

THE NATURE OF TRAITS

The constancy of a trait is merely an ideal or limiting concept—and for two reasons. One is that man is at no moment of his existence merely an adaptive, self-preserving creature; always there is in his behavior a spark of self-development and growth. For this reason his finished traits are never quite finished. In addition, a trait is never entirely independent of the world outside, but stands in constant active relationship to it. It indicates the way in which the person reacts to the world; but never are the stimuli that provoke the reaction entirely the same, and never therefore are the various expressions of one and the same trait completely in agreement with one another. The trait is each time slightly different because it confronts other determining conditions; and these conditions produce not only a special coloring in each act that a trait arouses, but also can influence the trait itself in a permanent way.

—William Stern

IN the last chapter the theory of traits was presented in broad outline. For the time being many special questions and complications were overlooked which now require full consideration. As Stern points out, the ever-changing nature of traits and their close dependence upon the fluid conditions of the environment forbid a conception that is over-rigid or over-simple.

HOW ARE TRAITS DISCOVERED?

The chief danger in the concept of trait is that, through habitual and careless use, it may come to stand for an assembly of separate and self-active faculties, thought to govern behavior all by themselves, without interference. We must cast out this lazy interpretation of the concept. For, to say the least, such psychological *dei ex machina* are more than a century out of date. *The basic principle of behavior is its continuous flow, each successive act representing a*

convergent mobilization of all energy available at the moment. No single trait—nor all traits together—determine behavior all by themselves. The conditions of the moment are also decisive; the special character of the stimulus, the temporary distribution of stresses and tensions within the neuropsychic system, all demand a special form of adaptive response, perhaps never again required in precisely the same way.

Only one maximally integrated activity takes place at any one time, and this activity is the product of a final convergent path wherein all available energy, though not all potential energy, is channelized to meet the present demand. From moment to moment there is a redistribution of this available energy, with the result that consummatory acts are ever changing and are the product of the interaction of all manner of determining factors, of which traits are only one.

Unless full recognition is given to this continuous, variable and convergent character of behavior, the theory of traits will become a purely fanciful doctrine of "little men within the breast" possessing, by hypothesis, exclusive control over each and every separate activity. A kindly little man will be made responsible for initiating acts of kindness, and other homunculi will be credited with acts that are aggressive, vulgar, or avaricious. This, in principle, is the error of the older faculty psychology with its list of the "active powers of the mind." It is likewise an ever present peril for any dynamic psychology that conceptualizes the "forces" presumed to initiate and guide behavior, whether they be nomothetic forces, such as instincts, drives, wishes, needs, or more individualized dispositions such as traits.

Recognizing and admitting the danger, it can more easily be avoided. One precaution is the constant return to *the observable stream of behavior*, the only basic datum with which the psychology of personality has to work. Here the principles of continuity and redistribution and convergence rule supreme. Traits as such are not observable in the stream of behavior. What is observable is the succession of specific adaptive acts that follow one another in close array. Though traits themselves are never directly observed, they are *of necessity* inferred. For without some inference of a flexible underlying structure in personality it would be impossible to account for the recurrent quality of the separate observable acts. And yet to avoid personifying the separate traits, it is ever necessary before assuming their presence to return to the basic behavioral evidence,

and to demonstrate that the inference is justified by strict adherence to the data.¹

Traits, then, are discovered not by deductive reasoning, not by fiat, not by naming, and are themselves never directly observed. They are discovered in the individual life—the only place where they can be discovered—only through an inference (or interpretation) made necessary by the demonstrable consistency of the separate observable acts of behavior.

There are many technical aids that may be employed in the discovery of traits, but each is nothing more than a refinement of the method used by anyone in everyday life. The refinements reduce the likelihood of error, but the procedure is basically the same. In ordinary life a judgment to the effect that a certain man is a "zealot for justice," is based on observation of his conduct in situations where he is seen to be active and aggressive in demanding equity or in championing the underdog. The judgment, of course, may be mistaken; it may be based on some one impressive single instance which, divorced from the usual pattern of circumstances, is not at all typical of the man's ordinary behavior. Since common sense has no accepted criterion for the inference of a trait, erroneous first impressions are often the consequence. Though the psychologist also relies on observation and inference, he is never satisfied with unverified first impressions. It is his business to demand a more exacting demonstration.

The methods for establishing a trait depend upon the kind of trait that is the object of investigation, whether it be a common trait or an individual trait. In the latter case, the so-called clinical method is ordinarily used, especially by psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, consulting psychologists, and writers of case histories. The investigator makes a sustained study of a particular individual and on the basis of personal acquaintance with the case pronounces that such and such traits are outstanding.² Now, the objection to this method is that it

¹ This concession to the *operational* criterion for the validation of concepts may be made without subscribing to the entire creed of operationism which would brand as "meaningless" every psychological hypothesis or inference not instantly defined by objective evidence. Traits are more readily defined in operational terms than are certain other concepts equally indispensable to the psychology of personality, such as self-consciousness, similarity, intention, intuition, and other forms of mental activity belonging to the realm of immediate experience.

² This is likewise the method of biography. Cf. R. B. Perry's characterization of William James: "Turning to James's benign traits, I find four that are peculiarly pervasive: sensibility, vivacity, humanity, and sociability." *The Thought and Character of William James*, 1935, Vol. II, p. 682.

rests ultimately upon the "intuition" of the investigator and is without the benefit of objective verification. The clinical method stands next door to common sense in its reliance on subjective pronouncements. But in defense of the clinical method it may be urged that prolonged critical probing of many-sided material, even though executed by a single mind without external checks, tends to be *self-validating*. Erroneous first impressions are transcended and the true pattern emerges with acquaintance. This line of defense does not, of course, justify all dogmatic assertions concerning traits, nor does it deny the inherent danger of subjective diagnosis. It merely hints at the fact (more fully discussed in Chapters XIV and XIX) that direct, synthetic judgments have their place even in scientific studies of personality.

Experimentation also provides evidence for the existence of individual traits. Whenever diverse tasks set in the laboratory are responded to in uniform ways, whenever many stimuli and many responses are found to be equivalent, a trait is safely inferred.³ Rating is another method, especially valuable when several judges are employed for the purpose of checking one another. The method of starred ratings (cf. p. 301) is particularly useful in the establishment of individual traits.

Serviceable especially in studying the traits of young children is the method of the time-sample. Two or more independent observers for short periods of time watch the natural and unrestrained activities of children. Each observation may last for no more than one minute. Through repetition, say, at intervals of one hour for several days, the accumulation of such observations gives a significant sampling of the behavior. When different observers agree on the frequent recurrence of certain forms of conduct an excellent basis exists for the inference of a trait.⁴

Time-sampling may be used either for the discovery of individual traits, or for the discovery of common (continuum) traits. In most researches to date the consistency of each child within a group has been studied with reference to the same common variable. There is nothing in the method, however, to prevent its being used for indi-

³ Such laboratory demonstrations of traits can take place, however, only when the tasks set for the subject are diverse enough to permit the discovery of the equivalence of *many* stimuli and of *many* responses. Cf. G. W. Allport, *Char. & Pers.*, 1933, 1, 259-264.

⁴ Cf. the work of F. L. Goodenough on such qualities as leadership, dramatic play, and reticence at the nursery school age. *J. Juw. Res.*, 1928, 12, 230-235.

vidual traits. A child who by intermittent observation is found always lost in fantasy, or vigorously active, or reading a book, may safely be said to have a certain trait or interest even if he is not directly compared with other children.

To aid in the discovery of *common* traits a variety of statistical devices may be used. Perhaps the most familiar are the various methods of determining the *reliability* of tests for some one trait. If a test, constructed of many items, and sampling a wide field of activity, is found to be reliable, this fact proves that subjects reply to the diverse items in a consistent way. If a test, for example, designed to measure *social withdrawing*, is reliable, it shows that subjects who "withdraw" in one situation (*e.g.*, who say that they keep a diary record of their inner life) are likely to "withdraw" in others (*e.g.*, admit being embarrassed when meeting strangers). If every response is positively correlated with every other it shows that the test is internally consistent, which means in turn, that the subjects, by and large, respond consistently and uniformly to the scale.

The contributions of statistical method to the demonstration of common traits are numerous; there are all manner of measures of correlation, contingency and association. Employed according to the needs of the special problem and the nature of the material in hand, each enables the investigator to determine the degree of co-variation of different forms of behavior. A demonstration of the persistence of association is always the first step in inferring the existence of a common trait.⁵

The procedure of assembling and examining the evidence for a trait, together with some of the difficulties involved, can be illustrated by reference to Dudyca's study of punctuality.⁶

The data for this study consisted of over 15,000 observations on the time of arrival of some 300 students at various exercises and collegiate gatherings (as diversified as basketball games, eight o'clock classes, vespers, private conferences, and college commons). Here is typical

⁵ Any measure of association, to be sure, requires interpretation. Whether or not a given magnitude of association proves the existence of a trait frequently depends on the bias of the investigator who interprets the measure. Time and again, for example, correlational coefficients between various indices (presumably of the same trait) are no larger than $+ .35$ or $+ .45$. Having in mind the low predictive value of such coefficients one investigator will say that no trait can be inferred; another, aware of the intrusion of unwanted variables into his experiment, or having supplementary evidence in mind, may consider such low coefficients indicative. There is no certain criterion.

⁶ G. J. Dudyca, "An Objective Study of Punctuality in Relation to Personality and Achievement," *Arch. of Psychol.*, 1936, No. 204.

raw material for the beginning of an extended study of traits. In this particular case, the problem was to determine whether punctuality (or earliness, or lateness) was a characteristic trait for every student.

After transforming into standard scores the records of earliness and lateness for each student for every occasion on which he was observed, the usual product-moment (Pearsonian) method of correlation was applied. The results were indecisive. There seemed to be only a slight tendency for students to maintain the same position of earliness or lateness in arrival. Eleven of the twelve coefficients of correlation were positive, but the largest (between arrival at entertainments and at college commons) was only $+.44$. From such evidence, the author, leaning to the side of caution, concludes, "We can hardly say that there is a general trait of punctuality—or its opposite, tardiness—which operates in the *whole* group."

Coefficients of correlation, however, have a propensity for accentuating *slight* variations in an individual's behavior, thus speciously reducing the evidence for traits, which of course require no such perfect correspondence of measures. The author makes this point, and explains his remedy in the following words: "Pearson *r*'s do not clearly reveal *trait behavior* because the variations in that behavior are accentuated. Since in life situations we are not interested in slight differences of a few minutes, but rather in whether a person is early, on time, or late, fine differences in promptness or tardiness, for practical purposes, are of little significance. Hence we must employ such statistical tools as make use of broad categories, namely, *Chi square which is not a measure of the degree of association, but of the probability that association is or is not significant*. It must be emphasized further that *those variations which decrease the r's, as already noted, are largely within the broad categories selected and hence have no effect on the Chi squares*. Since Chi square reveals whether there is consistency in a fairly broad area of behavior, and since the obtained values indicate a significant association, on the average, *we must conclude that there is evidence in support of a general trait of punctuality*, when punctuality is not conceived of as referring only to isolated, specific events, but to a trait which is variable within limits" (p. 30). Thus does a different statistical tool lead to opposite conclusions!

The author continues his analysis. He points out the inescapable weakness of any conception of a common (continuum) trait: "The distinguishing characteristics of individuals are very effectively hidden when a whole group, distributed according to measures on a certain trait, is dealt with. In other words, since the largest part of any group, normally distributed, clusters about a central tendency, and since the individuals who compose this part of the group are not distinctive in

the measured trait, those individuals who constitute the extremes of the distribution, and who are distinctive in the measured trait, are completely lost sight of because they constitute a minority. A far too common error which results from this lack of discrimination is the conclusion, that since the majority lack distinctiveness, there is none who possesses a general trait. This pitfall is avoided by using the method of contrasted groups, which is being used more and more generally in this type of study" (p. 41).

Using the method of contrasted groups, the picture again changes, this time more sharply favoring traits. Examination of cases of students falling within the extreme 20 per cent of earliness scores, and within the extreme 20 per cent of lateness scores, shows a remarkable consistency in their behavior. The early bird is nearly always early, the late comer usually late (though the evidence for a well-integrated trait of *earliness* is better than for *lateness*, due no doubt to the positive emphasis that social training places upon earliness. The early bird is *trying* to be prompt in every situation, but the late comer is not *trying* to be late. He is merely the victim of a thousand and one distractions. Hence it is that lateness is less well integrated than earliness).

According to Dudycha, "The unmistakable conclusion is: early students differ significantly from late students in punctuality in general and in specific situations; further they differ in both the *extent* and the *frequency* of earliness and lateness. . . . Further, since the contrasted groups include 40 per cent of the students observed, punctuality, or tardiness, is certainly found as a general attitude or trait in the behavior of at least two-fifths of the students; in the other 60 per cent it is less well organized, and exhibits less consistency" (p. 44).

This study demonstrates nicely the psychologist's procedure in the discovery of traits, and some of his dilemmas as well. Especially instructive is the finding that about two-fifths of the students in their own personal lives have well integrated habits of arriving early or late. Since time-of-arrival is essentially a matter of societal standards it is interesting indeed to see that in so large a percentage of cases a regular habit of behavior has been formed around these standards.

What then is Dudycha's dimension of punctuality? Is he dealing with common traits or individual traits? According to the terminology of this volume he has studied a hypothetical common trait. He has proved that consistency of behavior is not well marked for 60 per cent of his subjects, and therefore that no very reliable scale could be created for the measurement of earliness-lateness in the entire population. (It should, however, be remarked that many ex-

istent scales for common traits prove equally ill-adapted to the majority of cases.) As a common (continuum) trait therefore, punctuality leaves something to be desired, though it is perhaps no weaker than others of the same *genre*.

In the course of his investigations Dudycha found that about 20 per cent of his subjects were in one aspect of their behavior highly consistent and markedly similar to one another: they were always early. Now we cannot assume that all of the individuals in this group had precisely the same trait; not all the early birds were early for the same reason. They had, to be sure, uniform habits of earliness, but these habits may have "belonged" in quite different trait-patterns. In one student the habit of earliness may have been an adjunct to a trait of *ambition*, in others to a trait of *deference*, of *pride*, of *rivalry* or even *timidity*. Dudycha did not work on these more basic individual traits. But he does demonstrate clearly the fact that common cultural influences may set up habits in respect to which (by aspective analysis) many individuals may be profitably compared. In short, he has defined a common (continuum) trait and has established its range of applicability: all people *may* be ordered to his continuum, but with certainty and practical usefulness, only the extreme 40 per cent of the population. Such is frequently the situation with common traits.

THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF TRAITS: DO TRAITS DRIVE OR MERELY DIRECT?

Characteristic of the nervous machinery, says neurophysiology, is its arrangement in *levels*, the more complex higher levels standing in the dual role of driver and restrainer to the lower simpler levels.⁷ Therefore, since traits, on the physiological side, are undoubtedly neural dispositions of complex order, they may be expected to show motivational, inhibitory, and selective effects upon specific courses of conduct. Brief as this statement is, it is the sum and substance of the present aid from neurophysiology. So far as it goes it suggests that the operation of a trait is dynamic, both in governing the reception of the stimulus and in directing the response. But the information is too meager to warrant at the present time a physiological account of the operation of traits.

⁷ Cf. C. S. Sherrington, *Mental Hygiene*, 1923, 7, p. 13.

Two kinds of dynamic psychology were described in Chapter VII. One holds that the root motives of men are to be sought in the structure *underlying* the traits of personality, that is to say, in instincts, the Id, in certain original needs, wishes, or drives. Advocates of these theories are unable to envision traits as possessed of driving power. Psychoanalysis, for example, sees traits, not as systems of motivation, but as *symptoms* within the Ego, of driving power within the Id. For McDougall they are also individual ornamentations of propensities common to all men. Even Morton Prince, who regards traits as "obstinately persistent, enduring characteristics of the personality," and recognizes their determining influence on behavior, is of the opinion that the energy of the trait is ultimately always derived from the instincts.⁸ According to these views instinctive or impulsive action takes place under the general guidance of the "contributory habituation" of traits. Traits themselves are mere formal (directive) determining tendencies, *styles of adaptation*, but not the mainsprings of actions.⁹ This type of theory persists in making personal nature a mere incident in the universal pattern of human nature. It is not the attributes of a mind-in-particular that are dynamic, but those of the mind-in-general.

The other kind of dynamic psychology, advocated at length in Chapter VII, breaks with the nomothetic tradition completely, and regards motives as personalized systems of tensions, in which the core of impulse is not to be divorced from the images, idea of goal, past experience, capacities, and style of conduct employed in obtaining the goal. The whole system is integral. If biological drive plays a part (thirst, hunger, sex), it does so, not as *the* motive, but merely as an irritable state of bodily tissues set within an intricate and personalized psychophysical system.

For example, in the case of the motives commonly called sexual, there is, to be sure, a common biological capacity involved, but the concrete functioning of this capacity in each life is very different. It cannot be regarded as one and the same force in all personalities. It is not a single concrete motive, but is a factor, traceable in many

⁸ M. Prince, *Clinical and Experimental Studies in Personality*, 1929, pp. 123, 127.

⁹ A variant of this point of view stresses the redintegrative character of traits. Whenever a stimulus, or internal need, is effective in arousing any *portion* of the determining tendency, the trait as a whole is redintegratively activated. Thus aroused it directs the required response into characteristic channels. The trait *steers*, but the effective motives are still thought to be emotional tensions quite independent of the trait.

kinds of other dispositions (cf. pp. 187-189). Even a sub-classification of types of sexual interest does not suffice to mark off the individual case. To say, for example, that a certain man or woman is *homosexual* is by no means to characterize his or her motivation. There are myriad forms of homosexuality: overt, covert, active, passive, compulsive, sublimated, diffuse, specific, altruistic, gentle, sadistic, protective, adulatory, superficial, unconscious, temporary, lasting, esthetic, intellectual—ultimately, as many forms as there are individuals. The patterns are not directly comparable, for their significance in individual personalities is never twice the same. It is inexact to ascribe one underlying motivational system to all. What motivates each person is not some element common to all individuals, but his *own particular pattern* of tensions. We may perhaps learn something of the nature of this particular pattern from a study of the common biological capacity, but must not make the fatal mistake of assuming that it is the abstract capacity itself that does the motivating.

Only individualized patterns of motives have the capacity to select stimuli, to control and direct segmental tensions, to initiate responses and to render them equivalent, in ways that are consistent with, and characteristic of, the person himself.

But is the personalized trait dynamic in the sense of being self-active? does it in and of itself *initiate* behavior? Strictly speaking, no; any disposition must be *aroused* before it is dynamically active. According to the principles of convergence earlier described, at any one time energies are mobilized for purposes of adjustment as needed. Not every motivational system is at all times in a kinetic phase. The successive demands of living arouse first one region of stress, and then another. Only through an intricate course of stimulation and association are determining tendencies (including traits) raised from a state of potentiality to activity. Either external stimuli or segmental tensions of an organic order may arouse them; but such antecedent stimulation in itself is not the motive.

In another sense traits *do* initiate behavior. It is certainly not a ring on the telephone nor a friend's voice over the wire that causes an egotist to talk for half an hour unchecked about his latest exploits, or a gossip to recount at great length the doings of her neighbors. In these cases the response springs from deep-seated traits of personality, and not from a ring on the phone followed by a friend's voice over the wire. Traits may be even more self-active than these illustrations imply. The egotist and the gossip when alone may feel

quite restless until they have sought out an opportunity to unburden themselves. They *seek* an excuse to talk, and put themselves *in the way* of stimuli that will release the flood. A sociable person, if he is quite as ready to listen as to talk, may be restless until he is among people. An author, a housekeeper, a public speaker, a reformer, a craftsman, a musician, if deprived of their favorite occupation, may "itch" to return to their work. In many such instances of "spontaneous" motivation it seems impossible to trace the precise train of stimulation or association that sets up the aggravated field of stress. The traits appear to be self-active, at least at times when they are not specifically inhibited by contrary courses of conduct.

A certain man, known to everyone as generous and open-handed, was preoccupied at a picnic in lighting a camp-fire. Someone suggested that for supper a half-pint of cream was needed, and that it could probably be obtained at a nearby farmhouse. Still preoccupied with his fire, the generous man reached into his pocket and handed over *two* one dollar bills. There was no reason why he rather than any other member of the party should have footed the bill, and certainly no reason for handing over so much money: not even a Yankee farmer could conceivably charge more than *one* dollar for half a pint of cream.

What had happened in this simple situation? Caught off-guard, the fire-tender fully revealed his trait of open-handedness. Normally, the specific demands of the occasion, and a hasty bit of mental arithmetic, would have brought forth a silver coin, or that lacking, *one* of the dollar bills. Being preoccupied with other duties, the half-heard suggestion crossed the ever-low threshold of his generosity. The response was perfectly in keeping with the disposition, though somewhat excessive and maladaptive in terms of the demands of the occasion. The fact that he offered the money at all, and the fact that he offered it in extravagant amounts, show the decisive influence of the trait, all the more decisive because it was not specifically controlled.

Was it the trait that initiated the behavior, or was it the semi-conscious suggestion that came to his preoccupied mind? The suggestion of course was prior in time, and was required to throw a latent system into action. But the same words spoken to a niggardly or unsocial person might have had no effect at all. Whether we say it was the words or the trait that initiated the behavior, there is no doubt that the trait played the decisive role.

Interests, ambitions, compulsions, phobias, general attitudes, inclinations, hobbies, values, tastes, predilections, and the like, are all

traits, and are at the same time motives. Yet it is not correct to say that *all* motives are traits. The demands of some especially intense stimulation, such as pain, thirst, and the like, lead to immediate, and often reflex, adaptations not well integrated with other tendencies. Such motives are numerous, and quite specific, not at all resembling traits which are always complex and recurrent systems of stress.

Nor is it correct to think of all traits as motives—often they seem to have a defining or directive influence upon conduct, without true motivational significance. Some traits have less to do with *stress* than with *style*. Except in rare instances *politeness*, for example, seems not to be a motivational trait. One does not leave the house and seek out other people in order to be polite to them. One may seek out others because one is sociable and restless without their company; having sought them and being now in their company one may behave toward them in a polite *manner*. Nor is a man often *forceful* for the sake of being forceful; rather he employs a forceful style of behavior whenever he is, for other reasons, aroused to action. Such “directive” traits have been classed by Troland with the “praxiograms,” cortical patterns that do not initiate but do regulate the character of response.¹⁰ Some traits thus seem to have *motivational* (directional) significance, and some mere *instrumental* significance. The latter are primarily expressive in significance, and seem predominantly motor in their organization; they represent styles of behaving and, unlike the driving traits, are seldom involved in the profundities of emotional life. The distinction is clearly drawn by Stern who calls the driving traits *Richtungsdispositionen*, and the instrumental traits, *Rüstungsdispositionen*.

Now the two factors of *Richtung* and *Rüstung*, however closely interwoven, have nonetheless a certain independence of one another, and the most varied relations to one another. We are therefore compelled to distinguish between those dispositions that have a prevailingly directional character from those that are principally an implemental character. The former are purposive, they have a “tendency to,” the latter are capacities, and have a “potency for.”¹¹

This distinction is a useful one. But it must not be overworked. There is no sharp line between motivational traits and stylistic traits, between *direction* and *manner of expression*. Very often what was

¹⁰ L. T. Troland, *Cerebration and Action* (Vol. III of *The Principles of Psychophysiology*), 1932, p. 321.

¹¹ W. Stern, *Die menschliche Persönlichkeit*, 1923 ed., p. 83.

originally a motivational trait (e.g., interest in mechanics) becomes a mere instrument of expression (a skill serviceable in earning a living), or what was originally instrumental (e.g., skill in seamanship) may become a passionate interest. This continual transformation of motives from the level of mechanism to the level of drives, or *vice versa*, has been discussed at length in Chapter VII.

Whether a trait is dynamic or directive is, then, a matter of degree. At one extreme are the compelling, seemingly spontaneous, unrestrained, obsessional traits of neurotics or psychotics.¹² Shading from these compulsive systems are the interests of normal people, which in turn vary from absorbing passions to mild predilections. Still less dynamic are the directive traits; nevertheless, having a certain steering capacity, they cannot be entirely divorced from motive. The dynamic pressure of these expressive traits often passes unnoticed until an individual is compelled, through outside constraint, to act contrary to his usual style. The resulting discomfort and maladaptation show to what extent his expressive behavior has been dynamic in character. His equipment, abilities, and style, he finds, are not wholly matters of implementation; they too have a certain *Drang*. In brief, the distinction between driving traits and directive, while useful for some purposes, cannot be sustained too rigidly.

GENOTYPICAL, PHENOTYPICAL, AND PSEUDO-TRAITS

It is obvious that what seems to be the *same* trait may, in different people, have quite diverse origins. Shyness in one person, for example, may be due to hereditary influences that no amount of contrary pressure from the environment has been able to offset; in another person shyness may stem from an inferiority feeling built by an abnormally exacting environment. In spite of dissimilar histories, in appearance and in effect, the shyness of these two persons may be very much alike. Conversely, two youths suffering some shocking experience of grief or bitter disappointment, objectively alike, may be

¹² It may be well to remind the reader that such traits cannot be considered merely as *symptoms* of an unconscious conflict. Miserliness, scrupulosity, compulsive neatness, and similar traits are more than converted expressions of frustrated eroticism, infantile or otherwise. Even in cases where such unconscious components can be traced, these must be regarded not as the contemporary sum and substance of the motive, but merely as integral with it. Whether or not some initial repression took place, there have been elaborations and transformations in the focal character of the disposition until it must now be considered as rooted in the total life rather than in some one recess of the unconscious.

affected very differently. One of them becomes morose and ineffectual, lost in his trouble; the other stiffens his back and becomes more realistic and aggressive. The same fire that melts the butter, hardens the egg.

Lewin has shown this general problem of appearance *vs.* underlying cause to be of considerable importance in the investigation of personality. Descriptions in terms of here-and-now attributes are *phenotypical*; explanatory accounts, seeking underlying motives and stresses, are *genotypical*.¹³

This distinction, though valuable, has already been adequately implied in the foregoing discussion of the nature of traits. For one thing, common (continuum) traits are obviously conceived in phenotypical terms. When ascendance, perseverance, sociability, radicalism, punctuality, or neuroticism is measured for a whole population, with the intent of comparing all subjects in respect to the same trait, it is obvious that no account can be taken of the various reasons why different people are ascendant, persevering, sociable, or the like, nor can any attention be paid to the individual varieties of these traits. Stylistic (directive) traits also suggest Lewin's phenotypical classification, since they are more closely related to external conduct than to root motives. Conversely, driving traits must certainly be ordered to Lewin's conception of genotypical traits, for they are the very springs of conduct. The psychology of personality must deal with traits of *both* orders, if for no other reason than that in the course of development genotypes are often transformed into phenotypes, and phenotypes into genotypes. Chapter VII is a record of such transformations.

Another distinction of value is that drawn by Baumgarten between genuine traits and "pseudo-traits."¹⁴ This writer points out that erroneous inferences are often made when behavior is observed superficially and interpreted only at its face value. A bearer of gifts may not be, in spite of all appearances, a truly generous person: he may be trying to buy favor. A person chaste in conduct may not be chaste at heart. Ever so many "virtues" may be simulated and mistaken by the unwary observer for true traits. "Pseudo-traits," then, are errors of inference, misjudgments that come from fixing attention solely upon appearances. The best way to avoid such errors is to find the genotype that underlies the conduct in question. What is

¹³ K. Lewin, *Gesetz und Experiment in der Psychologie*, 1927.

¹⁴ F. Baumgarten, *Brit. J. Psychol.*, 1936, 26, 289-298.

the individual *trying to do* when he brings his gifts? If his basic motive is known then the sycophancy of his conduct is understood and the pseudo-trait gives way to the true trait in the diagnosis. Baumgarten's distinction reminds us once again that the soundest methods and utmost of critical acumen are essential in diagnosing personal traits. It is only by its ability to separate true traits from pseudo-traits that psychology makes any advance over common sense.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF TRAITS

Probably nothing whatsoever in the structure of any human mind exists sealed up in completely independent systems. Segmental reflexes seem most nearly to approach this condition, but even these can be markedly altered in their functioning by concurrent activity or tonus prevailing in other psychophysical regions. Neither are the oft-mentioned "dissociated complexes" and "logic tight compartments" of the mind entirely separate; their boundaries are at least *semi*-permeable. Since this is so, the influences determining conduct are manifold and fluid. A single act may, and usually does, result from the mobilization of available energy through *many* channels. Consider the task of writing a letter; it requires the convergence of mental sets, habits, motives of the moment, skills, stylistic traits, as well as the deepest of personal convictions and values. Such adaptive behavior always demands the effective convergence of many determining influences, traits among others. Generalizing the illustration, it may safely be said that no single performance is ever a univocal product of any one single trait.

At the same time, since many different adaptive acts distributed in time show repeatedly the same telic and expressive character, it becomes necessary to assume some stable and continuous influences at work. A markedly loquacious person, who talks at great length on the slightest provocation, must have some psychophysical tendency that helps to stabilize his conduct in this direction. Loquacity, provoked so easily (by an equivalence of stimuli), leads to fluent speech wherein all manner of ideas and expressions may be employed (equivalence of responses). Though it is not easy to conceive in neural terms, there must be some system with a low threshold of arousal, readily crossed by many stimuli and by many associational currents. At any one time, to be sure, the form of the loquacity is determined not only by the disposition in question, but by the simul-

taneous functioning of ideational content, by special attitudes toward the topic under discussion, toward the interlocutor, and innumerable other concurrent conditions, both inner and outer.

The term "focalized" disposition, previously introduced, fairly represents the nature of this internal press. When latent, as when active, the barriers between these dispositions are not rigid, for often an impulse arousing one trait may at the same time arouse others. In fact the arousal of several dispositions in varying degrees seems to be the rule, each contributing to the convergent conduct in proportion to its degree of arousal. Figuratively, traits "overlap" with one another. They do not operate on an "all or none" principle. The situation is represented diagrammatically in Figure 17, p. 246, where *interdependent* traits are contrasted with *independent* factors.

The trait, then, is identifiable, not by clean-cut contours or boundaries, but rather by a nuclear quality, by its *focus*. This focus is essentially the *telic* significance of the trait, that is to say, its meaning to the individual as a mode of survival and mastery. The loquacious disposition of the talkative man is, for him, a *modus vivendi*. So too are all the other focalized (and interdependent) systems of his personality; his esthetic interests, his thriftiness, his timidity, his neatness, his affectionate attachments, and his political conservatism—they are all *modi vivendi*. In this same sense attitudes as well as traits are focalized dispositions.

By now it is clear why, either for the population at large or for the single individual, it is impossible, strictly speaking, to classify traits. Since the significant foci in any two lives are never precisely the same the most to be hoped for in the total population is an inventory of some of the *common* traits in which people may be roughly compared. (This procedure will be followed in Chapter XV where its value and its limitations will become apparent.) For the *individual*, since his traits are never wholly independent of one another, enumeration in terms of mutually exclusive units is not possible.¹⁵

This question of the independence of traits has important implications for the construction and interpretation of *tests*. Since the tests

¹⁵ What usually happens in an attempt to list the basic traits of an acquaintance is that a *cluster* of trait-names is employed. One says of a friend, "She is one of the most tactful, sympathetic, and sociable people I know." Is only one focal disposition here intended, or two, or three? If more than one, then there is probably not independence among them, but some clustering tendency. Because of such clustering it becomes impossible to analyze a single life into wholly independent units.

are designed for the measurement of common traits, the interpretation of the score of any individual subject is an awkward task. When he answers the questions—or performs the acts—dictated by the test, he is behaving in a specific adaptive manner. If the reasoning of this chapter is sound, such adaptive behavior is unlikely to be the product of one and only one determining disposition. The test will not measure one and only one trait. It is rather a rough and approximate device whereby the investigator hopes to tap the trait in question along with he knows not what other variables. There is some justification for his belief that the sheer length of his scale will to a certain extent lead to a canceling out of the unwanted and intrusive variables. Further, if the test has a known reliability and validity, the investigator may with some assurance say that whatever extraneous reasons there may be for a subject's selection of responses, in the long run the trait itself probably has the most decisive influence on the selection and on the score.

But the problem becomes more seriously complicated when a test is designed (as many tests are) to measure not one trait, but *several*. Diagnostic weights, different for different traits, are assigned on the assumption, correct in itself, that a response is determined not by one single trait but by many. The simple uni-trait test is contented with *one* final score, admitting that many other determinants have gone *unmeasured*. The multi-trait scale (perhaps in the interests of efficiency or of that ever-recurring naive hope of finding one solution for all puzzles) expects to diagnose these other determinants (so far as they involve additional common-traits) all at one time.

Take, for example, Bernreuter's *Personality Inventory*, an omnibus of 125 questions, drawn largely from three pre-existing, "logical" scales each of which is intended to measure one and only one common trait.¹⁶ With the aid of these 125 questions the scale attempts to measure simultaneously *four* common traits of personality: *dominance*, *self-sufficiency*, *introversion*, and *neuroticism*. Each answer receives four scores (some of them being zero), according to its empirically (*i.e.*, statistically) determined diagnostic value for each of the four traits. Thus, one question reads, "Do you often feel just miserable?" If your answer is "?," meaning either you don't know how you feel or else that you don't know what the tester means, you are scored —3 on introversion, —1 on dominance, and 0 for both neuroticism and self-sufficiency. Now such a response to such a question seems to bear a very tenuous logical relation, if any at all, to any of these four traits. Why should a person who sets a question mark against such an item be judged extroverted and submissive, but neutral in respect to neuroticism and self-sufficiency?

¹⁶ R. G. Bernreuter, *J. Soc. Psychol.*, 1933, 4, 387-405.

In order to avoid such psychological confusion, it is much more wise to stick to the simpler conception of a scale, wherein a single response is evaluated only in its diagnostic significance for *one* trait, deliberately leaving unmeasured all the other determining influences affecting the score. In so doing the temptation to depart from the precincts of psychological intelligibility will be lessened.

A different attack on the dilemma created by multi-trait scales is to proceed in the direction of factor analysis as Flanagan has done in his treatment of the Bernreuter scale.¹⁷ Bernreuter very soon found such a high correlation between his measures of neuroticism and introversion that he could not consider them separate common traits; hence for practical purposes he reduced his measures from four to three. Flanagan goes still further; eliminating the correlations between all scores, he pulls out as substitutes for the four original, interdependent traits, two new and *independent* factors, which he christens *self-confidence* and *sociability*. After this ceremony, it turns out that if you "feel just miserable" you score +4 on Factor I, and 0 on Factor II. As the statistics grow better and better, the intelligibility grows less and less.—Contamination by statistical artifacts is not uncommon in scales of the multiple trait order. (From one highly sophisticated empirical scale comes this extreme instance: children who give the response word "green" to a stimulus word "grass" receive a score of +6 for "loyalty to the gang"—an example of empiricism gone wild.)

Unnecessary trouble springs from assuming, as some testers do, that *independent* factors are to be preferred to *inter-dependent* traits (cf. p. 245). What if certain scales do correlate with one another? (Correlations of the order of +.20 to +.40 are often found.) Each scale may still represent a well-conceived, measurable common trait (if it has demonstrated reliability and validity). No harm is done by overlap; indeed, overlap is a reasonable expectation in view of that roughness of approximation which is the very nature of the entire procedure (also in view of the tendency of certain traits to cluster). Well-considered scales with some overlap are preferable to ill-considered scales without overlap. To seek *intelligible* units is a better psychological goal than to seek *independent* units.

Constructive suggestions for avoiding such difficulties as we have been describing will be offered in Chapter XV where the logic of measuring common traits will be under discussion. For the time being it is sufficient to say that *inter-dependent traits* can be measured quite as successfully as *independent factors*, and, as a rule, much more meaningfully.

¹⁷ J. C. Flanagan, *Factor Analysis in the Study of Personality* (Stanford Press),

THE CONSISTENCY OF TRAITS

The scientific evidence for the existence of a trait always comes from demonstration by some acceptable method of *consistency* in behavior (the consistency being not a matter of stereotyped habits, but of equivalent responses). It is simple enough to prove some people self-consistent: they are, for example, almost always *decisive*, or almost always *fastidious*. In other cases, however, the evidence is less conclusive. The degree of consistency that different investigators will demand before inferring a trait is a somewhat subjective matter. Aware of the difficulties encountered in framing pertinent tests, experiments, and rating scales, and aware of errors in measurement and of the unmeasurable and uncontrollable interplay of determining tendencies in the subjects themselves, one investigator may be content with relatively low measures of consistency; while another, unmindful of, or unimpressed by, these handicaps, may demand almost perfect correspondence among his measures before inferring a trait.

To argue against this latter position is not necessarily to lower standards of psychological investigation. Perfect consistency will never be found and must not be expected. There are many reasons why this is so. For one thing, in the same personality, traits often contradict each other. People may be both ascendant *and* submissive, perhaps submissive only towards those individuals bearing traditional symbols of authority and prestige; and towards everyone else aggressive and domineering. So-called guilt-behavior may betoken contradictory traits: the overt virtue may be compensatory for the hidden vice. Ambivalence in one's feelings of loyalty and affection also makes for contradictions in traits. Every person has conflicts, frequently expressed in antagonistic dispositions. The ever-changing environment raises now one trait and now another to a state of active tension.

Likewise harmful to perfect consistency is the omnipresent principle of convergence. No trait operates alone. The adaptive act of the moment is only partially a function of the one trait. It is determined as well by many other traits (even by contradictory traits, if the situation has dual "valence"), and by all manner of specific attitudes, by mood, and by momentary conditions. The excessively methodical person may become careless and demoralized in his haste to catch a

train; the meticulously truthful person may lie if his life is at stake. Moreover, in every personality there are peculiarly specific dissociated habits. A person, otherwise polite and considerate, may, because of special prejudices, be rude to Jews, to red-heads, or to taxi-drivers.

A single inconsistency in behavior may mean very little. A vigorous executive who at the office, at home, or wherever he is in command, makes swift and emphatic decisions, may be reduced to virtual immobility when confronted in a restaurant with a tray of French pastry. Why? Perhaps it is just fatigue at the end of the day, or annoyance at being forced to decide so trivial an issue (in such cases the trait of decisiveness is not aroused); or his hesitation may be a throw back to some boyhood experience when the rod had inhibited the stealing of tarts. Such specific inhibitions may be at work, or the customary decisiveness may perhaps for this occasion be blocked by the activity of other deep-seated traits now functionally dominant, such as frugality or hypochondria.

Or, take the case of Dr. D, always neat about his person and desk, punctilious about lecture notes, outlines, and files; his personal possessions are not only in order but carefully kept under lock and key. Dr. D is also in charge of the departmental library: in this duty he is careless; he leaves the library door unlocked, and books are lost; it does not bother him that dust accumulates. Does this contradiction in behavior mean that D lacks traits? Not at all. He has two opposed stylistic traits, one of orderliness and one of disorderliness. Pursuing the case further, this duality is explained by the fact that D has *one* cardinal (motivational) trait from which these contrasting styles proceed. The outstanding fact about his personality is that he is a self-centered egotist who never acts for other people's interests, but always for his own. This cardinal trait of self-centeredness (for which there is abundant evidence) *demand*s orderliness for himself, but not for others.

For various reasons, therefore, simple statistical *correspondence* of measures is not the sum-total of the available evidence for traits. The more profound *congruences* of behavior emerge only after an intensive study of the organization of each personality.

And yet in arguing that the inner consistency of traits is often greater than surface explorations indicate, we must not commit the opposite error of presuming every trait to be organically self-consistent under all circumstances. As has been pointed out, traits are often aroused in one type of situation and not in another; not all

stimuli are equivalent in effectiveness. Successful adaptation and mastery require a trait to remain loose-knit, so that its determinative influence may be modified or checked according to special demands of the moment. To serve as a successful *modus vivendi* a trait must remain plastic or lose its usefulness.

We conclude then that the consistency of a trait is entirely a matter of degree.¹⁸ There must be some demonstrable relationship between separate acts before a trait can be inferred. Yet occurrence of dissociated, specific, or even contradictory acts is not necessarily fatal to the inference. Perfect and rigid self-consistency is not to be expected.

ARE TRAITS NORMALLY DISTRIBUTED?

The question of the distribution of traits arises, of course, only in connection with *common* traits. By their very nature individual traits cannot be scaled in a population.

Now, the investigator *wants* to think of any common trait as a single continuous variable with scores arranged according to a normal curve of distribution, corresponding to the probability (Gaussian) curve, so that he may treat the scores for any common traits according to convenient statistical principles. To have such a distribution facilitates the establishment of norms, the comparison of one individual with another, computations of correlations with other variables, and many other quantitative procedures dear to the heart of the tester. Without doubt, the most serviceable common traits are those whose distribution corresponds fairly closely to this requirement. Figure 22 illustrates the situation with one scale, the continuum in this case being Ascendance-Submission, constructed from a *pair* of traits, initially conceived according to the logic of biological adaptation and acculturation (cf. pp. 298, 410 ff.). Items designed to measure people on this continuum were scored in such a way that

¹⁸ The reader should note how frequently it has been necessary to speak of various attributive characteristics of traits as a "question of degree." Earlier, the amount of driving or of directive stress in a trait was shown to vary from case to case (as well as from time to time); further, a common trait was seen to be common only to a certain extent and in a certain sense; then too, independence turned out to be only a relative attribute of traits; and now the self-consistency of a trait also seems to be a variable matter. Likewise, we shall soon see that the importance of a trait in an individual life may vary from a cardinal position to a minor and inconsequential one. Finally, the unity of personality itself, as the next chapter will show, is neither perfect nor wholly mythical; it too is a question of amount. No sharper distinctions or more final statements are possible, for the simple reason that mental organization in all its phases *is* a matter of degree!