

9 March 1964

READING 8

TEMPERAMENT

PART 1

This week, if you like, we can keep the cold out of our bones by playing a game, the game of 'Temperaments'. For the discussion of 'temperament' must start as a very light-hearted one – a good joke at the expense of oneself and one's friends!

Though this is the age of 'Intelligence tests', yet the author of *A Hundred Years of Psychology* had to confess that:

... it must be admitted that there exists today scarcely a single well tried-out, convenient and reliable test in the *sphere of character*, the practical and theoretical significance of which is really understood.

This again expresses the difference between ordinary so-called 'scientific' studies and the Higher Knowledge; for with the help of that Knowledge there *does* exist such a test which can tell us all we need to know. Only we must first understand.

In discussing human temperament we regard a person as a physico-chemical machine, rather like a car. The performance of a car depends partly on its 'make' or structure and partly on the fluids ('humours') in circulation. There we have 1) petrol, 2) oil, 3) air, 4) water – four 'humours'. We mustn't forget the *air*, for without the right mixture between petrol vapour and air in the carburettor nothing would happen. Over and above all those four there is the electrical current.

Of the Greek philosophers, Hippocrates developed the 'humoral' System of Medicine – based on the idea of the four elements derived probably from the Pythagorean, Empedocles of Agrigentum. Plato, on the other hand, was concerned chiefly with the *kind of substance* of which a man's centres are composed; and in the *Theatetus* he gives a long description beginning:

Please assume, then, for the sake of argument that there is in our Souls a block of wax, in one case larger, in another smaller; in one case the wax is purer, in another more impure; or harder or softer; and in some of proper quality... Let us then say that this is the gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses, and that whenever we wish to remember anything that we see or hear or think of in our own minds, we have this wax under the perceptions and thought and imprint them upon it, just as we make impressions from signet rings; and whatever is imprinted we remember and know as long as the image lasts; but whatever is rubbed out or cannot be imprinted we forget and do not know.

And he goes on to describe the different kinds of wax which make the differences between people.

More recently there has been a curious hark-back to this idea among biochemists who recognise in the composition of the brain certain 'lipoid' substances that have some of the properties of vegetable oils like linseed, which when exposed to air and light is oxidised from a fluid to a solid – the basis of oil painting. At first when the oil is exposed to air nothing happens for twenty-four hours, but then 'it is as if the oil learnt to oxidise better and better'; when put back into

the dark for twenty-four hours and then into the light again it no longer waits twenty-four hours but 'remembers' within an hour or two. However, it can also forget, so that the 'teaching' has to be begun all over again. (from Dr. Louis Berman, *The Personal Equation*, 1925)

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The Outer Circle of Humanity returns again and again to the Four Temperaments of Hippocrates – based on two pairs of opposites – hot and cold, moist and dry.

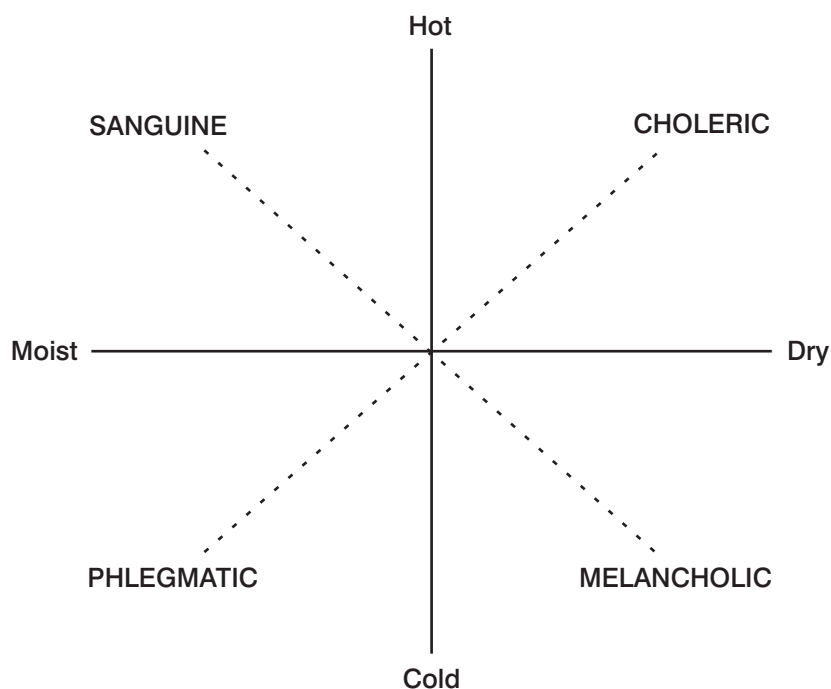


Figure 1

In the Middle Ages people were fascinated by this description of man which fitted so well with the basic idea in Plato's *Timaeus* – two extremes and two means – seen today as the binominal expansion of $(a + b)^3$.

You will see from Figure 1 that the two temperaments on the left are pleasant – gay and calm respectively; while the two on the right are unpleasant. Pavlov revived the idea because his laboratory dogs seemed to fit so clearly into these four divisions – the 'choleric' and the 'melancholic' being unstable and subject to neurosis. Sir Cyril Burt also found that delinquent school-children belonged almost entirely to those extremes.

In reality of course it is all just a 'Temperature' scale from cold to hot, expressed in the nervous system as a scale from *complete inhibition* to *extreme excitation* with any number of degrees you like to put in between. This is shown (Figure 2) in a mediaeval diagram introducing the four Temperaments.

So try to consider your friends on this temperature scale by finding first where you stand on the scale and relating them always to yourself. You will soon see that the whole scale exists in all of us; that each of us has those four Temperaments. The differences between people are a matter of emphasis; how long and how often one or other is uppermost and how far we swing towards the extremes.

(Pause for discussion)

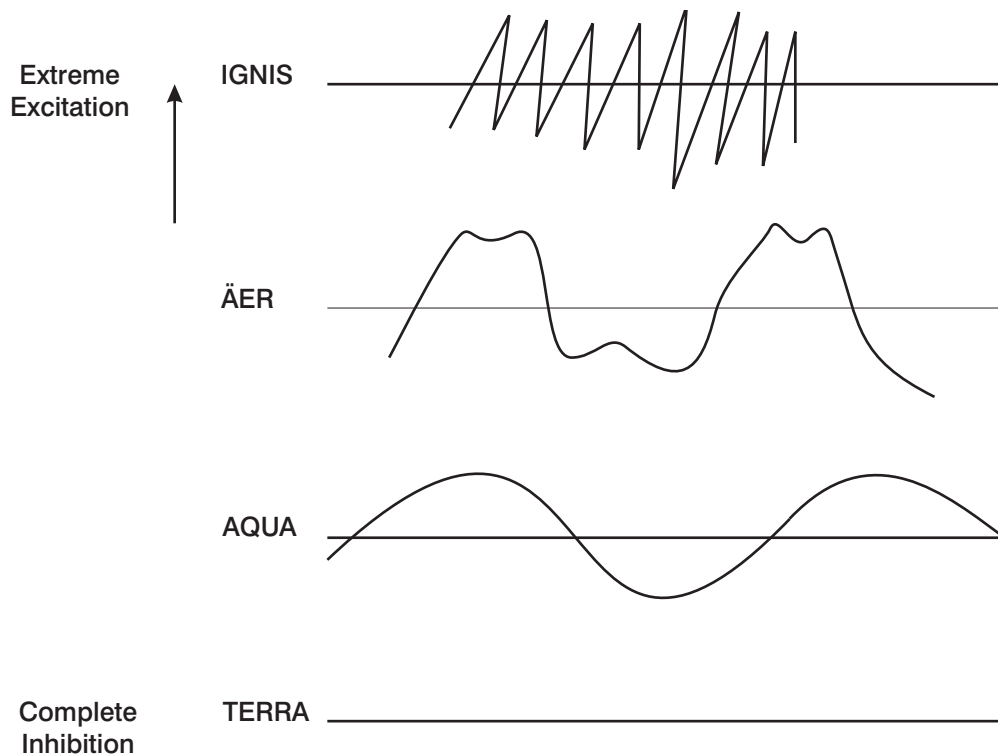


Figure 2

PART 2

You have probably realised in the course of your discussion, that this simple Scale of Temperature is not enough. It is a broad generalisation, quite useful, but insufficiently precise to account for the differences between people. Nevertheless if people today paid more attention even to that, a lot of tragedies could be avoided.

[Doctors only. No need to read at meeting.]

Take the 'Drug Traffic'. Every one of the new drugs continually being synthesised, has its advantages and disadvantages. In some individuals the advantages outweigh the disadvantages and vice versa. But what happens? The firm try to eliminate variations by testing the new drug on a uniform bunch of laboratory animals, such as rats. Having thus found that the drug is 'uniformly safe', it is put on the market and brought to the notice of individual doctors and dispensers. If it becomes at all popular a large-scale 'controlled trial' by a group of big hospitals is set up. When studied statistically *all the differences between individual temperaments are ironed out*; as often as not 'statistics prove' that the drug has no more potency than water; or that it is perfectly safe to use on everybody alike – tragedies like those due to Thalidomide only appear later. But if it were possible to compare the drug on four groups of individuals belonging to the four different 'Temperaments' – quite other results would show up clearly. That would be a beginning; though here again something more accurate is needed. A doctor can learn very much by trying a drug on himself. In my case one 'purple heart' tablet brings out all my worst characteristics; yet these teenagers take scores of them

every weekend quite indiscriminately! Those in the middle registers of temperament merely use up next week's energy; but always a certain number get addicted and become moral and mental wrecks. The same type-differences occur with heroin, barbiturates, tranquillisers and even with the antibiotics. So 'a simple well tried-out and reliable test' does become rather urgent.]

Did the scientists only know how to use it, the simple blood group test has everything that is required; but the 'Four Blood Groups' really mask *three pairs of opposites*, not two. To be able to interpret such a test the Law of Three Forces must, as in everything, be taken into account – and in this case the Three-roomed House is our guide. You have first of all to decide which room the person usually lives in, that is, whether they are governed by their thoughts or their feelings or their physical sensations. In the Intellectual room people swing between the two extremes, *Yes* and *No*; in the Emotional room they swing between *excitement* and *depression*; and if governed by Sensory-motor reactions, they swing between *active* and *passive*, the *quick* and the *slow* reactors.

Thus the Scale of Temperature operates within each room ; and so again there are not two pairs of opposites, but three!

Let's consider – in self and friend – some of these differences. First, *Yes* and *No*. This comes out in all sorts of situations, important and trivial. From the ordinary mundane point of view, isn't it just as unhappy to be the girl who always says 'yes' – always 'in trouble' – as to be the one who always says 'no'? Or suppose you want to buy a house; one kind of person finds something good in every house she sees; then she talks to the other kind who sees disadvantages in all of them. The same result: no house! Or again, when driving with my mother-in-law looking for a nice place to have a picnic lunch, to me almost every place had some advantage; to her there was something wrong with all of them. Without my well-balanced and 'sanguine' wife, we'd always have reached our destination with sandwiches intact, and an aching void in our middles!

You can just as well compare yourself with your friends in respect of the other two pairs of opposites! However pleasant a feeling, there will always be someone to find or create something unpleasant. Or the quick and the slow – how annoyed they can get with each other!

But by means of these six extremes, plus the Hippocratic 'Scale of Temperature', it is indeed possible to classify all human Temperaments – to study quite accurately the differences between human beings as physico-chemical machines. This has a firm basis in physiology. Both in the brain and in the spinal cord, at the 'synapses' between cells, there have been found to be both 'General Excitatory' and 'Central Inhibitory' substances (Denny Brown and others). More clearly still, in the Autonomic Division (the basis of our emotions) there are the powerful Sympathetic and Parasympathetic chemical transmitters which oppose each other throughout the body.

If you want to find something to work on, try it out on Shakespeare's characters. To take even the most difficult – Hamlet was well-balanced and quick of movement; while his feelings were pleasant he could be the 'observed of all observers', but under ghostly influence he became a prey to suspicion and then began to swither between 'Yes' and 'No' (called *folie du doute*), and so his character fell apart!

PART 3

The major Endocrine glands are store-houses or accumulators of energy for the centres in the three-storeyed house. Unfortunately physiology and medicine do not know enough yet about the normal functioning of these glands; they know only the abnormal, those extremes of excitation or inhibition which give rise to the well-known syndromes of disease. Endocrinology, a very detailed classification, has to be understood only later. Nevertheless, the original division between those glands whose activity results in *storing* of energy (anabolic) and those whose activity results in mobilising and *spending* energy (katabolic), can form a very good basis for study.

The last chapter of a *New Model of the Universe* needs also to be read and understood.

And having learnt all this, we shall only be able to see the six Temperaments in those clear moments when efforts at setting up a state of Attention have brought us Consciousness in the Higher Centres, for only then will we see ourselves and other people 'in the round'. And only by going up the Ladder of Self-realization is it possible to *change* one's temperament – the result of our previous lives, and reach Blake's 'sweet golden clime':

Where the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go.

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(**N.B.** This material is for two weeks.)

