

PERSONALITY AND EVERYDAY BEHAVIOR

by

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To My Father

PREFACE

What does he know? *What* can he do? Does he know how to add and subtract? Can he write good Chinese? Does he know the principal dates of history? Does he understand economic and social problems? Can he ride a bicycle, and skate, and play tennis? Does he know customs of courtesy? How can these things best be learned? What are the laws of efficient memorizing, and of developing skill? These questions are very important, but it is not the purpose of this book to deal with them.

How does he act? *How* does he feel? Does he carry on his daily activities efficiently? Is he happy? Does he gain the liking of other people? Can he overcome difficulty and discouragement? Can he win a marriage of lasting love and harmony? How can he best learn these things? What principles underlie emotional adjustment, and the development of sound and healthy personality? This book is concerned with such questions as these.

In seeking to understand *How*? it is necessary to be very persistent in asking *Why*? There is really no final difference between *How* and *Why*. When we ask *How*? we generally think of individual acts or types of behavior. When we ask *Why*? we try to dig down to deeper principles, to understand how human nature works, to see the relation of one set of acts

to another. The general conceptions of human nature and of learning that seem most adequate in relating the various *How's* together are developed briefly in Chapters II and IV.

The material here presented has gradually taken shape during use in a brief college course in mental hygiene, and is written primarily for further use in this course. Several hundred students have contributed to it thru their participation in group and individual conferences on such problems as are here discussed, and in permitting use to be made of the case descriptions that appear at the close of the text. Their cooperation is greatly appreciated.

My colleague Mr. Hsia Yun (夏雲) has been most generous in his help, having been almost entirely responsible for suggesting or criticizing the Chinese terms that have been included. His criticisms of Chapter IV were also most helpful. The previous instructor in the course mentioned, Mrs. Helen Firman Sweet, most kindly allowed full use of her notes, from which valuable suggestions were received. Others whose advice is appreciated are Mr. Lin Chia T'ung (林嘉通) and Mr. Yeh Te Kuang (葉德光), Mr. Lin on Chapter IV and Mr. Yeh on some of the Chinese terms. While my senior colleagues in the Department of Psychology, Chancellor C. W. Luh (陸志韋) and Professor T. T. Lew (劉廷芳) are in no way to be held responsible for the points of view or material here presented, it is impossible not to take this opportunity to express the warmest appreciation of their stimulating comradeship thru these years. Finally, my debt is very great to Louise Egbert Sailer, who has given many hours to detailed criticisms of phrasing and to sharing the burden of proof-reading.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING OR STUDY

The reader is warned against misunderstanding the terms that are used in the text, both those in Chinese and those in English. A dictionary definition or translation is likely to be very misleading. Each new subject or point of view must create its own terms, and the most convenient way to do this is to take some word that suggests the idea in part and try to fill it with new meaning for this particular use. The way to understand it is to study the way in which it is *here* used. The Chinese terms are often in their original meaning quite far from the equivalent of the English. They are chosen because they seem to offer the most convenient box in which to pack the new meaning. Often therefore they must not be used in exactly their original sense.

Walking two miles is doing twice as much work as walking one mile. Making three pairs of shoes is doing three times as much as making one pair. Does reading two books "do" twice as much as reading one book? Does a person who hears three lectures accomplish three times as much as if he had heard only one?

No, there is an important difference. Ordinarily we measure the *mile walked*, or look at the *shoes made*. They are the product in which we are interested. Pages read or lectures heard, however, are not the product. The important thing is the *changes in the mind* of the person reading. Does reading two books produce twice as much change of mind as reading one book? Does listening to three lectures produce

three times as much change of mind as listening to one lecture? Where two people read the same book or hear the same lecture, does an equally valuable change take place in the minds of both? What goes on in your mind as you read? What new understanding do you gain, and how permanently does it influence your thinking and behavior? *That* is the question, not the number of pages "covered" or the time spent.

This is why so often one person finds a certain book very stimulating while another finds the same book dull. One has been able to change his mind; the other has not. There is no such thing as a good book or a good speech or a bad book or a bad speech, regardless of the reader or the listener. A book may be good to you and bad to me, if your mind sets to work while mine does not. Reading a book the second or third or tenth time is often much more valuable than reading it the first time. Ideas grow. To the superficial person such rereading is a waste of time. He looks only for something "new" in the book. He does not realize that what is needed is something new and alive in his own mind.

Mental hygiene is a field in which everyone has large experience. The purpose of this book is to help people use their own experience to do their own thinking on this subject. Some will read the book and "finish" it. Others, it is hoped, will *begin* to think more actively about these problems.

Many of the questions at the end of each chapter may at first sight seem little related to the material in the chapter. Mechanical questions that each reader can formulate for himself are seldom included, questions such as: What are the main points in this chapter? How are they related to each other, and to

preceding chapters? What do the various terms mean? The reader who wishes to master the material will wish to begin with such questions as these before attempting to answer the others, tho he may find it useful to read the printed questions over carefully before reading the chapter itself. It is suggested that he write down beside the paragraphs in the text, the number of any question especially related to those paragraphs. It is far better to consider a few questions thoroly than to attempt to answer all of them quickly. Those chapters that appear in the form of a discussion are likely to seem confusing if they are read hastily. It should be very helpful to make an outline of each of them, showing the relation to each other of the various points of view expressed.

It is often complained that books such as these raise more questions than they answer. If in this case this complaint is justified, and the questions raised are important ones that are worth thinking about, the main purpose of these chapters will be achieved.

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A SUGGESTION FOR SELF-STUDY¹

Most people feel or act in some of the ways described below.
Give yourself a mark on each item as follows:

2, if you feel you are very much like this person.

1, if you feel you are somewhat like this person.

0, if you feel you seldom or never feel or act in this way.

Keep your record. You may find it interesting to mark one of your best friends on each item also. If you do so, keep this record too.

1. *A* worries a great deal about the future, even tho he knows that it does no good.
2. *B* wishes that he were not so nervous.
3. When *C* fails or is disappointed in anything, he feels:
"This is my fate. I was born to be unlucky."
4. *D* likes very much to help other people because they are grateful to him, and others praise him for his helpfulness.
5. *E* finds it hard to make friends.
6. *F* spends a great deal of time imagining himself to be a famous scholar, athlete, or hero.
7. *G* hates to yield to others. He will often use arguments that he knows are not sound rather than admit that he is wrong.
8. When one of his friends meets with some special success, *H* is likely to criticize in some way the friend or his achievement.
9. *I* finds that to complain of his troubles gives him a sort of satisfaction.
10. *J* often finds excuses for doing something that he wants to do, even tho he knows it is not wise.

¹ For this and other notes, see the *Notes* at the end of the volume.

11. *K* feels that he must not attempt anything in which he is likely to fail.
12. *L* often talks about his own faults, hoping that this will lead others to praise him.
13. *M* likes to criticize other people because it makes him feel that they are inferior to him, tho he says that he does it in order to help them.
14. *N* often asks others to criticize him, but when they do so he feels irritated.
- ✓ 15. *O* is likely to blame other people for mistakes that are really his own fault.
16. *P* feels that social parties are uninteresting and senseless.
17. *Q* thinks that he (or she) can never be attractive to members of the opposite sex.
18. *R* sometimes tells of some small mistakes that he has made, hoping that others will then not notice a more serious one.
- ✓ 19. *S* feels that he will be disgraced if he does not receive high marks in his studies.
- ✓ 20. *T* is superior to other people in one or two points, and this gives him great satisfaction.
- ✓ 21. *U* tries hard to keep troublesome problems out of his mind, but they keep coming back to disturb him.
- ✓ 22. When anyone treats him badly, *V* feels that his personality has been insulted and injured.
- ✓ 23. *W* thinks that his main problem is lack of will-power. He knows what is right but he cannot do it.
24. When *X* fails to succeed in something, he is likely to decide that it is not worth doing.
25. *Y* sometimes becomes sick in order to escape some problem or difficulty.
- ✓ 26. After *Z* has had a slight misunderstanding or quarrel with another person, he usually worries about it.

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CHAPTER I

CAUSES OF HUMAN ACTIONS

Let us say that a person's acts include everything that he does or feels. Breathing, seeing the blue sky, feeling sad, studying, brushing away a fly or playing a game,—all these are acts or sets of acts. In studying personality, we assume that every act has its causes. *Why* did he, or she, act that way? We must never tire of asking this question.

When *D* came out of class one day last week and started toward his bicycle, he saw a friend of his named *L* bending over it. *L* hurried away, and *D* discovered that his front tire was quite flat. He thought that *L* had let the air out of the tire as a joke, and he became extremely angry.

Why did he act in such a way? In order to answer this question we must raise several other questions:

Would the *average person* (常人) in similar circumstances think that *L* was responsible, or would he think that *L* had noticed that the tire was flat and was merely looking at it? If he would think that *L* was responsible, would he be angry, or would he laugh and plan to find some way to pay *L* back with some trick of his own? *Was D acting according to ordinary human nature or did he have a suspicious or bad-tempered nature of his own?*

We have asked how the average person would act in similar circumstances. What would "similar circumstances (同樣的情境)" be? We must understand clearly just what the situation was. Did *D* have any special reason to suspect *L* of trying to make trouble for

him? Had *L* done any such thing before? Did *D* dislike him for any reason? Were there others present who were laughing at *D* and embarrassing him? Was he in a special hurry? Would pumping up the tire again be very troublesome? Was he feeling just as well and cheerful as usual that morning, or had he perhaps received bad news the day before, or been worried over his finances, or been tired from studying too late the previous night?

Was *D*'s bad-tempered nature, or were special circumstances on this occasion, responsible for his anger? We must know how he acts at other times. Is he always suspicious of others, and easily offended at any joke played on him? Is he more sensitive toward *L* than toward other friends? Does he for any reason object especially to this particular kind of joke, letting air out of a tire?

What really was the cause of *D*'s anger? We cannot say merely that it was finding the tire flat. This was the *immediate cause* (目前的緣因), but in addition to that we must look for *underlying causes* (基本的緣因) and *contributing causes* (其他的緣因). Underlying causes lie in the nature of the man himself. If he has acted as an ordinary person would act under the circumstances, we may call the underlying cause simply "human nature" (人類的本性). If not, we must study his personal characteristics (特性), his bad temper, suspiciousness, or sensitiveness. Contributing causes are all those additional circumstances that influence behavior. In this case the contributing causes might be *D*'s special suspicion of *L*, the presence of others who laughed, his hurry, his being worried over bad news, his lack of sufficient sleep the previous night, and other factors that we may know nothing about.

A possible cause is of course not always an actual cause. The underlying cause of any act will be either merely human nature, or some personal characteristic, but not both. If *D* is asked why he became so angry, and he mentions several of the possible contributing causes that have been suggested, he may only be making *excuses* (藉故). An excuse looks like a cause, but it may be tested in this way: *If that circumstance had not been present, would D have acted in the same way? If so, then the "reason" is only an excuse.* *D* may blame his anger on his late study the night before. But if he acts in the same way when he has gone to bed early, when other circumstances are the same, then he has given an excuse and not a cause.

That which seems to be the immediate cause of an act, should sometimes be called merely the *occasion* (機會). Food is set before me when I am hungry, and I eat. The presence of the food is not really the *cause* of my eating, for if no food comes, I will search for some. The need exists and I intend to satisfy it. I desire an opportunity, an occasion. If however I am not hungry, and the presence of food still leads me to eat, it may really be called the immediate cause. An occasion is something between an immediate cause and an excuse. It is necessary for the performance of an act, but if one occasion is not offered, another will be sought. A person who wishes to criticize another can usually find an occasion for doing so.

In psychology we continually talk about the *Situation* (情境) that meets a person, and the *Response* (反應) that he makes. The situation is really the sum of all the causes of an act, and the response is of course the act itself. The *stimulus* (刺激) which is the immediate cause, is only one part of the situation. Which part of any situation will be the stimulus often

depends very largely on the past experience of the person who responds. When we walk through a market, or ride thru a city, each of us pays attention to those things in which he is most interested. Two people look at the same object. It is one kind of stimulus for one of them, and another kind for the other. The artist may see a garden as a scene to paint, while the child sees it as a place to play or the tired man as a place to rest. In the case of *D*'s anger the stimulus was "*L* playing a mean trick." From exactly the same scene, another person might have received the stimulus "*L* noticing my tire which is already flat" or "*L* playing a friendly joke on me." A stimulus is the part of the situation that we pay attention to and the meaning that it has for us. Meaning is extremely important in determining behavior. A slight criticism means very little to one person; to another it means that others consider him worthless, and makes him unhappy for several days.

The study of personality is largely a search for causes of actions and for the relationships between them. We are too often content to find merely one cause as the explanation of certain behavior. Or we consider an excuse to be a cause, or fail to distinguish between cause and occasion. Causes are likely to be immensely complex. There are often many causes for one act, as has been seen, and a change in any of them would make the act different in some way from what it is. In studying personality we are especially interested in underlying causes. If you change something in the environment you may avoid some particular trouble. But change the nature of the person and you have fitted him better to deal with any environment in which he is likely to be placed. If a boy steals, it is good to remove temptation from him. It is still better to change *him* so that he will not steal even if he meets temptation.

Questions

1. What further information must you have in order to answer each of the following questions?
 - a. "When *G* found that his rice was cold, he threw his bowl on the floor and broke it." Was this act due to "human nature" or to a personal characteristic of *G*?
 - b. "*H* had been jealous of *P* for a long time. Today when *P* made a slight mistake, *H* criticized him severely." Was *P*'s mistake the immediate cause, the occasion, or only an excuse for *H*'s criticism? Was the jealousy a contributing cause or not?
 - c. "*N* was greatly frightened by the loud thunder. She said that she was so frightened because a friend's house had once been struck by lightning." Was this an excuse for her fear, or a contributing cause?
2. In each of the following cases, two people acted very differently. Why? Suggest for each case at least two ways in which the causes might have differed.
 - a. *B* felt happy because he received 70% in Physics. *C* felt unhappy because she received 70% in Biology.
 - b. *X* gave some coppers to a beggar; he said he felt sorry for him. *Y* refused to give; he said the beggar ought to look for work.
 - c. *M* was pleased and a little excited when she was introduced to the famous visitor. *N* felt shy; she avoided the visitor entirely.
3. In each of the following cases, different causes seemed to produce similar behavior. How do you explain this?

- a. *G* and *E* were two school-boys. *G* studied hard only when he was scolded and threatened with punishment. *E* studied hard only when he was praised and encouraged.
 - b. *H* was most happy when she had new clothes that would attract attention. *J* was most happy when he was dressed just like his friends so that no one would notice his clothes at all.
 - c. *P* tried eating at several different restaurants, but liked none of them. In one the food was too salty; in another not salty enough. In one there was too little meat; in another not enough vegetables. He complained quite bitterly of each of them.
4. In each of the following cases, do you think that the explanations offered include all the true causes? Suggest other causes that might have been present.
- a. A man killed his daughter in a fit of anger. He said that he did it because she purposely prepared food for him that he did not like. She had determined to marry against his opposition.
 - b. He says that he wants friends, but he will not try to make them because he trusts no one to be loyal to him.
 - c. I cannot help disliking her because of that bad thing I heard about her, tho it may not have been true.
5. Give your own definition or explanation of each of the following: cause, occasion, excuse, immediate cause, contributing cause, personal characteristic, human nature.
6. Is it ever satisfactory to give "human nature" alone as the cause of any act?