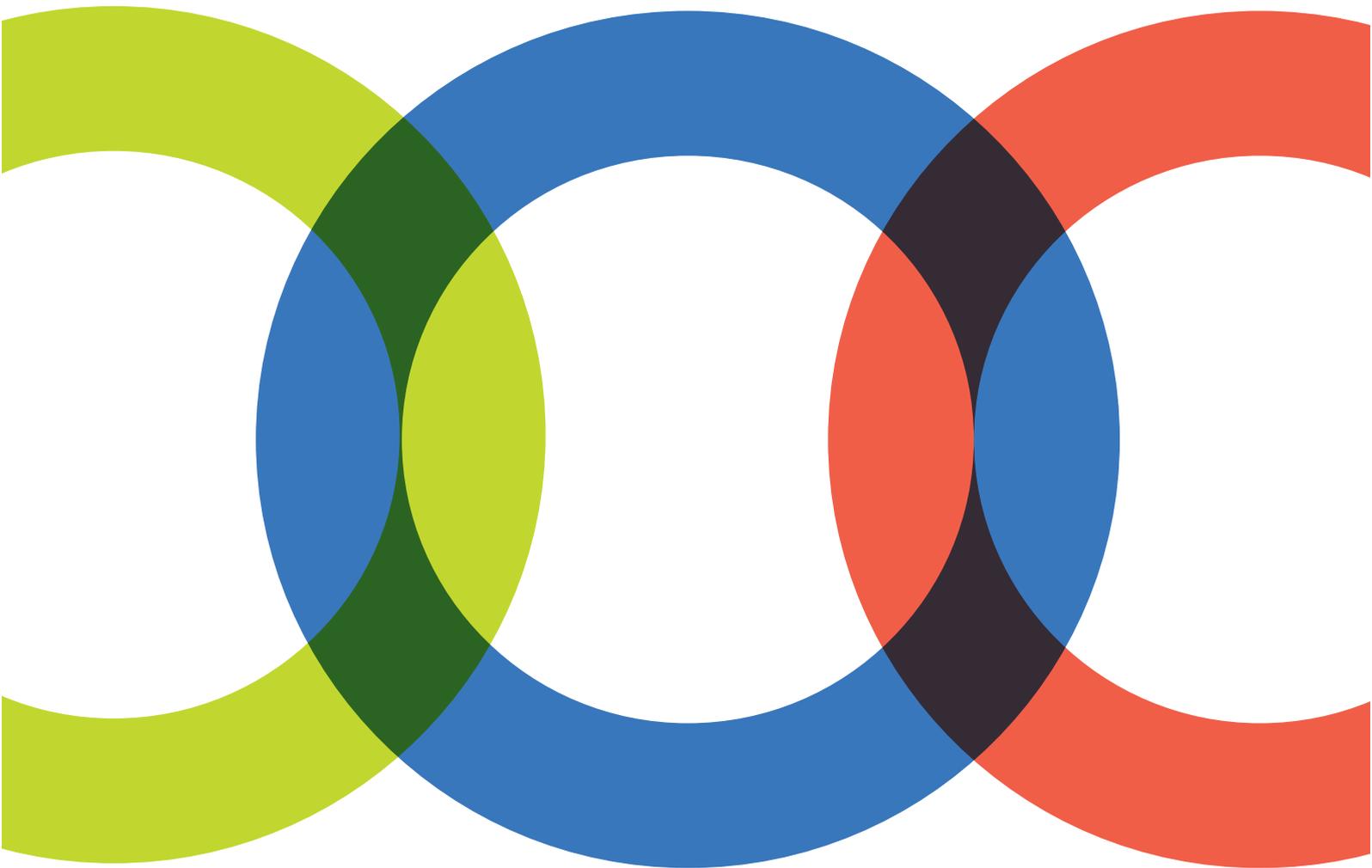


Discovering the Temperaments



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School of Human Relations

Contents

Contents	3
Acknowledgments	5
Introduction	7
Chapter 1: The Temperaments, the Elements and the Trials	9
Chapter 2: A Map of the Temperaments	17
1. Choleric (Fire)	18
2. Sanguine (Air)	24
3. Phlegmatic (Water)	29
4. Melancholic (Earth)	33
Chapter 3: How the Temperaments View Each Other	40
Chapter 4: The Temperaments and Feedback	42
Chapter 5: Working with the Temperaments	46
Chapter 6: Diagnosing the Temperaments	50
Chapter 7: Thresholds and the ‘Shadow’	54
Appendix 1: The Temperaments and the Elements	56
Appendix 2: Comparing ‘Typologies’	58
Appendix 3: An Archetypal View of Development	60
Bibliography	65

Acknowledgments

This manual draws together the insights and understanding that Bryce Taylor and Nick Ellerby gained over a number of years about the temperaments and their origins, the ways in which they can be valuable in personal development and their value as a tool in helping others.

Discovering the Temperaments aims to bring together in one place a variety of thoughts, writings and influences that a reader might find helpful in furthering their own understanding and insight. However, it is no substitute for the learning available through observation and interaction with others in discovering the temperaments and the way in which they colour our lives.

The authors, individually and together, have drawn on their many years' experience of working with others in a wide variety of arenas with many people, and their deep involvement in all aspects of human relations work; through organisational development work, in one-to-one relationships and in facilitating courses and workshops. A knowledge and understanding of the temperaments has proved an invaluable tool in the quest to come to know more and more of how people operate, the most effective way to enable people to reach their desired outcomes and how to understand their responses and reactions.

As Nick said when he first put his thoughts on the temperaments into writing:

“During 1991 whilst I was co-facilitating a two-year Oasis programme ‘The Practice of Counselling and the Management of Change’, I had the experience of spending two days with Mario van Boeschoten. The focus of the two days was an exploration of the temperaments as they operate in adult life. I was affected from the start by the resonance the descriptions and orientations had with my own life. Since then I have found the temperaments to hold continuing fascination and interest. I have had a number of opportunities to lead others through workshops examining how the temperaments might add to a person’s understanding of themselves and others and how such understanding can promote development within and between people in both life and work.”

Special thanks go to Mario van Boeschoten who has been an inspiration and constant source of new learning and who has willingly spent time talking through the concept and application of the temperaments, and from whom much of the content for this document was gained.

Introduction

Ways of Typing People

Throughout the ages there has been a long standing interest in finding ways to understand people as belonging to certain types, yet the use of types is relative. They provide general descriptions at the expense of individual detail and one of the complaints frequently heard when a person is given a profile is that it isn't that accurate.

Types, however, do provide useful frameworks and an overview that can locate some important distinctions. The four temperaments are amongst the oldest of ways of typing people. Jung devised his own, influenced to some extent by them, and the four learning styles also outlined here have overlaps with Jung's way of thinking. Perhaps this is an indication that there are some fairly stable differences between people that translate into the way they appear, the way they act and the way they prefer to learn.

Introducing people to 'typing' is to help give a useful language that separates out some important aspects of human responding. They don't have to be taken too seriously to be useful. And a type is a type – not an individual who may well have 'bits' of more than one type in their make-up as well as displaying different aspects of different types in different situations. They therefore need to be used with a good deal of allowance for the full humanity of the person to show through, rather than as an excuse for not noticing how rich a person each one of us is.

Chapter 1: The Temperaments, the Elements and the Trials

Temperament: ...in psychology, an aspect of personality concerned with emotional dispositions and reactions and their speed and intensity; the term often is used to refer to the prevailing mood or mood pattern of a person.
Encyclopaedia Britannica

Galen, the Greek physician of the 2nd century AD, developed the Temperaments from an earlier physiological theory of four basic body fluids (humours): blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. The ancient Greeks considered the health of mankind to be similar to their concepts of cosmology and did not relate these directly to anatomical concepts. The Temperaments were used as a basic typology, a way of characterising people before modern methods were devised and before psychological explanations were strongly featured as a way of talking about people.

The Temperaments provided a primary way of thinking about people that was much in use during the Middle Ages and even in Shakespeare's time, when they were referred to as 'the four humours'. In those times, man was seen as a microcosm of the universe whose behaviour was determined by his physiology which was, in turn, subject to planetary and, to a lesser extent, terrestrial influences.

In medieval times it was thought that each of us was also linked primarily to one of the four elements: earth, air, fire, or water. Our temperament had a dominant element to it that gave a cast of character to what we did; a kind of signature that we put on all we attempted. The four temperaments are:

- The Choleric
- The Sanguine
- The Phlegmatic
- The Melancholic.

Each of the four temperaments was in turn related to the four seasons, the four elements and four animals whose nature was thought to exemplify the specific temperament:

- Choleric: summer, fire and the lion
- Sanguine: spring, air and the ape
- Phlegmatic: winter, water and the lamb
- Melancholic: autumn, earth and the pig.

More recent theories emphasise the influence of the endocrine glands on emotional reactivity. Modern psychology attributes primary importance to the activity of the automatic nervous system, particularly its sympathetic branch, in emotional reactivity: autonomic over-responsiveness is intimately linked with neurotic dispositions. Because such responses can

be conditioned, individual differences in ease of conditioning (also probably innate) also play a part in determining temperament.

The Elements

For over 4,000 years the material world was considered to be composed of four basic elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire. There was also thought to be a fifth invisible element, which permeated all space, known as the Prima Materia (or Aether), which was considered to be the foundation substance of the other elements. The entire material world, including the health of Mankind was considered to evolve around the balance of the first four material elements of earth, water, air and fire. Aether was considered to represent the realm of invisible and spiritual forces in Man and the universe, and was generally disregarded when dealing with health on a physical level.

Each of the four elements was considered to have two qualities and each quality shared two elements:

- Fire: warm and dry
- Air: warm and moist
- Water: cold and moist
- Earth: cold and dry.

Each quality and each element has a series of correspondences associated with them, providing a relationship to bodily structures, organs, function, symptoms, events and a large number of other medical and everyday occurrences. Examples of these correspondences are the four seasons described above. By considering the relationships between the correspondences, the natural interplay of forces can be observed, providing a system of diagnosis and healing that was simple, effective and holistic.

The physiological functions of the body were perceived as follows:

- Air is taken in with each breath and its vital part, called 'pneuma', enters into the blood and is circulated with it
- 'Thymos', a vital energy essential for life is derived from the pneuma
- Food and drinks are taken in by way of the mouth and are transformed in the liver into 'humours' or vital essences, which also circulate with the blood.

The Humours and Healing

Initially the Greeks had three humours – blood, phlegm and bile – and their concepts had more than a passing resemblance to the tradition of Ayurvedic medicine. By Hippocrates' time, some changes in the traditions had taken place: the bile humour was expanded into two qualities, yellow bile and black bile, in order to provide a total of four qualities, which correspond to the four elements.

They were perceived to control the metabolism of the body, and thus health and life itself. When the humours were in balance, the body was healthy. An excess, deficiency or abnormality of one or more of these humours caused disease. Harmony of all parts is

essential for health. Disturbance of the humours may occur as a result of internal difficulties or be due to outside influences, such as abnormal climate, improper personal hygiene, poor diet, lack of or excessive activity, and unhealthy surroundings.

Hippocratic medicine considers three stages of disease:

1. A change in humoral proportions caused by external or internal influences and the reaction of the body to this by generating a fever or 'boiling' (coction).
2. The resultant crisis which caused the disorder to...
3. End through discharge of the excess humour – or by death.

These emanations or humours of the body may generally be observed during illness (blood, phlegm from the nose, vomit, abnormal faecal matter, urine and perspiration), and frequently an illness suddenly disappears after reaching a crisis – upon discharge of one of the humours.

1. Sanguis: provides motive energy of the body; stimulates the logical faculty. The receptacle for this humour is the veins and arteries.

2. Phlegm: has expelling properties; functioning to expel substances not required. It controls the Choleric humour; gives beneficial cooling and moistening effect on the heart. It also strengthens the function of the lower brain and the emotions, but is inimical to the intellect. It maintains proper fat metabolism and the balance of body fluids, electrolytes and hormones. The receptacle for the phlegm humour is the lungs.

3. Choleric: closely associated with the nervous system; acting to increase its rate of function. Choleric clarifies all humours, and has a warming effect on the body. It stimulates the intellect, increases physical and mental activity and courage. Its receptacle is the gall bladder.

4. Melancholic: consists of two parts

- a. A thick earthy aspect, the coldest part, prone to coagulation.
- b. A more fluid, vaporous substance, which has the ability to ascend and affect the brain and, if excessive, cause melancholy.

This vaporous substance is also known as Atrabile. In normal quantities, Melancholic stimulates memory and makes the nature homely, practical, pragmatic and studious. The coldest part is adherent and viscous and, if not eliminated properly, can settle on or in tissues, thus causing morbid deposits, which can form tumours. The spleen removes the Melancholic from the blood and body fluids, and is the receptacle of Melancholic.

Our Temperament and our 'Self'

Our temperament is not to be confused with our 'selves': just as we are not our behaviour, so we are not our temperament. However, we cannot get away from our temperament any more than we can get away from our behaviour. Temperament illustrates something relatively basic and essential about our 'stance' to life, for example, a Phlegmatic is not going to become a Choleric in one lifetime, nor is a Melancholic going to develop any great sanguinity either.

Although you cannot change your temperament, you can change your relationship to it!

The temperament provides an underlying way of approaching what happens to us and how we view life. Once you know how your temperament works you can work with it and not fight it – something almost every temperament does. So, for example, we can strengthen certain qualities and reduce the influence of others but some aspects of our temperament are going to be qualities that we are better learning to live with rather than stubbornly trying to eliminate. Most people have a dominant temperament, a secondary one and traces of a third. The fourth is usually absent. Age helps us ‘harmonise’ our temperaments and we can also learn to achieve a greater harmony between the various temperaments and our own temperament.

The temperaments largely disappeared from use as the modern scientific world evolved, but even though we now rely almost entirely upon the idea of *personality* to understand a person, the influence of the temperaments can still be seen, for example in saying someone is ‘good humoured’ or in ‘bad humour’, an indication of the temperaments’ influence upon our language, if not our thought.

However, interest in the temperaments is reappearing. Even though they don’t claim the kind of accuracy of modern science, they do have a strong explanatory power. The temperaments are not to be thought of as psychological profiles – the characteristics go deeper than personality and include genetic predisposition.

“Even with the basic types known as the temperaments, such variety exists among people that the very mystery of existence seems to express itself within these types. Temperament, that fundamental colouring of the human personality, plays a role in all manifestations of individuality that are of concern to practical life.” Rudolf Steiner¹

The work of Steiner in the early 1900s adds a further aspect to the temperaments and how they connect to four aspects of our self; each temperament having dominance in one area. This perspective brings a strongly spiritual dimension; seeing the temperament as the result of the forces of heredity and those the human being brings along as part of its own development for this incarnation.

This insight offers a view as to why the temperaments demonstrate themselves as they do.

- **Higher self:** individuality; fire; holds all together; capable of responding to and saying ‘no’ to both genetics and upbringing – **choleric**
- **Astral body:** inner life; awareness; consciousness; where we experience pain, emotions, feeling, values, thoughts, instincts, intentions – **sanguine**
- **Life forces** and the regulation of flows and processes: no consciousness; water – where the temperaments operate most strongly – **phlegmatic**
- **Physical body:** visible; earth – **melancholic**.

¹ *The Four Temperaments* by Rudolf Steiner, from a lecture given in Berlin, 1909.

A Link to Contemporary Ideas – Learning Styles

Another useful framework for looking at individuals and their different styles of learning has been developed by Honey and Mumford. The results from their questionnaires are plotted onto a framework with four major quadrants. The four main styles of learning are described as:

1. **Conceptualisers:** who like ideas and can work from theories; linked to the Choleric temperament.
2. **Activists/enthusiasts:** who work best when involved with others; linked to the Sanguine.
3. **Concrete thinkers/pragmatists:** who work with what's there and prefer doing to 'talking about it'; linked to the Phlegmatic.
4. **Reflectors/analysers:** who can see beyond the obvious, often think things through a great deal before acting, have a strong conscience; linked to the Melancholic.

Life Challenges

Life is not easy, nor is it designed to be. There are challenges to be faced, difficulties to surmount and internal forces to bring under our influence and understanding (rather than control). In addition, there are the tasks of each life stage at which we succeed, more or less. Our character, temperament and personality all have to be integrated into some sort of working order if we are to function in the society surrounding us. All this we know, and yet there is a prevalent belief that life, in spite of all this, should somehow be easier than it is. Perhaps, given all this, it should be a good deal harder.

The Four Elements and the Four Trials

The four elements give a sense of orientation to other aspects of life and each presides over a different part of human experience. The four elements are used here to illuminate briefly the temperaments and to indicate how the major trials of life can be linked to one of the four elements.

1. **Trial by earth:** this occurs when we are challenged to work out some new understanding or arrangement between our selves and our position in relation to our social world or social identity.

The challenge may come from having to move in order to take up a job when we are deeply attached to our roots. 'Roots' issues relate strongly to the earth element. It may be that we have to fight off the expectations of others about the adult identity we are expected to assume; to become a doctor or to follow in the family business, for example. Struggles to assert our will over laid-down expectations are typical of the trial by earth. And, of course, some people find they cannot make the break, or find the break itself so highly priced that they never succeed in recovering from it. They may leave their local area and take up the job, but some deep connection is gone and they never quite feel at home again.

2. **Trial by fire:** this is signalled when the old ideas no longer work and the usual explanations do not bring their expected comfort. Things no longer make sense in the way they have in the past. It is not so much that events cannot be explained or

no longer hold meaning, but our ideas about what meaning they do hold are no longer sufficient.

It may come slowly or suddenly, but the moment arrives when you know that you have to give up the familiar view of things and search for a new explanation. The 'burning' of old concepts and frameworks may take place in relation to a particular aspect of experience or may be much deeper. It may arise in a moment (when something so overwhelming happens that we know we will not be able to return to our old certainties) or it may take a prolonged period of hibernation before the full signs of the true extent of the crisis become manifest.

It may concentrate upon the nature of our understanding concerning a relationship, say, or over a deeply held view of some event or decision, or it may be an existential crisis, a loss of belief in anything. The effects of a serious trial by fire can be long-lasting and deeply difficult to work out, since once the foundations of belief have been shaken, it may well take a long time before an individual is prepared to put their trust in anything. It may lead to a deep pessimism, or nihilism.

3. Trial by water: distinguished by the theme of relationships. They slip away, or come under stress. Like the element of water itself, relationships themselves are fluid and unstable. People change; expectations are no longer met. We feel unsure of the love and trust of those close to us or we fail them. It can often arrive after a major change of another kind has taken place and then we look round, only to find all those people we once felt so sure of, well... 'Where are they now?' 'Where do they fit in?'

The trial by water may leave us feeling isolated and alone, no matter how many social contacts we have, because it is at a level of deeper connectedness that we are losing our bearings.

4. Trial by air: moments in life when it seems as if everything is hanging in suspension. It may be over one particular aspect of life, but we experience a moment of absolute uncertainty, when things could go one way or another. We know we have nothing to put against what is taking place. In some decisive way, we can only sit and wait; we are powerless to do more. When it takes place over our life itself, then we may experience one of those moments, which can last weeks or even months, when all things are held, poised to await a new surge of momentum or not. This is a time when the forces at work in our lives, once they break, may literally sweep us away.

Identifying the Four Trials

It may be, even from this outline, that it is possible to recognise those episodes in life when you have been working with one of the four trials; one of those phases when the questions gathered around one area of your life and seemed to pursue you. It may be, too, that you have lived through one of those longer periods when one trial has succeeded another: as one episode left you vulnerable to experiences in another area.

Bereavement may be the beginning of a *trial by earth* – of facing the reality of the relationship as it was. It may mean coming to the painful realisation that in a substantial way the relationship was based upon such dependency that both parties were held back from becoming who they might be. From the expressed sadness and all too genuine grief at the

loss, there begins the more complex process of reassessment. This in turn leads to seeing other themes, links and connections that could not be observed whilst the person was living. From this devastating realisation may flow insights and greater understanding of both our own biography and that of the person who has died.

This may lead to a *trial by fire*, the feeling that the old reassuring belief systems simply cannot account for the new understandings rushing through our life. The feeling of losing all contact with our former sense of how life was ordered can be disturbing and frightening.

In turn, this may give way to a *trial by air*, as all the past is suddenly held in stasis and all possibilities are suspended. No direction makes any sense in view of the rewritten life story that is beginning to appear. And, finally, the person experiences a *trial by water* as they look around in wonder at who is there and who they need to remain with them from this landscape of the past, which seems ever more like a two-dimensional world.

This example, caricature though it is, will nevertheless not be foreign to all readers. More important though, is the searching through your own biography to identify which of the trials you have already undergone, some perhaps more than once, and which you may feel are to come, or which you are to escape this time around. For not everyone is condemned to suffer all the trials.