

SYSTEMS OF TEMPERAMENT: A COMPARISON

RARELY do we find people reacting psychologically in the same way to any given situation. It was because of such a diversity of reactions that many ancient philosophers were prompted to ask: "What are the basic types of reactions, and how many are there?" The question, although answered in great detail by the ancients, still poses itself today, claiming the attention of intellectual giants as well as charlatans. The variety of answers given to the question through the years now formulates what are known as the 'different schools of temperament.' Because of the great strides that have been made in the many branches of psychology and psychiatry in the past century, it seems that a new impetus has been given to delve into some of these different views of thought and see just what, if anything, remains of the original notion of temperament as postulated by the ancients many centuries ago.

Many people may ask themselves, "What possible use could a knowledge of such a thing as temperament be to me?" As human beings there is a natural drive in each one of us to learn and to know. In the knowledge of ourselves, the first things we become aware of are our likes and dislikes; we know how we will respond in diverse situations. This response, or tendency to act or respond, does not necessarily have to be identical in each and every occurrence of the same or like situation; nevertheless, one definitive pattern or trend will most probably manifest itself.

We note from experience that certain things please us to a great extent while others are quite repulsive. However, before very long we become aware of the fact that the very things that are so pleasing to us are in many cases completely unappealing to another individual, and vice-versa. A knowledge of temperament will help us to recognize how another will respond to certain situations. More important, from this knowledge of temperament we can look into and know ourselves and our own reactions better, thus supplying ourselves with a guide for the normal activities of daily living. We see that a knowledge of temperament, though it be only a general knowledge, is a definite asset for individuals

in all walks of life, especially those whose position offers them an opportunity for guiding, or influencing others: educators, those in the medical profession and the clergy. We do not mean to imply that when a knowledge of temperament has been obtained that the prime factor in knowing a personality will be possessed. What is intended is that if we are to know the whole of an individual's personality, we must know the various parts that influence it.

The question that first arises is "What is temperament?" It seems that after many different schools of temperament are studied the best general definition would be: 'a certain psychological constitution depending on a certain physical constitution.' It is when one attempts to reconcile different opinions on the subject to the parts of this definition that a multitude of problems present themselves.

Perhaps the basic difficulties encountered refer to the number of existing temperaments, and the distinguishing characteristics of each. Many great men have postulated answers to these problems, yet any apparent substantial agreement among them seems to be lacking. When the average person is confronted with a dilemma such as this, he naturally wonders how anything with so many conflicting conclusions could be of very much practical value at all. Our purpose, then, is to ask and resolve to some extent the question, "Is there such diversity among the scholars as appears at first sight, or is there some link of similarity among them?"

The oldest characterological theory of which there is any record is the doctrine of the humors and their corresponding temperaments. This doctrine endured from the dawn of history down through the four parts cosmogony of Empedocles and continued on for many centuries.¹

About 440 B.C., Hippocrates, a Greek physician, put forth a principle of psychological correspondence between the four basic humors and the four basic kinds of temperament. Approximately a century later, Galen, another Greek physician, continued with the study begun by Hippocrates and formulated the first and what is known today as the 'Classical system of Temperament.'²

According to Hippocrates the four basic humors, namely, the blood, the black bile, the yellow bile and the phlegm, respectively corresponded to temperaments which were named after the corresponding humor. Thus the terminology which is so familiar to many discussions of temperament today had its inception. The temperaments were called *sanguine*, *melancholic*, *choleric* and *phlegmatic*. It is of course quite evident that in view

of modern advances in the fields of physiology and endocrinology the theory of humors put forth by Hippocrates had to be abandoned; the principle of psychological correspondence remains however. Chemical substances, notably the hormones, are now known to effect the working of the nervous system in ways that were only dimly surmised by the ancients.

The classical theory of temperament as formulated by Galen, following Hippocrates, describes the four types as follows. The choleric is typically a man of great ambition. He is well aware of his needs and wants, and will labor strenuously at any task until these needs and wants have been attained. The actions of the choleric are described as quick and deep. The choleric may be typified as bright, aggressive, and more often than not he will be a person possessing extremely fine qualities of leadership.

The phlegmatic, in sharp contrast to the choleric, is one who is extremely passive. Although the phlegmatic person is usually quite penetrating in his actions, his movements are extremely slow and deliberate, and thus he excels in long, tedious, tasks.

The sanguine person has perhaps the most amiable disposition of the four, but as a general rule, he will be quick and shallow in his actions and judgments and will be of a rather fickle nature.

Those who naturally possess a tendency to be very reserved, who have a love of retirement, and who are prone to reflect in a slow and deep manner on all matters, even those of a light nature, are classified by the ancients as melancholic.

In accordance with the theory, all individuals would fall into one of the above-mentioned classifications, but not necessarily only one. Indeed it would be a rare thing to find an individual who bears the characteristics of merely one of these types. Most people have a mixed temperament with one of the four predominating.

Now we ask the question: "Is this portion of the systems, i.e., these descriptions or categories of the classical system still valid; or has it yielded to modern discoveries and should be abandoned as was its counterpart, the theory of the humors? In an attempt to answer this question we shall briefly examine conclusions of four different authors on the subject. We shall consider only the more important points of their work and come to an understanding of their terms. Once this has been accomplished, perhaps we shall have some answer to our question. As we have already noted however, our purpose is not to emphasize similarities with

the theory of the ancients that are evident, but rather to search for some similarity in what seems to be complete chaos.

To begin our investigation we shall examine briefly the conclusions on temperament that have been put forth in a work by Rene Biot, M.D., and Pierre Galimard, M.D.³ These conclusions might be called a modern form of the classical theory of the ancients. Biot and Galimard thus define temperament: "Temperament is a set of characteristics which are fundamental, possessed at birth and which indelibly mark the individual, physiologically and mentally." In their work they list four types of temperament and describe each from the view point of physical structure, psychological structure and behavior. We shall note here some of the more outstanding characteristics.

The type they name as *lymphatic* is a very patient person. He is overly passive, but will persevere in any given task for an extremely long time. His work is very meticulous but accomplished very slowly. Doctors Biot and Galimard note that he has 'diminished vitality.'

It should be noted here that the physiological correlative assigned by these doctors is an 'Intensity of Vitality' and the use of it is channeled. By physiological correlative they mean to signify nothing more than a basis existing within the physical limits of the body, from which proceed very definite psychological traits. The doctors note also that the use of this correlative is channeled, i.e., the more intense the physical basis is in any one individual, the stronger will be the psychological tendencies or the traits of behavior in that individual.

This school lists for the second type of temperament *sanguine*. Due to an excess of vitality the sanguine individual is quite active, although sometimes too superficial and unstable in his actions and judgments. He is quite generous and very successful in dealing with youth.

Continuing with the enumeration of their four categories, they next note what they describe as the *bilious* type. He is often impetuous, not inclined to any serious speculation and is extremely active; he enjoys a struggle and thrives in conquest. These traits are in sharp contrast with the passive aspect of the melancholy type.

Finally they mention the *cerebral* type who is described as a deep thinker, a dreamer. The cerebral, however, is quite slow in his actions and reactions in contrast to the sanguine type.

Thus we notice immediately that there are many deviations from the classical theory of temperament as postulated by the ancients. First and

quite important is a different physical correlative. Biot and Galimard have put forth in place of the humors, 'intensity of vitality.' Their terminology agrees with that of the ancients in only one area, the sanguine. Is this the only area of similarity between the two theories? After a brief comparison, it is seen that basically, though not completely, the lymphatic type corresponds to the type the ancients called the phlegmatic. There are strong areas of resemblance between the bilious and the choleric. The cerebral and the melancholic clearly have many points in common. Thus while some variation from the theory of the ancients has been made, there are still great areas in which strong adhesion to the theory remains.

The conclusions that were reached by Drs. Biot and Galimard were formulated after studies were made of patients who were under their care. Although their practice was quite extensive we cannot say that their methodology would meet the rigorous demands of scientific measurements.

Next we examine the findings of Ernst Kretschmer. In his work entitled *Physique and Character*, Kretschmer places only two types of temperament, the *cyclothyme* and the *schizothyme*.⁴ It must be emphasized that while Kretschmer uses the above terminology, he intends that it be understood in a very limited sense. Therefore it would be well to include a note about this terminology.

By the words *cyclothyme* and *schizothyme*, Kretschmer does not intend that any state of mental illness be associated with them. Perhaps because of the great advances being made in the field of mental health, many of the terms by which certain illnesses are called have become quite well known, and it is precisely because of this familiarity with the terms involved that we must clarify Kretschmer's position. His terminology signifies certain tendencies which, although they are perfectly normal, if they were to reach a stage of abnormality we would have as a result a mental condition with a very similar name, e.g., schizophrenia.

The German School of Temperament, as the work and thought of Ernst Kretschmer is often called, places then only these two kinds of temperament, *cyclothyme* and *schizothyme*. We have here what would appear to be almost as complete a break from the theory of the ancients as is possible. Not only is there an absolute difference in terminology, but there is disagreement even in the number of different kinds of temperament that exist. Now we must look further into the system to seek some sort of an explanation.

By the word temperament Kretschmer understands that group of

mental events which is correlated with physical structure, probably through secretions. Temperament is co-determined by chemistry of the blood and the humors of the body; its physical basis is the brain-glandular apparatus.

Lest from this definition there arises the notion that Kretschmer believed in the theory of humors as posited by the ancients, we should clarify his viewpoint. By humors, Kretschmer has reference to the different hormones in the body, thus greatly emphasizing the early trend of thought of the ancients on this point of view and disassociating himself from any other notions that the ancients held with regard to the humors.

We also note in the definition that these mental events are correlated with physical structure. Most of Kretschmer's work involved an investigation of the nature of the existing correspondence between character and physique.

Before we enter upon an investigation of the characteristics of these two types perhaps it would be well to say a word about Kretschmer's methodology. Kretschmer based his study on only two hundred and sixty people, all of whom were mental defectives. This number it would seem, in an experiment such as this, was totally inadequate. All those examined were from Germany, and all were from the same general locality within the country, namely Swabia. Since all those examined were mental defectives, Kretschmer's investigation into their background was greatly dependent on second hand sources, family, friends, etc. Hence having seen that there are certain limits placed on Kretschmer's theory by the methodology he employed, we can now examine the characteristics of his two types.

We find that the cyclothyme would generally be a very congenial person, who is very loquacious and enjoys life extremely. Characteristics that are quite different from those mentioned above are found in some cyclothyms also, but these represent another side of the cyclothyme. This side of the cyclothyme tends to be calm and he is prone to becoming rather easily depressed. Regardless of the set of characteristics which the cyclothyme displays, along with it, he will also display a high degree of amiability. Kretschmer makes one final point, that while all who are classified in this category are inclined to a rather quiet life, the degree of quietness or activity varies in all individuals.

Prior to this point in our investigation of the work and system of Ernst Kretschmer we had not been able to note any similarity between his system of temperament and that of the ancients, save for the fact that

both admitted the existence of such a psychological tendency. However, after having examined some of the characteristics of the group described as cyclothymes we think that the absolute diversity which we noted now brings with it not a little similarity. A strong likeness can be seen between the cyclothyme temperament of Kretschmer and the sanguine temperament of the ancients.

However, one is liable to claim that we find in a person labeled as a cyclothyme tendencies to be quiet, calm, and reserved. We also find tendencies to easy depression and other characteristics which certainly the ancients did not include under the temperament that they called sanguine. While this fact cannot be denied, rather than confusing the situation, it serves to clear matters up a bit. These tendencies which are not observed in the person described as sanguine by the ancients, are observed and very clearly so, in people whom the ancients classified melancholic.

Lest the case tend to be either over or under stated, it must be noted that all we are seeking here is some point of agreement among these great men. It is absolutely necessary to find this agreement if we ourselves do not wish to become entangled in a web of different systems, all bearing their own useful, scientific and distinct qualities, advantages, and disadvantages. We emphasize, therefore, that each one of these systems is individualized by its peculiarities, but to enter into either a detailed criticism or discussion of these peculiarities is not our purpose here. Thus having noted existing differences, let us return now to our problem of finding notes of harmony between these systems.

Continuing with the examination of the system of Kretschmer, we next note the characteristics exhibited by those individuals who possess the psychological tendencies that Kretschmer labels as schizothymes. For the most part, the schizothyme possesses many qualities (but not all) that we would describe as perhaps eccentric, although these eccentricities will rarely include mannerisms which we could label as rude or impolite, for the schizothyme is usually extremely well mannered. He has little or no sense of humor and oftentimes he can be described as an extreme egotist. He also may respond to many situations in an apparently indifferent manner and be autistic, although sometimes the emotions of this type are perfectly controlled and cold.

After considering the traits of the person labeled by Kretschmer as schizothyme, we find that many of these same traits were recognized and given a different category by the ancients. Are there not in Kretschmer's

schizothyme very definite characteristics of the phlegmatic of the ancients? The tendency, for example, to be overly indifferent and the cold response to situations that usually warrant some type of positive reaction. When we consider such tendencies as egoism and autism, are we not able to see very definite similarities to the choleric of the ancients? Certainly such traits as shyness, seriousness, and a tendency to be reserved are typified in the melancholic temperament of the ancients.

Again, whether the reduction by Kretschmer of all temperamental characteristics is the proper way of classifying these characteristics, or whether the four types of the ancients should be strictly observed is not our problem. Our purpose was to search for a unity among these different schools of thought. Thus after viewing three theories, namely, the ancient classical theory of the Greeks, the modern classical theory of Biot and Galimard and the school of Ernst Kretschmer, it seems that to some extent the latter two are compatible with the classical theory of the ancients, although all admit of their own useful, scientific, and individual differences. These differences having been shown we now shall see the Italian School, or as it is sometimes called, the school of Di Giovanni.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Di Giovanni's theory on temperament consists in the number of types he puts forth. While in the schools of thought that we have considered, there has not been complete agreement as to number, the divergence in that area has not been extreme. Di Giovanni places twenty-four different biotypes to which all individuals can be reduced. However, his conclusions are not thoroughly substantiated by a statistical analysis nor does the group examined lend itself to scientific conclusions since those constituting the group were few in number and were all from the same general geographical location.

According to Di Giovanni, "A biotype is the morphological-physiological-psychological resultant, variable in individuals, of the properties of the cells and tissues and the humors of an organism."⁵ In other words, temperament, as seen by Di Giovanni, is the result of the structure of the organism, combined with both physiological and psychological characteristics to produce certain tendencies which are greatly varied in each individual. To avoid confusion it should be noted that by humors Di Giovanni intends to signify 'endocrine secretions' and thus does not imply the same notion of 'humor' as is connoted in the theory of the ancients.

Thus before we proceed very far into this school we already note several divergences from the classical theory as postulated by the early

Greeks. To find a thread of agreement, it is not necessary to examine all of the twenty-four Biotypes. Rather we shall select a few general headings or classifications, under which many different biotypes are contained, and examine them. If after this examination we are able to find similarities, then our investigation, for the present purpose, will be sufficiently extensive.

As we noted a biotype is the "morphological—physiological—and psychological resultant"; but we ask, "What are the characteristics of these biotypes?"

Di Giovanni describes under the "Hypopituitary Type" approximately six biotypes. Generally these biotypes are able to be described by such characteristics as: hypercritical, instinctive, aggressive, energetic in will, domineering, egoistic, and cold. In traits such as these, there are found many of the same notions that are typified in the bilious type of Biot and Galimard, and the schizothyme of Kretschmer, and most definitely in the choleric of the ancients.

Another of Di Giovanni's general classifications is the "Hypothyroid." Some of the characteristics exhibited by about eleven biotypes who fall into this group are: slowness in response, apathetic, analytic mind and optimistic outlook on things. From this definition one would have little difficulty finding a strong note of resemblance that can be traced all the way back through the systems that we have seen thus far, to the phlegmatic of the ancients.

When examining still another of these general classifications, namely the "Hypersuparenal Type," we find such characteristics of the biotypes that fall into this group as: great energy, insubordination, independence, indefatigability, and many other such traits which can easily be reconciled, at least in part, to the sanguine of the ancients.

The final general classification we note is the "Hyposuparenal Type." Here we find characteristics such as: nervousness, good intelligence, resistance to intellectual labor, easy depression and frequent sorrow. Once again evidences of similarity running through the systems of Biot and Galimard and Kretschmer to the melancholic of the ancients are too strong to be ignored.

Hence after examining these four general classifications we are able to associate approximately nineteen with the classifications made by the ancients. Having answered our question it would serve little purpose (save for the sake of emphasis) to go through an analysis of the other biotypes.

We note here, for the sake of completeness that the biotypes not mentioned are based on sexual differences which are admitted by all.

Once again, as was the case with the other two schools, it is necessary to point out that the differences in these systems are not repressed in order to bring out this likeness. Each is different from the others in numerous ways, but as we have noted, our purpose is not to emphasize differences, rather it is to seek some degree of harmony.

Thus with this brief analysis of the Italian school we come to view the final school chosen for this comparison. This is the American School under the direction of Professor W. H. Sheldon of Harvard University.

After a very efficient and scientific study of a large group of undergraduates, Sheldon concluded to approximately sixty traits which he used as a basis to judge temperament. He classified these sixty traits into three general groups and named them, the *viscerotonic*, the *somatotonic* and the *cerebrotonic*.⁶ Following the same general procedure as with the three previous theories, we shall not note all the traits of each group, but rather only enough to indicate whether there are in the classifications of Sheldon traits similar to those classified by the ancients.

Sheldon lists some of the traits of the viscerotonic as: evenness of emotional flow, complacency, smoothness, easy communication of feeling, and indiscriminate amiability. As characteristic traits of the Somatotonic he lists, in part: bold directness of manner, physical courage for combat, competitive aggressiveness, psychological callousness. For this third type, the identifying traits are in general: overly fast response, restraint in posture and movement, inhibited social address, introversion and many such others.

Just from the few traits of each type listed notes of similarity between the viscerotonic of Sheldon and the sanguine of the ancients are quite evident. The same holds true when a comparison is drawn between Sheldon's somatotonic and the choleric of the ancients. Finally in Sheldon's cerebrotonic we see a mixture of both the melancholic and phlegmatic traits as postulated by the ancients.

Here, as previously, we must note that the work of Sheldon differs from and enlarges upon the system of the ancients in many respects. Our purpose, however, was to find the answer to only one question: "Does some similarity exist amidst such evident differences?" From this extremely brief examination we are permitted to conclude in the affirmative, even though the degree of similarity might be slight.

Thus, though a cord of unity does exist and can be demonstrated, we

must realize that the questions related to temperament which still remain unanswered are indeed many. Answers are being sought to these questions and will continue to be sought, for it is only natural to reach out to discover what makes a person act or react the way he does to a given situation; to reach down beneath a surface that has perhaps been covered up by a very virtuous or viceladen life; to find the physical cause or causes of these reactions if such exist. These are the questions and problems that now remain to be answered and solved.

Hence while such problems are still the object of great intellectual endeavors, one is not able to deny that since the time of the Greeks there has been little substantial change, not only in man's reactions and tendencies to reactions, but also in the classifications of these tendencies and reactions.

—Terence Ryan, O.P.

¹ Allport, G. W., *Personality*; New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1937, p. 63.

² *Ibid.*

³ Biot, R., M.D. and Galimard, P., M.D., *Medical Guide To Vocations*; Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1955, Robert P. Odenwald, M.D. trans. pp. 48 ff.

⁴ Kretschmer, Ernst., *Physique and Character*; New York, The Humanities Press Inc., E. Miller, trans. pp. 127 ff.

⁵ Berman, L., M.D., *The Glands Regulating Personality*; New York, 1930.

⁶ Sheldon, W. H., M.D., *The Varieties of Temperament*; New York, Harper and Brothers, 1942. pp. 20 ff.

THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY GHOST IN THE SOUL

Mode of the Holy Spirit's Presence: Object of Love

1. There is something that unites us more closely to our friends than knowledge does, and this is love. Knowledge may teach us about them, may unlock for us gradually throughout life ever more wonderful secrets of their goodness and strength and loyalty. But knowledge of itself pushes us irresistibly on to something more. The more we know of that which is worth knowing, the more we must love it. Now love is greater than knowledge whenever knowledge itself does not really unite us to the object of our knowledge, so that St. Paul can deliberately put charity