

THE THEORY OF TRAITS

We have the right and the obligation to develop a concept of trait as a definitive doctrine; for in all the activity of the Person, there is besides a variable portion, likewise a constant purposive portion, and this latter we isolate in the concept of trait.

—William Stern

SCARCELY anyone has ever thought of questioning the existence of traits as the fundamental dispositions of personality. In common speech everyone presupposes traits when he characterizes himself or his acquaintances. This man, one says, is *gruff* and *reticent*, but a *hard-worker*; that man is *fastidious*, *talkative*, and *penurious*. Normally the psychologist too talks in these terms. But as soon as he enters his laboratory or class-room he is likely to leave common sense behind him and to embrace one or another of the scientific theories discussed in the last two chapters. Rightly he thinks of common sense as a faulty guide. Yet in the matter of human traits common sense is remarkably well-seasoned with experience, and scarcely deserves the complete rebuff it receives.

For one thing the path of common sense would never have led into the thickets of specificity nor run the aimless course of the doctrine of identical elements. Such non-focal theories of organization are entirely foreign to it. On the other hand, common sense would not go to the opposite extreme and regard personality as a perfect unity, faultless in integration. It is between the levels of specific habit and complete unity that common sense locates the natural foci of personality. It is there that psychologists should search.¹

¹ And physiologists likewise. Up to the present time there has been little work beyond rough speculation concerning the dynamics of "traces," of "cortical stresses," and "neurograms," all defined as multi-focal dispositions ready-organized to perform in some integrative fashion either at high tension or at low. (Cf. E. B. Holt, *Animal Drive and the Learning Process*, 1931; see especially pp. 167, 261, 263 for suggestive statements regarding this in-between level of analysis.) But in general so little is

ARE TRAITS BIOSOCIAL OR BIOPHYSICAL?

A certain metaphysical question is likely to arise at the outset of any discussion of traits, and if allowed to do so it bedevils the whole problem. The sooner it can be disposed of, the better. The question, in brief, is this: Are traits *bona fide*, veridical dispositions, or are they nothing more than nominal fictions, mere words, obscuring rather than clarifying the structure of personality? Some writers maintain the first position, some the second, and a few occupy a somewhat uncertain middle ground. The following quotations are typical of these three positions.

My own view is that traits are only convenient names given to types or qualities of behavior which have elements in common. They are not psychological entities but rather categories for the classification of habits.² (BIOSOCIAL)

A trait is a constant directing psychic force (*Richtkraft*) which determines the active and reactive behavior of the individual.³ (BIOPHYSICAL)

An individual is said to possess, or to be characterized by, a certain personality trait when he exhibits a generalized and consistent form, mode, or type of reactivity (behavior), and differs (deviates) sufficiently from other members of his social environment, both in the frequency and intensity of this behavior, for his atypicality to be noticed by relatively normal and impartial observers, themselves members of this same environment. . . . The definition tries to express the notion that the trait is a relation between the individual and his observers.⁴ (MIXED)

The first quotation is compatible with the hypothesis of identical elements. If habits, connected by their common bonds, are the true elements of personality, then it follows, as the author asserts, that trait-names are merely designations for categories of habits. He considers traits not so much as residing in the individual himself, as *forms of perception* for an observer to use.⁵

known concerning the divisions and gradients of the neural process that a neurophysiological account of human traits is as yet scarcely possible. In time the story developed here from a psychological point of view will no doubt find its physiological counterpart.

² M. May, *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 1932, 3, p. 133.

³ F. Baumgarten, *Die Charaktereigenschaften*, 1933, p. 15; also *Brit. J. Psychol.*, 1936, 26, p. 290.

⁴ P. E. Vernon, *Psychol. Rev.*, 1933, 40, 542 f.

⁵ The same author's suggestion that the total personality likewise be defined in biosocial terms, as "a man's social stimulus-value," was rejected in Chapter II.

TRAITS AND DETERMINING TENDENCIES

Psychology has never been able to do without some conception of determining tendency (implying a readiness for response). Without such a conception it could never pretend to account for the manifest stability and consistency of behavior and experience. Determining tendencies, of course, are not matters of direct observation, but only of inference. The inference, however, is altogether compulsory, for not only do the observed data lead inevitably in that direction, but without it psychology could not advance beyond the stage of recording unintelligible discrete acts and separate states of consciousness. To accept traits requires no radical revision of the psychologist's creed, for traits are biophysical in the same sense that determining tendencies, attitudes, or other dynamic influences have always been considered by psychology as biophysical.

The phrase "determining tendency" has both a narrow and a broad connotation. In its narrower sense it refers specifically to a mental set that facilitates the solution of a special problem or the execution of a certain act. In its broader sense, it is *any* directive tendency or condition of readiness for response. The doctrine of traits may be ordered to this broader conception. All traits are directive tendencies, but conversely all directive tendencies are not traits. Some directive tendencies are far too narrow and specific in their reference, and too fleeting in time to satisfy the criteria of a trait. To be sure even a transient mental set may have some dependence upon personal traits, for traits often underlie the determining tendency of the moment. But in themselves traits are more generalized and more enduring, having less to do with fleeting mental sets than with lasting mental structures such as interests, tastes, complexes, sentiments, ideals, and the like.

There are two familiar classes of determining tendencies—habit and attitude—with which the concept of trait must be compared in detail.

Trait and Habit. Ordinarily the term *habit* connotes an invariable and inflexible type of response following the recurrence of a definite stimulus situation with which it is, by experience and practice, tied. The two previous chapters have explained at some length why this type of unit cannot be accepted as the sum and substance of mental organization. The units of personality must be more versatile both in

respect to the situations that arouse them, and in respect to the responses they provoke.

In recent years some writers have sought to escape from the picture (bequeathed by William James) of the specific habit as a narrow task-master, and to put in its place a modified view, the doctrine of the *generalized habit*, or of a disposition that is not invariable in its mode of arousal or in its forms of expression.⁸ This conception is sponsored by Dewey. While still employing the standard term, *habit*, he portrays a far more flexible disposition than was characteristic of usage in the generation after James.

Repetition is in no sense the essence of habit. Tendency to repeat acts is an incident of many habits, but not of all. A man with a habit of giving way to anger may show his habit by a murderous attack upon someone who has offended. His act is nonetheless due to habit because it occurs once only in his life. The essence of habit is acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts, except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections or aversions, rather than the bare recurrence of specific acts.⁹

So far as it goes, Dewey's formulation of the *generalized habit* is in every particular equivalent to that of traits. Dewey does not deny the existence of some independent and specific habits, but these, he sees, are generally to be ordered under more inclusive dispositions. So much organization and coherence in mental life leaves no choice but to recognize great systems of inter-dependent habits, comprising *generalized dispositions* that grow in flexibility as they develop.

A young child may be regarded as forming a specific habit when he learns (with difficulty) to brush his teeth night and morning. For some years this habit may stand alone, aroused only by appropriate commands or by the appropriate environmental situation. With the passing of years, however, brushing teeth becomes not only automatic (as is the way of habits) but likewise firmly woven into a much wider system of habits, *viz.*, a trait of *personal cleanliness*. (If a more behavioral designation of the trait is desired, one can speak quite accurately though less conveniently, of a *generalized tendency* to remove all manner of dirt from one's person.) The adult is un-

⁸ Cf. S. S. Colvin, *The Learning Process*, 1921, pp. 49 f.

⁹ J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922, p. 42.

comfortable if he omits brushing the teeth from his daily schedule, not only because a single habit is frustrated, but because the omission violates a general demand for cleanliness.

This example implies, quite correctly, that a trait arises, in part at least, through the integration of numerous specific habits having in common not identical elements, but the same adaptive significance to the person. In addition to this gradual integration and conceptualization, the influence of personal temperament on the formation of traits must not be overlooked. As pointed out in Chapter IV, some styles of generalization are far easier for certain people to learn than others, depending upon innate influences of temperament, intelligence, and constitution. But however acquired, a trait is always a fusion of habits and endowment rather than a colligation or chain of habits alone.

By tracing the hypothetical history of another generalized habit, sociability, we can see the process more clearly. A young child finding that his mother is nearly always present to satisfy his wants, develops for her an early affective attachment (conditioning). But later other social contacts likewise prove to be conducive to this child's happy and successful adjustment: playmates, for example, or family gatherings, or crowds at the circus. Unless markedly timorous in temperament, or fearful and shy because of experiences of punishment or public ridicule, the child gradually comes to seek people, rather than to avoid them. A trait (not an instinct) of gregariousness develops. The child grows eager for social intercourse; he enjoys being with people. When isolated from them for some time, he misses them and becomes restless. The older he grows the more ways he finds of expressing this gregarious interest. He seeks to ally himself with groups of people at the lodge, at the theater, at church; he makes friends and keeps in touch with them, often entertains them, and corresponds with them. These separate activities are not habits. They are varied (but equivalent) aspects of a trait of sociability. On occasion this trait may become dynamic almost to the point of compulsiveness, leading to such excess of sociability that the person is morbid or unhappy unless with people.

Under guidance of this trait new and effective expressions may be found to satisfy the craving for social intercourse. Habits no longer dominate the trait; rather it is the trait that forces the formation of new habits, congenial and serviceable to the trait. The transformation of motives from the simple conditioned responses of in-

fancy is complete. The trait has transcended its specific foci of origin. Neither conditioned response, nor specific habit, nor identical elements, nor instinct represents the condition that prevails. Sociability has become a deep and characteristic quality of this individual's personality. Its expression is variable; a wide range of equivalent stimuli arouse it. Furthermore its structure has changed with time; for not only has it become a pervading style of behavior, but also a motivational system basic in the structure of this personality. The trait has become autonomous.

Trait and Attitude. A trait is a form of readiness for response; so too is an attitude. A trait is individualized, distinctive of its possessor; so too may be an attitude. A trait guides the course of behavior, and may often become dynamic and compulsive as well; so may the attitude. Both may be regarded as biophysical in nature, combining, in any proportion, the fruits of heredity and the fruits of learning. Are trait and attitude, therefore, equivalent concepts?

There is indeed a great similarity, and there are instances where it is a matter of indifference whether a certain disposition is called an attitude or a trait. To take one example, *introversion* and *extroversion* have been regarded both as *traits* of personality and as *attitudes* toward reality. Either designation is acceptable.

1. Yet there are three distinctions. In the first place an attitude has a well-defined object of reference, either material or conceptual; whereas traits have no such definite reference to objects. One's point of view toward liquor or frog's legs, toward arctic exploration, divorce, or Fascism are attitudes, but one's conservative, radical, ascetic, indulgent, reserved, or expansive *manner* of behaving is a trait. The more numerous the objects that arouse an attitude, the more closely does the attitude resemble a trait. The more an attitude is specific and stimulus-bound the less does it resemble a trait.

2. As this last statement implies, attitudes may be specific as well as general; whereas a trait may be only general. According to psychological usage an attitude may be a narrowly limited state of readiness for response. The *determinierende Tendenz*, the *Bewusstseinslage*, the *Aufgabe*, as sensori-motor sets of the moment, are all specific attitudes. They are not traits. On the other hand, in the case of a more widely extended attitude, *e.g.*, toward the world at large (*Weltanschauung*), there is no real distinction between attitude and trait.

3. The term attitude, furthermore, usually signifies the acceptance

or rejection of the object or concept of value to which it is related. Ordinarily attitudes are favorable or unfavorable, well-disposed or ill-disposed; they lead one to approach or withdraw, to affirm or to negate. Traits as a rule have no such clear-cut direction. They are often merely stylistic, and their significance is often adverbial rather than prepositional. But here again there are cases where the terms are interchangeable. A well-integrated trait of patriotism, for example, might equally well be a highly generalized favorable attitude toward all objects and values subsumed under the individual's conception of nationhood. In such a case the only basis of preference is the context of the discussion.

Both *attitude* and *trait* are indispensable concepts. Between them they cover virtually every type of disposition with which the psychology of personality concerns itself. Ordinarily *attitude* should be employed when the disposition is bound to an object or value, that is to say, when it is aroused by a well-defined class of stimuli, and when the individual feels toward these stimuli a definite attraction or repulsion. In some cases either of the terms (trait or attitude) is correct, as in the case of extroversion or patriotism, previously mentioned, or conservatism or radicalism. If in the last two cases the object or value against which the person is rebelling, or which he is intent on conserving, can be specified, the term attitude is preferable. If, on the other hand, the radicalism or the conservatism is chronic and "temperamental," expressed in almost any sphere of the person's behavior, then the term *trait* fits the situation better. Narrow or specific attitudes are never traits. A man is fond of his dog: he has a kindly attitude toward it. But if in general he is thoughtful of, and sympathetic toward men and beasts, he has a trait of kindness. The more generalized an attitude (the more difficult it is to specify its object or its polarity of affect), the more does it resemble a trait.¹⁰

Traits and Other Forms of Readiness. It is unnecessary to repeat here the distinctions drawn in earlier chapters between traits and *factors, needs, instincts*, and the array of both nomothetic and practical elements proposed by various authors as the basic units of personality. Nor need we say more about the opposition of traits to specific habits or to identical elements. All the demarcations have

¹⁰ This comparison between attitude and trait is condensed from a more complete account of the significance of attitudes for social psychology and the psychology of personality: G. W. Allport, "Attitudes," in *A Handbook of Social Psychology* (ed. by C. C. Murchison), 1935, chap. xvii.

now been drawn. We are left with a concept of trait as *a generalized and focalized neuropsychic system (peculiar to the individual), with the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide consistent (equivalent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior.*

This conception is not altogether novel. As previously pointed out, it has many approximate counterparts in psychological theory. Some of the dispositions listed below are virtually identical with traits, some represent special sub-classes of traits, and others are adumbrations of traits, proposed by authors having a point of view at least partially like the one here presented.

Psychological Concepts Equivalent to, Subordinate to, or Partially
Overlapping the Concept of Traits

<i>Charakterzug</i>	mode of adjustment
complex	motor-perceptual region (Lewin)
directional tendency	need integrate (Murray)
ego-system (Koffka)	<i>Neigung</i> (Lazurski)
<i>Eigenschaft</i> (Baumgarten, Stern)	phobia
foci of development	<i>Richtungsdisposition</i> (Stern)
general attitude	<i>Rüstungsdisposition</i> (Stern)
generalized habit (Dewey)	sentiment (McDougall)
ideal	style of life (Adler)
inner-personal region (Lewin)	subjective value (Spranger)
interest	taste
<i>linéament</i> (Boven)	<i>Triebfeder</i> (Klages)
mode of adaptation	trend

TRAIT AND TYPE

Again we refer to the sharp contrast between the theory of traits and the doctrine (any doctrine) of types. Unlike traits, types always have biosocial reference. A man can be said to *have* a trait; but he cannot be said to *have* a type. Rather he *fits* a type. This bit of usage betrays the important fact that types exist not in people or in nature, but rather in the eye of the observer. Type includes more than is in the individual. Traits, on the contrary, are considered wholly within the compass of the individual. The crux of the distinction is that in type the reference point is always some attribute, or cluster of correlating attributes abstracted from various personalities, a biosocial

reference defined by the interest of the particular investigator (cf. Figure 2, p. 15).

Many kinds of typology flourish. There are literary types, energy types, pathological types, constitutional types, eidetic types, statistical types, and ideal types. Whatever the kind, a typology is always a device for exalting its author's special interest at the expense of the individuality of the life which he ruthlessly dismembers. Every typology is based on the abstraction of some segment from the total personality, and the forcing of this segment to unnatural prominence. All typologies place boundaries where boundaries do not belong. They are artificial categories.

This harsh judgment is unavoidable in the face of the conflicting claims of various typologies. Many of them pretend to embrace the total personality, and to follow the cleavages that occur in nature. But the very typologies that have proclaimed themselves "basic," contradict one another. Compare, for example, the supposedly foundational types of Kretschmer, Spranger and Jaensch. Certainly not one of these typologies, so diverse in conception and scope, can be considered final, for none of them overlaps any other. Each theorist slices nature in any way he chooses, and finds only his own cuttings worthy of admiration.

Glance at the popular dichotomous types: extrovert—introvert, tough-minded—tender-minded, sensory—motor, masculine—feminine, subjective—objective, Apollonian—Dionysian, Philistine—Bohemian, sthenic—asthenic, and the like. What has happened to the individual? He is tossed from type to type, landing sometimes in one compartment and sometimes in another, often in none at all. The entire approach is external, directed toward abstracted points of similarity among men, rather than toward the integral neuropsychic make-up of any one individual man.

The present vogue of typology comes largely from the influence of psychiatry, which, for a long time following Kraepelin, had great interest in the classification of mental disease. Today, just at the time when many psychiatrists are turning away from classifications to the study of mental disturbance in the individual case, this discredited approach is sifting through to plague the psychology of normal personality. We may now, it is said, classify a person as cycloid, schizoid, melancholoid, manoid, paranoid, hypochondroid, hysteroid, imbeciloid, neurasthenoid, or epileptoid. And so we may, if we are interested in fitting him to the categories of mental disease. Quite as

properly the same person may be classified as of the sensory or motor type, if we are interested in his style of reaction; or of the visual, kinesthetic, or auditory type, if we are interested in his imagery; Nordic, Alpine or Mediterranean, if we are interested in his race. But if, as psychologists, we are interested in him as an individual, his multiple memberships in these miscellaneous types are all seen to be factitious. Better to study him alive, to observe his own individual *traits* in action, and see what they signify in his own life, even if by this method we cannot always neatly place him in our favorite filing cabinet. If the information to be gained indirectly through fitting him to one typology or another is worth anything at all, it will be sure to appear, much more significantly, when his *traits* are analyzed.

INDIVIDUAL *versus* COMMON TRAITS

Strictly speaking, no two persons ever have precisely the same trait. Though each of two men may be *aggressive* (or *esthetic*), the style and range of the aggression (or estheticism) in each case is noticeably different. What else could be expected in view of the unique hereditary endowment, the different developmental history, and the never-repeated external influences that determine each personality? The end product of unique determination can never be anything but unique.

This evident fact is one that most psychologists have great difficulty in accepting. If individuals cannot be compared with one another in respect to the same traits, what is to become of the psychology of personality as a "scientific" (*i.e.*, nomothetic) discipline? Outraged at the prospect, one psychologist exclaimed, "I think it is nonsense to say that no two men ever have the same trait. I mean, of course it is true, but it is one of those truths that can't be accepted." The die-hard nomothetist feels that in sheer loyalty to science, he *must* search for nothing but common and basic variables, however great the resulting distortion of the individual structure. But if he will put aside those methodological fetishes that make manifest truths unacceptable to him, and adopt a more liberal conception of his science, he will see that the dilemma is not fatal. The case for the *ultimate* individuality of every trait is indeed invincible, but there is nevertheless a certain logic that justifies his search for comparable and measurable units.

For all their ultimate differences, normal persons within a given

culture-area, tend to develop a limited number of *roughly comparable* modes of adjustment. The original endowment of most human beings, their stages of growth, and the demands of their particular society, are sufficiently standard and comparable to lead to some basic modes of adjustment that from individual to individual are *approximately* the same. To take an example: the nature of the struggle for survival in a competitive society tends to force every individual to seek his own most suitable level of *aggression*. As the saying goes, everyone *must* be either a boot or a door-mat. One child as he matures finds that a constant effort to dominate his fellows is for him the most successful design for living; another finds that for him there is more satisfaction in a characteristic yielding or submission. Somewhere between the extremes of exaggerated domination and complete passivity, there lies for each normal individual a level of adaptation that fits his intimate requirements. The psychologist does well to recognize all these possible gradations and to postulate a common variable (in this case, ascendance—submission) which, though rough and approximate, permits quantitative scaling. He does not measure directly the full-bodied individual trait that alone exists as a neuropsychic disposition and as the one irreducible unit of personality. What he does is to measure a common *aspect* of this trait, such a portion thereof as takes common cultural forms of expression and signifies essentially the same manner of adjusting within the social group.

To make the case quite concrete, let us suppose that the investigator wishes a scale for the purpose of comparing individuals in respect to the common (continuum) trait, ascendance—submission, mentioned above. He recognizes that he is concerned only with an aspect of neuropsychic dispositions that differ in each person. (There are endless varieties of leaders, dominators, aggressors, followers, yielders, and timid souls). What he does is to shut his eyes to the uniqueness of each case, and then seek a uniform schedule of test items that will force each individual into the same continuum. He selects plausible items from common cultural situations,¹¹ determines their diagnostic significance for the dimension he has in mind, standardizes and validates his scale as a whole, and emerges at last with a "personality test."

Measured in this way, ascendance—submission is not, strictly speaking, a trait at all. It is rather a bipolar directional scale or common continuum upon which a certain common aspect of true individual traits is measured.

¹¹ A selection of such "aspective" items is given on pp. 412 f.

In the strict sense of the definition of traits (p. 295) only the individual trait is a true trait: (a) because traits are always in individuals and not in the community at large, and (b) because they develop and generalize into dynamic dispositions in unique ways according to the experiences of each individual. The common (continuum) trait is not a true trait at all, but is merely a measurable aspect of complex individual traits.¹²

The question naturally arises whether common traits should be called *traits* at all. At first thought it seems confusing to speak of both biophysical dispositions (true traits) and empirical continua (products of abstractive analysis) by the same name. And yet for three reasons it seems best to let the term stand for both the individual and the common dimension.

1. In the first place, the term has a widely established generic usage. Hitherto it has not meant merely an individual trait (as in the definition on p. 295). In psychological parlance empirical continua are ordinarily called "trait scales"; and this usage must be respected. It is merely a step toward precision to speak of these continua as "common trait scales." To do so requires no radical change in usage.

2. The concepts of individual trait and common trait are complementary in the study of personality. What is unique and what is universal both need to be explored. Though the former approach is the more fundamental, the latter constitutes a large chapter in research (cf. Chapter XV). Hence, by preserving the term trait with its proper qualifying adjectives ("common" or "individual"), the two major methods of approaching personality are simultaneously covered, and a useful generic concept results. The psychology of personality is, in this sense, the scientific study of human traits.

3. There is an even stronger argument in favor of the epithet "common trait." Although it is undeniable that no two people have precisely the same trait, yet there are certain aspects of personality in respect to which all people in a given culture may reasonably be compared. It was shown above that ascendance and submission, to take two typical common traits, represent forms of adjustment which all individuals by virtue of biological necessity and cultural pressure must in varying degrees adopt. The same may be said for many other common forms of adjustment: gregariousness, talkativeness, tactfulness, radicalism, money-mindedness. Every *person* is also a *socius*. He

¹² This logic of traits agrees in all essentials with the position defined by F. H. Allport, "Teleonomic Description in the Study of Personality," *Char. & Pers.*, 1937, 6, 202-214. There is however a difference of terminology. This author means by "trait" what is here called a common trait, and for individual trait he proposes the designation "teleonomic trend."

must come to terms, though in varying degrees, with the demands of his culture. His basic traits are always his own, but they have a social aspect that is easily separated for analysis. Common traits, then, are not wholly arbitrary variables. They rest on an evolutionary and cultural logic. *Common traits are those aspects of personality in respect to which most mature people within a given culture can be compared.*¹³

The trap to be avoided is the erroneous assumption that the common trait ever corresponds exactly to the neuropsychic dispositions of individuals. Perhaps in occasional cases there may be a close accidental correspondence; but it is always precarious to measure common traits on the assumption that they are direct measurements of personal dispositions. A test has different meanings to different subjects, and their responses may have quite different significance. Time and again subjects in submitting themselves to a personality scale complain that the test does not fit them. They seem to sense that the scale misses their individual traits. There is no convincing reply to these critics. The best the psychologist can do is to assure them that the test is only a "rough measure," and that in individual cases it may indeed fall wide of its mark.

Since common traits are at best only convenient approximations, the psychologist should employ whatever technical aids he can to make his scale as serviceable as possible. By using statistical formulae he may determine the reliability of the scale; he may standardize it for various classes of people, making it more appropriate for vocational guidance or other practical uses. If by statistical analysis he finds his scale to be unreliable, he may discard the items found not to correlate with the remainder, and in so doing, of course, he alters to some extent his original conception of the common trait in question. In working out his scale he thus combines an initial conception of the trait with various empirical checks, and emerges with a somewhat mixed product that often gains through its applicability to a whole population of subjects what it loses in sensitiveness for the individual case.

In this process, factor-analysis is one of the statistical devices that

¹³ At a higher level the distinction between the individual trait and the common trait is reflected in the distinction between the *person* and the *socius*. The former is the complete man, a unique biophysical product in whom cultural influences have been embedded in individual ways within a biological ground. The *socius* is the man viewed in reference to his social status. His beliefs, attitudes and traits are regarded as conforming to, or deviating from, societal standards. The frame of reference in the former case is the person himself; in the latter case, external social norms.

may assist in fashioning common traits for efficient measurement. The scaling of "pure" and "basic" factors—while unjustified from the point of view of the organic structure of personality—has undoubted utility for certain practical purposes. Occasionally too factor-analysis may succeed in cutting through certain complications of a priori conception, and shed new light upon problems of defining the common trait in question.¹⁴ But one must be cautious lest the last state be worse than the first, for some factorial products are psychologically meaningless. Technical aids should never be allowed to lower the basic requirement of psychological intelligibility.

A nice illustration of the difference between common and individual traits is offered by Conrad's study of ratings. Three teachers were required to rate a number of children of preschool age upon 231 common traits, thus being forced to make the assumption that all the children did possess exactly these selfsame qualities in some degree. Proceeding on such a false assumption there was only a low agreement among the teachers, ranging from $+.14$ to $+.78$, with a median of $+.48$. Many of the children, it seems, were given ratings on the basis of sheer guesses, because the investigation *required* that each child receive a rating on every quality. But in the course of the same study, the teachers were instructed to *star* their ratings on such qualities as they considered to be of "central or dominating importance in the child's personality." On this part of their task the teachers agreed very well in their judgments: their ratings on such starred qualities correlated from $+.93$ to $+.96$.¹⁵ This result shows that the low reliability of rating may often be due to the fact that the subjects are forced into a scale where they do not belong. In a few cases (the starred qualities) the common trait concept seemed to correspond fairly well to some striking individual traits, but in most cases the common designations fell wide of the mark.

Consistent with its nomothetic tradition, psychology up till now

¹⁴ An instance is Guilford's reduction of introversion to certain component common traits. Two of these components (the principal factors) are *social withdrawing* and *emotionality*. Each is a meaningful trait, undoubtedly susceptible of measurement. In this case a concept that was troublesome to psychologists receives clarification. Jung's initial logic in respect to introversion, provocative though it was, turned out, at least for the purposes of measurement, to be amenable to improvement. Two, or perhaps more, separate scales, one for social withdrawing and one for emotionality, should probably replace the coarser omnibus scales hitherto relied upon to measure the somewhat amorphous common variable. (J. P. and R. B. Guilford, *J. Abnorm. & Soc. Psychol.*, 1934, 28, 377-399).

¹⁵ H. S. Conrad, *J. Educ. Psychol.*, 1932, 23, 671-680.

has been more interested in common than in individual traits. (The clinician and the therapist are exceptions to this rule.) Yet nothing is more essential in the entire field of personality than an adequate recognition of individual traits. The methods adapted to the study of common variables do not readily transfer to the study of individual traits. New techniques are needed. No investigator, for example, would undertake to scale *paranoia* in the general population; yet *paranoia* may on occasion be the very core of personality. Nor would he attempt to scale *fastidious exhibitionism*, a trait for which Beau Brummell was famous. Goethe, who believed that there is always a sense in which everything is true, had a charming trait of listening to everyone without contradicting him. This is not a common enough trait to be scaled, but it is important in the understanding of *Goethe's* personality. Nor is its antithesis common—the negativism of those, who, like Benvenuto Cellini, or Samuel Johnson, are notoriously *contredisant*. When this uncommon trait does exist, it is exceedingly important, for every proposal, every assertion, almost every word, arouses a rejection. Dickens immortalizes the trait in Mr. Grimwig; but Grimwigs are rarely encountered.

There are many other characters, both in fiction and in history, known for a single outstanding trait: Uriah Heep for his sycophancy, Rose Dartle for her peculiar insinuations, Oblomov for his procrastination, Mrs. Jellyby for her presbyoptic philanthropy, Micawber for his empty optimism, Chesterfield for his self-conscious good breeding, the Marquis de Sade for his sexual cruelty. Our vocabulary has been enriched by the *naming* of individual traits after these celebrities. What better proof could there be for the existence of cardinal traits too rare to be measured as common traits in a general population?

A Partial List of Trait-designations Derived from the Names of
Historical or Fictional Characters

Beau Brummell	Christ-like	Lesbian
Boswellian	Dantesque	Machiavellian
Byronic	Dionysian	Miltonic
Caliban	Don Juan	narcissistic
Calvinistic	Emersonian	Napoleonic
Cassandra	Falstaffian	Neronian
chauvinistic	Faustian	Oblomovism
Chesterfieldian	Homeric	Œdipus
Ciceronian	John Bull	Pantagruelian

Pecksniffian	quixotic	Scaramouch
Pickwickian	Rabelaisian	Shylock
Pollyanna	sadistic	Tolstoyian
Puckish	Sapphic	Xanthippe

The orthodox (nomothetic) psychologist will ask, "But what can psychology do with such individual traits? They cannot be measured; and they defy man-to-man comparison." Actually a great deal can be done. Individual traits, no less than common traits, are susceptible of genetic, analytical, and even experimental study, in the laboratory and elsewhere.¹⁶ Almost any method of studying personality (cf. Chapter XIV), other than tests and common scales, is adapted to the study of individual traits. After all, the comparison of individuals is only *one* of the goals of the psychology of personality. Understanding the individual case and determining the laws of the individual's development are just as legitimate and even more important goals.

THE PROBLEM OF TRAIT-NAMES

There are approximately 18,000 terms (chiefly adjectives) in the English language designating distinctive and personal forms of be-

¹⁶ Perhaps they may sometime, in a rather novel sense, be susceptible likewise of measurement. F. H. Allport suggests the possibility of developing an intra-individual continuum for each personality separately, in respect to which, one leading trait may be measured for its intensity and self-consistency without any reference whatsoever to other individuals.

The following instance suggests the approach: "There was a certain boy whose behavior at school was reported by his teacher as exemplary, while his home behavior was a cause of grave concern to his parents. At school he was orderly, industrious, and attentive, while at home he was noisy, unruly, and a bully toward the younger children. Rated upon a societally standardized continuum of degrees of a trait, e.g., the trait of 'tractability,' we find the results immediately ambiguous. The intra-individual distribution for both spheres (home and school) together becomes bi-modal rather than normal. The [common] trait approach breaks down. When, however, we describe his behavior teleonomically, that is, in terms of what he is really trying (and we do not mean consciously trying) to do, we may find a basic consistency underlying the contradiction in these two fields of his behavior. For example, the boy might, in both lines of conduct, be acting to gain the attention of his elders. An hypothesis concerning a possible law of this individual's general behavior is thus provided, which can be subjected to the test of verification through wider sampling and measurement." (*Char. & Pers.*, Duke University Press, 1937, 5, pp. 206 f.)

The proposal is that every instance of behavior may be studied for its closeness to a hypothetical central trait in this boy's life, viz., "trying to gain attention of his elders." If many acts clearly fall within this teleonomic continuum, then the trait is no longer hypothetical but empirically established, and its range and intensity may be statistically determined.

havior.¹⁷ At first sight this vast array of verbal symbols seems chaotic and wholly outside the psychologist's field of interest. But the more these terms are studied, the more instructive and pertinent do they become.

There is no denying that trait-names bear a very complex relation to the underlying structural units of personality. As a first step in clarifying this relation let us consider their origin. They seem to have come into existence in response to two entirely different human needs.

In the first place men experience a desire to represent by name such mental processes or dispositions of their fellows as can be determined by observation or by inference. There is a demand for depicting personality as accurately and as faithfully as possible, for with a suitable term, corresponding to authentic psychological dispositions, the ability to understand and to control one's fellows is greatly enhanced. There is then reason to suppose that trait-names are not entirely arbitrary, that they are to some extent self-correcting, for there is little to gain by preserving through names an erroneous belief in merely fictitious or fabulous entities; there is everything to gain by using terms that designate true psychic structures. If this consideration were the only basis underlying our vocabulary of trait-names we should find the correspondence between linguistic convention and psychological truth very close, much closer than it actually is.

There is, however, a second influence determining our lexicon of trait-names, namely, the tendency of each social epoch to characterize human qualities in the light of standards and interests peculiar to the times. Historically, the introduction of trait-names can be seen to follow this principle of cultural (not psychological) determination to a striking degree.

Astrological superstition produced *lunatic*, *jovial*, *saturnine*, and *mercurial*. Galenian medicine which prevailed in England until the time of Harvey brought the term *temperament*, and with it quite naturally, *sanguine*, *choleric*, *melancholic*, *phlegmatic*, *good-humored*, *bad-humored*, as well as *cold-blooded*, *hearty*, *heartless*, and *cordial* (derived from the belief that the heart was the seat of the intellect and feeling). Following the Protestant Reformation came some of our

¹⁷ Cf. G. W. Allport and H. S. Odbert: "Trait-Names: a Psycho-lexical Study," *Psychol. Monog.*, 1936, No. 211. This monograph was originally designed as an appendix to the present volume, but its length made separate publication necessary. The passages reprinted here represent an abbreviated summary of the study, but the original should be consulted for a full statement of issues insufficiently developed here, as well as for the complete list of 17,953 terms.

most indispensable trait-adjectives, reflecting the introspectiveness of the period, among them, *sincere*, *pious*, *bigoted*, *precise*, *fanatic*, also the substantives, *self-regard*, *self-assurance*, *self-love*, *self-confidence*, and *self-esteem*. *Selfish* is a term coined by the Presbyterians about 1640. To the aristocratic seventeenth century belong *fatuous*, *callous*, *countrified*, *disingenuous*. Political upheavals are responsible for such terms as *Tory*, *democrat*, and *radical*.

With the growing subjectivity of literature in the eighteenth century came numerous terms derived from self-analysis: *day-dream*, *depression*, *ennui*, *chagrin*, *apathy*, *diffidence*; and new (more subjective) meanings were attached to older terms, *reverie*, *excitement*, *constraint*, *embarrassment*, *disappointment* and others. In courtly circles in the eighteenth century persons were described as *prim*, *demure*, *gawky*, *enthusiastic*, *interesting*, and *boresome*. To recent years belong a surprising number of new expressions, still for the most part slang: *booster*, *rooter*, *knocker*, *hoodlum*, *climber*, *yes-man*, *four-flusher*, *crabber*, *cake-eater*, *chiseler*, *gigolo*, *flapper*, *racketeer*, *Babbitt*. To this ever-increasing vocabulary of human characteristics psychology has contributed its share: *introverted*, *extroverted*, *neurotic*, *regressive*, *psychasthenic*, *eidetic*, *cyclothymic*, *schizoid*, and the like.

It is therefore certain that trait-names are not univocal symbols corresponding throughout the ages to fixed varieties of human dispositions. In spite of the fact that the names probably would not have been invented unless there were something "really there" in the psychic make-up of individuals to call forth the new designations, still the symbols themselves are changeable and elusive. They are invented in accordance with current cultural interests; their meaning often varies, and some fall rapidly into disuse. (Although some trait-names become extinct, the tendency, in English at least, is for a rapid multiplication of terms designating human qualities, a reflection no doubt of the ever-rising interest in psychological problems.)¹⁸

The list of terms here under discussion is based on the 400,000 separate terms and derivatives included in Webster's *New International Dictionary* (edition of 1925). The exact number in the list is 17,953 words (obsolete terms excluded), or four and one-half per cent of the total English vocabulary.

The criterion for inclusion consists in the capacity of any term to distinguish the behavior of one human being from that of another. Terms representing common (non-distinctive) behavior are excluded, e.g., *walking* and *digesting*, whereas more differentiating and stylistic

¹⁸ G. W. Allport and H. S. Odbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3.

terms applied to these same activities, such as *mincing* and *dyspeptic*, are included. In many cases the application of this criterion involved a considerable degree of arbitrariness. In deciding doubtful cases the dictionary definition was followed: if in *any* of its meanings a term might be differentially employed in characterizing personal behavior it was admitted.

Adjectival and participial forms have been preferred throughout; nouns and adverbs appear only where no corresponding adjective or participle exists, or else in cases where their meaning is distinctive (e.g., both *Quaker* and *Quakerish* are included).¹⁹

Having defined certain principles for the selection of terms, the next task is to determine whether a basis can be found for a *psychologically* significant classification of the terms. A division of the list into four parallel columns seems to fill the need.

Column I. In this column appear those names that symbolize most clearly "real" traits of personality. They designate generalized and personalized determining tendencies—consistent and stable modes of an individual's adjustment to his environment. Obvious examples are *aggressive*, *introverted*, *sociable*. These terms do not imply merely temporary and specific behavior as do the terms in Column II (see p. 309); they are more neutral and less censorial than those in Column III; and they are less metaphorical and remote in their applicability to personality than those in Column IV. On the other hand, since the decision is often arbitrary, *the investigator using the list is advised not to depend upon Column I alone, but to consult the parallel columns for added terms according to his needs and interests.* The intention of this first column is to provide merely a *minimum* list of trait-names and not a final list. The number of terms in this column is 4,504, or 25 per cent of the total list.

Column II. This column contains terms descriptive of present activity, temporary states of mind, and mood. The criterion for inclusion reads as follows: "Might the quality in question characterize a person's mood, emotion, present attitude, or present activity (but not his enduring and recurring modes of adjustment)?" Typical terms in this column are *abashed*, *gibbering*, *rejoicing*, *frantic*. The majority of these terms are present participles, derived from verbs signifying differentiative behavior. This column contains 4,541 words, about 25 per cent of the entire list.

Column III. This list is the longest of the four, and contains character evaluations. Typical examples are *insignificant*, *acceptable*,

¹⁹ G. W. Allport and H. S. Odbert, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

worthy. The paradigm for inclusion reads "Might one judge a man as (*worthy*) without the man possessing a corresponding biophysical trait which may be symbolized with the *same* name?" It is obviously impossible to think of *worthiness* as resident in the structure of personality itself; it is altogether a social judgment. In this respect it differs decidedly from *benevolence*, *tolerance*, or *patience*. A person with three such biophysical traits would no doubt be *judged* as *worthy*, but he never could have a neuropsychic disposition of "worthiness." Some terms in this column imply no profound moral judgment but rather a social effect upon the emotions or moods of another, e.g., *dazzling*, *irritating*. These terms presuppose *some* traits in a man, but in themselves they are value-estimates and do not symbolize the psychological dispositions in him that cause him to have a dazzling or irritating effect upon others. This column contains 5,226 terms, or 29 per cent of the total list.

Strictly speaking, in the sense of the present volume, Column III is not a list of trait-names at all. It is, however, included for good reasons. In the first place, there are writers who consider personality to be essentially the social influence of an individual, and from this point of view these terms become especially significant; they represent not the reactions of the individual in question, but rather his "social stimulus-value." Furthermore, this vocabulary of social impressions and characterial judgment has a certain intrinsic interest for social psychology, sociology, and ethics.

Column IV. There are many terms of possible value in characterizing personality, even though they have no certain place in the first three columns. Since in one way or another they contribute to the total vocabulary of useful terms they are included in this miscellaneous column. More skillful editing might have made possible the assignment of some of these words to the first three columns. Subdivision is also possible. One sub-group might contain terms explanatory of behavior, past participles for the most part (e.g., *pampered*, *crazed*, *malformed*). Another sub-group could be made of physical qualities which are commonly considered to be associated directly or indirectly with psychological traits, e.g., *roly-poly*, *lean*, *red-headed*, *hoarse*. Still another group could be made of capacities or talents, such as *able*, *gifted*, *prolific*. Then there are many terms of allegorical and doubtful application to human personality, and still others that for various reasons are the despair of the editors. In all, this miscellaneous column contains 3,682 words, or about 21 per cent of the total list.²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

Such a classification is of necessity approximate and to some extent arbitrary. Experiment proves, however, that different judges agree fairly well upon the use of these classificatory groups.²¹ The most significant feature of the method is the separation of neutral trait-names in Column I from the evaluative or censorial terms in Column III. The psychology of personality must be kept free from confusion with the problems of evaluation (character). But the assignment of any given term to one of these categories rather than to the other is not always an easy matter.

Concepts originating in social judgment, e.g., *honest*, *unselfish*, *law-abiding*, may and often do become ideals or guiding principles adopted by individuals. In this sense, the introception of an ethical ideal into subjective attitude turns a characterial designation into a true trait-name. The plan followed in the classification is to place such terms in Column I if it seems that the social ideal does with fair frequency become a personal ideal and become thereby a true trait of personality. But it is obvious that certain normative concepts, like *fine*, *crazy*, or *perfect* are too general or too unpsychological ever to correspond precisely to any veridical personal trait.

In spite of our efforts to locate only neutral terms in Column I some of the terms appearing there do seem to imply censorial judgment. In America to say that John is *self-assured*, *inventive*, or *decisive* is to praise him; in some societies he would stand condemned. But in such cases as these it is clear that some definite psychological trait is the object of reference however much the flavor of judgment may cling to the trait-name employed.²²

Such a list is not only a thesaurus of terms, but also of *problems*. Each word is a record of common sense observation regarding human behavior. As such, each term constitutes an authentic problem for psychology. With this list at hand, the investigator will not be too easily beguiled into an over-simplified theory of personality.

The list here presented is drawn from the full classification, and presents only an illustrative sample of terms. If the reader will note the "flavor" of the terms in each column, he will see why only Column I can be regarded as a list of names of traits in the strict sense in which the term is used in this volume.

²¹ G. W. Allport and H. S. Odbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 28 f.

There remains the deeper metaphysical problem concerning the relation of any name to the unit-structures of nature. For centuries this problem has been disputed. The story is too long to be re-told here, but the solution suggested below is fully compatible with the biophysical view of traits advanced in this volume.

The theory we present then holds that trait-names are symbols socially devised (from a mixture of ethical, cultural and psychological interests) for the naming and evaluation of human qualities. Some of these terms are obviously censorial and as such have little utility for the psychologist. The non-censorial terms, however, are significant, for their common usage establishes a presupposition that some human beings possess actual dispositions or traits roughly corresponding to these symbols. There are, however, many more traits than any list of single names would indicate, for we often find neologisms, phrases, and metaphors called upon where trait-names are insufficient.

In scientific work no single trait-name can be accepted with assurance as applicable to a given personality until its correspondence with a true trait has been experimentally or clinically established. Traits cannot be called forth by fiat; they must be discovered.

The use of the same trait-name applied to any two different individuals signifies merely that the dispositions of both fall within a range of comparable judgments.

Although in some respects this theory follows the position of the Nominalists it does not agree at all with those extremists who in denying perfect correspondence between names and traits think they must also deny the very existence of traits. Traits exist in exactly the same sense in which any mental disposition or readiness-for-response exists. The naming of such intangible mental states is hazardous, but it is also unfortunately necessary. It would be absurd to allow the difficulties involved to lead us into the wholly untenable nihilistic position of denying mental organization and readiness altogether.

A trait-name is a range-name. Although traits are real enough entities, trait-names are essentially blankets, covering one trait in one person and other (similar) traits in other people. Though perceived as similar and labeled identically, the trait is never, strictly speaking, in two different human beings exactly the same.²³

As inadequate as common speech may be in representing the complex structure of personality, it is several grades more adequate than the mathematical symbols and neologisms that psychologists sometimes employ. The nature of our problem forces us to seek out,

²³ G. W. Allport and H. S. Odbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 f.

to identify, dynamic mental structures and sub-structures, *and to name them*. And this is necessary even though the lexicon of any language is far from offering a perfect catalogue of the elements of mental life. To use trait-names, but to use them cautiously, is, then, our lot. Nor need we fear them simply because they bear the age-long sanction of common sense.