The Psychology of Character Development
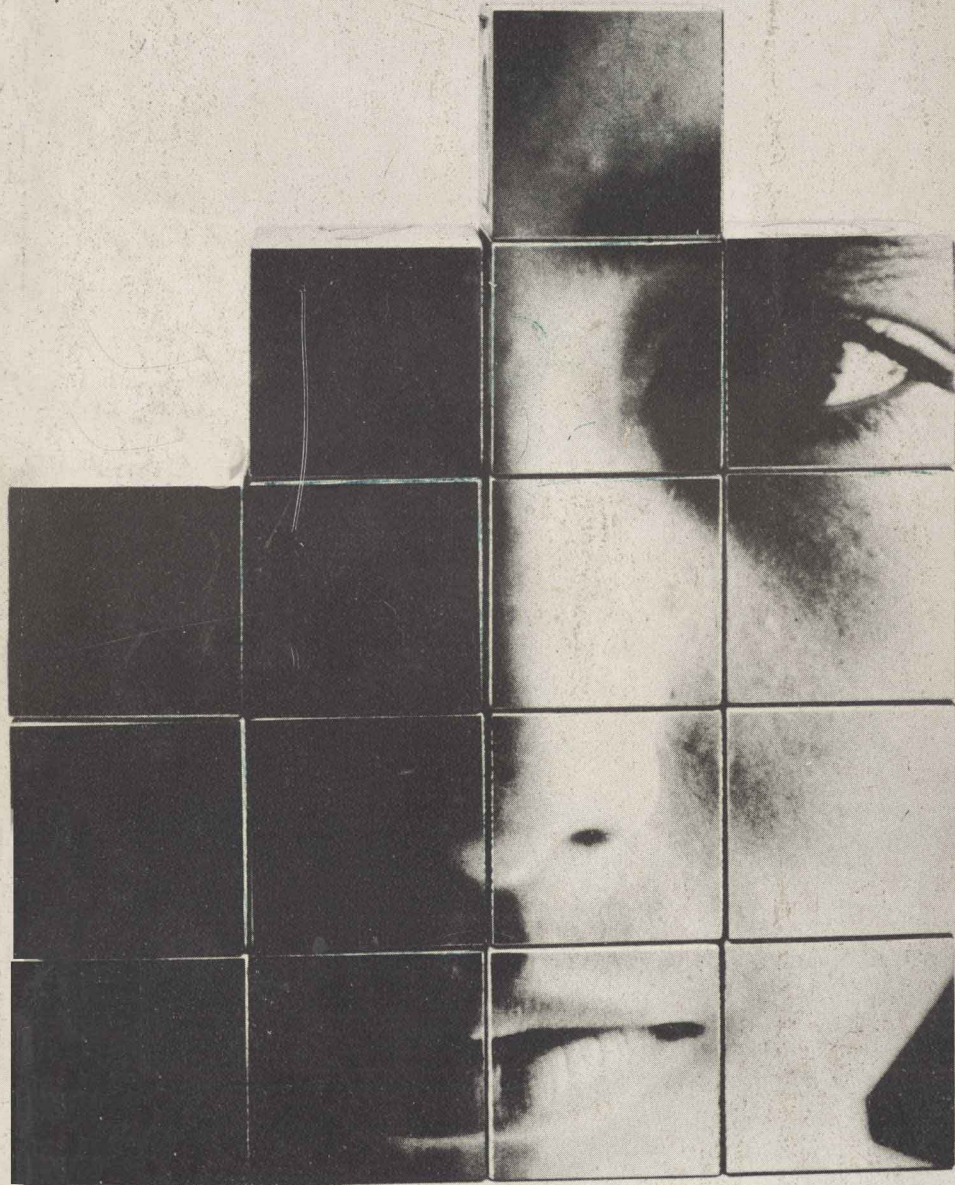## By Robert F. Peck with Robert J. Havighurst
and Ruth Cooper, Jesse Lilienthal, and Douglas More

The psychology of character development

by

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Preface

There is perhaps no study of human behavior more fraught with risk of subjective bias and culture-bound prejudice than is the study of moral character. Yet in no aspect of life is objective knowledge and understanding more essential to human happiness, perhaps even to racial survival. Although much wise thought has been accorded the subject through several millennia, relatively little scientific research has yet been done, particularly on the inner forces that shape and determine character.

A generation ago, the Character Education Inquiry, under the direction of Hartshorne, May, and Shuttleworth, devised some ingenious ways of testing children's honesty and other aspects of their moral behavior. When they described their findings, they were careful to point out that their tests tapped only a small segment of school behavior. They felt that the important features of character in the child's total life behavior remained to be investigated. In *Studies on the Nature of Character*, Volume III of their publication, they described the ways in which they attempted to probe these broader

characteristics and more general moral problems. However, they concluded that moral behavior was highly specific to each situation. It was, as they defined and tested it.

Their studies removed the ground from under some widely held beliefs to the effect that moral behavior was "all of a piece," with good behavior in one area of behavior assuring the presence of good behavior in other areas. Character, they found, was much more specifically related to particular situations than had been supposed. The Character Education Inquiry also showed that the supposed "character-building" agencies, such as church, schools, and Scouts, were not nearly so effective as many had supposed.

One unintended result of the Character Education Inquiry was that it apparently discouraged the proponents of experimentation and objective study in the field of character education. Most educators and psychologists reacted to the Inquiry by turning away from this complex area of human behavior. Thus it was a decade before people began to theorize and experiment again, with the conviction that they could accomplish something useful in this field.

In the 1940's, we undertook a new study. If behavior were viewed from a different angle from the one Character Inquiry adopted, that of persistent attitudes and ways of relating to people, it seemed to us likely that "popular opinion" about the generality of moral character, which Hartshorne and his colleagues felt was discredited by their studies, might turn out to be not so far wrong after all. We were prepared to find any and all discrepancies in moral behavior that the children might exhibit; but we also believed it possible to discover certain stable general tendencies—character structure, in other words. As the results of this study suggest, it seems an accurate description of the facts to say that some individuals have a predictably unstable pattern of moral behavior, whereas others show a consistent pattern of morality in the broad sense of respecting and considering other's needs and rights. In fact, the intercorrelations of honesty, loyalty, etc., which we found, were quite large and were significantly different from the low correlations the Character Education Inquiry reported, probably because their measurements were more particularistic and situationally restricted than the ones we used.

The chief difference is probably one of emphasis. The Character Education Inquiry stressed the variations that individuals show in their overt moral behavior on certain specific tests. It cannot be gainsaid that this is a matter of observable fact. We have gone more in the other direction, not to ignore variations in a person's behavior, but to look for some consistent, underlying orientation the individual may

display which makes him "all of a piece," even if it be in the very inconsistency of his obvious, overt behavior. As will be seen, we recognized and tried to show fully the discrepancies which almost always exist within any one person's behavior pattern, but not to the extent of throwing out such persistent, predictable trends as may also characterize his behavior. This emphasis runs the opposite risk of overgeneralizing. We have tried to strike a balance between depicting consistencies and pointing to inconsistencies; between recognizing general character structure, if it exists, and recognizing that a person seldom behaves in exactly one way in all situations—particularly if these situations are highly specific tests, within a narrow range of "in-school" behavior.

This line of inquiry has had increasing attention in the years since the Character Education Inquiry. Vernon Jones's comprehensive review of the research studies on character up to 1953 (Jones, 1954) points out the complexity of the intrapersonal forces that produce conduct, the complexity of the nature-and-nurture forces that produce character, and the central role of motivation in determining moral conduct. This view of character, though more implicit than explicit in his writing, seems to have been Ligon's throughout his years of study of character education. (Ligon, 1956.) Thus, the ideas which shaped our research have a long history. (Roback, 1952, 1955.) If it is new in any respect, it is, perhaps, in its attempt to comprehend all these aspects of character and character development in a single study. To apply all the varied appraisal techniques and statistical techniques in such a way that an integrated final pattern could be discerned, also required certain innovations. In method as well as in subject matter, therefore, this has been an exploratory research rather than a definitive one.

Its findings must also be regarded as provisional because it was necessary to limit the study to a relatively small number of cases. We believed, however, that at this stage in our knowledge of character it was more important to achieve a thorough understanding of each individual in a relatively small cross-sectional sample than to take more superficial measurements on a very large population.

As Gordon Allport has said, in his introduction to *An Experiment in the Prevention of Delinquency* (Powers and Witmer, 1951), "The basic principles involved in building character are not known. . . . To discover the how and why [of character development and change] a deeper study of cause and effect would be needed. And this study would have to focus on single cases because only in single cases can the factors producing the change be identified."

The course of this research has been typical of a new venture: a launching-out with only hazy, general direction; a gathering of facts which presumably might be useful; the slow emergence of more specific hypotheses; and only after a long while, the finding of certain vantage points from which to survey and map the area traversed.

GENESIS OF THE MORAL-CHARACTER STUDY

The present study was the second of two investigations of moral character in adolescence. In 1940 a committee of the Committee on Human Development was formed to plan for a research program. The committee met several times and finally proposed that a longitudinal study be made of child development in a Midwestern community. This study would be started with a group of children at birth and carried through to adulthood. It would have biological, psychological, and social-anthropological aspects. In particular it would employ the new social-anthropological methods of studying a modern community, which had not hitherto been used in any longitudinal study of child development. The decision was made early in 1941 to choose a community and get started on the program. W. Lloyd Warner took responsibility for collecting data on Midwestern communities between 5,000 and 25,000 in population. Eventually, by using a number of criteria of "typicality," some twenty communities between 5,000 and 15,000 were selected. In the spring of 1941 a committee consisting of W. Lloyd Warner, Ralph W. Tyler, Mandel Sherman, and Robert J. Havighurst visited "Prairie City" and talked with the superintendent of schools, the president of the school board, and the ministerial association. "Prairie City" seemed to be satisfactory, and the people who were interviewed all expressed interest in and approval of a study.

Late in 1941, three subcommittees were formed dealing with the biological, psychological, and social-anthropological aspects of the study respectively. At this point the United States declared war and it became evident that the time was not auspicious for the beginning of the longitudinal study. Even if money could be obtained, it would probably be difficult to obtain the technical personnel for the study. Accordingly, the longitudinal-study idea was modified into a series of more or less related investigations of various aspects of child development.

One area of major interest was the social structure of Prairie City. The work since 1942 is reported in three publications: *Democracy in*

Jonesville by Warner and associates, *Elmtown's Youth* by A. B. Hollingshead, and *Social Class in America* by Warner, Meeker, and Ellis. These studies were made in an effort to describe the web of life in Prairie City and the way it affects the behaviors, beliefs, and feelings of the growing child.

As a number of small studies were planned and executed, it began to be apparent that it would be extremely useful to concentrate on a specific group of children and follow their development in detail. Consequently, two groups of children were chosen for intensive investigation. One consisted of all those presently living in Prairie City who had been born in the year 1926. The other group was composed of all the children who were born in 1933.

It was at this time, in 1942, that the committee decided to undertake a study of the nature and development of moral character. Accordingly, instruments were designed and administered to the 1926 group, and a series of conferences was held which eventuated by 1945 in a report on the correlates of moral reputation. This work has been published in *Adolescent Character and Personality* by Havighurst and Taba.

Meanwhile, information had been gathered on the 1933 group for various purposes. In 1945 it was proposed that a full-scale study of the psychological and social development of these children be undertaken. Thirty-six children were chosen for intensive study and a large number and variety of instruments were used with them. This resulted in a "clinical conference" in 1946 and 1947 under the direction of Dr. Carolyn Tryon and Dr. William E. Henry. The population for that study was the same one that was used in the present research, though with the main focus of attention on psychosocial development and the forces affecting it. Three of the present authors, Havighurst, Peck, and More, participated in that project. During the course of it, methods for intensive case studies were developed which proved invaluable when the time came to design the present research.

During that study new methods of psychological inquiry, such as projective instruments, sociometric tests, and the like, proved so fruitful that in December of 1948 a new research on moral character was proposed. It was decided to use the 1933 group of children since there was such a wealth of information on them.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE MORAL-CHARACTER STUDY

The study of moral character had always been one of the central purposes of the whole Prairie City research program under Havighurst's

continuously active direction. By December, 1948, it seemed time once more to undertake a specific study of this problem. After Havighurst called an initial meeting to survey the whole Prairie City program, a series of meetings was held to plan a new investigation into moral character. The earlier project, reported by Havighurst and Taba, had confined itself to a study of factors related to moral reputation. Reputation was used in the belief that it gave a reasonable approximation to the actual moral behavior of the children. However, in the years since 1945, several of the staff had had experience in personnel assessment, both in the Tryon-Henry project and in other studies, which convinced us that we could now penetrate much more deeply into the motivations, as well as the surface appearance, of child behavior as it pertained to moral issues. Therefore, a trial theory of the motivation patterns in moral behavior was presented for discussion by Robert Peck.

This theory about the psychodynamics of character grew out of some ten years' study of Jung, Freud, Horney, Sullivan, and the "neoanalytic" school. The specific stimulus was Fromm's *Man for Himself*. Inspired by this, a theory of five character types, psychogenetically arranged, was evolved. At the same time, very much in the spirit of Henry Murray, an effort was made to specify and measure a rather large set of attitudinal and personality variables which it seemed reasonable to suppose were related to character and moral behavior. There was still no synthesis of these variables with the character types into any organized, comprehensive theory. They were ideas inductively derived from previous experience and reading. Their power to explain and order data was as yet untried.

This theory appeared to make sense, nonetheless, and to involve areas of feeling and action which were accessible by the instruments already developed and used. A research team was then formed, under Peck's chairmanship, to carry out a new study.

The next step was the draft of an outline for the analysis of each individual case. The earlier project had made clear the necessity for an organized framework for case analysis. In the early days of that conference, when the group simply sat down and decided it was going to "study a child," it found itself with case reports which were extremely difficult to compare with one another, and which often did not cover the same points from case to case. Therefore, slowly and rather painfully, a case outline was evolved, appropriate to the purpose of that study of psychosocial development.

This experience gave us a long head start in preparing for the present study. Having decided upon the necessity for a specific conceptual

framework and having decided upon the facets of individual personality which seemed to be relevant to moral functioning, we were able quite quickly to agree on a workable outline.

Weekly meetings were held, to improve the case outline and the theoretical framework. At this time it was decided to take an additional step beyond the qualitative case studies which had been done in the previous projects. It was agreed that rating scales should be constructed so that, when all the cases had been studied, detailed, quantitative comparisons could be made within and between cases. Without the ratings, it would not have been possible to achieve nearly the degree of clarity and specificity in the results which ultimately proved possible.

The chief reason for citing this chronology in so much detail is to show the slow, gradual emergence of concepts and procedures. The study did not begin with a full-fledged, satisfactory research design and methodology; rather it was evolved, often with hours of seemingly redundant discussion, until it appeared that a reasonably clear, sensible plan of operation was in hand. The six months spent in this kind of preparation were importantly responsible for whatever effectiveness the subsequent study may display.

On the twenty-fifth of June, 1949, the staff included Clara Berghoefer, Ruth Cooper, Gerald Handel, Walter Hartmann, Robert Havighurst, Douglas More, Robert Peck, Jeremy Sarchet, Robert Schmidt, and Stuart Wright. Semiweekly case conferences continued, together with the inevitable discussion and redefinition of variables, through the end of August, 1949. The month of September, which was a vacation period, brought a few changes in staff. When work resumed in late September, the staff consisted of James Abegglen, Clara Berghoefer, Harold Finley, Gerald Handel, Robert Havighurst, Philip Katch, Wilma Lux, Douglas More, Robert Peck, and Stuart Wright. The only change in staff after this point was when Philip Katch left and was replaced by Jesse Lilienthal. From this point on, a regular schedule of case analyses was maintained, in two two-hour conferences per week.

At every meeting lengthy discussions took place, concerning trait definitions and points of theory as well as interpretations of the particular case at issue. On October 25, for instance, the question of the rationale for the rating system was reopened. During December, 1949, and January, 1950, a systematic revision of the trait list and a set of operational definitions for all the traits were worked out. Thus, it was actually not until the first of February, 1950, that the theoretical framework and the trait definitions were on paper, in full. Some kind

of definition existed in black and white, of course, from the previous
June; but although there was quite good agreement on the interpreta-
tion of the traits, their meanings had not all been spelled out explicitly.
At this time, therefore, that task was completed.

During the fall and winter months the case studies had been pro-
gressing, and by the fifteenth of April the last of the thirty-four cases
had been presented. At this point Mr. Handel and Miss Lux left the
staff and eight people remained. A schedule of three conferences per
week was set up, to go over the twenty-four cases which had been
originally presented and rated prior to February 1, 1950. (That was
the point at which the final trait definitions were completed.) From
April 17 to June 10, the staff of eight rerated one case per day, three
times a week. All the quantitative analyses which are reported in the
rest of this study are based on the case ratings made after February 1,
1950.

By late 1950 the authors prepared several working papers, looking
toward a report on the study. Havighurst described the social struc-
ture of Prairie City and its relationship to character. His writing con-
stitutes a good half of Chapters II, VI, and VII of this book. Cooper
began her obverse-factor analysis, with the eventual results described
in the Appendix. More prepared papers on the reliability of the
conference ratings (see Appendix) and also on the social reputations
of the adolescents in the study. It was the ideas and leads in the
latter paper which were later followed in locating and analyzing the
data for Chapter VI. Lilienthal prepared a description of the families
in the study, and also wrote disguised versions of five case studies.
Chapter III contains substantial portions of those case studies, and
some of the description of families in Chapter V is derived from his
work.

In keeping with his responsibilities as formulator of the theory
underlying the study, Peck was responsible for constructing a coherent,
overall view of the data, and for seeing to the appropriate statistical
analysis. He therefore undertook the following steps.

First, a correlational analysis was made of all the ratings on all the
cases. This was largely an inductive step, since no comprehensive
pattern of character-personality relationships had yet been foreseen
and formulated. At first, the result seemed to be chaos. Simple inter-
correlations of variables showed a tendency for most of the personality
variables to be negatively related to the Amoral-character-type scale.
At the other extreme of morality, many personality variables appeared
to be positively related to the ratings of the subjects on the Rational-
Altruistic scale. No meaningful pattern could be discerned, however,

for the intermediate character types—which is to say, the intermediate degrees of morality. At this point, inductive exploration seemed to have become relatively fruitless.

Two further steps suggested themselves, however. First, the correlation matrix of the personality variables looked very much as though factor analysis would produce just a few distinct personality dimensions, out of the thirty-odd variables. With the aid of William Stephenson, such an analysis was applied. It "boiled down" the personality measures to six well-defined "vectors," whose meaning seemed to have definite implications for moral behavior, if some way could be found to relate them to the measures of character. (Peck, 1951.)

The second step involved a change of view on the character-type measures. Up to this point, the ratings of the thirty-four subjects on any one of the five character-type scales had been treated as a separate measure, with little useful result. Now it was decided to take into account the total character profile of each individual on all five types together. In the end, it was decided to classify each subject by his *dominant* character type—or type combination. This had the effect of giving a single overall score for "maturity of character" to each subject. When this kind of scale was constructed, and it was compared with the six personality vectors, at last it became possible to see a distinctive personality pattern for each of the character types. It could be shown, too, that character was closely related to personality throughout its entire range, from amorality to the most mature form of ethical behavior.

Meanwhile, as much by good fortune as by planning, certain ratings on the subject's families had been made by a research group in 1946–1947, and stored untouched. These independent family ratings were exhumed, factored, and compared with the character and personality measures, with the results reported in Chapter V of the present book. A somewhat similar procedure was applied to peer sociometric data which had been available, but not analyzed, during the conference phase of the character study. These results are given in Chapter VI.

The achievement of a coherent view of the total problem, the inclusion of appropriate new data and their appropriate analysis, the discovery and description of a "simple structure" in the total body of data—this required several years and the writing of several successive drafts of the manuscript, before this book achieved its present form. Havighurst gave editorial advice on the manuscript throughout this process.

In summary, this book represents the end product of years of exploratory study, largely inductive, by a good many people. If it now

appears to present a simple theory, in reasonably clear terms, with some provisional evidence to support it, this is a consummation for which we are profoundly grateful. To the degree this clarity is approached, success might be said to have crowned the sixteen years of exploring, in largely uncharted country, by a goodly company of inquiring minds.

One final word about authorship responsibility in this study: the factual data were provided by the work of many people; the undersigned, however, should be held solely responsible for all interpretations or speculations that appear anywhere in this book.

Throughout the years of this study we have been indebted to two organizations for their indispensable financial support. The Lilly Endowment, Inc., provided funds during the 1940's, when the field work was in progress. Thereafter, the actual analysis of the data by the Clinical Conference group, and the preparation of the first manuscript, were made possible by support from the Grant Foundation. Their support came at a crucial time and is therefore doubly appreciated.

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Austin, Texas
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A note on reading
this book

The most complete picture of the character study is to be gained by reading the chapters in sequence, with reference to the Appendix for the more detailed definitions and procedures. Some specialists might even prefer to read the Appendix first, for method, then read the main body of the book.

An effort has been made to make the main chapters as comfortably clear as possible for the non-technical reader. There are, however, a number of terms which require careful definition, some of them new to many readers. These are defined in the text the first time they are used, or at the most appropriate place. If any question arises, reference to that term in the index will show the page on which the term is defined.

Those interested in some special aspect of character development can read the appropriate chapter or chapters. The titles are intended to be self-explanatory, and each chapter can be read as a separate unit, with some side references to definitions that occur earlier in the book.

The non-technical reader who wishes, can gain a reasonably adequate picture of the theory and findings of the study by reading Chapters I, III, IX, and X. In fact, Chapter IX is a rather complete summary of the findings, though not of the research design or the procedures.

Contents

List of tables