conditions or the frozen arctic?

He also applied the idea to ecosystems, saying that an ecosystem such as a forest, with all its complexity, has a much greater actualization potential than a simple ecosystem such as a corn field. If one bug were to become extinct in a forest, there are likely to be other creatures that will adapt to fill the gap; On the other hand, one bout of "corn blight" or some such disaster, and you have a dust bowl. The same for us as individuals: If we live as we should, we will become increasingly complex, like the forest, and thereby remain flexible in the face of life's little – and big – disasters.

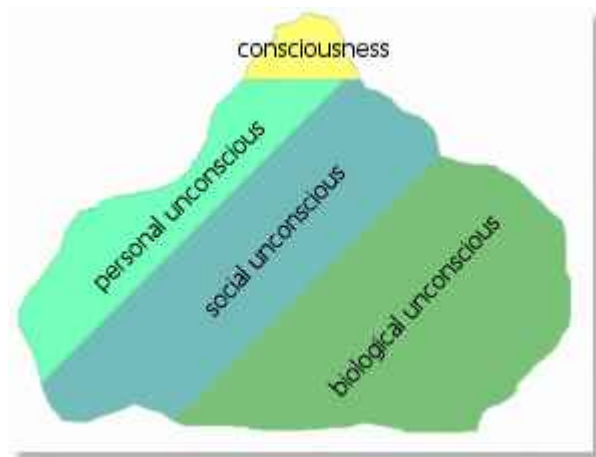
## 8. Instinct

The idea of the unconscious, popularized by Sigmund Freud, has become a fixture in our cultural conception of the person. Freud's version was more-or-less a place of great size wherein we find psychological versions of our physiological needs, and where we put experiences that we prefer not to recall. Today, most psychologists do not emphasize the unconscious to anywhere near the degree that Freud and other early personality theorists did. To some extent, it includes anything that we are not actively thinking about at the moment – all our memories, for example. But it also includes patterns of thought and action that are so well learned that, even when active, we are not fully aware of them – like we don't think about our fingers when we type. And it includes patterns that were laid down before we were even born, guided by DNA rather than by experience: Instincts.

In the image below, I use Freud's metaphor of the iceberg for our psyche. As you can see (and following Freud), the conscious part of the psyche – what we are aware of at any particular moment – is the smallest part, and the unconscious the largest. The personal unconscious includes all those memories that are not active at the moment, plus any peculiar habits you may have learned, especially early in life – phobias, for example. The social unconscious includes all the things you learned that are a part of your culture and society, things you picked up very early in life from parents and others – prejudices, for example. And the biological unconscious is composed of things that don't involve too much learning at all – the instincts.

While I call it the biological unconscious, Carl Jung called it the *collective* unconscious, because he believed it to be a common heritage that we all carry within us. He called the contents of this collective unconscious *archetypes*, which (at least in the earlier versions of his theory) are roughly equivalent to instinctual syndromes. According to Jung, an archetype is an unlearned tendency to experience things in a certain way.

The archetype has no form of its own, but it acts as an "organizing principle" on the things we see or do. It works the way that instincts work in Freud's theory: At first, the baby just wants something to eat, without knowing what it wants. It has a rather indefinite yearning which, nevertheless, can be satisfied by some things and not by others. Later, with experience, the child begins to yearn for something more specific when it is hungry – a bottle, a cookie, a broiled lobster, a slice of New York style pizza. The archetype is like a black hole in space: You only know its there by how it draws matter and light to itself. I will introduce some of Jung's archetypes as they become relevant in our more modern analysis of instincts.



### 8.1 Animal instincts

In Jung's theory, instincts involving simple survival and reproduction are a part of an archetype called the *shadow*. He believed that it derives from our prehuman, animal past, when our concerns were limited to survival and reproduction, and when we weren't self-conscious.

Jung believed that we often turn it into the "dark side" of our personalities, and the evil that we are capable of is often stored there in the form of a complex. Actually, the shadow is amoral – neither good nor bad, just like animals. An animal is capable of tender care for its young and vicious killing for food, but it doesn't choose to do either. It just does what it does. It is "innocent." But from our human perspective, the animal world looks rather brutal, inhuman, so the shadow becomes something of a garbage can for the parts of ourselves that we can't quite admit to.

Symbols of the shadow include the snake (as in the garden of Eden), the dragon, monsters, and demons. It often guards the entrance to a cave or a pool of water, which is the collective unconscious. Next time you dream about wrestling with the devil, it may only be yourself you are wrestling with!



Others – such as the Dutch biologist Niko Tinbergen – took a more scientific approach to instincts such as these. We'll begin with a wonderful example of instinctual behavior in animals: The three-spined stickleback is a one-inch long fish that one can find in the rivers and lakes of Europe. Springtime is, as you might expect, the mating season for the mighty stickleback and the perfect time to see instincts in action.

Certain changes occur in their appearances: The male, normally dull, becomes red above the midline. He

stakes out a territory for himself, from which he will chase any similarly colored male, and builds a nest by depositing weeds in a small hollow and running through them repeatedly to make a tunnel. This is all quite built-in. Males raised all alone will do the same. We find, in fact, that the male stickleback will, in the mating season, attempt to chase anything red from his territory (including the reflection of a red truck on the aquarium's glass).

But that's not the instinct of the moment. The female undergoes a transformation as well: She, normally dull like the male, becomes bloated by her many eggs and takes on a certain silvery glow that apparently no male stickleback can resist. When he sees a female, he will swim towards her in a zigzag pattern. She will respond by swimming towards him with her head held high. He responds by dashing towards his nest and indicating its entrance. She enters the nest, her head sticking out one end, her tail the other. He prods at the base of her tail with rhythmic thrusts. She releases her eggs and leaves the nest. He enters and fertilizes the eggs, and then, a thorough chauvinist, chases her away and waits for a new partner.

What you see working here is a series of sign stimuli and fixed actions: His zigzag dance is a response to her appearance and becomes a stimulus for her to follow, and so on. Perhaps I'm being perverse, but doesn't the stickleback's instinctive courtship remind you of some of our human courtship rituals? I'm not trying to say we are quite as mindless about it as the stickleback seems to be – just that some similar patterns may form a part of or basis for our more complex, learned behaviors.

Ethologists – people who study animal behavior in natural settings – have been studying behaviors such as the sticklebacks' for over a century. One, Konrad Lorenz, has developed an hydraulic model of how an instinct works. We have a certain amount of energy available for any specific instinctual system, as illustrated by a reservoir of water. There is a presumably neurological mechanism that allows the release of some or all of that energy in the presence of the appropriate sign stimulus: a faucet. There are further mechanisms – neurological, motor, hormonal – that translate the energy into specific fixed actions. Today, we might suggest that hydraulic energy is a poor metaphor and translate the whole system into an information processing one – each era has its favorite metaphors. But the description still seems sound.

Every instinct in every animal is, of course, the result of eons of selection. One sociobiologist, David Barash, suggests a guiding question for understanding possible evolutionary roots of any behavior: "Why is sugar sweet", that is, why do we find it attractive? One hypothesis is that our ancestors ate fruit to meet their nutritional needs. Fruit is most nutritious when it is ripe. When fruit is ripe, it is loaded with sugars. Any ancestor who had a taste for sugar would be a little more likely to eat ripe fruit.

His or her resulting good health would make him or her stronger and more attractive to potential mates. He or she might leave more offspring who, inheriting this taste for ripe fruit, would be more likely to survive to reproductive age, etc. A more general form of the guiding question is to ask of any motivated behavior "How might that behavior have aided ancestral survival and/or reproduction?"

A curious point to make about the example used is that today we have refined sugar – something which was not available to our ancestors, but which we discovered and passed on to our descendants through learned culture. It is clear that today a great attraction to sugar no longer serves our survival and reproduction. But culture moves much more quickly than evolution: It took millions of years to evolve our healthy taste for sugar; it took only thousands of years to undermine it.

### 8.2 Sex

It is obvious that we are attracted some people more than others. Sociobiologists have the same explanation for this as for everything else, based on the archetypal question "why is sugar sweet?" We should be sexually attracted to others whose characteristics would maximize our genetic success, that is, would give us many healthy, long-lived, fertile children.

We should find healthiness attractive and, conversely, illness unattractive. We should find "perfect" features attractive, and deformities unattractive. We should find vitality, strength, vigor attractive. We should find "averageness" attractive – not too short, not too tall, not too fat, not too thin.... Quasimodo, for all his decency, had a hard time getting dates.

These differences between the sexes is known as sexual dimorphism, and the process that leads to these differences is called sexual selection. Small functional differences between the sexes can become large nonfunctional ones over many generations. If female birds are instinctively inclined to prefer colorful males – perhaps because colorful males have served to distract predators from ancestral females and their chicks – then a male that is more colorful will have a better chance, and the female with a more intense attraction to color a better chance, and their offspring will inherit their colors and intense attraction to colors and so on and so on... until you reach a point where the colors and the attraction are no longer a plus, but become a minus, such as in the birds of paradise. Some males cannot even fly under the weight of all their plumage.

Human beings are only modestly dimorphic. But boy are we aware of the dimorphisms! Women tend to find tall, well-muscled men more attractive, for example. Men tend to like youth and nicely rounded softness attractive. An interesting odd detail comes to mind here: Youth and "nicely rounded softness" are slightly contradictory, since the young woman tends to be slender and "boyish", while the mature woman tends to develop a more "motherly" figure. Perhaps this plays a part in the cycles of women's fashion: One decade, women try to achieve rail thinness; the next they work on exaggerating their breasts or hips. In today's bizarre world of plastic surgery, we see thin women with disproportionately large breasts! Another odd detail is that, while women like a strong man, few are attracted to the overly-muscled body-builder types. The sociobiological explanation is a logical one: Too much of a good thing is a deviation from averageness, and a signal of mutation.

The dimorphism is also found in our behaviors. David Barash puts it so: "Males tend to be selected for salesmanship; females for sales resistance." Females have a great deal invested in any act of copulation: the limited number of offspring she can carry, the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth, the increased nutritional requirements, the danger from predators...all serve to make the choice of a mate an important consideration. Males, on the other hand, can and do walk away from the consequences of copulation. Note, for example, the tendency of male frogs to try to mate with wading boots: As long as some sperm gets to where it should, the male is doing alright.

So females tend to be more fussy about who they have relations with. They are more sensitive to indications that a particular male will contribute to their genetic survival. One of the most obvious examples is the attention many female animals pay to the size and strength of males, and the development of specialized contests, such as those of deer and sheep, to demonstrate that strength.

There are less obvious things as well. In some animals, males have to show, not just strength, but the ability to provide. This is especially true in any species which has the male providing for the female during her pregnancy and lactation – like humans! Sociobiologists suggest that, while men find youth and physical form most attractive, women tend to look for indications of success, solvency, savoir-faire.

Further, they suggest, women may find themselves more interested in the "mature" man, as he is more likely to have proven himself, and less interested in the "immature" man, who presents a certain risk. And women should be more likely to put up with polygyny (i.e. other wives) than men with polyandry (other husbands): Sharing a clearly successful man is better in some cases than having a failure all to yourself. And, lo and behold, polygyny is even more common than monogamy, while polyandry is found in perhaps two cultures (one in the Himalayas and the other in Africa), and in both it involves brothers "sharing" a wife in order not to break-up tiny inherited properties.

Taking it from the other direction, males will tolerate less infidelity than females: Females "know" their children are theirs; males never know for sure. It could always be the plumber's kid! Genetically, it matters less if males "sow wild oats" or have many mates or are unfaithful. And, sure enough, most cultures are harder on women than men when it comes to adultery. In most cultures, in fact, it is the woman who moves into the husband's family (virilocality) – as if to keep track of her comings and goings.

From our culture's romantic view of love and marriage, it is interesting to note that in most cultures a failure to consummate a marriage is grounds for divorce or annulment. In our own culture, infertility and impotence are frequent causes of divorce. It seems reproduction is more important than we like to admit.

Of course, there is a limit to the extent to which we generalize from animals to humans (or from any species to any other), and this is especially true regarding sex. We are very sexy animals: Most animals restrict their sexual activity to narrowly defined periods of time, while we have sex all month and all year round. We can only guess how we got to be this way. Perhaps it has to do with the long-term helplessness of our infants. What better way to keep a family together than to make it so very reinforcing!

A part of our personality is the role of male or female we must play. For most people that role is determined by their physical gender. But Freud, Jung, and Adler, as well as more recent theorists, feel that we are all really bisexual in nature. When we begin our lives as fetuses, we have undifferentiated sex organs that only gradually, under the influence of hormones, become male or female. Likewise, when we begin our social lives as infants, we are neither male nor female in the social sense. Almost immediately – as soon as those pink or blue booties go on – we come under the influence of society, which gradually molds us into men and women.

Since most of us feel pretty solidly heterosexual, this idea that we are all bisexual underneath it all isn't always cheerfully accepted. But it is quite clear that people are extremely "flexible" when it comes to sex. We quickly develop all sorts of odd habits and interests that have little to do with reproduction at all! Freud suggested that children are "polymorphously perverse", but that quality applies much better to adults.

This idea has been recently reinforced by our increased knowledge of the life of our closest genetic relative, the bonobo chimpanzee. The bonobo uses sex for far more than reproduction. It has become a way of establishing social relationships. They have sex with old lovers and new acquaintances. They have sex with the old and the young. They have heterosexual sex and homosexual sex. They even have certain varieties of incestuous sex! What a species of sex fiends, you say? Take a look at us!



Human beings, of course, have developed all kinds of rules about sex. We have strong taboos about incest. Many societies have strict rules about homosexuality. Many have rules about promiscuity. We even have rules about what parts of the body may be exposed and which not, and which may be ridiculously exaggerated (such as penis cones among certain New Guinea tribesmen, and 1950s pointy brassieres!). Some societies even force women to cover themselves from head to toe, so as to keep men's sexual arousal to a minimum, as if that's ever going to happen. But the point is that, despite all these rules, and the punishments that come with disobedience, people continue to do odd things with their genitalia.

Carl Jung took the idea of our bisexuality to its ultimate conclusion. He postulated two archetypes: The *anima* is the female aspect present in men, and the *animus* is the male aspect present in women. In myths and, Jung believed, dreams, the anima may be personified as a young girl, very spontaneous and intuitive, or as a witch, or as the earth mother. It is likely to be associated with deep emotionality and the force of life itself. The animus may be personified as a wise old man, a sorcerer, or often a number of males, and tends to be logical, often rationalistic, even argumentative.

Jung also has an archetype called the *hermaphrodite*. An hermaphrodite is both male and female, and so represents the union of opposites, an important idea in Jung's theory. For example, when we have a strong movement towards the masculine in our culture, we counteract it with a swing towards the feminine. In China, the male saint Avalokiteshwara slowly evolved into Kuan Yin, the female goddess of compassion! You can also see this in the early Christian adoption of Mary as a significant object of veneration. Jung believed that, if we ignore the sexual opposite within us, we are using only half of the potential available to us. In fact, the balancing of male and female qualities has been recognized for some time as beneficial to our mental health – an issue thoroughly studied by Sandra Bem and others, who refer to the balance as androgeny.

### 8.3 Children

And then we have the children. We are attracted to them, and they are attracted to us. Adults of many species, including ours, seem to find small representatives of their species, with short arms and legs, large heads, flat faces, and big, round eyes... "cute" somehow – "sweet," the sociobiologist might point out. It does make considerable evolutionary sense that, in animals with relatively helpless young, the adults should be attracted to their infants. It may also explain our affection for puppies, kitties, teddy bears, and baby dolls.

The infants, in turn, seem to be attracted to certain things as well. Goslings, as everyone knows, become attached to the first large moving object they come across in the first two days of life – usually mother goose (occasionally Konrad Lorenz or other ethologists). This is called imprinting. Human infants respond to pairs of eyes, female voices, and touch.

The goslings respond to their sign-stimulus with the following response, literally following that large moving object. Human infants, of course, are incapable of following, so they resort to subterfuge: the broad, full bodied, toothless smile which parents find overwhelmingly attractive.

Sociobiologists go on to predict that mothers will care for their children more than fathers (they have more invested in them, and are more certain of their maternity); that older mothers will care more than younger mothers (they have fewer chances of further procreation); that we will be more solicitous of our children when we have few (or only one!) than when we have many; that we will increase our concern for our children as they get older (they have demonstrated their survival potential); and that we will tend to push our children into marriage and children of their own.

Separation anxiety is a very common problem among children, especially younger ones. It is found in about 4% of kids. The problem is excessive anxiety about separation from the child's parents, other family members, or even their home. When separated, they become withdrawn and depressed and may have difficulty concentrating. They often develop other fears, anxiety about death, and nightmares. Of course, some separation anxiety is a normal part of childhood, so this can be a bit of a subjective call.

Separation anxiety usually occurs in tight, loving families. It often begins with some kind of life stress, such as moving to a new home or town, starting at a new school, or the death of a pet or relative. Fortunately, for most children, it ends sometime in adolescence if not earlier.

### 8.4 Helping

Helping behavior is likely when it involves our children, parents, spouses, or other close relations. It is less and less likely when it involves cousins or unrelated neighbors. It is so unusual when it involves strangers or distant people of other cultures and races that we recall one story – the good Samaritan – nearly 2000 years after the fact.

Sociobiologists predict that helping decreases with kinship distance. In fact, it should occur only when the sacrifice you make is outweighed by the advantage that sacrifice provides the genes you share with those relations. The geneticist J. B. S. Haldane supposedly once put it this way: "I'd gladly give my life for three of my brothers, five of my nephews, nine of my cousins...." Since my brothers and I share 50% of our genes, it would take three of them (150%) to beat saving my own butt (100%), and so on. This is called kin selection. Altruism based on genetic selfishness, at least according to Haldane!

Another kind of altruistic behavior is herd behavior. Some animals just seem to want to be close, and in dangerous times closer still. It makes sense: By collecting in a herd, you are less likely to be attacked by a predator. Other animals will signal the entire herd when they spot a predator. One famous example is the springbok of South Africa, which jumps straight up in the air when it sees a lion. Another is the prairie dog, which barks when it sees a coyote. Of course, that draws the attention of the predator to the one who is giving the signal, which is dangerous for that particular individual. But the next time, it will be some other member of the herd. It's a trade-off. Animals often help any member of their group, with the instinctual "understanding" that they may be the beneficiaries the next time they need help themselves.

Robert Trivers has suggested that some animals (ourselves included) engage in a more sophisticated version of helping called reciprocal altruism. Here you would be willing to help someone else if it is understood that he or she will do the same for you, or reciprocate in some other way, "tit for tat." Clearly, it helps if you have the ability to recognize individuals and to recall debts!

Other geneticists have pointed out that, if there is a genetic basis for reciprocal altruism, there will also be some individuals that cheat by allowing others to do for them without ever meeting their own obligations. In fact, depending on the advantages that reciprocal altruism provides and the tendency of altruists to get back at cheaters, cheaters will be found in any population. Other studies have shown that "sociopathy," guiltless ignoring of social norms, is found in a sizable portion of the human population.

There is, of course, no need for a human being to be 100% altruist or 100% cheat. Most of us (or is it all of us?), although we get angry at cheats, are quite capable of cheating when the occasion arises. We feel guilt, of course, but we can cheat. A large portion of the human psyche seems to be devoted to calculating our chances of success or failure at such shady maneuvers.

### 8.5 Aggression

Next to sex, personality theorists of the past have used aggression to explain human behavior most. Alfred Adler was one of the first: While he was Freud's favorite at first, he repeatedly annoyed the master by introducing the idea that sex drive wasn't the only thing that could lead to psychological problems: So could the aggression drive! Like many concepts in psychology, aggression has many definitions, even many evaluations. Some think of aggression as a great virtue (e.g. "the aggressive businessperson"), while others see aggression as symptomatic of mental illness.

The fact that we do keep the same word anyway suggests that there is a commonality: Both positive and negative aggression serve to enhance the self. The positive version, which we could call assertiveness, is acting in a way that enhances the self, without the implication that we are hurting someone else. The negative version, which we might call violence, focuses more on the "disenhancement" of others as a means to the same end.

Although the life of animals often seems rather bloody, we must take care not to confuse predation – the hunting and killing of other animals for food – with aggression. Predation in carnivorous species has more in common with grazing in vegetarian species than with aggression between members of the same species. Take a good look at your neighborhood cat hunting a mouse: He is cool, composed, not hot and crazed. In human terms, there is not the usual emotional correlate of aggression: anger. He is simply taking care of business.

That distinction noted, there remains remarkably little aggression in the animal world. But it does remain. We find it most often in circumstances of competition over a resource. This resource must be important for "fitness," that is, relevant to one's individual or reproductive success. Further, it must be restricted in abundance: Animals do not, for example, compete for air, but may for water, food, nesting areas, and mates.

It is the last item – mates – that accounts for most aggression in mammals. And it is males that are most noted for this aggression. The connection between masculinity and aggression is so strong, Adler once used the phrase "masculine protest" to refer to the aggressive instinct. Yes, Virginia, there are differences between the sexes: Both libido (sex drive) and aggression are greater (on average!) in the human male. And, naturally, libido and aggression are interrelated!

As we mentioned earlier, females have so much at stake in any act of copulation – so many months gestation, the increased energy requirement, susceptibility to attack, the dangers of birth, the responsibility of lactation – that it serves their fitness to be "picky" when looking for a partner. If females are picky, males must be show-offs: The male must demonstrate that he has the qualities that serve the female's fitness, in order to serve his own fitness. Deer and other antlered and horned mammals are good examples. Mind you, this need not be conscious or learned; in all likelihood, it is all quite instinctual in most mammals. It may possibly have some instinctual bases in us as well.

Some of this aggressiveness may in fact be mediated by testosterone, the "male" hormone. Inject testosterone into female mice and their threshold for aggressive behavior goes down. Remove testosterone from male mice (by castrating the poor things) and their thresholds go up. But I must add that testosterone does not cause aggression, it just lowers the threshold for it.

But females in many species can be quite aggressive (such as female guinea pigs), and females in most species can be extremely aggressive in certain circumstances (such as when facing a threat to her infants). In human societies, the sociological statistics are clear: Most violent crime is committed by men. But we have already noticed that, as women assert their rights to full participation in the social and economic world, those statistics are changing. Time will tell the degree to which testosterone is responsible for aggression in people.

Nevertheless, males engage in a great deal of head-butting. But one can't help but notice that these contests "over" females seldom end in death or even serious injury in most species. That is because these contests are just that: contests. They are a matter of displays of virtues, and they usually include actions that serve as sign stimuli to the opponent that the contest has ended in his favor: surrender signals. Continued aggression is of little advantage to either the loser or the winner. Even male rattlesnakes don't bite each other!

Territoriality and dominance hierarchies – once thought to be major focuses of aggressive behavior – seem to be relatively less significant. Animals tend to respect territorial and status claims more than dispute them. It is only when circumstances, whether natural or humanly created, are out of the ordinary that we see much aggression. And low food supplies likely have little to do with aggression. Southwick, studying Rhesus monkeys in the London Zoo, found that reducing the food supplies by 25% had no effect on the amount of aggression found, and reducing the food supplies by 50% actually decreased aggression! We find the same thing among primitive people.



So why so much aggression in people? One possibility is our lack of biological restraints. Sociobiologists predict that animals that are poorly equipt for aggression are unlikely to have developed surrender signals. Man, they say, is one of these creatures. But we developed technology, including a technology of destruction, and this technology "evolved" much too quickly for our biological evolution to provide us with compensating restraints on aggression. Experience tells us that guns are more dangerous than knives, though both are efficient killing machines, because a gun is faster and provides us with less time to consider our act rationally – the only restraint left us.

Another problem is that we humans live not just in the "real" world, but in a symbolic world as well. A lion gets aggressive about something here-and-now. People get aggressive about things that happened long ago, things that they think will happen some day in the future, or things that they've been told is happening. Likewise, a lion gets angry about pretty physical things. Calling him a name won't bother him a bit.

A lion gets angry about something that happens to him personally. We get angry about things that happen to our cars, our houses, our communities, our nations, our religious establishments, and so on. We have extended our "ego's" way beyond our selves and our loved ones to all sorts of symbolic things. The response to flag burning is only the latest example.

If aggression has an instinctual basis in human beings, we would expect there to be a sign stimulus. It would certainly not be something as simple as bright red males during mating season, as in stickleback fish. If we go back to the idea of competition as a fertile ground for aggression, we notice that frustration is a likely candidate. There are two of you who want the same thing; if one grabs it, the other doesn't get it and is unhappy; so he takes it, and now the other is unhappy; and so on. Goal-directed behavior has been blocked, and that is frustration.

Variations on that theme abound: We can be frustrated when an on-going behavior is interrupted (trying tripping someone); we can be frustrated by a delay of goal achievement (cut in front of someone on line at the movie theater); or we can be frustrated by the disruption of ordinary behavior patterns (try stealing my morning coffee). We are flexible creatures.

But we must beware here: Other things can lead to aggression besides frustration (or aren't highly paid boxers engaged in aggression?) and frustration can lead to other things besides aggression (or doesn't social impotence lead to depression?). Further, as Fromm points out, frustration (and aggression) is in the eyes of the beholder. He feels that the frustration must be experienced as unjust or as a sign of rejection for it to lead to aggression.

### 8.6 Society

Jung has an archetype he calls the *persona*. The persona represents your public image. The word is, obviously, related to the word person and personality, and comes from a Latin word for mask. So the persona is the mask you put on before you show yourself to the outside world. Although it begins as an archetype, by the time we are finished realizing it, it is the part of us most distant from the collective unconscious. At its best, it is the "good impression" we all wish to present as we fill the roles society requires of us. But, of course, it can also be the "false impression" we use to manipulate people's opinions and behaviors. And, at its worst, it can be mistaken, even by ourselves, for our true nature: Sometimes we believe we really are what we pretend to be! For better or worse, this archetype is "filled" with our cultural learning.

Many psychologists, sociologist, anthropologists, and others are wary of the explanations – convincing though they sometimes are – of the sociobiologists: For every sociobiological explanation, we can find a cultural explanation as well. After all, culture operates by the same principles as evolution.

There are many different ways to do any one task, but in the context of a certain physical environment and a certain culture, some ways of doing things work better than others. These are more likely to be "passed on" from one generation to the next, this time by learning.

Now, cultures need to accomplish certain things if they are to survive at all. They must assure effective use of natural resources, for example, which might involve the learning of all sorts of territorial and aggressive behaviors, just like in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a degree of cooperation, which might involve learning altruistic behaviors, rules for sharing resources and for other social relationships, just like the ones in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a continuation of the population, which might involve certain courtship and marital arrangements, nurturant behaviors, and so on, just like in sociobiological explanations.

If a society is to survive – and any existing society has at least survived until now – it must take care of the very same issues that genetics must take care of. And, because learning is considerably more flexible than evolutionary adaptation, we would expect culture to tend to replace genetics. That is, after all, only evolutionary good sense!

So do we have instincts? If we define instincts as automatic reflex-like connections – no, probably not. But define instincts as "strong innate tendencies toward certain behaviors in certain situations" – yes, we probably do. The important point is that we (unlike animals) can always say no to our instinctual behaviors, just like we can say no to our learned ones!

## 9. Temperaments

Temperaments are personality traits that are rooted in genetics. So, in order to talk about temperaments, we first need to talk about *traits*. Traits are the characteristics that make each of us different from others. When most people talk about personality, they are talking about these traits. Many of these traits are recognizable by their effects on your behavior. If you have certain consistent behaviors that others recognize, they often infer that you have a certain personality – i.e. a trait – that you will carry around with you into other situations.

Gordon Allport was a psychologist who was one of the first to pay a great deal of attention to these traits, which he called personal dispositions. A personal disposition produces equivalences in function and meaning between various perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and actions that are not necessarily equivalent in the natural world, or in anyone else's mind. To use one of Allport's own examples, a person with the personal disposition "fear of communism" may equate Russians, liberals, professors, strikers, social activists, environmentalists, feminists, and so on. He may lump them all together and respond to any of them with a set of behaviors that express his fear: making speeches, writing letters, voting, arming himself, getting angry, etc.

Allport emphasized that traits are essentially unique to each individual: One person's "fear of communism" is not the same as another's, my "introversion" is not the same as yours, his "paranoia" is not the same as hers, etc. For this reason, Allport strongly pushed what he called *idiographic* methods – methods that focused on studying one person at a time, such as interviews, observation, analysis of letters or diaries, and so on.

Allport does recognize that within any particular culture, there are *common* traits, ones that are a part of that culture, that everyone in that culture recognizes and names. In our culture, we commonly differentiate between introverts and extraverts or liberals and conservatives, and we all know (roughly) what we mean. But another culture may not recognize these. What, for example, would liberal and conservative mean in the middle ages?

Allport recognizes that some traits are more closely tied to one's self than others. *Central* traits are the building blocks of your personality, your core constructs. When you describe someone, you are likely to use words that refer to these central traits: smart, dumb, wild, shy, sneaky, dopey, grumpy.... He noted that most people have somewhere between five and ten of these.

There are also *secondary* traits, ones that aren't quite so obvious, or so general, or so consistent. Preferences, attitudes, situational traits are all secondary. For example, "he gets angry when you try to tickle him," "she has some very unusual sexual inclinations," and "you just can't take him out to restaurants."

But then there are *cardinal* traits. These are the traits that some people have which practically define their life. Someone who spends their life seeking fame, or fortune, or sex is such a person. Often we use specific historical or fictional people to name these cardinal traits: Scrooge (greed), Joan of Arc (heroic self-sacrifice), Mother Teresa (religious service), Marquis de Sade (sadism), Machiavelli (political ruthlessness), and so on. Relatively few people develop a cardinal trait.

*Temperaments* are central traits that are believed to be genetically based and therefore present from birth or even before. That does not mean that a temperament theory says we don't also have aspects of our personality that are learned! Temperament theorists have a focus on "nature," and leave "nurture" to other theorists!

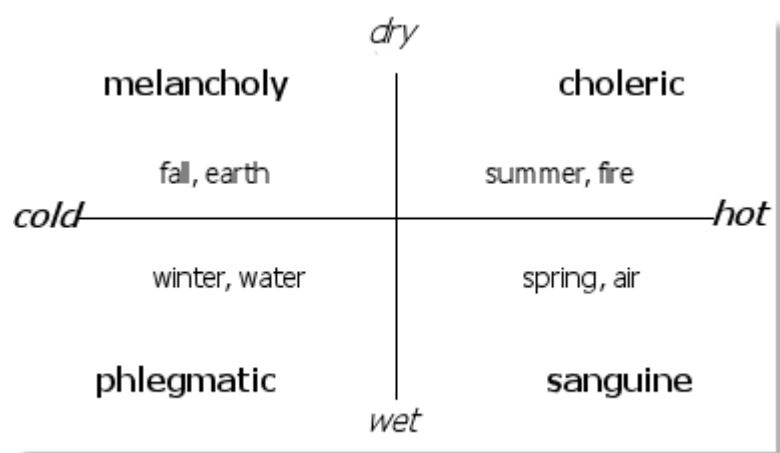
### 9.1 Ancient Greeks

The issue of personality types, including temperament, is as old as psychology. In fact, it is a good deal older. The ancient Greeks, to take the obvious example, had given it considerable thought, and came up with two dimensions of temperament, leading to four "types," based on what kind of fluids (called humors) they had too much or too little of. This theory became popular during the middle ages.

The *sanguine* type is cheerful and optimistic, pleasant to be with, comfortable with his or her work. According to the Greeks, the sanguine type has a particularly abundant supply of blood (hence the name sanguine, from sanguis, Latin for blood) and so also is characterized by a healthful look, including rosy cheeks.

The *choleric* type is characterized by a quick, hot temper, often an aggressive nature. The name refers to bile (a chemical that is excreted by the gall bladder to aid in digestion). Physical features of the choleric person include a yellowish complexion and tense muscles.

Next, we have the *phlegmatic* temperament. These people are characterized by their slowness, laziness, and dullness. The name obviously comes from the word phlegm, which is the mucus we bring up from our lungs when we have a cold or lung infection. Physically, these people are thought to be kind of cold, and shaking hands with one is like shaking hands with a fish.



Finally, there's the *melancholy* temperament. These people tend to be sad, even depressed, and take a pessimistic view of the world. The name has, of course, been adopted as a synonym for sadness, but comes from the Greek words for black bile. Now, since there is no such thing, we don't quite know what the ancient Greeks were referring to. But the melancholy person was thought to have too much of it!

These four types are actually the corners of two dissecting lines: temperature and humidity. Sanguine people are warm and wet. Choleric people are warm and dry. Phlegmatic people are cool and wet. Melancholy people are cool and dry. There were even theories suggesting that different climates were related to different types, so that Italians (warm and moist) were sanguine, Arabs (hot and dry) were choleric, Russians (cold and dry) were melancholy, and Englishmen (cool and humid) were phlegmatic!

What might surprise you is that this theory, based on so little, has actually had an influence on several modern theorists. Adler, for example, related these types to his four personalities. But, more to the point, Ivan Pavlov, of classical conditioning fame, used the humors to describe his dogs' personalities.

One of the things Pavlov tried with his dogs was conflicting conditioning – ringing a bell that signaled food at the same time as another bell that signaled the end of the meal. Some dogs took it well, and maintain their cheerfulness. Some got angry and barked like crazy. Some just laid down and fell asleep. And some whimpered and whined and seemed to have a nervous breakdown. I don't need to tell you which dog is which temperament!

Pavlov believed that he could account for these personality types with two dimensions: On the one hand there is the overall level of arousal (called excitation) that the dogs' brains had available. On the other, there was the ability the dogs' brains had of changing their level of arousal – i.e. the level of inhibition that their brains had available. Lots of arousal, but good inhibition: sanguine. Lots of arousal, but poor inhibition: choleric. Not much arousal, plus good inhibition: phlegmatic. Not much arousal, plus poor inhibition: melancholy. Arousal would be analogous to warmth, inhibition analogous to moisture! This became the inspiration for Hans Eysenck's theory.

### 9.2 Carl Jung

Carl Jung developed a personality typology that has become so popular that some people don't realize he did anything else! It begins with the distinction between *introversion* and *extroversion*. Introverts are people who prefer their internal world of thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dreams, and so on, while extroverts prefer the external world of things and people and activities.

The words have become confused with ideas like shyness and sociability, partially because introverts tend to be shy and extroverts tend to be sociable. But Jung intended for them to refer more to whether you ("ego") more often faced toward the persona and outer reality, or toward the collective unconscious and its archetypes. In that sense, the introvert is somewhat more mature than the extrovert. Our culture, of course, values the extrovert much more. And Jung warned that we all tend to value our own type most!

We now find the introvert-extrovert dimension in several theories, notably Hans Eysenck's, although often hidden under alternative names such as "sociability" and "surgency."

Whether we are introverts or extroverts, we need to deal with the world, inner and outer. And each of us has our preferred ways of dealing with it, ways we are comfortable with and good at. Jung suggests there are four basic ways, or functions:

The first is *sensing*. Sensing means what it says: getting information by means of the senses. A sensing person is good at looking and listening and generally getting to know the world. Jung called this one of the irrational functions, meaning that it involved perception rather than judging of information.

The second is *thinking*. Thinking means evaluating information or ideas rationally, logically. Jung called this a rational function, meaning that it involves decision making or judging, rather than simple intake of information.

The third is *intuiting*. Intuiting is a kind of perception that works outside of the usual conscious processes. It is irrational or perceptual, like sensing, but comes from the complex integration of large amounts of information, rather than simple seeing or hearing. Jung said it was like seeing around corners.

The fourth is *feeling*. Feeling, like thinking, is a matter of evaluating information, this time by weighing one's overall, emotional response. Jung calls it rational, obviously not in the usual sense of the word.

We all have these functions. We just have them in different proportions, you might say. Each of us has a superior function, which we prefer and which is best developed in us, a secondary function, which we are aware of and use in support of our superior function, a tertiary function, which is only slightly less developed but not terribly conscious, and an inferior function, which is poorly developed and so unconscious that we might deny its existence in ourselves.

Most of us develop only one or two of the functions, but our goal should be to develop all four. Once again, Jung sees the transcendence of opposites as the ideal.

Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers found Jung's types and functions so revealing of people's personalities that they decided to develop a paper-and-pencil test. It came to be called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and is one of the most popular, and most studied, tests around.

On the basis of your answers on about 125 questions, you are placed in one of sixteen types, with the understanding that some people might find themselves somewhere between two or three types. What type you are says quite a bit about you – your likes and dislikes, your likely career choices, your compatibility with others, and so on. People tend to like it quite a bit. It has the unusual quality among personality tests of not being too judgmental: None of the types is terribly negative, nor are any overly positive. Rather than assessing how "crazy" you are, the "Myers-Briggs" simply opens up your personality for exploration.

The test has four scales. Extroversion – Introversion (E-I) is the most important. Test researchers have found that about 75% of the population is extroverted.

The next one is Sensing – Intuiting (S-N), with about 75% of the population sensing.

The next is Thinking – Feeling (T-F). Although these are distributed evenly through the population, researchers have found that two-thirds of men are thinkers, while two-thirds of women are feelers. This might seem like stereotyping, but keep in mind that feeling and thinking are both valued equally by Jungians, and that one-third of men are feelers and one-third of women are thinkers. Note, though, that society does value thinking and feeling differently, and that feeling men and thinking women often have difficulties dealing with people's stereotyped expectations.

The last is Judging – Perceiving (J-P), not one of Jung's original dimensions. Myers and Briggs included this one in order to help determine which of a person's functions is superior. Generally, judging people are more careful, perhaps inhibited, in their lives. Perceiving people tend to be more spontaneous, sometimes careless. If you are an extrovert and a "J," you are a thinker or feeler, whichever is stronger. Extroverted and "P" means you are a senser or intuiter. On the other hand, an introvert with a high "J" score will be a senser or intuiter, while an introvert with a high "P" score will be a thinker or feeler. J and P are equally distributed in the population.

Each type is identified by four letters, such as ENFJ. These have proven so popular, you can even find them on people's license plates!

- ENFJ (Extroverted feeling with intuiting): These people are easy speakers. They tend to idealize their friends. They make good parents, but have a tendency to allow themselves to be used. They make good therapists, teachers, executives, and salespeople.
- ENFP (Extroverted intuiting with feeling): These people love novelty and surprises. They are big on emotions and expression. They are susceptible to muscle tension and tend to be hyperalert. They tend to feel self-conscious. They are good at sales, advertising, politics, and acting.
- ENTJ (Extroverted thinking with intuiting): In charge at home, they expect a lot from spouses and kids. They like organization and structure and tend to make good executives and administrators.
- ENTP (Extroverted intuiting with thinking): These are lively people, not humdrum or orderly. As mates, they are a little dangerous, especially economically. They are good at analysis and make good entrepreneurs. They do tend to play at oneupmanship.
- ESFJ (Extroverted feeling with sensing): These people like harmony. They tend to have strong shoulds and should-nots. They may be dependent, first on parents and later on spouses. They wear their hearts on their sleeves and excel in service occupations involving personal contact.
- ESFP (Extroverted sensing with feeling): Very generous and impulsive, they have a low tolerance for anxiety. They make good performers, they like public relations, and they love the phone. They should avoid scholarly pursuits, especially science.
- ESTJ (Extroverted thinking with sensing): These are responsible mates and parents and are loyal to the workplace. They are realistic, down-to-earth, orderly, and love tradition. They often find themselves joining civic clubs!

- ESTP (Extroverted sensing with thinking): These are action-oriented people, often sophisticated, sometimes ruthless – our "James Bonds." As mates, they are exciting and charming, but they have trouble with commitment. They make good promoters, entrepreneurs, and con artists.
- INFJ (Introverted intuiting with feeling): These are serious students and workers who really want to contribute. They are private and easily hurt. They make good spouses, but tend to be physically reserved. People often think they are psychic. They make good therapists, general practitioners, ministers, and so on.
- INFP (Introverted feeling with intuiting): These people are idealistic, self-sacrificing, and somewhat cool or reserved. They are very family and home oriented, but don't relax well. You find them in psychology, architecture, and religion, but never in business.
- INTJ (Introverted intuiting with thinking): These are the most independent of all types. They love logic and ideas and are drawn to scientific research. They can be rather single-minded, though.
- INTP (Introverted thinking with intuiting): Faithful, preoccupied, and forgetful, these are the bookworms. They tend to be very precise in their use of language. They are good at logic and math and make good philosophers and theoretical scientists, but not writers or salespeople.
- ISFJ (Introverted sensing with feeling): These people are service and work oriented. They may suffer from fatigue and tend to be attracted to troublemakers. They are good nurses, teachers, secretaries, general practitioners, librarians, middle managers, and housekeepers.
- ISFP (Introverted feeling with sensing): They are shy and retiring, are not talkative, but like sensuous action. They like painting, drawing, sculpting, composing, dancing – the arts generally – and they like nature. They are not big on commitment.
- ISTJ (Introverted sensing with thinking): These are dependable pillars of strength. They often try to reform their mates and other people. They make good bank examiners, auditors, accountants, tax examiners, supervisors in libraries and hospitals, business, home ec., and phys. ed. teachers, and boy or girl scouts!
- ISTP (Introverted thinking with sensing): These people are action-oriented and fearless, and crave excitement. They are impulsive and dangerous to stop. They often like tools, instruments, and weapons, and often become technical experts. They are not interested in communications and are often incorrectly diagnosed as dyslexic or hyperactive. They tend to do badly in school.

However useful and popular Jung's system is, it is primarily based on one man's observations. The next step is to try and do what Jung did with a bit more scientific precision. That's where Hans Eysenck comes in.

### 9.3 Hans Eysenck

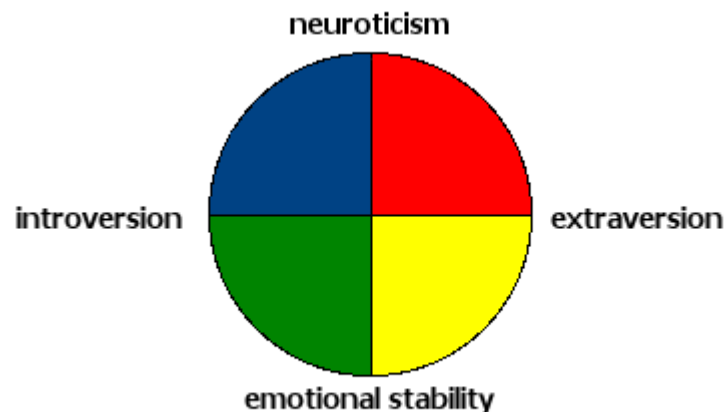
Eysenck's theory is based primarily on physiology and genetics. Although he is a behaviorist who considers learned habits of great importance, he considers personality differences as growing out of our genetic inheritance. He is, therefore, primarily interested in what is usually called temperament.

Eysenck is also primarily a research psychologist. His methods involve a statistical technique called factor analysis. This technique extracts a number of "dimensions" from large masses of data. For example, if you give long lists of adjectives to a large number of people for them to rate themselves on, you have prime raw material for factor analysis.

Imagine, for example, a test that included words like "shy," "introverted," "outgoing," "wild," and so on. Obviously, shy people are likely to rate themselves high on the first two words, and low on the second two. Outgoing people are likely to do the reverse. Factor analysis extracts dimensions – factors – such as shy-outgoing from the mass of information. The researcher then examines the data and gives the factor a name such as "introversion-extraversion." There are other techniques that will find the "best fit" of the data to various possible dimension, and others still that will find "higher level" dimensions – factors that organize the factors, like big headings organize little headings.

Eysenck's original research found two main dimensions of temperament: neuroticism and extraversion-introversion. Let's look at each one...

*Neuroticism* is the name Eysenck gave to a dimension that ranges from normal, fairly calm and collected people to one's that tend to be quite "nervous." His research showed that these nervous people tended to suffer more frequently from a variety of "nervous disorders" we call neuroses, hence the name of the dimension. But understand that he was not saying that people who score high on the neuroticism scale are necessarily neurotics – only that they are more susceptible to neurotic problems.



Eysenck was convinced that, since everyone in his data-pool fit somewhere on this dimension of normality-to-neuroticism, this was a true temperament, i.e. that this was a genetically-based, physiologically-supported dimension of personality. He therefore went to the physiological research to find possible explanations.

The most obvious place to look was at the sympathetic nervous system. This is a part of the autonomic nervous system that functions separately from the central nervous system and controls much of our emotional responsiveness to emergency situations. For example, when signals from the brain tell it to do so, the sympathetic nervous system instructs the liver to release sugar for energy, causes the digestive system to slow down, opens up the pupils, raises the hairs on your body (goosebumps), and tells the adrenal glands to release more adrenalin (epinephrine). The adrenalin in turn alters many of the body's functions and prepares the muscles for action. The traditional way of describing the function of the sympathetic nervous system is to say that it prepares us for "fight or flight."

Eysenck hypothesized that some people have a more responsive sympathetic nervous system than others. Some people remain very calm during emergencies; some people feel considerable fear or other emotions; and some are terrified by even very minor incidents. He suggested that this latter group had a problem of sympathetic hyperactivity, which made them prime candidates for the various neurotic disorders.

Perhaps the most "archetypal" neurotic symptom is the panic attack. Eysenck explained panic attacks as something like the positive feedback you get when you place a microphone too close to a speaker: The small sounds entering the mike get amplified and come out of the speaker, and go into the mike, get amplified again, and come out of the speaker again, and so on, round and round, until you get the famous squeal that we all loved to produce when we were kids. (Lead guitarists like to do this too to make some of their long, wailing sounds.)

Well, the panic attack follows the same pattern: You are mildly frightened by something – crossing a bridge, for example. This gets your sympathetic nervous system going. That makes you more nervous, and so more susceptible to stimulation, which gets your system even more in an uproar, which makes you more nervous and more susceptible.... You could say that the neuroticistic person is responding more to his or her own panic than to the original object of fear! As someone who has had panic attacks, I can vouch for Eysenck's description – although his explanation remains only a hypothesis.

His second dimension is *extraversion-introversion*. By this he means something very similar to what Jung meant by the same terms, and something very similar to our common-sense understanding of them: Shy, quiet people "versus" out-going, even loud people. This dimension, too, is found in everyone, but the physiological explanation is a bit more complex.

Eysenck hypothesized that extraversion-introversion is a matter of the balance of "inhibition" and "excitation" in the brain itself. These are ideas that Pavlov came up with to explain some of the differences he found in the reactions of his various dogs to stress. Excitation is the brain waking itself up, getting into an alert, learning state. Inhibition is the brain calming itself down, either in the usual sense of relaxing and going to sleep, or in the sense of protecting itself in the case of overwhelming stimulation.

Someone who is extraverted, he hypothesized, has good, strong inhibition: When confronted by traumatic stimulation – such as a car crash – the extravert's brain inhibits itself, which means that it becomes "numb," you might say, to the trauma, and therefore will remember very little of what happened. After the car crash, the extravert might feel as if he had "blanked out" during the event, and may ask others to fill them in on what happened. Because they don't feel the full mental impact of the crash, they may be ready to go back to driving the very next day.

The introvert, on the other hand, has poor or weak inhibition: When trauma, such as the car crash, hits them, their brains don't protect them fast enough, don't in any way shut down. Instead, they are highly alert and learn well, and so remember everything that happened. They might even report that they saw the whole crash "in slow motion!" They are very unlikely to want to drive anytime soon after the crash, and may even stop driving altogether.

Now, how does this lead to shyness or a love of parties? Well, imagine the extravert and the introvert both getting drunk, taking off their clothes, and dancing buck naked on a restaurant table. The next morning, the extravert will ask you what happened (and where are his clothes). When you tell him, he'll laugh and start making arrangements to have another party. The introvert, on the other hand, will remember every mortifying moment of his humiliation, and may never come out of his room again. (I'm very introverted, and again I can vouch to a lot of this experientially! Perhaps some of you extraverts can tell me if he describes your experiences well, too – assuming, of course, that you can remember your experiences!)

One of the things that Eysenck discovered was that violent criminals tend to be non-neuroticistic extraverts. This makes common sense, if you think about it: It is hard to imagine somebody who is painfully shy and who remembers their experiences and learns from them holding up a Seven-Eleven! It is even harder to imagine someone given to panic attacks doing so. But please understand that there are many kinds of crime besides the violent kind that introverts and neurotics might engage in!

Another thing Eysenck looked into was the interaction of the two dimensions and what that might mean in regard to various psychological problems. He found, for example, that people with phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder tended to be quite introverted, whereas people with conversion disorders (e.g. hysterical paralysis) or dissociative disorders (e.g. amnesia) tended to be more extraverted.

Here's his explanation: Highly neuroticistic people over-respond to fearful stimuli; If they are introverts, they will learn to avoid the situations that cause panic very quickly and very thoroughly, even to the point of becoming panicky at small symbols of those situations – they will develop phobias. Other introverts will learn (quickly and thoroughly) particular behaviors that hold off their panic – such as checking things many times over or washing their hands again and again.

Highly neuroticistic extraverts, on the other hand, are good at ignoring and forgetting the things that overwhelm them. They engage in the classic defense mechanisms, such as denial and repression. They can conveniently forget a painful weekend, for example, or even "forget" their ability to feel and use their legs.

Eysenck came to recognize that, although he was using large populations for his research, there were some populations he was not tapping. He began to take his studies into the mental institutions of England. When these masses of data were factor analyzed, a third significant factor began to emerge, which he labeled *psychoticism*.

Like neuroticism, high psychoticism does not mean you are psychotic or doomed to become so – only that you exhibit some qualities commonly found among psychotics, and that you may be more susceptible, given certain environments, to becoming psychotic.

As you might imagine, the kinds of qualities found in high psychoticistic people include a certain recklessness, a disregard for common sense or conventions, and a degree of inappropriate emotional expression. It is the dimension that separates those people who end up institutions from the rest of humanity!

### 9.4 Baby temperaments

Arnold Buss (b. 1924) and Robert Plomin (b. 1948), both working at the University of Colorado at the time, took a different approach: If some aspect of our behavior or personality is supposed to have a genetic, inborn basis, we should find it more clearly in infants than in adults.

So Buss and Plomin decided to study infants. Plus, since identical twins have the same genetic inheritance, we should see them sharing any genetically based aspects of personality. If we compare identical twins with fraternal twins (who are simply brothers or sisters, genetically speaking), we can pick out things that are more likely genetic from things that are more likely due to the learning babies do in their first few months.

Buss and Plomin asked mothers of twin babies to fill out questionnaires about their babies' behavior and personality. Some babies were identical and others fraternal. Using statistical techniques similar to factor analysis, they separated out which descriptions were more likely genetic from which were more likely learned. They found four dimensions of temperament:



1. *Emotionality-impassiveness*: How emotional and excitable were the babies? Some were given to emotional outbursts of distress, fear, and anger – others were not. This was their strongest temperament dimension.

2. *Sociability-detachment*: How much did the babies enjoy, or avoid, contact and interaction with people. Some babies are "people people," others are "loners."

3. *Activity-lethargy*: How vigorous, how active, how energetic were the babies? Just like adults, some babies are always on the move, fidgety, busy – and some are not.

4. *Impulsivity-deliberateness*: How quickly did the babies "change gears," move from one interest to another? Some people quickly act upon their urges, others are more careful and deliberate.

The last one is the weakest of the four, and in the original research showed up only in boys. That doesn't mean girls can't be impulsive or deliberate – only that they seemed to learn their style, while boys seem to come one way or the other straight from the womb. But their later research found the dimension in girls as well, just not quite so strongly. It is interesting that impulse problem such as hyperactivity and attention deficit are more common among boys than girls, as if to show that, while most girls can be taught to sit still and pay attention, many boys cannot.

### 9.5 The big five

In the last couple of decades, an increasing number of theorists and researchers have come to the conclusion that five is the "magic number" for temperament dimensions. The first version, called *The Big Five*, was introduced in 1963 by Warren Norman. It was a fresh reworking of an Air Force technical report by E. C. Tuppes and R. E. Christal.

But it wasn't until R. R. McCrae and P. T. Costa, Jr., presented their version, called *The Five Factor Theory*, in 1990, that the idea really took hold of the individual differences research community. When they introduced the NEO Personality Inventory, many people felt, and continue to feel, that we'd finally hit the motherload!

Here are the five factors, and some defining adjectives:

1. *Extraversion* – adventurous, assertive, frank, sociable, talkative (versus *Introversion* – quiet, reserved, shy, unsociable).
2. *Agreeableness* – altruistic, gentle, kind, sympathetic, warm.
3. *Conscientiousness* – competent, dutiful, orderly, responsible, thorough.
4. *Emotional Stability* – calm, relaxed, stable (versus *Neuroticism* – anxious, angry, depressed).
5. *Culture or Openness to Experience* – cultured, esthetic, imaginative, intellectual, open.

Temperaments could only be called temperaments if they are stable over time, that is, resistant to environmental issues. Costa and McCrae (1994) found the following correlations between tests over six years:

Neuroticism -	.83
Extraversion -	.82
Openness -	.83
Conscientiousness -	.79
Agreeableness -	.63

Pretty powerful! Looking at other studies, some of which stretched for 30 years, they found about .50 correlations. Still good!

The Dunedin Study by Caspi and his associates (2003) did a particularly strong study (in Dunedin, New Zealand) that looked at the change in traits of 1000 kids over 23 years and found considerable stability. The most stable were two groups, which they called "undercontrolled", which Costa and McCrae might consider high in neuroticism but low in agreeableness and conscientiousness, and "inhibited" (low extraversion).

In a great book by Dunn and Plomin (1990) called *Separate lives: Why siblings are so different*, the issue of "heritability" is discussed at length. Heritability, as you may have guessed, is the degree of the variance in personality traits that can be accounted for by heredity. It turns out to be about 40%. But what accounts for the other 60%? One would assume upbringing. But that turns out to be wrong! Instead, most of that 60% is accounted for by individual experience *not* shared with your siblings. Dunn and Plomin estimate that 40% of your personality is due to genetics, 35% to this "non-shared" environment, 20% to measurement error, and only 5% to the shared environment (upbringing). This is surprising, but it doesn't mean that your personality is determined by genetics. An equal amount is due to learning, except most of the learning is more individual than expected.

As you can see, while temperaments have staying power, they do change over time. Costa and McCrae (1994) also found that Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness tend to decline as we get older. We become a little quieter, you might say, and stuck in our ways. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness tend to go up – we learn how to get along with others and how to get things done. But they don't change very much. Really, we learn how to use our personality in the life that is given to us.

At this point in time, the Big Five is the "gold standard" for personality research. Versions of these tests are now available free on the internet in order that researchers all over the world can coordinate their research. But there are still other factors which we need to take into account as possible temperaments. The most important of these is intelligence.

### 9.6 Intelligence

Another viable candidate for status as a quality of temperament is intelligence. Intelligence is a person's capacity to (1) acquire knowledge (i.e. learn and understand), (2) apply knowledge (solve problems), and (3) engage in abstract reasoning. It is the "power" of one's intellect, and as such is clearly a very important aspect of one's overall well-being. Psychologists have attempted to measure it for well over a century, and have gotten pretty good at it.

*Intelligence Quotient* (IQ) is the score you get on an intelligence test. Originally, it was a quotient (a ratio):  $IQ = MA/CA \times 100$  [MA is mental age, CA is chronological age]. Today, scores are calibrated against norms of actual population scores. Here are approximate proportions at various levels:

- Under 70 [mentally retarded] – 2.2%
- 70-80 [borderline retarded] – 6.7%
- 80-90 [low average] – 16.1%
- 90-110 [average] – 50%
- 110-120 [high average] – 16.1%
- 120-130 [superior] – 6.7%
- Over 130 [very superior] – 2.2%

Intelligence is significantly genetic. The correlation in IQ scores between mother and child, father and child, and between two natural siblings is approximately .50, which is what we would expect, since you share half your genetic materials with your parents, children, and siblings. Likewise, correlation between parents and their adopted children is roughly 0.

But we can also see a number of environmental aspects to intelligence: A stimulating environment, parental encouragement, good schooling, specific reasoning skills, continued practice, and so on, certainly help a person become more intelligent. Likewise, there are certain biological factors that are nevertheless environmental: prenatal care, nutrition (especially in early childhood), freedom from disease and physical trauma, and so on. All of these are important and cannot be ignored – especially when these are the things we can most easily do something about!

I believe that something better than half of intelligence is accounted for by genetics. And this is, to put it simply, a matter of brain efficiency. If your brain is well-developed, free from genetic defects, free from neurochemical imbalances, then it will work well, given a decent environment. But no matter how good your environment, if you are forced to rely on "bad equipment," it will be much more difficult to attain high intelligence.

Most of the normal curve of intelligence, I believe, is due to a variety of physiological impairments of brain efficiency, such as that resulting from malnourishment, prenatal trauma, chromosomal damage, and, most often, simple inheritance of certain neurochemical makeups. These stretch what would otherwise be a much "tighter" curve out to the low end.

The great majority of us have fairly healthy brains. A very few have particularly healthy brains. It would seem that having particularly healthy brains would be a fantastic aid to one's "fitness," so I can only guess that not being too bright must be even better!

### 9.7 Maleness and femaleness

After a few millenia of sexism, we are rightfully wary of ideas that suggest that men and women may be psychologically different from each other. And yet we can't get away from the evidence that we do have some differences, and that these differences are tied to our physiological differences. Even if we stick simply to hormonal differences, we have to recognize that the sex hormones do make us behave differently in certain circumstances. On top of that, we are coming to recognize some physiological differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals. So, while I fervently hope that I do not imply value differences with my discussion of male-female (and homosexual-heterosexual) personality traits, I must sally forth!

The psychological differences between men and women revolve around our biological roles and the instincts we have to carry out those roles. Men, as with so many mammalian males, appear to be significantly more aggressive than women. This is probably related to our evolutionary need to compete with other men for the attention of women. That competition has led to men being larger and more muscular and, of course, loaded with that most irritating hormone, testosterone. The size and strength of men in relation to women has led to the gender-specific roles in primitive society: men are more likely to engage in the short-burst high-energy tasks such as hunting, while the women engage in less intense but far more extended tasks such as gathering. Unfortunately, the size and strength differential has also led to most societies being dominated by men, often with women relegated to a slave-like social status.

Women have strong ties to infants, which could be accounted for by the fact that they carry the fetus for 40 weeks and then nurse the baby for two or three years (at least in primitive cultures), all strongly supported by hormone-mediated instincts. Again, in primitive societies, the woman is either pregnant, nursing, or caring for her children continuously. This makes her even more likely to restrict her other activities to gathering, cooking, and other home-bound pursuits. It also makes her more likely to be dominated by men. It also makes her (and her family) far more concerned about an appropriate mate than would be the men.

The overall effects on men's and women's psychological natures are still evident today, despite the slow movement towards social equality. Men are still far more likely to act on their aggressive impulses and commit violent crimes. They are more likely to attack than to retreat. They engage in more high-risk activities. They are more likely to seek multiple partners. They are more likely to abandon their children.

Women, on the other hand, are more likely to retreat than to attack, and tend to show emotion more dramatically. They tend to prefer nurturant activities to competitive ones, even as children. They seek more same-sex companionship than men. They talk more, and are more fluent than men. (Note that in mixed groups, men talk more because they are more assertive, while women tend to back off in order to maintain order in the group.) And they are more likely to continue in a relationship, even if only "for the sake of the children".

Again, please keep in mind that we are talking about overall tendencies. Many women are aggressive, for example, and many men are nurturant. Some of the things I mentioned as differences may be due more to cultural learning, or at least be reinforced by cultural learning, than I suggest, and so may change dramatically in the future.

The big question for personality theory here is whether maleness-femaleness is a fundamental dimension, or is just a composite of some of the other dimensions we've discussed here. I vote for fundamental, but I have been known to be wrong!

### 9.8 Autism

Another possible temperament factor is autism. Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder that causes children to have a great deal of difficulty interacting with other people. It can be so severe that the child will not make eye-contact, not respond to their name, not learn to talk, and spend much of their day rocking or doing other repetitive things like rolling a ball back and forth or spinning coins. Obviously hard on the children, it is even harder for their families.

The causes of autism are still not known. It is believed by most researchers that it involves problems with neural circuits, and twin studies suggest that genetic influences are likely. For a long time, it was incorrectly believed that autism resulted from parental neglect.

The usual approach to helping children with autism is to use rewards to encourage social interaction, try to develop their language skills, and lead them to some degree of self-care. Some children respond very well and go on to support themselves. Others remain in a state that requires care for the rest of their lives.

There has been some limited success with antipsychotic drugs and with antidepressants.

In the last 20 years or so, a number of finer differentiations have evolved regarding what is now seen as an *autistic spectrum*.

First, we have something called *Asperger's syndrome*. These children (and adults) are generally of normal (and sometimes high) intelligence, but have difficulty in social interaction. They seem exceptionally shy and have a hard time making eye contact. They have trouble learning what is called pragmatics – the part of communication between people that involves recognizing turn-taking, facial expressions, gestures, and other non-verbal cues. They tend to focus intensely on one thing at a time, don't like abrupt changes, and develop obsessive routines. As adults, they usually adapt, but are seen as being socially inept, absent minded, and eccentric. Of course, that begs the question a little: Is this truly a separate disorder, or just a little out there on the continuum of normal behavior?

There are other syndromes that focus more on language: The *semantic-pragmatic disorder* is sometimes used to label certain children who are similar to Asperger's children but more sociable. The focus of their problem is more on the communications side.

*Hyperlexia* is more a symptom than a disorder. It is a matter of being rather precocious in reading words, and being fascinated by letters and numbers. On the other hand, children with hyperlexia don't communicate well, nor do they socialize well.

*Non-verbal learning disability* is a matter of having a hard time with visual, spatial, and motor skills. They have a hard time picking out, say, one house out of a row of them, tying their shoes, getting dressed, kicking a ball, reading facial expressions, and recognizing the tone of someone's voice. One of the notable symptoms is the tendency to stare, especially when visually over-stimulated.

A related problem that is close to my heart (because I have a mild version of this) is *prosopagnosia* or face blindness. This affects about 2 1/2 % of the population, and people with this problem have a difficult time recognizing faces. It can be so severe that a man can walk past his own mother and not recognize her! Generally, people with this problem develop other ways of recognizing people, such as clothing or hair styles. I recognize people I have known for a long time, but cannot place less familiar people out of the context of, say, a specific classroom or circumstance. It makes one seem rude, but it is unintentional. Interestingly, people with prosopagnosia often also have a hard time identifying some other things, such as dogs and cars! It is believed to be a problem involving the fusiform gyrus, which is involved in facial recognition.

Where does autism fit with the other personality traits we have been discussing? It is not clear. One possibility is that it is related to psychoticism, with its detachment from reality. Another is that it is a variation of introversion, with its withdrawal from social interaction. It may be a combination of these, or others, or it may be in a category of its own.

### 9.9 Antisociality

Another group of temperament issues revolve around the lack of conscience we find in some people: an inability to empathize with others, an absence of guilt. We might call these problems "antisociality" as opposed to the autistic spectrums "unsociability." There are three disorders that often involve this syndrome: conduct disorder in children, and borderline and antisocial personality disorders in adults.

### Conduct disorder

Here's what the Surgeon General's report has to say:

*Children or adolescents with conduct disorder behave aggressively by fighting, bullying, intimidating, physically assaulting, sexually coercing, and/or being cruel to people or animals. Vandalism with deliberate destruction of property, for example, setting fires or smashing windows, is common, as are theft; truancy; and early tobacco, alcohol, and substance use and abuse; and precocious sexual activity. Girls with a conduct disorder are prone to running away from home and may become involved in prostitution. The behavior interferes with performance at school or work, so that individuals with this disorder rarely perform at the level predicted by their IQ or age. Their relationships with peers and adults are often poor. They have higher injury rates and are prone to school expulsion and problems with the law. Sexually transmitted diseases are common. If they have been removed from home, they may have difficulty staying in an adoptive or foster family or group home, and this may further complicate their development. Rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and suicide itself are all higher in children diagnosed with a conduct disorder (Shaffer et al., 1996b).*

There have been many studies of conduct disorder, with many, sometimes contradictory results. There seems to be a genetic component, which is why I include it here; but it also has a number of social risk factors, such as a lack of love from parents or caretakers, neglect, abuse, poverty, and other family problems. Other possible roots include prenatal problems, birth complications, and brain damage.

Among children from 9 to 17, we find between 1 and 4 percent showing evidence of conduct disorder, and the problem being worse in the cities. There is a correlation between the bad behavior of 3-year-olds and their bad behavior when they are 11 to 13 (Raine et al., 1998). Between 25 and 50% of these children are believed to develop into antisocial adults.

Treatment of children with conduct disorder tends to focus on making their family lives happier and more consistent. If the parents or other caretakers are responsive, there are programs that teach them how to use rewards and punishments more effectively. For many of these kids, it is a matter of trying to find a home for them at all! Medications have not been found to help.

### Borderline personality disorder

Borderline people (mostly women) usually have a rather rough time with relationships. They are very moody, going from cheerful to angry to sad and back to cheerful at a speed few of us can match. They often seem to worship someone one minute and, an hour later, hate them. They are often impulsive, getting involved with drugs and alcohol, reckless sexual relationships, spending sprees, and so on. And they often engage in self-destructive behavior, ranging from speeding to "cutting" (self-mutilation) to suicidal behavior. They use these things to threaten others into doing what they want.

Borderline personality disorder is so-called because of the belief that it represents a personality style that is close to, but not quite, psychotic. Many of their symptoms, as you can see, suggest that. But I have been impressed by the ability to lie and manipulate in borderline people I have known – nearly as well as the antisocials. Instead of coming off as powerful, they use their weaknesses to manipulate. And, like antisocials, they appear to feel little if any empathy or guilt. They pull you towards them, then push you away, then pull you back. They pit one friend against another. They dramatize situations to their own ends. They move, chameleon-like, from one "personality" to another. Also like the antisocials, they are extremely difficult to treat. Possibly, they combine some of the issues of antisocial personality disorder with psychosis. Inasmuch as borderlines are predominantly women, it is also possible that they have followed their cultural guidelines as to traditional male-female differences in behavior, and are antisocials who use more passive means of getting their way.

But it also seems that much of their behavior is self-defeating. There are signs of dissociation that suggest that borderline personality disorder may be related to some degree to multiple personality or even schizophrenia. It is more common in people who have a history of neglect, abuse, and family conflict, so both a degree of dissociation and defensive manipulation would be expected.

### **Antisocial personality disorder**

*A pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following:*

- *failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest;*
- *deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure;*
- *impulsivity or failure to plan ahead;*
- *irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults;*
- *reckless disregard for safety of self or others;*
- *consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations;*
- *lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another.*

It is believed that something on the order of one in six people (mostly men) have this personality disorder. I think it is likely to be higher – perhaps 20%. The antisocial disorder used to be called the sociopath, and before that, the psychopath. The change in name simply reflects the fact that the public tends to associate the disorder only with the most extreme and dramatic cases, such as serial killers. But in fact, people with little sense of empathy or guilt live all around us and we hardly notice them until they affect us personally. If they have a decent level of intelligence, they fully recognize that certain acts are illegal or looked down upon by others, and, since that only makes trouble for themselves, they avoid those things. In other words, most antisocials are rational. I believe that, in addition to the violent criminals that may be obviously antisocial, there are also many highly successful antisocials who, in fact, owe their success to the very fact that they don't really care how they get wealth and power, only that they do actually get it. I have strong suspicions about some of those corporate executives who blithely steal from their employees and stockholders and calmly lie about it when caught. I also suspect that some of our politicians are sociopaths, especially those that seem to be able to ignore the suffering of the less fortunate while filling their pockets and the pockets of their friends with money, or those who have no qualms about declaring wars that kill and maim thousands of our own young men and women, as well as hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children of the so-called enemy.

No one knows exactly where the antisocial personality disorder comes from, but we do know that many violent criminals have damage to the prefrontal lobes. Apparently, the prefrontal lobes play a big part in controlling the limbic system, including damping emotions. In some circumstances, the fear response of the amygdala is dampened, while the rage response is intensified. If you are very angry but afraid of nothing, you can do a great deal of damage! Of course the majority of antisocials have not had damage to the prefrontal lobes, and so we can only speculate that perhaps these areas are less well developed than they are in normal people.

Others view antisocial personality disorder as derived from poor upbringing, involving abuse or neglect. In particular, some believe that it is the result of a lack of love, especially from the mother, which prevents the child from developing the ability to love, or even the ability to recognize the personhood of others. As with most psychological disorders, it is quite likely that both the physical and the developmental explanations play a part. One unfortunate aspect of the disorder is that there seems to be no therapy that can touch it. These people are excellent liars and manipulators, quite capable of convincing their therapists and others that they have reformed, found Jesus, or otherwise bettered themselves. Many go on to form inspirational groups and write self-help manuals. But it's really just that they've found another way to use people.

On the other hand, one could also argue that desensitizing oneself to the pain of others and becoming arrogant and self-centered is a matter of survival in some societies. Like paranoia, it is more likely to develop in egocentric and hierarchical cultures.

### 9.10 Conclusions

Although you may feel a bit overwhelmed with all the various theories, personality theorists in fact are more encouraged than discouraged: It is fascinating to us that all these different theorists, often coming from very different directions, still manage to come up with very parallel sets of temperament dimensions.

*Extraversion – introversion* is universally accepted as a temperament. But we may need to re-evaluate the far ends of this dimension. First, though extraversion is generally the preferred end, extraversion comes with a price: extraverts do not learn from their experiences as much as introverts do and so tend to make repeated mistakes, social and physical, that introverts do not make. They also can become needy when it comes to social interaction. You have no doubt seen the recent phenomenon of the cell-phone addict, who walks around with his or her phone (often with earphones) permanently attached to their ears. It seems they just cannot do without that constant social contact. On the introverted side, we might include some of the autistic spectrum disorders, at least in part. The difficulty that, for example, the Asperger's person has relating to others may be a matter of extreme introversion.

*Emotional stability – neuroticism* is also universally accepted. I believe, however, that we really need to re-examine the "stable" end of the dimension. The neuroticistic end is pretty clear: A tendency to emotionality, especially anxiety, is clearly in-born, and make high neuroticistic people much more prone, as the name implies, to anxiety disorders and depression. But isn't there something to be said for some anxiety? It evolved, no doubt, because being a bit wary can make the difference between life and death! So, having little or no anxiety or other emotional responses – being to "cool" – has its own problems. I suspect that people who get involved in high-risk activities do so because they find it more difficult to find excitement in life. And I have noticed that some criminals (and a few heads of state as well) are exceptionally calm. Even their eyes have that sleepy look that suggests they never get nervous. So, I suggest that never getting emotional might be just as problematic as being too emotional.

*Agreeableness – disagreeableness* is less universally accepted. Generally, people like agreeable people, which is, of course, why we consider them agreeable. The negative side of agreeableness is that agreeable people are often also conforming, even obedient, people, uncomfortable with disagreement and controversy. The disagreeable people, for all their possible lack of tact, at very least speak their minds and are not afraid to disagree. Agreeable people seem to be very sensitive to the feelings of other, and this end of the dimension sounds very much like Jung's *feeling* type. Disagreeable people, perhaps, like Jung's *thinking* type, have difficulty understanding others, especially their feelings.

Perhaps we can find the *asocial* disorders at the extreme disagreeable end of this dimension. In Myers-Briggs based research, men are more likely to be thinking (possibly disagreeable) and women more likely to be feeling (possibly agreeable). There is some confirmation for this in that conduct disorder in children and antisocial personality disorder in adults include far more men than women. But the borderline disorder, as I mentioned, is predominantly women, suggesting either that borderline is not a "female" variation of antisocial, or that the asocial traits are not related to disagreeableness.

*Conscientiousness – nonconscientiousness* is also less accepted. But it agrees very nicely with Myers and Briggs' traits of judging and perceiving, as well as with Freud's contrast of the anal retentive and anal repulsive. The latter two have a long history in psychology, and we still use these terms. The anal retentive is finicky, neat, clean, orderly, and thrifty. The anal expulsive is easy-going, messy, and relaxed in regards to money. In Freud's original system, these are not inborn, but the consequence of early and/or harsh potty training and late and/or lackadaisical potty-training. It is doubtful that these types are due directly to potty training, but a general family atmosphere of cleanliness and orderliness, versus the opposite may very well cause, or at least bring out, these characteristics. Nevertheless, I (and many others) believe that there is a considerable genetic component to these traits.

Conscientiousness in its extreme becomes perfectionism. Combined with neuroticism, it is probably at the root of the obsessive-compulsive disorder. It is possible that nonconscientiousness is the major contributor to Eysenck's dimension of *psychoticism* as a kind of involuntary inattentiveness to one's environment. The early stages of schizophrenia often involve a messy, disorderly lifestyle.

*Impulsivity* (vs deliberateness) might also be related to conscientiousness – nonconscientiousness (in reverse, of course), but it isn't a precise match. Impulsivity is certainly related to the problem of attention deficit and hyperactivity (ADHD). The fact that the *antisocial* types we discussed earlier often have problems with impulse-control may mean that the antisocial disorders are a combination of nonconscientiousness and disagreeableness.

*Openness – conventionality*. The last of the "big five" is openness, or culture, and it is the least robust of the bunch. First, we might suggest that being "open" is not necessarily a wonderful thing. We all know some people who are so "open" that they are interested in anything, no matter how trivial, obscure, or even deviant. "Flakey" is a word that comes to mind. On the other hand, I would suggest that a good name for the opposite end of openness (rarely discussed) would be the conventional. This puts the openness dimension in line with Jung's *sensing-intuiting* distinction (reversed, of course). Both ends have advantages and disadvantages.

"O" is the most interesting of the traits to me. First, it has some correlation with intelligence. For example, McCrae and Costa (1985) found a +.32 correlation – small but significant. But more interesting is its relationship with ideas usually considered more learned than inherited, such as "liberal v. conservative." McCrae and Costa (1980) noticed, for example, that typical conservative values such as respect for authority and tradition correlated negatively with openness.

Another connection is a reversed one between openness and authoritarianism. The basic book on authoritarianism is *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno and his colleagues (1950). They developed the F-scale (California Fascism Scale). This test tapped the following qualities:

- Conventional values
- Strongly punitive reaction to the violation of those values
- Overly concerned with deviations from sexual norms
- Anti-intellectual attitudes
- Rigid categories and tendency to stereotyping
- Preoccupation with power and strength
- Submission to authority
- Hostility to others
- Belief that the world is a very dangerous place

These same qualities, in a less extreme form, are typical of conservatism generally. Trapness (1994) found a  $-.57$  correlation between openness and authoritarianism as measure by the F-scale!

*Activity-lethargy.* I don't see a clear connection to the dimensions we have discussed so far, and I suggest that it is a separate dimension, ignored, perhaps, because it is seen as more a physical thing than a psychological one. Perhaps it doesn't show up as a temperament in adults because adults have been so affected by their environment that the genetic foundations of activity level are hidden. It could, of course, have some connection to impulsivity and ADHD. Personally, I think that activity-lethargy is a legitimate temperament that needs to be added to the "big five."

Until further research finally establishes the relationship of these (and potentially other) factors, I suggest that we consider them the "Big Eleven":

## 9. Temperaments

<p><b>Extravert:</b> People-oriented, talkative. Prefers the company of people, comfortable with many, uncomfortable with isolation. Socially daring, not easily embarrassed or shamed.</p>	<p><b>Introvert:</b> Shy, quiet. Prefers solitude or the company of no more than a few people. Easily embarrassed or shamed.</p>
<p><b>Stable:</b> Cool, emotionally stable. Not quick to anger or fear. Less likely to feel sadness or anxiety. May even seek intense experiences.</p>	<p><b>Neuroticistic:</b> Nervous, emotional, moody. Easily scared, made angry, or brought to tears. More likely to develop emotional problems such as anxiety disorders, depression, and anger-control issues.</p>
<p><b>Conscientious:</b> Orderly, organized. Uncomfortable with disorder. On-time, responsible. Sometimes obsessive and self-critical (esp. with high neuroticism).</p>	<p><b>Impulsive:</b> Short attention span, unconcerned with order, spontaneous. Tends to lateness, often seen as irresponsible. Often carefree and fun-loving (esp. with high extraversion).</p>
<p><b>Agreeable:</b> Friendly, warm. Pleasant to others, avoids argument, enjoys social calm. May be somewhat conformist or at least compromising.</p>	<p><b>Disagreeable:</b> Hard to get along with. Strong opinions, quite independent, enjoys argument. Not concerned with keeping to social pleasantries.</p>
<p><b>Open:</b> Open to new experiences. Enjoys cultural variety, the arts, philosophy, and so on. Enjoys meeting people significantly different from themselves.</p>	<p><b>Conventional:</b> Prefers familiarity. Likes things to stay the same. Uncomfortable with people that are different. Not interested in philosophy or high culture.</p>
<p><b>Active:</b> Enjoys activity, movement. Can't sit still for long. Always looking for something to do. Often enjoys engaging in sports, for example, or making things with their hands.</p>	<p><b>Lethargic:</b> Inactive, slow. Prefers sedate activities. Prefers a walk or even sitting to vigorous activity. Often perceived as being lazy.</p>
<p><b>Intelligent:</b> Able to absorb new information easily. Understands even complex issues easily. Solves problems easily.</p>	<p><b>Unintelligent:</b> Finds learning difficult. Must work hard to understand new things. Gives up solving problems.</p>
<p><b>Feminine:</b> Nurturant, social, verbal, emotionally expressive.</p>	<p><b>Masculine:</b> Aggressive, less emotional attachment, more risk-taking.</p>
<p><b>Grounded:</b> Able to easily differentiate imagination from reality. In touch with reality. Free of hallucinations and delusions.</p>	<p><b>Psychoticistic:</b> Has difficulty distinguishing imagination from reality. Prone to hallucinations and delusions.</p>
<p><b>Engaged:</b> Has an intuitive grasp of social interaction. Able to detect subtle social cues. Good at communicating feelings.</p>	<p><b>Autistic:</b> Does not appear to possess social instincts or learn subtle social cues. Has difficulty with language and other forms of communication. Highly literal.</p>
<p><b>Empathetic:</b> Understands and even shares in the feelings of others. Capable of identifying with others. Compassionate.</p>	<p><b>Psychopathic:</b> Does not identify with the feelings of others. Feels little guilt or shame. May even enjoy manipulating others or causing others pain or humiliation.</p>

### 10.1 Constructed realities

The world before it is perceived is an infinite collection of qualities. It is up to the perceiver to use some of these qualities to differentiate one event from another. This process of differentiation is driven by desire (relevance, need, meaning...). The perceiver does not "construct" reality itself; he or she constructs an *understanding* of reality, a model or theory which guides perception and behavior. Neither does reality alone *determine* perceptions and behaviors; reality is experienced "through" our understanding of it.

Animals, we presume, live in a perceived reality mediated only by instinct and individual experience. The differentiations they have or develop remain close to the natural "fault lines" of reality before it is perceived. In other words, what one animal sees is pretty likely to be similar to what another of the same species with similar experiences perceives. This unconstructed *immediate* reality is also what infants experience – and what we all experience, every now and again, when we are totally engaged in the world.

We adult human beings, on the other hand, are more usually creatures of symbolization, language, and culture. We may have instincts, and we certainly have our own unique experiences, but we also learn from the experiences of others (or even the whimsy of others) communicated through language and other symbols, artifacts, and techniques.

Let's back up a moment: Images are anticipations temporarily detached from their referents in the real world – perceptions without their objects. When we imagine (fantasize, think...), we use these "loose" anticipations *as if* they were real. We experience the same problems and problem-solving, with the same distresses and delights, that we experience in full interaction with the world.

Symbols are events that become attached to images. These symbols thereby allow us to "project" images (and fantasies, and thoughts...) outside our minds, in the form of speech, writing, art, and so on. We can then communicate our mental images to others who share our symbols.

These symbols can themselves be held within our minds as images, and we can manipulate those images as we can any other. We are now actually three-times removed from immediate experience! This is what most of us call thought in the strictest sense, i.e. the internal manipulation of symbols.

When rules for manipulating symbols are shared along with a set of symbols, we have a language. We communicate to the extent that we share these symbols and rules, which ultimately means to the extent that we share differentiations. This is the essence of culture: shared differentiations – shared understanding of reality – as reflected in shared symbols.

This ability gives us a huge advantage: Each individual need not discover from scratch what others have discovered before them. Plus, in a social creature (one that requires, not just enjoys, the presence of others), the very real and immediate needs of others can be efficiently communicated, rather than vaguely intimated and guessed at. Further, words (and symbols in general) are not tied to reality the way that anticipatory images are. They can be manipulated, moved around, recombined.... They are our most powerful means of creativity.

But there is a negative side to this as well. Because words and symbols are relatively independent of reality, they can easily develop a life of their own. Differentiations and complex systems of differentiations that may once have had meaning (or not) are communicated to the developing child as if they represented a reality directly, experientially, available to anyone. I refer to this as *constructed* reality, since it is made rather than "grown" experientially from the reality beyond perception. It is, we might say, a *fiction* or myth, and it may be beneficial or destructive.

The most important constructed reality is social reality itself. We create this social reality out of fabric provided for us by our culture through our parents, teachers, peers, media, etc. Each individual's social reality is somewhat different, but our social realities are similar, and mutually validating, to the extent that we share common cultural traditions, meaning common symbolic differentiations. If we share socio-cultural traditions, we are "cut from the same cloth," so to speak.

These social realities are fictions that have socially evolved over generations because they aid in the smooth operation of society. They survive the way physical characteristics and instincts survive, and for the same reasons. We could even speak of cultural genes or "memes", as some indeed have. But they are fictions, created and not "born," and only loosely tied to deeper reality. As long as they tend to help rather than hinder, and do not too frequently fly in the face of that deeper reality, they can survive and flourish.

Unfortunately, we tend to *reify* these structures, to give them lives of their own. We may even consider them more real than the experiences they represent. And they may become *roadblocks* to further actualization, rather than aids. They may be used to interpret and explain reality, instead of being used for practical communication. "E = mc<sup>2</sup>" becomes a law of the universe rather than an abbreviated description of a recurrent pattern. "God" becomes an all-powerful entity beyond and behind the very world he was invented to explain. A person is neurotic, introverted, self-actualizing, etc., rather than worried, shy, or creative. And so on and so on.

All this leads me to some very strong conclusions: For the most part, religions are fictions; governments are fictions; economies are fictions; philosophies are fictions; sciences are fictions; arts are fictions; societies are fictions; all the "isms" – capitalism, socialism, racism, humanism, sexism, feminism... are fictions. They are words with few referents. A mature, experienced, intelligent person can handle these words and use them as conveniences in communication. Unfortunately, the great majority of people apparently cannot.

Erich Fromm suggests that the human needs can be expressed in one simple statement: The human being needs *to find an answer to his existence*. Fromm says that helping us to answer this question is perhaps the major purpose of culture. In a way, he says, all cultures are like religions, trying to explain the meaning of life. Some, of course, do so better than others. A more negative way of expressing this need is to say that we need *to avoid insanity*, and he defines neurosis as an effort to satisfy the need for answers, but one that doesn't work very well. He says that every neurosis is a sort of private religion, one we turn to when our culture no longer satisfies.

## 10.2 Culture

*"Culture is a way of thinking, feeling, believing. It is the group's knowledge stored up (in memories..., books, and objects) for future use." (Clyde Kluckhohn, Mirror for Man)*

Culture is learned. But, as we saw, learning, at least in people, is a lot more than just conditioned responses. It would be more accurate to think of it as a soaking-up of the world – especially the social world – around you. This makes the impact of culture considerably richer, if less fundamental, than the impact of genetics.

It is easy to get carried away by genetic or sociobiological explanations for human behavior. They seem so reasonable! But you have to be careful: Many of the things that have sociobiological explanations may also have learned, cultural explanations that are just as reasonable.

For example, it is certainly true that those who carry a gene that pushes the individual towards sexual activity are more likely to leave behind children who, in turn, will have that gene and pass it on, etc. And, conversely, those who carry a gene that makes them sexually unresponsive may leave behind fewer children, and that gene eventually may disappear from the species.

But a society of people with certain well-learned cultural habits that push them to reproduce has the same effect! Someone who thoroughly believes that it is one's duty to have many children is more likely to actually have them, and then teach them what they so thoroughly believe: That it is one's duty to have many children. And so on down the line!

Those who believe they should reproduce pass on those beliefs as well as their genes. Those who believe that it is better to remain celibate don't pass on their genes, nor their beliefs in celibacy. But wait: Haven't there been cultures that promote celibacy – the Catholic and Buddhist traditions of monastic life, for example?

In these cases, although a portion of the society is not reproducing, that portion may actually serve a useful purpose for the rest of society, helping to pass on that society's beliefs via education. The beliefs concerning the value of celibacy are passed on to other people's children, and so they continue as well!

Cultures need to accomplish certain things if they are to survive at all. They must assure effective use of natural resources, for example, which might involve the learning of all sorts of territorial and aggressive behaviors, just like in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a degree of cooperation, which might involve learning altruistic behaviors, rules for sharing resources and for other social relationships, just like the ones in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a continuation of the population, which might involve certain courtship and marital arrangements, nurturant behaviors, and so on, just like in sociobiological explanations.

If a society is to survive – and any existing society has at least survived until now – it must take care of the very same issues that genetics must take care of. But, because learning is considerably more flexible than evolutionary adaptation, culture tends to take over many of the tasks of genetics. That is, after all, only evolutionary good sense!

It has become popular to refer to these beliefs as *memes* (in analogy to genes). "It is your duty to have many children," "Celibacy is to be valued," "Obey those older than you," "Kill those who do not conform to our beliefs," are all examples of memes.

Also included as memes are all the techniques a society develops, such as how to make a flint tool, how to grind wheat, how to butcher a pig, how to make a cake, how to wage a battle, how to read and write, and so on, all the way up to how to build a nuclear power plant or perform neurosurgery.

Other memes include the rules to sports and games, the way we keep time and dates, the events we celebrate, the rituals we engage in, the rules for choosing leaders, the way we keep track of who owes whom how much.... The list is endless. And yet all these things survive – or not – in a manner not too dissimilar from the manner in which we pass on our genetic inheritance: If they promote the welfare of the society, they continue. If they work against the welfare of the society, they will disappear, perhaps with that society.

Many memes have very short life-times: Top-ten music hits seldom last longer than a few months; Fashions are notorious for changing one year to the next; And the popularity of one celebrity or another goes as fast as it comes. But some memes last for generations, and some last for a thousand years or more! There are characteristics of various ethnic groups (often contributing to exaggerated stereotypes) that can be traced back centuries and seem to be nearly impossible to erase. These memes may even become things that a people use to identify themselves as a culture.

Examples can easily be found in the cultures of traditional people around the world. The ancestors of people living in small villages in parts of the Middle East, or Sub-Sahara Africa, or high in the Andes of South America would likely have little difficulty fitting in with their descendents – except, I suppose, for the occasional radio or cellphone. Even in Europe, the day-to-day life of peasants changed little from the dark ages to the renaissance.

Another example is language. Language usually changes very slowly, if there are no major movements of tribes. In Iceland, a very modern country in every other way, the language is nearly identical to that spoken by its original viking settlers from a thousand years ago!

On the other hand, when populations start to move and cultures begin to mingle, we can see rapid changes in culture. One hundred years ago, white Americans were rarely well educated, looked to the Bible for guidance, were very independent, hard-working, and frugal, and would have nothing to do with African Americans or their culture. Today, almost all have a high school degree, and a large number have college degrees. Religion still has a strong influence, but most people turn to doctors, lawyers, and psychiatrists for guidance. Most people work for large corporations and government institutions, belong to unions, expect all sorts of government services. They tend to spend money very freely – even money they don't actually have – and consider leisure time a God-given right. And parts of African American culture have been thoroughly absorbed into the mainstream culture: Blues, jazz, rock, and hip-hop are referred to as true American music, though created by the descendants of slaves. And they might even consider voting for an African American for president!

Even more dramatic are the changes wrought by technological advances. Many of the major cultural changes of history follow major changes of technology: The agricultural revolution and the industrial revolutions are the obvious examples. Consider the technological revolution of the last century: Imagine the world of your great-grandfather or great-grandmother 100 years ago. No cars, no highways, no airplanes, no radios, no televisions, no telephones, no computers, no recorded music, no internet.... Imagine what your great-grandfather or great-grandmother would think of the world today. Things have changed.

If we look at the world today, we can clearly see the results of centuries, even millennia of this cultural kind of evolution: Democracy seems to be winning out over totalitarianism; Science seems to be winning out over superstition; Less happily, militarism seems to be winning out over peacefulness, and the economics of greed over an economics of compassion. We may have to be extra vigilant in the near future: Militarism and capitalism have little use for the voice of the people, and prefer ignorance over knowledge.

Another thing to consider here: Just like genes are selected in the context of an ecosystem, so are memes selected in a larger context. What worked really well in the stone age may not work so well in the agricultural age. What meant superiority in the middle ages may lead to disaster in the industrial age. Even what meant success in the last century may not mean success in this one.

And one more thing: Unlike physical evolution, cultural evolution can change very quickly! We don't have to wait for the slow processes of natural selection: Change can occur in a single generation. And a single individual can introduce a new meme – a new belief or technique – that alters the world. Think of Edison, Gandhi, Lister, Einstein, Sanger, Darwin, Pinel, Pasteur, Gorbachev... the list goes on and on!

### 10.3 Getting a picture of a society

What makes up a society? How do we describe one? It is a complicated affair, but here are some suggestions as to what we need to keep in mind:

*Aspects*

1. Who – the individuals, the roles, the qualifications....
2. What – the objects, clothing, tools, ritual objects, technology....
3. When – scheduling, timing, cycles....
4. Where – the locale, buildings, furnishings....
5. How – the activities, rituals, techniques....

*Domains* (or Why we do these things)

1. Organization – order (kinship systems, government, guilds, corporations).
2. Power structures – enforcement (the military, police, defense, war).
3. Production – subsistence (work, industry, agriculture, crafts, technology, cooking, cleaning, sewing, modern professions, applied science...).
4. Education – learning (school, apprenticeship, research).
5. Recreation – entertainment (play, sports, toys, games, art, music, musical instruments, stories, literature, theater...).
6. Belief systems – stability (propitiation of the gods or spirits, satisfaction of superstitious tendencies, social manipulation, moral control, religion, magic, theoretical science...).

*Layers of society* (the "concentric domains")

1. Family – the most intimate circle and its activities, including meals, sexuality and reproduction, child rearing, male/female and adult/child role differentiation....
2. Community – a larger circle of people that we still think of as "us," and all that pertains to "us."
3. The Others – the people beyond our community, whom we think of as "them," and how we relate to "them."

(There may be additional layers and sublayers, depending on the complexity of the society.)

**10.4 Cultural typologies**

I am a fan of the work of Richard Castillo, who uses three very traditional culture dimensions in discussing multicultural psychopathology and therapy.

1. *Sociocentric vs. egocentric.* This is also known as collectivism vs. Individualism.

In the sociocentric society, a person gets his or her identity from the group, traditionally, the extended family. Your status comes from your position within the group, and the group's position in the larger society. People rarely try to move beyond the group, since that means a loss of identity. In fact, being "excommunicated" is the strongest punishment the group can apply.

In an egocentric society, a person's identity is independent of the group. Even when there remain socially stigmatized individuals and groups, the egocentric society maintains an ideal that says you are what you make of yourself, rather than what class, race, or gender you were born into. Being dependent on others, on the other hand, is frowned upon. The down side is that you have much less of a safety net in egocentric societies.

## 2. *Dominance hierarchies (authoritarianism) vs. Egalitarianism.*

In societies with prominent dominance hierarchies, people at lower levels of the hierarchy are perceived as having less value and are stigmatized. This leads them to develop low self-esteem, which in turn leads them to accept the situation as deserved and appropriate. These people see their social environment as hostile and respond to it in various ways: They may simply submit to their plight, they may attempt to "pass" as members of higher status groups, they may imitate their "betters," or they may resist their plight with violence.

Egalitarian societies tend to view all people as having similar value, even when that may not be entirely true of the society. Equality is at very least held up as an ideal to aspire to. People in egalitarian societies tend to prefer negotiation over conflict, informal leadership based on abilities as opposed to authoritarian structures, consensus over division. People are much less likely to resort to violence.

3. *Premodern vs. modern.* Premodern societies have a relatively low level of technology. They tend to have a subsistence economy with little specialization. Kinship systems are the predominant basis for social organizations, and authority tends to be located in the family or in religion. And supernatural causes are assumed for many things.

Modern societies are basically those that have passed into an industrial economy, or at least a high-level agricultural level with a significant urban population. Social organizations other than the family are common and significant, and, while religion may still have a powerful influence, scientific and technical solutions to problems are commonly sought.

This last dimension is clearly oversimplified, although it serves well enough in the modern world for psychology's purposes. The classification of societies on the basis of degree of technological and economic progress is, of course, old as the hills, and was particularly important to Karl Marx and the many social scientists he influenced.

An example of such a classification scheme is the one developed by anthropologists Morton H. Fried and Elman Service, which has four levels of society:

1. *Hunter-gatherer bands* – very small population density, an economy based on (of course) hunting and gathering, with the tasks divided approximately on the basis of sex and age, and an otherwise egalitarian set of relationships.
2. *Tribal societies* – low population density, an economy based on simple agriculture and some domestication of animals, and a moderate amount of social stratification and specialization.
3. *Stratified societies* – moderate populations, with formal hierarchies and assigned statuses. There are firmly established classes with defined rank. Agriculture is sophisticated, the society may develop strong pastoral habits, and there is considerable specialization, especially among artisans. Villages are large, sometimes including wide-ranging alliances, and serious warfare raises its ugly head.
4. *Civilization* – high populations, with considerable urban concentration. Multiple hierarchies, considerable authoritarianism, much social stratification, including layers of leadership at the top, and peasants, serf, and slaves at the bottom.

Of course, civilizations can vary hugely. The ancient Romans were certainly civilized, and yet few of us living in western societies (or even most nonwestern ones) would enjoy living in such a society. Something happened in the last few hundred years, that has led us to at very least strive for a degree of liberty, equality, and, yes, fraternity.

In addition, in those same few hundred years, technology has evolved at a breakneck speed, taking the factory system that we even find in ancient Rome and transforming it into modern industry. Add steam engines, the automobile, electricity, mass communication, and the computer, and you have a society that would no doubt appear magical to those ancient Romans.

This latter differentiation – just subsets of civilization – is actually the one that Castillo is referring to when he differentiates premodern from modern!

### 10.5 The band

It is an educated guess that our original society resembled what is now a rare form: the band. Our paleolithic ancestors were hunter-gatherers – a style of life that lasted about 90% of our time on this planet. Now we only find these bands in areas of the world so hostile that more sophisticated societies simply haven't wanted them: deserts, the arctic, the deepest rain forests.

But back at the beginnings of human life, bands could be found everywhere, and especially in the lush savanna of Africa to which we owe our roots.

A band is an association of somewhere between 10 and 50 people, mostly related by birth or marriage. It is thought that people were spread very thin back then – between .2 and .02 people per square mile – because of the large area of land needed to support even small populations surviving only by hunting and gathering. For comparison, Pennsylvania has 260 people per square mile, the USA has 62, and even Alaska has .7!

Most members of a band could probably do any of the tasks required for survival, but men specialized in hunting while women specialized in gathering and child care. Training consisted of children imitating adults and actually performing the full range of adult tasks early in life. Work was life, and life was work.

Tools were developed early in the history of our species – in fact, it was our *pre-Homo sapiens* ancestors who invented them. The band had all the basic tools: scrapers, axes, spears, sewing needles, mortar and pestle, baskets, simple clothing to wear, and tents, huts, or caves to live in. All tools were homemade.

Bands were fairly egalitarian. Status was based on respect for someone's abilities, and that respect could change in different situations and over time. Anyone with some respect could make a suggestion, but no one was in a position to give orders. And others followed those suggestions because it was the rational thing to do. The closest you get to a leader is a person that the Inuit call the *ihumakortujok*: "person of wisdom in ordinary affairs."

The economy of the band is simplicity itself: generalized reciprocity. Each person got what he or she needed, and if there was anything left, it was shared. Each band may have had set formulas regarding how to split up game: Often the one who made the kill had the right to distribute as he saw fit. Sometimes the kill would be partitioned, with the front parts of the animal going to the one who made the kill, and the hind quarters split among his assistants. Whatever the rules were, when the hunters returned, there would be a general feast.

The concept of private property only extended to a few decorative or ceremonial articles, and never to the necessities of life. Neither were there exclusive rights to land use, watering holes, animal herds or plants. These might be associated with a particular band, and it might be considered polite to ask first, but the idea of ownership as we know it probably didn't occur to them.

Theft was unknown, simply because there was nothing to steal. Instead, the sin was not sharing, being stingy, or refusing a gift. Even then, the response was likely to be a matter of ignoring or making fun of the culprit.

Relations with other bands was touchier, but scarcity tended to mean more sharing, not less. If hostilities did break out, it was likely to be a matter of aggressive posturing rather than anything physical, and if someone should actually get hurt, everyone goes home and feels bad about it. Some plains Indian groups, for example, even though they had evolved well beyond the band level, still preferred to "fight" in the form of something called "counting coup," that is, in the form of ritualized contests involving sudden forays, the goals of which were nothing more than touching the enemy.

Besides which, bands were exogamous, meaning you had to find a spouse outside your band. Marriage ties between bands meant that even they were relatives of a sort.

It is only when it comes to behaviors that threaten the solidarity of the band that we might have seen the far more drastic responses of murder or ostracism – which was death as well – in these societies.

This society, although our most basic, is nevertheless a far cry from what we see in the world of the chimpanzees or the baboons: No power hierarchies, no alpha males or alpha females, no gangs of irritable bachelors.

What were the psychological motivations of these people? Selfishness is sin; everything is in the service of the band. So one would imagine that our ancestors had to suppress their assertive instincts rather severely and allow only their nurturant instincts to express themselves. The only sense of assertiveness that might have been permitted is striving to model oneself after the best of your band, the role models who, of course, put the good of the band ahead of their own individual needs!

But notice: No band, no individual. There is actually not a very great gap between what is in one's own interest and what is in the group's interest. The nurturant instincts and the assertive instincts, far from being in conflict, actually supported each other. Life was hard, no doubt. But inner turmoil was probably minimal.

### 10.6 The tribe

At some point, bands started evolving into tribes. This probably first happened in the neolithic Near East, perhaps 10,000 years ago. The innovation that made this possible was agriculture. For the first time, we saw surpluses. Farmers had to work harder than the hunters and gatherers, but that was a small price to pay for the security farming brought.

Agriculture meant a good deal less traveling. Although it began with the slash-and-burn technique, which still required moving every few years, families could put down some roots (no pun intended!) and allow their population to increase. Instead of 10 to 50, a farming community could support hundreds of people, and often in a smaller area.

Keep in mind that 10,000 years ago, there were only about 8 million people in the entire world – less than now live in New York City. Bringing it closer to the present, in 1500, just before the European expansion, there were only one million people living in the area now covered by the USA and Canada, as many as are now comfortably collected in the state of Rhode Island.

Tools included hoes and plows, and would eventually be made with metal. Clothes were more often made of cloth, which required looms. Houses were made of wood and stone, which required the tools of construction. Things were getting substantial! This in turn encouraged a few people to develop their talents in one direction or another, rather than remaining generalists.

Most importantly, agriculture requires a new system of economics. With surpluses come the concepts of food preservation and storage. These in turn demand that the surpluses be collected and later redistributed. And something this important demands that we find among ourselves someone of great character, and that we imbue the position with powerful controlling rituals and tokens.

In many tribal cultures, the chief is the hardest worker in the tribe. He maintains his prestige by demonstrating the quality most valued in someone entrusted with the important task of redistributing surpluses: generosity. He must pay for the satisfaction of his position by giving things away! A particularly dramatic example of this is the famous potlatch of the Indians of British Columbia.

As the populations of farming villages increases, they begin to split, first into moieties (two very extended families) and later clans. These moieties and clans each resemble the earlier bands, with their own special cultural traditions, and they use each other as sources of spouses. Of course, this means that it is less important to have good relations with other tribes.

Clans become lineages as the tribal structure matures. "Family trees" become very important. This is determined, of course, in different ways in different tribes. But in any tribe, the details of social behavior are heavily dependent on the way in which you are related to others. This becomes especially important as positions originally based on respect become positions based on inheritance.

Surpluses, specialization, and a variety of ritual objects mean more property, and the concept of theft arises. At first, this mostly applies to symbolic items, but eventually it includes areas of land, particular fruit or nut trees, totem animals, personal tools, and so on. Adultery, too, becomes a greater concern, now that keeping track of lineages has become important. These lead to an increase in the amount of conflict within the tribe, and likewise an increase in the importance of explicit rules.

In the band, the rules were implicit, even unconscious. "This is the way we behave.... This is the way we have always behaved." In the tribe, though, we may have differences among the various clans. We have more property to be concerned about, more surpluses to carefully redistribute, more feelings to be hurt. So the rules become more explicit, more law-like. Punishments, too, become more defined, and often harsher.

The psychology has begun to change a bit, it would seem. People are beginning to be differentiated from each other, in specializations and rank, as well as on the basis of talent and reputation. In the more "natural" world of the band, the crowded village would have long ago splintered. People are behaving differently in the different clans and lineages. Some have more clout than others, just because of the luck of a good birth.

The tribe still requires most individuals to suppress whatever assertive tendencies they may have, but the social instincts that so easily lead to conformity in the band now need considerable outside forces to support them. Conformity becomes a real issue, with more rules and stricter punishments, precisely because there is less "natural" conformity!

But it won't be until the next stage of social development that the urges toward self-promotion would actually start seeing some rewards.

### 10.7 Civilization

Civilization comes with the development of the city-state. As agricultural technology develops, fewer people need to be involved in farming. And more people can be supported to engage in arts and crafts. The complexity of a large population requires improvement in management techniques. The transformation of the warrior from any able-bodied member of society to a professional specialty occurs. With that comes the transformation of the war chief into a continuous leadership position. Religious life as well transforms from a placation of nature spirits and appeals to the dead into an organized hierarchy of priests, with their own leadership position.

Eventually, we see the development of stratification: Some people have power and some don't. Some have everything they need and others have to make do with what's left to them. Some have, some have not. I should mention that this concept spread to the pristine tribes, which became the considerably less friendly societies we still find today. There are no more "pristine" societies!

There are a number of possible scenarios for the development of stratification. Perhaps a pastoral tribe has taken advantage of their mobility and warfare savvy to take over nearby farming communities, turning themselves into a ruling elite. Perhaps, with the invention of irrigation, downstream people become dependent on the good graces of upstream people. Perhaps a shortage of land develops, and the distribution of produce turns into the distribution of land – for rent!

In bands and pristine tribes, hoarding is antisocial. In stratified societies, it is institutionalized. Property becomes private. Instead of shortages increasing sharing, shortages raise prices (at first value in trade, later in labor, later still in money). You can even hold back necessities to raise prices, or create black markets and play favorites.

Because stratification is stressful, it is by nature unstable, and requires some strong organization to keep the society from flying apart. We develop various bureaucracies: military institutions, religious institutions, legal institutions, a treasury.... There are large farms worked by peasants or slaves, and large workshops of craftsmen and slaves, but all owned by the elite. This is the beginning of what Karl Marx called the alienation of the worker from the product of his or her labor: You have no claim to what you grow or make. It all belongs to the well-named *owners*.

Stratification creates poverty. When times are hard, it is no longer the entire group that suffers: The elite takes what it thinks it is due, and the underclass does without.

Stratification institutionalizes war. In order to feed the city's or state's voracious appetite, the elite look to what other cities or states have, and decide to take it. Or they fear the greed of the other state, and attack to prevent attack. The warrior class justifies its existence by making war.

Stratification breeds slavery. In band societies, women and children are occasionally captured during raids, but they are usually absorbed into the society. There is more slavery in tribes, but they are almost always a minority of the population. The city state places slaves under threat of death and torture, and creates a class that is even lower than the underclass.

These city states continue to grow. It seems that they *need* to grow in order to survive! They may begin with a thousand people; they end up as empires with millions. It has only taken a few thousand years for these social structures to dominate the entire planet.

Civilization adds considerable stress to its individual members. On the one hand, selfish motivations are actively encouraged: Survival depends on taking care of "number one" (and one's nearest and dearest). On the other hand, the institutions work by means of explicit rewards and punishments to control the assertiveness of most of the underclass and a good portion of the elite. Within certain small groups, the kinds of conformity pressures we see in the band may still operate. But beyond those, we see severe consequences instituted to keep people and groups of people in their "place."

One of the most significant psychological methods of promoting conformity is religion. Since the society is split into many different groups and several classes, there is no longer a general "center of gravity" for norms to revolve around. Instead, an otherworldly ideal is promoted, conformity to which is encouraged by promises of rich rewards or horrendous suffering in the afterlife. The more effective the religious ideology, the less the elite needs to waste their resources on more physical incentives to conformity.

Under certain circumstances, a state or empire might enter into a steady-state period. If there is relatively little threat from outside the society and relative prosperity within, and if the religious ideology is powerful and the bureaucracies efficient, a state may last for centuries. Examples include ancient Egypt and China. The closest we get to such long-lasting states in Europe are the Roman Empire and the culture of the Middle Ages, the first because of its military structure, the latter because of its powerful religious traditions.

Crucial to such steady-state societies is an image of reality involving a "great chain of being." The society – even the world – is ordered into a huge stratification, from God and his angels down through the kings and popes, down through the various elites, down to the artisans and merchants, down to the peasants and the working poor of the cities, down to slaves and barbarians, down even into the realm of the animals. This chain of being is understood as being established by God, or something in the nature of the universe, such as karma. The people of these societies saw this chain like we see the laws of nature.

And just like disobeying the laws of nature results in disaster, so does disobeying the laws of society. God or karma or whatever forces hold the universe together will get you, now or in the afterlife, if you attempt to deviate. This, of course, gives all members of the society – but especially those on higher rungs – the right, even the duty, to help God or karma along. Disobey the social laws and you are truly an outlaw – someone who is no longer a part of the great chain at all.

### 10.8 The age of the individual

In the last 500 years or so, beginning in Europe, a rather dramatic change in social structures and the accompanying psychological attitudes has occurred. Bit by bit, we have magnified the role of the individual. At the same time, society and its conformity pressures haven't really diminished, meaning that we have become "split personalities" in that the pressures to conform and the pressures to realize one's autonomy divide each of us, and often cause us to feel alienated from our societies, our communities, and even ourselves.

How did this come about? The first step, I believe, was a shake up of the European order during the renaissance. Before, the continent was unified culturally by the Catholic Church, if not by a single empire. The great chain of being, for all the infighting amongst the nobility, held. With the renaissance, the powers of the nobility increased, the boundaries between nobility and the church became blurred, and the authority of the pope diminished. Aristocrats began to think of themselves as free agents, who could rise (and fall) in the great chain via wealth and politics, as well as warfare. The church, which had the supposed last word on one's status, could be bought off or simply ignored.

The second step was the protestant reformation. At first, it was simply an extension of renaissance power struggles. But it also contained some slight variations on traditional beliefs that allowed people to essentially deconstruct the great chain of being. In 1517, Luther (and others) said that our salvation was in our own hands, and not something mediated by the priests and bishops of the church. God speaks to each of us, and judges each of us, and grants his grace to each of us, as individuals. Lutheranism would, of course, simply become a minor variation of the Catholic Church in short order – but a new "meme" had been introduced.

Calvin added another small idea to the mix: Since God knows all, he knows who will be saved and who will be damned. Some of us, regardless of our blood lines or position in the church, were predestined to end up in heaven, and the idea of the Elect was born! People, of course, wanted to know what signs would indicate salvation, and found it in something that cut across old hierarchies of church and state: wealth. And, since wealth is far more variable than the older traditions of the great chain, people began compete for places on what was now more of a ladder than a chain.

Christopher Columbus and his imitators played a big part. By opening up the "new world" to Europe in 1492, he gave the European people two things: An incredible surge of wealth in the form of silver and other products they could compete over (at the expense of the prior inhabitants of both the Americas and Africa, of course), and a place for thousands of malcontents to escape where they could – perhaps – make fortunes independently of their social origins.

Another piece of the puzzle is the Gutenberg Bible. The printing press meant that increasing numbers of people had access to the word of God, and had less need to rely on the priesthood. In addition, reading was an asset to the middle classes, since it allows one to keep books and ledgers – allows one to keep score, you might say. As printing expanded beyond the Bible, philosophical and technical thought became available to that literate middle class. People were asking themselves: How is the priest or the nobleman so different from me? Why should they get all the respect?

A bit later, we see a few more literal revolutions: The Great Peasant War of 1525; the Edict of Nantes in 1598; Dutch independence from Spain in 1648; the overthrow of the British monarchy in 1649; the Declaration of Rights in 1689; the rebellion of those pesky colonists in American in 1776; the overthrow of the French nobility in 1789; and so on. The idea that "the people" (always defined with limitations, of course) had actual rights – what a concept! And what a boost to the individual!

Then there's the industrial revolution. Beginning in England and rapidly expanding to the continent, the development of the factory system of production caused a massive reconfiguration of western Europe, with peasants moving from their traditional farms to the cities, exchanging their bondage to the land for bondage to the machine. The aristocratic landowners become less and less significant, while the factory owners, usually of middle class origins, became richer and more powerful.

And late, very late, in all this, we see the freeing of 40 million serfs in Russia in 1861 and 4 million slaves in the United States in 1863, and similar events all over the western world. The day to day conditions of serfs and slaves changed very little – but the idea of individual freedom for even the lowliest among us is a genie you cannot easily put back in the bottle! Even women – that eternal underclass – would achieve political equality in many places by the early 1900's.

All this was not without consequences, of course. Wars became more extensive and sophisticated. Churches of all denominations became more possessive of what power they had left. The nobility hardly missed out on all the opportunities for wealth and power. And the modern concept of the nation-state solidified, complete with patrolled borders, standing armies, heavy taxation, and huge bureaucracies. England became Great Britain, France became a powerhouse, Italy and Germany finally became unified, Russia and the US entered the international scene.

Finally we have the socialist revolutions – especially the Russian Revolution in 1917 – with dreams of *economic* equality for all. Although the extreme versions have since failed, socialism has had a huge impact everywhere. The worker was protected, education was spread more evenly, the poor were assisted, and the powerful industrialists were restrained. There was something closer to a "level playing field," where each individual had similar opportunities to make of their lives what they wished, than ever before. Sadly, what should have been the final surge of freedom would coincide with the battles of huge nation-states that were World War I and II.

While the hunter-gatherer condition lasted hundreds of thousands of years, and the agricultural tribes lasted tens of thousands, and the traditional civilizations began only thousands of years ago, all these later changes happened in a mere few hundred years. Change was actually noticeable to the people embedded in it. We are still reeling from it.

Psychologically, we are stretched rather thin today: Society still asks us to conform, but that conformity is more a matter of law than of cultural tradition and religious ideology. Although we rarely think in terms of great hierarchies or chains of being anymore, we still feel the pressures to conform "horizontally," to each other – feelings strongly supported by the novel forces of mass media. On the other hand, the variety of beliefs, cultural traditions, lifestyles, choices of careers, educational opportunities, and international movement, constantly confront our minds with the fact of our considerable autonomy and the responsibilities that come with it. We can no longer say, when we feel unhappy with our lives, that this unhappiness is the sad but inevitable result of being born to a particular station on the great chain of being.

We are a divided animal, with conflicting instinct: The assertive instincts drive us towards individuality, and the nurturant instincts drive us towards community. Both derive from older instincts: The assertive is based on our basic needs plus competition for mates and a place in the dominance hierarchy. The nurturant is based on infant care, mate pairing, herd instincts, and reciprocity.

When we add cultural learning, the assertive instincts may be expressed by individuality, leadership, stratification, striving for success, etc. Similarly, the nurturant instincts may be expressed by conformity, ethical codes, religions, and morality. Just like sexual needs can be expressed in dramatically different ways in different cultures, so can the assertive and nurturant instincts, providing the foundation for the many thousands of societies our species has created.

But note that these instincts may also contain the roots of their own transcendence. For example, our assertive need to "show off" can be stretched into a desire for creativity and self-expression. And our nurturant need to care for our own children can be extended to a concern for all children, humanity, animals, and life itself.

## 11. The social unconscious

When our understanding of things is lacking and we fail to anticipate, we scramble to improve our understanding; once we understand something, and our anticipations are right on target, we are satisfied. In fact, it almost seems that we spend our lives trying to be unconscious! After all, we feel distress when things go wrong and delight when things improve, but neither when things are going just right.

Things that are thoroughly learned are unconscious. Concerning small behaviors, we call them habits. When they concern social behaviors, we call them rituals. Coronations, marriage ceremonies, funerals, standing on line, taking turns when talking, saying "hello, how are you," whether you want to know or not – all are examples of rituals.

There are also ways of thinking and perceiving that are so thoroughly learned we tend not to be conscious of them: attitudes, mind-sets, norms, prejudices, defenses, and so on. The key to identifying habits and rituals is that the acts are essentially emotionless (hence unconscious). Mind you, things "around" the habit or ritual may be emotional (i.e. a funeral!), but the things done are done rather automatically – like driving a car, once you've caught on – until things go wrong!

When that happens, you experience some kind of distress. Go ahead, tell someone who asks "how are you" all about how you really are! Or stand the wrong way in an elevator. Or interrupt the smooth flow of a restaurant (e.g. by taking peoples' orders, "to help out"). This is called Garfinkling, after Harold Garfinkle, who invented it. It will reveal rules of behavior that are so ritualized that we've forgotten they exist.

Anyway, maintaining things the way they are, keeping social "law and order," is an extremely powerful motivation. In its most positive form, it's our desire for peace and contentment. In its most negative form, it is our resistance to anything new or different.

### 11.1 Conformity

Even as adults, we depend on others. Sometimes, to use some existential terms, we "fall victim" to "the Other," that faceless generalization we often refer to as "people" (as in "people are watching") or "we" (as in "we don't do those things") or "they" (as in "they wouldn't like that"). We forfeit our freedom and allow ourselves to be enslaved by our society. The existentialists call this fallenness, and it is the foundation of what most of call conformity.

Conformity is actually a rather complex concept, and there are a number of different kinds:

1. The conformity to norms we discussed earlier is often quite unconscious. It has been internalized (learned well), probably in early childhood. Our societal norms are seldom doubted; rather, we take them as givens, as "the way things are." The learning is supported throughout life by the "validity" of the norm – i.e. it works because it is the norm.
2. But sometimes we choose, consciously, to conform, as when we join a group voluntarily. We adopt certain norms because the group is attractive to us and we identify with the group and its values or goal. In its more dramatic forms, this is called conversion.
3. In other cases, we conform because we are forced to, i.e. we are conscious of our conformity but it seems a lot less voluntary. This is often called compliance, and it can be brought on by anything from a gun to the head or the promise of candy. In other words, it is conformity due to the sanctions the society or group has in effect.

4. But most of what we call conformity in the research literature concerns something "somewhat conscious" and "not quite voluntary." It is usually brought on by social anxiety – fear of embarrassment, discomfort at confusion, a sense of inferiority, a desire to be liked, and so on. I think it should be called defensive conformity.

Conventionality is the most pervasive form of conformity. It involves ignoring one's freedom and living a life of conformity and shallow materialism. If you can manage to be like everyone else, you need not make choices. You can turn to authority, or to your peers, or to the media for "guidance." You can become too "busy" to notice the moral decisions you need to make. You are fallen and living in what Sartre called bad faith.

### 11.2 Norms

It's one of the great mysteries of the world that, while the laws of nature (like gravity) "weigh us down," their very consistency, their orderliness, their predictability, allows us to use them for our own ends. Knowing the laws of gravity and aerodynamics and so forth allows us to design and build airplanes that (in a sense) "free" us from those laws! Our power comes from our knowledge of that background of order.

The social world is also orderly. Social order doesn't have the necessity that physical order has, and while the force of law or custom may be powerful, ultimately we choose to conform or not. "You cannot have sex with your mother" is a powerful injunction, but it's still not quite as powerful as "You cannot walk through a brick wall." (Kelvin, p. 21)

Nevertheless, just like in the physical world, in order to act in the social world, we need some order. The social order is based on shared expectations (beliefs, rules, values) called norms.

Norms are used as standards with which we measure the appropriateness of behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, and even feelings, within the social group to which the norms are relevant. "Social group" may refer to an entire culture or society, a subculture or ethnic group, an organization or community, or even a club or gang.

The word norm is from the same root as "normal," and the simplest way of finding norms in some group or society is to see what the people consider to be normal. Normal (if you remember your basic statistics) means "what is highly probable" – and you could list various behaviors and ask people to rate them. (These ratings are known as subjective probabilities.)

How often do you brush your teeth? Never? Once a year? Once a month? Once a day? Twice a day? Three times a day? Every hour? Continuously? In our society, I believe, once or twice a day might be considered normal. A child might skip a day; a dental hygienist might brush after every meal and snack.

But note: A norm need not be what everyone says is right or good! We probably all should brush three times a day, and floss as well, but we don't – that wouldn't be considered "normal." Criminals may be abnormal, but so are saints!

On the other hand, sometimes the norm is not what most people do. It's interesting to compare what people think is normal with what actually is normal (statistically) in private domains such as sexuality! Not long ago, for example, society's norms still included taboos regarding masturbation, even while a majority of people engaged in the practice!

Norms, like habits, seem to maintain their own existence: "The behavior 'prescribed' by an informal norm is prescribed because it is deemed to be valid. This validity itself, however, is inferred from the frequency of occurrence of the behavior in question." (Kelvin, p. 87) So we brush our teeth once or twice a day because that is normal, and it is normal because we brush our teeth once or twice a day.

Note that one of the most common source of information about "frequency of occurrence" is tradition. So a norm such as "boys will wear pants; girls will wear skirts" is justified by saying "boys were meant to wear pants; girls were meant to wear skirts," and that in turn is justified by noting "It has always been so."

Beyond habit and tradition, a group or society may also reinforce norms with sanctions, that is, with rewards and (especially) punishments. Then, when norms and sanctions become formalized, they become rules, laws, judicial systems, penitentiaries, electric chairs, and so on.

The classic demonstration of normative behavior is Muzafer Sherif's. If I shine a pin-point of light on a wall in an otherwise pitch-black room, it would appear to move – an illusion called the autokinetic effect. If I were to ask you how far it moved, you could give a guess – 5 or 6 inches, perhaps. What Sherif did was to have a group of people view the dot and give their guesses outloud. While at first the guesses might differ by a few inches, with each repeated presentation of the light, their guesses would come closer together – that is, the group would develop a "norm."

If Sherif put a "stooge" – one of his assistants – in a group and instructed him to give an inflated guess (14 or 15 inches, for example), the group would tend to make higher guesses in response to the stooge. If the stooge stuck to his high guesses, he could bring the whole group up to his guess. Sherif even found that the artificially high norms could last for several "generations" of subjects: He would replace, after so many guesses, first the stooge, then others of the original group, with new people. The high norm would only slowly disappear.

So, in the real world, we have many norms that are no longer terribly helpful or relevant, that nevertheless last and last. There are lots of examples to be found in the relations between men and women!

We tend to think of conformity to norms as being bad somehow – a sign of weakness, stupidity, even fascist slavishness. But, first of all, our lives are full of conformity to norms, much of which we don't even notice because we all conform! After all, conformity to norms is normal, by definition.

Take clothing: You may think of yourself as being highly individualistic, and may point out the great variety of styles around you. But notice instead the similarities: As you look around you at your fellow students, notice the jeans and t-shirts and preppy hand-me-downs. And what would happen if one of you came into class in a tuxedo, a chiffon evening gown, a bikini, nothing, a kimono or sari, in the clothing of the opposite sex... well, that wouldn't be "right," would it – perhaps a sign of mental illness. That is, we would make inferences, as in any act of person perception.

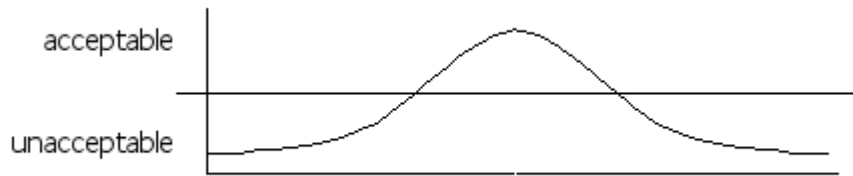
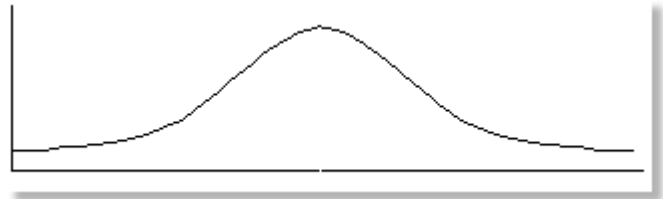
Secondly, imagine what it would be like if everyone wore, did, spoke without regard to "styles," "traditions," norms--without regard to others' expectations? You'd be living in constant unpleasant unpredictableness. You've all met "unusual" people, people from whom you never quite know what to expect: Imagine if everyone acted that way. The mild irritation would mount to unbearable levels. It'd be what many people experience when they move to other parts of the world and don't know the norms: culture shock.

Imagine further what it would be like for young children, who are only just learning to anticipate people. Childhood would be even more painful than it already is. It is not for nothing that we maintain a certain comfortable regularity in our homes, that we don't act crazy in front of children, and that we all sometimes feel a nostalgia for the "simple life" of our home towns. Developmentally, we grow "into" our individuality from a base of consistency.

There are a number of different ways of describing norms. The simplest is to contrast prescribed and proscribed behavior. Prescribed behaviors are the "musts," the obligations, the things that make you a member of the group. Proscribed behaviors are the "must nots," the taboos. Small groups will kick you out if you do these things (like "no shoes, no service"). Societies tend to imprison, institutionalize, excommunicate, exile, or kill you.

## 11. The social unconscious

Another way refers to the ideas of normality and probability mentioned before: The horizontal axis represents the variety of behaviors in question; the vertical axis the degree of normality:

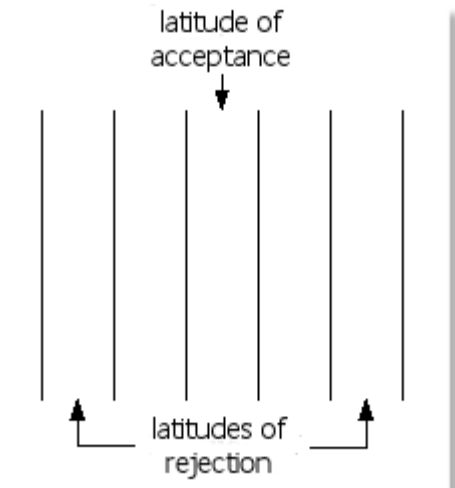


We need to add only one thing: a line that divides the acceptable from the unacceptable behaviors, so:

If we are looking at "appropriate dress for professors" as the behaviors, we might find tuxedos and evening gowns on one end of the curve, and swim suits or complete nakedness on the other end. In between, anything from blue jeans to three-piece pin-striped suits might be acceptable.

Sherif developed a third way of describing norms that compromises between the gradual curve and the abruptness of "prescribed-proscribed." There is a set of behaviors in a latitude of acceptance which are important to membership; there are also latitudes of rejection that include behaviors unacceptable to the group; and in between are neutral latitudes that include the irrelevancies:

A Lutheran, for example, might be comfortable with Episcopalian and Presbyterian church services, be non-committal about a Catholic mass on the one hand or a Methodist service on the other, place Greek Orthodox services beyond Catholic ones as sensual and mysterious, and Baptist services beyond Methodist ones as rather exuberant and excited.



Among the details that Sherif discovered in his research was that the more "ego-involvement" (i.e. passion) in the issues, the smaller the latitude of acceptance and larger the latitudes of rejection. A very intense Lutheran might not find any services other than his own acceptable.

And people who find themselves at one extreme or the other of a range tend to be more ego-involved. Extreme religious groups tend to be much fussier about what seems to others to be tiny details. In some ways it is easier, psychologically, to be an extremist: It takes less thought, less effort; You know. Moderates, on the other hand, tend to more tolerant, and more confused.

Which brings us to some of the problems we find concerning norms. One problem is the disagreement about norms that we find when two groups or societies necessarily interact. Another problem is disagreement within a group or society as to the norms, or the latitudes, or the appropriate sanctions. Many petty squabbles, and quite a few major wars, are based on the social friction that occurs when norms are not agreed upon.

Once upon a time, we lived in small, isolated, and rather authoritarian societies: Norms were strong, tradition was strong, there was little conflict and little change. Even today much of the world's people live in what developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner calls monolithic societies.

But nowadays, because of communications and education, we find ourselves more and more confronted with a great variety of norms – what Bronfenbrenner calls pluralism. The constant bickering typical of our society is one symptom. But so is, according to Bronfenbrenner, the development of higher values! It is difficult to develop a sophisticated value system for yourself if you haven't experienced a variety of value systems.

In monolithic cultures, norms are expected to be known and followed by everyone. E. T. Hall calls this high context: You have to be aware of millions of subtle little details in order to know what to do or how to read another person's behavior. A child in a monolithic culture learns the rules with his mother's milk, and the rules tend to be quite unconsciously adhered to. Japan is more monolithic or high context than we are, for example.

On the other hand, in pluralistic cultures, norms have to be pretty well spelled out – what Hall calls low context. There are fewer norms, they have to be consciously followed, and are often explicitly taught. Our own culture, especially when you get out of rural areas or the urban neighborhoods, is very pluralistic and low context.

### **An example: attraction**

What constitutes attractiveness may well have a genetic component to it, of course. But it is well worth noting that attractiveness can be very different in different cultures. In our culture, for example, thin is in. In the old Hawaiian culture, on the other hand, fat was where it was at. European culture, just a few hundred years ago, had a similar opinion: Look at Rembrandt's nudes! As long as your size allows you to survive and reproduce, nature allows culture to determine the variations.

Or look at how we decorate ourselves. In our culture, women paint their faces. In one tribe in Ethiopia, it's the men who paint their faces. Men of the ancient Celts (ancestors of the Irish, among others) and American Indians not long ago painted their faces when going into battle. Maoris, the Ainu of Japan, the Native Americans of the Pacific northwest all thought facial tattoos were attractive, as do present day members of certain American subcultures. A few cultures use scarring to decorate their faces and bodies.

We wear earrings. Many women in India (and some here) also wear nose-rings. Some South American tribes stretched their earlobes. Some African tribes wore lip plugs. The Chinese of the last century thought deformed feet looked nice on rich ladies. We thought wasp waists and big bustles were sexy 100 years ago. Today, some people like piercing their navels, nipples, tongues, and even (ouch!) their genitalia.

How much we wear is another issue: We don't permit the display of a woman's breasts in public; other cultures permit that, but not the display of thighs; others don't permit display of the face; others still don't permit the display of a woman's hair. We don't permit public display of a man's penis; in the late middle ages, men wore "cod pieces," which contained and exaggerated the penis; in New Guinea, some tribes wear long cones over their penises. In ancient Greece, male athletes competed in the nude (that's what gymnastics means – nude exercise!) On and on.

And, what's more, attractiveness is in the eye of the individual beholder as well. Everyone, for example, believes their own baby is the most beautiful! In other words, learning accounts for at least a great deal of what we consider attractive.

Whatever the roots of attractiveness, its effects are powerful. When it comes to attractive people, we tend to ignore their faults, forgive their trespasses, and even infer good qualities they don't necessarily have – better dispositions, motives, intelligence, etc.

An experiment by Snyder, Tanke, and Bersheid says a great deal about the effects of attractiveness: Men were asked to talk to a woman over the phone after being shown a picture of her. Half were shown an attractive picture of her; the other half were shown an unattractive picture of her. The ones that had seen the attractive photo thought she sounded more poised, humorous, and socially adept.

The conversations were bugged, and the independent listeners, who did not know which pictures the men had seen, rated the men who had seen the attractive photo as more poised, humorous, and socially adept.

And these independent listeners rated the woman talking to these men who had seen the attractive photo as being more poised, humorous, and socially adept – though, again, neither they nor the woman knew which photo the men had seen! In other words, if other people think you are good-looking, you will act appropriately and think of yourself as a good person: the old self-fulfilling prophecy. And if people consider you ugly, you may become crabby, which only confirms everyone's suspicions about ugly people.

### **Another example: personal space**

There are certain culturally specified distances for various interactions – usually one for public address, one for ordinary conversation, and one for intimate conversation. In our culture, public distance begins at about ten feet--which is part of the reason people tend not to sit in the front row of a classroom. The conversational distance is about 2 and a half feet, and the intimate distance is a few inches.

There is a little illustration of this called the parking lot waltz. If I take you into an open space, such as a parking lot, engage you in some conversation, and stand too close to you, you will feel uncomfortable and begin to back away. If I step closer, you will back off again. By changing angles, I can waltz you around the parking lot. Try it, it works. You will know that you are too close because you will feel uncomfortable, too. Things can go wrong, however, if you read my closeness as an attempt to get intimate and you either run away or beat me up.

The same works in reverse – but not as well. As you recall, moving away is read as a loss of interest, breaking off a conversation, so the other person is likely to say goodbye and leave. There are, of course, some people who don't read signs very well and will continue to talk to you even as you walk briskly away!

As I said, different cultures have different distances. Germans, for example, have longer conversational distances, three or three and a half feet. Arabs, on the other hand, have very short distances, one and a half and even one foot. It is considered a social pleasure to feel the other's warm, moist breath and smell their smells. Americans often feel uncomfortable when talking with Arabs and back away, which the Arab sees as being cold and impolite. Many international business deals probably fall through because of personal distance!

Of course, we also have personal distances behind us and to the sides. We have, in fact, a personal envelope. At a relatively uncrowded bus stop, for example, people will spread themselves out to a comfortable degree.

Again, different cultures have different envelopes, and men and women differ as well. But notice the effect of context: Watch the different distributions of people at a party. Notice the differences between all male group, all female groups, and mixed groups. Or look at the way people squeeze through a crowd: Do they face the person they are brushing past, or turn their backs to them? It is interesting.

Situations change our personal envelopes. In New York City at three in the morning, a person walking behind us makes us nervous – even if they are a block away. But in a rush hour subway, we can be squeezed together like sardines, and we ignore the sexual or aggressive messages of violated intimate space, though we seldom feel comfortable!

Two examples of the interaction of situations and envelopes you might want to observe for yourself are the direction one faces in elevators and the effects of "neighborliness" at urinals.

The envelope can also vary because of personal experiences. A Vietnam veteran friend of mine would take off your head if you came up behind him too quickly. And some researchers have found that criminals tend to have rather large envelopes. The question remains: Did they get into crime because their huge envelopes were constantly getting stepped on, or did they develop huge envelopes in response to the dangerous games they play?

### **One more example: time**

The anthropologist E. T. Hall distinguishes two broad conceptions of time: monochronic and polychronic. "M-time" is typical of modern, industrialized, western cultures – such as our own. "P-time" is typical of more traditional ones – such as we find in Latin America and the Middle East.

M-time involves schedules: Time is thought of as a ribbon or a road, and it is chopped up, with each piece assigned a certain purpose. Each piece has a clearly defined beginning and end: promptness counts; tardiness is a character flaw, if not a sin. Time is concrete: It can be saved or spent, lost or made up... and eventually you run out. We have clocks and calendars and use them – or rather they use us.

M-time is really rather arbitrary (why 50 minute classes? 40 hour work weeks? 15 week semesters?). You have to learn to follow all these schedules: except for the day, the year, and the seasons, they do not come naturally. Also, you deal with people in a way that is molded by m-time: one person (or a few) at a time, orderly, separately... Life is segmented; social life is segmented.

P-time, on the other hand, makes Americans crazy: The first thing likely to hit you is the lack of concern about appointments. An hour wait is not at all bad – if you complain, they point out that they were speaking with someone important – and you wouldn't want them to rush someone important! A government office may have a courtyard where dozens of appointments sit or walk about, and several officials "mingle" with them, rather than everyone lining up for their 15 minutes. If you get ignored – well, perhaps your problem wasn't sufficiently significant to cause you to step up and interrupt!

P-time is people-oriented, task-oriented, and very much tradition-oriented: Like the priest who can't see you now because someone needs him or an artist who'll get to you when the inspiration has worn off a bit, the present moment is rather sacrosanct. "3:15 on October 28th," on the other hand, is an abstraction that means nothing in P-time.

This, of course, is terribly inefficient!

In contrast, we M-timers schedule not only our work but our fun as well: dinner at 8:00, a weekend in N.Y., two weeks vacation, Reality TV at 9:00 (for precisely one hour), John has the kids on Saturdays, spends a little "quality time" with them, sex on Friday at 10:00....

M-time is efficient, and it's likely that we would never have developed our high-tech society without it. But it is also alienating. It turns us into something akin to the very machines we work with: wristwatches, punchclocks, factory whistles, assembly lines, computers.

### **11.3 Roles**

So, norms are shared expectations. Usually we think of these shared expectations as referring to general behavior expected of everyone in the group. But we can also have shared expectations concerning specific members of the group. We may expect them, and they may expect themselves, to perform a certain function, to play a certain role in the group. Roles are shared expectations concerning functions.

There are many different types of roles. For example, many roles are formal. In large groups (organizations, societies), these formal roles have titles and are used to refer to some category of people. "Doctor," for example, is a title we give to certain people, and we expect them to act in certain ways in certain situations. And they expect themselves to act so, too. Note that people who play certain roles may get together to form groups of their own, e.g. the American Medical Association.

There are also very tiny roles called low-level implicit positions that have no title, are very short-lived, are found only in certain highly specific circumstances, and may be quite flexible. "Giving the bride away" at a wedding is an example: It doesn't have its own title (like "maid of honor"); it occurs only at a specific point in the ceremony and lasts only a few minutes; it never carries over into, say, the reception; and the role, though usually played by the father of the bride, may be played by another person, or even by more than one person – both parents, for example.

Then there are roles so broad they get confused with biology. What is "woman," for example? A certain chromosome arrangement? Certain reproductive plumbing? Or is it a way of being loaded with all sorts of cultural expectations? It is more of the latter than most people realize.

One important thing about roles is that they come in pairs; role-relations are always reciprocal. We (non-doctors), when we find ourselves in certain situations in the presence of doctors, are expected to behave in certain ways. Doctors expect it of us; onlookers expect it of us; and we ourselves expect it of us. We take the role of patient.

This goes back to the idea of contrasts: To have doctor you must have patient; to have teacher you must have student; husband-wife; parent-child..., and all in reverse as well. Notice the embarrassment, or even pathology, of someone playing a certain role to the wrong person, or attempting to play it towards everyone.

In my definition I mentioned functions. For roles to be meaningful to people, they must have a function, a purpose, a task in the society or group; they do not refer to accidental or haphazard behaviors. The doctor is there for a purpose, as is the patient. It is the task or function that becomes our standard for evaluating the role-player: One can be a good doctor or a bad one, a good patient or a bad one, and so on.

But I must point out to you that many, perhaps most, of the behaviors associated with a role are more symbolic of purpose than truly purposeful – although the symbolic is always "purposeful" in that it tells us that a role is present. Why does the doctor wear a lab coat and write illegibly? Why does the banker wear a suit? The bride a wedding dress?

I also keep mentioning situations. Roles typically express themselves in the context of certain situations. At the hospital, in the examining room, at the scene of an emergency...these are appropriate situations to engage a doctor-patient role relationship. If the doctor asks you to remove your clothing at a cocktail party, you may be suspicious.

Roles also typically express themselves in the context of a performance. The doctor has examining room routines, the banker has certain paperwork, the bride has her wedding.... Notice again the amount of symbolism in the performance, beyond the actually task.

The performance may, however, be much more than symbolic: It may have functions of its own. Much of the examining room ritual, for example, is devoted to de-sexualization. We go out of our way to guarantee asexuality: The nurse at the door, the air conditioning one setting too cold, the cold, hard, plastic table with paper on it, the cold stethoscope, the rubber gloves, the uniforms, the diplomas on the walls... all help in making the intentions clear.

The lack of warmth exhibited by surgeons is another example: In order to deal with the realities of surgery, it seems necessary for most surgeons to keep themselves emotionally detached from the people they cut into! Note the age-old rule among surgeons that they never operate on family members.

Roles may have some specific prerequisites: to be a doctor, a certain education is expected, along with experience, licensing, etc. To be a bride, you must be a woman of a certain minimum age, not married to someone else, etc. Likewise, roles may also have certain consequences: The MD degree opens up a certain range of possibilities; being a bride results in a specific new role, that of wife.

There are plenty of opportunities for problems regarding roles. First, we can have misunderstandings between people. For example, we may not realize we are supposed to be in a certain role relation – like when one of you thinks you're lovers, but the other doesn't. Or we may not know what the role entails, what the rules are, what others expect of us. Or we may both "know" but not agree!

Another source of trouble is that we normally have multiple roles in our lives, and these can conflict. A man, for example, may be a father and a policeman – tender and loving in the morning, tough and hard-nosed in the evening. Normally, this is not a problem – there are different people involved, situations, times... But what happens when the policeman catches his own son dealing drugs? Conflict!

Even one role can actually be many roles, depending on the contrasting role: A doctor acts one way towards patients, another towards nurses, a third way towards administrators, another way towards fellow doctors. But what happens when his patient is a fellow doctor? Or when his administrator tells him he must watch the budget while his nurses point out his humanitarian concerns? Conflict!

Finally, an individual can become confused about his or her roles. In the example of the policeman, what would happen if he began to act fatherly to all the juvenile delinquents on his patrol? Or if he began to bring home the tough cop role to his wife and kids? Many people have the problem of not being able to leave the job at work.

### 11.4 Status

Status is such a useful word, it is a pity that it is used in so many different ways. For our purposes, let's define it as "shared expectations regarding influence." Here's a fuller definition from Sherif: "Status is a member's position (rank) in a hierarchy of power relations in a social unit (group or system) as measured by the relative effectiveness of initiative (a) to control interaction, decision-making, and activities, and (b) to apply sanctions in cases of non-participation and non-compliance." Whew!

I used the word influence. This is what someone has when others change their beliefs or behaviors to fit his or hers. But, as you are no doubt aware, there are two kinds of influence: In the first kind, there are sanctions involved, either the use of them, the threat, or just the potential. This is called power.

Power has several sources. First, it may be rooted in skill, the knowledge you have that allows you to influence others. A master chess player controls his opponent by using his superior understanding of tactics and strategy; a master politician does the same through persuasion, manipulation, and gamesmanship.

Power can also derive from resources: If you have wealth or weapons at your disposal, you have greater opportunity to apply sanctions. A gun makes for great obedience on the part of others.

And power can derive from legitimacy. Most people with power don't actually possess that much talent or resources. They are acknowledged as having power, and therefore influence, and therefore status, by others, who in turn have skills, resources, or legitimacy of their own. It serves their purposes to support the one, as it once served English barons to have a king: It provides a social order to work within.

The second source of influence is respect. This is "power" that is given to you by the people you influence; Rather than complying because of fear or greed, they follow you because of their admiration.

This too has several roots: The most powerful is the admittedly vague concept of attractiveness, often called "referent power." We give respect to people for the irrational reason of physical attractiveness, as well as the more rational reason of personal attractiveness. And we find them attractive not only on the basis of what they are, but on the basis of what they are in relation to us--i.e. their similarities to us. More of this in the future.

Another basis for respect is expertise ("expert power"). Skills and knowledge relevant to the task are a very rational reason to be influenced by someone. Note the difference here between the skills mentioned under power and those mentioned here: The first involve skills at influence, rather than at the task at hand. But notice that, when we compete with someone, the task is the competition, the influencing, and we may very well respect the other's ability to beat the pants off us!

And a last basis for respect is trustworthiness, a sense that the person is honest, has the best interests of others in mind, has no ulterior motives.

There is one more basis for status and influence which doesn't clearly fall under either power or respect: Tradition. Status is clearly an aspect of norms in this regard. Why do you follow this person? I've always followed them. How else to explain the British monarchy, or the die-hard Republican or Democrat who has always voted so, regardless of the issues, the candidate's qualifications, or any other relevant concern.

There are a number of points one should keep in mind about status: First of all, status is characteristically a part of a broader role, so all the things we've said about roles apply. Most roles involve some status differentiation (e.g. parent and child), and some roles are mostly a matter of status (e.g. chief, chairperson, president, etc.).

So, status involves the reciprocal nature of roles: In order to be king, you must have subjects; in order to be a doormat, you must have someone to walk all over you.... And it partakes of the symbolic, ritualistic character of roles, perhaps even more so, inasmuch as most pageantry celebrates status!

Status also has its share of problems – perhaps more than its share!. First, there is uncertainty as to relative status. Just like roles, status is "in the minds" of the people involved, and so always hard to measure. The results of this uncertainty are all the power struggles we see around us every day.

A set of problems more unique to status derive from the distinction between status based on power and status based on respect: Sometimes people have no respect for the legitimate authority (national and office dictators, for examples); other times, we find the people we respect unable to achieve the power they need to get things done.

Generally, low status means low freedom: "The predictability of one's behavior is the sure test of one's own inferiority" (Crozier, 1964, quoted in Kelvin, p. 158). But influence also means responsibility. So status may in fact involve a restriction of freedom as well as the increase of freedom we normally expect with status. If your status is based on legitimacy, you must do right by all those who give you that legitimacy; if your status is based on respect, you must behave in a manner that upholds that respect; and if your influence is based purely on your wits and strength, you can never rest!

### 11.5 Society and our mental health

When we created culture, it developed a life of its own. Rather than remaining close to other aspects of our natures, culture can become a force in its own right. And even if, in the long run, a culture that interferes with our actualization dies out, we, in all likelihood, will die with it.

Don't misunderstand: Culture and society are not intrinsically evil! It's more along the lines of the birds of paradise found in Papua-New Guinea. The colorful and dramatic plumage of the males apparently distract predators from females and the young. Natural selection has led these birds towards more and more elaborate tail feathers, until in some species the male can no longer get off the ground. At that point, being colorful doesn't do the male – or the species – much good! In the same way, our elaborate societies, complex cultures, incredible technologies, for all that they have helped us to survive and prosper, may at the same time serve to harm us, and possibly even destroy us.

Carl Rogers tells us that organisms know what is good for them. Evolution has provided us with the senses, the tastes, the discriminations we need: When we hunger, we find food – not just any food, but food that tastes good. Food that tastes bad is likely to be spoiled, rotten, unhealthy. That what good and bad tastes are – our evolutionary lessons made clear! This is called organismic valuing.

Among the many things that we instinctively value is positive regard, Rogers umbrella term for things like love, affection, attention, nurturance, and so on. It is clear that babies need love and attention. In fact, it may well be that they die without it. They certainly fail to thrive – i.e. become all they can be.

Another thing – perhaps peculiarly human – that we value is positive self-regard, that is, self-esteem, self-worth, a positive self-image. We achieve this positive self-regard by experiencing the positive regard others show us over our years of growing up. Without this self-regard, we feel small and helpless, and again we fail to become all that we can be!

Carl Rogers believed that, if left to their own devices, animals will tend to eat and drink things that are good for them, and consume them in balanced proportions. Babies, too, seem to want and like what they need. Somewhere along the line, however, we have created an environment for ourselves that is significantly different from the one in which we evolved. In this new environment are such things as refined sugar, flour, butter, chocolate, and so on, that our ancestors in Africa never knew. These things have flavors that appeal to our organismic valuing – yet do not serve our actualization well. Over millions of years, we may evolve to find broccoli more satisfying than cheesecake – but by then, it'll be way too late for you and me. A curious point to make about the example used is that today we have refined sugar – something which was not available to our ancestors, but which we discovered and passed on to our descendants through learned culture. It is clear that today a great attraction to sugar no longer serves our survival and reproduction. But culture moves much more quickly than evolution: It took millions of years to evolve our healthy taste for sugar; it took only thousands of years to undermine it.

Our society also leads us astray with conditions of worth. As we grow up, our parents, teachers, peers, the media, and others, only give us what we need when we show we are "worthy," rather than just because we need it. We get a drink when we finish our class, we get something sweet when we finish our vegetables, and most importantly, we get love and affection if and only if we "behave!"

Getting positive regard on "on condition" Rogers calls conditional positive regard. Because we do indeed need positive regard, these conditions are very powerful, and we bend ourselves into a shape determined, not by our organismic valuing or our actualizing tendency, but by a society that may or may not truly have our best interests at heart. A "good little boy or girl" may not be a healthy or happy boy or girl!

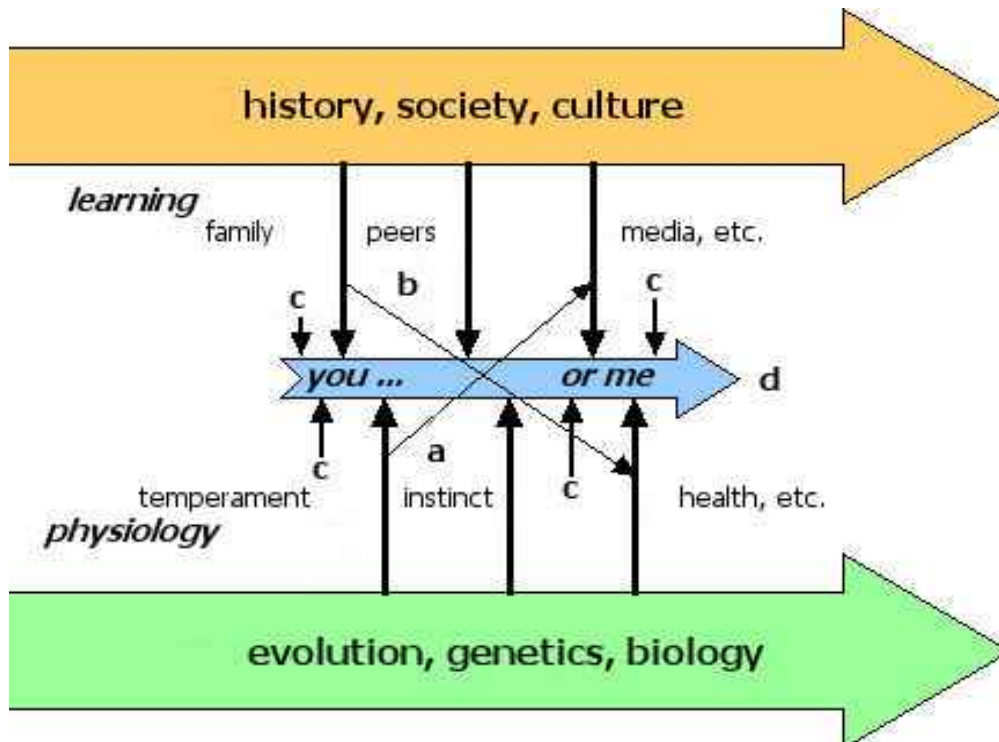
Over time, this "conditioning" leads us to have conditional positive self-regard as well. We begin to like ourselves only if we meet up with the standards others have applied to us, rather than if we are truly actualizing our potentials. And since these standards were created without keeping each individual in mind, more often than not we find ourselves unable to meet them, and therefore unable to maintain any sense of self-esteem.

At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves a bit, allow me to give you a simple way of looking at the influence of culture on mental health. Just like with more individual problems, psychological disorders based on culture often – maybe always – begin with stress. The nature of the society – as enacted within families, communities, and, today, in the media – is such that it always contains cultural, "institutionalized" stressors, demands made upon the individual, prejudices, abuse, disrespect, and so on – the "conditions of worth" Rogers talks about. Stress leads to strong emotions: fear, anger, depression. These emotions in turn lead to various actions: obedience, conformity, violence, escapism, narcissism, resignation, apathy, cynicism, suicide.

Culture is very difficult to separate from (a) biology and (b) individual variation. The only thing not in doubt is its enormous influence on our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

## 12. Self-determination

Being a visual sort, I like to put things into graphic form. So here goes:



What you see here is "poor me" (or "poor you"), at the center of enormous forces. At top, we have history, society, and culture, which influence us primarily through our learning as mediated by our families, peers, the media, and so on. At the bottom, we have evolution, genetics, and biology, which influence us by means of our physiology (including neurotransmitters, hormones, etc.) Some of the specifics most relevant to psychology are instincts, temperaments, and health. As the nice, thick arrows indicate, these two mighty forces influence us strongly and continuously, from conception to death, and sometimes threaten to tear us apart.

There is, of course, nothing simple about these influences. If you will notice the thin arrows (a) and (b). These illustrate some of the more roundabout ways in which biology influences our learning, or society influences our physiology. The arrow labeled (a) might represent an aggressive temperament leading to a violent response to certain media messages that leads to a misunderstanding of those messages. Or (b) might represent being raised with a certain set of nutritional habits that lead to a physiological deficiency in later life. There are endless complexities.

I also put in a number of little arrows, marked (c). These represent accidental influences, physiological or experiential. Not everything that happens in our environment is part of some great historical or evolutionary movement! Sometimes, stuff just happens. You can be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or the right place at the right time: Hear some great speaker that changes the direction of your life away from the traditional path, or have a cell hit by stray radiation in just the wrong way.

Last, but not least, there's (d), which represents our own choices, the idea that, beyond society and biology and accident, sometimes my behavior and experience is caused by... me!

Let's start by looking at what some of the theorists of the past have said.

### 12.1 Alfred Adler

Adler said that your lifestyle (personality) is "not merely a mechanical reaction." This makes Adler considerably different from Freud. For Freud, the things that happened in the past, such as early childhood trauma, determine what you are like in the present. Adler sees motivation as a matter of moving towards the future, rather than being driven, mechanistically, by the past. We are drawn towards our goals, our purposes, our ideals. This is called *teleology*, and the idea goes all the way back to Aristotle.

Moving things from the past into the future has some dramatic effects. Since the future is not here yet, a teleological approach to motivation takes the necessity out of things. In a traditional mechanistic approach, cause leads to effect: If a, b, and c happen, then x, y, and z must, of necessity, happen. But you don't have to reach your goals or meet your ideals, and they can change along the way. Teleology acknowledges that life is hard and uncertain, but it always has room for change!

A major influence on Adler's thinking was the philosopher Hans Vaihinger, who wrote a book called *The Philosophy of "As If."* Vaihinger believed that ultimate truth would always be beyond us, but that, for practical purposes, we need to create partial truths. His main interest was science, so he gave as examples such partial truths as protons and electrons, waves of light, gravity as distortion of space, and so on. Contrary to what many of us non-scientists tend to assume, these are not things that anyone has seen or proven to exist: They are useful constructs. They work for the moment, so let us do more science, and hopefully will lead to better, more useful constructs. We use them "as if" they were true. He called these partial truths *fictions*.

Vaihinger, and Adler, pointed out that we use these fictions in day to day living as well. We behave as if we knew the world would be here tomorrow, as if we were sure what good and bad are all about, as if everything we see is as we see it, and so on. Adler called this *fictional finalism*. You can understand the phrase most easily if you think about an example: Many people behave as if there were a heaven or a hell in their personal future. Of course, there may be a heaven or a hell, but most of us don't think of this as a proven fact. That makes it a "fiction" in Vaihinger's and Adler's sense of the word. And finalism refers to the teleology of it: The fiction lies in the future, and yet influences our behavior today.

### 12.2 Gordon Allport

One thing that motivates human beings is the tendency to satisfy biological survival needs, which Allport referred to as *opportunistic functioning*. He noted that opportunistic functioning can be characterized as reactive, past-oriented, and, of course, biological.

But Allport felt that opportunistic functioning was relatively unimportant for understanding most of human behavior. Most human behavior, he believed, is motivated by something very different – functioning in a manner expressive of the self – which he called *proprie functioning*. Most of what we do in life is a matter of being who we are! Proprie functioning can be characterized as proactive, future-oriented, and psychological.

Proprie comes from the word *proprium*, which is Allport's name for that essential concept, the self. He defines it as the aspects of your experiencing that you see as most essential (as opposed to incidental or accidental), warm (or "precious," as opposed to emotionally cool), and central (as opposed to peripheral). He had reviewed hundreds of definitions for that concept and came to feel that, in order to more scientific, it would be necessary to dispense with the common word self and substitute something else. For better or worse, the word *proprium* never caught on.

To get an intuitive feel for what propiate functioning means, think of the last time you wanted to do something or become something because you really felt that doing or becoming that something would be expressive of the things about yourself that you believe to be most important. Remember the last time you did something to express your self, the last time you told yourself, "that's really me!" Doing things in keeping with what you really are, that's propiate functioning.

### 12.3 Existentialism

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once compared us with God and, of course, found us lacking. God is traditionally understood as being omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal. We, on the other hand, are abysmally ignorant, pitifully powerless, and all too mortal. Our limitations are clear.

We often wish we could be more like God, or at least like angels. Angels, supposedly, are not as ignorant or powerless as we are, and they are immortal! But, as Mark Twain pointed out, if we were angels, we wouldn't recognize ourselves. Angels do nothing but God's bidding. They can't help it. They simply live out God's plan for them, and for eternity no less!

Tables are more like angels than we are. Tables have a nature, a purpose, an essence, that we have given them. They are there to serve us in a certain way, like angels are there to serve God.

Chipmunks are like this, too. They also have a plan, a blueprint, if you like, in their genetics. They do what their instincts instruct them to do. They seldom require career counseling.

It may be dull to be an angel, or a table, or a chipmunk, but it sure is easy! You could say that their *essences* come before their *existences*: What they are comes before what they do.

But, say existentialists, this is not true for us. "Our existences precede our essences," as French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre put it. I don't know what I'm here for until I've lived my life. My life, who I am, is not determined by God, by the laws of Nature, by my genetics, by my society, not even by my family. They each may provide the raw material for who I am, but it is how I choose to live that makes me what I am. I create myself.

If the scientist is the model of humanity for George Kelly and cognitive psychologists, the artist is the model for existentialists.

You could say that the essence of humanity – the thing that we all share, and makes us distinct from anything else in the world – is our lack of essence, our "no-thing-ness," our *freedom*. We cannot be captured by a philosophical system or a psychological theory; we cannot be reduced to physical and chemical processes; our futures cannot be predicted with social statistics. Some of us are men, some are women; some are black, some are white; some come from one culture, some from another; some have one imperfection, some another. The "raw materials" differ dramatically, but we all share the task of making ourselves.

### 12.4 Free-will vs determinism

The concept of free will has undergone some hard times lately. The obvious success of science, and the materialistic, deterministic, reductionistic assumptions that usually accompany it, have made free will seem old-fashioned, associated more with scholastic theologians than modern men and women. But I find the concept impossible to ignore, much less dispose of.

Let's begin by saying what free will is, and what it isn't. Free will is not the same as freedom of action. Freedom of action refers to things that prevent a willed action from being realized. For example, being in prison means you are not free to paint the town red. Being in a straight jacket means you are not free to wave hello. Being paralyzed means not being able to move your limbs. These are not issues of free will. Free will means being free to try to escape (or not), to try to wave (or not), to try to move your limbs (or not).

Neither is free will the same as political or social freedom (better known as liberty). Just because you will be executed for taking the local dictator's name in vain, doesn't mean you aren't free to try, or even free to actually do so. You'll just wind up paying for the satisfaction.

And one thing free will is certainly not is "willpower". "Willpower" is a mythical power some people claim to have and like tell other people they should have. In reality, it is just a matter of one motive out-weighting another. The runner runs his marathon despite the pain and exhaustion, not because he has some special power, but because he likes to demonstrate his prowess more than he likes being pain-free. The model restricts her diet to salad despite her hunger, not because she has a powerful will, but because she values appearance over satiety. These folks may tell the fat man that he should just use his "willpower" and start dieting and exercising, when in fact he has been doing exactly the same thing that they have been doing. In his case, his desire for food and rest outweigh his desire for health and long life. Telling him to use his "willpower" is like telling a diabetic to start producing insulin.

On the other side of the argument, I need to point out that determinism is not the same thing as fatalism, destiny, or predestination. Determinism means that the way things are at one moment is the necessary result of the ways things were the moment before. It means that every effect has its cause, and that nothing, not even the will, is exempt. It does not mean that the future is already established.

Let's run through some arguments for free will, followed by the determinist's responses. Since the free willist is making a claim, and an exceptional one at that, the burden of proof is on him or her.

First, there is the experience argument. I experience something within myself that I understand as making choices, and that those choices are not determined by anything other than myself.

The determinist will respond that you are simply not aware of the causes of your decisions, and have labeled that ignorance "free will." There were no doubt neurons firing and chemicals sailing across synapses and so forth, all very deterministically resulting in my choice of the danish.

The free willist might suggest that belief is a crucial part of free will. If you were to set me up with the danish and the muffin, knowing that I tend to choose danishes, you might very well say the end result was determined. But if I knew you were trying to prove your point, I would simply choose the muffin instead, or neither.

The determinist would simply say that this extra tidbit of knowledge – that I am trying to fool you – has replaced your usual causal factors. Instead, you are reacting, quite mechanically, to a threat to your beliefs.

Maybe so, says the free willist. But you must admit that I can be awfully random at times. I can suddenly jump out of my chair and scream "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too" at the top of my lungs. Let's see you predict something like that!

The determinist would respond that indeterminism is far from free will. If that's all there is to free will, then a roulette wheel is better at it than you are.

But I am unpredictable, says the free willist.

The determinist would point out that that is merely a practical problem, not a philosophical one. The fact that I cannot pin point the precise location and velocity, say, of all the particles in the universe, doesn't mean that you aren't determined by them. In fact, even if that were theoretically impossible (as suggested by the Heisenberg uncertainty principle), it only means I can't predict, not that you have free will!

The free willist may point out that, without free will, morality has no meaning. All the best things about people – generosity, bravery, compassion – have no meaning. If we are as determined as falling bricks, then Adolph Hitler could no more be blamed for his evil actions than Mother Teresa could be praised for her good ones. What then of our world?

Simple, says the determinist. We will have to live without morality. Many people are already moral relativists, or even moral nihilists. Our societies can get along just fine with laws and judicial processes and prisons using nothing more than tradition, majority self-interest, reciprocity, and the rule of cover-your-ass. Maybe that's all morality has ever been!

Another argument a free willist can make is that we have this unique ability to stop and think about a decision-making situation. We can exit the stream of cause-and-effect for a moment. We pause before the high-calorie meal to consider the advisability of diving in. Animals rarely do this: If a hungry lion has an antelope before her, she eats. And we can postpone the decision as long as we like. Even if the actual choice we make at some particular moment in time is determined, the length of time we wait for that moment to arrive is not.

Or is it? says the determinist. What caused you to wait exactly one minute before choosing? Or what caused you to stop your pausing and jump into things at just that moment? Besides, isn't this pause just a matter of two forces of equal strength short-circuiting the normal processes?

Jean-Paul Sartre came up with an interesting free will argument. He said that we can ignore something real and we can pretend something unreal. For example, I could imagine that there is no danish before me – something I often need to do in the service of dieting. Or I can see the poppy seeds in the muffins as maggots. This imagination is a powerful thing! But the determinist would just say that imagination is just one more neurological mechanism, explainable by deterministic principles.

I must point out that, although the free willist has not exactly won any arguments so far, the determinist has put himself in a somewhat more defensive position. Some of that "burden of proof" is moving over to the determinist side. For example, he has claimed that imagination is something physical. That is a claim that we need not just accept: We can challenge him to demonstrate the validity of the claim.

Another possible foundation for free will is creativity. I can create a new option. I am not stuck with the cheese danish or the poppy seed muffin. I can throw them both and choose a bag of cheesy puffs. Or I can literally create a new concoction: Get out my mixing bowls and bake something no one has ever seen before, such as a poppy seed danish or a cheese muffin. Or I can get out my blender and make a muffin and danish slurpy.

Of course, the determinist, becoming rather tiresome by now, would just say that creativity is just a word we use to label unconscious neural events that surprise even us – an accident. If someone steps on your danish and muffin by accident, no one would think to call the wad on the bottom of his shoe a new creation!

(Of course, the determinist is claiming now that creativity is mechanical – something he could be challenged to defend.)

So, how about differentiating between causes and reasons? When I get myself a Big Mac, is it cause-and-effect determinism that led me there? Did the growling in my stomach force me into my car, the sight of the golden arches make me jerk my steering wheel in their direction? Or did I notice my appetite and conceive a plan: Look through my repertoire of gastronomic delights, I decide on a Big Mac, drive purposefully to the golden arches, and order what I want? Was I, in other words, "pushed from behind" by causes, or did I follow my reasons?

This is Aristotle's teleology and Adler's fictional finalism and Allport's propiagate functioning. Instead of reacting to stimuli, we project a future situation which we take as a goal. The connection between cause-and-effect is one of necessity. There is nothing necessary about purposes. They can be accomplished – or not.

But the determinist would respond with the same argument he made with imagination and creativity: Your perceptions and cognitions and emotions, your past experiences, inevitably lead to your projecting that goal and working toward it. It only appears to you to be free of necessity. But note how quickly we give up our goals when other, more powerfully supported forces push in upon us.

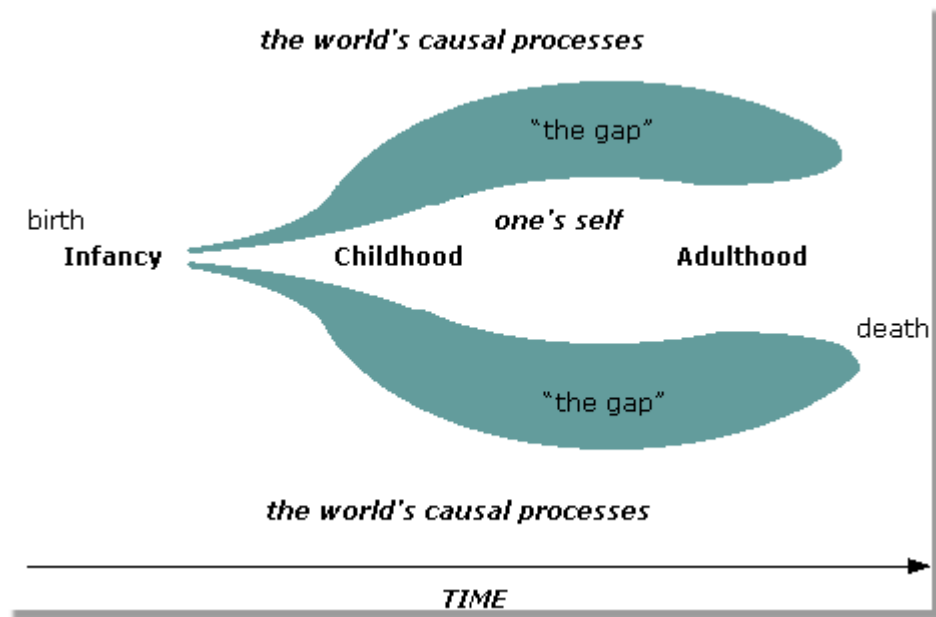
One last try for free will: I suggest that, as we develop from babies into adults, we separate from the world. Our causal processes become increasingly independent of the causal processes outside of us, especially in the mental realm. A gap develops that allows us to be influenced by outside situations, but not determined by them. This gap is like a large river: The man on the opposite bank can wave and jump and yell all he wants – he cannot directly affect us. But we can listen to him or interpret his semaphore signals. We can treat his antics as information to add to all the information we have gathered over our lives, and use that information to guide our decisions – influenced, but not caused.

The baby begins life nearly as intimately connected with his or her world as in the womb. As we develop from babies into adults, we gradually separate ourselves from the world. Our interior causal processes – especially mental processes – become increasingly independent of the causal processes outside of us. A gap develops that allows us to be influenced by outside situations, but not necessarily determined by them.

By the end of life, some of us are nearly impervious to what others think about us, can rise above nearly any threat or seductive promise, can ignore nearly any kind of urge or pain. We are still determined – but little in our immediate situation is more than information we utilize in making our decisions. In one sense, we are still determined – determined by that developing person we are, determined by our selves. But nothing else in our present circumstances, or even in our past going way back to some time in childhood when that gap was first fully realized, is more than information to utilize in making free decisions.

This gap is like a large river: The man on the opposite bank can wave and jump and yell all he wants – he cannot directly affect us. But we can listen to him or interpret his semaphore signals. We can treat his antics as information to add to all the information we have gathered over our lives, and use that information to influence our decisions – influence, but not cause.

I know very well that the determinist can respond to this idea as well. But now he is as much on the defensive as the free willist has ever been. In fact, the undecided listener may begin to conclude that it is the deterministic stance – nothing is free! – that is the more extreme, less reasonable one.



The argument of free will versus determinism is in some measure a false one. Both sides have been reduced to straw men (easily destroyed arguments) by oversimplification. As I mentioned at the start, free will has never meant freedom to ignore the laws of nature, and determinism does not mean everything is predictable. Perhaps the best thing we can do to get past the stalemate is to develop a new concept that points to the complexity of the person and his or her interaction with the world. Instead of free will versus determinism, maybe we should adopt Albert Bandura's preferred term: *Self-determination*.

As a middle-aged man, I have dozens of years of experiences – my childhood, my cultural inheritance, the books I've read, conversations with friends, my own thoughts – that have made me who I am today. All this is on top of my unique genetics and other physical realities of who I am. The things that happen to me *now* are experienced *through* this mass of uniqueness, and my responses depend, not only on my present situation, but on all that I *am*. This may not be "free will" in the absolute sense, but it is certainly self-determination.

It should never be forgotten, however, that this freedom is extremely limited! Biology, society, and circumstances are far, far more powerful.

If we possess this (limited) freedom, we also possess a (limited) responsibility for our actions. For most adults, it can be legitimately claimed that who we are includes basic moral concepts and a rational respect for law conveyed to us by our parents and others. These things are a part of who we are, and are available to us when we make a choice to behave one way or another. We are therefore culpable if we disregard these moral and legal concepts. This dovetails nicely into the legal tradition that asks whether or not a person actually *knows* right from wrong, and whether the person has the maturity or the cognitive wherewithall to *choose* right over wrong.

In other words, we don't have to be "above" the natural world in order to have a degree of freedom within that world.

"Values" is a topic I find difficult to place. They include emotions, certainly, and they are often highly motivating, so I considered discussing them in one of those earlier chapters. And yet, inasmuch as they are strongly influenced by culture and learning and tie in as well with self-determination, I thought I'd save them for a bit later in the book. Also like self-determination, they are things that are very hard to put into traditional scientific frameworks as well and so a great deal more ambiguous and slippery than simpler motives and emotions. So here goes...

### 13.1 Alfred Adler

For Alfred Adler, second in importance only to striving for perfection is the idea of *social interest* or social feeling (originally called *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* or "community feeling"). In keeping with his holism, it is easy to see that anyone "striving for perfection" can hardly do so without considering his or her social environment. As social animals, we simply don't exist, much less thrive, without others, and even the most resolute people-hater forms that hatred in a social context!

Adler felt that social concern was not simply inborn, nor just learned, but a combination of both: It is based on an innate disposition, but it has to be nurtured to survive. That it is to some extent innate is shown by the way babies and small children often show sympathy for others without having been taught to do so. Notice how, when one baby in a nursery begins to cry, they all begin to cry. Or how, when we walk into a room where people are laughing, we ourselves begin to smile.

And yet, right along with the examples of how generous little children can be to others, we have examples of how selfish and cruel they can be. Although we instinctively seem to know that what hurts him can hurt me, and vice versa, we also instinctively seem to know that, if we have to choose between it hurting him and it hurting me, we'll take "hurting him" every time! So the tendency to empathize must be supported by parents and the culture at large. Even if we disregard the possibilities of conflict between my needs and yours, empathy involves feeling the pain of others, and in a hard world, that can quickly become overwhelming. Much easier to just "toughen up" and ignore that unpleasant empathy – unless society steps in on empathy's behalf!

One misunderstanding Adler wanted to avoid was the idea that social interest was somehow another version of extraversion. Americans in particular tend to see social concern as a matter of being open and friendly and slapping people on the back and calling them by their first names. Some people may indeed express their social concern this way. But other people just use that kind of behavior to further their own ends. Adler meant social concern or feeling not in terms of particular social behaviors, but in the much broader sense of caring for family, for community, for society, for humanity, even for life. Social concern is a matter of being useful to others.

### 13.2 Gordon Allport

Dissatisfied with both Freudian psychology and behavioral psychology, Allport introduced an idea that was very controversial in its time, called *functional autonomy*. The idea here is that the way you behave today may have had its origins in your past, but it has in all likelihood become independent of these origins. For example, I developed a nasty addiction to cigarettes when I was 17 because I wanted to fit in with my older co-workers. But ten years later, few of my colleagues smoked and, by then a bit more mature, I didn't feel a need to fit in in that way anyway. But I still smoked! The reasons for smoking when I was 27 (or 37) had nothing to do with the origin of the habit, and revisiting my past would serve no purpose in helping me get over my habit.

What Allport called propiarte functional autonomy involves the self a bit more than habits do. Values are the usual example. Perhaps you were punished for being selfish when you were a child. That doesn't in any way detract from your well-known generosity today – it has become a value you hold dear!

The idea of propiarte functional autonomy – values – led Allport and his associates Vernon and Lindzey to develop a respected categorization of values (in a book called *A Study of Values*, 1960) and a test of values.

1. the *theoretical* – a scientist, for example, values truth.
2. the *economic* – a businessperson may value usefulness.
3. the *aesthetic* – an artist naturally values beauty.
4. the *social* – a nurse may have a strong love of people.
5. the *political* – a politician may value power.
6. the *religious* – a monk or nun probably values unity.

Most of us, of course, have several of these values at more moderate levels, plus we may value one or two of these quite negatively. There are modern tests used for helping kids find their careers that have very similar dimensions.

As you acquire positive values and develop your personality, you may eventually attain *psychological maturity*, Allport's term for mental health. He lists seven characteristics:

1. Specific, enduring extensions of self, i.e. Involvement.
2. Dependable techniques for warm relating to others (e.g. trust, empathy, genuineness, tolerance...).
3. Emotional security and self-acceptance.
4. Habits of realistic perception (as opposed to defensiveness).
5. Problem-centeredness, and the development of problem-solving skills.
6. Self-objectification – insight into one's own behavior, the ability to laugh at oneself, etc.
7. A unifying philosophy of life, including a particular value orientation, differentiated religious sentiment, and a personalized conscience.

### 13.3 Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow is probably best known for his biographical studies of a number of famous people (Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt come to mind) who he felt had the qualities he associated with what he called the *self-actualizing person*. Given to making lists, he mentions these qualities:

1. Reality centered – self-actualizers are in touch with reality, are sensitive to the truth, and are not given to denial.
2. Problem centered – they see difficulties as problems for which a solution is needed, rather than as things to avoid, postpone, or pass on to others to solve.
3. Different perception of means and ends – they recognize that ends do not justify means, and that means are in themselves ends as well.
4. Autonomy from physical and social needs – they are capable of rising above their immediate needs, whether they are the demands of the body or the desires we all have to gain the acceptance of others.
5. Resist enculturation – they are not victims of their society and its culture.
6. Enjoy solitude – they are not dependent upon the presence of others around them for their satisfaction.
7. Preference for deeper personal relations – rather than having "thousands" of friends, they prefer a few more profound relationships.

8. Unhostile sense of humor – they would never joke about others, but instead see humor in themselves or in the human condition.
9. Acceptance of self and others – they realize that they must accept others as they are, and extend that acceptance to their own limitations.
10. Spontaneity and simplicity – they are quite capable of being spontaneous and they prefer simplicity over ostentation.
11. Humility and respect – they don't have grandiose ideas about themselves, yet show respect to even the lowliest of others.
12. Human kinship – they have a strong sense that all men and women are brothers and sisters.
13. Strong ethics – they have a solid sense of what is right and wrong and adhere to an ethical life-style.
14. Freshness of appreciation – they are capable of seeing even routine experiences as if they were brand new.
15. Creative – they are able to approach things from new directions, and generally have an interest in creative activities.
16. Peak experiences – they are far more likely to have experiences of self-transcendence.

Maslow also suggests that self-actualizing people have certain metaneeds which they need like we all need certain vitamins and minerals. For example, they need...

Truth, rather than dishonesty.  
 Goodness, rather than evil.  
 Beauty, not ugliness or vulgarity.  
 Justice and order, not injustice and lawlessness.  
 Simplicity, not unnecessary complexity.  
 Meaningfulness, rather than senselessness.....

If they do not get these spiritual "vitamins," they may develop metapathologies such as alienation, depression, and cynicism. Being self-actualizing is not the same thing as happiness, according to Maslow, and I would certainly agree.

#### 13.4 Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers, like Maslow, is just as interested in describing the healthy person as he is in describing the unhealthy. His term is *fully-functioning*, and involves the following qualities:

1. *Openness to experience*. This is the opposite of defensiveness. It is the accurate perception of one's experiences in the world, including one's feelings. It also means being able to accept reality, again including one's feelings. Feelings are such an important part of openness because they convey organismic valuing. If you cannot be open to your feelings, you cannot be open to actualization. The hard part, of course, is distinguishing real feelings from the anxieties brought on by conditions of worth.
2. *Existential living*. This is living in the here-and-now. Rogers, as a part of getting in touch with reality, insists that we not live in the past or the future – the one is gone, and the other isn't anything at all, yet! The present is the only reality we have. Mind you, that doesn't mean we shouldn't remember and learn from our past. Neither does it mean we shouldn't plan or even day-dream about the future. Just recognize these things for what they are: memories and dreams, which we are experiencing here in the present.

3. *Organismic trusting.* We should allow ourselves to be guided by the organismic valuing process. We should trust ourselves, do what feels right, what comes natural. This, as I'm sure you realize, has become a major sticking point in Rogers' theory. People say, sure, do what comes natural – if you are a sadist, hurt people; if you are a masochist, hurt yourself; if the drugs or alcohol make you happy, go for it; if you are depressed, kill yourself.... This certainly doesn't sound like great advice. In fact, many of the excesses of the sixties and seventies were blamed on this attitude. But keep in mind that Rogers meant trust your real self, and you can only know what your real self has to say if you are open to experience and living existentially! In other words, organismic trusting assumes you are in contact with the actualizing tendency.
4. *Experiential freedom.* Rogers felt that it was irrelevant whether or not people really had free will. We feel very much as if we do. This is not to say, of course, that we are free to do anything at all: We are surrounded by a deterministic universe, so that, flap my arms as much as I like, I will not fly like Superman. It means that we feel free when choices are available to us. Rogers says that the fully-functioning person acknowledges that feeling of freedom, and takes responsibility for his choices.
5. *Creativity.* If you feel free and responsible, you will act accordingly, and participate in the world. A fully-functioning person, in touch with actualization, will feel obliged by their nature to contribute to the actualization of others, even life itself. This can be through creativity in the arts or sciences, through social concern and parental love, or simply by doing one's best at one's job. Creativity as Rogers uses it is very close to Erikson's generativity.

### 13.5 Existential psychology

Existentialists are a tough bunch. They fully acknowledge the hardship of life and to some extent even celebrate it.

First, you are "thrown" into the world, a world not of your choosing. As the teenager might say "I didn't *ask* to be born!" We don't choose our genetics, the historical time period of our life, the location of our birth, the nature of our parents. Neither do we choose many things that happen later in life, from the surprise inheritance from a rich uncle to the agony of cancer. Nevertheless, you must "play the hand you are dealt." They call this *thrownness*.

Second, you are totally enveloped in a social world from the moment you arrive. And although the rules of society are not quite as powerful as the laws of nature, it can be painfully difficult for us to rise above them. They call this *fallenness*.

Third, you can not avoid *anxiety*. We are a forward-looking creature that is obliged to make choices throughout our lives. However, we are not endowed with the ability to see which decision will result in the best ends. Since life is one decision after another, and every decision involves anxiety, anxiety is an inevitable part of life. As the old blues song says, if you ain't scared, you ain't right.

Fourth, you cannot avoid *guilt*. Because you are not omniscient, some of your choices will be bad ones. The German word that existentialists use is *Schuld*, which means not only guilt but debt. If you choose the easy way out of situations, you will be left with a debt to yourself as a human being.

And fifth, you know what is expected of us as human beings – a knowledge existentialists call *understanding*.

If all this isn't enough, we are perhaps the only creatures on this planet that are aware of our own impending *death*. Existentialists are sometimes criticized for being preoccupied with death, and they do, in fact, discuss it in greater depth than do most theorists. But it is hardly a morbid interest. It is in facing death that we are most likely to come to an understanding of life. When we become aware of our mortality, we may at first shrink from it and try to forget its reality by getting "busy" in the day-to-day activities of the social world. But this will not do. Avoiding death is avoiding life.

I once found myself holding one of my infant daughters while at the same time thinking about death – a strange thing perhaps, but thinking about these things is my life's work! When I glanced down at her sleeping face, I thought about how soon she and I would die. At that moment, I was overwhelmed by my love for her. It is the very fact that she and I have only a very short time together that makes love more than just a familial arrangement. When you fully realize that you are going to die, every moment you waste is wasted forever.

Unlike most other personality theorists, the existentialists make no effort to avoid value judgments. Phenomenologically, good and bad are as "real" as solid waste and burnt toast. So they are quite clear that there are better and worse ways of living life. The better ways they call *authentic*.

To live authentically means to be aware of yourself, of your circumstances (thrownness), of your social world (fallenness), of your duty to create yourself (understanding), of the inevitability of anxiety, of guilt, and of death. It means further to accept these things in an act of self-affirmation. It means involvement, compassion, and commitment.

Notice that the ideal of mental health is not pleasure or even happiness, although existentialists have nothing particularly against those things. The goal is to do your best.

### 13.6 Viktor Frankl

*(T)here is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, and existence restricted by external forces.... Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete. (Frankl, 1963, p. 106)*

The existential psychologist Viktor Frankl's theory and therapy grew out of his experiences in Nazi death camps. Watching who did and did not survive (given an opportunity to survive!), he concluded that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had it right: "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how." (Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in 1963, p. 121) He saw that people who had hopes of being reunited with loved ones, or who had projects they felt a need to complete, or who had great faith, tended to have better chances than those who had lost all hope.

He called his form of therapy logotherapy, from the Greek word *logos*, which can mean study, word, spirit, God, or meaning. It is this last sense Frankl focusses on, although the other meanings are never far off. Comparing himself with those other great Viennese psychiatrists, Freud and Adler, he suggested that Freud essentially postulated a will to pleasure as the root of all human motivation, and Adler a will to power. Logotherapy postulates a will to meaning.

One of Viktor Frankl's major concepts is conscience. He sees conscience as a sort of unconscious spirituality, different from the instinctual unconscious that Freud and others emphasize. The conscience is not just one factor among many; it is the core of our being and the source of our personal integrity.

He puts it in no uncertain terms: "... (B)eing human is being responsible – existentially responsible, responsible for one's own existence." (1975, p. 26) Conscience is intuitive and highly personalized. It refers to a real person in a real situation, and cannot be reduced to simple "universal laws." It must be lived.

He refers to conscience as a "pre-reflective ontological self-understanding" or "the wisdom of the heart," "more sensitive than reason can ever be sensible." (1975, p. 39) It is conscience that "sniffs out" that which gives our lives meaning.

Like Erich Fromm, Frankl notes that animals have instincts to guide them. In traditional societies, we have done well-enough replacing instincts with our social traditions. Today, we hardly even have that. Most attempt to find guidance in conformity and conventionality, but it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid facing the fact that we now have the freedom and the responsibility to make our own choices in life, to find our own meaning.

But "...meaning must be found and cannot be given." (1975, p. 112) Meaning is like laughter, he says: You cannot force someone to laugh, you must tell him a joke! The same applies to faith, hope, and love – they cannot be brought forth by an act of will, our own or someone else's.

"...(M)eaning is something to discover rather than to invent." (1975, p. 113) It has a reality of its own, independent of our minds. Like an embedded figure or a "magic eye" picture, it is there to be seen, not something created by our imagination. We may not always be able to bring the image – or the meaning – forth, but it is there. It is, he says, "...primarily a perceptual phenomenon." (1975, p. 115)

Tradition and traditional values are quickly disappearing from many people's lives. But, while that is difficult for us, it need not lead us into despair: Meaning is not tied to society's values. Certainly, each society attempts to summarize meaningfulness in its codes of conduct, but ultimately, meanings are unique to each individual.

"...(M)an must be equipped with the capacity to listen to and obey the ten thousand demands and commandments hidden in the ten thousand situations with which life is confronting him." (1975, p. 120) And it is our job as physicians, therapists, and educators to assist people in developing their individual consciences and finding and fulfilling their unique meanings.

So how do we find meaning? Frankl discusses three broad approaches. The first is through experiential values, that is, by experiencing something – or someone – we value. This can include Maslow's peak experiences and esthetic experiences such as viewing great art or natural wonders.

The most important example of experiential values is the love we feel towards another. Through our love, we can enable our beloved to develop meaning, and by doing so, we develop meaning ourselves! Love, he says, "is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire." (1963, pp. 58-59)

Frankl points out that, in modern society, many confuse sex with love. Without love, he says, sex is nothing more than masturbation, and the other is nothing more than a tool to be used, a means to an end. Sex can only be fully enjoyed as the physical expression of love.

Love is the recognition of the uniqueness of the other as an individual, with an intuitive understanding of their full potential as human beings. Frankl believes this is only possible within monogamous relationships. As long as partners are interchangeable, they remain objects.

A second means of discovering meaning is through creative values, by "doing a deed," as he puts it. This is the traditional existential idea of providing oneself with meaning by becoming involved in one's projects, or, better, in the project of one's own life. It includes the creativity involved in art, music, writing, invention, and so on.

Frankl views creativity (as well as love) as a function of the spiritual unconscious, that is, the conscience. The irrationality of artistic production is the same as the intuition that allows us to recognize the good. He provides us with an interesting example:

*We know a case in which a violinist always tried to play as consciously as possible. From putting his violin in place on his shoulder to the most trifling technical detail, he wanted to do everything consciously, to perform in full self-reflection. This led to a complete artistic breakdown.... Treatment had to give back to the patient his trust in the unconscious, by having him realize how much more musical his unconscious was than his conscious. (1975, p. 38)*

The third means of finding meaning is one few people besides Frankl talk about: attitudinal values. Attitudinal values include such virtues as compassion, bravery, a good sense of humor, and so on. But Frankl's most famous example is achieving meaning by way of suffering.

He gives an example concerning one of his clients: A doctor whose wife had died mourned her terribly. Frankl asked him, "if you had died first, what would it have been like for her?" The doctor answered that it would have been incredibly difficult for her. Frankl then pointed out that, by her dying first, she had been spared that suffering, but that now he had to pay the price by surviving and mourning her. In other words, grief is the price we pay for love. For the doctor, this thought gave his wife's death and his own pain meaning, which in turn allowed him to deal with it. His suffering becomes something more: With meaning, suffering can be endured with dignity.

Frankl also notes that seriously ill people are not often given an opportunity to suffer bravely, and thereby retain some dignity. Cheer up! we say. Be optimistic! Often, they are made to feel ashamed of their pain and unhappiness.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he says this: "...everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (1963, p. 104)

### 13.7 Values and anticipation

Where do values come from? They come from our nature as anticipatory creatures.

Human beings are forward-looking by nature. We "look forward" to continued and enhanced existence. In day-to-day life, we can see that our activity is directed towards ends, goals, purposes. When we pause in our activity, we can see the nature of our motivation in the anticipatory image – something not present that we wish, want, or strive for. But because most motivation is anticipatory and not causal, it is not *necessary*, and "stimulus-response" only applies to a small part of our lives!

Preserving our bodily existence means that we seek food and water, rest and exercise, and escape from pain and irritation. And, through a subterfuge as old as life, we seek sex. Mostly, these too are anticipatory and do not bear the weight of necessity – urgency, yes, but necessity, no. But, since the body is "out there" as well as "in here," there are things that inevitably overpower us. When we try to hold our breath too long, for example, we eventually faint and breathe.

Actualizing the mind or understanding means that we seek meaningfulness and avoid confusion, and seek to test and improve our understanding through an assertive attitude – unless life has worn down our assertiveness and made passivity the way of survival.

We also seek support for and improvement of understanding through others. They are sources of experience that relieve us of the need to have all experiences first-hand, and they validate or correct our understanding. With them, we build a social reality which, though again lacking necessity, bolsters our potential for actualization.

Note that this social reality – though it exists as a means toward individual maintenance and enhancement – may become so salient and so powerful that the individual – willingly or not – may be sacrificed to the maintenance or enhancement of the social reality!

Because our actualization is anticipatory, we can be confronted by more than one conflicting purpose at a time, no one of which is necessary. We must therefore *choose*.

We are not free in the radical sense of getting whatever we want (e.g., to fly). We are only free to choose what we want (to try to fly, or not). We choose the meanings we place on things. We choose our attitude towards things. We can will to do what we wish.

Once we have willed an act, it passes beyond our will and becomes subject to the same laws of nature and chance as anything else. Our freedom is embedded in determinism. So we are severely limited in power.

We make our choices on the basis of our understanding (of the situation, the world in general, our selves, and the nature of actualization). Unfortunately, that understanding is always incomplete. And so we are severely limited in understanding.

And yet we must act and so choose. Not choosing or not acting are themselves choices and acts. So we must choose and act despite our powerlessness and ignorance. But the distress of conflicting choices – the difficulty of freedom – may lead us to avoid choosing as much as possible by embedding ourselves more deeply in authoritarian social structures, mass culture, or compulsive personality structures (which we will discuss later).

Further examples of conflicts are endless: What is good for me now may not be good for me in the long run; what is good for me in one way of understanding it may not be good for me in another way; what is good for me biologically may not be good for me psychologically, and vice versa; what is good for me may not be good for you, and therefore not good for me; what is good for you (and therefore good for me) may be bad for him (and therefore bad for me); and so on.

We may even find ourselves confronted with a choice between allowing the anticipated degeneration of self (body or mind) due to sickness and voluntarily ending our lives. We may come to understand "stopping" our lives as a closer approximation to actualization than continued pain-filled "retreat."

Finally, although my particular desires all ultimately serve the desire to maintain and enhance myself, I live knowing that, for all my efforts, I die in the end. My very existence is severely limited!

In a negative sense, I am motivated to avoid things that focus my attention on this ultimate barrier to actualization, e.g. others' deaths, my own and others' diseases and suffering, physical, social, and mental disorder, even dirt and decay and things that merely symbolize degeneration. The distress of these things may be intensified by an awareness of my own mortality.

In a positive sense, I am motivated to seek a way of transcending death (as I am motivated to seek ways of transcending all my various limitations), through raising and educating of children, through love of others and identification with a community of beings, through art, invention, and creativity in general, and through philosophy.

By changing our understanding of self, we change the relevance of death to self. Here's what Mozart said about death in a letter to his father:

*I need not tell you with what anxiety I await better news from you. Since death (take my words literally) is the true goal of our lives, I have made myself so well acquainted with this true and best friend of man that the idea of it no longer has terrors for me, but rather much that is tranquil and comforting. And I thank God that he has granted me the good fortune to obtain the opportunity of regarding death as the key to our true happiness. I never lie down in bed without considering that, young as I am, perhaps on the morrow I may be no more. Yet not one of those who know me could say that I am morose or melancholy, and for this I thank my Creator daily and wish heartily that the same happiness may be given to my fellowmen.*

### 13.8 Transcendence of self

Here is a simple list of the general values I believe we hold. Most of us, I believe, seek several of these. A few of us focus on only a couple.

1. **pleasure** (comfort, food, drink, sex, fun, entertainment...)
2. **admiration** (physical beauty, praise, notoriety, fame...)
3. **wealth** (security, financial success, prosperity ...)
4. **power** (control, influence...)
5. **competence** (ability, talent, skill, accomplishment...)
6. **beauty** (art, literature, music, natural beauty...)
7. **knowledge** (truth, understanding, philosophy, science...)
8. **affection** (love, companionship, friendship, family, intimacy...)
9. **goodness** (common decency, justice, world peace, compassion...)
10. **tranquility** (personal peace, simplicity, integrity...)

Some, as you can see, are very basic and common to most people. I don't know anyone, personally, that doesn't value pleasure at least to some degree! But as you go down the list, a different quality starts to show itself, a quality best called "transcendence of self."

There are times when we are, for a moment, "transported outside ourselves," or, to put it another way, when we feel an identity with something greater than ourselves. Many people experience these moments when they stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon for the first time, or walk into one of the great cathedrals of Europe for the first time. The ocean, the acropolis, sequoias, hummingbirds, music, even a great book or movie can do this as well. We could call it a peak, spiritual, or mystical experience, or just call it awe.

This kind of thing also happens with certain behaviors. Mountain climbers talk about the "flow experience" (named by the psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi), when their minds are fully occupied with the task at hand and they become "one with the mountain." Dancers, actors, musicians, and athletes mention similar experiences of involvement. Tai chi is one of the purest forms of flow.

The pleasure of self-transcendence is similar in some ways to physical pleasure: Just like physical pleasure, self-transcendence is a withdrawal from consciousness. If you recall the "loop" of anticipation which is the root of consciousness, self-transcendence occurs when that loop approaches perfect anticipation, with no adaptation required. Since any extraneous problems would automatically attract our attention, the loop must also be all-consuming, totally involving. This, of course, is what happens when we contemplate beauty or become fully occupied by some activity.

On a more complex level, there are actions such as bravery: If you rush into a burning building to save a baby – that's brave! But if you did so because someone promised you a million dollars as a reward – that's just greedy. It's only bravery if you don't do it as a means to an end. Neither is it bravery if you act in order to win approval or to go to heaven. Neither is it bravery if you aren't aware of the danger, or if you're hypnotized or drugged.... You must choose to do it knowing the risks.

A brave person is one who does it because he feels it is the right thing to do. He may come by this feeling through intuition, or social learning, or moral reasoning, but as long as he sees it as the right thing to do, and nothing more, it's bravery. Another way to look at it is that a person behaves bravely because it is a part of who he is. It is a part of his integrity. He wouldn't feel right if he didn't. He couldn't live with himself.

Or take generosity: If you give unselfishly, you are generous. If you give in order to ingratiate yourself to someone, or to get something from someone – that's just manipulation. It's only generosity if you have no ulterior motives. The same goes for honesty: Is it still honesty if it serves an ulterior motive? And then, there is love. Is it still love if you have conditions on it?

Human happiness seems to be strongly tied to having close and satisfying relationships with friends, family, and, of course, a partner. The desire for a partner is so powerful in human beings that one writer suggested the basic unit of human life is not the individual, but the couple. Love is basically a matter of caring about someone else's well-being as much or more than you care about your own. If they feel pain or sadness, you suffer with them. If they find happiness, you feel happy for them. Strong love even involves sacrificing your own happiness – and even sometimes your own life – for the other person.

*The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. (Frankl, 1963, p. 59)*

Once again, the good life is not only the maintenance and enhancement of self but also the transcendence of self, a loss of self that paradoxically leads to an expansion of self.

## 14. Stages

Stages are something most personality theorists shy away from. Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson are the obvious exceptions, as is the developmentalist Jean Piaget. And yet there is a very biological basis for the idea. We can, on pure biology, separate out at least three stages: the fetus, the child, and the adult. This is parallel to the egg, caterpillar, butterfly example we learned in high school biology.

In addition, we can see three transitional stages: infancy, adolescence, and senescence.

Infancy is not, actually, found in more primitive animals, and is greatly exaggerated in humans. We humans are, in a sense, all born prematurely. Perhaps this was the result of an evolutionary dilemma: How can an upright creature give birth to a baby with a large head without killing the mom? That's right: Give birth before it gets too big!

What that does for us is more than just let us live long enough to give birth again. It lets the infant soak up information much earlier, and in a different way. It would seem that for the first 6 to 12 months, our neural development is as yet incomplete. As we learn, we actually *create* certain neural paths, rather than just tightening synapses as we do later in life. It's as if we were actually learning instincts!

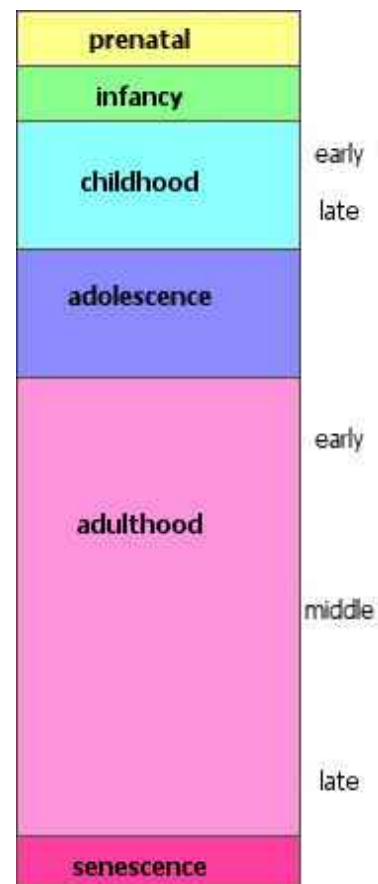
Adolescence also qualifies, I believe, as a stage. The transition from child to adult involves rather massive hormonal changes accompanied by a growth spurt like you hadn't seen since you were two! It is hard for me to conceive of these changes not having some direct effect on us psychologically.

Senescence is, strictly speaking, the last year or so of a full life, during which time the organs begin to deteriorate and shut down. We don't usually see this as a stage, and in fact most people never reach it, as accidents and diseases usually beat senescence to the punch. But socially speaking, in our culture we certainly prepare ourselves for this inevitability, and that might constitute a social stage, if not a biological one.

As this last point suggests, there are certainly cultural additions we can make. In *our* culture, there is a sharp transition from preschool child to school child, and another sharp transition from single adult to married adult. For all the power of biology, these social stages can be every bit as powerful.

To venture a guess as to the psychological side of these biological stages: The fetus focuses on biological development, which is transformed by the presence of others in the infant into ego development in the child. In turn, the ego development of the child is transformed by the advent of sexuality in adolescence into the "trans-ego" or social development of the adult.

As I mentioned, there are three people closely associated with the idea of stages, Freud, Erikson, and Piaget. We will start with Freud.



### 14.1 Sigmund Freud

Freud noticed that there are areas of our bodies that are more sensitive to touch and pleasure, and that these areas are places where the inner mucous skin meets the outer world: mouth, anus, genitalia. Nowadays, we call these erogenous zones. One might note that the ear canal, the conjunctiva of the eye, the tissue just inside the nose, and the nipples also qualify. Freud strongly believed in the significance of sex in our lives (an idea supported by Darwin and modern sociobiology), and he noticed that, at different points in a child's development, different erogenous zones seem to come to the forefront. In infancy, the mouth seems to be a focus of interest, obviously. It is not only the organ of nutrition, but the organ of exploration.

So Freud called the first 18 months of life the oral stage.

The next stage, Freud believed, involved an inordinate focus on the anus. Few psychologists agree with this assessment, but the whole issue of potty training may be thought of as causing the child to focus there. Catching on to the trick of holding stuff in and letting it go, and the accompanying pain and pleasure (and parental approval and disapproval!), are not easy for all kids, especially when parents (reflecting societies standards) make it an issue. So, the period from 18 months to 3 years old, Freud labelled the anal stage.

Then, from 3 to 6 (adjusted, of course, to the individual's unique pace), he called the phallic stage. By phallic, he meant the penis and the clitoris. He should be commended for even realizing the clitoris existed, considering his times! A fair number of children (he believed all of them) do find pleasure in rubbing these delightful body parts. Some even have orgasms, since you are actually capable of orgasm at birth.

From 6 to 12, he believed, was the latent stage, wherein your "sexuality" (loosely defined) goes underground. In fact, a considerable number of grade school children masturbate during this age range. And I myself recall some interesting exercises in "playing doctor" with a similarly inclined girl down the street.

Finally, beginning at 12 or so, there is the genital stage, where (assuming you made it through the other stages in one piece) you now are capable of intercourse. Note that Freud believed that heterosexual intercourse was the only truly adult sexuality. Masturbation, oral sex, and homosexuality should have been left behind. Of course, we quite disagree nowadays. All three are perfectly normal adult behaviors.

### 14.2 Erik Erikson

Erikson is most famous for his work in refining and expanding Freud's theory of stages. Development, he says, functions by the epigenetic principle. This principle says that we develop through a predetermined unfolding of our personalities in eight stages. Our progress through each stage is in part determined by our success, or lack of success, in all the previous stages. A little like the unfolding of a rose bud, each petal opens up at a certain time, in a certain order, which nature, through genetics, has determined. If we interfere in the natural order of development by pulling a petal forward prematurely or out of order, we ruin the development of the entire flower.

Each stage involves certain developmental tasks that are psychosocial in nature. Although he follows Freudian tradition by calling them crises, they are more drawn out and less specific than that term implies. The child in grammar school, for example, has to learn to be industrious during that period of his or her life, and that industriousness is learned through the complex social interactions of school and family.

The various tasks are referred to by two terms. The infant's task, for example, is called "trust-mistrust." At first, it might seem obvious that the infant must learn trust and not mistrust. But Erikson made it clear that there it is a balance we must learn: Certainly, we need to learn mostly trust; but we also need to learn a little mistrust, so as not to grow up to become gullible fools!

Each stage has a certain optimal time as well. It is no use trying to rush children into adulthood, as is so common among people who are obsessed with success. Neither is it possible to slow the pace or to try to protect our children from the demands of life. There is a proper time for each task.

If a stage is managed well, we carry away a certain virtue or psychosocial strength which will help us through the rest of the stages of our lives. On the other hand, if we don't do so well, we may develop maladaptations and malignancies, as well as endanger all our future development. A malignancy is the worse of the two, and involves too little of the positive and too much of the negative aspect of the task, such as a person who can't trust others. A maladaptation is not quite as bad and involves too much of the positive and too little of the negative, such as a person who trusts too much.

### 14.3 Jean Piaget

Piaget is the most scientific of the three, and focusses on what we now call cognitive development, that is, the development of perception, memory, and problem solving (which he referred to as intelligence). His work is based on thousands of careful studies by him and his students, and by many others afterwards.

He postulates two synergistic aspects of cognitive development: *assimilation* and *accomodation*. Assimilation is where the child takes a new object into a previously developed skill or schema. For example, a baby learns how to hammer, but then adds an ever increasing number of "hammers" (rattles, spoons, teddy bears, the cat...) to the hammering schema. Accommodation is where the child needs to adjust his schema to an object which does not fit into the original schema. The cat, for example, is likely to resist the idea of his leg being used as a hammer. The child may accommodate by altering the hammer schema and creating the pounding schema: Use your little fist as a hammer and bring it down forcefully on kitty.

Assimilation and accommodation work like pendulum swings at advancing our understanding of the world and our competency in it. According to Piaget, they are directed at a balance between the structure of the mind and the environment, at a certain congruency between the two, that would indicate that you have a good (or at least good-enough) model of the universe. This ideal state he calls *equilibrium*.

As he continued his investigation of children, he noted that there were periods where assimilation dominated, periods where accommodation dominated, and periods of relative equilibrium, and that these periods were similar among all the children he looked at in their nature and their timing. And so he developed the idea of stages of cognitive development. These constitute a lasting contribution to psychology.

### 14.4 Family

Freud's biggest contribution to our understanding of personality is in exploring the effects of parenting on the child's development. Rather than dwell on Freud's numerous errors in this aspect of his theorizing, I will provide you with a version which I call "Freud lite."

So, in the oral stage, there comes the task of weaning. At some point, Mom gets tired of the chore (or gets viciously bitten on her nipples – ouch!), and the child is encouraged to take solid foods. Babies are perfectly happy with the original situation, and resist this change of menu. Some mothers will accept baby's demands and continue to nurse for months more. Others will demand right back and force the issue. Freud saw this as a "crisis." Freud always did have a penchant for drama! But this step, plus all the other contests of will between parents and child at this stage, could certainly be considered a task. I personally doubt that this task will leave any major scars on the child's psyche, but Freud (and Freudians) do.

Mom and dad, as fully socialized adults, reflect their society, of course. And society says that one is not permitted to excrete anywhere at anytime, and must wear clothing when in public, and similar unreasonable demands. So the child needs to be potty trained. This is not particularly natural (although children will eventually learn to control these things themselves – just much later than society prefers), so it can involve some stress on both the child's and parents' part. Freud focused on the potty training issue, but if you generalize a little, you begin to realize that there are a whole mess of other things as well: washing one's own face, brushing one's own teeth, getting dressed by oneself, eating neatly on one's own, picking up one's toys, etc. Call it hygiene training. The child actually does begin to want to do everything by themselves, but it often doesn't go as smoothly as desired.

Then there's sex. Of course we aren't talking about adult ideas of sex (one sincerely hopes). But the distinction between boys and girls looms large in children's minds around four or five, most especially in any society where the roles are strongly marked. Plus, many children develop that interesting habit of rubbing one's "special spot," a habit frowned upon by a society like Freud's – or ours. If you want to know about the Oedipal complex, penis envy, and castration anxiety, Google them. They are old ideas that are truly no longer relevant.

Instead, notice that there is a dynamic in the family involving mom, dad, and child. Once the child learns that girl-boy construct, he or she will look to mom and dad for the details. Freud's ideas are rather complicated, but we can simplify easily: boys tend to identify with dad, and mom serves as a role-reactor, that is, she plays the "girl" part in the play. Likewise, girls tend to identify with mom and use dad as a role-reactor. Over time, boys and girls redirect their affections appropriately. Rather than fear of the same sex parent (Freud's explanation), we suspect it is simply a matter of children not being attracted in a physical sense to the people they are most familiar with. It would be like sleeping with your brother or sister, and we appear to instinctively find the idea less than appealing by the time we reach sexual maturity.

### **Brothers and sisters**

Alfred Adler must be credited as the first theorist to include not only a child's mother and father and other adults as early influences on the child, but the child's brothers and sisters as well. His consideration of the effects of siblings and the order in which they were born is probably what Adler is best-known for. I have to warn you, though, that Adler considered birth-order another one of those heuristic ideas-- useful fictions – that contribute to understanding people, but should be not be taken too seriously.

The only child is more likely than others to be pampered, which often leads to being a bit self-centered. After all, the parents of the only child have put all their eggs in one basket, so to speak, and are more likely to take special care – sometimes anxiety-filled care – of their pride and joy. If the parents are abusive, on the other hand, the only child will have to bear that abuse alone.

The first child begins life as an only child, with all the attention to him- or herself. Sadly, just as things are getting comfortable, the second child arrives and "dethrones" the first. At first, the child may battle for his or her lost position. He or she might try acting like the baby – after all, it seems to work for the baby! – only to be rebuffed and told to grow up. Some become disobedient and rebellious, others sullen and withdrawn. Adler believes that first children are more likely than any other to become problem children. More positively, first children are often precocious and more intelligent and tend to be relatively solitary and more conservative than the other children in the family.

The second child is in a very different situation: He or she has the first child as a sort of "pace-setter," and tends to become quite competitive, constantly trying to surpass the older child. They often succeed, but many feel as if the race is never done, and they tend to dream of constant running without getting anywhere. Other "middle" children will tend to be similar to the second child, although each may focus on a different "competitor."

The youngest child is likely to be the most pampered in a family with more than one child. After all, he or she is the only one who is never dethroned! And so youngest children are the second most likely source of problem children, just behind first children. On the other hand, the youngest may also feel incredible inferiority, with everyone older and "therefore" superior. But, with all those "pace-setters" ahead, the youngest can also be driven to exceed all of them.

Who is a first, second, or youngest child isn't as obvious as it might seem. If there is a long stretch between children, they may not see themselves and each other the same way as if they were closer together. There are eight years between my first and second daughter and three between the second and the third: That would make my first daughter an only child, my second a first child, and my third the second and youngest! And if some of the children are boys and some girls, it makes a difference as well. A second child who is a girl might not take her older brother as someone to compete with; A boy in a family of girls may feel more like the only child; And so on. As with everything in Adler's system, birth order is to be understood in the context of the individual's own special circumstances.

### **The extended family**

Erikson also had some things to say about the interaction of generations, which he called mutuality. Freud had made it abundantly clear that a child's parents influence his or her development dramatically. Erikson pointed out that children influence their parents' development as well. The arrival of children, for example, into a couple's life, changes that life considerably, and moves the new parents along their developmental paths. It is even appropriate to add a third (and in some cases, a fourth) generation to the picture: Many of us have been influenced by our grandparents, and they by us.

A particularly clear example of mutuality can be seen in the problems of the teenage mother. Although the mother and her child may have a fine life together, often the mother is still involved in the tasks of adolescence, that is, in finding out who she is and how she fits into the larger society. The relationship she has or had with the child's father may have been immature on one or both sides, and if they don't marry, she will have to deal with the problems of finding and developing a future relationship as well. The infant, on the other hand, has the simple, straight-forward needs that infants have, and the most important of these is a mother with the mature abilities and social support a mother should have. If the mother's parents step in to help, as one would expect, then they, too, are thrown off of their developmental tracks, back into a lifestyle they thought they had passed, and which they might find terribly demanding. And so on....

The ways in which our lives intermesh are terribly complex and very frustrating to the theorist. But ignoring them is to ignore something vitally important about our development and our personalities.

### **Family and society**

Our families mostly just reflect our society and culture. Erich Fromm emphasizes that we soak up our society with our mother's milk. It is so close to us that we usually forget that our society is just one of an infinite number of ways of dealing with the issues of life. We often think that our way of doing things is the only way, the natural way. We have learned so well that it has all become unconscious – the social unconscious, to be precise. So, many times we believe that we are acting according to our own free will, but we are only following orders we are so used to we no longer notice them. Fromm outlines two kinds of unproductive families.

1. *Symbiotic families.* Symbiosis is the relationship two organisms have who cannot live without each other. In a symbiotic family, some members of the family are "swallowed up" by other members, so that they do not fully develop personalities of their own. The more obvious example is the case where the parent "swallows" the child, so that the child's personality is merely a reflection of the parent's wishes. In many traditional societies, this is the case with many children, especially girls.

The other example is the case where the child "swallows" the parent. In this case, the child dominates or manipulates the parent, who exists essentially to serve the child. If this sounds odd, let me assure you it is common, especially in traditional societies, especially in the relationship between a boy and his mother. Within the context of the particular culture, it is even necessary: How else does a boy learn the art of authority he will need to survive as an adult?

In reality, nearly everyone in a traditional society learns both how to dominate and how to be submissive, since nearly everyone has someone above them and below them in the social hierarchy. But note that, for all that it may offend our modern standards of equality, this is the way people lived for thousands of years. It is a very stable social system, it allows for a great deal of love and friendship, and billions of people live in it still.

2. *Withdrawing families.* In fact, the main alternative is most notable for its cool indifference, if not cold hatefulness. Although withdrawal as a family style has always been around, it has come to dominate some societies only in the last few hundred years, that is, since the bourgeoisie – the merchant class – arrive on the scene in force.

The "cold" version is the older of the two, found in northern and central Europe and parts of Asia, and wherever merchants are a formidable class. Parents are very demanding of their children, who are expected to live up to high, well-defined standards. Punishment is not a matter of a slap upside the head in full anger and in the middle of dinner; it is instead a formal affair, a full-fledged ritual, possibly involving cutting switches and meeting in the woodshed. Punishment is cold-blooded, done "for your own good." Alternatively, a culture may use guilt and withdrawal of affection as punishment. Either way, children in these cultures become rather strongly driven to succeed in whatever their culture defines as success.

All of the preceding families function by what is usually called the *authoritarian* parenting style, which is, in fact, the traditional style of parenting we find all over the world and back as far as we can see in history. Parents are the bosses in the family, and what they say, goes. The consequences can be harsh – physical punishment, verbal browbeating, social ostracism – although this does not mean there is not also plenty of love as well.

The other style of withdrawing family is called the *permissive* (or *laissez-faire*) style. In this case, the child is pretty much allowed to do whatever they like, and the parent interferes only in emergency situations. While we do see this style in some primitive societies with relatively peaceful and safe environments, it is more often seen in modern societies such as our own.

Changes in attitudes about child rearing have led many people to shudder at the use of physical punishment and guilt in raising children. The newer idea is to raise your children as your equals. A father should be a boy's best buddy; a mother should be a daughter's soul mate. But, in the process of controlling their emotions, the parents become coolly indifferent. They are, in fact, no longer really parents, just cohabitants with their children. The children, now without any real adult guidance, turn to their peers and to the media for their values. This is the modern, shallow, television family!

Two new influences are particularly notable in regards to this new kind of family structure:

First, school (and other educational systems, such as apprenticeship, in other cultures) takes up a considerable part of a child's day. It is, in a very real sense, a child's job. It also seems that this is, in fact, an appropriate time for education, in that children learn easily (relatively speaking).

And second, television – and all the various media we surround ourselves with today – has a powerful influence on children that we are only now starting to understand a little. With children spending hours every day in front of one kind of screen or another, they are absorbing cultural values at a record rate.

Unfortunately, these values may be considerably different from the values parents would like their children to have: Constant exposure to commercials teaches our kids that having things is the way to happiness; The violence they see, even in cartoons, teaches them that you get what you want by taking it, and that the pain of others is unimportant; The emphasis on appearance and sexuality teaches them that looks are everything and anything is all right if it feels good.

Between TV, movies, magazines, music, and now the internet, parents have their job cut out for them. This may be the first generation of parents who have the odd task of teaching their children one thing, while other powerful social forces are teaching them something else! Sadly, many parents have completely abdicated this responsibility, and allow their kids to see and do whatever they want.

What makes up a good, healthy, productive family? Fromm suggests it is a family where parents take the responsibility to teach their children reason in an atmosphere of love. Growing up in this sort of family, children learn to acknowledge their freedom and to take responsibility for themselves, and ultimately for society as a whole.

This last style is called authoritative, which means that, while the child is given considerable freedom and input into family decision-making, the parent is still clearly the parent. Rules are clearly spelled out and never arbitrary, and punishments "fit the crime" but are not physically or psychologically abusive. Psychologists believe that this style is most likely to lead to good development, of course.

Of course, parents are not the only influence. In early childhood, and even in infancy, peers – in the form of siblings and play friends – are quite influential. As we get closer to adolescence, though, they begin to dominate. As most parents can see in their own children, much of childhood seems to involve you children paying less and less attention to what you think and more and more attention to what their friends think. This is, of course, a natural thing for the child to do as they move towards independence.

### 14.5 The infant

Although science generally avoids making value statements, in the world of psychology, one value is comfortably accepted by everyone: We would like to know how best to raise children to become healthy, happy, and productive people. This is what the field of developmental psychology is all about.

Infancy is usually considered the first 2 1/2 years of life. The first two months of infancy is called the *neonatal* period. At this point, life is mostly a matter of satisfying one's basic needs: Enough milk (preferably mom's), staying warm and dry, and, of course, pooping. Lots and lots of pooping. More seriously, the infant needs to be protected from harm and infection, the latter being the greatest threat at this time of life.

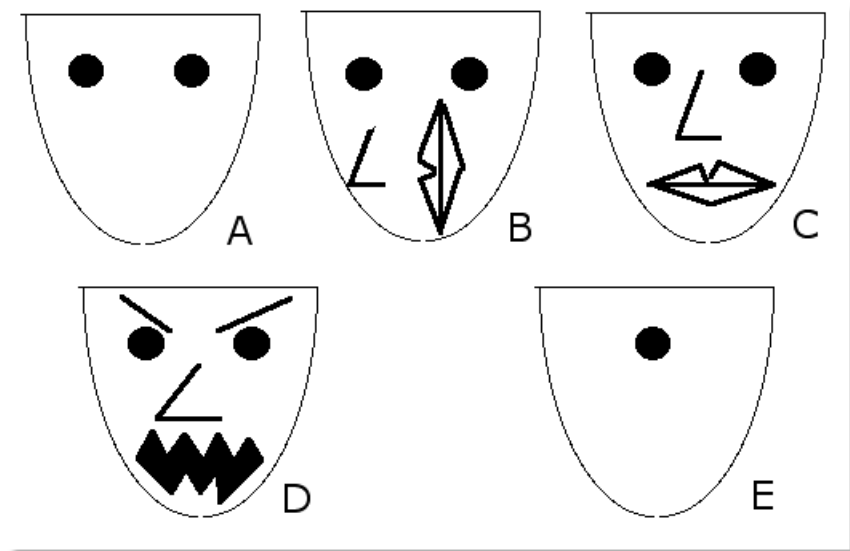
In a way, the neonate is a fetus out of his or her element. A great deal of neurological development especially is still going on. Since the neurons are still reproducing and growing their axons, the neonate's nervous system retains a considerable amount of plasticity, meaning that there is relatively little specialization of function. If damage were to occur to a part of the brain, for example, another part of the brain could still take over.

Infants can see at birth, but they are very nearsighted and can't coordinate their eye movements. Hearing, on the other hand, is already at work in the womb, by about the 20th week. Smell and taste are sharp at birth, and babies have a preference for sweets, which, not coincidentally, includes breast milk.

In the neonate, we can clearly see the presence of some basic reflexes, such as rooting (searching for mom's nipple) and the startle reflex. We can also see certain instinctual patterns: Infants seem to orient towards faces and voices, especially female ones, and seem to recognize their mother's voice and smell.

There have been many interesting experiments in this regard. They use some interesting special techniques: Some videotape the babies face to keep track of where they are looking and how they are responding; others use a special pacifier that keeps track of the rate of sucking, as babies suck more rapidly when they are experiencing something interesting.

One example of an experiment looked at babies responses to various faces, as represented by masks, similar to the ones pictured here:



The surprising finding was that the babies seemed interested in all the faces – even the "scary" one – except the one consisting of one eye. It would seem that the presence of two eyes is a key feature for infants!

The most important psychological task for the infant is called attachment, meaning the establishment of a tight bond with mom, dad, and other significant people. This is our human version of the imprinting process we see in animals, where a baby animal learns to follow its mother. Since our infants can't walk, they make effective use of their parents' instincts to be attracted to babies, by cooing, gurgling, smiling, and generally acting cute.

Physical touch seems to be crucial to attachment. In orphanages in troubled countries, where there may be a significant shortage of caregivers, the infants are often deprived of much physical contact with the nurses. Even when all their other needs are being met, the infants tend to become withdrawn and sickly and even die. As the baby book says, babies need to be held and cuddled and loved.

Attachment is normally established by 8 months or so. Signs of attachment include separation anxiety, which is common between 6 and 18 months old, and stranger anxiety, which is common between 8 months and 24 months.

Middle infancy (about 2 to 15 months) is a period of rapid growth and weight gain. The nervous system is clearly pulling its act together, and the infant has a strong drive to move and make noise. Among its needs now are not only the presence of a loving adult, but opportunities to experience the environment and to explore it. And the inborn personality differences called temperaments become very clear.

Gordon Allport says that the infant is working on two tasks: developing a *sense of body* and *self-identity*. We all have a body, we feel its closeness, its warmth. It has boundaries that pain and injury, touch and movement, make us aware of. Allport had a favorite demonstration of this aspect of self: Imagine spitting saliva into a cup – and then drinking it down! What's the problem? It's the same stuff you swallow all day long! But, of course, it has gone out from your bodily self and become, thereby, foreign to you.

Self-identity also develops in infancy. There comes a point where we recognize ourselves as continuing, as having a past, present, and future. We see ourselves as individual entities, separate and different from others. We even have a name! Will you be the same person when you wake up tomorrow? Of course – we take that continuity for granted.

### **The sensorimotor stage**

Piaget's first stage is the *sensorimotor stage*. It lasts from birth to about two years old. As the name implies, the infant uses senses and motor abilities to understand the world, beginning with reflexes and ending with complex combinations of sensorimotor skills.

Between one and four months, the child works on *primary circular reactions*, where an action of his own which serves as a stimulus to which it responds with the more of the same action, and around and around we go. For example, the baby may suck her thumb. That feels good, so she sucks some more... Or she may blow a bubble. That's interesting so I'll do it again....

Between four and 12 months, the infant turns to *secondary circular reactions*, which involve an act that extends out to the environment: She may squeeze a rubber duckie. It goes "quack." That's great, so do it again, and again, and again. She is learning what Piaget called "procedures that make interesting things last."

At this point, other things begin to show up as well. For example, babies become ticklish, although they must be aware that someone else is tickling them or it won't work. And they begin to develop *object permanence*. This is the ability to recognize that, just because you can't see something doesn't mean it's gone! Younger infants seem to function by an "out of sight, out of mind" schema. Older infants remember, and may even try to find things they can no longer see.

Between 12 months and 24 months, the child works on *tertiary circular reactions*. They consist of the same "making interesting things last" cycle, except with constant variation. I hit the drum with the stick – rat-tat-tat-tat. I hit the block with the stick – thump-thump. I hit the table with the stick – clunk-clunk. I hit daddy with the stick – ouch-ouch. This kind of active experimentation is best seen during feeding time, when discovering new and interesting ways of throwing your spoon, dish, and food.

Around one and a half, the child is clearly developing *mental representation*, that is, the ability to hold an image in their mind for a period beyond the immediate experience. For example, they can engage in deferred imitation, such as throwing a tantrum after seeing another child throw one an hour ago. They can use mental combinations to solve simple problems, such as putting down a toy in order to open a door. And they get good at pretending. Instead of using a doll as something to sit on, suck on, or throw, now the child will sing to it, tuck it into bed, and so on.

### **Erikson's first stage**

Erikson's first stage, infancy or the *oral-sensory stage*, is also approximately the first year or year and a half of life. The task is to develop *trust* without completely eliminating the capacity for *mistrust*.

If mom and dad can give the newborn a degree of familiarity, consistency, and continuity, then the child will develop the feeling that the world – especially the social world – is a safe place to be, that people are reliable and loving. Through the parents' responses, the child also learns to trust his or her own body and the biological urges that go with it.

If the parents are unreliable and inadequate, if they reject the infant or harm it, if other interests cause both parents to turn away from the infants needs to satisfy their own instead, then the infant will develop mistrust. He or she will be apprehensive and suspicious around people.

Please understand that this doesn't mean that the parents have to be perfect. In fact, parents who are overly protective of the child, are there the minute the first cry comes out, will lead that child into the maladaptive tendency Erikson calls *sensory maladjustment*: Overly trusting, even gullible, this person cannot believe anyone would mean them harm, and will use all the defenses at their command to retain their Pollyanna perspective.

Worse, of course, is the child whose balance is tipped way over on the mistrust side: They will develop the malignant tendency of *withdrawal*, characterized by depression, paranoia, and possibly psychosis.

If the proper balance is achieved, the child will develop the virtue *hope*, the strong belief that, even when things are not going well, they will work out well in the end. One of the signs that a child is doing well in the first stage is when the child isn't overly upset by the need to wait a moment for the satisfaction of his or her needs: Mom or dad don't have to be perfect; I trust them enough to believe that, if they can't be here immediately, they will be here soon; Things may be tough now, but they will work out. This is the same ability that, in later life, gets us through disappointments in love, our careers, and many other domains of life.

## 14.6 The young child

From 15 to 30 months, we call the baby a toddler, from the way they walk. They are getting control over both their fine and large muscles, learning to speak, and learning to use the potty. At the same time, they are developing a serious sense of independence, strong likes and dislikes, and the ability to say no to their parents. This is where we get the notion of the "terrible twos." The "threes" aren't so easy either.

Rollo May points out that this is the first point at which we engage in *rebellion* (the other being adolescence). The child develops his or her sense of self by means of contrast with adults, from the "no" of the two year old to the "no way" of the teenager. The rebellious person wants freedom, but has as yet no full understanding of the responsibility that goes with it. The teenager may want to spend their allowance in any way they choose – yet may still expect the parent to provide the money, and will complain about unfairness if they don't get it!

Allport suggest that this is the age at which we develop a sense of *self-esteem*. There also comes a time when we recognize that we have value, to others and to ourselves. This is especially tied to a continuing development of our competencies.

### The toddler

Erikson's second stage is the *anal-muscular* stage of early childhood, from about eighteen months to three or four years old. The task is to achieve a degree of *autonomy* while minimizing *shame and doubt*.

If mom and dad (and the other care-takers that often come into the picture at this point) permit the child, now a toddler, to explore and manipulate his or her environment, the child will develop a sense of autonomy or independence. The parents should not discourage the child, but neither should they push. A balance is required. People often advise new parents to be "firm but tolerant" at this stage, and the advice is good. This way, the child will develop both self-control and self-esteem.

On the other hand, it is rather easy for the child to develop instead a sense of shame and doubt. If the parents come down hard on any attempt to explore and be independent, the child will soon give up and assume that they cannot and should not act on their own. We should keep in mind that even something as innocent as laughing at the toddler's efforts can lead the child to feel deeply ashamed, and to doubt his or her abilities.

And there are other ways to lead children to shame and doubt: If you give children unrestricted freedom and no sense of limits, or if you try to help children do what they should learn to do for themselves, you will also give them the impression that they are not good for much. If you aren't patient enough to wait for your child to tie his or her shoe-laces, your child will never learn to tie them, and will assume that this is too difficult to learn!

Nevertheless, a little "shame and doubt" is not only inevitable, but beneficial. Without it, you will develop the maladaptive tendency Erikson calls *impulsiveness*, a sort of shameless willfulness that leads you, in later childhood and even adulthood, to jump into things without proper consideration of your abilities.

Worse, of course, is too much shame and doubt, which leads to the malignancy Erikson calls *compulsiveness*. The compulsive person feels as if their entire being rides on everything they do, and so everything must be done perfectly. Following all the rules precisely keeps you from mistakes, and mistakes must be avoided at all costs. Many of you know how it feels to always be ashamed and always doubt yourself. A little more patience and tolerance with your own children may help them avoid your path. And give yourself a little slack, too!

If you get the proper, positive balance of autonomy and shame and doubt, you will develop the virtue of *willpower* or determination. One of the most admirable – and frustrating – thing about two- and three-year-olds is their determination. "Can do" is their motto. If we can preserve that "can do" attitude (with appropriate modesty to balance it) we are much better off as adults.

### **The preschooler**

Stage three is the *genital-locomotor* stage or play age. From three or four to five or six, the task confronting every child is to learn *initiative* without too much *guilt*.

Initiative means a positive response to the world's challenges, taking on responsibilities, learning new skills, feeling purposeful. Parents can encourage initiative by encouraging children to try out their ideas. We should accept and encourage fantasy and curiosity and imagination. This is a time for play, not for formal education. The child is now capable, as never before, of imagining a future situation, one that isn't a reality right now. Initiative is the attempt to make that non-reality a reality.

But if children can imagine the future, if they can plan, then they can be responsible as well, and guilty. If my two-year-old flushes my watch down the toilet, I can safely assume that there were no "evil intentions." It was just a matter of a shiny object going round and round and down. What fun! But if my five year old does the same thing... well, she should know what's going to happen to the watch, what's going to happen to daddy's temper, and what's going to happen to her! She can be guilty of the act, and she can begin to feel guilty as well. The capacity for moral judgement has arrived.

Erikson is, of course, a Freudian, and as such, he includes the *Oedipal* experience in this stage. From his perspective, the Oedipal crisis involves the reluctance a child feels in relinquishing his or her closeness to the opposite sex parent. A parent has the responsibility, socially, to encourage the child to "grow up – you're not a baby anymore!" But if this process is done too harshly and too abruptly, the child learns to feel guilty about his or her feelings.

Too much initiative and too little guilt means a maladaptive tendency Erikson calls *ruthlessness*. The ruthless person takes the initiative alright; They have their plans, whether it's a matter of school or romance or politics or career. It's just that they don't care who they step on to achieve their goals. The goals are everything, and guilty feelings are for the weak. The extreme form of ruthlessness is the antisocial personality (better known as the psychopath).

Ruthlessness is bad for others, but is actually relatively easy on the ruthless person. Harder on the person is the malignancy of too much guilt, which Erikson calls *inhibition*. The inhibited person will not try things because "nothing ventured, nothing lost" and, particularly, nothing to feel guilty about. On the sexual, Oedipal, side, the inhibited person may be impotent or frigid.

A good balance leads to the psychosocial strength of *purpose*. A sense of purpose is something many people crave in their lives, yet many do not realize that they themselves make their own purposes, through imagination and initiative. I think an even better word for this virtue would have been courage, the capacity for action despite a clear understanding of your limitations and past failings.

Allport theorizes two aspects of the self that develop during this age: *self-extension* and *self-image*. Self-extension develops between four and six. Certain things, people, and events around us also come to be thought of as central and warm, essential to my existence. "My" is very close to "me!" Some people define themselves in terms of their parents, spouse, or children, their clan, gang, community, college, or nation. Some find their identity in activities: I'm a psychologist, a student, a bricklayer. Some find identity in a place: my house, my hometown. When my child does something wrong, why do I feel guilty? If someone scratches my car, why do I feel like they just punched me in the stomach?

Self-image also develops between four and six. This is the "looking-glass self," the me as others see me. This is the impression I make on others, my "look," my social esteem or status, including my sexual identity. It is the beginning of what others call conscience, ideal self, or persona.

### **Preoperational stage**

Piaget's *preoperational* stage lasts from about two to about seven years old, covering both the toddler and preschool stages.

Now that the child has mental representations and is able to pretend, it is a short step to the use of symbols.

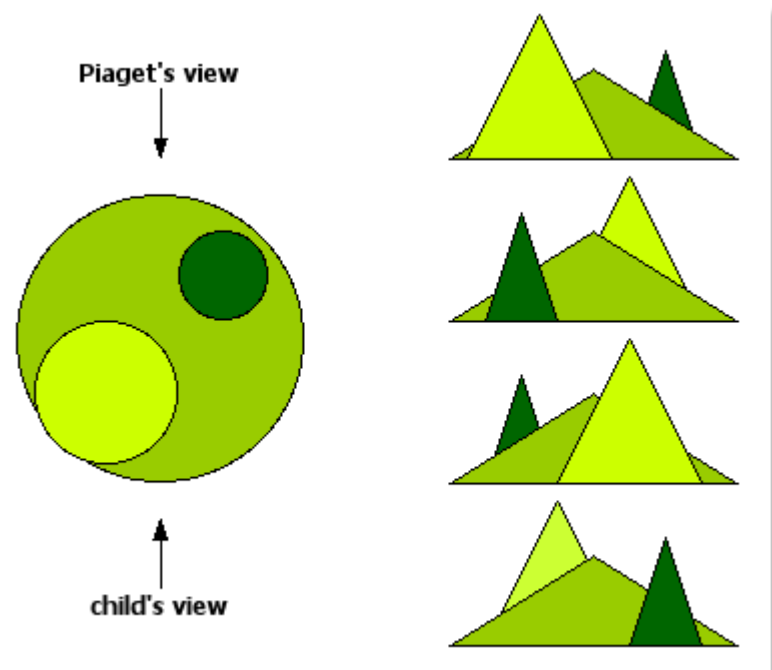
A symbol is a thing that represents something else. A drawing, a written word, or a spoken word comes to be understood as representing a real dog. The use of language is, of course, the prime example, but another good example of symbol use is creative play, wherein checkers are cookies, papers are dishes, a box is the table, and so on. By manipulating symbols, we are essentially thinking in a way the infant could not: in the absence of the actual objects involved!

Along with symbolization, there is a clear understanding of past and future. For example, if a child is crying for its mother, and you say "Mommy will be home soon," it will now tend to stop crying. Or if you ask him, "Remember when you fell down?" he will respond by making a sad face.

On the other hand, the child is quite *egocentric* during this stage, that is, he sees things pretty much from one point of view: his own! She may hold up a picture so only she can see it and expect you to see it too. Or she may explain that grass grows so she won't get hurt when she falls.

Piaget did a study to investigate this phenomenon: He would put children in front of a simple plaster mountain range and seat himself to the side, then ask them to pick from four pictures the view that he, Piaget, would see. Younger children would pick the picture of the view they themselves saw; older kids picked correctly.

Similarly, younger children center on one aspect of any problem or communication at a time. For example, they may not understand you when you tell them "Your father is my husband." Or they may say things like "I don't live in the USA; I live in Pennsylvania!" Or, if you show them five black and three white marbles and ask them "Are there more marbles or more black marbles?" they will respond "More black ones!"



Perhaps the most famous example of the preoperational child's centrism is what Piaget refers to as their inability to conserve liquid volume. If I give a three year old some chocolate milk in a tall skinny glass, and I give myself a whole lot more in a short fat glass, she will tend to focus on only one of the dimensions of the glass. Since the milk in the tall skinny glass goes up much higher, she is likely to assume that there is more milk in that one than in the short fat glass, even though there is far more in the latter. It is the development of the child's ability to decenter that marks him as having moved to the next stage.

### 14.7 The older child

Erikson's fourth stage is called the *latency stage*, and it runs from about six to twelve. The task is to develop a capacity for *industry* while avoiding an excessive sense of *inferiority*. Children must "tame the imagination" and dedicate themselves to education and to learning the social skills their society requires of them. Gordon Allport has a very similar idea of this age. He calls it "rational coping," and involves the child developing his or her abilities to deal with life's problems rationally and effectively.

There is a much broader social sphere at work now: The parents and other family members are joined by teachers and peers and other members of the community at large. They all contribute: Parents must encourage, teachers must care, peers must accept. Children must learn that there is pleasure not only in conceiving a plan, but in carrying it out. They must learn the feeling of success, whether it is in school or on the playground, academic or social.

A good way to tell the difference between a child in the third stage and one in the fourth stage is to look at the way they play games. Four-year-olds may love games, but they will have only a vague understanding of the rules, may change them several times during the course of the game, and be very unlikely to actually finish the game, unless it is by throwing the pieces at their opponents. A seven-year-old, on the other hand, is dedicated to the rules, considers them pretty much sacred, and is more likely to get upset if the game is *not* allowed to come to its required conclusion.

If the child is allowed too little success, because of harsh teachers or rejecting peers, for example, then he or she will develop instead a sense of inferiority or incompetence. An additional source of inferiority Erikson mentions is racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination: If a child believes that success is related to who you are rather than to how hard you try, then why try?

Too much industry leads to the maladaptive tendency called *narrow virtuosity*. We see this in children who aren't allowed to "be children," the ones that parents or teachers push into one area of competence, without allowing the development of broader interests. These are the kids without a life: child actors, child athletes, child musicians, child prodigies of all sorts. We all admire their industry, but if we look a little closer, it's all that stands between them and an empty life.

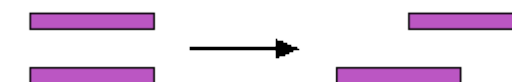
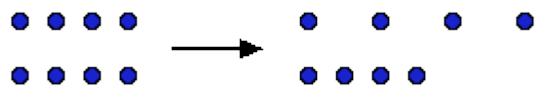
Much more common is the malignancy called *inertia*. This includes all of us who suffer from the "inferiority complexes" Alfred Adler talked about. If at first you don't succeed, don't ever try again! Many of us didn't do well in mathematics, for example, so we'd rather die than we take another math class. Others were humiliated instead in the gym class, so we never try out for a sport or play a game of raquetball. Others never developed social skills – the most important skills of all – and so we never go out in public. We become inert.

A happier thing is to develop the right balance of industry and inferiority – that is, mostly industry with just a touch of inferiority to keep us sensibly humble. Then we have the virtue called *competency*.

### Concrete operations

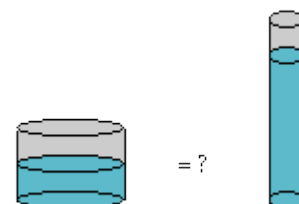
The *concrete operations* stage lasts from about seven to about 11. The word operations refers to logical operations or principles we use when solving problems. In this stage, the child not only uses symbols representationally, but can manipulate those symbols logically. Quite an accomplishment! But, at this point, they must still perform these operations within the context of concrete situations.

The stage begins with progressive *decentering*. By six or seven, most children develop the ability to conserve number, length, and liquid volume. *Conservation* refers to the idea that a quantity remains the same despite changes in appearance. If you show a child four marbles in a row, then spread them out, the preoperational child will focus on the spread, and tend to believe that there are now more marbles than before.



Or if you have two five inch sticks laid parallel to each other, then move one of them a little, she may believe that the moved stick is now longer than the other.

The concrete operations child, on the other hand, will know that there are still four marbles, and that the stick doesn't change length even though it now extends beyond the other. And he will know that you have to look at more than just the height of the milk in the glass: If you pour the milk from the short, fat glass into the tall, skinny glass, he will tell you that there is the same amount of milk as before, despite the dramatic increase in milk-level!



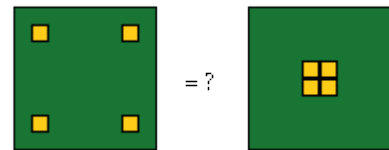
By seven or eight years old, children develop conservation of substance: If I take a ball of clay and roll it into a long thin rod, or even split it into ten little pieces, the child knows that there is still the same amount of clay. And he will know that, if you rolled it all back into a single ball, it would look quite the same as it did – a feature known as reversibility.



By nine or ten, the last of the conservation tests is mastered: conservation of area. If you take four one-inch square blocks, and lay them on a six-by-six cloth together in the center, the child who conserves will know that they take up just as

much room as the same squares spread out in the corners, or, for that matter, anywhere at all. Actually, many adults have trouble with this.

If all this sounds too easy to be such a big deal, test your friends on conservation of mass: Which is heavier: a million tons of lead, or a million tons of feathers? Some of them will "center" on the words "lead" and "feathers", and not even notice that you actually said that they each weigh a ton.



In addition, a child learns *classification* and *seriation* during this stage. Classification refers back to the question of whether there are more marbles or more black marbles? Now the child begins to get the idea that one set can include another. Seriation is putting things in order. The younger child may start putting things in order by, say size, but will quickly lose track. Now the child has no problem with such a task. Since arithmetic is essentially nothing more than classification and seriation, the child is now ready for some formal education!

### 14.8 Adolescence

Puberty is the beginning of adolescence. But when is puberty, exactly? The hormonal changes begin as early as 8 years old. But the physical changes don't usually make themselves known for several years later.

In modern western societies, we usually say that puberty starts between 11 and 12 years old for girls, and between 12 and 13 for boys. 95% of all girls will start somewhere between 8 1/2 and 13, and boys a year or more later, between 9 1/2 and 15.

The first clear sign of puberty for girls is the beginnings of breast development, around the age of 12. There is also an overall growth spurt that begins around 10 1/2, peaks at 12, and begins to slow around 14. But the main mark of puberty is menarche (pronounced MEN-ark-ee), the first period. In modern western societies, it tends to happen between 12 and 13.

Curiously, in 1890, a girl's first period tended to occur at 14 or 15. In 1840, it often began as late as 17! It is thought that this was due to differences in nutrition. Also notice that the average age at which a woman marries today is around 25. In 1890, it was around 22. In the Middle Ages, it could be as young as 12 or 14. (Remember that Romeo and Juliet were only 16!)

The first mark of puberty in boys is the start of testes growth around the age of 13, and penis growth around 14. The growth spurt for boys tends to begin at 12 1/2, peak at 14, and slow by 16 – hence the common sight of girls towering over their partners at school dances!

The growth spurt we mentioned is about 8 to 10 cm (3 to 4 inches) of height a year for both girls and boys – similar to the rate of growth back when they were only 2 years old! With this spurt, there is a significant loss of fat in boys, especially in the limbs, which accounts for the common "beanpole" look among adolescents. Girls may also lose fat, but not as dramatically as boys. An unfortunate tendency today, however, is the onset of obesity in adolescence due to the high fat, high sugar diet many teens adopt.

Adolescence is definitely a time of increasing strength: A 14 year old boy has 14 times the number of muscle cells of a 5 year old boy. A 14 year old girl has 10 times the muscle cells of a 5 year old girl.

### Peers

Psychologically, adolescence is a pretty busy time. Becoming a sexual adult involves a number of things that may very well have instinctual roots: Boys compete with each other for attention with shows of physical ability and acts of daring, often bordering on the insane; girls compete for the attention of boys, most commonly by attempting to enhance their appearance. Different cultures have different details, but the basic pattern is pretty universal.

The single most important thing seems to be *social acceptance*. If you do not have a circle of friends, in the teenage world you are nothing. For many teenagers, whether their isolation is due to a family move or social inhibition, physical abnormalities or not meeting local standards of attractiveness, not being accepted is a cause of depression and sometimes suicide. I believe this response is very likely one we have inherited from our very social pre-human ancestors: If you don't have your group, you might as well be dead.

In later adolescence, two things dominate a teenager's mind: Finding a boyfriend or girlfriend and finding a way to make a living. The way these needs are expressed can range from trying to have sex with whomever will have you and making, borrowing, or stealing enough money to make a good showing, to a serious effort at creating the foundation for a lifelong partnership and family based in love and training for a financially and personally rewarding career.

The end of adolescence is as much a social thing as a physiological thing, so it is very hard to say when that is, but in western cultures, we usually think of 18 as a convenient mark. But, with work and family delayed as long as we do, a lot of the traditional tasks of adolescents continue well into the 20's. Think about it: Why is it (in the US anyway) you can drive, go to college, vote for the president, and die in foreign wars when you are 18 – but you can't have a beer till you're 21? You are not considered mature enough!

Because the adolescent is in the process of breaking away from his or her parents, there is often conflict between them. Ideally, adolescents acknowledge their parents wisdom and politely leave the house, while parent trust their children to make their own decisions and let them go. Unfortunately, it often doesn't work that way. It is almost as if nature is making us so repugnant to each other that we are absolutely eager to go our separate ways.

These conflicts between parents and their adolescent children go back many generations. Socrates and other Greek philosophers complained about this upcoming generation of spoiled slackers, as did writers in the renaissance and all the centuries. Here's a paraphrase of one such complaint:

"Where did you go?"

"I did not go anywhere."

"If you did not go anywhere, why do you idle about? Go to school... Do not wander about in the street.... Don't stand about in the public square or wander about the boulevard.... You who wander about in the public square, would you achieve success?... Because my heart had been sated with weariness of you, I kept away from you and heeded not your fears and grumblings.... Because of your clamorings... I was angry with you.... Because you do not look to your humanity, my heart was carried off as if by an evil wind. Your grumblings have put an end to me, you have brought me to the point of death."

This is a piece of a conversation between a Sumerian youth and his father, recorded in cuneiform some 3 or 4 thousand years ago. (From S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, University of Chicago Press, 1963.) Funny, I could have sworn I heard this conversation just the other day!

### Ego identity

According to Erikson, the task during adolescence is to achieve *ego identity* and avoid *role confusion*. It was adolescence that interested Erikson first and most, and the patterns he saw here were the bases for his thinking about all the other stages.

Ego identity means knowing who you are and how you fit in to the rest of society. It requires that you take all you've learned about life and yourself and mold it into a unified self-image, one that your community finds meaningful.

Gordon Allport has a similar view of adolescence: He calls it *proprie striving*. This is my self as goals, ideals, plans, vocations, callings, a sense of direction, a sense of purpose. The culmination of proprie striving, according to Allport, is the ability to say that I am the *proprietor* of my life – i.e. the owner and operator!

There are a number of things that make things easier: First, we should have a mainstream adult culture that is worthy of the adolescent's respect, one with good adult role models and open lines of communication.

Further, society should provide clear *rites of passage*, certain accomplishments and rituals that help to distinguish the adult from the child. In primitive and traditional societies, an adolescent boy may be asked to leave the village for a period of time to live on his own, hunt some symbolic animal, or seek an inspirational vision. Boys and girls may be required to go through certain tests of endurance, symbolic ceremonies, or educational events. In one way or another, the distinction between the powerless, but carefree, time of childhood and the powerful and responsible time of adulthood, is made clear.

Without these things, we are likely to see role confusion, meaning an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world. When an adolescent is confronted by role confusion, Erikson says he or she is suffering from an identity crisis. In fact, a common question adolescents in our society ask is a straightforward question of identity: "Who am I?"

One of Erikson's suggestions for adolescence in our society is the *psychosocial moratorium*. He suggests you take a little "time out." If you have money, go to Europe. If you don't, bum around the U.S. Quit school and get a job. Quit your job and go to school. Take a break, smell the roses, get to know yourself. We tend to want to get to "success" as fast as possible, and yet few of us have ever taken the time to figure out what success means to us. A little like the young man from an aboriginal tribe, perhaps we need to dream a little.

There is such a thing as too much "ego identity," where a person is so involved in a particular role in a particular society or subculture that there is no room left for tolerance. Erikson calls this maladaptive tendency *fanaticism*. A fanatic believes that his way is the only way. (Adolescents are, of course, known for their idealism, and for their tendency to see things in black-and-white.) Fanatics will gather others around them and promote their beliefs and life-styles without regard to others' rights to disagree.

The lack of identity is perhaps more difficult still, and Erikson refers to the malignant tendency here as *repudiation*. They repudiate their membership in the world of adults and, even more, they repudiate their need for an identity. Some adolescents allow themselves to "fuse" with a group, especially the kind of group that is particularly eager to provide the details of your identity: religious cults, militaristic organizations, groups founded on hatred, groups that have divorced themselves from the painful demands of mainstream society. They may become involved in destructive activities, drugs, or alcohol, or you may withdraw into their own psychotic fantasies. After all, being "bad" or being "nobody" is better than not knowing who you are!

If you successfully negotiate this stage, you will have the virtue Erikson called *fidelity*. Fidelity means loyalty, the ability to live by societies standards despite their imperfections and incompleteness and inconsistencies. We are not talking about blind loyalty, and we are not talking about accepting the imperfections. After all, if you love your community, you will want to see it become the best it can be. But fidelity means that you have found a place in that community, a place that will allow you to contribute.

### Formal operations

The concrete operations child has a hard time applying his new-found logical abilities to non-concrete – i.e. abstract – events. If mom says to junior "You shouldn't make fun of that boy's nose. How would you feel if someone did that to you?" he is likely to respond "I don't have a big nose!" Even this simple lesson may well be too abstract, too hypothetical, for his kind of thinking.

Don't judge the concrete operations child too harshly, though. Even adults are often taken-aback when we present them with something hypothetical: "If Edith has a lighter complexion than Susan, and Edith is darker than Lily, who is the darkest?" Most people need a moment or two before they can answer.

From around 12 on, we enter the *formal operations* stage. Here we become increasingly competent at adult-style thinking. This involves using logical operations, and using them in the abstract, rather than the concrete. We often call this *hypothetical* thinking.

It is the formal operations stage that allows one to investigate a problem in a careful and systematic fashion. Ask a 16 year old to tell you the rules for making pendulums swing quickly or slowly, and he may proceed like this:

A long string with a light weight – let's see how fast that swings.  
 A long string with a heavy weight – let's try that.  
 Now, a short string with a light weight.  
 And finally, a short string with a heavy weight.

His experiment – and it is an experiment – would tell him that a short string leads to a fast swing, and a long string to a slow swing, and that the weight of the pendulum means nothing at all!

The teenager has learned to group possibilities in four different ways:

By conjunction: "Both A and B make a difference" (e.g. both the string's length and the pendulum's weight).

By disjunction: "It's either this or that" (e.g. it's either the length or the weight).

By implication: "If it's this, then that will happen" (the formation of a hypothesis).

By incompatibility: "When this happens, that doesn't" (the elimination of a hypothesis).

On top of that, he can operate on the operations – a higher level of grouping. If you have a proposition, such as "it could be the string or the weight," you can do four things with it:

Identity: Leave it alone. "It could be the string or the weight."

Negation: Negate the components and replace or's with and's (and vice versa). "It might not be the string and not the weight, either."

Reciprocity: Negate the components but keep the and's and or's as they are. "Either it is not the weight or it is not the string."

Correlativity: Keep the components as they are, but replace or's with and's, etc. "It's the weight and the string."

Someone who has developed his or her formal operations will understand that the correlate of a reciprocal is a negation, that a reciprocal of a negation is a correlate, that the negation of a correlate is a reciprocal, and that the negation of a reciprocal of a correlate is an identity (phew!!!).

Maybe it has already occurred to you: It doesn't seem that the formal operations stage is something everyone actually gets to. Even those of us who do don't operate in it at all times. Even some cultures, it seems, don't develop it or value it like ours does. Abstract reasoning is simply not universal.

### 14.9 Adulthood

If you have made it this far, you are in stage six, the stage of *young adulthood*, which lasts from about 18 to about 30. The ages in the adult stages are much fuzzier than in the childhood stages, and people may differ dramatically. The task of young adulthood is to achieve some degree of *intimacy*, as opposed to remaining in *isolation*.

Intimacy is the ability to be close to others, as a lover, a friend, and as a participant in society. Because you have a clear sense of who you are, you no longer need to fear "losing" yourself, as many adolescents do. The "fear of commitment" some people seem to exhibit is an example of immaturity in this stage.

This fear isn't always so obvious. Many people today are always putting off the progress of their relationships: I'll get married (or have a family, or get involved in important social issues) as soon as I finish school, as soon as I have a job, as soon as I have a house, as soon as.... If you've been engaged for the last ten years, what's holding you back?

Neither should the young adult need to prove him- or herself anymore. A teenage relationship is often a matter of trying to establish identity through "couple-hood": Who am I? I'm her boy-friend. The young adult relationship should be a matter of two independent egos wanting to create something larger than themselves.

Our society hasn't done much for young adults, either. The emphasis on careers, the isolation of urban living, the splitting apart of relationships because of our need for mobility, and the general impersonal nature of modern life prevent people from naturally developing their intimate relationships. I am typical of many people in having moved dozens of times in my life. I haven't the faintest idea what has happened to the kids I grew up with, or even my college buddies. My oldest friend lives a thousand miles away. I live where I do out of career necessity and, until recently, have felt no real sense of community.

Before I get too depressing, let me mention that many of you may not have had these experiences. If you grew up and stayed in your community, and especially if your community is a rural one, you are much more likely to have deep, long-lasting friendships, to have married your high school sweetheart, and to feel a great love for your community. But this style of life is quickly becoming an anachronism.

Erikson calls the maladaptive form *promiscuity*, referring particularly to the tendency to become intimate too freely, too easily, and without any depth to your intimacy. This can be true of your relationships with friends and neighbors and your whole community as well as with lovers.

The malignancy he calls *exclusion*, which refers to the tendency to isolate oneself from love, friendship, and community, and to develop a certain hatefulness in compensation for one's loneliness.

If you successfully negotiate this stage, you will instead carry with you for the rest of your life the virtue or psychosocial strength Erikson calls *love*. Love, in the context of his theory, means being able to put aside differences and antagonisms through "mutuality of devotion." It includes not only the love we find in a good marriage, but the love between friends and the love of one's neighbor, co-worker, and compatriot as well.

### **Middle age**

The seventh stage is that of *middle adulthood*. It is hard to pin a time to it, but it would include the period during which we are actively involved in raising children. For most people in our society, this would put it somewhere between 30 and 60. The task here is to cultivate the proper balance of *generativity* and *stagnation*.

Generativity is an extension of love into the future. It is a concern for the next generation and all future generations. As such, it is considerably less "selfish" than the intimacy of the previous stage: Intimacy, the love between lovers or friends, is a love between equals, and it is necessarily reciprocal. Oh, of course we love each other unselfishly, but the reality is such that, if the love is not returned, we don't consider it a true love. With generativity, that implicit expectation of reciprocity isn't there, at least not as strongly. Few parents expect a "return on their investment" from their children; if they do, we don't think of them as very good parents!

Although the majority of people practice generativity by having and raising children, there are many other ways as well. Erikson considers teaching, writing, invention, the arts and sciences, social activism, and generally contributing to the welfare of future generations to be generativity as well.

Stagnation, on the other hand, is self-absorption, caring for no-one. The stagnant person ceases to be a productive member of society. It is perhaps hard to imagine that we should have any "stagnation" in our lives, but the maladaptive tendency Erikson calls *overextension* illustrates the problem: Some people try to be so generative that they no longer allow time for themselves, for rest and relaxation.

The person who is overextended no longer contributes well. I'm sure we all know someone who belongs to so many clubs, or is devoted to so many causes, or tries to take so many classes or hold so many jobs that they no longer have time for any of them!

More obvious, of course, is the malignant tendency of *rejectivity*. Too little generativity and too much stagnation and you are no longer participating in or contributing to society. And much of what we call "the meaning of life" is a matter of how we participate and what we contribute.

This is the stage of the "midlife crisis." Sometimes men and women take a look at their lives and ask that big, bad question "what am I doing all this for?" Notice the question carefully: Because their focus is on themselves, they ask what, rather than whom, they are doing it for. In their panic at getting older and not having experienced or accomplished what they imagined they would when they were younger, they try to recapture their youth. Men are often the most flamboyant examples: They leave their long-suffering wives, quit their humdrum jobs, buy some "hip" new clothes, buy a sporty car, and start hanging around singles bars. Of course, they seldom find what they are looking for, because they are looking for the wrong thing!

But if you are successful at this stage, you will have a capacity for *caring* that will serve you through the rest of your life.

### 14.10 Late adulthood

According to the Surgeon General's report (1999), old age should be, for most of us, a pretty good period in our lives. Our average life span is in the 70's, the science of medicine continues to advance, we are (slowly) becoming more aware of the effects of habits such as smoking and drinking, the advantages of exercise and a good diet, and the rewards of continued education and social concern. Nevertheless, some 20% of older people have age-related disabilities.

Aging also involves some deterioration of neurological functions. Our reactions are slower, our senses are weaker, our memory isn't what it used to be, and so on. But generally, we should not expect senility as a normal part of aging. Most seniors look forward to retirement as a time when they have more freedom and time to do the things they have postponed in the past. And a person who makes it to 65 can expect another 20 years of life. Given sufficient financial resources and general good health, it can be the "golden years."

This last stage, referred to delicately as *late adulthood* or maturity, or less delicately as old age, begins sometime around retirement, after the kids have gone, say somewhere around 60. Some older folks will protest and say it only starts when you feel old and so on, but that's an effect of our youth-worshipping culture, which has even old people avoiding any acknowledgement of age. In Erikson's theory, reaching this stage is a good thing, and not reaching it suggests that earlier problems retarded your development!

The task is to develop *ego integrity* with a minimal amount of *despair*. This stage, especially from the perspective of youth, seems like the most difficult of all. First comes a detachment from society, from a sense of usefulness, for most people in our culture. Some retire from jobs they've held for years; others find their duties as parents coming to a close; most find that their input is no longer requested or required.

Then there is a sense of biological uselessness, as the body no longer does everything it used to. Women go through a sometimes dramatic menopause; Men often find they can no longer "rise to the occasion." Then there are the illnesses of old age, such as arthritis, diabetes, heart problems, concerns about breast and ovarian and prostate cancers. There come fears about things that one was never afraid of before – the flu, for example, or just falling down.

Along with the illnesses come concerns of death. Friends die. Relatives die. One's spouse dies. It is, of course, certain that you, too, will have your turn. Faced with all this, it might seem like *everyone* would feel despair.

In response to this despair, some older people become preoccupied with the past. After all, that's where things were better. Some become preoccupied with their failures, the bad decisions they made, and regret that (unlike some in the previous stage) they really don't have the time or energy to reverse them. We find some older people become depressed, spiteful, paranoid, hypochondriacal, or developing the patterns of senility with or without physical bases.

Ego integrity means coming to terms with your life, and thereby coming to terms with the end of life. If you are able to look back and accept the course of events, the choices made, your life as you lived it, as being necessary, then you needn't fear death. Although most of you are not at this point in life, perhaps you can still sympathize by considering your life up to now. We've all made mistakes, some of them pretty nasty ones; Yet, if you hadn't made these mistakes, you wouldn't be who you are. If you had been very fortunate, or if you had played it safe and made very few mistakes, your life would not have been as rich as is.

The maladaptive tendency in stage eight is called *presumption*. This is what happens when a person "presumes" ego integrity without actually facing the difficulties of old age. The malignant tendency is called *disdain*, by which Erikson means a contempt of life, one's own or anyone's.

Someone who approaches death without fear has the strength Erikson calls *wisdom*. He calls it a gift to children, because "healthy children will not fear life if their elders have integrity enough not to fear death." He suggests that a person must be somewhat gifted to be truly wise, but I would like to suggest that you understand "gifted" in as broad a fashion as possible: I have found that there are people of very modest gifts who have taught me a great deal, not by their wise words, but by their simple and gentle approach to life and death, by their "generosity of spirit."

### Strokes

The most common cause of psychological problems among older people is *strokes*. Most strokes are blood clots that get stuck in the small blood vessels (capillaries) in the brain that supply neurons with oxygen and other necessities. When this happens, many neurons die for lack of oxygen. If this happens often enough, the person may develop what is called *multi-infarct dementia*. They may become confused and disoriented; some may take to wandering off and getting lost; some have difficulty forming new memories; many develop emotional problems such as anxiety and depression.

Besides the cumulative effect of minor strokes (*TIA*s or *transient ischemic accidents*), there are also situations where there is a more massive interruption of blood flow to the brain caused by a large clot in a major blood vessel (*ischemic stroke*) or the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain (*hemorrhagic stroke*). These are the kinds of strokes we usually think of, and the consequences are much more obvious: The person may feel dizzy, numb and weak, often on one side of the body or the other; some will have obvious problems with producing or understanding speech, or trouble with vision. In addition to these problems, they also develop the characteristics of dementia mentioned above: Confusion, disorientation, memory lapses, anxiety, and depression.

There is no treatment for strokes other than controlling blood pressure which, along with age, is the major risk factor. (smoking, drinking, and diabetes also contribute to the problem.) Likewise, there is no direct treatment of the dementias that follow. However, physical, occupational, and speech therapy can help stroke victims regain much of what they have lost by re-learning or learning to work around what they have lost. These therapists deserve a lot of credit for their wonderful work!

### Alzheimer's

When many of us notice our slower memories, we think immediately of *Alzheimer's*. It does, after all, affect somewhere between 8 and 15 percent of people over 65. Memory loss is indeed the most notable feature of Alzheimer's, and can extend to the point of no longer recognizing one's own family. Alzheimer's also includes problems with language, recognizing things, and decision making. Almost inevitably, people become anxious, irritable, and depressed. Who wouldn't. Plus, it is not just hard on the patient. One could argue that it is even harder on the family, especially those charged with daily care.

The big difference between Alzheimer's and strokes is that Alzheimer's is a deterioration of the entire brain, which slowly dies away at the edges and is replaced by cerebrospinal fluid. It is much slower, but its effects are general rather than more specific.

There may be genetic factors involved in Alzheimer's, and it can run in families. A reduction in the amounts of acetylcholine in the brain seems to play a part. Autopsies reveal real physical changes, including "neurofibrillary tangles" and "neuritic plaques." On the other hand, there are several things that may delay (but not cure) Alzheimer's, including certain genes, more education, the use of NSAID's, estrogen replacement therapy, and vitamin E. A great deal of research is being done on Alzheimer's, and we look forward to a day when it no longer looms over the last years of people's lives.

## 15. Moral development

Morality begins with biology, and specifically with the instincts we have evolved over eons to aid in our survival and reproduction. For human beings, there are three of these instincts:

One is based on kin selection, and it tells us that we should care for our closest relatives, especially our children. After all, caring for our relatives increases the likelihood of their survival and reproduction, which in turn increases the likelihood of our genes – including the ones that lead us to care for our relatives – get passed on to future generations.

The second is the care we feel for our mates. As an animal that produces few offspring, requires a nine month gestation culminating in a precarious delivery and resulting in a very vulnerable infant requiring years of care, we have evolved a strong tendency to develop attachments to our mates. As any parent can tell you, it takes at least two people to raise children.

The third is sympathy. We, like many other animals, are social creatures, and, like so many prairie dogs, we are attuned to the emotions and behaviors of our fellow humans. When one of us is frightened, the rest go into high alert; when one of us is angry, we can rouse the ire of an entire mob; when one of us is laughing, others begin to laugh as well – even when they don't get the joke.

Of these three, sympathy is the weakest. In the animal world, there are always "cheaters," animals of the same species who take advantage of others who instinctually aid each other. In the human world, we have a great many examples of these cheaters, whom we often label "sociopaths." Also, the tendency to sympathy depends a great deal on social learning. It needs to be nourished by example. In any family where sympathy is lacking, any instinctual tendency a child may have can easily be destroyed by abuse or neglect, or just self-centered parenting.

As human beings, we have evolved a rather large brain, and one that is capable of learning a great many things, not least of which is language. The ability to learn allows much quicker adaptation to environmental change than evolution, and so tends to "drive out" much of the hardwiring that animals come supplied with. Certainly we still have instincts, but they can be over-written with social learning far most easily than in, say, cats and dogs.

A community that has survived and expanded for many decades or centuries is one which has provided its members with patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that permit that survival. We could call these patterns memes, or stick to older words such as beliefs and techniques – it doesn't matter. Among the patterns that appear to work well for most societies are ones that encourage extending the range of the instincts of sympathy and love of family to all members of the community, rather than just close relations. Traditions of mutual respect, obedience to authority, cooperation, and so on, are good examples. These traditions make it less likely that community members waste their energies on internal conflicts and use it instead on productive activities, community defense, and, possibly, expansion at the expense of other communities.

The Hebrews of the Old Testament are a great example of a community whose beliefs allowed them to prosper. But when the Bible says we should love our neighbor, it clearly meant our neighbor literally, our fellow Hebrew, and not, say, Egyptians or Assyrians or Canaanites, as evidenced by all the rather vicious warfare of the day. Being good to one's enemy, someone who is not a member of our "tribe," is a rather novel concept, one, in fact, that makes its appearance only among the Jews of Hellenistic times (after Alexander the Great). After all, any community that has the belief that they should be nice even to aggressors, is a community that usually doesn't last long and takes that pleasant belief down with it.

### The good Samaritan

Although the idea of universal respect had been promoted earlier, notably by Buddha, Jesus, and Greek philosophers, the movement that would be most influential in actualizing the idea would not come until the Enlightenment. I believe that this was because it was only then that we had essentially filled the planet. Nations and Empires were butted up against each other with no room to wiggle. It had become clear that, if we were to be happy, we could no longer stop at making nice with our literal neighbors or our fellow tribe-mates. We had to make nice with other nations, other cultures, perhaps even everybody! The difficulty here, of course, is that you need to convince people to move beyond their instinctive love of family, beyond the social indoctrination provided by their tribe, towards accepting the fundamental sanity of universal respect.



The great value of this biosocial view of morality is that it removes the issue from religious and philosophical debate and places it squarely in the realm of the pragmatic. Without denying the inherently subjective nature of our goals as human beings, we may be able to agree that one reasonable goal is the maximizing of happiness. The question is then how do we educate people to understand that it is in all our best interests to nurture our innate tendencies toward compassion.

### 15.1 Kohlberg's Theory

Traditionally, psychology has avoided studying anything that is loaded with value judgements. There is a degree of difficulty involved in trying to be unbiased about things that involve terms like "good" and "bad!" So, one of the most significant aspects of human life – morality – has had to wait quite a while before anyone in psychology dared to touch it! But Lawrence Kohlberg wanted to study morality, and did so using some of the most interesting (if controversial) techniques. Basically, he would ask children and adults to try to solve moral dilemmas contained in little stories, and to do so outloud so he could follow their reasoning. It wasn't the specific answers to the dilemmas that interested him, but rather how the person got to his or her answer.

One of the most famous of these stories concerned a man named Heinz. His wife was dying of a disease that could be cured if he could get a certain medicine. When he asked the pharmacist, he was told that he could get the medicine, but only at a very high price – one that Heinz could not possibly afford. So the next evening, Heinz broke into the pharmacy and stole the drug to save his wife's life. Was Heinz right or wrong to steal the drug?

There are simple reasons why Heinz should or should not have stolen the drug, and there are very sophisticated reasons, and reasons in between. After looking at hundreds of interviews concerning this and several other stories, Kohlberg outlined three broad levels and six more specific stages of moral development.

Level I: *Pre-conventional morality*. While infants are essentially amoral, very young children are moral in a rather primitive way described by the two pre-conventional stages.

Stage 1. We can call this the *reward and punishment stage*. Good or bad depends on the physical consequences: Does the action lead to punishment or reward? This stage is based simply on one's own pain and pleasure, and doesn't take others into account.

Stage 2. This we can call the *exchange stage*. In this stage, there is increased recognition that others have their own interests and should be taken into account. Those interests are still understood in a very concrete fashion, and the child deals with others in terms of simple exchange or reciprocity: "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." Children in this stage are very concerned with what's fair, but are not concerned with real justice.

Level II: *Conventional morality*. By the time children enter elementary school, they are usually capable of conventional morality, although they may often slip back into pre-conventional morality on occasion. But this level is called conventional for a very good reason: It is also the level that most adults find themselves in most of the time!

Stage 3. This stage is often called the *good boy/good girl stage*. The child tries to live up to the expectations of others, and to seek their approval. Now the concern includes motives or intentions, and concepts such as loyalty, trust, and gratitude are understood. Children in this stage often adhere to a concrete version of the Golden Rule, although it is limited to the people they actually deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Stage 4. This is called the *law-and-order stage*. Children now take the point of view that includes the social system as a whole. The rules of the society are the bases for right and wrong, and doing one's duty and showing respect for authority are important.

Level III: *Post-conventional morality*. Some adolescents and adults go a step further and rise above moralities based on authority to ones based on reason.

Stage 5. The *social contract stage* means being aware of the degree to which much of so-called morality is relative to the individual and to the social group they belong to, and that only a very few fundamental values are universal. The person at this level sees morality as a matter of entering into a rational contract with one's fellow human beings to be kind to each other, respect authority, and follow laws to the extent that they respect and promote those universal values. Social contract morality often involves a utilitarian approach, where the relative value of an act is determined by "the greatest good for the greatest number."

Stage 6. This stage is referred to as the *stage of universal principles*. At this point, the person makes a personal commitment to universal principles of equal rights and respect, and social contract takes a clear back-seat: If there is a conflict between a social law or custom and universal principles, the universal principles take precedence.

I can't leave Kohlberg without mentioning his younger colleague at Harvard, Carol Gilligan. Kohlberg's early research was done at a boy's school. Later, when girls became part of the research population, the girls were regularly rated as lower in the stages than boys of the same age. Upon investigating further, Gilligan found that it was the way in which the girl's expressed themselves that led the raters to place them in earlier stages, and that, under review, their answers were often at the same or even higher levels than the boys. It seems that girls (and women) tend to view moral situations in terms of relationships and commitment, rather than in terms of rules and regulations. That made them appear to be functioning at level 2 or 3, when in fact they were expressing something closer to level 5.

Gilligan went a bit further with this than I am comfortable with, by suggesting that the differences in moral thinking between males and females is tied to genetics, and that female forms of morality are essentially superior to male forms.

### 15.2 Bronfenbrenner's Theory

Another psychologist unafraid to tackle morality was Urie Bronfenbrenner. He is famous for his studies of children and schools in different cultures. He outlines five moral orientations:

1. *Self-oriented morality.* This is analogous to Kohlberg's pre-conventional morality. Basically, the child is only interested in self-gratification and only considers others to the extent that they can help him get what he wants, or hinder him.

The next three orientations are all forms of what Kohlberg called conventional morality:

2. *Authority-oriented morality.* Here, the child, or adult, basically accepts the decrees of authority figures, from parents up to heads of state and religion, as defining of good and bad.
3. *Peer-oriented morality.* This is basically a morality of conformity, where right and wrong is determined not by authority but by one's peers. In western society, this kind of morality is frequently found among adolescents, as well as many adults.
4. *Collective-oriented morality.* In this orientation, the standing goals of the group to which the child or adult belongs over-ride individual interests. Duty to one's group or society is paramount.

The last orientation is analogous to Kohlberg's post-conventional level:

5. *Objectively oriented morality.* By objectively, Bronfenbrenner means universal principles that are objective in the sense that they do not depend on the whims of individuals or social groups, but have a reality all their own.

Bronfenbrenner noted that while 1 is found among children (and some adults) in all cultures, 6 is found in relatively few people in any culture. The differences between 2, 3, and 4 are more a matter of culture than of development. Many cultures promote strict obedience to authority figures. One can see this in some middle eastern cultures, where the word of the religious authorities is law. In many western cultures, conformity to one's peers is a powerful force. And in others still, such as some Asian cultures, the welfare of the group is considered far more important than that of the individual.

Bronfenbrenner also talks about how we get movement from one orientation to another. The movement from 1 to 2, 3, or 4 involves participation in the family and other social structures, where concern for others begins to take precedent over concern for oneself.

Movement from 2, 3, or 4 to 5 occurs when a person is exposed to a number of different moral systems which at least partially conflict with each other, a situation he calls moral pluralism. This forces the person to begin to think about what might lie beneath all the variation, and lead him or her to consider ultimate moral principles.

On the other hand, sometimes people slide back down to the lowest orientation when they suffer from the disintegration of social structures, as in war and other social disasters. This can force a person's attentions back onto their own needs, and cause them to begin ignoring the welfare of larger social groupings.

### 15.3 Seven perspectives

As you may have come to expect, I also have some theorizing of my own in regards to this topic. Moral development has, in fact, been my main interest for the last 30 years or so.

Although my intuition leads me to believe that there is, ultimately, only one reality – infinite and eternal – experience leads me to believe that there are as many views or perspectives of that reality as there are conscious creatures. Each of us has a different genetic inheritance, different health histories, different cultural backgrounds, different upbringings, unique individual experiences... and so on.

It is a surprise to me that we agree about the world as much as we do! Even more: Our views of reality change over the years and even from moment to moment as our situations and moods change. It would seem, at first pass, that any attempt to reduce these views or perspectives to a few categories or types would be doomed before it began!

But then, study of the history of ideas and the development of individual minds suggests to me that, perhaps, there are a few clusters we can point to – complexes of ideas that gravitate to each other, perhaps because they share some logical connectedness that goes beyond individual variation. The following ideas are an extension of my Perspectives Theory and were inspired by the work of Rachel Lauer. To be succinct, I believe that there are seven such perspectives and that we can further organize them into three broader categories as well as into a rough developmental hierarchy.

#### The autistic perspective

The first perspective I call the autistic (not to be confused, however, with the disorders of the autistic spectrum). I don't believe that anyone is ever completely involved in this perspective, but it is best seen in infants, autistic children, and severely psychotic adults. On the other hand, we all slip into this perspective from time to time, most obviously when we are dreaming, but also when we engage in instinctive, automatic, or defensive behavior.

A person taking the autistic view believes that their personal subjective perspective is, in fact, the only perspective, and that, to the extent that the consciousness of others is recognized at all, everyone sees reality this same way. It is, in other words, egocentric and self-oriented. In infants (and one might presume, in animals), the autistic perspective is one that stays very close to immediate reality as presented by the senses and feelings. In older children and adults, it is likely to include a perfect faith in one's own construction of reality, including all the differentiations one has learned. In the case of the psychotic, those differentiations might include some very sophisticated constructions developed prior to the slide back into autism.

"Symptoms" of autistic perception and cognition in normal children and adults include ideas of magic and animism, i.e., the idea that other entities, including animals, plants, and even nonliving things, also perceive and respond to events as the person does.

Each of the seven perspectives has a view of morality as well, which follows pretty clearly from a perspective's overall description. For the autistic perspective, good is what pleases oneself, bad what hurts. Morality is a simple, innocent hedonism. The autistic morality is fairly congruent with Piaget's pre-operational morality, Kohlberg's pre-conventional level, and Bronfenbrenner's self-oriented morality.

### The authoritarian perspective

The authoritarian view is a common one – perhaps the most common one. It is a step above the autistic in that, although it is a subjective view, it takes into account the views of others. In fact, it may be said to absorb the views of others. Developmentally, the simple fact of living among other human beings leads one out of the autistic into the authoritarian. The child must inevitably broaden his or her perspective to encompass that of "significant others," if only to survive. In most circumstances, this process is enormously simplified by the fact that all of a child's immediate contacts share most of a single social reality.

This is the perspective that most fully accepts social reality. This means, however, that an authoritarian person accepts only one social reality, and understands it as universal. Someone who does not accept the same social reality is seen as either an infant or insane. When the social reality is threatened, either by another social reality or by more immediate experiences, the tendency is for defensive mechanisms to engage, although further epistemological development is another possibility.

Most children, as well as the adults of a primitive, isolated, or highly structured traditional societies, will take this position. There is a tendency to legalistic thinking and an inordinate respect for tradition, even when painful. Further, authoritarians tend to classify events, objects, and even people in pigeon-hole types or categories, with relatively few gradations. And they tend to believe in universal dualities – black vs white, good vs bad, us vs them... – with little room for "in between" or "both."

Both the autistic and the authoritarian views are "subjective" views, in the sense that they believe in and value the interpretation, whether individual or social, of experience more than the experience itself. In the autistic, the value of events relative to individual needs and desires is more important than truth as some of the higher perspectives would understand it. In the authoritarian, the weight of valuing has simply shifted to the social surround.

In either case, at least when we consider people beyond the infancy stage, there is in addition a particular faith in the power of words, which is in keeping with their attachment to constructed reality.

In the authoritarian view, the good is founded in tradition and in the authoritarian promotion of that tradition. As Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin would put it, this is a morality of *absolute principles*, usually viewed as being handed down to humanity by God. It is similar to Piaget's concrete operations morality, Kohlberg's conventional level, and Bronfenbrenner's three middle types.

### The rationalistic perspective

The next three perspectives (rationalistic, mechanistic, and cybernetic) together constitute the "objective" views, in contrast to the previous "subjective" ones. They share the idea that truth has an objective existence to be discovered outside of either personal or social realities. Developmentally (and historically) speaking, we see in these objective perspectives an acknowledgement that we may be mistaken, as individuals and as societies.

For this reason alone, it is not surprising that we only see these objective perspectives among the exceptional intellects and the well-traveled of traditional societies, and that these perspectives only become more common in multi-cultural societies, especially the world-spanning cultures of the last few centuries. Even then, these perspectives are not available to everyone, and may very well be defended against. It should also not be surprising that, in modern societies, it is still only the child in the second half of elementary school that begins to exhibit these objectivist qualities.

The objective views are similar to Piaget's formal operations morality, Kohlberg's post-conventional level, and Bronfenbrenner's objectively-oriented morality.

The rationalistic perspective values reason, logic, technicalities, words, and, if sufficiently sophisticated, mathematics. It is an idealistic perspective in that the objective truth it seeks is held to be contained by the mind. When someone brought up in the authoritarian tradition is exposed to other social realities beyond his or her own, he or she is most likely to begin by seeking commonalities among those social realities, commonalities that inhere in the words and other symbolic approaches of the societies or cultures involved. These are, by nature, psychological or ideal.

Developmentally, the late elementary school child and early adolescent are the best examples, with all their well known tendency to argument and idealism. Historically, the ancient Greeks, most especially Pythagoras and Plato, are the best examples, although Aristotle, with his enormous contributions to logical thought, can hardly be left out. Although they are considerably more sophisticated, the approaches of philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant owe a great deal to the rationalistic perspective, as does Piaget's psychology.

The rationalistic morality is one that focuses on universal principles. We can see more clearly here why the rationalistic fits best between the authoritarian and the mechanistic: The rationalistic view takes the absolutes of various authoritarian perspectives and seeks the commonalities among them, ultimately to discover what, presumably, any rational person might agree to. There is often the idea, as Sorokin points out, that these ultimate principles come from God, while subordinate principles, accounting for all the varieties of moral systems, come from Man. Note that this is similar to Kohlberg's stage of universal principles.

### **The mechanistic perspective**

The mechanistic perspective is the perspective we find in classical science: Though not disdainful of logic and mathematics, it views truth as something to be discovered outside the mind, in the world. It is empirical in emphasis rather than rationalistic, and puts its trust in matter (materialism) more than mind (idealism). It, more than any other perspective, is the most likely to condemn subjectivism and to emphatically strive for a pure objectivism. Since the goals of the mechanistic perspective involve independence from all subjectivity, it tends to focus on quantity as the only significant quality, and on cause and effect (even when understood as non-necessary) over all other relations. And these emphases in turn make the mechanistic view especially reductionistic, especially when it addresses psychological phenomena.

The mechanistic view often goes so far as to deny the existence of non-material qualities, even consciousness itself. This is in strong contrast to the rationalistic view, which instead tends to idealize mind and denigrate matter, considering it corrupt or degenerate, and sometimes dismissing it altogether. Unlike the higher perspectives, however, the mechanistic view seems oblivious to the contradictions involved in these denials, the effects of the observer on the observed, and the nature of the scientific approach as an epistemology. This commonly results in a tendency to replace older explanatory structures, without consideration of the possible truths they may contain, with the "religion of science" we might call scientism.

The mechanistic is most likely to be found, in people growing up in a modern society, among adolescents and young adults. It is a youthful, exuberant perspective, with a great deal of power and practical application. Much of the successful side (and some of the dark side) of the modern world is due to mechanistic thinking.

The mechanistic morality is utilitarian, often focused on social contract. As Sorokin puts it, morality is relativistic and founded on man-made principles. In its extreme form, the mechanistic view sees morality as purely subjective and without universality. Moral or value judgments, therefore, are a matter of individual taste or social custom. At its worst, the mechanistic view reduces values to material force – i.e. might makes right, survival of the fittest, and so on.

### The cybernetic perspective

The cybernetic tends to be the most mature of the three objective views because it requires certain realizations that are rare among rationalistic and mechanistic people: The cybernetic person has fully recognized that the observer influences the observed, that there is no empirical demonstration of the existence of matter, that there is some sort of reality to non-material events, and that the mechanistic understanding of cause and effect is far too limiting – too linear – an understanding of relationships.

In some senses, the cybernetic view is a synthesis of the rationalistic and the mechanistic. Instead, it accepts both reason and empiricism as valid approaches to knowledge, and see mind and matter as two sides of the same coin. The cybernetic perspective sees the experimental method not as a testing of causal connections but as an effort at comparing the functioning of a model with the functioning of the larger reality. Originally, that model was a verbal theory, but as the cybernetic view develops beyond the mechanistic, models begin to include other structures and their processes, the most obvious being the use of computer simulations.

Our own society is being rapidly pulled into the cybernetic perspective, and we can see its impact in the prevalence of systems approaches in all fields of science. In psychology, this is reflected in the cognitive "revolution". Perhaps the best sign of the dominance of the cybernetic approach is the use of the word *information*, which is, pretty clearly, the preferred term for that compromise substance which is neither material nor mental.

In psychology, this cybernetic approach is the newest wave after the collapse of the highly mechanistic behaviorist tradition. There is great pride being taken in the impact that psychology is having on other fields, although the credit may have to go more to linguistics than psychology. Nevertheless, it does seem that many humanistic and social science fields are now more aware of the psychological side of their fields, especially the idea that the observer has a significant impact on the observed – e.g. that societies and cultures and art and literature and music and so on are "in the eyes of the beholder."

Even the idea that logic and truth are psychological qualities has become popular. Unfortunately, few seem to recognize that making logic dependent on the individual means there is no true logic at all – including the logic it took to come to the conclusion that logic is psychological to begin with! This was the insight that started Edmund Husserl on his way to developing phenomenology.

Another criticism of the cybernetic perspective is that, by turning to the neutral substance of information, it has turned away from immediate experienced reality quite completely. Where is truth? In the cybernetic view, it certainly can't be in the colorful, noisy, warm-blooded, emotional world we experience directly. It must instead be in the cold gray on-off world of information! The mechanistic view at least has its solid material, and the rationalistic world its forms and images.

The cybernetic view of morality is, true to form, an interactive one. The impact of the valuer becomes important, and moral judgments are viewed as having contexts. It is this view that I think better accounts for the highly moral women that Kohlberg's student, Carol Gilligan, wrote about. These women, because they kept moral judgments in the context of social expectations, individual pains and pleasures, and so forth, were judged by traditional Kohlberg standards as being of rather low moral development, conventional (authoritarian) if not lower. Instead, I see them as a higher form, approaching the epistemic. However, unlike Gilligan, I don't think this perspective is restricted to women, although certainly more commonly found among them in our society.

Although the rationalistic, mechanistic, and cybernetic are rather equal in terms of complexity, they do tend to arise, both historically and in individual development, in the order given. The rationalistic view allows easier transition from the authoritarian valuing of symbols; the mechanistic is the most representative of the three (so perhaps less "contaminated" by authoritarian as well as by higher perspectives); and the cybernetic begins to acknowledge the problems that the next level attempts to address.

### The phenomenological perspective

The last two perspectives can best be understood as a synthesis of the subjective views and the objective views. The phenomenological approach accepts the immediate experienced reality of individual consciousness as true, yet recognizes that there are as many of these "realities" as there are perceivers. The true, ultimate reality is therefore understood as the sum of all these perspectives, plus much that is unperceived. Unlike the objectivist approaches, which insist that we *subtract* our subjectivity from our observations to arrive at an ultimate reality much reduced from experience, the phenomenological view sees ultimate reality as all views added together, and then some!

The perspective, then, could be labeled intersubjective, rather than subjective or objective. Whatever label we give it, it is accepting of multiple perceived realities and deals well with the difficulties of relativity and uncertainty, yet maintains a "faith" (which is nonetheless founded empirically and rationally) in ultimate reality. If it isn't yet clear to the reader, this is the perspective adopted by perspectives theory itself.

There are, however, some negative points to the phenomenological approach: It is, for example, far less "efficient" than the mechanistic or cybernetic approaches, because it tends to shy away from the kind of closure required for action. The phenomenological person often has very little need for closure, and will tend to continue to wait for more views on the matter. Although this may be a virtue in regard to psychological or sociological understanding, it may be an unnecessary drag in technological sciences and political issues. In other words, phenomenological people may not be terribly practical.

Since all views have some value, they may tend to support a particular view, perhaps a minority position, even to the point of seeming authoritarian. However, when others begin to see their point, they may very well switch their allegiance to another position. So then they appear indecisive or equivocal, if not argumentative or contrary. There is a lot to be valued here, however: What they are really exhibiting is their openness and tolerance.

The phenomenological is naturally rather liberal. Another potential flaw, then, is what I call the liberal fallacy: All alternative perspectives are equally valuable and deserve equal defense. Liberals in all fields often find themselves defending fringe positions and people of unusual, if not psychotic, character. This then undermines their otherwise sophisticated and generous positions on issues. A psychologist, for example, who believes that the schizophrenic's view of reality must be respected in order to be understood runs the risk of being considered psychotic himself by his colleagues. Likewise, the person of liberal politics may find he or she is supporting the rights of others that he or she would otherwise find quite unsavory. Another way of putting it is that people, in all the previous perspectives, tend to move to a single clear position, even so far as to say "this is the way it is." The phenomenological perspective is the first that tends to avoid such conclusions.

The phenomenological perspective views moral value as necessarily involving consciousness, yet having its own reality. That is, good is to be found in the interaction of mind and world, yet is not to be dismissed as therefore somehow unreal – especially when you consider that all reality, to the extent that we have anything to do with it, is a matter of such interaction! Another way to understand it is to see goodness (and badness) as another real qualitative dimension.

While the great majority of differences between cultures or individuals have nothing to do with moral judgement, other differences are moral. Hence, the phenomenological person respects the variety of individual and social perspectives, yet does not shy away from recognizing that some perspectives are better than others. We could say that the good is a direction in which we prefer to move, a direction, perhaps of self-actualization (or even life-actualization), which is quite real, yet which cannot be expressed in the form of absolute universal principles.

In terms of day-to-day choices and decisions, I think this approach works by adopting certain principles as guidelines to action. Hence, the phenomenological morality functions like William Perry's idea of *commitment*. It is also similar to the existentialist idea of "the project," in which one declares a value system (among other things), and commits oneself to it.

### **The transcendental perspective**

There is one more perspective I can see, even though I'd be the first to admit that I am rarely, if ever, "in" it: the transcendental perspective. It is even more "open," "impractical," and, yes, "flaky" than the phenomenological, from the perspective of most of modern society, although primitive and traditional societies seem more accepting of it. It involves, as the name implies, transcending the multiple perspectives of the epistemic and coming into contact with the ultimate reality. This is done by stripping away constructed reality altogether, through techniques such as meditation, and concentrating on immediate reality. This ultimately involves the diminution of desire and self. That means moving closer and closer to an unconscious state while retaining the ability to recall the experience. In a very real sense, it is a matter of dying – or almost dying – and returning to everyday reality with a new perspective on life.

Since eastern traditions have made quite an impact on the west in the last century or so, quite a number of words have become current as labels for this perspective: Tao, satori, buddhahood, enlightenment, nirvana, cosmic consciousness, and so on. A particularly good label is Maslow's peak experiences, in that it distances the phenomenon from particular religious practices and philosophical points of view, and especially recognizes that the experience is one that normal people can have in their everyday lives, not one only available to monks seated in the lotus position. It describes any experience in which one loses one's sense of individual separateness and feels instead a strong sense of union with all consciousness, life, the universe, or God.

In the transcendental mode of morality, the good is what is done. It is an expression of one's intimacy with the universe, with the needs of all life, the desire of all consciousness. The good is an expression, as Spinoza might put it, of God-or-Nature, and we are capable of recognizing it intuitively. Again, I'm only speculating rather than describing when it comes to this perspective.

A couple of things should be made clear about the transcendental perspective: One is that it is, like the autistic, more a direction than a stage. One simply can't stay there and continue to exist. It is more an attitude that is reinforced by brief and occasional experiences of transcendence. Another is that, by its very nature, the transcendental perspective is not one amenable to much discussion. Words and other symbols are part of the *problem* of constructed reality, in that we tend to reify them and then think of them as more real than the things to which they refer.

So, although words are not in and of themselves an anathema to transcendence, they are potential pitfalls along the path. The very first chapter of the Tao te Ching, for example, warns us that the Tao that can be spoken isn't the true Tao. And Zen warns its students to never mistake the finger that points at the moon for the moon itself.

With those points made, I will take my own advice and cease to discuss the transcendental perspective.

### **Development of perspective**

As mentioned earlier, there is a degree to which these perspectives can be organized from simplest to most mature, even if each view has its situational strengths and weaknesses. Only among the three objective views is there much room for argument. And certainly, if we disregard this taxonomy altogether for a moment, there is a movement towards a richer, more complex, more encompassing understanding of reality throughout life. At least there should be if the person can be said to be healthy and self-actualizing.

Movement towards complexity via continued interaction with the world and adaptation when one's knowledge fails is an aspect of self-actualization which I call elaboration. We can discern two aspects of this process: differentiation and integration.

In childhood, it seems that differentiation dominates. It is really a simple matter of needing to accumulate "data" before one faces the task of integrating it. So children, from the adult perspective, seem like sponges, absorbing even trivia at astounding rates. There is, of course, a great deal of integration going on as well, but it is not as salient as the simple differentiation.

In adulthood, on the other hand, much of the differentiation our lives require has already been accomplished, and integration becomes more salient, at least in adults that continue to elaborate. And in a rich and complex society such as our own, many adults feel a degree of "information overload," and the reduction and simplification of this overload becomes a strong motivation.

Bringing this back to our taxonomy of perspectives, we can see a rough (and only rough) parallel between the perspectives and developmental ages: The autistic is the stage of infancy; the authoritarian, early childhood; the rationalistic, late childhood; the mechanistic, adolescence; the cybernetic, young adulthood; the epistemic, late adulthood; the transcendental, old age. But, as Kohlberg and Bronfenbrenner note, moral development lags behind other forms of development, including Piaget's and Erikson's stages. And even people who have "evolved" to the highest levels can fall.

## 16. Psychological disorders

One of the best definitions of a psychological disorder is George Kelly's: "Any personal construction which is used repeatedly in spite of consistent invalidation." The behaviors and thoughts of neurosis, depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, etc., are all examples. So are patterns of violence, bigotry, criminality, greed, addiction, and so on. The person can no longer anticipate well, yet can't seem to learn new ways of relating to the world. He or she is loaded with anxiety and hostility, is unhappy and is making everyone else unhappy, too.

Let's start by looking at what some others of the most famous psychologists have to say about psychological disorders.

### 16.1 Sigmund Freud

You could say that Freud made mental illness popular, so it is appropriate we begin with his ideas. First, he believed that our drives or instincts cannot be denied. If we pretend to ourselves, in the primary example, that we have no sexual desire because expressing that desire is socially unacceptable or even thought to be evil, that sexual desire nevertheless demands to be heard. As that need increases, it will manifest in sexual dreams (hidden at first), odd defensive behaviors and obsessions, and the like.

Secondly, he believed that traumas, especially in childhood, lead to defenses – repression in particular – when the ego is incapable of dealing with the traumas. This means that the experience is "pushed" into the unconscious where it need not be faced and dealt with properly – for now. This repressed material develops a life of its own and becomes something very similar to a drive or instinct. Because the repressed material has its own energy, it will manifest itself in many different ways, such as dreams, nightmares, repetitive behaviors, obsessions, phobias, hysterical paralysis, apparently physical disorders, depression, and so on.

Furthermore, there are certain traumas that are more likely to occur than others, and are particularly associated with sexual development. Sexuality, for Freud, was admittedly a pretty broad affair, involving things like the infants need to suck, the toddlers interest in poop, and the young child's confusing about sex roles. Nevertheless, if one is weaned early and harshly, or hardly weaned at all, if one is disciplined severely during potty training or is allowed to wear diapers for years, or if mom and dad don't provide just the right balance of love and distance, certain neurotic patterns – what he called character types – would inevitably develop.

The issue of repression is, of course, at the center of all this, and repression is an idea that is much debated nowadays. The empirical evidence tends to be negative. If anything, people tend to remember traumas more clearly, not less so! But in clinical situations, it seems that some people do indeed forget their traumas. I'm on the fence on this issue, and time will tell.

### 16.2 Carl Jung

According to Carl Jung, whenever we are confronted by the need to make a decision between one thing and another, psychological energy is created, in proportion to the distance between the two options. The energy created from the opposition is "given" to both sides equally. When I was a kid, I once found a baby robin that had fallen from its nest. Being an animal lover, I went to help it. I picked it up and was struck by its fragility. I thought "I could crush it by just closing my hand." So, when I held that baby bird in my hand, there was energy to go ahead and try to help it. But there is an equal amount of energy to go ahead and crush it. I tried to help the bird, so that energy went into the various behaviors involved in helping it. But what happens to the other energy?

Well, that depends on your attitude towards the wish that you didn't fulfill. If you acknowledge it, face it, keep it available to the conscious mind, then the energy goes towards a general improvement of your psyche. You grow, in other words.

But if you pretend that you never had that evil wish, if you deny and suppress it, the energy will go towards the development of a complex. A complex is a pattern of suppressed thoughts and feelings that cluster – constellate – around a theme provided by some archetype. If you deny ever having thought about crushing the little bird, you might put that idea into the form offered by the shadow (your "dark side"). Or if a man denies his emotional side, his emotionality might find its way into the anima archetype. And so on.

Here's where the problem comes: If you pretend all your life that you are only good, that you don't even have the capacity to lie and cheat and steal and kill, then all the times when you do good, that other side of you goes into a complex around the shadow. That complex will begin to develop a life of its own, and it will haunt you. You might find yourself having nightmares in which you go around stomping on little baby birds!

If it goes on long enough, the complex may take over, may "possess" you, and you might wind up with a multiple personality. In the movie *The Three Faces of Eve*, Joanne Woodward portrayed a meek, mild woman who eventually discovered that she went out and partied like crazy on Saturday nights. She didn't smoke, but found cigarettes in her purse, didn't drink, but woke up with hangovers, didn't fool around, but found herself in sexy outfits. Although multiple personality is rare, it does tend to involve these kinds of black-and-white extremes.

The most serious of these conflicts revolve around the oppositions created by our archetypes. He particularly points to the conflict between ego and shadow (basically the same idea as Freud's ego and id) and between the anima (the female aspect) and the animus (the male aspect). If you are a woman, it is the unfulfilled animus that may haunt you; if you are a man, it is the anima. It is the ego-shadow conflict that accounts for the three faces of Eve. It is the anima-animus conflict that accounts for problems of sexual identity and hostility.

### 16.3 Alfred Adler

In Adler's theory, we are all of us "pulled" towards fulfillment, perfection, self-actualization. And yet some of us – the failures – end up terribly unfulfilled, baldly imperfect, and far from self-actualized. And all because we lack social interest, or, to put it in the positive form, because we are too self-interested. So what makes so many of us self-interested?

Adler says it's a matter of being overwhelmed by our inferiority. If you are moving along, doing well, feeling competent, you can afford to think of others. If you are not, if life is getting the best of you, then your attentions become increasingly focussed on yourself.

Obviously, everyone suffers from inferiority in one form or another. For example, Adler began his theoretical work considering organ inferiority, that is, the fact that each of us has weaker, as well as stronger, parts of our anatomy or physiology. Some of us are born with heart murmurs, or develop heart problems early in life; Some have weak lungs, or kidneys, or early liver problems; Some of us stutter or lisp; Some have diabetes, or asthma, or polio; Some have weak eyes, or poor hearing, or a poor musculature; Some of us have innate tendencies to being heavy, others to being skinny; Some of us are retarded, some of us are deformed; Some of us are terribly tall or terribly short; And so on and so on.

Adler noted that many people respond to these organic inferiorities with compensation. They make up for their deficiencies in some way: The inferior organ can be strengthened and even become stronger than it is in others; Or other organs can be overdeveloped to take up the slack; Or the person can psychologically compensate for the organic problem by developing certain skills or even certain personality styles. There are, as you well know, many examples of people who overcame great physical odds to become what those who are better endowed physically wouldn't even dream of!

Sadly, there are also many people who cannot handle their difficulties, and live lives of quiet despair. I would guess that our optimistic, up-beat society seriously underestimates their numbers.

But Adler soon saw that this is only part of the picture. Even more people have psychological inferiorities. Some of us are told that we are dumb, or ugly, or weak. Some of us come to believe that we are just plain no good. In school, we are tested over and over, and given grades that tell us we aren't as good as the next person. Or we are demeaned for our pimples or our bad posture and find ourselves without friends or dates.

Or we are forced into basketball games, where we wait to see which team will be stuck with us. In these examples, it's not a matter of true organic inferiority – we are not really retarded or deformed or weak – but we learn to believe that we are. Again, some compensate by becoming good at what we feel inferior about. More compensate by becoming good at something else, but otherwise retaining our sense of inferiority. And some just never develop any self esteem at all.

If the preceding hasn't hit you personally yet, Adler also noted an even more general form of inferiority: The natural inferiority of children. All children are, by nature, smaller, weaker, less socially and intellectually competent, than the adults around them. Adler suggested that, if we look at children's games, toys, and fantasies, they tend to have one thing in common: The desire to grow up, to be big, to be an adult. This kind of compensation is really identical with striving for perfection! Many children, however, are left with the feeling that other people will always be better than they are.

If you are overwhelmed by the forces of inferiority – whether it is your body hurting, the people around you holding you in contempt, or just the general difficulties of growing up – you develop an inferiority complex. Looking back on my own childhood, I can see several sources for later inferiority complexes: Physically, I've tended to be heavy, with some real "fat boy" stages along the way; Also, because I was born in Holland, I didn't grow up with the skills of baseball, football, and basketball in my genes; Finally, my artistically talented parents often left me – unintentionally – with the feeling that I'd never be as good as they were. So, as I grew up, I became shy and withdrawn, and concentrated on the only thing I was good at, school. It took a long time for me to realize my self-worth.

If you weren't "super-nerd," you may have had one of the most common inferiority complexes I've come across: "Math phobia!" Perhaps it started because you could never remember what seven times eight was. Every year, there was some topic you never quite got the hang of. Every year, you fell a little further behind. And then you hit the crisis point: Algebra. How could you be expected to know what "x" is when you still didn't know what seven times eight was?

Many, many people truly believe that they are not meant to do math, that they are missing that piece of their brains or something. I'd like to tell you here and now that anyone can do math, if they are taught properly and when they are really ready. That aside, you've got to wonder how many people have given up being scientists, teachers, business people, or even going to college, because of this inferiority complex.

But the inferiority complex is not just a little problem, it's a neurosis, meaning it's a life-size problem. You become shy and timid, insecure, indecisive, cowardly, submissive, compliant, and so on. You begin to rely on people to carry you along, even manipulating them into supporting you: "You think I'm smart / pretty / strong / sexy / good, don't you?" Eventually, you become a drain on them, and you may find yourself by yourself. Nobody can take all that self-centered whining for long!

There is another way in which people respond to inferiority besides compensation and the inferiority complex: You can also develop a superiority complex. The superiority complex involves covering up your inferiority by pretending to be superior. If you feel small, one way to feel big is to make everyone else feel even smaller! Bullies, braggarts, and petty dictators everywhere are the prime example. More subtle examples are the people who are given to attention-getting dramatics, the ones who feel powerful when they commit crimes, and the ones who put others down for their gender, race, ethnic origins, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, weight, height, etc. etc. Even more subtle still are the people who hide their feelings of worthlessness in the delusions of power afforded by alcohol and drugs.

### 16.4 Karen Horney

Horney's theory is perhaps the best theory of neurosis we have. First, she offered a different way of viewing neurosis. She saw it as much more continuous with normal life than previous theorists. Specifically, she saw neurosis as an attempt to make life bearable, as a way of "interpersonal control and coping." This is, of course, what we all strive to do on a day-to-day basis, only most of us seem to be doing alright, while the neurotic seems to be sinking fast.

In her clinical experience, she discerned ten particular patterns of neurotic needs. They are based on things that we all need, but they have become distorted in several ways by the difficulties of some people's lives:

Let's take the first need, for affection and approval, as an example. We all need affection, so what makes such a need neurotic? First, the need is unrealistic, unreasonable, indiscriminate. For example, we all need affection, but we don't expect it from everyone we meet. We don't expect great outpourings of affection from even our close friends and relations. We don't expect our loved ones to show affection at all times, in all circumstances. We don't expect great shows of love while our partners are filing out tax forms, for example. And, we realize that there may be times in our lives where we have to be self-sufficient.

Second, the neurotic's need is much more intense, and he or she will experience great anxiety if the need is not met, or if it even appears that it may not be met in the future. It is this, of course, that leads to the unrealistic nature of the need. Affection, to continue the example, has to be shown clearly at all times, in all circumstances, by all people, or the panic sets in. The neurotic has made the need too central to their existence.

The neurotic needs are as follows:

1. The neurotic need for affection and approval, the indiscriminate need to please others and be liked by them.
2. The neurotic need for a partner, for someone who will take over one's life. This includes the idea that love will solve all of one's problems. Again, we all would like a partner to share life with, but the neurotic goes a step or two too far.
3. The neurotic need to restrict one's life to narrow borders, to be undemanding, satisfied with little, to be inconspicuous. Even this has its normal counterpart. Who hasn't felt the need to simplify life when it gets too stressful, to join a monastic order, disappear into routine, or to return to the womb?
4. The neurotic need for power, for control over others, for a facade of omnipotence. We all seek strength, but the neurotic may be desperate for it. This is dominance for its own sake, often accompanied by a contempt for the weak and a strong belief in one's own rational powers.

5. The neurotic need to exploit others and get the better of them. In the ordinary person, this might be the need to have an effect, to have impact, to be heard. In the neurotic, it can become manipulation and the belief that people are there to be used. It may also involve a fear of being used, of looking stupid. You may have noticed that the people who love practical jokes more often than not cannot take being the butt of such a joke themselves!
6. The neurotic need for social recognition or prestige. We are social creatures, and sexual ones, and like to be appreciated. But these people are overwhelmingly concerned with appearances and popularity. They fear being ignored, be thought plain, "uncool," or "out of it."
7. The neurotic need for personal admiration. We need to be admired for inner qualities as well as outer ones. We need to feel important and valued. But some people are more desperate, and need to remind everyone of their importance – "Nobody recognizes genius," "I'm the real power behind the scenes, you know," and so on. Their fear is of being thought nobodies, unimportant and meaningless.
8. The neurotic need for personal achievement. Again, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with achievement – far from it! But some people are obsessed with it. They have to be number one at everything they do. Since this is, of course, quite a difficult task, you will find these people devaluing anything they cannot be number one in! If they are good runners, then the discus and the hammer are "side shows." If academic abilities are their strength, physical abilities are of no importance, and so on.
9. The neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence. We should all cultivate some autonomy, but some people feel that they shouldn't ever need anybody. They tend to refuse help and are often reluctant to commit to a relationship.
10. The neurotic need for perfection and unassailability. To become better and better at life and our special interests is hardly neurotic, but some people are driven to be perfect and scared of being flawed. They can't be caught making a mistake and need to be in control at all times.

### 16.5 Carl Rogers

Life is filled with stress. Many people's difficulties begin with childhood experiences of abuse, neglect, poverty, sickness, parent's sicknesses or death, parental psychological problems, divorce, immigration, accidents, deformities, etc. Sometimes, we are strong enough, or have enough support, to weather these storms. More often, we find that these experiences leave us with an on-going apprehension about life. We end up suffering from anxiety, guilt, sadness, anger... not just as a direct result of the specific experience, but because we no longer trust life.

A child with loving parents and compassionate relations, peers, and teachers may well be able to cope with these problems. On the other hand, a lack of support, a lack of what Rogers calls positive regard, can leave even a child blessed with a comfortable environment troubled with self-doubt and insecurity.

Many of our theories were developed in order to help those who cannot cope, and looking at Adler, Horney, Rogers, Bandura, and others, we find a great deal of agreement as to the details. As I said a moment ago, in order to cope with life's difficulties, we need positive regard – a little love, approval, respect, attention.... But others often make that love and approval conditional upon meeting certain standards, not all of which we can meet. Over time, we learn to judge ourselves by those standards. It is this incongruence (Rogers' term) between what we need and what we allow ourselves that leaves us with low self-esteem, or what others call a poor self-concept or an inferiority complex.

Note that there is a real advantage to the idea of inferiority over self-esteem: It is rare to have an overall sense of low self-esteem. Instead, most people have a sense of inferiority in some domains and not in others. Acknowledging the specificity of inferiority allows us to focus in on possible remedies, while just saying someone suffers from low self-esteem leaves us with little sense of where to start!

Confronted with the difficulties of life, lacking in the support of others, and not even enjoying confidence in ourselves, we find we must defend ourselves however we can. We can list a large number of defense mechanisms, as Anna Freud did, or we might be able to simplify a little, like Carl Rogers: We defend our sensitive egos by denial and rationalization.

- *Denial* (perhaps including repression) is the attempt to block the offending experiences directly, at the cost of emotional exhaustion.
- *Rationalization* (including, perhaps, perceptual distortion) is a more sophisticated and less exhausting way of dealing with the offending information by working around it.

Either way, they are lies we tell ourselves and others in order to minimize the impact of that incongruence between our need for love and security and what is afforded to us. We use these lies because they help, actually. But they only help in the short run: Over time, they lead us into a possibly serious misunderstanding of how the world (especially other people) works, and of who, in fact, we are.

For those people who are, perhaps, a bit stronger than those who succumb to neuroses, we still find suffering in the form of alienation: There develops a split between the deeper, "truer" core self within, and the persona (to borrow Jung's term) that we present to the outside world to attempt to meet with those conditions of worth that Rogers talks about. We feel inauthentic, false, phony, dishonest on the one hand, and misunderstood or unappreciated on the other. Over the long haul, this is likely to lead to depression and withdrawal from social life. But sometimes, alienation can lead to new perspectives on life and some remarkably creative insights. Perhaps we owe a good portion of our art, music, and literature to these same people.

### 16.6 Existential psychology

One of the things (as a card-carrying neurotic) that I like about existential psychologists is that they have a little bit more respect for the poor neurotic than other theories do: In some ways, the neurotic is a more aware than the conventional person: They know they are faced with choices, and it scares the daylights out of them. It scares them so much, in fact, that they are overwhelmed. They freeze or panic, or change their existential anxiety and guilt into neurotic anxiety and guilt: Find something "small" – a phobic object, an obsession or compulsion, a target for anger, a disease or the pretense of a disease – to make life's difficulties more objective. An existential psychologist would say that, although you may get rid of the symptoms with any number of techniques, ultimately you need to face the reality of *Dasein* (existence).

Ludwig Binswanger saw inauthenticity as a matter of choosing a single *theme* for one's life, or a small number of themes, and allowing the rest of *Dasein* to be dominated by that one theme. A person Freudians might call "anal retentive," for example, might be one dominated by a theme of hoarding, or holding in, or tightness, or perfection. Someone who doesn't seem in control of his or her life may be dominated by a theme of luck, or fate, or waiting. A person who anxiously over-eats may be dominated by a theme of emptiness, hollowness, and the need to fill oneself. A "workaholic" may be dominated by a theme involving wasted time or being overtaken. Rather than elaborating on the many ways in which a person elaborates their neurosis, existentialists argue that each neurotic finds his own path.

### 16.7 Viktor Frankl

People today seem more than ever to be experiencing their lives as empty, meaningless, purposeless, aimless, adrift, and so on, and seem to be responding to these experiences with unusual behaviors that hurt themselves, others, society, or all three.

One of Frankl's favorite metaphors is the *existential vacuum*. If meaning is what we desire, then meaninglessness is a hole, an emptiness, in our lives. Whenever you have a vacuum, of course, things rush in to fill it. Frankl suggests that one of the most conspicuous signs of existential vacuum in our society is boredom. He points out how often people, when they finally have the time to do what they want, don't seem to want to do anything! People go into a tailspin when they retire; students get drunk every weekend; we submerge ourselves in passive entertainment every evening. The "Sunday neurosis," he calls it.

So we attempt to fill our existential vacuums with "stuff" that, because it provides some satisfaction, we hope will provide ultimate satisfaction as well: We might try to fill our lives with pleasure, eating beyond all necessity, having promiscuous sex, living "the high life;" or we might seek power, especially the power represented by monetary success; or we might fill our lives with "busy-ness," conformity, conventionality; or we might fill the vacuum with anger and hatred and spend our days attempting to destroy what we think is hurting us. We might also fill our lives with certain neurotic "vicious cycles," such as obsession with germs and cleanliness, or fear-driven obsession with a phobic object. The defining quality of these vicious cycles is that, whatever we do, it is never enough.

These neurotic vicious cycles are founded on something Frankl refers to as *anticipatory anxiety*: Someone may be so afraid of getting certain anxiety-related symptoms that getting those symptoms becomes inevitable. The anticipatory anxiety causes the very thing that is feared! Test anxiety is an obvious example:

If you are afraid of doing poorly on tests, the anxiety will prevent you from doing well on the test, leading you to be afraid of tests, and so on.

A similar idea is *hyperintention*. This is a matter of trying too hard, which itself prevents you from succeeding at something. One of the most common examples is insomnia: Many people, when they can't sleep, continue to try to fall asleep, using every method in the book. Of course, trying to sleep itself prevents sleep, so the cycle continues. Another example is the way so many of us today feel we must be exceptional lovers: Men feel they must "last" as long as possible, and women feel obliged to not only have orgasms, but to have multiple orgasms, and so on. Too much concern in this regard, of course, leads to an inability to relax and enjoy oneself!

A third variation is *hyperreflection*. In this case it is a matter of "thinking too hard." Sometimes we expect something to happen, so it does, simply because its occurrence is strongly tied to one's beliefs or attitudes – the self-fulfilling prophecy. Frankl mentions a woman who had had bad sexual experiences in childhood but who had nevertheless developed a strong and healthy personality. When she became familiar with psychological literature suggesting that such experiences should leave one with an inability to enjoy sexual relations, she began having such problems!

His understanding of the existential vacuum goes back to his experiences in the Nazi death camps. As the day-to-day things that offer people a sense of meaning – work, family, the small pleasures of life – were taken from a prisoner, his future would seem to disappear. Man, says Frankl, "can only live by looking to the future." (1963, p. 115) "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed." (1963, p. 117)

While few people seeking psychological help today are suffering the extremes of the concentration camp, Frankl feels that the problems caused by the existential vacuum are not only common, but rapidly spreading throughout society. He points out the ubiquitous complaint of a "feeling of futility," which he also refers to as the abyss experience.

Even the political and economic extremes of today's world can be seen as the reverberations of futility: We seem to be caught between the automaton conformity of western consumer culture and totalitarianism in its communist, fascist, and theocratic flavors. Hiding in mass society, or hiding in authoritarianism – either direction caters to the person who wishes to deny the emptiness of his or her life.

Frankl calls depression, addiction, and aggression the mass neurotic triad. He refers to research that shows a strong relationship between meaninglessness (as measured by "purpose in life" tests) and such behaviors as criminality and involvement with drugs. He warns us that violence, drug use, and other negative behaviors, demonstrated daily on television, in movies, even in music, only convinces the meaning-hungry that their lives can improve by imitation of their "heroes." Even sports, he suggests, only encourage aggression.

### 16.8 Albert Ellis

Ellis's therapy is known as REBT.

*REBT – Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy – begins with ABC! A is for activating experiences, such as family troubles, unsatisfying work, early childhood traumas, and all the many things we point to as the sources of our unhappiness. B stands for beliefs, especially the irrational, self-defeating beliefs that are the actual sources of our unhappiness. And C is for consequences, the neurotic symptoms and negative emotions such as depression panic, and rage, that come from our beliefs.*

*Although the activating experiences may be quite real and have caused real pain, it is our irrational beliefs that create long-term, disabling problems! Ellis adds D and E to ABC: The therapist must dispute (D) the irrational beliefs, in order for the client to ultimately enjoy the positive psychological effects (E) of rational beliefs.*

*For example, "a depressed person feels sad and lonely because he erroneously thinks he is inadequate and deserted." Actually, depressed people perform just as well as non-depressed people. So, a therapist should show the depressed person his or her successes, and attack the belief that they are inadequate, rather than attacking the mood itself!*

*Although it is not important to therapy to pin-point the source of these irrational beliefs, it is understood that they are the result of "philosophical conditioning," habits not unlike the habit of answering the phone just because it rings. Further, Ellis says that we are biologically programmed to be susceptible to this kind of conditioning!*

*These beliefs take the form of absolute statements. Instead of acknowledging a preference or a desire, we make unqualified demands on others, or convince ourselves that we have overwhelming needs. There are a number of typical "thinking errors" people typically engage in, including...*

- 1. ignoring the positive,*
- 2. exaggerating the negative, and*
- 3. overgeneralizing.*

*I may refuse to see that I do have some friends or that I have had a few successes. I may dwell on and blow out of proportion the hurts I have suffered. I may convince myself that nobody loves me, or that I always screw up.*

*There are twelve examples of irrational beliefs that Ellis often mentions...*

### 12 Irrational Ideas That Cause and Sustain Neurosis

1. *The idea that it is a dire necessity for adults to be loved by significant others for almost everything they do – instead of their concentrating on their own self-respect, on winning approval for practical purposes, and on loving rather than on being loved.*
2. *The idea that certain acts are awful or wicked, and that people who perform such acts should be severely damned – instead of the idea that certain acts are self-defeating or antisocial, and that people who perform such acts are behaving stupidly, ignorantly, or neurotically, and would be better helped to change. People's poor behaviors do not make them rotten individuals.*
3. *The idea that it is horrible when things are not the way we like them to be – instead of the idea that it is too bad, that we would better try to change or control bad conditions so that they become more satisfactory, and, if that is not possible, we had better temporarily accept and gracefully lump their existence.*
4. *The idea that human misery is invariably externally caused and is forced on us by outside people and events – instead of the idea that neurosis is largely caused by the view that we take of unfortunate conditions.*
5. *The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome we should be terribly upset and endlessly obsess about it – instead of the idea that one would better frankly face it and render it non-dangerous and, when that is not possible, accept the inevitable.*
6. *The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face life difficulties and self-responsibilities – instead of the idea that the so-called easy way is usually much harder in the long run.*
7. *The idea that we absolutely need something other or stronger or greater than ourself on which to rely – instead of the idea that it is better to take the risks of thinking and acting less dependently.*
8. *The idea that we should be thoroughly competent, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects – instead of the idea that we would better do rather than always need to do well and accept ourself as a quite imperfect creature, who has general human limitations and specific fallibilities.*
9. *The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect it – instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.*
10. *The idea that we must have certain and perfect control over things – instead of the idea that the world is full of probability and chance and that we can still enjoy life despite this.*
11. *The idea that human happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction – instead of the idea that we tend to be happiest when we are vitally absorbed in creative pursuits, or when we are devoting ourselves to people or projects outside ourselves.*
12. *The idea that we have virtually no control over our emotions and that we cannot help feeling disturbed about things – instead of the idea that we have real control over our destructive emotions if we choose to work at changing the masturbatory hypotheses which we often employ to create them.*

*(From The Essence of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, by Albert Ellis, Ph.D. Revised, May 1994.)*

### 16.9 Buddhist Psychology

I would like to add the thoughts of one more famous psychologist to this chapter – one from a good 2500 years ago: Siddhartha Gotama, also known as the Buddha. He left his home and family at the age of 39 to seek the answer to the problem of suffering. After six years living in the woods, he eventually found his answer while meditating under a tree. He began his very first sermon with the four Noble Truths:

1. *Life is suffering.* Life is at very least full of suffering, and it can easily be argued that suffering is an inevitable aspect of life. If I have senses, I can feel pain; if I have feelings, I can feel distress; if I have a capacity for love, I will have the capacity for grief. Such is life.

Duhkha, the Sanskrit word for suffering, is also translated as stress, anguish, and imperfection. Buddha wanted us to understand suffering as a foundation for improvement.

One key to understanding suffering is understanding anitya, which means that all things, including living things, our loved ones, and ourselves, are impermanent. Our peculiar position of being mortal and being aware of it is a major source of anxiety, but is also what makes our lives, and the choices we make, meaningful. Time becomes important only when there is only so much of it. Doing the right thing and loving someone only have meaning when you don't have an eternity to work with.

Another key concept is anatman, which means that all things – even we – have no "soul" or eternal substance. With no substance, nothing stands alone, and no one has a separate existence. We are all interconnected, not just with our human world, but with the universe.

2. *Suffering is due to attachment.* We might say that at least much of the suffering we experience comes out of ourselves, out of our desire to make pleasure, happiness, and love last forever and to make pain, distress, and grief disappear from life altogether.

We are not therefore to avoid all pleasure, happiness, and love. Nor are we to believe that all suffering comes only from ourselves. It's just not necessary, being shot once with an arrow, to shoot ourselves again, as the Buddha put it.

Attachment is one translation of the word trishna, which can also be translated as thirst, desire, lust, craving, or clinging. When we fail to recognize that all things are imperfect, impermanent, and insubstantial, we cling to them in the delusion that they are indeed perfect, permanent, and substantial, and that by clinging to them, we, too, will be perfect, permanent, and substantial.

Our lack of "essence" or preordained structure, our "nothingness," leads us to crave solidity. We are, you could say, whirlwinds who wish they were rocks. We cling to things in the hopes that they will provide us with a certain "weight." We try to turn our loved ones into things by demanding that they not change, or we try to change them into perfect partners, not realizing that a statue, though it may live forever, has no love to give us. We try to become immortal, whether by anxiety-driven belief in fairy-tales, or by making our children and grand-children into clones of ourselves, or by getting into the history books or onto the talk shows. We even cling to unhappy lives because change is too frightening.

Another aspect of attachment is dvesha, which means avoidance or hatred. To Buddha, hatred was every bit as much an attachment as clinging. Only by giving those things which cause us pain permanence and substance do we give them the power to hurt us more. We wind up fearing, not that which can harm us, but our fears themselves.

The most frightening things we've seen in this century are the mass movements – the Nazis, the Red Guard, the Ku Klux Klan, terrorist groups, and on and on. The thought seems to be that, if I'm just a little puff of wind, maybe by joining others of my kind, I can be a part of a hurricane! Beyond these are all the petty movements – political ones, revolutionary ones, religious ones, antireligious ones, ones involving nothing more than a style or fashion. And hatred is the glue that holds them together.

A third aspect of attachment is avidya, meaning ignorance. At one level, it refers to the ignorance of these Four Noble Truths – not understanding the truth of imperfection and so on. At a deeper level, it also means "not seeing," i.e. not directly experiencing reality, but instead seeing our personal interpretation of it. More than that, we take our interpretation of reality as more real than reality itself!

In some sutras, Buddha adds one more aspect of attachment: anxiety. Fear, like hatred, ties us to the very things that hurt us.

*3. Suffering can be extinguished.* At least that suffering we add to the inevitable suffering of life can be extinguished. Or, if we want to be even more modest in our claims, suffering can at least be diminished.

I believe that, with decades of practice, some monks may be able to transcend even simple, direct, physical pain. I don't think, however, that us ordinary folk in our ordinary lives have the option of devoting those decades to such an extreme of practice. My focus, then, is on diminishing mental anguish rather than eliminating all pain.

Nirvana is the traditional name for the state of being (or non-being, if you prefer) wherein all clinging, and so all suffering, has been eliminated. It is often translated as "blowing out," with the idea that we eliminate self like we blow out a candle. This may be a proper understanding, but I prefer the idea of blowing out a fire that threatens to overwhelm us, or even the idea of taking away the oxygen that keeps the fires burning. By this I mean that by "blowing out" clinging, hate, and ignorance, we "blow out" unnecessary suffering.

I may be taking a bit of a leap here, but I believe that the Buddhist concept of nirvana is quite similar to the existentialists' *freedom*. Freedom has, in fact, been used in Buddhism in the context of freedom from rebirth or freedom from the effects of karma. For the existentialist, freedom is a fact of our being, one which we often ignore, and which ignorance leads us to a diminished life.

*4. And there is a way to extinguish suffering.* This is what all therapists believe – each in his or her own way. But this time we are looking at what Buddha's theory -dharma – has to say: He called it the Eightfold Path. I will save that for the chapter on therapy!

### 16.10 A biosocial theory

Okay, I lied. I have one more theorist to talk about: your humble servant, me. Here are some of my thoughts on neurosis:

Neurosis refers to a variety of psychological problems involving persistent experiences of negative affect including anxiety, sadness or depression, anger, irritability, mental confusion, low sense of self-worth, etc., behavioral symptoms such as phobic avoidance, vigilance, impulsive and compulsive acts, lethargy, etc., cognitive problems such as unpleasant or disturbing thoughts, repetition of thoughts and obsession, habitual fantasizing, negativity and cynicism, etc. Interpersonally, neurosis involves dependency, aggressiveness, perfectionism, schizoid isolation, socio-culturally inappropriate behaviors, etc.

Generally, neurosis means poor ability to adapt to one's environment, an inability to change one's life patterns, and the inability to develop a richer, more complex, more satisfying personality.

First, there are clearly a variety of predisposing factors involved in mental illness. Some of us are born with temperaments that make us edgy, nervous, or easily upset. Others have a life-long difficulty feeling pleasure. Others still have problems differentiating fantasy from reality. In other words, we may have certain "hardware" problems that make it more likely that we suffer from certain "software" problems. The evidence strongly suggests that schizophrenia, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorders in particular have genetic and physiological components.

The second point is that one's culture, upbringing, education, and learning in general may prepare one to deal with the stresses of life, or not. It is important to remember that some people who have physiological predispositions towards problems may grow up in circumstances that keep them healthy, while some physiologically healthy people suffer under extreme circumstances which overwhelm them.

The third point concerns the triggering stressors in people's lives which lead to the various emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms of neurosis. These stressors can be understood as consisting of situations of uncertainty and confusion, usually involving interpersonal relationships, that overwhelm the person's capacities, learned and/or inherited, to cope with those situations.

And finally, it needs to be understood, however, that these disorders are nevertheless psychological ones: Mental illness plays itself out in the arena of personal consciousness. That is where the suffering comes in.

So, basically, we deal with the world by using our previously acquired knowledge of the world, in coordination with our inherited capacities, to solve the problems presented to us as efficiently as possible. When we are up to the task, our emotional responses are kept to within tolerable limits. When we are not up to the task, we experience anxiety. This anxiety may develop into other emotional responses – depression, anger, withdrawal – as well, depending on the details of the problem, our inherited traits, and our learned patterns of response to problematic situations.

When we experience repeated occasions of stress and anxiety, we begin to develop patterns of behavior and cognition designed to avoid or otherwise mitigate the problem, such as vigilance, escape behaviors, and defensive thinking. These may develop into an array of attitudes which themselves produce anxiety, anger, sadness, etc.

### **Developmental aspects**

The family is often the focus in discussing the origins of neurosis. First, any genetic predispositions towards neurosis may be inherited. Secondly, the family may have provided little in the way of preparation for a child to deal with the stresses of life. And thirdly, the family may itself be a source of the stress and confusion which the child may be unable to cope with. It may often be the case that a parent is him- or herself troubled by neuroses, and thereby provides the genetics, the poor parenting skills, and the stresses that lead children to develop neuroses.

A child is still in the process of learning the skills required to survive and thrive in the social world, and is thereby more susceptible to stress. He or she needs both parental guidance and a degree of security. The child needs to know that the parent will be there for him or her. This reliability is communicated by means of the love a parent expresses to the child. If the child fails to perceive that love (even if it does actually exist), he or she will be left with considerable and very general anxiety, as well as feelings of incompetence and unlovableness.

On the other hand, we should not jump to conclusions in this regard: Not all neurotics raise neurotic children, and not all neurotics were themselves raised by neurotic parents. There are many stressful events which can overwhelm even fairly emotionally stable and well educated children, adolescents, and even adults. Among these, we can mention the death of parents, their divorce and remarriage, foster homes, institutionalization, ill health of the child or the parents, war time experiences, immigration, poverty and homelessness, assault, sexual abuse, bigotry, and so on.

Many people develop neuroses during adolescence. The sometimes dramatic physical and emotional changes can by themselves overwhelm some adolescents. Even more likely, these changes, combined with the need to demonstrate social competence and to gain peer approval, can lead to great stress and overwhelm the adolescent's emotional capacities. Teenagers rejected by their peers, due to weight problems, physical appearance, weakness, retardation and learning problems, social shyness or awkwardness, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, etc., are especially vulnerable. Many, if they have the resources and especially if they have support from family and friends, recover in early adulthood. Others do not.

Just like the child, the adolescent is still in a stage of development, and has the added burden of requiring the social skills involved in sexual competition. These are usually learned by imitating other adolescents, especially those that are admired for their skills and successes. The learning is then supported by gaining validation from other adolescents in the form of acceptance and approval. Without that approval, the adolescent feels no confidence in his or her social skills and again lives with the anxiety of never quite knowing how to act. The adolescent is left with feelings of isolation and self-loathing.

Many of these issues continue to apply in young adulthood and even later. Young adults typically feel the need for a partner in life, for a network of friends, for a sense of competence as evidenced by success in college or in the workplace, and so on. Later, the desire for children, for financial security, and for social respect add to the stress. And later still, coming to terms with the prospect of ill health, the death of friends and family, and one's own mortality provide the older adult with new challenges for their emotional strength. The better the foundation in childhood and adolescence, however, the better the chances that the adult will be able to cope.

### **Fear of nothing**

Sometimes, when people first become aware of the insubstantiality of social reality, they panic. Looking for meaning in social reality is like looking for the center of an onion: you peel and peel, only to find nothing at all! This panic I call existential anxiety, and we see it making its appearance whenever social reality is threatened.

Someone suffering from a social phobia, for example, is afraid that he or she will fail to uphold the standards of society, fail to live up to the expectations of others. We may ask them, "what is the worst that can happen?" A healthy person just moves on after embarrassments. But the neurotic sees no existence outside these social forms, and fears the loss of their entire reality.

You can also see this fear of "nothing" in our fears of illness and death and in fears that revolve around the fuzzy borders between that which is alive and that which is not, such as fears of insects, snakes, the dead, mechanical devices, and so on. I remember my children routinely tossing anything remotely alive (such as dolls that move) out of their bedrooms at night.

Some examples of neurotic behaviors – obsessions, compulsions, amnesias, and conversion disorders – may best be understood as the conventional person's last ditch efforts at keeping neurotic anxiety at bay. These symptoms are outgrowths of the perfectionist's rigid structures and the authoritarian's dedication to rules and sanctions, when these constructs are threatened.

We might also use existential anxiety to understand depression: Here, the person is experiencing the emotional exhaustion that comes from prolonged fighting to maintain their social reality in direct conflict with experience. Instead of uselessly trying to adapt to the social norms, the course of action that would most benefit them is one of finally doing what their experiences tell them is far truer to reality than society. Society, of course, may smack them down if they try – hence the difficulty! And yet awareness of the illusory nature of social reality is dawning, and we might feel some optimism in the case of the depressed individual!

### Authoritarianism

The authoritarian neurotic is a person who retreats from the complexity of life into authoritarian structures. Again, the neurotic is not a child, nor a peasant in some traditional society, so this authoritarian world-view must be supported by defensive mechanisms that help him or her to avoid full recognition of traumas and chaos.

The authoritarian neurotic will tend to exhibit his or her rigid sociality in one of two ways: Depending on such factors as temperament, upbringing, and specific social situation, they will be either aggressive or compliant. Aggressive neurotics, predominantly men (due to both temperament and upbringing), tend to expect others to bend to their will, and are likely to be angry and even violent if their expectations are not met. Compliant neurotics, predominantly women (again, due to both temperament and upbringing), tend to expect to yield to the will of others. They suffer from sadness and spend much of their cognitive time trying to adapt, i.e. trying accept into themselves changes that would be more efficiently accomplished by changing others (most often, the aggressive males they keep company with!).

But please notice that both aggressiveness and compliance change depending on the people you are interacting with: The aggressive man is likely to become quite compliant when faced with a clear social superior; the compliant woman is likely to be quite aggressive towards her children or servants. In a traditional society, these relations operate quite smoothly, with very little overt anger or sadness, and certainly without much sadism or masochism. Among neurotics, the defensive mechanisms change the anxiety that is at the root of the neurosis into anger or sadness, even to the point of sadism and masochism. As Freud pointed out, these are just two sides of the same coin, which is the authoritarian perspective.

In the history of humanity, the great majority of people have simply and fully "bought into" social reality. Inasmuch as each ethnic group was fairly isolated, social reality was the only reality anyone knew, and it served their purposes well. Large traditional societies were very much the same: Everywhere you looked, the same standards of behavior applied. Only at the very outskirts of your society did you find people living by other rules, and they could be effectively dealt with by calling them barbarians – babblers, ones who don't know the right words – or by not considering them to be people at all.

In our own society, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain this fiction. We travel, we communicate around the world. Even in our own towns, there are people who are different, yet are clearly still people and not "babblers." And yet, the rich and complex social realities we each grow up with cannot be surrendered so easily, even in the face of such experiential evidence. We defend our beliefs, usually by emphasizing even more the conventionalities of our social realities. We become sticklers for the rules. We become *conventional*.

At first glance, this conventional person, so terribly concerned with social forms, may appear to be more moral than most, the one with the well-developed superego. But he or she is concerned with the forms, not with people and their pains and sorrows. *True* compassion is when you see nothing in another's face but his or her humanity. The conventional person only sees social duties.

### Other forms of neurosis

Once a person gets beyond the authoritarian level, that is, when they realize that obeying superiors or conforming to the masses is not the ultimate source of values, they may nevertheless be susceptible to neurotic patterns. For example, if one looks to reason for a solution to life's stresses, and yet finds those stresses too much to take, he or she may begin to retreat into the comfort of rigid personality structures.

These can range from full-blown obsessive-compulsive to anxiety neurosis to compulsive personality, but is best represented by the rather mild but enormously common personality type we could call the perfectionist. Among the qualities perfectionists tend to exhibit are a love of order in their own lives, including neatness and punctuality, and a tendency to foist that order onto others, sometimes to the point that they resemble authoritarian types, except that the order they demand is not so much society's order, but an order that they feel they themselves best represent – all this stemming, of course, from their fear of the chaos they see on the horizon.

They may also appear rather narcissistic, especially to the degree that they consider themselves ideal specimens as a defensive reaction to their fears and anxieties. The give-away that they are rationalists, rather than authoritarians or psychotics, is that they consider their rigid structures universal rather than just social mores, while nevertheless being fully aware of the reality of other ways of being. They love logic and reasoning and tend to consider themselves supremely logical whether it is among their talents or not, and consider the lack of logic to be the major flaw of others.

Another pathway to neurosis is found in people who, in their efforts to comprehend life, tend to reduce self to physiology, mind to brain, consciousness to epiphenomenon, values to tastes, morals to customs, and truth to opinion. The consequence may be a feeling that nothing is tied down, that nothing, including myself, is real, that the whole world is some kind of illusion – i.e. depersonalization and derealization. So is the sense that everything I do is meaningless, that not much of what I do has any effect anyway, and most especially that there is no right and wrong. One may develop a sense of emptiness or deadness, with a desire to return to a simpler but more sensuous mode of being.

### **Psychosis**

Some people who have been driven back into an autistic perspective by the complexities or violence of a reality they are not prepared, temperamentally or cognitively, to deal with. Their autistic view is not natural to them, as it might be to an infant, in that they already have a degree of experience with the world, including social reality. It must therefore be supported by a defensive avoidance of difficult situations – i.e. of situations that they paradoxically need to face and adapt to in order to progress beyond their autistic perspective.

We must always begin where the patient is. So, in the case of the autistic or schizophrenic person, we must begin with their personal reality and the defenses which they use to maintain it. In other words, we must first take great pains to shelter them from perceptions of danger. Only when they feel safe, in an often highly simplified environment, can we begin to gradually introduce the kinds of complexities, in watered down versions, in which they may find the differentiations they need to adapt and move out of their personal world. These differentiations cannot lead in any direct fashion to mature perspectives, but can only be directed at an authoritarian world-view. Ironically, in order to help schizophrenics, we must lead them towards conventionality!

### **The peach**

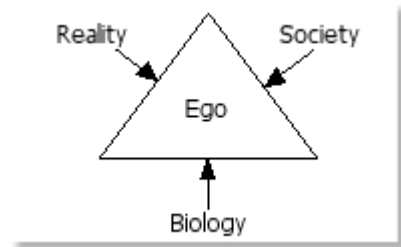
It should be clear by now that at least one aspect of mental health is the ability to take social reality (as well as idiosyncratic reality) for what it is and deal with it as one must, yet to be in close contact with immediate (unconstructed) reality. Not conventional, the mentally healthy person has gone beyond neurotic anxiety without falling into the deeper illusions of the psychotic's idiosyncratic constructed reality.

Life is really more like a peach than an onion: It has a solid core. This core is the reality of immediate individual experience. Although this reality is only a small view of ultimate or total reality, it has the advantage of being a piece of *truth*, rather than fiction. This is the sunrise, the toothache, the lover's touch, the fear and the anger and the sadness, and the joy. This is life here and now. This is life beyond words.

## 17. Defenses and coping strategies

An occasional lie to support our egos might not be so bad. But lies breed lies: "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!" your grandmother may have told you. And as you continue lying, before you know it, you have gone so far from reality that you are faced with nothing but problems.

Freud talked about this at great length: The poor ego ("I") is surrounded by the often-conflicting demands of three powerful entities: reality (the great undeniable), the id (representing our biological drives), and the superego (representing parental – i.e. society's – demands). When all those pressures get to be too much, the ego feels overwhelmed, like it's about to be washed away. We all too often feel like we're about to lose control, go out of our minds, go crazy, die... This is anxiety.



The best way of dealing with anxiety is to solve the problems that cause it. But if this is beyond you, you may have to block some of the demands: Shut out reality, or pretend you don't have needs, or ignore those feelings of shame or guilt.

One of the nicest ways of understand defenses is from the Swiss existential psychologist Medard Boss: He considers defensiveness as a matter of not illuminating some aspect of life, and psychopathology analogous to living in darkness. Therapy, in turn, involves re-lighting one's life – a process we might well call "enlightenment!"

### 17.1 Sigmund Freud

The ego deals with the demands of reality, the id, and the superego as best as it can. But when the anxiety becomes overwhelming, the ego must defend itself. It does so by unconsciously blocking the impulses or distorting them into a more acceptable, less threatening form. Freud called these techniques the ego defense mechanisms, and he, his daughter Anna Freud (right), and other disciples have discovered quite a few.

*Denial* involves blocking external events from awareness. If some situation is just too much to handle, the person just refuses to experience it. As you might imagine, this is a primitive and dangerous defense – no one disregards reality and gets away with it for long! It can operate by itself or, more commonly, in combination with other, more subtle mechanisms that support it.

I was once reading while my five year old daughter was watching a cartoon (The Smurfs, I think). She was, as was her habit, quite close to the television, when a commercial came on. Apparently, no-one at the television station was paying much attention, because this was a commercial for a horror movie, complete with bloody knife, hockey mask, and screams of terror. Now I wasn't able to save my child from this horror, so I did what any good psychologist father would do: I talked about it. I said to her "Boy, that was a scary commercial, wasn't it?" She said "Huh?" I said "That commercial...it sure was scary wasn't it?" She said "What commercial?" I said "The commercial that was just on, with the blood and the mask and the screaming...!" She had apparently shut out the whole thing.

Since then, I've noticed little kids sort of glazing over when confronted by things they'd rather not be confronted by. I've also seen people faint at autopsies, people deny the reality of the death of a loved one, and students fail to pick up their test results. That's denial.

Anna Freud also mentions denial in fantasy: This is when children, in their imaginations, transform an "evil" father into a loving teddy bear, or a helpless child into a powerful superhero.

*Repression*, which Anna Freud also called "motivated forgetting," is just that: not being able to recall a threatening situation, person, or event. This, too, is dangerous, and is a part of most other defenses.

As an adolescent, I developed a rather strong fear of spiders, especially long-legged ones. I didn't know where it came from, but it was starting to get rather embarrassing by the time I entered college. At college, a counselor helped me to get over it (with a technique called systematic desensitization), but I still had no idea where it came from. Years later, I had a dream, a particularly clear one, that involved getting locked up by my cousin in a shed behind my grandparents' house when I was very young. The shed was small, dark, and had a dirt floor covered with – you guessed it! – long-legged spiders.

The Freudian understanding of this phobia is pretty simple: I repressed a traumatic event – the shed incident – but seeing spiders aroused the anxiety of the event without arousing the memory.

Other examples abound. Anna Freud provides one that now strikes us as quaint: A young girl, guilty about her rather strong sexual desires, tends to forget her boy-friend's name, even when trying to introduce him to her relations! Or an alcoholic can't remember his suicide attempt, claiming he must have "blacked out." Or when someone almost drowns as a child, but can't remember the event even when people try to remind him – but he does have this fear of open water!

Note that, to be a true example of a defense, it should function unconsciously. My brother had a fear of dogs as a child, but there was no defense involved: He had been bitten by one, and wanted very badly never to repeat the experience! Usually, it is the irrational fears we call phobias that derive from repression of traumas.

*Asceticism*, or the renunciation of needs, is one most people haven't heard of, but it has become relevant again today with the emergence of the disorder called anorexia. Preadolescents, when they feel threatened by their emerging sexual desires, may unconsciously try to protect themselves by denying, not only their sexual desires, but all desires. They get involved in some kind of ascetic (monk-like) lifestyle wherein they renounce their interest in what other people enjoy.

In boys nowadays, there is a great deal of interest in the self-discipline of the martial arts. Fortunately, the martial arts not only don't hurt you (much), they may actually help you. Unfortunately, girls in our society often develop a great deal of interest in attaining an excessively and artificially thin standard of beauty. In Freudian theory, their denial of their need for food is actually a cover for their denial of their sexual development. Our society conspires with them: After all, what most societies consider a normal figure for a mature woman is in ours considered 20 pounds overweight!

Anna Freud also discusses a milder version of this called *restriction of ego*. Here, a person loses interest in some aspect of life and focuses it elsewhere, in order to avoid facing reality. A young girl who has been rejected by the object of her affections may turn away from feminine things and become a "sex-less intellectual," or a boy who is afraid that he may be humiliated on the football team may unaccountably become deeply interested in poetry.

*Isolation* (sometimes called intellectualization) involves stripping the emotion from a difficult memory or threatening impulse. A person may, in a very cavalier manner, acknowledge that they had been abused as a child, or may show a purely intellectual curiosity in their newly discovered sexual orientation. Something that should be a big deal is treated as if it were not.

In emergency situations, many people find themselves completely calm and collected until the emergency is over, at which point they fall to pieces. Something tells you that, during the emergency, you can't afford to fall apart. It is common to find someone totally immersed in the social obligations surrounding the death of a loved one. Doctors and nurses must learn to separate their natural reactions to blood, wounds, needles, and scalpels, and treat the patient, temporarily, as something less than a warm, wonderful human being with friends and family. Adolescents often go through a stage where they are obsessed with horror movies, perhaps to come to grips with their own fears. Nothing demonstrates isolation more clearly than a theater full of people laughing hysterically while someone is shown being dismembered.

*Displacement* is the redirection of an impulse onto a substitute target. If the impulse, the desire, is okay with you, but the person you direct that desire towards is too threatening, you can displace to someone or something that can serve as a symbolic substitute.

Someone who hates his or her mother may repress that hatred, but direct it instead towards, say, women in general. Someone who has not had the chance to love someone may substitute cats or dogs for human beings. Someone who feels uncomfortable with their sexual desire for a real person may substitute a fetish. Someone who is frustrated by his or her superiors may go home and kick the dog, beat up a family member, or engage in cross-burnings.

*Turning against the self* is a very special form of displacement, where the person becomes their own substitute target. It is normally used in reference to hatred, anger, and aggression, rather than more positive impulses, and it is the Freudian explanation for many of our feelings of inferiority, guilt, and depression. The idea that depression is often the result of the anger we refuse to acknowledge is accepted by many people, Freudians and non-Freudians alike.

Once upon a time, at a time when I was not feeling my best, my daughter, five years old, spilled an entire glass of chocolate milk in the living room. I lashed out at her verbally, telling her she was clumsy and had to learn to be more careful and how often hadn't I told her and...well, you know. She stood there stiffly with a sort of smoldering look in her eyes, and, of all things, pounded herself on her own head several times! Obviously, she would rather have pounded my head, but, well, you just don't do that, do you? Needless to say, I've felt guilty ever since.

*Projection*, which Anna Freud also called displacement outward, is almost the complete opposite of turning against the self. It involves the tendency to see your own unacceptable desires in other people. In other words, the desires are still there, but they're not your desires anymore. I confess that whenever I hear someone going on and on about how aggressive everybody is, or how perverted they all are, I tend to wonder if this person doesn't have an aggressive or sexual streak in themselves that they'd rather not acknowledge.

Let me give you a couple of examples: A husband, a good and faithful one, finds himself terribly attracted to the charming and flirtatious lady next door. But rather than acknowledge his own, hardly abnormal, lusts, he becomes increasingly jealous of his wife, constantly worried about her faithfulness, and so on. Or a woman finds herself having vaguely sexual feelings about her girlfriends. Instead of acknowledging those feelings as quite normal, she becomes increasingly concerned with the presence of lesbians in her community.

*Altruistic surrender* is a form of projection that at first glance looks like its opposite: Here, the person attempts to fulfill his or her own needs vicariously, through other people.

A common example of this is the friend (we've all had one) who, while not seeking any relationship himself, is constantly pushing other people into them, and is particularly curious as to "what happened last night" and "how are things going?" The extreme example of altruistic surrender is the person who lives their whole life for and through another.

*Reaction formation*, which Anna Freud called "believing the opposite," is changing an unacceptable impulse into its opposite. So a child, angry at his or her mother, may become overly concerned with her and rather dramatically shower her with affection. An abused child may run to the abusing parent. Or someone who can't accept a homosexual impulse may claim to despise homosexuals.

Perhaps the most common and clearest example of reaction formation is found in children between seven and eleven or so: Most boys will tell you in no uncertain terms how disgusting girls are, and girls will tell you with equal vigor how gross boys are. Adults watching their interactions, however, can tell quite easily what their true feelings are!

*Undoing* involves "magical" gestures or rituals that are meant to cancel out unpleasant thoughts or feelings after they've already occurred. Anna Freud mentions, for example, a boy who would recite the alphabet backwards whenever he had a sexual thought, or turn around and spit whenever meeting another boy who shared his passion for masturbation.

In "normal" people, the undoing is, of course, more conscious, and we might engage in an act of atonement for some behavior, or formally ask for forgiveness. But in some people, the act of atonement isn't conscious at all. Consider the alcoholic father who, after a year of verbal and perhaps physical abuse, puts on the best and biggest Christmas ever for his kids. When the season is over, and the kids haven't quite been fooled by his magical gesture, he returns to his bartender with complaints about how ungrateful his family is, and how they drive him to drink.

One of the classic examples of undoing concerns personal hygiene following sex: It is perfectly reasonable to wash up after sex. After all, it can get messy! But if you feel the need to take three or four complete showers using gritty soap – perhaps sex doesn't quite agree with you.

*Introjection*, sometimes called identification, involves taking into your own personality characteristics of someone else, because doing so solves some emotional difficulty. For example, a child who is left alone frequently, may in some way try to become "mom" in order to lessen his or her fears. You can sometimes catch them telling their dolls or animals not to be afraid. And we find the older child or teenager imitating his or her favorite star, musician, or sports hero in an effort to establish an identity.

A more unusual example is a woman who lived next to my grandparents. Her husband had died and she began to dress in his clothes, albeit neatly tailored to her figure. She began to take up various of his habits, such as smoking a pipe. Although the neighbors found it strange and referred to her as "the man-woman," she was not suffering from any confusion about her sexual identity. In fact, she later remarried, retaining to the end her men's suits and pipe!

I must add here that identification is very important to Freudian theory as the mechanism by which we develop our superegos.

*Identification with the aggressor* is a version of introjection that focuses on the adoption, not of general or positive traits, but of negative or feared traits. If you are afraid of someone, you can partially conquer that fear by becoming more like them. Two of my daughters, growing up with a particularly moody cat, could often be seen meowing, hissing, spitting, and arching their backs in an effort to keep that cat from springing out of a closet or dark corner and trying to eat their ankles.

A more dramatic example is one called the *Stockholm syndrome*. After a hostage crisis in Stockholm, psychologists were surprised to find that the hostages were not only not terribly angry at their captors, but often downright sympathetic. A more recent case involved a young woman named Patty Hearst, of the wealthy and influential Hearst family. She was captured by a very small group of self-proclaimed revolutionaries called the Symbionese Liberation Army. She was kept in closets, raped, and otherwise mistreated. Yet she apparently decided to join them, making little propaganda videos for them and even waving a machine gun around during a bank robbery. When she was later tried, psychologists strongly suggested she was a victim, not a criminal. She was nevertheless convicted of bank robbery and sentenced to 7 years in prison. Her sentence was commuted by President Carter after 2 years.

*Regression* is a movement back in psychological time when one is faced with stress. When we are troubled or frightened, our behaviors often become more childish or primitive. A child may begin to suck their thumb again or wet the bed when they need to spend some time in the hospital. Teenagers may giggle uncontrollably when introduced into a social situation involving the opposite sex. A freshman college student may need to bring an old toy from home. A gathering of civilized people may become a violent mob when they are led to believe their livelihoods are at stake. Or an older man, after spending twenty years at a company and now finding himself laid off, may retire to his recliner and become childishly dependent on his wife.

Where do we retreat when faced with stress? To the last time in life when we felt safe and secure, according to Freudian theory.

*Rationalization* is the cognitive distortion of "the facts" to make an event or an impulse less threatening. We do it often enough on a fairly conscious level when we provide ourselves with excuses. But for many people, with sensitive egos, making excuses comes so easy that they never are truly aware of it. In other words, many of us are quite prepared to believe our lies.

A useful way of understanding the defenses is to see them as a combination of denial or repression with various kinds of rationalizations.

All defenses are, of course, lies, even if we are not conscious of making them. But that doesn't make them less dangerous – in fact it makes them more so. As your grandma may have told you, "Oh what a tangled web we weave..." Lies breed lies, and take us further and further from the truth, from reality. After a while, the ego can no longer take care of the id's demands, or pay attention to the superego's. The anxieties come rushing back, and you break down.

And yet Freud saw defenses as necessary. You can hardly expect a person, especially a child, to take the pain and sorrow of life full on! While some of his followers suggested that all of the defenses could be used positively, Freud himself suggested that there was one positive defense, which he called sublimation.

*Sublimation* is the transforming of an unacceptable impulse, whether it be sex, anger, fear, or whatever, into a socially acceptable, even productive form. So someone with a great deal of hostility may become a hunter, a butcher, a football player, or a mercenary. Someone suffering from a great deal of anxiety in a confusing world may become an organizer, a businessperson, or a scientist. Someone with powerful sexual desires may become an artist, a photographer, or a novelist, and so on. For Freud, in fact, all positive, creative activities were sublimations, and predominantly of the sex drive.

### 17.2 Alfred Adler

Other theorists are more likely to talk about things like "coping strategies" rather than defenses. This idea begins with Alfred Adler. He talks about three of these maladaptive approaches using a number of different terms:

1. The getting or leaning personality – someone who takes care of their needs by relying on others to take care of them.
2. The ruling or dominant personality – someone who dominates others in order to take care of their needs.
3. The avoidant personality – someone who simply avoids life's difficulties when possible, and may not have their needs taken care of at all.

At one point, he also uses the ancient Greek and Roman classifications: phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic, respectively.

Adler, like Freud, saw personality or lifestyle as something established quite early in life. In fact, the prototype of your lifestyle tends to be fixed by about five years old. New experiences, rather than change that prototype, tend to be interpreted in terms of the prototype, "force fit," in other words, into preconceived notions, just like new acquaintances tend to get "force fit" into our stereotypes.

Adler felt that there were three basic childhood situations that most contribute to a faulty lifestyle. The first is one we've spoken of several times: organ inferiorities, as well as early childhood diseases. They are what he called "overburdened," and if someone doesn't come along to draw their attention to others, they will remain focussed on themselves. Most will go through life with a strong sense of inferiority; A few will overcompensate with a superiority complex. Only with the encouragement of loved ones will some truly compensate.

The second is pampering. Many children are taught, by the actions of others, that they can take without giving. Their wishes are everyone else's commands. This may sound like a wonderful situation, until you realize that the pampered child fails in two ways: First, he doesn't learn to do for himself, and discovers later that he is truly inferior; And secondly, he doesn't learn any other way to deal with others than the giving of commands. And society responds to pampered people in only one way: hatred.

The third is neglect. A child who is neglected or abused learns what the pampered child learns, but learns it in a far more direct manner: They learn inferiority because they are told and shown every day that they are of no value; They learn selfishness because they are taught to trust no one. If you haven't known love, you don't develop a capacity for it later. We should note that the neglected child includes not only orphans and the victims of abuse, but the children whose parents are never there, and the ones raised in a rigid, authoritarian manner.

### 17.3 Karen Horney

Karen Horney came up with nearly the same three types, and coined the term "coping strategies:"

1. *Compliant* – someone who is obedient, conforming, and dependent.
2. *Aggressive* – someone who asserts their superiority over others in one way or another.
3. *Withdrawing* – someone who withdraws from social interaction, physically and/or psychologically.

Like Adler, Horney uses a number of other terms and phrases to refer to her three strategies: Besides compliance, she referred to the first as the moving-toward strategy and the self-effacing solution. Besides aggression, the second was referred to as moving-against and the expansive solution. And, besides withdrawal, she called the third moving-away-from and the resigning solution.

It is true that some people who are abused or neglected as children suffer from neuroses as adults. What we often forget is that most do not. If you have a violent father, or a schizophrenic mother, or are sexually molested by a strange uncle, you may nevertheless have other family members that love you, take care of you, and work to protect you from further injury, and you will grow up to be a healthy, happy adult. It is even more true that the great majority of adult neurotics did not in fact suffer from childhood neglect or abuse! So the question becomes, if it is not neglect or abuse that causes neurosis, what does?

Horney's answer, which she called the "basic evil," is parental indifference, a lack of warmth and affection in childhood. Even occasional beatings or an early sexual experience can be overcome, if the child feels wanted and loved.

The key to understanding parental indifference is that it is a matter of the child's perception, and not the parents' intentions. "The road to hell," it might pay to remember, "is paved with good intentions." A well-intentioned parent may easily communicate indifference to children with such things as showing a preference for one child over another, blaming a child for what they may not have done, overindulging one moment and rejecting another, neglecting to fulfill promises, disturbing a child's friendships, making fun of a child's thinking, and so on. Please notice that many parents – even good ones – find themselves doing these things because of the many pressures they may be under. Other parents do these things because they themselves are neurotic, and place their own needs ahead of their children's.

Horney noticed that, in contrast to our stereotypes of children as weak and passive, their first reaction to parental indifference is anger, a response she calls basic hostility. To be frustrated first leads to an effort at protesting the injustice!

Some children find this hostility effective, and over time it becomes a habitual response to life's difficulties. In other words, they develop an aggressive coping strategy. They say to themselves, "If I have power, no one can hurt me."

Most children, however, find themselves overwhelmed by basic anxiety, which in children is mostly a matter of fear of helplessness and abandonment. For survival's sake, basic hostility must be suppressed and the parents won over. If this seems to work better for the child, it may become the preferred coping strategy – compliance. They say to themselves, "If I can make you love me, you will not hurt me."

Some children find that neither aggression nor compliance eliminate the perceived parental indifference. They "solve" the problem by withdrawing from family involvement into themselves, eventually becoming sufficient unto themselves – the third coping strategy. They say, "If I withdraw, nothing can hurt me."

### 17.4 Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm has created an approach that combines aspects of existentialism with sociology. First, he talks about how, although we are endowed with the ability to make our own choices, the responsibility that comes with that ability can be hard to bear. He then describes three ways in which many of us attempt to "escape from freedom:"

Authoritarians seek to avoid freedom by fusing ourselves with others, by becoming a part of an authoritarian system like the society of the Middle Ages. There are two ways to approach this. One is to submit to the power of others, becoming passive and compliant. The other is to become an authority yourself, a person who applies structure to others. Either way, you escape your separate identity.

Fromm referred to the extreme versions of authoritarianism as masochism and sadism, and points out that both feel compelled to play their separate roles, so that even the sadist, with all his apparent power over the masochist, is not free to choose his actions. But milder versions of authoritarianism are everywhere. In many classes, for example, there is an implicit contract between students and professors: Students demand structure, and the professor sticks to his notes. It seems innocuous and even natural, but this way the students avoid taking any responsibility for their learning, and the professor can avoid taking on the real issues of his field.

Fromm elaborates the two aspects of authoritarianism with two personality orientations:

*Receptive orientation* people are those who expect to get what they need. If they don't get it immediately, they wait for it. They believe that all goods and satisfactions come from outside themselves. This type is most common among peasant populations. It is also found in cultures that have particularly abundant natural resources, so that one need not work hard for one's sustenance (although nature may also suddenly withdraw its bounty!). It is also found at the very bottom of any society: Slaves, serfs, welfare families, migrant workers... all are at the mercy of others.

This orientation is clearly the same as Adler's leaning-getting, and Horney's compliant personality. In its extreme form, it can be characterized by adjectives such as submissive and wishful. In a more moderate form, adjectives such as accepting and optimistic are more descriptive.

*Exploitative orientation* people expect to have to take what they need. In fact, things increase in value to the extent that they are taken from others: Wealth is preferably stolen, ideas plagiarized, love achieved by coercion. This type is prevalent among history's aristocracies, and in the upper classes of colonial empires. Think of the English in India for example: Their position was based entirely on their power to take from the indigenous population. Among their characteristic qualities is the ability to be comfortable ordering others around! We can also see it in pastoral barbarians and populations who rely on raiding (such as the Vikings).

The exploitative orientation is the same as Adler's ruling-dominant, and Horney's aggressive types. In extremes, they are aggressive, conceited, and seducing. Mixed with healthier qualities, they are assertive, proud, captivating.

Then he introduces a couple more orientations: *Hoarding orientation* people expect to keep. They see the world as possessions and potential possessions. Even loved ones are things to possess, to keep, or to buy. Fromm, drawing on Karl Marx, relates this type to the bourgeoisie, the merchant middle class, as well as richer peasants and crafts people. He associates it particularly with the Protestant work ethic and such groups as our own Puritans.

Hoarding is associated with the kind of families we first see in the bourgeoisie or middle class. Selling and buying emphasizes the need for close accounting and strong self-discipline, which becomes a personality passed on from generation to generation. I might add that there is a clear connection with perfectionism as well. Freud would call it the anal retentive type, Adler (to some extent) the avoiding type, and Horney (a little more clearly) the withdrawing type. In its pure form, it means you are stubborn, stingy, and unimaginative. If you are a milder version of hoarding, you might be steadfast, economical, and practical.

While authoritarians respond to a painful existence by, in a sense, eliminating themselves in an authoritarian social structure: If there is no me, how can anything hurt me? But others respond to pain by striking out against the world: If I destroy the world, how can it hurt me? It is this escape from freedom that accounts for much of the indiscriminate nastiness of life – brutality, vandalism, humiliation, crime, terrorism.... Fromm believed that it was the hoarding personality that was most susceptible to the impulse to destructiveness.

One historical example might be the situation of many young men in Germany after the first world war: born into middle class families with strong discipline, they found themselves unemployed and in desperate straits. When organized and encouraged to direct their pent-up anger at traditional targets (the Jews), they became destructive in ways that are still hard to wrap one's head around.

Fromm adds that, if a person's desire to destroy is blocked by circumstances, he or she may redirect it inward. The most obvious kind of self-destructiveness is, of course, suicide. But we can also include many illnesses, drug addiction, alcoholism, even the joys of passive entertainment. This is the same as Anna Freud's "turning against the self" defense.

The last response to painful freedom and responsibility he called *automaton conformity*. Authoritarians escape by hiding within an authoritarian hierarchy. But our society emphasizes equality! There is less hierarchy to hide in (though plenty remains for anyone who wants it, and some who don't). When we need to hide, we hide in our mass culture instead. When I get dressed in the morning, there are so many decisions! But I only need to look at what you are wearing, and my frustrations disappear. Or I can look at the television, which, like a horoscope, will tell me quickly and effectively what to do. If I look like, talk like, think like, feel like... everyone else in my society, then I disappear into the crowd, and I don't need to acknowledge my freedom or take responsibility. It is the horizontal counterpart to authoritarianism.

The person who uses automaton conformity is like a social chameleon: He takes on the coloring of his surroundings. Since he looks like a million other people, he no longer feels alone. He isn't alone, perhaps, but he's not himself either. The automaton conformist experiences a split between his genuine feelings and the colors he shows the world, very much along the lines of Horney's and Roger's theories.

Automaton conformity is the escape used by people of the *marketing orientation*. They expect to sell. Success is a matter of how well I can sell myself, package myself, advertise myself. My family, my schooling, my jobs, my clothes – all are an advertisement, and must be "right." Even love is thought of as a transaction. Only the marketing orientation thinks up the marriage contract, wherein we agree that I shall provide such and such, and you in return shall provide this and that. If one of us fails to hold up our end of the arrangement, the marriage is null and void – no hard feelings (perhaps we can still be best of friends!) This, according to Fromm, is the orientation of the modern industrial society. This is our orientation!

This modern type comes out of modern families, where children are allowed to make adult choices, and adults try to stay kids all their life. There are few rules and their is little discipline. They think of themselves as democratic, but in fact parents have simply abdicated their responsibilities. Adler and Horney don't have an equivalent, but Freud might: This is at least half of the vague phallic personality, the type that lives life as flirtation. In extreme, the marketing person is opportunistic, childish, tactless. Less extreme, and he or she is purposeful, youthful, social. Notice today's values as expressed to us by our mass media: Fashion, fitness, eternal youth, adventure, daring, novelty, sexuality... these are the concerns of the celebrity and his or her less-wealthy admirers. The surface is everything! Let's go bungee-jumping!

In fact, since humanity's "true nature" is freedom, any of these escapes from freedom alienates us from ourselves. Here's what Fromm had to say:

Man is born as a freak of nature, being within nature and yet transcending it. He has to find principles of action and decision making which replace the principles of instincts. He has to have a frame of orientation which permits him to organize a consistent picture of the world as a condition for consistent actions. He has to fight not only against the dangers of dying, starving, and being hurt, but also against another danger which is specifically human: that of becoming insane. In other words, he has to protect himself not only against the danger of losing his life but also against the danger of losing his mind. (Fromm, 1968, p. 61)

I should add here that freedom is in fact a complex idea, and that Fromm is talking about personal freedom to choose from the options available to one, rather than just political freedom (often called liberty): Most of us, whether they are free or not, tend to like the idea of political freedom, because it means that we can do what we want. Most of us today want political freedom, but then fail to do much with it personally: We may well fight for freedom (of the political sort), and yet when we have it, we tend to be conformist and often rather irresponsible. We have the vote, but we fail to use it! Fromm is very much for political freedom – but he is especially eager that we make use of that freedom and take the responsibility that goes with it.

There is a healthy personality as well – the *productive orientation* – which Fromm occasionally refers to as the person without a mask. This is the person who, without disavowing his or her biological and social nature, nevertheless does not shirk away from freedom and responsibility. This person comes out of a family that loves without overwhelming the individual, that prefers reason to rules, and freedom to conformity.

The society that gives rise to the productive type (on more than a chance basis) doesn't exist yet, according to Fromm. He does, of course, have some ideas about what it will be like. He calls it *humanistic communitarian socialism*. That's quite a mouthful, and made up of words that aren't exactly popular in the USA, but let me explain: Humanistic means oriented towards human beings, and not towards some higher entity – not the all-powerful State nor someone's conception of God. Communitarian means composed of small communities (*Gemeinschaften*, in German), as opposed to big government or corporations. Socialism means everyone is responsible for the welfare of everyone else. Thus understood, it's hard to argue with Fromm's idealism!

Fromm says that the first four orientations (which others might call neurotic) are living in the having mode. They focus on consuming, obtaining, possessing.... They are defined by what they have. Fromm says that "I have it" tends to become "it has me," and we become driven by our possessions!

The productive orientation, on the other hand, lives in the being mode. What you are is defined by your actions in this world. You live without a mask, experiencing life, relating to people, being yourself.

He says that most people, being so used to the having mode, use the word have to describe their problems: "Doctor, I have a problem: I have insomnia. Although I have a beautiful home, wonderful children, and a happy marriage, I have many worries." He is looking to the therapist to remove the bad things, and let him keep the good ones, a little like asking a surgeon to take out your gall bladder. What you should be saying is more like "I am troubled. I am happily married, yet I cannot sleep...." If I have children – well, that's a fact. If I am a father – then I can be a good one or a bad one. By saying you have a problem, you are avoiding facing the fact that you are the problem – i.e. you avoid, once again, taking responsibility for your life.

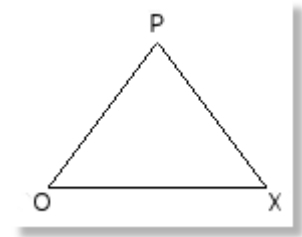
### 17.5 Balance theory

Social psychologists have also been interested in the phenomenon of defensiveness. Fritz Heider, a social psychologist with a Gestalt background, developed a theory called balance theory or "P-O-X" theory.

Let's say you are the parent of a small child. Your baby comes home from kindergarten one afternoon bearing a gift. You tear into the crude wrapping and find -surprise! – a clay ashtray. It is easily the ugliest entity in the universe, and you don't smoke. But your little artist stands there before you with a smile as broad as all outdoors and eyes sparkling with unbounded pride.

You say to your child "oh thank you so much; it's so very beautiful; you sure are good at art; I love it; we'll put it right here in the display case with the antique crystal collection!" What folks who haven't gone through this don't understand is that you meant every word.

Fritz Heider looks at it like this: You are the person (P); your child is the other (O); the clay ashtray is the third element in the triangle (X). And there are several relations among them:



Heider says that our minds tend to seek out a balanced state when dealing with such situations, wherein the relations among person, other, and thing are "harmonious." Three positive relations are harmonious. So are two negative relations with one positive relation:

"I don't like John.  
John has a dog.  
I don't like the dog either."

This kind of triangle is less happy, but no less balanced.

On the other hand, we tend to avoid unbalanced states. Two positive relations with one negative one is unbalanced:

"I love my child.  
She made this ashtray.  
I hate the ashtray."

In these triangles, the relations are *stressed to change*. We will tend to adapt by convincing ourselves that one of the relations is other than it is. You might convince yourself that your child didn't really make the ashtray; you might decide you don't really like your child as much as you thought; or you might decide you like the ashtray. In the broader picture, we do see parents balancing the triangle by "losing" the ashtray or, more sinister, communicating their disappointment, using threats or guilt, and otherwise pushing the child to be the child they would have liked to have had.

### 17.6 Cognitive dissonance theory

A theory that is similar to Heider's but focuses on somewhat different concerns is Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. It has a very simple central principle: "An individual strives to produce *consonance* and to avoid *dissonance*." We experience dissonance when we become aware that our actions contradict certain beliefs about ourselves. Consonance, as you might imagine, is the peaceful absence of dissonance, synonymous with Heider's "harmony."

If I consider myself an honest person, that belief implies that I don't lie. Yet I catch myself in the middle of a lie. This is dissonant. Or I know that I love my parents. This implies that I write them more than once per year. Yet once a year is exactly how often I write. This, too, is dissonant. Or I don't do things to harm myself. Cigarettes are bad for me. And I am at this moment dragging on a cigarette.

Dissonance, like imbalance, is "stressed to change." I might change my behavior, quit smoking, for example. I might change my belief that I don't do things to harm myself, which is at least honest. But the weakest link in this example is the connection between the two: the idea that cigarettes are bad for me. I have personally told myself such things as "it keeps the weight off," "the anxiety would kill me sooner," "the research had flaws," "cigarettes are just a scapegoat for industrial pollution," "they'll discover a cure soon," "I only smoke a few packs a day," and "it won't happen to me." One way or another, we tend to change our beliefs – "fix" them – in an effort to reduce the dissonance: We lie to ourselves.

Most of the research done on dissonance involves a matter of inadequate justification, that is, the reasons for doing something just weren't good enough: I lied to my friend. This is normally dissonant with my belief that I, as a good friend, do not lie – unless I have "a real good reason" (i.e. an adequate justification), like saving his life, or maybe saving his feelings. Without such a "real good reason," there is inadequate justification.

### 17.7 Carl Rogers

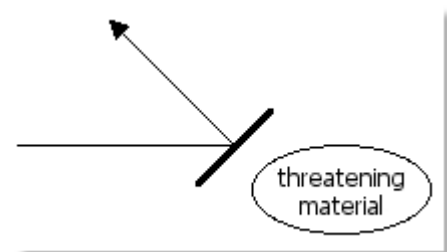
It is Carl Rogers who has the most elegant theory on defensiveness:

When you are in a situation where there is an incongruity between your image of yourself and your immediate experience of yourself (i.e. between the ideal and the real self), you are in a threatening situation. For example, if you have been taught to feel unworthy if you do not get A's on all your tests, and yet you aren't really all that great a student, then situations such as tests are going to bring that incongruity to light – tests will be very threatening.

When you are expecting a threatening situation, you will feel anxiety. Anxiety is a signal indicating that there is trouble ahead, that you should avoid the situation! One way to avoid the situation, of course, is to pick yourself up and run for the hills. Since that is not usually an option in life, instead of running physically, we run psychologically, by using defenses.

Rogers' idea of defenses is very similar to Freud's, except that Rogers considers everything from a perceptual point-of-view, so that even memories and impulses are thought of as perceptions. Fortunately for us, he has only two defenses: denial and perceptual distortion.

Denial means very much what it does in Freud's system: You block out the threatening situation altogether. An example might be the person who never picks up his test or asks about test results, so he doesn't have to face poor grades (at least for now!). Denial for Rogers does also include what Freud called repression: If keeping a memory or an impulse out of your awareness – refuse to perceive it – you may be able to avoid (again, for now!) a threatening situation.



Perceptual distortion is a matter of reinterpreting the situation so that it appears less threatening. It is very similar to Freud's rationalization. A student that is threatened by tests and grades may, for example, blame the professor for poor teaching, trick questions, bad attitude, or whatever – anything other than reasons which threaten self-esteem (stupidity, laziness, alcoholism...). The fact that sometimes professors are poor teachers, write trick questions, and have bad attitudes only makes the distortion work better: If it could be true, then maybe it really was true!



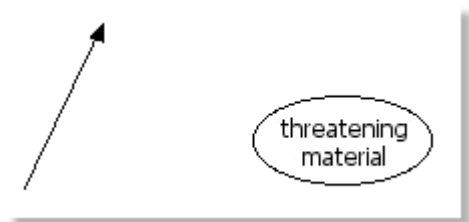
## 17. Defenses and coping strategies

It can also be much more obviously perceptual, such as when the person misreads his grade as better than it is. Sometimes we create the reason, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, a student may get drunk the night before the exam. When he fails, he can say to himself that it was the hangover, not his stupidity.

Unfortunately for the poor neurotic (and, in fact, most of us), every time he or she uses a defense, they put a greater distance between the real and the ideal. They become ever more incongruous, and find themselves in more and more threatening situations, develop greater and greater levels of anxiety, and use more and more defenses.... It becomes a vicious cycle that the person eventually is unable to get out of, at least on their own.

Therapists have a hard time with people who distort heavily, such as paranoids and histrionic personalities. Sometimes, the web of lies becomes so complex that it can easily include the therapist!

Taken to the extreme, distortion becomes what the existentialists call *conventionality* or "busy-ness." We don't notice problems because we are so caught up in our own conventional little lives. War? Starvation? Pollution? Injustice? Inhumanity? In a minute... right now, it's time for Wheel of Fortune! Conventionality can be drawn so:



With conventionality, no-one has to anxiously block experiences or invent rationalizations. The problems remain unconscious (ignored) because they have become a part of the social background. Whenever we feel that something must be the way it is, or that it is only natural or rational, when we say that of course we must have war, or of course there have to be rich and poor, or of course this must be forbidden and that absolutely required, we may be facing a society-wide defense!

In this section, we will review the major disorders and look as well as some comments from the existential psychologist Viktor Frankl.

### 18.1 Anxiety disorders

The anxiety disorders are the most common disorders. Nearly all of us know someone, or have suffered ourselves, from a panic attack or a phobia. At very least, most of us get pretty nervous when we are standing in front of a crowd of people who expect us to say something intelligent or, if nothing else, amusing.

Anxiety is at the root of many, if not all, of our psychological disorders. It is, physically, a kind of fear response, involving the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, in response to a dangerous situation. More specifically, anxiety is the anticipation of danger, learned through repeated stress or trauma. Some people are innately more sensitive to stress, and so are more likely to experience anxiety and develop anxiety disorders. But everyone becomes sensitized to stress and trauma with repeated experiences: Each experience "tunes" the nervous system to respond more quickly and more profoundly to perceived danger.

We often talk about anxiety as some sort of genetic issue, and also as something based on traumas in childhood. But long term stress is probably more often the root of anxiety disorders. The constant demands of living in poverty, discrimination, war, and abuse are a part of daily life for millions of people around the world.

There are basically five ways in which people respond to unrelenting stress and trauma and the anxiety that comes with them:

1. Anxiety disorders – the subject of this section.
2. Self-medication – often leading to alcoholism and other drug-dependencies.
3. Depression – shutting down (a common western response).
4. Somatization – bodily aches and pains (a common non-western response).
5. Dissociation – various "trance" states, and ultimately, psychosis.

Which way a person goes depends on many things, such as their personality, their culture, specific circumstances and so on. But these responses are in no way exclusive!

Viktor Frankl views the anxiety neuroses as rooted in existential anxiety – "the sting of conscience." (1973, p. 179) The individual, not understanding that his anxiety is due to his sense of unfulfilled responsibility and a lack of meaning, takes that anxiety and focuses it upon some problematic detail of life. The hypochondriac, for example, focuses his anxiety on some horrible disease; the phobic focuses on some object that has caused him concern in the past; the agoraphobic sees her anxiety as coming from the world outside her door; the patient with stage fright or speech anxiety focuses on the stage or the podium. The anxiety neurotic thus makes sense of his or her discomfort with life.

### Panic attacks and panic disorder

Panic attacks are pretty intense. You know if you have one. You begin to sweat, tremble, get dry mouth or sick to your stomach. You may start breathing heavily or feeling palpitations or even chest pain. You feel like you are going to go crazy, lose control, or even die. Some of you may have experienced a bit of this when you first had to give a speech or be in a play.

Panic disorder is what we call a fairly regular history of panic attacks. This can be quite debilitating and lead to other problems, including agoraphobia, below. People who develop panic disorder tend to do so early, in adolescence or young adulthood, and it is about twice as common among women.

Panic attacks are themselves traumatic, and so lead to increased anxiety, which makes the person more vigilant and more likely to misinterpret situations as well as bodily symptoms, and so have more panic attacks. They are the classic example of anticipatory anxiety: Being afraid of having a panic attack is the very thing that *causes* the panic attack!

### **Agoraphobia**

Agoraphobia is literally Greek for "fear of the marketplace," but is now understood as an anxiety disorder that prevents people from leaving some area that they feel secure in. A common form is the inability to leave one's home. Some people are even restricted to a couple of rooms within their homes. Others can leave their homes but are restricted to some real or imaginary boundaries, such as their home town or a border two miles from home. Less severe versions involve a fear of travel or of being in a crowded place (that marketplace).

It occurs about twice as often among women than among men. Since 95% of agoraphobics also have panic disorder, perhaps the two categories are really only one.

### **Specific phobias**

When most people think about anxiety disorders, they think about specific phobias. A phobia is a strong but essentially irrational fear of something. Common examples include snakes, rats, mice, dogs, birds, spiders, bees, insects in general, heights, enclosed spaces, flying in airplanes, driving cars, storms, open water, injections, blood, and clowns. (Personally, I think if you aren't afraid of clowns, you are crazy.) But there are literally hundreds more. Phobias often start in childhood, but also often start in one's twenties.

Phobias can be understood in part as a matter of conditioned fear: Strong anxiety or a panic attack is experienced at the same time as the phobic object, and so becomes associated with that object. More often than not, the panic is not a response to the phobic object (snake, mouse, or spider), but rather to the loss of security experienced when someone (such as your mom or dad) responds dramatically to that object. If mom or dad is scared, I should be *really* scared!

It also seems that many phobias have a strong built-in component. Many people are at least uncomfortable, if not phobic, around snakes, mice, spiders, reptiles, dogs, heights, tight spaces, and swooping birds. These things make us fearful even before we learn their potential danger. These fears do make some sense, if you consider the dangers these could have posed for our ancient ancestors. Of course, it is not the figure of a bird, a snake, a spider, or a dog that directly leads to the fear response. It is rather the swooping motion, the slithering, the unpredictable presence, the low growling noises, and so on.

### **Social phobia**

Social phobia usually starts in childhood or adolescence and often begins with an experience of embarrassment or shame. Many of the same characteristics mentioned with the panic attack are a part of social phobia. What differentiates social phobia from other phobias is that it revolves around – wait for it – social situations, such as public speaking and performance. It is also associated with a shy or introverted personality. It isn't easy to get rid of social phobia and many people live with it their whole lives. On the other hand, many people simply avoid the situations that bring it on and do quite well.

Social phobia is another example of anticipatory anxiety: The expectation of social embarrassment causes the anxiety that leads to social embarrassment... In the U.S., social phobia often begins in early adolescence, when peers often humiliate shy children. This is common in any highly competitive society like ours. Also, people in lower social positions in a very hierarchical society (and yes, ours is one) often find themselves victimized this way, and developing social phobia.

In Japan, there is an interesting variation on social phobia called *taijin kyofusho*. This involves great anxiety that other people find your appearance, your face, and even your odor offensive.

### **Generalized anxiety disorder**

Generalized anxiety disorder is – yes – the most general form of the anxiety disorders. It is characterized by a long period (technically, more than six months) of excessive worryings which interferes with work and relationships. It often involves other, more physical, symptoms such as fatigue, tension, irritability, and insomnia. It occurs about twice as often in women as in men.

In Latin America, some people suffer from something called *nervios* ("nerves"). They feel a great deal of anxiety, insomnia, headaches, dizziness, even palpitations. It usually begins with a loss of someone close, or with family conflicts. Since family is everything in many cultures, family problems are often at the root of psychological problems.

### **Post-traumatic stress disorder**

Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when people are faced with stress beyond their ability to handle. Being mugged or raped, be witness to an accident or murder, or experiencing war or refugee camps, are examples. Rape victims and war veterans will sometimes try to get back to their ordinary lives, only to find that they are constantly vigilant, experiencing flashbacks and nightmares, and unable to deal with the ordinary demands of life. Work suffers, relationships crumble. Unfortunately, the person with PTSD may resort to what we call self-medication, i.e. alcohol or drugs, to deal with the pain. Of course, these only add to the problem.

Many are severely depressed. There is also a degree of dissociation involved, meaning that victims become numb, detached, showing little emotion. They no longer feel real. Perhaps this is actually an adaptive response to traumatic stress. We find this kind of dissociation commonly in refugee populations, who can sometimes seem like zombies. They may simply be protecting themselves from further psychological pain.

PTSD appears to involve a number of problems with the hippocampus which, if you recall, is devoted to moving short-term memories into long-term storage. First, intensely emotional events lead to intense memories called flashbulb memories. It seems that these memories may actually be partially stored in the amygdala, which accounts for the fearfulness involved. In addition, the prolonged stress of experiences such as war or childhood abuse actually begins to destroy tissue in the hippocampus, making it more difficult to create new long term memories. Studies show that people who have suffered long-term trauma have anywhere from 8 to 12% less hippocampus. The net result could be that they are, in a sense, stuck in their traumatic past.

About half of people with PTSD remit (get better) within 6 months. The rest may suffer with it for years, sometimes for life. Again, it is women who suffer most from this disorder. In addition to possible genetic predispositions to anxiety, women are more likely victims of trauma.

### **18.2 Obsessive-compulsive disorder**

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a combination of – you guessed it – obsessions and compulsions. An obsession is a thought that you can't seem to get out of your mind, sort of like a song or jingle, but with more sinister effects. For example, a person may obsess about the idea that they may harm themselves or someone else, or that a disaster is about to occur. A common obsession is a concern with germs or toxins. A compulsion is an act, usually repetitive, that the person finds themselves unable to resist, sort of like checking your alarm clock more than once, or turning around to make sure the door you just locked is truly locked. Again, the obsessions are more sinister:

Some people need to perform acts over and over, checking doors not once or twice, but dozens of times; they may feel the need to touch each parking meter they pass; they may need to put things in order of size or alphabet. The most common compulsions relate to cleanliness. Some people will wash their hands many times, even to the point of skin damage and bleeding. Others will need to do the laundry repeatedly. Others still will be unable to shake hands because of their fear of germs.

The disorder is found in equal proportions in men and women, and tends to start in adolescence and young adulthood. It is associated to some degree with tics and Tourette's disorder (multiple, sometimes large, tics, and occasionally vocal grunts and barks or even swear words).

We are beginning to understand some of the brain activities associated with OCD. The caudate nucleus (a part of the basal ganglia near the limbic system) is responsible, among other things, for urges, including things like reminding you to lock doors, brush your teeth, wash your hands, and so on. It sends messages to the orbital area (above the eyes) of the prefrontal area, which tells us that something is not right. It also sends messages to the cingulate gyrus (just under the frontal lobe), which keeps attention focused, in this case on the feeling of something not being right and needing to be done. It is believed that, in people with OCD, this system is stuck on "high alert."

It should be noted that OCD responds fairly well to the same medications (such as Prozac) that help people who are depressed, which suggests that the serotonin pathways of the frontal lobe and limbic system are involved, just as they are with depression. More recently, scientists have discovered several genes that appear to be strongly tied to OCD.

But don't think OCD is a purely physiological disorder! It varies a great deal from culture to culture. In some cultures, the behaviors are even seen as positive. Remember that there are still all kinds of superstitious behaviors that people engage in today, which are no different from compulsions. And, while being obsessed with, say, germs is considered odd, being obsessed with, say, football is considered perfectly okay in our culture!

Viktor Frankl views the obsessive-compulsive person as lacking the sense of completion that most people have. Most of us are satisfied with near certainty about, for example, a simple task like locking one's door at night; the obsessive-compulsive requires a perfect certainty that is, ultimately, unattainable. Because perfection in all things is, even for the obsessive-compulsive, an impossibility, he or she focusses attention on some domain in life that has caused difficulties in the past.

The therapist should attempt to help the patient to relax and not fight the tendencies to repeat thoughts and actions. Further, the patient needs to come to recognize his temperamental inclinations towards perfection as fate and learn to accept at least a small degree of uncertainty. But ultimately, the obsessive-compulsive, and the anxiety neurotic as well, must find meaning. "As soon as life's fullness of meaning is rediscovered, the neurotic anxiety... no longer has anything to fasten on." (1973, p. 182)

### **Similar disorders**

We might also include hypochondriasis here (even though it is "officially" classified as a *somatoform* disorder). People with hypochondriasis (called hypochondriacs) are preoccupied with fears of having or getting a serious disease. Even after being told that they do not have the disease they are concerned about, they continue to worry. They often exaggerate minor abnormalities, go from doctor to doctor, and ask for repeated examinations and medical tests. A guess at prevalence of hypochondriacs is that it involves between 4% and 9% of the population.

A curious version of hypochondriasis is found in India, called dhat. People with dhat suffer from anxiety, fatigue, aches, weakness, depression, and so on – all revolving around an obsessive concern with having lost too much semen! We may laugh, but 100 years ago, westerners also believed that a man has only so much semen to use in his life-time, and 50 years ago, coaches would warn their players not to have sex the night before a big game because it would drain them of energy. In the U.S. today, people are obsessed with aging to such a degree that they are willing to undergo surgery and injections of poisons to appear younger – even though these activities may actually decrease their life-span!

Three other disorders are similar to obsessive-compulsive disorder (although officially categorized as *impulse-control disorders*):

*Trichotillomania* is the "recurrent pulling out of one's hair for pleasure, gratification, or relief of tension that results in noticeable hair loss." (DSM IV) It is not restricted to hair on head, and may even involve pulling out eyelashes. Trichotillomania is often associated with stress, but sometimes occurs while the person is relaxed as well. It usually starts in childhood or adolescence. 1 to 2% of college students report having had trichotillomania at some time.

*Kleptomania* is the "recurrent failure to resist impulses to steal objects not needed for personal use or monetary value." (DSM IV) The person knows it is wrong, fears being caught, and feels guilty about it, but can't seem to resist the impulse. It is rare, but much more common among women than among men. It is, as you can imagine, difficult to differentiate from intentional stealing!

*Pathological gambling* is "recurrent and persistent maladaptive gambling behavior." (DSM IV) We often call it *compulsive gambling*. A lot of distorted thinking goes with it – superstition, overconfidence, denial. Pathological gamblers tend to be people with a lot of energy who are easily bored, and the urge to gamble increases when they are under stress. It may involve 1 to 3% of the population, and two thirds are men.

### 18.3 Mood disorders

As the name implies, mood disorders are defined by pathological extremes of certain moods – specifically, sadness and elation. While sadness and elation are normal and natural, they may become pervasive and debilitating, and may even result in death, either in the form of suicide or as the result of reckless behavior. In any one year, roughly 7% of Americans suffer from mood disorders.

#### Depression

The most common mood disorder is major depression. Besides pervasive sadness, depression involves a loss of interest in anything that the person once considered important. Nothing seems to give them pleasure anymore. As for physical symptoms, many depressed people suffer from insomnia and a loss of appetite. However, others (myself included) wind up overeating and sleeping a great deal.

The nastiest part of depression is the tendency to dwell on death, and depressed people make up somewhere in the range of 20 to 35 percent of suicides. Many turn to drugs and alcohol in an effort to find relief.

Depression tends to last between 6 and 12 months, and some fortunate folks never suffer from it again. More commonly, depressed people suffer a recurrence after a period of a few more months, and many will continue to cycle through depressive periods for the rest of their lives.

Depression is often an accompaniment of anxiety disorders, and like the anxiety disorders, women are about twice as likely to suffer from depression as men. Women tend to attempt suicide about four times as often as men, but men succeed about four times as often as women. This is due to the choice of means: Women prefer overdoses, which often go "wrong" (i.e. they survive), while men prefer guns, which tend to go "right."

Depression is related, of course, to sadness. Sadness is a natural response to difficult circumstances that cannot be resolved by running away (that would be fear) or attacking the problem (that would be anger). Instead, there is the sense that one must wait for the problem to resolve by itself. In grief, for example, we ultimately realize that only time will lessen the pain.

We consider sadness to have passed over into pathology when we lose the sense that the pain will lessen. We continue to suffer, we have guilt feelings, we dwell on the problem, we even try to shut down our feelings altogether. Traumatic events such as the sickness or death of a loved one are common causes of depression.

But continual stress is also a common cause of depression. Living with stress causes the depletion of the body's resources, including changes in the availability of the neurotransmitters associated with energy, happiness, and calm. With repeated stress, the nervous system becomes increasingly sensitive to additional stress, until it no longer seems to be able to cope. A simple way to say this is that you become emotionally exhausted from life's difficulties.

We find depression more commonly in people who live in the face of poverty, discrimination, and exploitation. It is not a complete surprise that 70% of depressed people are women, as living in a male-dominated society adds to the stresses women must deal with. It is also more common among people in stigmatized populations. Cultural psychologist Richard Castillo even suggests that treating depression as a "brain disease" is a way society avoids facing the significant social problems that lead to depression.

One well-known explanation of depression considers it a matter of *learned helplessness*. If we see ourselves as helpless in the face of stress and trauma, if we see our suffering as hopeless, we develop depression. This leaves a dilemma for psychologists: It often helps people to see depression as a "brain disease" involving low serotonin levels, since they can stop seeing themselves as somehow responsible for their condition. But that also means they now see depression as something that can only be helped by external medical intervention.

Like most existential psychologists, Frankl acknowledges the importance of genetic and physiological factors on psychopathology. He sees depression, for example, as founded in a "vital low," i.e. a diminishment of physical energy. On the psychological level, he relates depression to the feelings of inadequacy we feel when we are confronted by tasks that are beyond our capacities, physical or mental.

On the spiritual level, Frankl views depression as "tension between what the person is and what he ought to be." (1973, p. 202) The person's goals seem unreachable to him, and he loses a sense of his own future. Over time, he becomes disgusted at himself and projects that disgust onto others or even humanity in general. The ever-present gap between what is and what should be becomes a "gaping abyss." (1973, p. 202)

Depression is not as common in nonwestern and premodern cultures. In those cultures, it is more likely that emotional exhaustion is expressed via somatization, i.e. in the form of physical complaints. Castillo suggests that the prevalence of depression in modern western societies such as the U.S. is due to our emphasis on financial success, material values, and the idea that we each have individual responsibility for our own happiness. In other societies, people rely more on defined status, tradition, and the social support of extended family. Also in other societies, people don't see happiness as a *right*. In the U.S., if you are not happy, we assume that there is something terribly wrong!

### **Bipolar disorder**

Bipolar disorder used to be called manic-depression, which was a good word for it. Instead of cycling between depression and an ordinary state, they cycle between depression and mania. It is the mania that differentiates it from regular depression.

Mania is a state of mind which involves excitement, irritation, often a sense of strong well being, and a sense that one can do pretty much anything. Manics may believe that they are incredibly talented, are unusually creative, and are immune to danger. They may go on spending sprees, gambling escapades, sexual adventures, and high-risk activities. They tend to feel full of energy and their minds race. While they may in fact get a great deal done, they are also very near to something more psychotic, with paranoia and irrational thoughts.

It is likely that mania involves a certain amount of dissociation – that is, a refocussing of attention away from painful situations (especially social ones) and onto a powerful, grandiose fantasy. So bipolar disorder may be a matter of an energetic fantasy phase followed by emotional exhaustion followed by another energetic fantasy phase, and so on.

Mania is sometimes associated with creativity, and a number of famous writers, artists, musicians, and others are believed to have been bipolar. They would be depressed for months, and then have bursts of energetic creative activity, only to fall back into depression. People believed to have been bipolar include Ludwig von Beethoven, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Isaac Newton, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allen Poe, Mark Twain, Virginia Woolf, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh, Marilyn Monroe, Jimmy Hendrix, Sting, Ozzie Osbourne, Adam Ant, and Kurt Cobain.

### **18.4 Trance disorders**

There are a number of disorders that involve an altered state of consciousness called trance. Trance disorders is not an official name, but it is particularly appropriate. First, the somatoform disorders.

#### **Somatoform disorders**

Somatoform disorders are characterized by a concern with the body. Stress and trauma lead to anxiety, but instead of developing one of the anxiety disorders or depression, some people somaticize: They experience the anxiety as fatigue, loss of appetite, body aches, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and so on. Somatization is actually the most common manifestation of anxiety, especially in non-western countries.

It has been noted, since the 1800s, that people with these disorders are uncommonly easy to hypnotize. This suggests that they may also find it easy to convince themselves of physical ailments that don't really exist. This can be understood as a matter of dissociation (which we discuss under dissociative disorders, below). Some people (usually nervous extraverts) are able to focus their attention on some aspects of their bodies (such as aches and pains) and focus attention away from other aspects (such as the ability to feel their hands or use their legs). This accounts for the way hypnosis and folk remedies are able to help people with somatoform disorders.

There are several variations:

People with *somatization disorder* have a history of complaints concerning their physical health, yet show little or no signs of actually having the problems they think they have. It is a rare disorder in western societies, affecting .2 to 2% of women and less than .2% of men. These people seem to have a very broad variety of problems, including pain in different parts of the body, gastrointestinal problems, sexual and menstrual symptoms and neurological problems. It has been a concern, however, that this diagnosis has been misused in the past, especially in regards to women who may very well have had real medical conditions beyond the abilities of their doctors to diagnose!

In China, somatization disorder is a relatively common problem, and is labelled *neurasthenia*. Neurasthenia combines somatization with feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, and distraction. In Korea, there is a version called hwa-byung. It is most commonly found in less educated, middle aged women who are trapped in bad marriages.

*Conversion disorder* was formerly known as *hysteria*, and became famous as the disorder that inspired Sigmund Freud to develop psychoanalysis. It is similar to somatization, but is more focused on neurological problems such as paralysis of limbs, muscle weakness, balance problems, inability to speak, loss of sense of touch, deafness, vision problems, even blindness, and yet involve no underlying neurological problems! It is very rare, but is considerably more common in women. It is often seen in context of accidents or military activity, and is more common among rural and other people who are medically naive. As Freud and other early psychiatrists noted, the symptoms disappear with hypnosis – but other symptoms usually arise to fill in the gap.

People with *pain disorder* have a history of complaints specifically concerning pain. These people are not lying, and are not malingering – they really feel pain, even though the cause is not found. It is relatively common, but many are concerned with using this diagnosis: There have been real medical problems discovered that had previously been "dismissed" as psychological, such as fibromyalgia. Nevertheless, we have to be careful not to underestimate our ability to intensify or even create suffering in ourselves. Simply focussing attention on small aches and pains can intensify them.

### **Dissociative disorders**

In dissociative disorders, one aspect of a person's psychological makeup is dissociated (separated) from others. A commonality among most people diagnosed with these disorders is their susceptibility to trance states, hypnosis, and suggestibility. Hans Eysenck's research suggests as well that these are more likely to be nervous extraverts.

*Dissociative amnesia* is the "inability to recall important personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature," (DSM IV) but more than what we would characterize as ordinary forgetfulness. It is not due, of course, to a physical trauma, drug use, or a medical condition. Instead, it is due to the ability that these people have to focus away from certain memories that disturb them.

It has been increasingly common for people to report having forgotten childhood traumas, especially sexual abuse, while in the care of certain therapists. Recent researchers now believe that the "recovered memories" that these patients report are actually implanted in the minds of these very suggestible people by their over-enthusiastic therapists. It is still not known whether all recovered memories should be suspect or not, although memory research suggests that trauma is more typically remembered well, not poorly.

*Fugue* is amnesia accompanied by sudden travel away from a person's usual haunts. Time away can range from a few hours to months. When these people return to normal, they often don't remember what happened while they were away. A few adopt an entirely new identity while "on the road."

*Dissociative identity disorder* – formerly known as *multiple personality* – involves someone developing two or more separate "identities" that take over the person's behavior from time to time. The "usual" personality doesn't remember what happens when an alternate personality takes over. Dissociative identity disorder is not the same as schizophrenia, but does have some similarities. In schizophrenia, voices and impulses are seen as coming from outside oneself, while in dissociative identity disorder, they are seen as coming from within, in the form of these alternate personalities.

One of the first cases to reach the public was the story of Eve White. Eve White (a pseudonym, of course), was a mild mannered woman with a domineering husband. She found herself waking up with garish makeup, hangovers, and other signs that she had been out carousing during the night. This alternate personality that took over occasionally was called Eve Black. Eventually, the two personalities were brought together, and Eve's story was made into a movie with actress Joanne Woodward called "The Three Faces of Eve." A second movie was much more popular: "Sybil." This was the true story of a woman who had been severely abused by her schizophrenic mother, and developed (supposedly) 26 personalities.

People with multiple personalities are usually easily hypnotized, making it likely that this disorder may be caused or at least aggravated by therapists, intentionally or unintentionally, much like recovered memories. It is looked upon with skepticism by many psychologists.

On the other hand, it may also be understood as a modern version of a fairly common occurrence in the nonwestern, premodern world: Spirit possession. In cultures where the powers of gods, ghosts, and demons are taken for granted, people sometimes feel possessed by these outside personalities. In more modern societies, lacking the possession explanation, people assume that the alternate personality is internal.

*Depersonalization* is the "persistent or recurrent feeling of being detached from one's mental processes or body..." (DSM IV) Often the world seems odd as well, which is called *derealization*. Physical objects may seem distorted and other people may seem mechanical. Again, these people may be particularly easy to hypnotize, and the feeling can be induced even in normal people under hypnosis. Half of all adults may have experienced a brief episode of depersonalization or derealization in their lifetime, but it is most common in people who have suffered from abuse, the loss of a loved one, or have seen combat. It is also common under the influence of hallucinogens like LSD.

*Dissociative trance disorder* is an unofficial category often referred to by psychologists and psychiatrists working in premodern, nonwestern societies. Trance is a narrowing of one's attention so that some things (such as sight, movement, or even outer reality) are placed outside awareness. Cross-cultural therapist Richard Castillo, in his book *Culture and Mental Illness*, says that trance is "an adaptation with great individual and species survival value." It is not far from such non-pathological states as hypnosis and meditation.

Castillo gives numerous examples:

*Amok* is found in Malaysia and Indonesia. The word comes from the Sanskrit for "no freedom." It involves a person losing their sense of self, grabbing a weapon such as a machete, and running through the village slashing at people. Afterwards, they have no memory of what they have done and are typically excused from any damage, even if their actions resulted in someone's death!

*Grisi siknis* is found among teenage girls and young women of the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua. They also run wild with machetes, occasionally assaulting people or mutilating themselves. They have no memory of their actions.

*Pibloktoq* or *arctic hysteria* is found among polar Eskimos. For anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, a person takes off their clothing and runs screaming through the snow and ice, as a response to a sudden fright.

*Latah* (in Malaysia) involves violent body movements, taking unusual postures, trance dancing, mimicking other people, throwing things, and so on.

"Falling out" (in the Bahamas) involves falling to the ground, apparently comatose, but hearing and understanding what is going on around you.

"Indisposition" (in Haiti) is a possession trance understood as a response to fear.

"Fits" (in India) is a seizure-like response by some women to family stress, curable by exorcism or by simply telling her husband to protect her from her in-laws!

In the west, these kinds of behaviors are often classified as impulse control disorders, along with trichotillomania, compulsive gambling, pyromania, and kleptomania. One of these – *intermittent explosive disorder* – is basically the same as running amok, and is commonly known as "going postal."

### 18.5 Psychosis

Mania, conversion disorders, and somatization disorders lead us into a category distinct from the neuroses

As you recall, we construct a "social reality" for ourselves based on our experiences of others in our society. This social reality is nowhere near as solid as our experiential reality, and we are troubled when it is threatened. During war or economic depression, immigration or cultural revolutions, some people become severely depressed or develop neurotic symptoms in a vain effort to hold on to the stability that our social reality provides.

And some people go through experiences that "break" their social reality altogether. For someone with great resources – intelligence, nurturant upbringing, self-confidence, whatever – this experience could be an enlightenment. For people with few resources – people who don't have a well-developed understanding of the world – this experience can destroy their psychological integrity. They are reduced to grabbing whatever flotsam they can to fashion a life-raft: bits and pieces of personal experience, social reality, and fantasy are patched together and used as a substitute for understanding. This is psychosis: to live in a second kind of constructed reality which I call idiosyncratic reality.

The psychotic lives in a world of words and ideas that, like that of the conventional person and the neurotic, does not match well with experience. Unlike the conventional person or neurotic, however, the psychotic does not have a community of like thinkers to encourage him or her when the fictions are threatened. He or she is alone and is kept alone by fear of emptiness.

Understand that we all have our idiosyncratic realities: Each of us has a slightly different version of the social reality. Each of us has serendipitous experiences that are not true guides to reality, but have had such an impact on us that we cannot easily discard them, as in the case of childhood traumas. Most of us, however, have some degree of awareness of how it is we differ from others, and label those differences as either our psychological faults or as special virtues, while we retain essential communication with others who share most of our social reality. The psychotic has given that up.

### Schizophrenia

When people think about "crazy" people and people in mental institutions, they are often thinking of people with schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is the primary example of what psychologists and psychiatrists used to call a psychosis. The general characteristic of people with a psychosis is that they seem to be out of touch with reality. Mood disorders, especially mania, used to be considered psychoses as well.

Someone with a neurosis appears to be more emotionally troubled, perhaps even excessively responsive to reality rather than out of touch with reality. The anxiety disorders are the primary examples. Although we don't use these terms as much today, psychology students should keep them in mind!

The key feature of schizophrenia is a loss of connection to reality. Perception in particular is disrupted, including the classic auditory hallucinations – hearing voices. But thinking and feeling are disrupted as well, all leading to occasionally bizarre behaviors. Traditionally, we divide the symptom of schizophrenia into positive ones and negative ones. Positive symptoms are things you "have," negative ones are things you "lack."

Positive symptoms:

*Delusions* are irrational beliefs. Common ones include delusions of paranoia (everyone is after me) and delusions of reference (everything is talking about me). Of course, if everyone is talking about you and looking for you, you must be pretty important. Hence we sometimes see delusions of grandeur, even to the point (in extreme cases) of believing one is Christ.

*Hallucinations* are inaccurate perceptions. As I mentioned, auditory hallucinations – voices – are common, and may be accompanied by visual hallucinations. A hallmark of the voices is that they seem to the schizophrenic to clearly come from the outside, and not from within their own minds.

We also see *disorganized speech*, which in turn implies *disorganized thinking*. They go from one topic to another, sometimes in midsentence, and often do not relate their speech to anything around them or to other people's conversations.

*Catatonic behavior* is found in certain schizophrenics (called, appropriately, catatonic schizophrenics). It involves a detachment from one's environment, staring blankly into space, and may involve unusual postures that would seem to be very uncomfortable. Fortunately, these postures are "waxy," meaning that caretakers can gently reform the postures into something less tiring.

Negative symptoms:

*Flat affect* means that the variety and intensity of emotional expression of emotion is reduced. Many schizophrenics have a bland expression, flat voices, and avoid eye contact.

*Poverty of speech* is self-explanatory. Many schizophrenics speak slowly with little content.

*Avolition* is a lack of goal directed behavior. They may seem not to care about anything.

Schizophrenia usually begins in a person's twenties. It sometimes starts earlier, which is why they originally called it dementia praecox – the dementia of the immature. It usually begins with social withdrawal and loss of interest, and will eventually move on to unusual behaviors. This is when the person's family begins to worry. The disorder can come and go, with periods of lucidity between the bouts of psychosis, but roughly 50 to 70 percent of people with schizophrenia do get better.

Viktor Frankl considers schizophrenia as rooted in a physiological dysfunction, in this case one which leads to the person experiencing himself as an object rather than a subject.

Most of us, when we have thoughts, recognize them as coming from within our own minds. We "own" them, as modern jargon puts it. The schizophrenic, for reasons still not understood, is forced to take a passive perspective on those thoughts, and perceives them as voices. And he may watch himself and distrust himself – which he experiences passively, as being watched and persecuted.

Frankl believes that this passivity is rooted in an exaggerated tendency to self-observation. It is as if there were a separation of the self as viewer and the self as viewed. The viewing self, devoid of content, seems barely real, while the viewed self seems alien.

Although Frankl's logotherapy was not designed to deal with severe psychoses, Frankl nevertheless feels that it can help: By teaching the schizophrenic to ignore the voices and stop the constant self-observation, while simultaneously leading him or her towards meaningful activity, the therapist may be able to short-circuit the vicious cycle.

### Cultural Variation

Schizophrenia is more common in egocentric, as opposed to sociocentric, cultures. In egocentric societies, each person is seen as more or less responsible for him- or herself, and others may withdraw from the sufferer and allow him or her to fall into isolation. Families may feel free to express criticism and even hostility when a member does not live up to expectations. Sociocentric societies, even when they have other, very negative, qualities, nevertheless provide support in the form of extended families. And, since individual success is not as important as the family's welfare, individuals are not judged as harshly.

Cultural psychologist Richard Castillo suggests that city living, wage labor, and capitalist society places a lot of demands on people, some of whom are not up to the task. Independence is expected, so people who are not capable of independence are seen as inadequate. You are expected to be productive, unless you are disabled. So if you can't work, you must therefore be disabled, and so again inadequate.

Here's another interesting observation about less developed countries and some non-western societies: Recovery from schizophrenia is common. In some of these societies, the voices are interpreted as the voices of the ancestors. Sometimes, the voices are positive, and they give the hearer and his or her family needed advice. When the advice is acted upon, the ancestor withdraws. Even if the voices and impulses are negative, they are seen as the effects of demons or witchcraft, and appropriate rituals will bring that person back to him- or herself. In western society, on the other hand, schizophrenia is defined as an incurable brain disease. No wonder people don't usually get better!

### 18.6 Alienation

*People want lives in folk societies, wherein everyone is a friendly relative, and no act or object is without holiness. Chemicals make them want that. Chemicals make us furious when we are treated as things rather than as persons. When anything happens to us which would not happen to us in a folk society, our chemicals make us feel like fish out of water.*

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was talking about alienation. The word comes from the Latin "to be made into a stranger," and it once referred to being deprived of your birthright. But feeling like a fish out of water expresses the feeling quite well.

The sociologist Seeman analyzed alienation into six aspects that still have meaning:

1. *Powerlessness*: "Nothing I do makes a difference." "You can't fight city hall."
2. *Normlessness*: "Being 'good' just won't cut it anymore." "Nice guys finish last."
3. *Meaninglessness*: "I can't make sense of it all anymore." "What's it all about?"
4. *Cultural estrangement*: "My culture's values aren't mine." "What is 'success,' anyway?"
5. *Self-estrangement*: "My work doesn't mean much to me." "What I learn in school isn't relevant."
6. *Social isolation*: "I'm alone." "I don't fit in." "No one visits me anymore."

Who hasn't felt at least one of these? Or know others who feel them? Some psychologists and sociologists have suggested that alienation is a sign of our times.

### Causes

Psychological distress is the feeling we experience when we face problems; psychological delight is the feeling we experience as we solve these problems. So delight depends on distress, because solving problems means first having problems. Now, although we spend a lot of time running away from problems – through defensiveness, or aggression, or mindless conformity – occasionally we *take on* problems. This requires will.

Will is putting aside present distress in order to reach future delight. Or staying hopeful, even eager, in the face of anxiety. Or taking on problems with the intention of solving them. I'm sure you can think of many things that require will: dieting, for example – ignoring the cheesecake and attending to the image of a future god or goddess. Or going to work or to class.... You can see why, in the research literature, will is often referred to as *delay of gratification*.

When we talk about will, we usually think immediately of what I shall call *instrumental will*. This is where the means and the ends are artificially connected: The distressful things you have to go through are not "naturally" connected to the delightful goals you are attempting to achieve.

*Instrumental production* – working for money and such – is the most obvious example: You put up with boredom, fatigue, anxiety, and all sorts of crap at work, so you can experience a little delight at other times (due almost exclusively to your paycheck!). Also qualifying as instrumental production for many people is school: You go to class and read books, not for the joy of learning, but for the almighty grade, followed by the glorious diploma, and hopefully ending with the financially-rewarding job.

In much of research, the motivation behind instrumental production is called *extrinsic motivation*.

Another example is *instrumental association*. You find this a lot at work, too. Think of all the people you have to be friendly to, even if you don't want to be. Think of the last time you had to talk to someone you didn't like – perhaps you recall how much your face hurt from smiling at this person all day! But this is a big part of business: You have chickens; Joe has chicken coops; You can't stand him, but for the sake of business, you put up with him.

Another name for instrumental association is *Gesellschaft*. Instrumental production and association together make up the central concern of economics-style social theories such as exchange theory.

It should be obvious at this point that I have another form of will in mind as well. I call it *natural will*, and it involves means and ends that are "naturally," even intimately, tied together. With natural will, the distress you put up with is due to the same problem which, when you solve it, provides the delight. Like instrumental will, it comes in two flavors:

*Natural production* includes much of what we call craftsmanship, art, and even science. The artist "sees" the end result of his efforts in the uncut marble, "sees" the final brush strokes on the blank canvas, "hears" how his unwritten song should sound. The artist knows what he wants, but must struggle to arrive. You sweat, you curse, but in the end you feel much like the child who proudly presents his clay ashtray to his parents.

The motivation behind natural production is often called *intrinsic motivation*.

There is, of course, also *natural association*. Lovers, families, friendships, clans, neighborhoods.... You sweat with them, too, and curse. But you "hang around" anyway, even if you don't have to. Although it takes will, we are supported by that totally irrational feeling that makes us want to "hang around" – love, or a sense of belonging at least. Your well-being is tied to another's well-being.

This is also called *Gemeinschaft*.

It is this natural production and association that does *not* operate by the economic rules of exchange theory, is *not* directed towards "outcomes," is done, in fact, for no economic reasons at all. It operates, rather, by non-mathematical principles having to do with increasing complexity in the service of life. Mystical stuff.

Examples abound: The bond between parent and child is often highly unrewarding, considered economically, yet it is a hard bond to break; the loyalty among soldiers will occasionally lead one to sacrifice his very life for the others; there's unrequited love...; the starving artist.... If you consider what we value most in life – honesty, generosity, caring, bravery – you will notice that these things *require* a lack of concern with costs and benefits! Running into a burning building to save a child only after being promised a million dollars isn't considered brave – just greedy.

It is true that the instrumental side of life has always been with us. It seems, for example, that we invented tools before we were who we are (*homo sapiens*), and tools are the very symbol of instrumentality. Nevertheless, I feel comfortable calling the natural *natural* because it seems likely that it was far more common in our early history than it is today. The anthropologist Robert Redfield called the hypothetical situation of our earliest ancestors the *folk society*, and described it so:

[It is] small, isolated, nonliterate, and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity. The ways of living are conventionalized into that coherent system we call a "culture." Behavior is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical, and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type categories of experience and the familial group is the unit of action. The sacred prevails over the secular; the economy is one of status rather than the market.

That is, it is a society marked by predominantly natural associations and natural production. Our society, I think you would agree, is highly instrumental in comparison.

### Consequences

When, in our highly instrumental society, we find ourselves without natural association and production, we feel alienation.

Normally, living instrumentally doesn't lead to alienation. After a hard day of instrumental association, I can go home and relax with family and friends – my natural associations. I may even have some friends at work. And, at the end of the week, after all my hard instrumental work, I get my paycheck, which (after taking care of the necessities) brings me some natural pleasures – movies, books, restaurants, hobbies, sports.... And I may even get some natural satisfaction in my work itself.

Unfortunately, in a largely instrumental society, these things are easily undermined. First, we may discover that we lack natural associations – that we are rather lonely people. There may be a fundamental scarcity of natural associations: Our families are very small, we move around a lot, friends and lovers come and go. One death in a modern day "subnuclear" family, for example, can be far more devastating than many deaths in a tribal community.

We can also *lose faith* in people. We teach our kids "never judge a book by its cover," "all that glitters is not gold," "never take candy from a stranger...." We teach them to take people *not* as they appear to be, but to look for hidden motives, to look for what they are really after – to look at them instrumentally. But what happens, then, when the child decides to put Daddy in the same category he has been taught to use with the used-car salesman? The natural is undermined by the instrumental.

We also discover our lack of natural production – our boredom. Again, the scarcity of natural production is a problem: How many "creative" jobs are there, really? How much of even a good job is actually interesting? How much time and money can we spend on our rather contrived (i.e. instrumental) hobbies and sports?

Further, as with association, instrumental production tends to drive out natural production. Remember Deci's research? Give kids gold stars for what they enjoy doing and, before you know it, they no longer do it unless the gold star is waiting! Paying an artist for creativity or a thinker for inventiveness is like paying someone for sex... the thrill soon evaporates.

But even with little in the way of natural association and production, we can get along quite well. The instrumental life still has its rewards. There has to be something that *triggers* alienation, that makes us aware of it: This happens when instrumental association and production *fail*, that is, when we are faced with the fact that all that work actually does not lead to happiness.

The failure of instrumental association and production can happen in two ways. First, it can be a matter of *means*: If we lose our jobs, to use the obvious example, we can't pay our bills – and our pleasures are the first things we have to sacrifice. If you flunk out of college, there is no degree, and no fine career, waiting for us.

The failure of the instrumental can also be a matter of *ends*: Money can provide an opportunity for natural enjoyments, but it can't buy them. Our inclination, when life begins to bore us, is to throw more money into "entertainment." But when the entertainment fails to entertain, we ask ourselves "is this all there is?"

### **Back to the beginning**

We can go back and review Seeman's six aspects of alienation using the preceding analysis: In regards to production, we too often find ourselves facing an absence of the natural or intrinsically rewarding (*meaninglessness*). Further, we face the failure of instrumental means (*powerlessness*) and the ultimately unsatisfying nature of instrumental ends (*self-estrangement*).

Likewise, in regards to association, we find ourselves facing an absence of the natural (*social isolation*), the failure of instrumental means (*normlessness*), and the ultimately unsatisfying nature of instrumental ends (*cultural estrangement*).

The solution to alienation is now clear: Correct or reverse the courses described above. First, the alienated person needs to find work that does in fact lead to rewards that are in fact rewarding! This, more often than not, is a social and political issue: Where does one find such work and how does one train for it?

But beyond this, the alienated person needs to find and maintain sources of natural production and association – meaningful activities and loving relationships. A part of this, too, is social and political, and often even a matter of luck. But it may also require changes in a person's ways of perceiving and thinking about work and people and themselves.

It is somewhat surprising that, for all the variation in theories, there is considerable agreement regarding therapy.

First, there is an emphasis on self-awareness or, as Freud put it, making the unconscious conscious. We encourage our clients to understand their biological, social, and personal unconscious and related motivations, to examine the conflicts between their needs and the standards society and they themselves impose, and to look behind their defensive posturings.

We are also taught to encourage our clients to discover more conscious, higher motivations – meaning the development of competence, creativity, and compassion, becoming valuable to oneself and to others....

And the means of therapy? We are taught to use genuinely caring dialog, and to provide support (not management or control) with a goal of eventual autonomy for the client.

Now, each theory has its own set of preferred techniques. Some, such as the radical behaviorist approach, insist that techniques are all you need. Others, such as Rogers' approach, suggest that you don't need techniques at all, just an empathic, respectful, and honest personal presence. Probably the majority of therapists, however, follow the middle path and use a few techniques that they have found useful and that fit their clients' and their own personalities.

In addition, we now have a fairly reliable set of drugs that appear to help. Our understanding of the physiological bases for psychological problems has been growing rapidly, and, while that understanding is far from complete, it has allowed us to help people more effectively. Most therapists are still hesitant to rely entirely on medications, perhaps rightly so. But these medications certainly seem to help in emergency situations and for those whose suffering just doesn't respond to our talk therapies.

Next, let's take a look at some of the better known forms of therapy.

### 19.1 Sigmund Freud

Freud (with his friend Joseph Breuer and Breuer's client Bertha Pappenheim, better known as "Anna O") invented psychotherapy. That's why we still keep him in our hearts – even though he was wrong about so many things. The basic idea is very simple: Provide the patient with a comfortable physical environment and a safe social environment. That's the idea behind the famous couch and the reason for the tapestries on the walls of Freud's office, and the reason he sat out-of-view of the patient. Then, let the patient talk about whatever comes to mind – free association. He or she will inevitably drift towards his deeper concerns, while a direct attack would simply cause resistance. Help the client make sense of such clues to the unconscious as dreams, accidents, and slips of the tongue (Freudian slips, of course). Encourage the patient to bring the unresolved unconscious conflicts into the open by allowing him or her to express these feelings to the therapist (transference). Help the client to reexperience the original trauma in the safety of the therapy situation (catharsis). And help him or her to understand the source of the trauma and lay the experience back to rest (insight).

For all the criticism we sometimes heap on old Sigmund, this isn't far from what we all do as therapists. His particular form of therapy worked best for the conversion disorders experienced by many of his upper-class young female patients suffering, as they did, from the repression of their natural sexuality. Of course, it wasn't as effective with other types of neurosis.

## 19.2 Carl Jung

Another common theme in therapy is the idea of balance. This idea goes all the way back to the ancients. The Greek's theory of health emphasized that your bodily fluids, called humors, needed to be kept in balance. If one humor or another were to gain dominance, the result is ill-health, including psychological problems. Chinese and Indian traditional medicine also emphasizes this balance or harmony of parts.

Carl Jung's entire theory revolves around balance, especially between anima and animus (one's feminine and masculine aspects) and between the ego (one's individuality) and the shadow (one's biology). The former in particular has received a great deal of attention and empirical support: Androgenous people (those who combine qualities of both the "feminine" and the "masculine") appear to be mentally healthier. The latter also has support: For example, people who are able to think in "shades of gray" are much more mature than those who see everything as black and white, good vs. evil, us vs. Them.

## 19.3 Otto Rank

Otto Rank was another one of Freud's close associates, and his theory picks out one particular form of balance that would inspire many other theorists. He was interested in the minds of artists – famous painters, musicians, and writers. On the one hand, Rank says, the artist has a particularly strong tendency towards glorification of his own will. Unlike the rest of us, he feels compelled to remake reality in his own image. And yet a true artist also desires immortality, which he can only achieve by identifying himself with the collective will of his culture and religion. Good art could be understood as a joining of the material and the spiritual, the specific and the universal, or the individual and humanity.

This joining doesn't come easily, though. It begins with the will, Rank's word for the ego, but an ego imbued with power. We are all born with a will to be ourselves, to be free of domination. In early childhood, we exercise our will in our efforts to do things independently of our parents. Later, we fight the domination of other authorities, including the inner authority of our sexual drives. How our struggle for independence goes determines the type of person we become. Rank describes three basic types:

First, there is the adapted type. These people learn to "will" what they have been forced to do. They obey authority, their society's moral code, and, as best as they can, their sexual impulses. This is a passive, duty-bound creature that Rank suggests is, in fact, the average person.

Second, there is the neurotic type. These people have a much stronger will than the average person, but it is totally engaged in the fight against external and internal domination. They even fight the expression of their own will, so there is no will left over to actually do anything with the freedom won. Instead, they worry and feel guilty about being so "willful." They are, however, at a higher level of moral development than the adapted type.

Third, there is the productive type, which Rank also refers to as the artist, the genius, the creative type, the self-conscious type, and, simply, the human being. Instead of fighting themselves, these people accept and affirm themselves, and create an ideal, which functions as a positive focus for will. The artist creates himself or herself, and then goes on to create a new world as well.

To explain the roots of these types, Rank suggested that we all have within us two conflicting instincts, which he call the life instinct and the death instinct. The "life instinct" pushes us to become individuals, competent and independent. The "death instinct" pushes us to be part of a family, community, or humanity. We also feel an aversion to each: The "fear of life" is the fear of separation, loneliness, and alienation; the "fear of death" is the fear of getting lost in the whole, stagnating, being no-one.

### 19.4 Alfred Adler

There are considerable differences between Adler's therapy and Freud's: First, Adler preferred to have everyone sitting up and talking face to face. Further, he went to great lengths to avoid appearing too authoritarian. In fact, he advised that the therapist never allow the patient to force him into the role of an authoritarian figure, because that allows the patient to play some of the same games he or she is likely to have played many times before: The patient may set you up as a savior, only to attack you when you inevitably reveal your humanness. By pulling you down, they feel as if they are raising themselves, with their neurotic lifestyles, up.

This is essentially the explanation Adler gave for resistance: When a patient forgets appointments, comes in late, demands special favors, or generally becomes stubborn and uncooperative, it is not, as Freud thought, a matter of repression. Rather, resistance is just a sign of the patient's lack of courage to give up their neurotic lifestyle.

The patient must come to understand the nature of his or her lifestyle and its roots in self-centered fictions. This understanding or insight cannot be forced: If you just tell someone "look, here is your problem!" he or she will only pull away from you and look for ways of bolstering their present fictions. Instead, A patient must be brought into such a state of feeling that he likes to listen, and wants to understand. Only then can he be influenced to live what he has understood. (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956, p. 335.) It is the patient, not the therapist, who is ultimately responsible for curing him- or herself.

The goal is to help the client realize his or her own self – his or her "style of life" as Adler put it. Style of life refers to how you live your life, how you handle problems and interpersonal relations. Here's what he himself had to say about it: "The style of life of a tree is the individuality of a tree expressing itself and molding itself in an environment. We recognize a style when we see it against a background of an environment different from what we expect, for then we realize that every tree has a life pattern and is not merely a mechanical reaction to the environment."

Finally, the therapist must encourage the patient, which means awakening his or her social interest, and the energy that goes with it. By developing a genuine human relationship with the patient, the therapist provides the basic form of social interest, which the patient can then transfer to others.

### 19.5 Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers is best known for his contributions to therapy. His therapy has gone through a couple of name changes along the way: He originally called it non-directive, because he felt that the therapist should not lead the client, but rather be there for the client while the client directs the progress of the therapy. As he became more experienced, he realized that, as "non-directive" as he was, he still influenced his client by his very "non-directiveness!" In other words, clients look to therapists for guidance, and will find it even when the therapist is trying not to guide.

So he changed the name to client-centered. He still felt that the client was the one who should say what is wrong, find ways of improving, and determine the conclusion of therapy – his therapy was still very "client-centered" even while he acknowledged the impact of the therapist. Unfortunately, other therapists felt that this name for his therapy was a bit of a slap in the face for them: Aren't most therapies "client-centered?"

Nowadays, though the terms non-directive and client-centered are still used, most people just call it Rogerian therapy. One of the phrases that Rogers used to describe his therapy is "supportive, not reconstructive," and he uses the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle to explain: When you help a child to learn to ride a bike, you can't just tell them how. They have to try it for themselves. And you can't hold them up the whole time either. There comes a point when you have to let them go. If they fall, they fall, but if you hang on, they never learn.

It's the same in therapy. If independence (autonomy, freedom with responsibility) is what you are helping a client to achieve, then they will not achieve it if they remain dependent on you, the therapist. They need to try their insights on their own, in real life beyond the therapist's office! An authoritarian approach to therapy may seem to work marvelously at first, but ultimately it only creates a dependent person.

There is only one technique that Rogerians are known for: reflection. Reflection is the mirroring of emotional communication: If the client says "I feel like shit!" the therapist may reflect this back to the client by saying something like "So, life's getting you down, hey?" By doing this, the therapist is communicating to the client that he is indeed listening and cares enough to understand.

The therapist is also letting the client know what it is the client is communicating. Often, people in distress say things that they don't mean because it feels good to say them. For example, a woman once came to me and said "I hate men!" I reflected by saying "You hate all men?" Well, she said, maybe not all – she didn't hate her father or her brother or, for that matter, me. Even with those men she "hated," she discovered that the great majority of them she didn't feel as strongly as the word hate implies. In fact, ultimately, she realized that she didn't *trust* many men, and that she was *afraid of being hurt* by them the way she had been by one particular man.

Reflection must be used carefully, however. Many beginning therapists use it without thinking (or feeling), and just repeat every other phrase that comes out of the client's mouth. They sound like parrots with psychology degrees! Then they think that the client doesn't notice, when in fact it has become a stereotype of Rogerian therapy the same way as sex and mom have become stereotypes of Freudian therapy. Reflection must come from the heart – it must be genuine, congruent.

Which brings us to Rogers' famous requirements of the therapist. Rogers felt that a therapist, in order to be effective, must have three very special qualities:

1. *Congruence* – genuineness, honesty with the client.
2. *Empathy* – the ability to feel what the client feels.
3. *Respect* – acceptance, unconditional positive regard towards the client.

He says these qualities are "necessary and sufficient:" If the therapist shows these three qualities, the client will improve, even if no other special "techniques" are used. If the therapist does not show these three qualities, the client's improvement will be minimal, no matter how many "techniques" are used. Now this is a lot to ask of a therapist! They're just human, and often enough a bit more "human" (let's say unusual) than most. Rogers does give in a little, and he adds that the therapist must show these things in the therapy relationship. In other words, when the therapist leaves the office, he can be as "human" as anybody.

I happen to agree with Rogers, even though these qualities are quite demanding. Some of the research does suggest that techniques don't matter nearly as much as the therapist's personality, and that, to some extent at least, therapists are "born" not "made."

### 19.6 George Kelly

Therapy is a matter of freeing clients from the dead-end perceptions and behaviors and cognitions and emotions they have set up to protect themselves from the hardships of life. Snygg and Combs once said that "Therapy is the provision of a facilitating situation wherein the normal drive of the organism for maintenance or enhancement of organization is freed to operate." This can be done by active intervention by a therapist or by enabling the client to discover his or her own differentiations, depending on the individual's needs.

If a person's problem is poor construction, then the solution should be *reconstruction*, a term Kelly was tempted to use for his style of therapy. Psychotherapy involves getting the client to reconstrue, to see things in a different way, from a new perspective, one that allows the choices that lead to elaboration.

Kellian therapists essentially ask their clients to join them in a series of experiments concerning the clients' life styles. They may ask their clients to loosen their constructs, to slip them around, to test them, to tighten them up again, to "try them on for size." The intent is to encourage movement, essential for any progress.

Kelly, with his background in drama, liked to use role-playing (or enactment) to encourage movement. He might take the part of your mother and have you express your feelings. After a while, he might ask you to reverse roles with him – you be your mother, and he'll be you! In this way, you become aware of your own construction of your relationship and your mother's construction. Perhaps you will begin to understand her, or see ways in which you might adapt. You may come to a compromise, or discover an entirely new perspective that rises above both.

Kelly's therapy often involves home-work, things he would ask you to do outside the therapy situation. His best known technique is called fixed-role therapy. First, he asks you for a description of yourself, a couple of pages in the third person, which he calls the character sketch. Then he constructs, perhaps with the help of a colleague, another description, called the fixed-role sketch, of a pretend person.

He writes this sketch by examining your original sketch carefully and using constructs that are "at right angles" to the constructs you used. This means that the new constructs are independent of the original ones, but they are used in a similar way, that is, they refer to the same range of elements.

If, for example, I use genius-idiot as a construct in dealing with people, I don't give them a lot of room to be somewhere in between, and I don't allow much for change. And, since we use the same constructs on ourselves as we use for others, I don't give myself much slack either. On a really good day, I might call myself a genius. On most days, I'd have no choice, if I used such a dramatic construct, but to call myself an idiot. And idiots stay idiots; they don't turn into geniuses. So, I'd be setting myself up for depression, not to mention for a life with very few friends.

Kelly might write a fixed-role sketch with a construct like skilled-unskilled. This is a much more "humane" construct than genius-idiot. It is much less judgmental: A person can, after all, be skilled in one area, yet unskilled in another. And it allows for change: If I find that I am unskilled in some area of importance, I can, with a little effort, become skilled.

Anyway, Kelly would then ask his client to be the person described in the fixed-role sketch for a week or two. Mind you, this is a full time commitment: He wants you to be this person 24 hours a day, at work, at home, even when you're alone. Kelly found that most people are quite good at this, and even enjoy it. After all, this person is usually much healthier than they are!

Should the client come back and say "Thank you, doc! I believe I'm cured. All I need to do now is be "Dave" instead of "George" for the rest of my life," Kelly would have a surprise in store: He might ask that person to play another fixed-role for a couple of weeks, one that might not be so positive. That's because the intent of this play-acting is not that the therapist give you a new personality. That would quickly come to nothing. The idea is to show you that you do, in fact, have the power to change, to "choose yourself."

Kellian therapy has, as its goal, opening people up to alternatives, helping them to discover their freedom, allowing them to live up to their potentials. For this reason, and many others, Kelly fits most appropriately among the humanistic psychologists.

### 19.7 Albert Ellis

Ellis sees neurosis as based on the presence of three main irrational beliefs:

1. "I must be outstandingly competent, or I am worthless."
2. "Others must treat me considerately, or they are absolutely rotten."
3. "The world should always give me happiness, or I will die."

The therapist uses his or her skills to argue against these irrational ideas in therapy, or, even better, leads the client to make the arguments. For example, the therapist may ask...

1. Is there any evidence for this belief?
2. What is the evidence against this belief?
3. What is the worst that can happen if you give up this belief?
4. And what is the best that can happen?

In addition to argument, the REBT therapist uses any other techniques that assist the client in changing their beliefs. They might use group therapy, use unconditional positive regard, provide risk-taking activities, assertiveness training, empathy training, perhaps using role playing techniques to do so, encourage self-management through behavior modification techniques, use systematic desensitization, and so on.

Ellis has come to emphasize more and more the importance of what he calls "unconditional self-acceptance." He says that, in REBT, no one is damned, no matter how awful their actions, and we should accept ourselves for what we are rather than for what we have achieved.

One approach he mentions is to convince the client of the intrinsic value of him or herself as a human being. Just being alive provides you with value.

He notes that most theories make a great deal out of self-esteem and ego-strength and similar concepts. We are naturally evaluating creatures, and that is fine. But we go from evaluating our traits and our actions to evaluating this vague holistic entity called "self." How can we do this? And what good does it do? Only harm, he believes.

There are, he says, legitimate reasons for promoting one's self or ego: We want to stay alive and be healthy, we want to enjoy life, and so on. But there are far more ways in which promoting the self or ego does harm, as exemplified by these irrational beliefs:

- I am special or I am damned.
- I must be loved or cared for.
- I must be immortal.
- I am either good or bad.
- I must prove myself.
- I must have everything that I want.

He believes very strongly that self-evaluation leads to depression and repression, and avoidance of change. The best thing for human health is that we should stop evaluating ourselves altogether!

But perhaps this idea of a self or an ego is overdrawn. Ellis is quite skeptical about the existence of a "true" or "real" self, ala Horney or Rogers. He especially dislikes the idea that there is a conflict between a self promoted by actualization versus one promoted by society. In fact, he says, one's nature and one's society are more likely to be mutually supporting than antagonistic.

He certainly sees no evidence for a transpersonal self or soul. Buddhism, for example, does quite well without it! And he is skeptical about the altered states of consciousness mystical traditions and transpersonal psychology recommend. In fact, he sees these states as being more inauthentic than transcendent!

On the other hand, he sees his approach as coming out of the ancient Stoic tradition, and supported by such philosophers as Spinoza. He sees additional similarities in existentialism and existential psychology. Any approach that puts the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the individual and his or her beliefs is likely to have commonalities with Ellis's REBT.

### 19.8 Existential Therapy

Existential psychologists make a point of discovering their client's world view (or world design). This is not a matter of discussing a person's religion or philosophy of life, necessarily. They want to know about your *Lebenswelt*, Husserl's word for "lived world." He is looking for a concrete, everyday world view.

Ludwig Binswanger will, for example, try to understand how you see your *Umwelt* or physical world – things, buildings, trees, furniture, gravity....

He will want to understand your *Mitwelt*, or social world, as well. Here we are talking about your relations to individuals, to community, to culture, and so on.

And he will want to understand your *Eigenwelt* or personal world. This includes both mind and body, whatever you feel is most central to your sense of who you are.

Binswanger also talks about different *modes*: Some people live in a *singular* mode, alone and self-sufficient. Others live in a *dual* mode, as a "you and me" rather than an "I." Some live in a *plural* mode, thinking of themselves in terms of their membership in something larger than themselves – a nation, a religion, an organization, a culture. Still others live in an *anonymous* mode, quiet, secretive, in the background of life. And most of us live in all these modes from time to time and place to place.

Our relationship with others is as important to existential psychologist Medard Boss as it is to Binswanger. We are not individuals locked up inside our bodies; We live rather in a shared world, and we illuminate each other. Human existence is shared existence.

While Binswanger likes to use Heidegger's *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt*, and *Eigenwelt*, Boss prefers Heidegger's *existentials*, the things in life that we all have to deal with. He is interested, for example, in how people see space and time – not the physical space and time of measured distances and clocks and calendars, but human space and time, personal space and time. Someone from long ago, who now lives far away, may be closer to you than the person next to you right now.

He is interested in your view of time. He would like to know how you view your past, present, and future. Do you live in the past, forever trying to recapture those golden days? Or do you live in the future, always preparing or hoping for a better life? Do you see your life as a long, complex adventure? Or a brief flash – here today, gone tomorrow?

Also of interest is the way you treat space. Is your world open, or is it closed? Is it cozy or is it vast? Is it warm or cold? Do you see life as movement, as a matter of journeys and adventures, or do you see it from an immovable center? None of these things mean anything all by themselves, of course, but combined with everything else, learned in the intimate relationship of therapy, they can mean a great deal.

Boss is also interested in how we relate to our bodies. My openness to the world will be expressed by my bodily openness and my extension of my body out into the world, what he calls my "bodying forth."

A particularly "Bossian" concern is *mood* or *attunement*: Boss suggested that, while we are always illuminating the world, we sometimes illuminate one thing more than another, or illuminate with different hues. It's no different from how we try to set a certain mood by lighting a room one way rather than another.

For example, if you are in an angry mood, you are "attuned" to angry things, angry thoughts, angry actions; you "see red." If you are in a cheerful mood, you are "attuned" to cheerful things, and the world seems "sunny." If you are hungry, all you see is food; if you are anxious, all you see are threats.

As you can see, the language of existential analysis is metaphor. Life is much too big, much too rich, to be captured by anything so crude as prose. My life is certainly too rich to be captured in words that you thought up before you even met me! Existential therapists allow their clients to reveal themselves, disclose themselves, in their own words, in their own time.

Boss has studied dreams more than any other existentialist, and considers them important in therapy. But instead of interpreting them as Freudians or Jungians do, he allows them to reveal their own meanings. Everything is not hiding behind a symbol, hiding from the always-present censor. Instead, dreams show us how we are illuminating our lives: If we feel trapped, our feet will be bound by cement; if we feel free, we will fly; if we feel guilty, we will dream about sin; if we feel anxious, we will be chased by frightening things. Existentialists might suggest that you let your dreams inspire you, let them guide you, let them suggest their own meanings. They may mean nothing, and they may mean everything.

The essence of existential therapy is the relationship between the therapist and the client, called an *encounter*. An encounter is the genuine presence of one Dasein to another, an "opening up" of one to the other. Unlike more "formal" therapies, such as Freud's, or more "technical" ones, such as the behaviorists', an existential therapist is likely to be involved with you. Transference and countertransference are seen as natural parts of the encounter, not to be abused, of course, but not to be avoided either.

On the other hand, humanists might find the existential therapist more formal than they, and more directive. The existential therapist is more likely to be "natural" with you – often quietly listening, but sometimes expressing their own thoughts, experiences, even emotions. "Being natural" also means acknowledging the differences between you. The therapist has the training and the experience, after all, and it is the client (presumably) who has the problems! Existential therapy is seen as a dialog, and not a monologue by the therapist, nor a monologue by the client.

But existential analysis has as its goal the autonomy of the client. Like teaching children to ride a bicycle, you may have to hold them up for a while, but eventually you have to let them go. They may well fall down, but if you never let them go, they will never learn to ride! If the "essence" of Dasein – being human – is freedom and responsibility for one's own life, then you can't help people become more fully human unless you are prepared to release them.

### 19.9 Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl is nearly as well known for certain clinical details of his approach as for his overall theory. The first of these details is a technique known as paradoxical intention, which is useful in breaking down the neurotic vicious cycles brought on by anticipatory anxiety and hyperintention.

*Paradoxical intention* is a matter of wishing the very thing you are afraid of. A young man who sweated profusely whenever he was in social situations was told by Frankl to wish to sweat. "I only sweated out a quart before, but now I'm going to pour at least ten quarts!" (1973, p. 223) was among his instructions. Of course, when it came down to it, the young man couldn't do it. The absurdity of the task broke the vicious cycle.

The capacity human beings have of taking an objective stance towards their own life, or stepping outside themselves, is the basis, Frankl tells us, for humor. And, as he noted in the camps, "Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation." (1963, p. 68)

Another example concerns sleep problems: If you suffer from insomnia, according to Frankl, don't spend the night tossing and turning and trying to sleep. Get up! Try to stay up as long as you can! Over time, you'll find yourself gratefully crawling back into bed.

A second technique is called *dereflection*. Frankl believes that many problems stem from an overemphasis on oneself. By shifting attention away from oneself and onto others, problems often disappear. If, for example, you have difficulties with sex, try to satisfy your partner without seeking your own gratification. Concerns over erections and orgasms disappear – and satisfaction reappears! Or don't try to satisfy anyone at all. Many sex therapists suggest that a couple do nothing but "pet," avoiding orgasms "at all costs." These couples often find they can barely last the evening before what they had previously had difficulties with simply happens!

Frankl insists that, in today's world, there is far too much emphasis on self-reflection. Since Freud, we have been encouraged to look into ourselves, to dig out our deepest motivations. Frankl even refers to this tendency as our "collective obsessive neurosis." (1975, p. 95) Focusing on ourselves this way actually serves to turn us away from meaning!

For all the interest these techniques have aroused, Frankl insists that, ultimately, the problems these people face are a matter of their need for meaning. So, although these and other techniques are a fine beginning to therapy, they are not by any means the goal.

"(H)uman existence – at least as long as it has not been neurotically distorted – is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter lovingly." (1975, p. 78) Frankl calls this self-transcendence, and contrasts it with self-actualization as Maslow uses the term. Self-actualization, even pleasure and happiness, are side-effects of self-transcendence and the discovery of meaning.

### 19.10 Rollo May

For the American Existential psychologist Rollo May, the most important motive for most people is *eros*. Eros is love (not sex), and in Greek mythology was a minor god pictured as a young man (who the Victorians would later transform into that annoying little pest, Cupid). May understood love as the need we have to "become one" with another person, and refers to an ancient Greek story by Aristophanes: People were originally four-legged, four-armed, two-headed creatures. When we became a little too prideful, the gods split us in two, male and female, and cursed us with the never-ending desire to recover our missing half!

Just like with Rank, another important concept for May is *will*, which he defines as the ability to organize oneself in order to achieve one's goals. This makes will roughly synonymous with ego and reality-testing, but with its own store of energy, as in ego psychology.

Another definition of will is "the ability to make wishes come true." Wishes are "playful imaginings of possibilities," and are manifestations of our daimons. Many wishes, of course, come from eros. But they require will to make them happen! Hence, we can see three "personality types" coming out of our relative supply, you might say, of our wishes for love and the will to realize them. Note that he doesn't actually come out and name them – that would be too categorical for an existentialist – and they are not either-or pigeon holes by any means. But he does use various terms to refer to them, and I have picked representative ones.

There is the type he refers to as "neo-Puritan," who is all will, but no love. They have amazing self-discipline, and can "make things happen"... but they have no wishes to act upon. So they become "anal" and perfectionistic, but empty and "dried-up." The archetypal example is Ebenezer Scrooge.

The second type he refers to as "infantile." They are all wishes but no will. Filled with dreams and desires, they don't have the self-discipline to make anything of their dreams and desires, and so become dependent and conformist. They love, but their love means little. Perhaps Homer Simpson is the clearest example!

The last type is the "creative" type. May recommends, wisely, that we should cultivate a balance of these two aspects of our personalities. He said "Man's task is to unite love and will."

As I said, these concepts are pretty universal among personality psychologists, even when the words we use differ. I use the words individuality and community. Others use words such as autonomy and homonymy, agency and communion, egoism and altruism, and so on. Founded in our instincts for assertiveness and nurturance, in their highest forms they are self-enhancement and self-transcendence, respectively.

Whatever the words, the balance to be achieved is between the impulse to serve oneself (becoming all one can be as an individual) and the impulse to serve others (become one with the universe of others). But serve only yourself, and you end up alone; serve only others, and you lose your identity. Instead, one must serve oneself in order to serve others well, and serve others in order to best serve oneself. At some point the two aren't so much balanced as working synergistically. Here's a nice quote from good old Einstein that sums it up nicely:

*Man is, at one and the same time, a solitary being and a social being. As a solitary being, he attempts to protect his own existence and that of those who are closest to him, to satisfy his personal desires, and to develop his innate abilities. As a social being, he seeks to gain the recognition and affection of his fellow human beings, to share in their pleasures, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to improve their conditions of life. Only the existence of these varied, frequently conflicting strivings accounts for the special character of a man, and their specific combination determines the extent to which an individual can achieve an inner equilibrium and can contribute to the well-being of society. (Einstein, "Why Socialism?" in Monthly Review, NY, May 1949)*

### 19.11 The eightfold path

As promised, we now take a look at the Buddhist approach:

The first two segments of the path are referred to as *prajña*, meaning wisdom:

*Right view* – understanding the Four Noble Truths, especially the nature of all things as imperfect, impermanent, and insubstantial and our self-inflicted suffering as founded in clinging, hate, and ignorance.

*Right aspiration* – having the true desire to free oneself from attachment, hatefulness, and ignorance.

The idea that improvement comes only when the sufferer takes the first step of aspiring to improvement is apparently 2500 years old.

Therapy is something neither the therapist nor the client takes lying down – if you will pardon the pun. The therapist must take an assertive role in helping the client become aware of the reality of his or her suffering and its roots. Likewise, the client must take an assertive role in working towards improvement – even though it means facing the fears they've been working so hard to avoid, and especially facing the fear that they will "lose" themselves in the process.

The next three segments of the path provide more detailed guidance in the form of moral precepts, called *sila*:

*Right speech* – abstaining from lying, gossiping, and hurtful speech generally.

Speech is often our ignorance made manifest, and is the most common way in which we harm others. Modern psychologists emphasize that one should above all stop lying to oneself. But Buddhism adds that by practicing being true to others, and one will find it increasingly difficult to be false to oneself.

*Right action* – behaving oneself, abstaining from actions that hurt others (and, by implication, oneself) such as killing, stealing, and irresponsible sex.

*Right livelihood* – making one's living in an honest, non-hurtful way.

Here's one we don't talk about much in our society today. One can only wonder how much suffering comes out of the greedy, cut-throat, dishonest careers we often participate in. This by no means means we must all be monks: Imagine the good one can do as an honest, compassionate, hard-working accountant, business person, lawyer, or politician!

I have to pause here to add another Buddhist concept to the picture: *karma*. Basically, karma refers to good and bad deeds and the consequences they bring. In some branches of Buddhism, karma has to do with what kind of reincarnation to expect. But other branches see it more simply as the negative (or positive) effects one's actions have on one's integrity. Beyond the effects of your selfish acts have on others, for example, each selfish act "darkens your soul," and makes happiness that much harder to find. On the other hand, each act of kindness, as the gypsies say, "comes back to you three times over." To put it simply, virtue is its own reward, and vice its own hell.

The last three segments of the path are the ones Buddhism is most famous for, and concern *samadhi* or meditation. I must say that, despite the popular conception, without wisdom and morality, meditation is worthless, and may even be dangerous.

*Right effort* – taking control of your mind and the contents thereof.

Simple, direct practice is what it takes, the developing of good mental habits: When bad thoughts and impulses arise, they should be abandoned. This is done by watching the thought without attachment, recognizing it for what it is (no denial or repression!), and letting it dissipate. Good thoughts and impulses, on the other hand, should be nurtured and enacted. Make virtue a habit, as the stoics used to say.

There are four "sublime states" (brahma vihara) that some Buddhists talk about. These sublime states are fully experienced by saintly creatures called bodhisattvas, but the rest of us should practice them every moment of every day as an exercise in self-improvement. They are loving kindness to all you meet, compassion for those who are suffering, joy for others without envy, and equanimity or a peaceful, evenly balanced attitude towards the ups and downs of life.

*Right mindfulness* – mindfulness refers to a kind of meditation involving an acceptance of thoughts and perceptions, a "bare attention" to these events without attachment.

It is called *vipassana* in the Theravada (southern Buddhism) tradition, and *shikantaza* in the Ch'an (Zen) tradition. But it is understood that this mindfulness is to extend to daily life as well. It becomes a way of developing a fuller, richer awareness of life, and a deterrent to our tendency to sleepwalk our way through life.

One of the most important moral precepts in Buddhism is the avoidance of consciousness-diminishing or altering substances – i.e. alcohol or drugs. This is because anything that makes you less than fully aware sends you in the opposite direction of improvement into deeper ignorance.

But there are other things besides drugs that diminish consciousness. Some people try to avoid life by disappearing into food or sexuality. Others disappear into work, mindless routine, or rigid, self-created rituals.

Drowning oneself in entertainment is one of today's favorite substitutes for heroin. I think that modern media, especially television, make it very difficult to maintain our balance. I would like to see a return to the somewhat Victorian concept of "edifying diversions:" see a good movie on PBS or videotape – no commercials, please – or read a good book, listen to good music, and so on.

We can also drown awareness in material things – fast cars, extravagant clothes, and so on. Shopping has itself become a way of avoiding life. Worst of all is the blending of materiality with entertainment. While monks and nuns avoid frivolous diversions and luxurious possessions, we surround ourselves with commercials, infomercials, and entire shopping networks, as if they were effective forms of "pain control!"

*Right concentration* – meditating in such a way as to empty our natures of attachments, avoidances, and ignorance, so that we may accept the imperfection, impermanence, and insubstantiality of life.

This is usually thought of as the highest form of Buddhist meditation, and full practice of it is pretty much restricted to monks and nuns who have progressed considerably along the path.

But just like the earlier paths provide a foundation for later paths, later ones often support earlier ones. For example, a degree of "calm abiding" (*shamatha*), a beginning version of concentration, is essential for developing mindfulness, and is taught to all beginning meditators. This is the counting of breaths or chanting of mantras most people have heard of. This passifying of the mind is, in fact, important to mindfulness, effort, all moral practice, and even the maintaining of view and aspiration. I believe that this simple form of meditation is the best place for those who are suffering to begin – though once again, the rest of the eightfold path is essential for long-term improvement.

### 19.12 Biosocial therapy

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
the courage to change the things I can change;  
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Now this is just what we need: Another approach to psychotherapy! Don't panic, though. I have no intention (nor the competence) to invent a new form of therapy. Instead, allow me to outline what I think are some of the best ideas to be found in the various therapies we discussed above, while relating these ideas to the basic orientation of biosocial psychology.

Basically, psychotherapy is a form of education. Like old Socrates once said, a bad man does bad things out of ignorance. If he knew better, he wouldn't do these things. The same applies to someone with psychological problems. So our job as therapists is to be educators – or, as Socrates would say, to help people remember what they already know.

#### 1. Gaining control of the beast

Those of us that develop psychological problems are likely to have physiological roots to those problems. Especially common are overly strong emotional responses. Sometimes it is the lack of responsiveness. Sometimes it is the strength or weakness of physical needs such as our need for food or sex. Sometimes it is an acquired need, such as the need for alcohol or heroin. With inadequate coping skills and sufficient stress, we react in ways that are not helpful. So one thing we can try to do is to find a way to remedy the original physiological weaknesses.

Drugs should not be discounted. There is nothing particularly noble about doing without them. Mental health is not a matter of "willpower"! Even drugs that are presently illegal may well have their uses. Always remember the central idea of biosocial psychology: Mind and body are not two separate things. Psychological pain is physical pain, and physical pain is psychological pain, and likewise for everything else we've discussed in this book. Drugs can be your worst enemy or the best friend you've ever had.

Other ways of developing some control over emotions, needs, and instinctual processes include meditation, music, art...

The most basic form of meditation involves attending to one's breath. Begin by sitting in a simple chair, keeping your back erect if you can. The more traditional postures are the lotus position, sitting on a pillow with each foot upon the opposite thigh, and variations such as the half lotus (one foot on the opposite thigh, the other out in front of the opposite knee). This is difficult for many people. Some people kneel, sitting back on their legs or on a pillow between their legs. Many use a meditation bench: kneel, then place a little bench beneath your behind. But meditation is also done while standing, slowly walking, lying on the floor, or even in a recliner!

Traditionally, the hands are placed loosely, palms up, one on top of the other, and with the thumbs lightly touching. This is called the cosmic **mudra**, one of a large number of symbolic hand positions. You may prefer to lay them flat on your thighs, or any other way that you find comfortable.

Your head should be upright, but not rigid. The eyes may be closed, or focussed on a spot on the ground a couple of feet ahead of you, or looking down at your hands. If you find yourself getting sleepy, keep your eyes open!

Beginning meditators are often asked to count their breath, on the exhale, up to ten. Then you begin back at one. If you lose track, simply go back to one. Your breath should be slow and regular, but not forced or artificially controlled. Just breathe naturally and count.

A few weeks later, you may forego the counting and try to simply follow your breath. Concentrate on it entering you and exiting you. Best is to be aware as fully as possible of the entire process of breathing, but most people focus on one aspect or another: the sensation of coolness followed by warmth at the nostrils, or the rise and fall of the diaphragm. Many meditators suggest imagining the air entering and exiting a small hole an inch or two below your navel. Keeping your mind lower on the body tends to lead to deeper meditation. If you are sleepy, then focus higher, such as at the nostrils.

You will inevitably find yourself distracted by sounds around you and thoughts within. The way to handle them is to acknowledge them, but do not attach yourself to them. Do not get involved with them. Just let them be, let them go, and focus again on the breath. At first, it might be wise to scratch when you itch and wiggle when you get uncomfortable. Later, you will find that the same scant attention that you use for thoughts and sounds will work with physical feelings as well.

Many people have a hard time with their thoughts. We are so used to our hyperactive minds, that we barely notice the fact that they are usually roaring with activity. So, when we first sit and meditate, we are caught off guard by all the activity. So some people find it helpful to use a little imagination to help them meditate. For example, instead of counting or following your breath, you might prefer to imagine a peaceful scene, perhaps floating in a warm lagoon, until the noise of your mind quiets down.

Meditate for fifteen minutes a day, perhaps early in the morning before the rest of the house wakes up, or late at night when everything has quieted down. If that's too much, do it once a week if you like. If you want, do more.

If you are more of a physical person, rather than a mental one, you might prefer progressive relaxation, the technique developed by Joseph Wolpe for systematic desensitization. Or try yoga or tai chi. Or sit in a comfortable chair and listen to calm classical or "new age" music. When I am stressed, I sometimes play Albinoni's adagios while watching my screen saver, which has peaceful pictures of places and things that I've collected over the years from the internet. These can all be considered forms of meditation!

Most therapists know: Anxiety is the most common manifestation of psychological suffering. And when it's not anxiety, it's unresolved anger. And when it's not anger, it's pervasive sadness. All three of these can be toned down to a manageable level by simple meditation. Meditation will not eliminate these things – that requires wisdom and morality and the entire Buddhist program – but it will give the sufferer a chance to acquire the wisdom, morality, etc!

Beyond recommending simple meditation, therapists might recommend simplification of lifestyle, avoidance of sensationalistic or exploitative entertainment, a holiday from the news, a retreat to a monastery, or a simple weekend vacation. When it comes to mental health, less is more!

### 2. Seeing what is there

Therapy is an art, not a science. The therapist must deal with individual human beings, and no general laws of human nature will ever cover the uniqueness of the individual before him or her. The therapist must come to understand the client "from the inside out," understand the world the client lives in, in an act of creative empathy. That will then permit you to begin where the client is, rather than from where you would like to see him or her go! And it doesn't hurt if you as a therapist have experienced some anxiety or depression or anger in your life. Heaven forbid you haven't had any problems or even traumas! These will only help you experience the client's suffering more clearly.

People with psychological problems follow their interpretation of reality, rather than an accurate perception of it. We start off our lives obeying authority – mom, dad, your teacher, the cop on the corner... This becomes conformity to "everybody", as in "everybody knows you should do x and not y!" From this, we build a constructed reality, using our social constructs. This in turn keeps us from seeing the world as it is, from seeing unconstructed reality, "raw" reality – the peach pit under all that fuzz. And we can only be free from "everybody" when we have learned to differentiate constructs from phenomena.

We do this by (1) understanding intentionality and (2) practicing bracketing. Intentionality means being open to all aspects of the phenomenon, not leaving out what belongs. So we must allow phenomena – whether it be a thing out there, or a feeling or thought inside us, or another person, or human existence itself – to reveal itself to us. We can do this by being open to the experience, by not denying what is there because it doesn't fit our philosophy or psychological theory or religious beliefs. Spiegelberg said "The genuine will to know calls for the spirit of generosity rather than for that of economy..." (1965, p. 657.)

Bracketing is the other side of the coin. Bracketing means setting aside all our usual, "natural" assumptions about the phenomena. You can't hear something (or someone) if you are loudly telling it what it is! Practically speaking, this means we must put aside our biases, prejudices, theories, philosophies, religions, even common sense, and accept the phenomenon for what it is. If therapists brought all their prejudices into the therapy situation with them, they would never be able to understand their clients in all their frustrating uniqueness. The same is true for any human being!

One very odd, but important, point (originally suggested by Viktor Frankl): Do not over-analyze! The idea is to get an accurate, realistic perception, not to dig for unconscious explanations. In fact, we are not looking for explanations at all, really – just the facts. Dwelling on the problem makes it an emotional issue once again, which we were trying hard to deal with in step one! A part of what makes neurosis so difficult to deal with is that neurotics are extremely self-centered. This is not a criticism of them: If you are hurting, of course you are going to be self-centered! But typically, analysis only makes people even more self-centered than they already are. The idea instead is to become problem-centered instead, because a problem is something you might be able to solve.

### 3. Learning to reason

The first line of the Buddhist text *Dhammapada* is "actions follow thoughts like the cart follows the ox", and much of Buddhist teaching concerns the connection between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Another philosophical text from the ancients that I love is the first century philosopher Epictetus' *Manual*, a stoic guide book also loved by the soldiers of the Roman Empire. It tells us that "People are disturbed, not by things, but by the views they take of them."

I agree with Karen Horney and Albert Ellis (and Carl Rogers and George Kelly...) that a great deal of what makes for mental illness is our irrational beliefs. The basics of irrational thinking is clear: we exaggerate the negative; we ignore the positive; and we overgeneralize. By overgeneralize, I mean that people tend to see their problems as coming from everyone (not just a few), as occurring all the time (instead of occasionally), and as referring to all aspects of life (not just one or two). In addition, there are several consequences: emotional disturbances such as anxiety, depression, and hostility; self-defeating behaviors; the blocking of your goals and an overall blocking of positive development. But there is more.

We get our irrational beliefs, for the most part, from others. It can be from specific individuals, such as your mother or father. It can be from the general atmosphere of your culture. These beliefs are often a matter of standards – what Rogers called "conditions of worth." If we are fortunate, we can meet others' expectations of us. If we are not, we live in that "tyranny of the shoulds" that Horney talks about, and get into the "musturbation" that Ellis so colorfully talks about. Do you need success? fame? sainthood? total independence? Who says?

Something that exacerbates this "should" business is our tendency to mistake our desires for our needs. It certainly would be nice to be successful and famous. Who wouldn't like that? Or to be brilliant, or beautiful, or athletic. Who wouldn't like the best food, a wonderful house to live in, tons of friends, a fantastic spouse? But do you need these things? One of my favorite characters from ancient Greek philosophy is Diogenes. He ate scraps, wore rags, and lived in one of those giant jugs the ancients used to ship olive oil. And he was happy! You don't need very much to stay alive or even to find happiness. Only when you start wanting this and that, and believing that you can't be happy without it, do you start to feel deprived.

One root of our problems is that fact that human beings are very conservative creatures. We don't particularly like change, especially when it comes to changing ourselves. We would rather continue doing things the way we have always done them – even if doing things this way has made us totally miserable. You can see this conservative tendency in everything from how babies respond to frustration to how we deal with the loss of a loved one: The first emotion we experience is anger! The world is wrong, and it must change now! It is only when the anger fails to get results that we accept the fact that we must patiently wait for our mind to accept the reality before us, which makes us very sad indeed.

There is also an unfortunate feedback (or is it feedforward?) mechanism here as well. The best illustration of this is Viktor Frankl's anticipatory anxiety: The woman who is afraid of public speaking gets herself so worked up that her mouth goes dry, her hands tremble, her mind goes blank, and she fails once again at public speaking, which confirms her fear. It is a vicious cycle: You expect the worst, anxiety builds up, you get what you expected. Another, broader example is the person who, feeling incompetent, learns to depend on others. This avoids not just the original problems but all opportunity to learn self-sufficiency, thereby augmenting the problem.

Further, you don't just augment the problem, you can multiply the problem: The alcoholic is the archetypal example: He's got problems, and a drink or two gives him temporary (but welcome) relief. But his problems continue, so he drinks a bit more. After a while, his drinking is causing more problems than he had to begin with! His wife leaves him, his kids won't talk to him, he loses his job, his house, his money... So what does he do? He has another drink.

The answer, of course, is to stop the vicious cycle. Frankl's methods of paradoxical intention and dereflection may be useful. A more general technique is gradualism: While it is often impossible to take on a problem head-on, it is just as often quite possible to approach it gradually. Gradual exposure to a phobic object, for example, often works well, as does gradual exposure to the object of a compulsion while restrained from acting on it. Baby steps!

One more effect of this conservatism is fatalism: our tendency to believe that our pasts – especially our childhoods – determine the way we feel today. We tear our hair out thinking "If only my parents had been perfect! If only I had this or that when I was a child! If only.... then I would be healthy and happy today!" There is no doubt that the past leads to the present, and there is no doubt that some events in your past can leave permanent scars. But what happened then does not have a direct causal link to your feelings right now. Intervening are all the skills and experiences and values you have accumulated since then. And self-determination improves with practice!

Bifurcation is perhaps the most common fallacy used in irrational beliefs. People seem to find it easier to see the world in extremes – "black and white" – rather than in gradations or dimensions – "shades of gray". Like adolescents commonly do, everything is either "awesome" or "sucky". People are either good (typically "us") or bad ("them"). Of course, if we use these radicalized constructs on others, we will use them on ourselves as well. So if I can't quite manage to see myself as "brilliant", I will have no choice but to see myself as "useless". Notice how such a bifurcation is immune to reason: You must be one or the other; you cannot change; there is no middle way; it is applied to all aspects of life instead of to only one or another.

If you bifurcate in this way, you tend to turn "lousy" into "unbearable." Of course, we all feel bad sometimes. Perhaps we don't feel so great much of the time. But if your world-view is one of extremes, you can't just feel lousy – it's great or it's unbearable. You can't just be decent – you must be perfect! Of course, since perfection is pretty much impossible, you will wind up feeling terrible, and you eventually settle down with your terribleness and stop trying at all. Or you apply the same dichotomy to others, and expect them to meet up with your perfectionistic standards. No matter how you boss and bully them, they never quite make the mark, the idiots!

Troubled people need to learn to view things in a more graduated way, a way that permits change, that can be applied differently to different aspects of life, that doesn't hang a label on a person. If someone believes that everyone must be good, or they will be damned, he must be lead to ask him or herself: What does it really mean to be good? It means being kind, doesn't it? and nothing else. And it is the act that is good, not the person. So, we should try to act in a kindly fashion as best we can. And we can expect no more from others. Perfection is for angels, not humans.

#### 4. Finding the meaning of life

Our lives are such small things. Sometimes we think we need something grand to make them worthwhile – like eternal life in paradise, or great success, or intense experiences. Or we feel we need a grand philosophy or religion to give our lives meaning. But that's just not true.

It's the little happinesses of life that give it meaning. Some laughter, some conversation, good food and a little sex, satisfaction at a job well done, a walk on the beach, making a difference, even if its a small difference, seeing your children become happy, healthy, productive adults, washing your car, a game of cards, a good movie, a beer...

One major source of happiness is competence. It is the essence of our drive towards individual development. To master an art, a craft, a musical instrument, a science, to be so well practiced at something means that you begin to experience that sense of flow we've talked about. You feel more like a conduit of something higher – which is purpose. Don't get me wrong: You don't need to be a concert pianist or a brain surgeon. Knitting a perfect scarf, playing a favorite tune on an old guitar, balancing the books, or doing your best at your job, all function as purpose.

Another important source of happiness is compassion. Even mastery doesn't fully satisfy unless it is directed outwards, towards others. As I said, meaning doesn't come from above. Neither can we give it to ourselves. Ultimately, the only source of meaning is others. We are meaningful to them, and they in turn give us meaning. When you ask "what is the meaning of my life?" you should rephrase it "what do I mean to others?" In a speech to English college students (quoted in Frankl 1975, p. 85), the great humanitarian Albert Schweitzer once said, "The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

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Well, that's it for now. I hope you found the book enjoyable – perhaps even helpful! There's much more, of course. But most of it, I believe, is a matter of details. Each chapter of this book includes ideas that need to be expanded upon and tested. It's a bit like chemistry: Chemists have a single unified theory, but there is likely an infinite number of studies that still need to be done and, one hopes, many good and practical applications to be developed. Psychology is still a baby science – but it is a science! And each one of you can contribute something. So get out there and show us what you can do!

I would like to finish with a quote from Fra Giovanni Giocondo (c.1435–1515):

*I salute you!  
I am your friend, and my love for you goes deep.  
There is nothing I can give you which you have not.  
But there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take.  
No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.  
Take heaven!  
No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant.  
Take peace!  
The gloom of the world is but a shadow.  
Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy.  
There is radiance and glory in darkness, could we but see.  
And to see, we have only to look.  
I beseech you to look!*

Best wishes,  
George Boeree

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