

Introduction to Descriptive Psychology

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Forward

Descriptive Psychology is an entirely different approach to understanding and describing people and what they do. The same can be said of every theory of psychology, of course: Behaviorism is entirely different from psychodynamic theory is entirely different from humanistic psychology, and so on. The way in which Descriptive Psychology is different is that it is not a theory at all. It is a careful and precise elaboration of the very ideas of people and action that all the theories are theories *about*. It includes no abstractions or assumptions. The formulations of topics like people, action, emotion, and relationships often look like “just common sense.” As you will see in the first Chapter, this appearance is not accidental. Descriptive Psychology has a close relationship to common sense, but is not *just* common sense.

In part because of the way in which Descriptive Psychology differs from other approaches to psychology, people educated in it have often had considerable difficulty answering the questions, “OK, so what’s Descriptive Psychology?” and “Have you got anything I can read?” There is a substantial scholarly and professional literature in Descriptive Psychology, but until now there has not been a straightforward introduction to the field, something that explains in more detail what Descriptive Psychology is and what it has to say about people and human action. This article is written with the hope of filling that gap.

The formulations in the following chapters, with exceptions as noted, and of experience and feelings, are due to P. G. Ossorio. The formulation of experience and feelings are due to the author. All errors are solely the responsibility of the author.

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Chapter I What is Descriptive Psychology?

Descriptive Psychology is the name of a distinctive approach to psychology that began in the early 1960s, with the observation by psychologist Dr. Peter Ossorio that:

There is no such thing as a science of psychology. To be a science, a field must have a scientific formulation of its subject matter. The subject matter of psychology is persons and behavior. And there is no scientific formulation of persons and behavior.

He continued with the observation that having an actual science of psychology appeared to be of great potential value, and set out to create one. The result of those efforts, by Ossorio and some others, is what is now termed Descriptive Psychology.

Developing the desired field requires clarity on what is meant by "science." At that time, there was considerable dispute on what constituted a science, and the role of theories and experiment in psychology. In a move that characterized his approach in all the following work, Ossorio observed that, "Whatever else it is, to be a science a field must be precise, systematic, and comprehensive."

It is important to note, in order to prevent possible confusion, that this was not offered as a "definition" of science, nor was it engaging with any of the controversy about science. It was rather a conservative formulation of necessary conditions, conservative in the sense of neither inventing nor assuming anything, but simply observing logical requirements to call a field a science. A collection of doctrines, beliefs, theories, assemblages of facts, or any formulation of any field that was imprecise, unsystematic, or did not cover the field might be of value, but would not be called "scientific."

To summarize: Descriptive Psychology is a **precise, systematic, comprehensive formulation of persons and behavior.**

How to start

Ossorio set out to create something new. The traditional way to begin a new formulation of any field is to define one's terms, because it is crucial to be able to be clear about what one is talking about. In this case, however, that was not possible, for two reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, there were already several conflicting definitions of the terms "person" and "behavior." Behaviorists defined "person" as a type of physical mechanism; psychoanalysts as a subject driven by unconscious desires, primal impulses (the id), and early childhood experiences; Gestalt psychologists as an indivisible "whole" or "gestalt," integrating mind, body, and emotions; Rogerian psychologists as an organized entity existing in a constantly changing

phenomenal field, driven by an innate tendency to self-actualize, maintain, and enhance their experience; Carl Jung as a system of conscious and unconscious forces, influenced by internal "archetypes" and external social pressures. Many of these formulations are extant today. Similarly, "behavior" is variously defined as observable actions, internal psychological states (thoughts/feelings), adaptive responses to stimuli, and the potential and expressed capacity to respond to internal and external stimuli. Another definition would be just another definition.

Second, and more profoundly, any set of definitions of terms is itself stated using other terms, with their own meanings. If "person," for example, is defined as some combination of other concepts, then the concept of person cannot be fundamental, and similarly for "behavior."

In light of these considerations, Ossorio asked an entirely different question. Rather than attempting to settle which definition is right, and thereby become embroiled in already existing disputes, he asked:

What must people *share*, in order to be able to disagree, about anything?

The answer is that they must share concepts. Two people cannot disagree about, e.g., what a chair is unless they share the concept of chair. If they do not, all they can do is misunderstand each other.

To have a shared concept of some thing means people must be able to distinguish between that thing and other things: chairs vs. other things, walking vs other things, greeting someone vs. other things, etc. It does not mean they must be able to articulate the concept of that thing, only that they can make the distinction and act on it. It is not a simple task, for example, to precisely formulate the concept of telephone, but a small child can tell the difference between a telephone and other things, and use one.

Accordingly,

- To disagree about persons, we must share the concept of person.
- To disagree about behavior, we must share the concept of behavior.

This shared understanding is usually called "common sense about people." ("Common sense" is used to mean other things, as well. We will clarify that shortly.)

Thus, creating the desired precise, systematic formulation of persons and behavior proceeds not by devising new definitions, but by *identifying* and *articulating* the already shared concepts of person and behavior.

The task of creating a comprehensive formulation of people and behavior is somewhat larger, though. Behavior takes place in the real world, and people disagree about what the world is. A common view is that the world is composed of material objects, fundamental particles in

varying sizes of assemblages, including chairs, people, and planets, but a number of philosophers disagree, holding that the world is made of processes, events, or relations.

So we have the same situation as with persons and behavior: people disagree about what the real world is, and therefore people must also share the concept of real world, often called “common sense about the world.” As with other concepts, this means having the distinctions of real world and being real, i.e., being able to distinguish between real world and other things, such as imaginary worlds, a partial or incomplete world, etc.

We arrive at the conclusion that in order for what we observe to be the case, namely disagreement about people, behavior, and the world, people must *already share* the concepts of person, behavior, and real world.

This leads us to a more complete answer to the question at the beginning of this chapter: Descriptive Psychology is **a precise, systematic, comprehensive articulation of the concepts of person, behavior, and the real world.**

Or, less formally, **common sense about people and behavior, made precise and systematic.**

As noted earlier, the term “common sense” needs clarification. It is used to refer to three kinds of things: 1) Factual generalizations, such as “Men are taller than women.” 2) Preconceived ideas, often social prejudices, such as, “Women aren’t good at math.” 3) Concepts and their relationships, such as, “Bachelors are unmarried,” or, “If a person is called upon to do something he can’t do, he’ll do something else instead.” It is this third usage that is meant when we say, “Common sense about people and behavior, made precise and systematic.

The relationship to empirical work

As a systematic articulation of a system of concepts, Descriptive Psychology contains no theories, definitions, empirical generalizations, posited “internal processes,” abstractions, or assumptions. The formulations comprise a language that can be used for formulate theories and empirical conjectures precisely. It is, in this sense, pre-empirical.

For example, in subsequent chapters, we will give the formulations of behavior, personality characteristics, reasons, and emotional behavior. Using those formulations, one can precisely formulate the following principle: Provocation elicits hostile behavior, unless a) The provoked person has stronger reason not to act in a hostile way, b) The person does not recognize the provocation for what it is, or c) The person takes it that he or she *has* responded in a hostile way but is mistaken, or d) The person successfully re-describes the provoking action as not provocative. This is not a theory; it is a reminder of the relationship between provocation, hostility, reasons, and behavior. With this formulation, however, one is then in a position to formulate conjectures and do empirical work to confirm or disconfirm them. Various

hypotheses can be formulated in terms of percentages of a population that do respond with hostility; percentages of a population that respond with various kinds of hostile action; percentages of a population that act on other reasons, what those reasons are, and how many act on each of those reasons; etc.

The following chapters will present the content of Descriptive Psychology, articulations of:

- Person
- Behavior
- Reasons
- Choice
- Relationship
- Emotion
- World
- Communities
- Place in the world (“Status”)
- And the inter-relationships between those concepts

The logical inter-relationships among the various aspects of the concepts of person and behavior are central to those concepts. Here is an example:

Two people, John and Dave, are friends. John says to Dave, “Hey, let’s go get a beer at Pete’s Bar and Grill!” They do, but Pete’s is closed. So Dave says, “Well, then let’s go to Tony’s, down the street.”

The behavioral logic, i.e., the logical relationships between the concepts of relationship, choice, and action, illustrated here, are:

- Relationship “Friend” holds between John and Dave
- If A has relationship R with respect to B, A has reason to do X with respect to B
- If a person is called upon to do X, and can’t, he will do something else, instead.

Thus, we see an explanation of why John and then Dave do what they do, embodying the logical relationships between relationships of the two possible behaviors.

What is the payoff of having this articulation?

It is natural to ask what the value of this set of articulations of concepts and their inter-relationships might be, other than as an intellectual exercise. An analogy is useful here. The

discipline of geometry is a careful, precise articulation of the concepts of lines and shapes, and their inter-relationships. Its value is to better understand difficult and puzzling shapes, and it is indispensable to people in a variety of occupations, including architects, artists, and wallpaper hangers.

The value of Descriptive Psychology, as a careful, precise articulation of the concepts of person and behavior, and their inter-relationships, is to better understand people and what they do in complex, puzzling, and difficult situations, and it is of value to anyone who wants or needs that understanding, including ordinary people and psychology professionals, particularly psychotherapists.

A formal system

We noted above that Descriptive Psychology includes no definitions, that it is, rather, an articulation of already-shared concepts. A natural question is how, then, one is to know the meaning of the terms. In formulations of other fields, the “entry point” is the definitions, which are used to formulate other concepts. With no definitions, what is the entry point?

This seems at first glance to mean there is no way to understand what is being said. Fortunately, this is not the case. The example of geometry again is helpful. Most people learn plane geometry in high school, and one of the first lessons they learn is that the definitions of point, line, and plane, the fundamental concepts of geometry, are circular. A point is the intersection of two lines; a line is the intersection of two planes; a plane is a set of points. Most students find this very disorienting at first, having been taught that one must define one’s terms and definitions cannot be circular. But after some practice *using* these concepts, they become comfortable with the fact that these three concepts comprise a formal system, i.e., a system defined entirely within itself, not by reference to something outside of it. As with geometry, any formal system is learned by using it, i.e., by acting on its concepts. (It is perhaps worth noticing that every natural language is also a formal system: words and phrases are defined using other words and phrases, and the entire set of definitions is circular. And every person learns their native language by using it, i.e., by speaking it and otherwise acting on the concepts the words and phrases refer to.)

So it is with the concepts of person, behavior, and world. One of Ossorio’s most profound insights, in beginning what eventually came to be called Descriptive Psychology, is that person, behavior, and all the constituent concepts involved in being a person acting in the world comprise a formal system, *which persons have already mastered*.

Chapter II Behavior

Experience has shown that the most easily understood way to present the Descriptive formulation of behavior is to begin with an example. Accordingly, consider an everyday, unmistakable example of behavior: A speaker, let's call her Holly, is going to give a tutorial to a group. Holly happens to be the kind of person who values having the door to the room closed when she's giving a tutorial. She closes the door to the room, just before starting.

What do we have to specify, in order to specify this particular action, that is, this behavior by this individual, Holly?

First, let enumerate the various aspects of this action, in ordinary language.

- The individual giving the tutorial, Holly.
- Holly wants, intends, that the door to be closed.
- Holly knows the difference between doors and other things (i.e., is acting on that distinction), this particular door vs. others, closed vs. not closed.
- Holly knows how to walk and close doors, i.e., has those skills.
- Holly visibly walks to the door and closes it.
- The achievement, or result, of the visible process is that the door is closed.
- The action reflects one of Holly's personal characteristics: she values having a closed room when giving a tutorial
- The significance of this action, that is, the larger things being done, by doing this:
 1. Closing the door is part of the larger action of arranging the room
 - 1.1. Arranging the room is part of the yet larger action of giving a tutorial
 - 1.1.1. Giving a tutorial is engaging in the even larger action of explaining something of interest to a group

The factors are what makes Holly closing the door *this* action, not some other one. If Josh closed the door instead of Holly, it would be different; if Holly did not intend to have the door closed, we would count it as a different behavior, the kind called an accident; and so forth.

Enumerating these aspects, we see that in the general case a behavior is fully specified by stating:

- I: the individual whose behavior it is
- W (Want): what the individual wants to accomplish, the intended resulting state of affairs
- K (Know): distinctions being acted on - concepts, facts, and perspectives

- Kh (Know-how): the skills involved in the action
- P (Performance): the observable process involved, the procedural aspect
- A (Achievement): the actual end result, the achievement
- PC (Personal Characteristics): personal characteristics of the individual actor that make this behavior different from others (traits, attitudes, interests, styles, values) (We will clarify these characteristics below.)
- S (Significance): the larger behavior(s) done, by doing this

Thus, the full formal specification of Holly closing the door is:

- I: Holly
- W (Want): the door is closed
- K (Know): doors vs. other things; this door vs. others; closed vs. other
- Kh (Know-how): how to walk, how to close doors
- P (Performance): walk to the door and close it
- A (Achievement): the door is closed
- PC (Personal Characteristics): Holly values having a closed room for a tutorial
- S (Significance): the larger behavior(s) done, by doing this
 1. Arrange a lecture room
 - 1.1. Give a tutorial
 - 1.1.1. Explain a topic of interest

These 8 factors can be thought of as the *parameters* of behavior, the ways one behavior can differ from another. This illustrates that we are not defining behavior, but articulating the already shared knowledge of what behavior is. Since this is the first case we have seen in this Introduction of specifying by parameters, the following analogy (due to C. J. Peek) may be helpful. Many people are familiar with construction 2x4's, familiarity acquired by using them and often by purchasing them. Everyone in that group knows what differentiates one kind of 2x4 from another: Length, width, thickness, type of wood, and grade. Any particular 2x4 is fully specified by giving the values for each of these parameters.

In formal style, we can say that B (Behavior) = <I, W, K, Kh, P, A, PC, S>. (Formula 1)

In Descriptive Psychology, this formulation is typically referred to as "Intentional Action," highlighting the (logical) fact that intention – what the Individual wants to accomplish – is central to our concept of behavior. This is often abbreviated as IA. The term "Intentional Action" does not mean that all outcomes are intended; sometimes things go wrong, resulting in

behaviors contrast with *instrumental* or *extrinsic* ones. For most people, washing dishes is extrinsic; few do it for its own sake. (This concept is a good example of a characteristic common to many Descriptive Psychology formulations: intrinsic and extrinsic practices is a well-known concept in psychology and, though not formally defined, to persons in general. Sir Edmund Hillary's reply, when asked why he climbed Everest, "Because it was there," is perhaps the most famous example of citing intrinsicness. What is new here is not the concept of intrinsicness, but the articulation of it in terms of behavior, and the recognition of the inappropriateness of postulating an "internal need" to account for it.)

The logic here is that the action, as described here, is done for its own sake. It is *not* done in order to achieve some other goal or meet some other need. There is no overarching "internal" need involved here, or any abstract postulated general need. Just as a chess player plays chess purely to play chess, the behavior articulated above is of an individual, Holly, giving a tutorial purely to give a tutorial, one aspect of which is the audience having new understanding.

The second part of the answer to "Why stop here in the hierarchy" is the one alluded to: because we were describing a case in which giving a tutorial is intrinsic. There are, of course, other cases, perhaps the most obvious being that one is paid to do so. In that case, the individual might be described as "doing their job as a hired speaker." Or, the speaker might be meeting a personal need, perhaps a need to affirm their standing as an expert in a field. In that case, the specification of the Significance would be, "Affirm one's status as an expert." (We will discuss status and affirmation in a subsequent Chapter.)

It is important, in understanding actual people rather than articulating the logic of people, to realize the importance of intrinsic practices in human life. Intrinsic practices are what is meaningful. As A.O. Putman put it, "Satisfaction accompanies intrinsicness," that is, satisfaction is the experience, or feeling, one has when doing something intrinsic. In life, that is where satisfaction and meaning come from. Conversely, finding life meaningless, or having no "juice," is what happens when nothing is intrinsic. Similarly, loss of potential for doing what is intrinsic is loss of meaning in one's life. This is the phenomenon of anhedonia, a not uncommon reason for people to seek psychotherapy. (It should be noted that the phenomenon itself should not be confused with stipulated physiological conditions, such as dopamine disruption.)

Forms of Behavior Description

The 8-parameter IA formulation identifies what is necessary for a full specification of a behavior. Often, though, it is useful, or important, to be able give a less complete specification. We may not know the value for the W parameter (the intention), for example. Behavior called

“accidental” is a different example. If Holly bumped the door without meaning to and it closed, without a W specification. A different sort of example is, “Bob got milk.” In this case, we know only the values for the I, W, K, and A parameters.

The mechanism that allows for the needed variety of behavior descriptions is that any parameter or combination of them can be omitted, denoted as “null,” meaning, “not specified.” (The symbol θ is often used to represent “null”.) The “Bob got milk” case is specified by

- I: Bob
- W: have milk
- K: milk vs. other things, having milk vs. not
- Kh: θ
- P: θ
- A: have milk
- PC: θ
- S: θ

or $\langle \text{Bob, have milk, \{milk vs. other, having vs. not\}, } \theta, \theta, \text{ have milk, } \theta, \theta \rangle$.

Other examples of these forms include:

- “I was fixing the latch, but couldn’t get it.” Values for Kh, P, and A are θ .
- “I had a car accident.” An Achievement Description: the values for W, K, Kh, P, and S are all θ .
- “They were rescued.” A Significance Description: all values except S and A are θ .

Due to the ambiguity of the English language (and, to our knowledge, every human language) it is not uncommon for someone to think of their own behavior (i.e., to describe it to themselves) in ways that result in uncalled for emotions. Perhaps the most obvious is the all-too-common situation of a car accident described by the driver as, “I hit someone!” More than one driver has been less inclined to see themselves as guilty of wrongdoing on hearing, “Not exactly. Only under an Achievement Description. You didn’t hit them in the ordinary sense of the word – you did not intend to.”

Deliberate Action

Intentional Action describes any kind of action, by any kind of individual: amoebas, clams, fleas, dogs, chimpanzees, etc. What is commonly observed about humans (all the actual persons we currently know of) is that a person knows what they are doing and chooses to do it.

This case is characterized by:

- The individual knows what they are doing: the K parameter specification includes the name of the behavior
- *The individual wants to do the behavior he/she is doing*: the W parameter specification includes the name of the behavior.

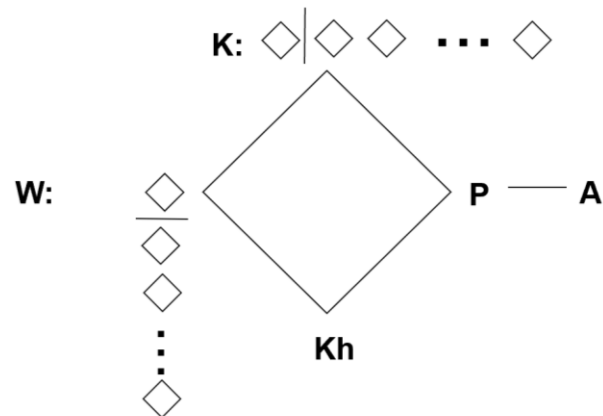
(Recall that the specifications of the values for the parameters are just formal identifiers, not explanations or verbal representations of complex situations.)

Following ordinary English usage, this is termed Deliberate Action, and a description of this kind is a Deliberate Action description.

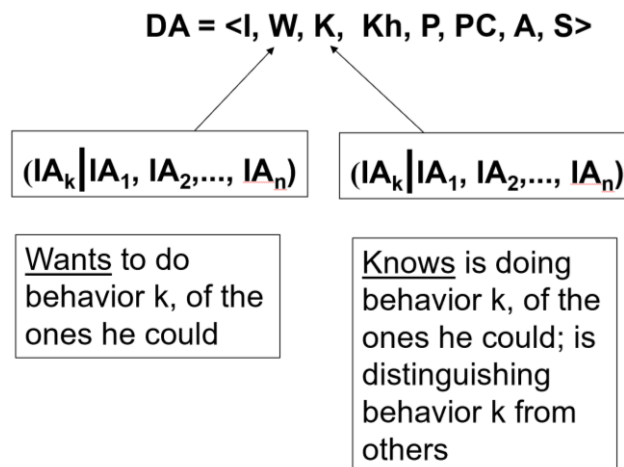
It is common to describe deliberate action as including an “unconscious episode” of deliberation, or a decision process that occurs “subconsciously” or too rapidly to be observed. None of those theoretical or stipulated events are implied here. None are ruled out, of course; if evidence for such an episode is discovered that case would be specified by elaborating the P parameter, the Process or Performance. Deliberate Action descriptions simply articulate the concept of knowing what one does and choosing to do it.

In some cases there is an overt episode of deliberation, sometimes described as “weighing the options” or “considering the alternatives.” Deliberating is a distinct behavior, preceding the deliberate action, in which one, or a group of people, examine the situation, the various reasons for doing different things, and the relative importance of those reasons. This will be discussed in Chapter IV, Reasons and Choice, below.

The Diamond diagram for Deliberate Action is:



and the formal parameter-style representation is:



Actors, Observers, and Critics

Ossorio observed that one of the most obvious characteristics of people is that they “self-regulate,” that is, they observe how their actions are proceeding, or the results, and alter the behavior as needed. This does not imply any sort of mechanism, as is sometimes stipulated, but only that people observably carry out these three jobs or, stated differently, have these three

roles in their own lives. Thus, the concept of a person behaving includes these three kinds of “functioning”: behaving, observing the behavior, and critiquing the behavior so as to modify it as appropriate.

This set of roles, and their inter-relationships, is formulated in Descriptive Psychology in terms of the three roles of Actor, Observer, and Critic:

- A person acting as an Actor engages on some behavior, B.
- That person, acting as an Observer, observes the circumstances and behavior B as it proceeds. The job of the Observer is to observe the situation simply in terms of the object, processes, events, and states of affairs present, with no evaluation or appraisal.
- The person, acting as a Critic, critiques the circumstances and behavior B for how the behavior is going, including but not limited to whether it looks like it is going to be successful. The job of the Critic is to give appraisals of the situation, descriptions that automatically indicate that some change in the behavior is called for: “not so fast,” “soften the tone of voice,” “persuade, don’t coerce.”

It is important to keep in mind that these roles are three statuses, or positions, that are all occupied by the same person. In Descriptive formulations and conversations, one will often hear language such as, “For the Actor, here’s what’s significant,” or, “The Observer sees only the facts with no judgment.” That language is used because it is very convenient, and sometimes useful for clarifying a situation, but it is one person acting in three roles, not distinct individuals. This logic is very easy to see in the case of driving a car. You *never* simply set the steering wheel and gas and proceeds you adjust the wheel and gas, proceed a bit, observe the direction you appear to be pointing in and the immediate circumstances (other vehicles, pedestrians, etc.), appraise the new circumstances, and alter the wheel and other controls as appropriate.

This tripartite functioning can be compared to the functioning of a thermostat and furnace: the furnace burns, the thermometer measures the temperature and compares it to the setting, and turns on or turns off the furnace. This is a useful analogy, but can be misleading, because in the case of a person, there are three roles being fulfilled by one person doing things, not three objects comprising a mechanism. Persons have no mechanisms (though their bodies do). (That last sentence needs a bit of clarification. It is not a claim or a philosophical position. It is a reminder that the concept of a person does not include mechanisms. In the same way, the concept of poker does not include that of trump cards.)

Ordinary life, barring special circumstances, is just like this. A person occupies all three of the statuses of A, O, and C, simultaneously. One acts, observes how it’s going, and “corrects course” as needed. This very ordinariness results in people often not recognizing that they are fulfilling

three roles, and that, just as with any status and behavior, things can go wrong. The point of Critic functioning is to alter the behavior in light of moment-to-moment circumstances, including how the actual performative aspect of the behavior is progressing, *so that the behavior goes right*. In other words, the Critic is for the benefit of the Actor.

Speaking again of actual persons, rather than the logic of person and behavior, some of the more common ways of going wrong have to do with Critic functioning. Perhaps the most well-known is the phenomenon of the overactive, or inappropriately harsh, Critic, always appraising the action as “not good enough” or “you can do better.” Or a Critic holding the Actor to impossible, super-human standards. (There is a good deal more to say about such cases; we are here pointing out only the A-O-C issue.) Conversely, a number of drugs, including alcohol, are universally recognized as interfering with Critic appraisals of how things are going, or whether a behavior is appropriate to the circumstances.

Chapter III What Is a Person?

The articulation above of behavior as Intentional Action, and in particular of Deliberate Action, makes the answer to “What is a person?” deceptively simple:

A person is an individual whose behavior is, paradigmatically, deliberate action.

In other words, to say, “She is a person” *is the same thing* as saying, “Her behavior is, paradigmatically, deliberate action.”

That is, however, only the bare formulation. We commonly say a good deal more in describing a person, and those descriptions typically consist of specifying, to one degree of certainty or another, their Personal Characteristics: their traits, attitudes, interests, styles, abilities, knowledge, and values.

These aspects of person, sometimes referred to as Personal Characteristics or personality, are, in other approaches to psychology, described as internal attributes or factors, consisting of enduring thoughts, feelings, and motivations that drive behavior. Descriptive Psychology formulates these characteristics as observable facts about persons and behavior, without assumptions or postulated distinctions such “internal” and “external.” Accordingly, the various Personal Characteristics are articulated as patterns of observable behaviors.

(By “pattern” we mean that there are recognizable relationships between the various constituent behaviors.)

Sidebar: “Paradigmatically”?

We noted earlier that definitions are not used in Descriptive Psychology. Definitions are used to clarify what one is talking about. Without definitions, how does Descriptive Psychology meet that need?

We have seen one method, with behavior: Giving a parametric formulation of the range of cases. A second is to specify a case that is recognizable as the unmistakable, “if ever there were one, this is it” case. “Paradigmatically” means, “In the paradigm case.” Thus, this formulation of the concept of person is, “...whose behavior, in the paradigm case, is deliberate action.” Work in Descriptive Psychology often involves formulating the paradigm case of a phenomenon. Having a paradigm case, one can then specify variations of the paradigm case, to cover the range of cases of interest.

The “enduringness” of personal characteristics is an essential part of the concept. Thus, these patterns of kinds of behaviors are thought of as persisting throughout a person’s life history, but with the understanding that characteristics can change. Thus, “throughout the person’s life” means “this is the pattern that can be expected to be seen, barring change in this characteristic.” A classic example is trait hostility: A person exhibiting high trait hostility engages in hostile behaviors more frequently than what is considered appropriate, and significantly more so. (It is clear that this formulation is dependent on what is considered appropriate in a specific community. This is consistent with the fact that what is considered normal in one community may be seen differently in another.)

The patterns of behavior commonly accepted as Personal Characteristics are:

- Traits: To have a trait is to exhibit a frequency of a kind of behavior with significantly greater or lesser frequency than the norm. Any behavior can be the basis for a trait; some people are hostile, some are kind, some are analytical, some are artistic, some are risk-averse, etc.
- Attitudes: To have an attitude is to display a kind of behavior toward some kind of object or situation with significantly greater or lesser frequency than the norm. Traits are wide-ranging; attitudes are toward (or against) a particular kind of thing.
- Interests: The concept of interest is that it is an interest *in* something: some kind of object, some kind of situation, some field of endeavor, etc. To say a person has an interest in something is to say they exhibit behaviors involving that something with significantly greater frequency, but in addition, that the behaviors are intrinsic to that person; they engage in them with no other end in view. Children are often interested in dinosaurs; some people are interested in art; some are interested in physics; some are interested in hiking.
- Styles: “Style” is talking not about someone’s behaviors, but about “how they do it,” that is, variations in the Performance parameter of their behaviors. Some people have a poetic style of speech; some people always dress elegantly; some walk fast; etc. Thus, a style description is saying that the person’s behaviors exhibit Performances (the procedural aspect) of the specified sort consistently, to a significantly greater degree.

It is convenient to label these four as Dispositions, the kind of behaviors a person is disposed to engage in.

A different kind of Personal Characteristic is what are called their Powers, because they address a person’s capabilities for engaging in kinds of behaviors, not actual patterns of occurrence.

These are:

- Abilities: An ability is an ability to accomplish something or some kind of thing. We say a person has the ability to speak English, to do advanced mathematics, to paint beautiful

pictures, to run faster than anyone else. To say a person has an ability to do something is to say that under normal circumstances he/she can be expected to succeed at that thing.

- Knowledge: A person's knowledge is all the facts and concepts he/she has the competence (learned skills) to act on, sometimes called their "cognitive repertoire."
- Values: A fundamental fact of persons is that a person values certain states of affairs over others, and will act to bring about those states of affairs (if they can, and circumstances permit, and they do not have other values of greater priority).

Informally, one could say that Dispositions are talking about what one is inclined to do, and Powers are talking about what one can do.

Finally, there are two other characteristics of persons, which are derived from the ones above, and so are called Derivatives. They refer to states of affairs that are not themselves patterns of behavior, but are logically related to such patterns: States and Capacities.

State refers to a systematic change in a person's powers and/or dispositions. Paradigmatically, they are acquired relatively quickly, do not persist, and reverse relatively quickly. A paradigm case of a state is being drunk: it comes on relatively quickly, persists for a short time (relative to a human life), and dissipates. Famously, being drunk involves changes in what one is inclined to do and what one is prepared act on and able to do. Another kind of state is that of emotional state, which plays a large role in many lives. We will discuss these in Chapter V.

The second Derivative Personal Characteristic is that of Capacity. It is the primary concept needed to answer questions such as, "How does an infant grow up to be an adult?" The answer to that kind of question – how does one become a basketball player, a pianist, a mathematician, an artist – is always of two parts: a history of behaviors by which one acquires the skills, abilities, concepts, and perspectives involved (a "learning history"), and the initial capacity. Logically, the concept is needed to describe the fact that one person may have the learning history leading to being, e.g., a good amateur pianist, while another, with the same history, will not. We commonly say, "Well, they didn't have the talent."

So we see that Personal Characteristics are patterns of behaviors over a life history. A natural question is, "Why these particular patterns (traits, attitudes, etc.)?" The answer is simply that these are the distinctions persons make and use about persons and their behavior throughout their lifetimes. There are obviously many possible patterns, and at some time some of them could come to be identified as distinctions about people that persons make and act on, and in such a case they would be identified as a new kind of Personal Characteristic.

Chapter IV Reasons and Choice

A central aspect of the concept of person is that people make choices of what to do, in light of their circumstances.

Since causal explanations of behavior are so common, and have such a long history, it is worthwhile to note that this reminder about the shared concept of person is not engaging in any way with issues of causality in human behavior. The fundamental logical fact is that persons choose; re-formulations of this fact in terms of cause-and-effect descriptions can be done, but are exactly that: theoretical re-descriptions. The concept of a person is entirely distinct from the concept of a machine or any system governed by cause-effect relationships. Thus, the above reminder about persons choosing should not be taken as any claim or denial of causality. If one chooses to do so, one can apply such a description, thereby using a concept from a different domain than the domain of persons and behavior.

Elaborating the logical fact of choice in light of circumstances, we can begin with the observation that choices reflect a person's circumstances. In a typical case, such as when you first get up in the morning (a circumstance), you have choice of at least three behaviors: Wash up, get dressed, or get coffee. Your circumstances include whether you want coffee this morning, whether you have a roommate, how they feel about you going around in pajamas, whether you have the ingredients to make coffee the way you like it, etc.

The mere circumstances, however are not directly related to what one does. They put constraints on possible behaviors, e.g., if there is no coffee, you do not have the option of making coffee, but that is all. What *is* directly related to a person's behavior is the *reasons* related to the various circumstances. If you don't really want coffee this morning, you have no reason to make it, and conversely. If your roommate objects to you going around ungroomed in your pajamas, you have reason to get dressed first, etc.

And finally, not all reasons carry the same weight for you. (Note that this is particular to the individual.) If your roommate's reaction to your ungroomed condition while making coffee carries little or no weight, their reaction will not be reflected in your choice. The relative weights, or priorities, the various reasons carry for the person reflect their Values.

Since reasons have a central role in the formulation of choice, we need an articulation of the concept of reason, that is, a precise formulation of the concept of reason. One such formulation is:

A reason is a state of affairs, related to one more circumstances, that carries a tautological implication for behavior.

By “tautological” we mean that to say one has a reason is the same thing as saying some behavior is called for. (In that sense, it is “automatic,” though not in any mechanistic sense.)

For example, if person P says that the ice cream looks delicious, they are identifying a state of affairs that is the same thing as saying that they have reason to eat that ice cream.

P may, of course, not actually engage in the implied behavior. There are always other circumstances P finds relevant, which may have associated reasons, with varying weights, i.e., priorities, for P. He may be full, he may also know that the looks of that particular ice cream are deceiving, he may be dieting, etc.

To summarize, a person’s behavior is the one they choose, of the ones (perceived as) available to them

- in the light of their circumstances,
- in light of the reasons stemming from the circumstances,
- and the priorities the reasons have for them.

This choice is commonly referred to as the judgment, or decision, of what to do.

Categories of Reasons

There are four kinds of reasons:

- Prudential: States of affairs in the person’s interest
- Hedonic: States of affairs that are pleasurable or fun
- Ethical: States of affairs that are morally or ethically called for
- Esthetic: States of affairs that are appropriate, in one of three ways:
 - Artistically appropriate
 - Socially appropriate
 - Intellectually appropriate

Since the above sentence looks so much like a claim, which would need justification, let us clarify. It is not a claim, but an articulation of a logical fact about persons and reasons. It is analogous to saying that there are only 4 kinds of polygons with six sides or less.

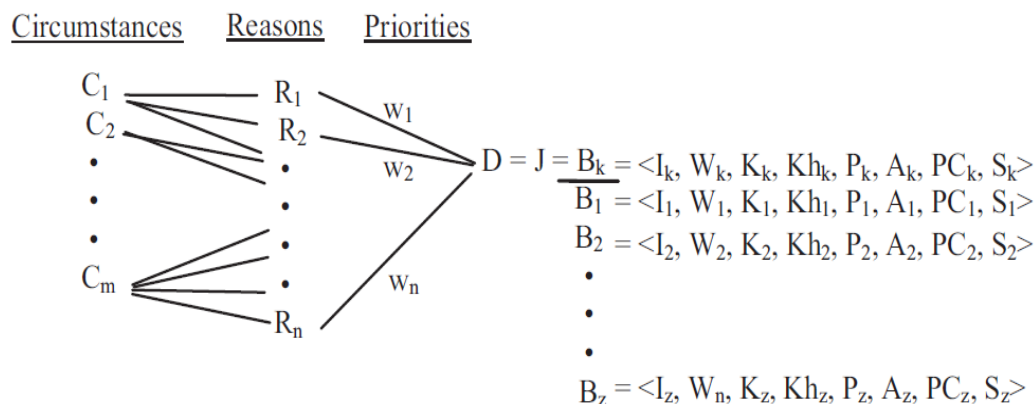
People act on each kind of reason, and report that they do. It is sometimes argued that people act only on what is in their own interest because, e.g., if you want to help someone else and do so, you are getting what you want, and typically get satisfaction from that. Such arguments overlook the (logical) fact that helping someone else is based on an ethical or esthetic (appropriateness) reason. Further, such arguments conflate two distinct concepts: the intended state of affairs (the W parameter of the behavior) and the reason that the person is acting on. In short, the fact that one gets satisfaction from doing the right thing is irrelevant to the fact that one is choosing to do the right thing.

Two questions arise naturally in regard to the four categories of reason: Why four, and why these four? The answer is that these are the four kinds of reasons that have ever been identified. Should another kind of reason be identified and found, after examining a wide enough range of behaviors, to be another kind of reason, we (persons) would agree that it is another kind of reason. (The word “enough” here means that some number of cases would be called for, but that would be a social and empirical question, not one that could be answered in advance.) The fundamental methodology in Descriptive Psychology is to identify and articulate concepts, not invent them.

(At one point in the development of Descriptive Psychology, Ossorio and others considered whether political reasons should be included as a distinct category. After examination, it was decided that such reasons were a kind of Prudential reason.)

The CRJ Diagram

The relationships between circumstances, reasons, weights, and decision (or judgement) can be depicted in a diagram called the Circumstances-Reasons-Judgment (or CRJ) diagram:



(Notice that one Circumstance may lead to several reasons. Ice cream may be available, and one may expect it to be delicious, but be on a diet -- two reasons stemming from one circumstance.) The diagram is a graphical depiction of the elaboration of the simple statement, "He decided to do B ": "He did B, of all the things he could have done, given his circumstances, the accompanying reasons, and his priorities."

The diagram also depicts, by its absence, the logical fact that a judgement, or decision, is not a process. A person picks from the options for action that they know of; no process is involved. It is sometimes claimed that there is an "unconscious" process involved, but such processes are, by definition, only stipulated or assumed, never observed. There is no difference between an assumed process that "must" occur but cannot be observed and no process at all.

Sometimes, though, the decision is preceded by other behaviors, and those behaviors do comprise a process. Those behaviors might include ensuring all the relevant circumstances have been identified, identifying all the reasons stemming from the circumstances, and reaching agreement on appropriate relative priorities. Further, people sometimes engage in those additional behaviors with no observable Performance, just as people sometimes do "mental arithmetic." That kind of phenomenon is what is called "thinking it over" or "weighing one's options."

This diagram is encountered fairly frequently in the Descriptive Psychology literature. It has been found to be useful in navigating complex decisions, and in negotiating differences in choice of behavior. In negotiation, for example, it is often useful to find out what another person's "picture" of their circumstances, reasons, relative priorities, and available options are.

One caveat is called for here: The CRJ diagram does not depict cause and effect, or a process. The lines in the diagram represent logical relationships, not causal or sequential. Circumstances do not cause reasons. Likewise, there is no implication that in making a decision a person first identifies their circumstances, then the reasons stemming from the circumstances, etc. The diagram is a reconstruction of a decision, and in reconstructing someone's choice one may start anywhere – with the circumstances, the reasons, or the behavior itself.

Maxims

Choosing among available behavioral options is the paradigmatic, and virtually the universal, case of behavior. There are always options (though one may have overwhelming reason not to do some.) There are a number of logical relationships between the concepts of person, behavior, and reasons, termed *Maxims* or maxims for behavioral choice. We saw an example of one such maxim earlier: If a person is called upon to do something, and they can't, they will do something else, instead (if they do anything at all). The maxims can be said to "govern" behavior, though more precisely they specify what constitutes a valid description of behavior.

In his earlier work, Ossorio enumerated nine maxims:

1. A person takes it that things are as they seem unless he has reason to do otherwise.
2. If a person recognizes an opportunity to get something she wants, she has a reason to try to get it.
3. If a person has a reason to do something, he will do it unless he has a stronger reason not to.
4. If a person has two reasons for doing X, she has a stronger reason for doing X than if she had only one of these reasons.
5. If a situation calls for a person to do something he can't do, he will do something he can do.
6. A person acquires facts by observation (and thought).
7. A person acquires concepts and skills by practice and experience in some of the social practices that involve the use of the concept or the exercise of the skill.
8. If a person has a given personal characteristic, she acquired it in one of the ways it can be acquired, i.e., by having the prior capacity and an appropriate intervening history.
9. Given the relevant competence, behavior goes right if it doesn't go wrong in one of the ways it can go wrong.

In later work (*Place*) he substantially expanded this list, to formulate much of the content of Descriptive Psychology in the form of maxims. For example, “A person requires a world to have any behavior potential at all.”

The Maxims are often taken to be claims or empirical generalizations, since they are in the form of sentences, and that is what sentences of that form typically are. They are not, though, just as the sentence, “A triangle is a closed figure composed of three straight lines” is not a claim or empirical generalization; it is an articulation of the concept of triangle. Sometimes this is clarified by asking, “What if this were not so?” For example, suppose the relationship given in Maxim 1 were not the case. That would mean it would be acceptable behavior to assert that some observation was not actually the case, even though there was no reason think so. Such a statement, if taken literally, is immediately recognizable as logical nonsense. When language like is used, it is always a way of saying, “There is some reason to not take it this way, even if I cannot identify it right now.”

Chapter V Emotion

Emotional behavior is the most fundamental of what are called emotional phenomena, and the most unmistakable. A paradigm case of emotional behavior is fear behavior, as illustrated in the following scenario (due to Ossorio):

- A lion walks into the room I am in.
- I jump out the window.
- A bystander asks, "Why did you do that?"
- I answer, "I was afraid of the lion!"

The behavioral logic illustrated here is:

- Person P observes state of affairs S (a lion is in the room with P)
- P recognizes S as a case of second state of affairs, T (lion is dangerous to P).
- P has a learned tendency to act on T *without deliberation* (escape danger)
- P engages in that behavior, in one of the ways available (escape, by jumping out window)

We say that state of affairs (situation) T is an *appraisal*: A state of affairs that tautologically implies action. In other words, to say, "That lion is dangerous to me" *is to say*, "I have reason to escape." "Dangerous" is the name of a relationship, in this case between P and the lion, and so an appraisal is the recognition of a relationship. The elements of an emotional behavior are thus a circumstance, and appraisal of that circumstance, and an action.

Putting this all together, we have:

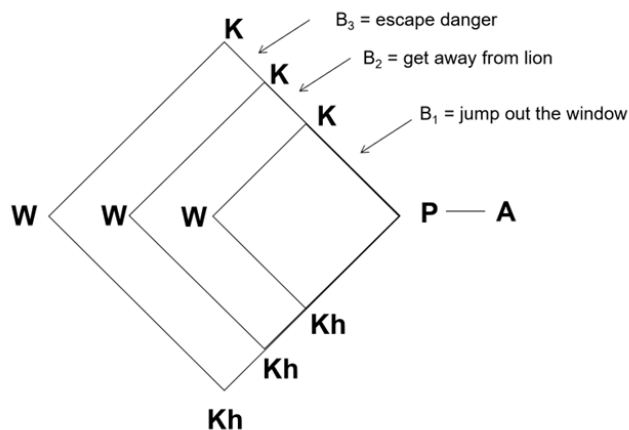
- I see the lion.
- I appraise the lion being there as dangerous to me.
- The relationship that the lion is dangerous to me gives me reason to escape.
- I have a learned tendency to escape when I recognize danger.
- I escape, by jumping out of the window.

The behavior, in this case of escaping danger, has the same hierarchical character as other behaviors:

1. I jump out the window
 - 1.1. as a way to get away from the lion
 - 1.1.1. which is a way to escape danger

The reason for explicitly citing the hierarchy here is to illustrate that the logic of the behavior is to be found in the intrinsic practice, in this case escaping danger, not the particular *way* of engaging in that practice.

It is sometimes useful to portray emotional behavior with a Diamond Diagram, as follows:



Without recognition of a) the relationship being acted on (danger) and b) the way of acting on that relationship (escape), emotional behavior looks irrational, and indeed is often described as such, or due to a hypothetical physical connection involving the brain.

What we see here, by articulating the concept of emotional behavior, is that emotional behavior is entirely rational. More specifically, it is reality-based: One observes a circumstance, appraises it, and acts without deliberation on the appraisal. It is not, as one commonly hears, “crazy,” “irrational,” etc. The rationality is often apparent, though, only on identifying the larger, intrinsic, practice that the specific, lower-level, behavior is implementing. The logic of jumping out the window is only apparent if one recognizes that it is a way of escaping danger.

However, people sometimes make mistakes. One might mistake the actual situation, overlook some crucial detail of it, appraise it incorrectly, or do something inappropriate as a way of engaging in the larger behavior called for, e.g., try to escape through a wall. These are just mistakes, not irrationality. Further, a number of Personal Characteristics are related to emotional behavior. Perhaps the most well-known is trait hostility, in which a person has a pattern of inappropriately appraising others’ behaviors as hostile. Another mistake.

The fear-danger “formula” fits all emotional behaviors:

- Fear: danger elicits escape
- Anger: provocation elicits hostility (hostile behavior)

- Guilt: wrongdoing elicits penance
- Sadness: bad fortune elicits lamentation
- Grief: grievous loss elicits grieving
- Joy: good fortune elicits celebration

As with fear behavior, each of these formulations is not to be taken as a deterministic rule or “law,” but a summary formulation of the behavioral logic of acting on an appraisal (which, as noted, incorporates a relationship). Specifically, in the case of fear,

Danger elicits escape, *unless*:

- The person does not recognize the danger
- The person is acting on one or more other relationships (If the person’s child is in the room with the lion, no one is surprised that the person does not escape)
- The person mistakenly believes they are escaping the danger
- The person is unable to do any of the behaviors that would escape the danger.

Emotional States

Emotional behavior is the fundamental emotional phenomenon. However, sometimes a person has stronger, even overwhelming, reason not to engage in the behavior called for. A classic case is a person who is unfairly and inappropriately berated by his supervisor, which is a provocation, but the person knows that if they respond with a hostile behavior, they will lose their job. (Currently, a widely recognizable case is that of a supervisor making inappropriate sexual advances, and all the person having overwhelming reason, such as keeping one’s valued job, to not engage in any of the appropriate responses.)

This situation, the “unresolved” need for an emotional behavior, can result in the corresponding emotional *state*: of fear, of anger, guilt, sadness, etc. Recall that a state is a systematic change in a person’s powers and/or dispositions – what they are inclined to do and/or are able to do. The state may be short term or longer-lasting, depending on the person’s Personal Characteristics and their opportunities to act in the manner called for. The continuation of the classic angry-at-the-boss case is that the person goes home and kicks their dog – a hostile (though inappropriate) behavior. In addition, sometimes a person can see no opportunity to engage in the behavior called for. This is famously how it is for some cases of wrong-doing, in which the person can see no way to do penance, and is consequently in a state of guilt.

Currently, one of the most well-known of such states is anxiety. Anxiety is a state of fear, a condition in which a person is disposed to find danger, or its less-potent cousin, risk, in a wide

variety of everyday situations that are not in fact dangerous. Accordingly, a therapist or counselor skilled with emotional issues will address the fear: what sort of thing the person is afraid of, how they came to see those things as dangerous or risky, etc., and help the person become able to change their appraisals. While medication or techniques for addressing the physical manifestations of the state may be helpful, they do not address the actual problem. (This does not mean such measures cannot be helpful. Sometimes they are, enabling a person to fully participate in the therapy or counseling.)

Experience and feelings

It is widely recognized that emotional behavior is related to experience or feelings, and physiology. At this point we need to clarify what feelings are, and how they and physiology fit into the picture.

Examining what are called experiences, we can see that two aspects are central to the concept: they are “subjective,” and they are observations of “internal” events or sensations. Descriptions of something as internal to a person are valuable metaphors, and are of course extremely common, but they cannot be taken literally; there is no such actual thing as the inside of a person. “Internal” is metaphorical language for the inaccessibility of some observations to any person other than the one making the observation. The experience of something is what a person observes when encountering that thing, that is in-principle private. Feelings are a kind of experience, but whereas experiences can accompany any behavior or situation, feelings accompany appraisals. Feelings are the experience of appraisal.

For example, the experience of driving a car is whatever one experiences one has when driving a car, and the feeling of fear is whatever one has when recognizing danger – if one has any experiences, or feelings, at all. (It is common for people to report, when asked how they felt when in danger, that they had no feelings at all, that they were totally focused on escaping.) That is, whatever private observations one makes on those occasions.

So far we have related feelings to observations of appraisals. There is more to say, however. Unlike an experience, which is just a private observation, there is an immediate connection between feelings and action. The experience of, e.g., typing on a keyboard is whatever one experiences when typing on a keyboard. Feelings, by contrast, imply action. Feeling afraid implies escaping; feeling love implies romantic actions; feeling joyous implies celebrating.

Every observation is an observation from some specific position, and what one sees depends on the position one sees from. This holds for physical positions and observations, of course, but

equally for positions in the human world. Consider for example a person who is both an engineer and an artist observing some complex machinery. If they are asked an engineering question, e.g., “What is the energy efficiency of this engine,” they will tend to see from the position of engineer, and observe objects and states of affairs important in engineering behaviors and appraisals. If, on the other hand, they are asked an esthetic question, e.g., “How elegant are the curves this part makes as the engine operates,” they will tend to see from the position of artist, and observe objects and states of affairs important in artistic behaviors and appraisals.

In Chapter II, we discussed the roles every person occupies in their own lives, Actor, Observer, and Critic. The Critic’s job is giving appraisals, and appraisals are descriptions that imply action, as do feelings. Actor, Observer, and Critic are positions, just as engineer and artist are.

For the person as an Actor, what one sees is “field of action,” i.e., solely action-related factors and possibilities: actions and possibilities for action, hindrances to action, adjustments to action, etc. A runner “in the zone” (a metaphor for seeing only as an Actor) will not see a tree limb on the ground in front of her; she will see a hindrance: A state of affairs requiring action, not an object. Metaphorically, the situation can be described as: The Critic makes appraisals, but must communicate them to the Actor *in Actor language*, the language of action, hindrances, adjustments, enablements, etc., because that is the only kind of thing an Actor knows. Appraisals and feelings are two ways of talking about the same thing: a recognition of a situation calling for action, talking as an Observer and talking as an Actor. We can summarize this as: *Feelings are Actor knowledge of appraisal*.

This leads to the following pragmatic conclusion: Feelings are not what matters. A person’s feelings can *indicate* what is happening, that is, the appraisals of situations, but they are not *what* is happening. Feeling afraid is not what is significant; what is significant is the recognition of danger (correct or not).

Accordingly, in discussing implications for therapy, Ossorio says, “Pay attention to the reality basis of feelings.”

Physiology

Behavior is not physiology -- a reminder that the concept of behavior is not the concept of physiology. Similarly, emotional behavior and emotional states are not the same thing as physiological processes and states. Physiology is the range of bodily processes, at all levels of detail, that take place when a person acts or makes an appraisal. Physiological descriptions are elaborations of the Performance parameter (P in Formula 1 on p. 8) of behavior.

In more detail, the relationship between emotion and physiology is as follows:

- An appraisal (often called an “emotional reaction”) gives one reason to *do* something, i.e., engage in some behavior
- In a human body, that means several things occur before the performance of the behavior.
 - For example, to escape danger, one runs. Before the running activity begins, muscles tense up, adrenaline is released, blood pressure rises, etc.
 - These events may include processes involving neurotransmitters. It is well known, e.g., that dopamine release accompanies thrilling events.
 - These may happen even if the behavior itself does not.

Thus: *physiological* states and processes accompany the *behavioral* state of anger, fear, joy, etc. Conversely, physiological changes can change a person’s state, i.e., changes in their dispositions and/or powers. An injection of adrenaline will change one’s alertness, resulting in more, and more focused, observations of the one’s circumstances, and an altered tendency to react to them.

Drugs are an obvious example of changing a person’s physiological state, just as adrenaline does. The same logic applies: a drug changes a person’s state, altering what they can do and are inclined to do. Drugs do not, however, cause behavior. Any such description is an elision of the full description: “Drug D changed person P’s state, thereby altering his/her inclination to do X kind of behavior, and/or reducing his/her abilities to assign appropriate priorities to his/her options.” The most famous case of a drug altering a person’s state is undoubtedly alcohol.

Since it is currently common to describe various behaviors as performed by the brain, or to assert that the brain or some part of it causes behavior, some discussion of the actual relationship between the brain and behavior is called for. As noted in the first paragraph of this section, physiological processes, and the physical objects involved in those processes, are elaborations of the P parameter of behavior, the observable process. Processes have steps or

stages; that is why they are called processes. These steps are themselves processes, so a description in the form of a hierarchy of ever-finer-grained processes can be given of the P parameter. The P parameter remains, however, one part of the Intentional Action, not the Action itself.

Consider, for example, the behavior of a batter hitting a pitch. The batter sees the pitch (the K parameter), judges when and where to aim the swing, and swings. Swinging is the Performance. The first stage of this process is stepping forward with the lead foot, a motion. This motion, a process, includes the brain sending a signal through the spinal cord and nerves to the leg and muscle fibers. The process of the brain sending a signal is comprised of smaller processes, such as generation of an electrochemical impulse, and even smaller processes, such as neurotransmitters crossing synaptic junctions. The processes and sub-processes that involve the brain or parts of it are how the process occurs, and if the brain is damaged in such a way that one or more sub-processes cannot take place, the Performance, and therefore the Intentional Action, cannot occur. This relationship, in which brain processes take place as part of the Performance, and its converse, that brain damage or certain states prevent the action or make it defective, is not a cause-effect relationship. It is a kind of part-whole relationship with the name “provides for”: the brain *provides for* the action. (This relationship has been extensively discussed by N. L. Kirsch.)

Chapter VI Relationships and Behavior

Relationships are the “glue” of the world – the physical world and the human world. A person’s behavior in a room depends on the geographic relationships to what is in the room – objects, processes and events happening, etc. The same holds for relationships between people. Unlike geographic relationships, relationships between persons imply and constrain behaviors. We saw this with John suggesting to Dave that they get a beer at Pete’s. John and Dave have the relationship of friend, and John was acting on that relationship. We say, “That’s what friends do.” Had they had a different relationship, e.g., enemy, John’s suggestion would not have been appropriate to the circumstances. But if John saw that a different relationship was possible, perhaps “co-worker,” he might be attempting to change the existing relationship in the direction of the possible one. Thus, behavior is closely related to relationship and relationship change.

Behavior follows relationship

The logical relation between relationships and behavior, illustrated by the invitation to get a beer, is:

- If person P has relationship R with respect to Q, he/she tautologically has reason to engage in certain behaviors with respect to Q, and not to engage in others. (Recall that “tautologically” means that to say P has relationship R to Q *is to say* that P has reason to engage in certain behaviors and not others.)

This is known in Descriptive Psychology as the Relationship Formula or Relationship-Behavior Formula, sometimes abbreviated as, “Behavior follows relationship.”

Some examples are:

- Teachers teach students. Relationship: Teacher-student
- Doctors treat patients. Relationship: Doctor-patient
- Married couples sleep with each other, exclusively: Relationship: Married
- Friends confide in each other. Relationship: Friend

The Relationship-Behavior Formula should not be read as an absolute rule or a cause-effect relationship. The formula as stated is actually a short version of the full maxim, which enumerates several “unless” clauses:

- If a person has reason to act on relationship R, he/she will do so, unless:

- He has stronger reason to something else;
- He does not recognize that he has that reason;
- He is unable to do so;
- He mistakenly takes it that he is carrying out a version of that action;
- The behavior goes wrong, in one of the ways it can.

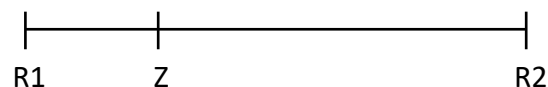
Since it can be cumbersome to repeat the full formula, one will often hear Descriptive Psychologists say, “Behavior follows relationship,” or refer to “the usual unless clauses.”

Relationship follows behavior

One of the more obvious facts about relationships is that they change. Strangers become acquaintances, acquaintances become friends, etc. The dynamic is described by the following Relationship Change Formula:

- If person P has relationship R1 with respect to person Q, and
 - P engages in behavior B with Q, which is consistent with relationship R2 and not consistent with R1,
 - Then P’s relationship with Q changes in the direction of relationship R2. (Or, elaborating, changes R1 to relationship Z which is more similar to R2 than R1 is.)

In graphic form:



(“Not consistent” here means only that having relationship R1 does not imply a reason to do B. It does not mean that doing B would violate relationship R1.)

Some examples of relationship change are:

- A student becomes a colleague
- IT consultants become trusted advisors
- Teachers become mentors
- Friends become lovers
- Friends become enemies
- Couples “grow apart”

The last of these is frequent, and frequently ill-understood, sufficiently to merit elaboration, via the Relationship Change Formula: Romantic partners do more and more things consistent with the relationship of roommate, and not consistent with romantic-partner: buying groceries, doing their respective jobs, cleaning their house, etc., and the relationship changes, slowly, in the direction of roommate.

Relationships and names for relationships

There are a few complications involving names for relationships that call for comment.

First, we (persons) have and can recognize many more relationships than we have names for. As a simple example, consider the relationship between the left front wheel of a car and right front window. It is immediately recognizable as a relationship, but there is no simple name for it. This is why often, if asked a question such as, “What’s your relationship with him,” it is common for someone to say, “Oh, we go out for a beer occasionally.” The action and its frequency serve to identify the relationship, for which there is no other name.

Second, related to the fact there are more relationships than names, is that many relationship names are used to talk about several distinct relationships. “Friend” is perhaps the most obvious example, used to talk about a number of relationships having recognizable similarity but being consistent with different behaviors.

Finally, some readers, particularly those with background in formal logic, may confuse identifying a relationship with giving a formal mathematical expression for it, perhaps in predicate calculus. “He is sitting on the chair” unmistakably identifies a relationship between a person and a chair, but there is no mathematical definition of “sitting on.” (It should be noted that a mathematical expression would be a kind of name.) The essential fact about a relationship is that it can be identified, not that it has a customary, or formal, name.

Appraisals, relationships, feelings, and feeling language

We have seen the relationships between circumstances, appraisals, and feelings: Appraisal of circumstance is recognition of a relationship; having the relationship is having reason to act; a feeling is Actor’s knowledge of appraisal and therefore of relationship.; emotion is appraisal with the added element of a learned tendency to act on the appraisal without deliberation.

But sometimes, a person making an appraisal may be unable to identify, or describe, the situation being appraised. “That picture is beautiful” is an appraisal, calling for admiring the

picture, but it is famously difficult to identify the state of affairs involving parts of the picture that is being appraised as beautiful. This is an example of the complexities of what one may be able or unable to identify in a situation. Sometimes the state of affairs appraised is unknown, or the person is unable to describe it further. Sometimes nothing is clear to the person but the called-for action. Or, the person may be unable, as Observer, to identify what they see clearly as Actor. These complexities are why statements such as,

- “I’ve got feelings for him/her.”
- “This feels like the right thing to do.”
- “Something feels wrong here.”
- “This feels *right*.”

are common. People in this kind of situation often exhibit this kind of verbal behavior, sometimes called “feeling language.” Examples include:

- Verbalizing an appraisal but omitting the circumstance appraised:
 - “That feels like the right amount of water in the coffee pot.”
 - “I’ve got a feeling we should prioritize getting a firm schedule for delivery of this part.”
- Verbalizing an appraisal when ones does not know the circumstance:

Gil: “I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

Wil: “What’s going on?”

Gil: “I don’t know, but something doesn’t look right.”
- Expressing an appraisal one is uncertain about
 - “I’m not sure, but I’ve got a feeling that....”

Chapter VII Status: A person's place in the world

It is a truism that one has to have a world, in order to have any possibilities for doing anything. It was mentioned above that this can be formulated with the maxim, "A person requires a world to have any behavior potential at all," which is a brief articulation of the relationship between person, behavior, and world,

One cannot merely have a world. To have a world, one must have a place *in* that world. In Descriptive Psychology, the term for place, or position, in the world is *status*. ("Standing" and "position" are also common.) As we are talking about the world that includes persons, behavior, and relationships, this is sometimes phrased as "place in the social context, or, "Being in the World." It provides the way to articulate being and related concepts.

If one is sitting in a room, there are innumerable geometric relationships with other things in the room: to-the-left-of, above, nearby, within reach, south-by-southeast-of, etc. It is entirely impractical to keep track of all such relationships, and we have another, related, concept, position, that serves as a summary of all of them. Identifying the positions of, e.g., a person in the room and a window, allows identification of the geometric relationship between them. Position can thus be described as "encoding" those relationships.

The same holds for the human, not just physical, relationships. One's status encodes all of one's relationships in the human world, both actual and potential. Further, due to the close logical relationship between relationships and behaviors, one's status encodes all of the behaviors one can potentially do – one's *behavior potential*. A person's status, their place in the world, is therefore extremely important in understanding their life, what they do, and how they do it.

In more detail, every behavior, even those with no observable performance, involves logical roles or Elements. At a minimum, there is the role of actor carrying out the behavior. In all cases, there are eligibility rules for which individuals can take on which roles in the action. This is explicit in most games. In football, for example, the person playing center is not eligible to go out for a pass. (In some cases, the eligibility is only that the individual is a person. Any individual person is eligible to call for help. Machines are not.) Since one can only engage in actions one is eligible for, and one has the option of engaging in any action one is eligible for, it is equally the case the status encodes one's eligibilities. (One may be eligible to do something but unable to do it, so eligibilities are not identical with behavior potential. If I break my leg, I am still eligible to run in a race, but running the race is not part of my behavior potential.)

Recall that satisfaction and meaning stem from engaging in intrinsic practices. As a result, behavior potential and eligibility are not simply accounting devices for behaviors. Status encodes all of a person's relationships and all of their behavior potential. It is, accordingly, overwhelmingly important in a person's life. People can and do fight and die for it.

Behavior potential has an important relationship with choice:

- Maxim: A person will not choose less behavior potential over more.

(It is important to read this Maxim carefully. As discussed in earlier, choosing means knowing what one is doing and selecting it, of the available behavioral options. The Maxim does not mean one will never do anything that results in loss of behavior potential, but rather that of the available options, a person will choose the one that is the greatest gain or, if such is the case, the least loss. The classic case is a mother sacrificing herself for her child: loss of the child would be the greater loss of behavior potential.)

Because status encodes behavior potential, we have the related Maxim:

- Maxim: A person will not choose lesser status over more.

Status has a further important relationship with behavior. Each status has behaviors that "characterize" it. These are behaviors *intrinsic to* the status, meaning that a person in that position does it for its own sake. For example:

- Chess playing is intrinsic to a chess player.
- Rooting for your team is intrinsic to a football fan.
- Teaching is intrinsic to a teacher.

The paradigm case, which is also the ordinary, everyday, case is that a person has a status and does what a person in that position does, i.e., carries out the practices intrinsic to the status. Doctors practice medicine, lawyers practice law, mothers and fathers care for their children (several practices), etc.

How are statuses acquired

Statuses are not discovered. They are *assigned*, by someone with the eligibility to do so. This is the same logic as that of a director of a play assigning an individual a role in the play. (This is

why Ossorio sometimes refers to dramaturgical patterns in life.) A paradigm case is that of “acquiring” a friend:

- You observe that someone appears to be the kind of person who you would like to have as a friend.
- You invite them, e.g., for coffee. By doing that, you have assigned them the status of possible friend, and acted on that status.
- They accept the invitation and you go for coffee.
- You both enjoy the conversation, and each of you assigns the other the status of friend. You then have the relationship friend-of.

As illustrated here, a status is nothing like a fact, nor a summary or generalization of facts. A status is a place in the world, assigned by a person; in assigning the status, the person is acting on facts (and possible facts). Facts are states of affairs recognized as being so; a status is a place. (Of course, that one has assigned someone the status of friend is a fact, just as the flower pot being next to the door is a fact.)

The paradigm case of status assignment is probably the most common way one acquires a status. One is treated as having that status *S*, in one or more practices, and comes to be assigned status *S* by others in one’s community. (Community is a complex concept, which will be discussed in Chapter IX.) This is how, for example, someone becomes a recognized expert on some topic at work, becomes recognized as “the guy who is really into that stuff” in one’s social circle (a different community), etc.

A maxim, first formulated by A. O. Putman, that encapsulates the above logic is:

- Maxim: A person becomes as they are treated as being.

As illustrated by the example of acquiring a friend, every person assigns people (and things) statuses. (A valuable watch, for example, is one that has the status of “valuable” in the person’s life. It is not citing attributes of the watch.) In other words, every person has the **status of status-assigner**.

Status, facts, and status change

Since a status is not a summary of facts, changes in facts related to a status cannot change it. Facts about a person cannot change their status, expressed in the following

- Maxim: Status assignments are impervious to fact.

However, status assignments are not impervious to *reassignment*. It can happen that discovered facts may give a person reason to change an assigned status. A friend can be re-assigned the status of “good friend.” Conversely, some facts may give one reason to re-assign someone who has been a friend to the status of “no friend of mine.”

Assigning someone a lesser status is a *degradation*; conversely, an assignment to a better status is an *accreditation*. The paradigm case of how degradations occur is the *degradation ceremony*, first articulated by the social psychologist Harold Garfinkel, illustrated by the famous degradation of the French Officer, Alfred Dreyfus.

- A soldier is convicted of an egregious offense, an action that violates a core value of his Regiment.
- The Commander strips off the soldier’s insignia, breaks the soldier’s sword over his knee, and pronounces, “You are no longer, and never really were, a member of this Regiment.”

The logic of the degradation ceremony is that it is a social practice including the following:

- There is a community of persons holding shared values, values considered by them to be required to be purely “one of us,” (sometimes stated as “member in good standing”).
- There are three roles: Perpetrator, Denouncer, and Witness (the last of which may be filled by more than one person). The Denouncer and Witness are required to be members in good standing, and, importantly, are acting as representatives of the community and acting on the community’s values, not out of personal motivation.
- The Denouncer tells the Witness what the Perpetrator did.
- The Denouncer re-describes the Perpetrator’s act as being a violation of the community’s values necessary for membership.
- The Denouncer describes the Perpetrator’s action to the Witness as a genuine expression of the Perpetrator’s character, not to be explained by extraordinary circumstances or an atypical state, and makes the case for the description as necessary. (“I was drunk” is not an excuse.)

It follows that the Perpetrator is not simply a member in good standing, in the position they have been assigned, and so

- The Denouncer publicly assigns the Perpetrator a new status with reduced behavior potential.

The new status must be consonant (as assessed by the community members) with the seriousness of the violation, up to and including expulsion (as with the soldier in the above example). Expulsion is loss of all behavior potential in that community. Legal proceedings resulting in punishment probably the most commonly recognized example of the degradation ceremony.

Accreditation ceremonies are the opposite. The action or actions of a person in the community are described as showing that it is appropriate (“right and proper”) to re-assign them to a higher status, with more behavior potential. Thus, an ordinary employee becomes a Supervisor, a Lieutenant becomes a Colonel, a student becomes a graduate, a PhD student becomes a Doctorate “with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto.”

Degradations entail loss, so they are accompanied by emotions such as sadness and grief. Conversely, accreditation famously is accompanied by joy, the celebration of good fortune. The graduating class throws their caps in the air.

Informal ceremonies

Much more common than formal degradation or accreditation ceremonies are informal ones, with much less, or no, formal structure. Insults are probably the most common of these: “You stupid jerk! How dare you do that?! Get out of here!” Or, more pithily, “You idiot!” “Idiot” names a place; “You idiot” is putting an individual in that place. (Note that it is not ascribing an attribute to the individual.) Quite a few coarse insults are degradations.

It is important to note that the language of these abbreviated ceremonies often appears to be citing the individual’s Personal Characteristics, but is not being used that way. It is being used to define the individual’s appropriate *position* – their status.

A very common way new statuses are obtained is by doing the behavior intrinsic to that status. One becomes a chess player by playing chess; one becomes a runner by running; one becomes a team lead in an organization by doing what a team leads does (often followed by an accreditation ceremony: “Congratulations! You’re the new team lead!”).

Since informal ceremonies rarely explicitly state that the individual is now reduced or raised in status, the Significance of the observed action is sometimes unclear. In such cases, clarity often

results by asking, “What is he doing, by doing that?” That question is looking for the larger behavioral pattern that the particular behavior can be recognized as an instance of. Very frequently, it is helpful to pay attention to the language issue noted above: many adjectives are describing a *position*, not a person.

Countering degradations

Degradation and accreditation ceremonies (formal and informal) are only part of the dynamics of status. A famous saying holds that, “An insult affects one only if accepted.” A degradation ceremony, formal or informal, can fail, or be rejected. The individual may refuse to agree with the re-description of their action as violating a central community value, or reject the description of the act as showing their true character. (“I was drunk” is perhaps the most famous of such rejections.)

A different form of defense against the degradation is to degrade the Denouncer. The Denouncer must be a member in good standing of the community, i.e., must be eligible to be Denouncing. Further, they must be acting as a representative of the community, not for a personal reason. This is the logic behind statements such as, “Who are you, to be saying that,” a challenge to the eligibility of the Denouncer. The well-known physical gestures of contempt are exactly that.

An “accepted” insult, often described as “internalized,” is a degradation that the person makes *of themselves*. The person accepts that it is appropriate that they have the lesser status and that the degradation was called for. Sometimes, though, the degraded person may be not be allowed by members of the community to engage in practices for which they are no longer eligible, but consider themselves as still holding their old position. They consider themselves to actually have the position but that circumstances are intervening. A different case of imperviousness of status to fact.

Since degradation is a loss of status, and therefore of behavior potential, is a loss that matters. Threat of degradation tautologically calls for acting to counter the degradation, just as danger calls for escape. The behavior called for is self-affirmation. Often that is by engaging in the practice intrinsic to the status. In the vernacular this is often called “proving” one has the status in question, and is very common. We saw an example in Chapter II: the expert in a field giving a tutorial not to give a tutorial, but to affirm his status as expert.

Self-concept

The idea of the self-concept is widely recognized as a statement of “who I am.” It is traditionally defined as an organized summary description of the individual’s characteristics, qualities, roles, and relationships. In short, as a picture of the person.

This formulation has a number of serious conceptual problems (as discussed by Ossorio and R. M. Bergner). These include:

- Self-concept is famously resistant to new information. People will maintain their self-concept in the face of facts that directly contradict the description. People will commit serious crimes but insist they are really good persons. Economists have observed that often lower-middle class people consider themselves rich, that is, assign themselves that status, though currently short of funds. Accounting for these facts requires assuming unobservable cognitive mechanisms that somehow censor incoming information, and stipulating resistance to change of the picture of oneself.
- It is particularly hard to satisfactorily use such suppositions to account for the rejection of overwhelmingly positive information, as occurs in the Impostor Syndrome.

Descriptive Psychology uses the concept of status for an entirely different conceptualization:

A person’s self-concept is a summary formulation of their place in the world. It is the status they have assigned *themselves*.

A person’s self-concept is a picture of the person’s *place*, not the person.

Most often, this status assignment is not an overt action, but rather the place one treats oneself as having. Sometimes, the person does not recognize what place they have assigned themselves, a situation sometimes described as “unconscious.” “Treating oneself as having” refers to the social practices one can participate in, i.e., has the eligibility, or permission, for. Permission is the same concept as eligibility; giving oneself permission is giving oneself eligibility. Since a person becomes as they are treated as being, i.e., assigns themselves the status they are assigned by others, the place one takes oneself to have tends to be the place others treat one as having, for better or for worse, whether one recognizes it or not.

In particular, quite a number of problematical psychological situations and conditions in the life of a person centrally involve the place in the world they have assigned themselves. A person

who has been treated for all their lives as having the “job” of serving others, regardless of her own desires, will strongly tend to assign herself the status of servant, without recognizing it (R.M. Bergner, *Status Dynamic Therapy*). As a result, she will tend to dismiss her own desires and act in servant-like ways, at the cost of dissatisfaction and pain. Status dynamic therapy is an approach to psychotherapy centered on status, self-concept, and ways to help the client change the status they have assigned themselves to one more conducive to a satisfying life.

Chapter VIII Worlds

Previous parts of this Introduction have talked about the world, including observations that behavior takes place in the world, that a person needs a world to have any behavior potential at all, and that a person's status is their place in the world. All these observations have relied on one made in Chapter I, that people disagree about what a world is and therefore must share the concept of real world, whether or not they can articulate it. This Chapter addresses that articulation. We do that in two parts: the concept of a world, in general, and the human world – the one that matters, to us persons.

The concept of a world

First, a word of warning. In this subsection we temporarily change our focus somewhat. "What is a world" is the kind of question philosophers deal with. It usually has little connection to people and behavior. Ossorio addressed it, and we will briefly address it, because a precise, systematic articulation of the concept of world is "part of the job": if we are to have that sort of formulation of people behaving in the world, we have to have that sort of formulation of "world."

We begin with the observation that, on its face, our concept of "world" includes that a world has parts, constituents, which can be "broken down" into smaller constituents and assembled into larger ones:

- Objects. Objects generally can be decomposed into smaller objects, and composed into larger objects.
- Processes, which also can be decomposed and composed
- All the states of affairs -- situations and facts -- actual and possible, which like objects and processes can be decomposed and composed.
- All the possible events, possibilities for what could happen.

Second, the various constituents have relationships to each other. Our concept of a world is not that of a jumble of disconnected parts; it forms whole, a single totality in which every constituent is connected to every other one. A car is not a jumble of parts; the parts must have very specific relationships with each other.

Third, there are various logical relationships between the kinds of constituents of a world. Processes change one state of affairs to another; an event is a change from one state of affairs to another with no intervening states of affairs; processes divide into sub-processes; objects

into sub-objects; the constituents of a state of affairs may be other, smaller, states of affairs, objects, processes, or events, with identifiable relationships.

Historically, philosophers have argued that real world is “really” all objects, or all processes, etc. Ossorio’s profound insight on this topic is that a world consists of all of these kinds of thing, and that these four concepts and their inter-relationships constitute a formal system, in which each element is defined in terms of the others. Persons master it like we master any formal system: not through definitions in terms of concepts outside of it, but by using it. In short, we learn the logic of the world by living and acting in it. (Babies do not initially know that an object that disappears continues to exist. They generally learn that between four and eight months of age, by dropping things and then finding them.)

We say “a world” because there are many worlds: the world of chess, the world of football, the world of art, the world of accounting. Each of these is a bona fide world: a totality of related objects, processes, events, and states of affairs, of a certain sort.

What do we mean by “of a certain sort?” Not that all the constituents have some characteristic in common. We mean that every world has some fundamental element (object, process, etc.) that the other elements are derived from. They may be constituents of the fundamental element, or the fundamental element may be a constituent of other, larger objects, processes, events, and states of affairs.

The fundamental element of the world of chess is playing a game of chess; the world of chess also includes the board, the pieces, the moves, the rules of chess, players, timing clocks, books about chess, analyses of games, tournaments, prizes, the various statuses of players of different levels, etc. Informally, it is chess games, all their parts, and everything that is done involving playing a game of chess. As the world of chess illustrates, “fundamental” does not mean “smallest,” as is typically said of the physical world.

Similarly, the fundamental element of the world of football is playing a game of football, and it includes the ball, the players, the field, fans, leagues, news coverage of games, championships, cheering for one’s team, lamenting a team’s performance, etc.

Of great practical importance is that, as we shall see in the following Chapter, each business has at least two worlds: the world of the particular thing they are doing, and the world of accounting (a vitally important insight due to C.J. Peek). The world of healthcare, for example, includes the worlds of medicine and of accounting. Famously, the two sometimes conflict.

So a world is everything involved, in one way or another, with the fundamental element. For chess, it's playing a game of chess. For art, it's creating an object of artistic value. For medicine, it's caring for the health of patients.

And for the human world, it's **persons behaving in the world**.

Thus, we have what we wanted: a formal system for articulating, as completely as desired, everything about a person and their behavior, in any situation. To be specific, the Intentional and Deliberate Action formulations are fully formal articulations of two concepts fundamental to behaving as a person.

Ossorio extended his work on the formal reality concepts to derive what he termed "descriptive formats" that can be used to formally specify any particular object, process, event, or state of affairs, at any level of detail. The various constituents and their inter-relationships are specified with formal names. An example, dramatically illustrating the difference ordinary language and a formal state of affairs description, is "Inflation in the 1920s led to the rise of National Socialism." The English locution constitutes a purely *formal* name, or identifier, of a state of affairs, one with two constituents and one relationship, "led to." (And of course many books have been written giving the details of those states of affairs, in ordinary language.) The descriptive formats are primarily of use in technological applications of Descriptive Psychology, such as building artificial intelligence systems that have knowledge of an organization, or simulations of a human society.

For our purposes here, and most non-technological purposes, what matters, and what we will focus on, are the relationships between a person and their world.

The human world

We have a formulation of the concept of world, in general: a totality of related objects, processes, events, and state of affairs. What, then is the human world?

The human world is the real world, the world of everything involving persons and their behavior: behavior, choice, relationships, emotion, place, and everything that makes up a person's life among persons. It is the world of persons behaving, the totality of everything in the world and all their relationships. It is the world that matters to people:

- All the persons
- All the actual and possible behaviors

- All the actual and possible relationships between people and other parts of the world
- All the actual and possible processes
- All the objects (and sub-parts, etc.), the “furniture” of a human life
- Since status encodes relationships, all the actual and possible statuses
- All actual and possible states of affairs – all the facts and possible facts
- All the actual and possible events

Having completed our needed digression to questions of the nature of the world, we return to issues of the relationship of a person to the world, and to his or her world.

What does it mean to be real?

At the end of the last sub-section, we used a common expression, “his or her world.” That needs clarification, because at first glance it sounds like we’re saying a world is particular to an individual, that each person has their own world. It is common to hear expressions like, “in my world” or “in his world.”

Worlds are shared; there is no such thing as a private world. It’s part of the concept. A person does not, literally, have their own world. “In my world” and similar language is a shorthand allusion to a different, and important concept: what it means to be real to someone. What is real to a person is everything they are prepared to act on, and the totality of what they are prepared to act on is what is called “their world.”

Worlds include a wide variety of things people in that world acknowledge as true but are not prepared to act on. When such a thing does become real to the person, one will often hear expressions such as, “Now I get it!” The distinction here is that of (merely) true vs. real.

Ossorio presents a highly illustrative scenario that captures this phenomenon:

Everyone knows that modern highway bridges are very safe. Engineers know how to build them, and rigorous standards are enforced for bridges. Now imagine you are driving down the road and you come to a bridge. You think nothing of it, and proceed across. But as you get to the other side, you see it collapse in your rearview mirror.

But you know bridges are safe. You shake it off and continue down the road. You come to another bridge, and the same thing happens. This time you’re more

disturbed, but you still know the safety statistics, and you continue. But then, the same thing happens with a *third* bridge.

And when you come to a fourth bridge, you stop and say, “I’m not driving over that thing! Bridges may be safe, but what I know is that all the bridges I drive over fall down!”

What has become real to that driver is that bridges fall down, and he’s acting on it. What is true – the statistics about bridges – remains the same; what is real has changed.

The distinction of true vs. real is the central issue in many important and common problematical situations. The famous, “my head says one thing by my heart another” is an expression of exactly this distinction: what the person acknowledges to be true contrasting with what they are prepared to act on. This is the phenomenon called denial: the person acknowledges something is true but it is not real to them: “Yes, I know I’m destroying my life, but...”

Acquiring, and keeping, a world

A person does not acquire a world on their own. An infant acquires the human world by being assigned roles in practices in the world, and being treated as successful in carrying out those roles. Parents and caregivers play with the baby, talk to him/her, smile, and so forth. When the baby smiles, she is treated as having engaged in a basic behavior with the adult, perhaps greeting, perhaps mutual enjoyment. The infant acquires more and more distinctions, and after a time engages in more behaviors – rolling over, batting a crib toy, etc. And so the learning history continues, the infant acquiring the distinctions and social practices of a child, teenager, and eventually adult. The adult has thus acquired a world, the world of persons and behavior.

The same kind of history is the way other worlds are acquired, but as adults a person’s abilities to acquire the concepts and practices of another world – of art, of chess, of mathematics – are far greater, including linguistic competence.

Since a world is a totality, including all the facts and possible facts, all the events and possible events, etc., a person may discover new states of affairs, something that has been merely possible but is now actual. Since it was already possible, the discovery of something new does not, paradigmatically, change the world one has acquired, i.e., change the entire world into something else. New things are “just how it is.” As a result, paradigmatically, what one takes the world to be changes little:

- Maxim: A person takes the world to be as they have found it to be.

This is why adults often take relationships to be as they have found them to be in their family of origin, and why a person's history can be informative in understanding what they take the world to be, including relationships and how one acts on those relationships. A person's history is not what matters in understanding them; what they take the world to be is. While one can, e.g., re-describe another's behavior as "re-enacting" trauma, one can also refrain from such re-descriptions, and observe that the person is acting on the world as they have found it to be. As we saw in the last Chapter, that world includes their place in it, that is, all the relationships with everything and everyone in the world, and thus all their behavior potential; everything they could be and do.

PTSD and other world-changing events

So new facts or events ordinarily do not change the world, that is, make it into a different world. But not always.

The term "unthinkable" refers to something that is not only not so, but that *could not be* so. It is outside the actualities and possibilities that comprise the world, the world that the person takes to be the case. The following scenario, due to Ossorio, illustrates this concept:

Imagine you are sitting in a room, doing nothing in particular, say eating lunch. You happen to glance up and see a huge Easter Island sort of face in the wall, glaring at you. At that point, two things can happen: You can say to yourself, "Wow, that's some hallucination I just had!" Or, you can take it that the world is not what you thought it was, but something entirely different.

Someone who has had a face-in-the-wall experience, who cannot take the first option of describing it as a hallucination, is in a difficult situation. His or her world has changed, but in unknown, and unknowable-in-advance, ways. Worlds are connected totalities; who knows what *else* there could be in a world where faces pop out of the wall and glare at you? And since they don't know what the world is, they cannot know what their place in it is, nor could be. These are enormous, all-encompassing problems that *must* be solved, for otherwise the person cannot know what the world is or their place in it – and therefore how their behavior potential has changed.

This is the situation of a person who has post-traumatic stress disorder. Unsurprisingly, the person's highest priority is finding out, or establishing, what this new world is, and their place in

it. The symptoms of PTSD are recognizable as attempts to make sense of the new world, or, to say it technically, to find out just what new world this is, its constituents and how they are related to each other and to themselves, and what possible place they can have it – a place that fits them. The recurrent dreams of people with PTSD are typically reconstructions of events in a search for what they “add up to” – what new real world they are part of. (The advantage of dreams is that all reality constraints and all Critic functioning are dropped, leaving the person, as pure Actor, free to “try out” possible answers to, “What kind of world is this?”) People often need help with this word-reconstruction, and as an approach to therapy in which the person’s world and their place in it is central, Status Dynamic therapy is often particularly helpful.

Not every bad situation or trauma (an event that results in significant loss of behavior potential) results in PTSD. The most common occasion for unthinkable events is, unsurprisingly, combat, but other events can be not only catastrophic but unthinkable. Whether the traumatic event leads to PTSD depends on several characteristics of the person, including at a minimum a) their ability to re-describe the event to themselves as shocking, a previously unknown possibility for the world, but not unthinkable, and b) in the case where they do see the world as having changed to something else, their ability to assign themselves a status they can live with in the new world. These abilities are sometime called “resilience.”

Not all world changes are catastrophic, however. Famously, falling in love is often described as “changing the world.” Poets and others have for millenia described the experience of “everything is the same, but everything is different!” That’s the experience of seeing the same things, but as parts of a different world. “It is the East, and Juliette is the Sun” is an expression of having become part of a world in which the fundamental element is changed: Juliette.

Change of world is the case when a person has a sudden experience of the Transcendent – God, or Ultimate Truth (the Buddhist expression). Here too, it is well-known for the person to exclaim, “It is the same, but everything is different,” or, “I never knew it could be like this!”

Chapter IX Communities

As with World, we have used the concept of community at several points in the preceding Chapters. And as with World, we know persons share the concept of community, because they disagree about it. In this Chapter we articulate that shared concept, as first done by A. O. Putman.

We proceed as we did with the formulation of behavior, by beginning with an unmistakable example of what is sometimes called a “cohesive group”: the community of football (i.e., American football.) We saw the world of football earlier. Its fundamental element is playing a game of football, and includes every object, process, event, state of affairs, and behavior related in any way to playing football: the ball, the players, the field, fans, leagues, news coverage of games, championships, cheering for one’s team, lamenting a team’s performance, etc. The *community of football* is the organized group of people that share the world of football, and are involved in any way with playing a game of football, where by “organized” we mean there are recognized positions, statuses, that various people occupy, various practices they engage in, with the eligibility for those practices encoded by the various statuses. Recognizable statuses include player, coach, fan, sportswriter, team, commentator, owner (of a team), and others. Cheering for one’s team is intrinsic to the status of fan, playing is intrinsic to the status of player, etc.

Every community has its specific language, its “jargon.” The medical and legal communities are famous for their distinctive languages. Some examples of football language are “at the snap” (when the center passes the ball back between his legs to the quarterback), “line of scrimmage” (where the teams line up to begin the next play), and a pass play. Key action terms are blitz (aggressive defense), sacking in the quarterback (tackling them), and of course “touchdown.” Each of these terms refers to a football concept, a distinction members recognize and act on.

A very important aspect of a community, that is typically what “cohesiveness” of a community refers to, is the principles that every member is expected to adhere to. These are termed *choice principles*, because they are principles that are expected to govern the behavioral choices of members. (In sociology and anthropology, these are often called “cultural principles.”) In the football community, key principles are playing for the benefit of the team rather than individual glory, always doing one’s best, and loyalty to the team.

In parametric format, Community is formulated as:

C (Community) = $\langle M, St, Ct, CP, L, P, W \rangle$, where

- M (Members) are the individuals in Community C
- S (Statuses) is the set of statuses in Community C
- Ct (Concepts) is the concepts, the distinctions, recognized and acted on by members of Community C
- L (Language) is the language distinctive to Community C
- P (Practices) are the practices, i.e., the organized patterns of action, in Community C
- CP (Choice Principles) are the choice principles of Community C
- W (World) is the totality of the related objects, processes, events, and states of affairs involved in the Practices of Community C

Communities based on the playing of a game (football, chess, etc.) are paradigm cases of Community, but there are many, many more, sometimes with Statuses and Principles less immediately recognizable. Every human society is a community; every religion is one; clubs are communities; neighborhoods often are; every organization, sub-organization and team in it, is a community (of a special kind, to be discussed below); every family is one. (This recognition, though formulated as a “system,” is the core insight of Family Systems theory and therapy, which pays attention to statuses within the family and associated eligibilities.)

Certain elaborations of these parameters are called for:

- **Members:** Members are the persons in the Community. Importantly, there must be at least two; our concept of community is that it includes more than one person. Non-persons, such as machines and computer software, are sometimes described as members, but that is a non-paradigmatic usage, done because it is sometimes useful for describing interactions and relationships between a machine and a person in the community. Because members are the ones who can participate in the practices associated with the various statuses, they must have various powers to be able to do so. One must be able to run to be a football Player, for example.
- **Statuses:** Statuses are the recognizable positions within the Community, as discussed in the previous Chapter. Paradigmatically, Members treat each other as having some Status with the Community. (This is, for example, quite visible in a medical setting, where there are physicians, surgeons, physician assistants, nurses of different kinds, etc.).

- Concepts are the distinctions acted on in the various behaviors within the Community. Members are expected to be able to recognize and act on them, and a good deal of the specialized training or education needed to become a Member of many communities involves acquiring that competence. This is an example of individuals acquiring the powers to carry out the Practices of the community; Surgeons, e.g., have very extensive knowledge (a Personal Characteristic) of anatomy.
- Practices are, as has been previously mentioned, organized patterns of behaviors, recognized by Members as doing a single thing: passing the football, drawing up a will, teaching a class, giving a lecture, selling a car. Recalling the example of Holly giving a tutorial, practices are the Significance of the particular action. So, by engaging in an Intentional Action, a person is engaging in a Practice (or Social Practice) of some community. In this way, behavior is *always* engaging in a Practice of a Community. (This does not mean the behavior is public or involves other Members. A sculptor silently examining a block of marble to “find the figure within” is engaged in a private version of a social practice of the Sculpting Community.)

A certain subset of a Community’s Practices is called their Core Practices. While typically Members do not participate in all the practices of a Community, some practices are considered, by Members, to be required for membership. Putman’s example is a chess club: Reading chess books and working chess problems are optional practices, but someone who does not play chess is not an actual (typically called *bona fide*) Member of the club.

- Choice Principles are the policies and principles that Members expect Members to adhere to in their choice of actions. This is perhaps easiest to see using the CRJ diagram, from Chapter III. In that diagram are Circumstances, Reasons, and relative priorities (weights). Choice Principles tautologically provide Members with reasons to act in certain ways and not others, and include priorities of those reasons. For example, being loyal to one’s team is a Choice Principle in the football community. Behaviors that are acting on that Principle include cheering for one’s team in a game, celebrating their successes, and lamenting their failures, and those practices have a high priority relative to other options, e.g., dismissing a win or loss as unimportant.

Human societies are Communities, and as such each society has Choice Principles, some of which can be expected to differ from those of other societies. Cultures are different, and this is a central way they differ. American culture is famous for the principle of

individualism; Japanese culture for the principle of valuing politeness. An example of a Choice Principle governing not only individual practices is that in certain societies a Member is expected to rarely engage in any practice other than ones specifically associated with their status. A hotel receptionist in such a society, for example, will rarely engage in any conversation (verbal behaviors) with a guest other than ones involving checking the guest in, checking that the room is satisfactory, etc.

The human community

References to “the human community” are common. This appears to be in recognition of things in common to all persons, regardless of their society, i.e., their culture. Using the Community formulation, we can see how this makes sense, but also the way in which “the human community” is not a paradigm case of Community:

CofP (Community of Persons):

- Members: All individual persons
- Statuses: Person, adult, child, infant
- Ct: The concepts of persons and behavior
- Language: $\emptyset$. There is no universal human language.
- Practices:
 - Assigning statuses
 - Negotiating differences
 - Bargaining
- Choice Principles:
 - Preserve one’s life
 - Ensure the well-being of one’s children, particularly infants
 - Ensure the well-being of children in general
- World: the World of Persons and Behavior

(This is not presented as a full specification, but only as a minimum specification of Practices and Choice Principles. An interesting research project would be to further identify the Statuses of this community, as well as extending and refining the Practices and Choice Principles.)

Pathology

Satisfaction and meaning in a person's life derive, as we noted earlier, from participation in intrinsic practices. Practices, including intrinsic ones, are practices *of a community*. A person's life, therefore, including the satisfaction and meaning they find in it, is their life *in their community*. That community may vary from person to person. For some, it is their family; for others their work community; for some, their religion; etc. Participation in the life of their community is, in all cases, central.

Sometimes, a person finds themselves unable to participate in the life of their community. A person with agoraphobia, for example, will be unable to participate in a wide variety of practices of almost any community, and so is likely to feel isolated and lonely. The centrality of community participation to a person's well-being provides the Descriptive Psychology formulation of psychopathology without reference to "internal" factors, physical symptoms, or specific behaviors:

A person is in a pathological state when there is a significant restriction in their ability to participate in the life of their community.

In more detail, this means the inability to engage in the intrinsic practices, *as* intrinsic practices, of their community.

"Participation *as* an intrinsic practice" is intended to clarify the distinction between doing the actions that make up an intrinsic practice, but not doing the practice for its own sake. This is the phenomenon of "going through the motions." In such a case, people will say, "Well, I can do it, but it's meaningless."

This formulation is, evidently, community-specific, and Ossorio points out that this is by necessity. He notes that it has long been an ideal in psychology to have a universal definition of pathology, one that applies in all contexts, and that such a formulation has never been achieved. Context is necessary. To paraphrase his example, "A person considered pathological in Segovia in 1960 would not be considered pathological in New York in 2026."

However, this formulation also exhibits the maximum generality possible, the closest to universality that could be the case: An individual who cannot participate in the Community of Persons would be considered pathological, no matter what other Communities they are Members of. One who cannot, for example, assign statuses, or

negotiate their own status, cannot achieve the most basic necessities of life as a person: negotiating their place and assigning others places in their lives. Recalling the description of acquiring a friend, and the central role of assigning status, such an individual would be unable to form significant relationships of any kind, assign objects the status of “valued,” etc.

Organizations

Organizations famously have “corporate cultures” that play a very large role in how they do their work, i.e. choice by members of which work practices and how to go about doing them. It is readily observable that every organization has Members, Statuses, Concepts, Language, Choice Principles, and its World. However, as Putman pointed out in his work formulating the concept of Organization, organizations have an additional feature: An organization has a *mission*. A mission is the single over-arching Practice that every other Practice is part of. In an Organization, the Mission is thus the highest Significance, the single Practice intrinsic to all Members. Thus,

Org (Organization) = <M, S, Ct, L, P, CP, W, Mission>.

“We make cars; that’s what we do.”; “Provide health care to the people of this County.”; “Get our criminal defendants declared Not Guilty.”; etc.

The large majority of people work in organizations, whether business, non-profit, or governmental. This formulation helps explain the complexity of work life, helps in understanding the decisions of managers at all levels, and in general makes it easier to find satisfaction in one’s work in an organization.

Conclusion

This has been an Introduction to what Descriptive Psychology is and its primary formulations of psychological concepts. The discussions of the topics are by no means complete. There is a great deal more to say about, for example, Descriptive Psychology-informed psychotherapy in general and status dynamic therapy in particular. A number of papers have been published in psychology journals, and there are 10 volumes of *Advances in Descriptive Psychology*, the academic journal of record for Descriptive Psychology. A significant amount of work in artificial intelligence, unlike the Large Language Model work of today, has been done, using the Descriptive Formats and a technology for automatically measuring subject matter relevance and other semantic characteristics of text, originally devised by Ossorio. Quite a bit of work has been done in the area of organizations, particularly in the fields of software engineering and healthcare. It is hoped that this Introduction will serve as the basis for further exploration in areas of interest.

Additional Resources

The Society for Descriptive Psychology, founded in 1978 to promote work in, and applications of, Descriptive Psychology, maintains a website, www.sdp.org. The Society has held a Conference each year since then. The site is an excellent archive of Descriptive Psychology literature, including videos of Conference presentations and articles that may be difficult to find elsewhere.

A brief bibliography:

Descriptive Psychology in general, and relationships to various schools of psychology:

The Behavior of Persons. P. G. Ossorio, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 2013.

Ossorio's most complete work, with the formulations presented in this Introduction and extensive commentary on them

Meaning and Symbolism. The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio, Vol .VI. P. G. Ossorio, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 2010.

Place. The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio, Vol. III. P. G. Ossorio, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 1998.

A reformulation of many of the formulations of Descriptive Psychology using the concept of status as the starting point, rather than behavior.
One of Ossorio's most readable works.

"What Actually Happens". The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio, Vol. V. P.G. Ossorio, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 2005.

The full articulation of the reality concepts of object, process, event, and state of affairs, including the descriptive formats, with extensive commentary on applications in psychology and philosophy.

"Mathematical Description of Biological Structures, Mechanisms, and States," H J. Jeffrey, International Journal on Advances in Life Sciences, V. 1 No. 1, 2009.

A fully mathematical formulation of the descriptive formats. The examples are from biology, but the formulations are general.

Essays on Clinical Topics. The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio, Vol. VI. P. G. Ossorio, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 1997.

Seminar on Clinical Topics: The Collected Works of Peter G. Ossorio, Vol. VII, Descriptive Psychology Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 2013.

Extensive discussions on Descriptive Psychology-informed therapy and techniques in status dynamic therapy

Status Dynamic Therapy: Creating New Paths to Therapeutic Change. R. M. Bergner, Burns Park Publishers, Ann Arbor, MI. 2007.

“What Is the Self-Concept? An Alternative Formulation and Therapeutic Strategies for Change”. R. M. Bergner, *Practice Innovations*, Online First Publication, March 20, 2025. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pri0000284>

Depression: Doesn't Have to be Depressing. J. R. Holmes, Pelican Press, Pensacola, FL. 2013.

Social Psychology

“There Is Something New in the World of Social Science Conceptualizations: A Review of Place”. H. J Jeffrey, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 2013, 153(5), 623–628.

A formulation of much of the content of Descriptive Psychology using a different starting point, status and world. Develops concepts central to several issues in social psychology: person in society, influence of community and culture on behavior, cultural relativity of worlds, identity, and multi-cultural issues.

Organizations

Putman, A.O. (1990). Organizations. In K.E. Davis, (Ed.), *Advances in Descriptive Psychology*, Vol. 5 (pp. 11-46). Ann Arbor, MI: Descriptive Psychology Press.

H J. Jeffrey. “Relationship definition and management: Tools for requirements analysis”, *Journal of Systems and Software*, Volume 24, Issue 3, March 1994, Pages 277-294.

Behavioral Economics

The Irrationality Illusion: A New Paradigm for Economics and Behavioral Economics". H. J. Jeffrey and A. O. Putman. *The Journal of Behavioral Finance*, 14:161–194, 2013.

Application of Descriptive Psychology formulations to behavioral economics, based on the recognition that economic behavior is a kind of behavior, and therefore can be understood and described as such. includes a summary of the relationship between reasons and behavior in the form of 7 principles that are then applied to behavioral choice.