

A Dynamic  
Theory  
of  
Personality

Kurt Lewin

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

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人格的动力理论

Kurt Lewin  
〔美〕库尔特·勒温 著

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**人格的动力理论**

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“新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列”，选取了在新闻学与传播学历史上具有里程碑意义的大师经典名作。如传播学“四大奠基人”哈罗德·拉斯韦尔、保罗·拉扎斯菲尔德等及加布里埃尔·塔尔德、罗伯特·帕克、哈罗德·英尼斯、马歇尔·麦克卢汉、库尔特·卢因、卡尔·霍夫兰等这些学界耳熟能详的名家佳作。这些是传播学与新闻学的奠基之作，也是现代新闻学与传播学发展的基础。许多名作都多次再版，影响深远，历久不衰，成为新闻学与传播学的经典。此套丛书采用英文原版出版，使读者读到原汁原味的著作。

随着中国高等教育教学改革的推进，广大师生已不满足于仅仅阅读国外图书的翻译版，他们迫切希望能读到原汁原味的原版图书，希望能采用国外英文原版图书进行教学，从而保证所讲授的知识体系的完整性、系统性、科学性和文字描绘的准确性。此套丛书的出版便是满足了这种需求。亦可使学生在专业技术方面尽快掌握本学科相应的外语词汇和了解先进国家的学术发展的方向。

本系列丛书在原汁原味地引进英文原版图书的同时，将目录译为中文，作为对原版的一种导读，供读者阅读时参考。本系列丛书有些因为出版年代比较久远，也囿于当时印刷水平的限制，有些地方可能与现在的标准不太一致，在不影响读者阅读的前提下，我们未对其进行处理，以保证英文原版图书的原汁原味，

从事经典著作的出版，需要出版人付出不懈的努力，好在有全国新闻院系的专家教授们的大力扶持，为我们提供了备选书目并对英文目录进行了翻译，因此使我们得以在学术出版的道路上走得更远。我们自知本系列丛书也许会有很多缺陷，我们也将虚心接受读者提出的批评和建议。

## PREFACE

The present book is a collection of originally independent articles which were written at different times and for quite different occasions. Hence, the reader will find some of the fundamental ideas recurring throughout the book. The selection has been made in order to give a picture of the fields thus far studied, the psychology of the person and of the environment, and at the same time to indicate their connections with the various applied fields, especially child psychology, pedagogy, psychopathology, characterology, and social psychology.

Only a few years ago one could observe, at least among German psychologists, a quite pessimistic mood. After the initial successes of experimental psychology in its early stages, it seemed to become clearer and clearer that it would remain impossible for experimental method to press on beyond the psychology of perception and memory to such vital problems as those with which psychoanalysis was concerned. Weighty "philosophical" and "methodological" considerations seemed to make such an undertaking a priori impossible. The first positive experiments in this direction seemed only to confirm the belief that the experimental psychology of (will, emotion, and character was condemned to rest content with surface facts and to leave all deeper problems to schools and speculation, incapable of experimental test.

Working in this field I felt that I had begun a task methodologically and technically sound and necessary, the broader elaboration of which could not be expected for decades. Nevertheless it soon became clear that though these problems are difficult, they are by no means impossible to solve. One had only to clear out a number of hoary philosophical prejudices and to set his scientific goal high enough to arrive at explanation and prediction. Today it can no longer be doubted that the questions set, for example, by psychoanalysis are readily accessible to experimental clarification if only appropriate methods and concepts are employed. Indeed, it seems some-

what easier to advance to dynamic laws in the field of needs and emotions than in the psychology of perception. My visit to American universities during the last year has shown me that, in spite of all the differences of historical background, the belief in these possibilities is giving rise to many experiments. The relations to psychopathology and to comparative psychology give promise of becoming especially fruitful. Naturally I know how near the beginning we stand. But the development seems to be proceeding much more rapidly than I had hoped. The reason for this is, above all, the historical position of psychology, which is ripe for a "Galileian" mode of thought.

I have been asked whether I approve of the name "topological psychology" for this type of research. I have no objection to it so long as the following points are emphasized. I am convinced that psychology is today in a position to grow beyond the "schools" in the old sense of the word. To contribute to this growth is a major goal of our work which uses, so far as possible, the language of mathematics. For this language is less equivocal than any other and at the same time "objective" and "unspeculative," since it expresses only the structural order of things and events. However, I do not limit myself to concepts of topology. Furthermore, the use of mathematical language is only an expression of a more general "constructive" method whose chief characteristic is its greater ability to bridge the gap between theory and particular fact. Nevertheless, topology remains the basic mathematical discipline for the presentation of dynamics in the whole field of psychology, and I am more and more convinced that it will become, beyond this, a solid framework for a dynamic sociology.

Doctors D. K. Adams and Karl Zener have undertaken the great labor of translating the articles into English. Only those who know the difficulties of this sort of translation in scientifically new fields will appreciate the extent to which I am indebted to them.

KURT LEWIN.

## TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

Several of the terms used in this translation may be better understood if the German terms which they are designed to translate are indicated. The adjectives *psychisch* and *seelisch* have both been translated "psychic" or "psychical" because it seems to us that events, processes, and structures that are properly called psychical do not become *psychological* until they have been operated upon in some way by the science of psychology or by psychologists. An ambiguity is thus avoided which could give rise to unnecessary misunderstandings and which, in the case of physics, has done so. Thus the expression "the physical world" is ambiguous because it may mean "the material world of experience" or "the world of physics," two radically different things.

The word *Seele* has been translated, with much misgiving, by "mind." We had thought to translate it by "soul," in the belief that the time was ripe for a reintroduction of the latter word into the technical English terminology of psychology. It seemed impossible that there should be any confusion of the psychological "soul," deduced as it is from concrete behavior, with the "soul" of theology, the properties of which cannot be derived from or tested by concrete behavior. But a sampling of opinion among American psychologists was against the use of this more accurate translation. It is consequently necessary to point out that "mind" as here used ("the totality of psychical systems") is not to be taken in any narrowly intellectualistic sense but rather in a meaning approximating that of McDougall. In his later papers Lewin uses the term *psychologische Person* (translated by "psychological person") in what seems to be essentially the same sense as *Seele* in the earlier articles.

Other translations which might require comment are explained either in the text itself or in notes.

Acknowledgment is due Professor Murchison, Director, and the Clark University Press for permission to reprint Chapters I and III, which originally appeared in the *Journal of General Psychology*, Volume 5, pages 141-177, and in Murchison's *Handbook of Child Psychology*, respectively.

The monograph *Die psychologische Situation bei Lohn und Strafe* (Chapter IV of this book) was first published by Hirzel of Leipzig in 1931. The "Theorie des Schwachsinn" (Chapter VII of this book) was published in *Hommage au Dr. Decroly* by Les Usines reunies Scheerders van Kerchove a St.-Nicholas-W., Belgium in 1933. "Erziehung zur Realität" (Chapter V of this book) was published in *Die Neue Erziehung* in 1931. We have to thank the publishing house of Julius Springer, Berlin, for permission to translate the portion of *Vorsatz, Wille und Bedürfnis* which appears in Chapter II and for the use of most of the figures in Chapter VIII. The latter have been redrawn after certain of those in the long series of articles edited by Professor Lewin in the *Psychologische Forschung*. We also wish to thank Mr. Charles E. Stuart for generous assistance in preparing the drawings.

D. K. ADAMS.

K. E. ZENER.

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA,  
March, 1935.



# 目 录

序.....	i
译者序.....	iii
第一章 当代心理学中，亚里士多德与伽利略式思考方式 之冲突.....	1
第二章 灵魂的结构.....	43
第三章 儿童行为与发展中的环境力.....	66
第四章 奖励与惩罚的心理环境.....	114
第五章 现实的教育.....	171
第六章 替代行为和替代价值.....	180
第七章 低能儿的动力理论.....	194
第八章 实验研究的调查.....	239
人名索引.....	275
主题索引.....	279

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	i
TRANSLATORS' PREFACE. . . . .	iii
CHAPTER I	
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ARISTOTELIAN AND GALILEIAN MODES OF THOUGHT IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIND . . . . .	43
CHAPTER III	
ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES IN CHILD BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOP- MENT. . . . .	66
CHAPTER IV	
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATIONS OF REWARD AND PUNISH- MENT. . . . .	114
CHAPTER V	
EDUCATION FOR REALITY . . . . .	171
CHAPTER VI	
SUBSTITUTE ACTIVITY AND SUBSTITUTE VALUE. . . . .	180
CHAPTER VII	
A DYNAMIC THEORY OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED . . . . .	194
CHAPTER VIII	
SURVEY OF THE EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS . . . . .	239
INDEX OF NAMES . . . . .	275
INDEX OF SUBJECTS . . . . .	279

# A DYNAMIC THEORY OF PERSONALITY

## CHAPTER I

### THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ARISTOTELIAN AND GALILEIAN MODES OF THOUGHT IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

In the discussion of several urgent problems of current experimental and theoretical psychology I propose to review the development of the concepts of physics, and particularly the transition from the Aristotelian to the Galileian mode of thought. My purpose is not historical; rather do I believe that certain questions, of considerable importance in the reconstruction of concepts in present-day psychology, may be clarified and more precisely stated through such a comparison, which provides a view beyond the difficulties of the day.

I do not intend to infer by deduction from the history of physics what psychology ought to do. I am not of the opinion that there is only one empirical science, namely, physics; and the question whether psychology, as a part of biology, is reducible to physics or is an independent science may here be left open.

Since we are starting from the point of view of the researcher, we shall, in our contrast of Aristotelian and Galileian concept formation, be less concerned with personal nuances of theory in Galileo and Aristotle than with certain ponderable differences in the modes of thought that determined the actual research of the medieval Aristotelians and of the post-Galileian

<sup>1</sup> *Jour. Gen. Psychol.*, 1931, 5, 141-177, edited by Carl Murchison.

physicists. Whether some particular investigator had previously shown the later sort of thinking in respect to some special point or whether some very modern speculations of the relativity theory should accord in some way with Aristotle's is irrelevant in the present connection.

In order to provide a special setting for the theoretical treatment of the dynamic problems, I shall consider first the general characteristics of Aristotelian and Galileian physics and of modern psychology.

#### GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE TWO MODES OF THOUGHT

##### *In Physics*

If one asks what the most characteristic difference between "modern" post-Galileian and Aristotelian physics is, one receives, as a rule, the following reply, which has had an important influence upon the scientific ideals of the psychologist: the concepts of Aristotelian physics were anthropomorphic and inexact. Modern physics, on the contrary, is quantitatively exact, and pure mathematical, functional relations now occupy the place of former anthropomorphic explanations. These have given to physics that abstract appearance in which modern physicists are accustomed to take special pride.

This view of the development of physics is, to be sure, pertinent. But if one fixes one's attention less upon the style of the concepts employed and more upon their actual functions as instruments for understanding the world, these differences appear to be of a secondary nature, consequences of a deeplying difference in the conception of the relation between the world and the task of research.

##### *Aristotelian Concepts.*

*Their Valiative Character.* As in all sciences, the detachment of physics from the universal matrix of philosophy and practice was only gradually achieved. Aristotelian physics is full of concepts which today are considered not only as specifically biological, but preeminently as valiative concepts. It abounds in specifically normative concepts taken from ethics, which

occupy a place between valuative and nonvaluative concepts: the highest forms of motions are circular and rectilinear, and they occur only in heavenly movements, those of the stars; the earthly sublunar world is endowed with motion of inferior types. There are similar valuative differences between causes: on one side there are the good or, so to speak, authorized forces of a body which come from its tendency toward perfection (*τέλος*), and on the other side the disturbances due to chance and to the opposing forces (*βλα*) of other bodies.

This kind of classification in terms of values plays an extraordinarily important part in medieval physics. It classes together many things with very slight or unimportant relation and separates things that objectively are closely and importantly related.

It seems obvious to me that this extremely "anthropomorphic" mode of thought plays a large role in psychology, even to the present day. Like the distinction between earthly and heavenly, the no less valuative distinction between "normal" and "pathological" has for a long time sharply differentiated two fields of psychological fact and thus separated the phenomena which are fundamentally most nearly related.

No less important is the fact that value concepts completely dominate the conceptual setting of the special problems, or have done so until very recently. Thus, not till lately has psychology begun to investigate the structural (*Gestalt*) relations concerned in perception, thus replacing the concept of optical illusion, a concept which, derived not from psychological but from epistemological categories, unwarrantedly lumps together all these "illusions" and sets them apart from the other phenomena of psychological optics. Psychology speaks of the "errors" of children, of "practice," of "forgetting," thus classifying whole groups of processes according to the value of their products, instead of according to the nature of the psychological processes involved. Psychology is, to be sure, beyond classifying events *only* on the basis of value when it speaks of disturbances, of inferiority and superiority in development, or of the quality of performance on a test. On all sides there are ten-

dencies to attack actual psychological processes. But there can hardly be any doubt that we stand now only at the beginning of this stage, that the same transitional concepts that we have seen in the Aristotelian physics to lie between the valuative and the nonvaluative are characteristic of such antitheses as intelligence and feeble-mindedness or drive and will. The detachment of the conceptual structure of psychology from the utilitarian concepts of pedagogy, medicine, and ethics is only partly achieved.

It is quite possible, indeed I hold it to be probable, that the utility or performance concepts, such as a "true" cognition versus an "error," may later acquire a legitimate sense. If that is the case, however, an "illusion" will have to be characterized not epistemologically but biologically.

*Abstract Classification.* When the Galileian and post-Galileian physics disposed of the distinction between heavenly and earthly and thereby extended the field of natural law enormously, it was not due solely to the exclusion of value concepts, but also to a changed interpretation of classification. For Aristotelian physics the membership of an object in a given class was of critical importance, because for Aristotle the class defined the essence or essential nature of the object and thus determined its behavior in both positive and negative respects.

This classification often took the form of paired opposites, such as cold and warm, dry and moist, and compared with present-day classification had a rigid, absolute character. In modern quantitative physics dichotomous classifications have been entirely replaced by continuous gradations. Substantial concepts have been replaced by functional concepts.

Here also it is not difficult to point out the analogous stage of development in contemporary psychology. The separation of intelligence, memory, and impulse bears throughout the characteristic stamp of Aristotelian classification; and in some fields, for example, in the analysis of feelings (pleasantness and

<sup>1</sup> E. CASSIRER, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff, Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik*, B. Cassirer, Berlin, 1910.

unpleasantness), or of temperaments,<sup>1</sup> or of drives,<sup>2</sup> such dichotomous classifications as Aristotle's are even today of great significance. Only gradually do these classifications lose their importance and yield to a conception which seeks to derive the same laws for all these fields, and to classify the whole field on the basis of other, essentially functional, differences.

*The Concept of Law.* Aristotle's classes are abstractly defined as the sum total of those characteristics which a group of objects have in common. This circumstance is not merely a characteristic of Aristotle's logic, but largely determines his conception of *lawfulness* and *chance*, which seems to me so important to the problems of contemporary psychology as to require closer examination.

For Aristotle those things are lawful, conceptually intelligible, which occur *without exception*. Also, and this he emphasizes particularly, those are lawful which occur *frequently*. Excluded from the class of the conceptually intelligible as mere chance are those things which occur only *once*, individual events as such. Actually since the behavior of a thing is determined by its essential nature, and this essential nature is exactly the abstractly defined class (*i.e.*, the sum total of the common characteristics of a whole group of objects), it follows that each event, as a particular event, is chance, undetermined. For in these Aristotelian classes individual differences disappear.

The real source of this conception may lie in the fact that for Aristotelian physics not all physical processes possess the lawful character ascribed to them by post-Galileian physics. To the young science of physics the universe it investigated appeared to contain as much that was chaotic as that was lawful. The lawfulness, the intelligibility of physical processes was still narrowly limited. It was really present only in certain processes, for example, the courses of the stars, but by no means in all the transitory events of the earth. Just as for other young sciences, it was still a question for physics, whether physical

<sup>1</sup> R. SOMMER, *Über Persönlichkeitstypen*, *Ber. Kong. f. exper. Psychol.*, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> LEWIN, *Die Entwicklung der experimentellen Willenspsychologie und die Psychotherapie*, S. Hirzel, Leipzig, 1929

processes were subject to law and if so how far. And this circumstance exercised its full effect on the formation of physical concepts, even though in philosophical principle the idea of general lawfulness already existed. In post-Galileian physics, with the elimination of the distinction between lawful and chance events, the necessity also disappeared of proving that the process under consideration was lawful. For Aristotelian physics, on the contrary, it was necessary to have criteria to decide whether or not a given event was of the lawful variety. Indeed the regularity with which similar events occurred in nature was used essentially as such a criterion. Only such events, as the celestial, which the course of history proves to be regular, or at least frequent, are subject to law; and only in so far as they are frequent, and hence more than individual events, are they conceptually intelligible. In other words, the ambition of science to understand the complex, chaotic, and unintelligible world, its faith in the ultimate decipherability of this world, were limited to such events as were certified by repetition in the course of history to possess a certain persistence and stability.

In this connection it must not be forgotten that Aristotle's emphasis on frequency (as a further basis for lawfulness, besides absolute regularity) represents, relative to his predecessors, a tendency toward the extension and concrete application of the principle of lawfulness. The "empiricist," Aristotle, insists that not only the regular but the frequent is lawful. Of course, this only makes clearer his antithesis of individuality and law, for the individual event as such still lies outside the pale of the lawful and hence, in a certain sense, outside the task of science. Lawfulness remains limited to cases in which events recur and classes (in Aristotle's abstract sense) reveal the essential nature of the events.

This attitude toward the problem of lawfulness in nature, which dominated medieval physics and from which even the opponents of Aristotelian physics, such as Bruno and Bacon, escaped only gradually, had important consequences in several respects.



As will be clear from the preceding text, this concept of lawfulness had throughout a quasi-statistical character. Lawfulness was considered as equivalent to the highest degree of generality, as that which occurs very often in the same way, as the extreme case of regularity, and hence as the perfect antithesis of the infrequent or of the particular event. The statistical determination of the concept of lawfulness is still clearly marked in Bacon, as when he tries to decide through his *tabula praesentia* whether a given association of properties is real (essential) or fortuitous. Thus he ascertains, for example, the numerical frequency of the cases in which the properties warm and dry are associated in everyday life. Less mathematically exact, indeed, but no less clear is this statistical way of thinking in the whole body of Aristotelian physics.

At the same time—and this is one of the most important consequences of the Aristotelian conception—regularity or particularity was understood entirely in *historical* terms.

The complete freedom from exceptions, the “always” which is found also in the later conceptions of physical lawfulness, still has here its original connections with the frequency with which similar cases have occurred in the actual, historical course of events in the everyday world. A crude example will make this clearer: light objects, under the conditions of everyday life, relatively frequently go up; heavy objects usually go down. The flame of the fire, at any rate under the conditions known to Aristotle, almost always goes upward. It is these frequency rules, within the limits of the climate, mode of life, etc., familiar to Aristotle, that determine the nature and tendency to be ascribed to each class of objects and lead in the present instance to the conclusion that flames and light bodies have a tendency upward.

Aristotelian concept formation has yet another immediate relation to the geographically-historically given, in which it resembles, as do the valuative concepts mentioned above, the thinking of primitive man and of children.

When primitive man uses different words for “walking,” depending upon its direction, north or south, or upon the sex