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What Is
Your
Temperament
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Here is a test for discovering your natural temperament, and suggestions for utilizing its strength and counter-acting its weakness.



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WHAT IS YOUR TEMPERAMENT?

DONALD F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

“Do you want to make friends easily; overcome bashfulness and backwardness; get ahead in business and be a success? Do you want to overcome your weakness, capitalize on your strength, direct your particular talents into the most appropriate channels? Would you like to have peace and contentment, a sense of well-being in all circumstances, new zest and zeal for your daily work? Herein is revealed the secret formula for attaining all these things.”

The above lines might have been an advertisement for any one of the many schemes that have broken out in

newspapers and magazines in recent years to teach people something they did not know about themselves. Many of the schemes, indeed, are rank deception and superstition. Thousands have been deceived and are still being deceived; but all testified to their desire for success in life and their realization of the part self-knowledge must play in its attainment.

In contrast to these schemes, this article will present a means of self-analysis that anyone can use, and that has a solid basis in psychology and fact. It will give you a knowledge of your strength and weakness; your good tendencies and your bad; it will prepare you against situations and circumstances that, unforeseen, would be but poorly managed; it will direct you to utilize your particular forces and energies in the best possible way, because it will tell you what they are.

Self-knowledge must begin with an understanding of how you are made up as a human being. We must distinguish in each individual: 1) the physical constitution; 2) the temperament; 3) the character.

The physical constitution consists in the special physical make-up of the individual. You have a certain height and breadth and color; a certain type of bone formation and muscular development; a certain kind of blood circulation, nervous system, glandular activity. All of these and many more things go into your physical constitution; they give you a certain type of body, considered quite apart from your soul.

Your soul, of course, is united to your body as its life-giving principle. But your soul always works through your body, and therefore will tend to act in certain ways according to its peculiar type of body. Therefore, your

particular body, especially because of the glandular activity and working of the nervous system, will tend to cast the activities of your soul into a certain mold; to give them definite characteristics and traits; to make you naturally like some things and dislike others; to make you weak in some things and strong in others. Your body does not overwhelm your soul, which is always the dominating principle; but it does color its actions in a definite way. Now the sum total of the natural tendencies, impulses, actions, preferences, and inclinations that result from the union of your type of body with a human soul forms your *temperament*.

Each individual is born with a certain temperament, because he is born with a certain type of body. He retains that temperament through his life unless his body undergoes considerable changes, which is unusual but

not impossible. It is evident then, that if one knows what his particular temperament is, he has a start in self-knowledge that admits of unlimited possibilities for improvement and advancement.

However, the temperament is only one element that enters into the formation of *character*. Character is what a person makes of himself, working on the temperament that he has at hand. Education, self-knowledge, environment, habits, the grace of God, spiritual practices, — all these things working on a given temperament, give a person the character he shows to the world.

It may be a bad character, if the wrong kind of education, bad habits, poor environment, ignorance of self, have allowed only the weak points in his temperament to be developed. It will be a good character if self-knowledge, good education, well directed

habits, have overcome latent weaknesses and developed the strength inherent in the temperament with which he was born.

From this the necessity of understanding one's own temperament is evident at a glance. Human failures, apart from the misuse of the grace of God, are caused by one of two things: failure to recognize one's natural weaknesses and to provide against them; or failure to know one's natural strength and to direct it to proper ends. If you know your temperament, you will be forewarned against the points in which you may fail.

There are four types of temperament; one of them predominates in almost every individual. It is true that the predominating temperament will often form a mixture with another of the four; it may require considerable self-examination to discover it when education and training have already

exerted their influence upon it; but it can be discovered by everyone, and valuable lessons learned.

TEMPERAMENT TABLE

In order to discover your particular temperament, answer honestly the following questions. If you answer "yes" to seven or more of the questions in a given set, this will indicate your predominant temperament. If you answer "yes" to five or more of the questions in a given set, this will represent your secondary temperament.

CHOLERIC

1. Am I fond of action, and impatient of delay when something is to be done?
2. Do I love to organize others and to direct them in some work?
3. Do I find myself frequently planning great projects and campaigns?
4. Do I have a tendency toward lavishness, doing things on a large scale, or chafing when I cannot?
5. In conference with others, am I intolerant of their views, and very dogmatic in expressing mine?

6. Am I inclined to raise my voice in argument and to use sarcasm and scorn?
7. Do I contradict others quite bluntly?
8. When someone sets obstacles or reasons in the way of some work I want to do, does it make me want to do the thing all the more?
9. Do I try to crush others who oppose me, or at least get back at them in some way?
10. Do I love to think about work I have done, successes I have achieved?

NERVOUS

1. Have I been called impractical, theoretical, idealistic, in many of my plans and proposals?
2. Do I brood over things, my friends, my work, my past, my future?
3. Do I love poetry, the more imaginative and sentimental the better?
4. Do I take strong and lasting dislike to certain persons, sometimes at first sight?
5. Am I inclined to have few friends, but to love them very intensely, and to be jealous of their love?
6. Am I sensitive, easily hurt by others,

and inclined to hold resentment a long time?

7. Do I like to be alone, feel aversion for crowds? When in crowds remain silent—apart?
8. Do I find obedience hard because I think of so many reasons that the one commanding does not understand?
9. Do I worry about my health, and grow despondent over mistakes I have made?
10. Do I find myself subject to fits of depression that sometimes last for days at a time?

PHLEGMATIC

1. Have I a number of small hobbies, or one on which I spend a great deal of time?
2. Do I find myself left cold in the presence of the enthusiasms of others?
3. Do I idle away considerable time, even when there is something important to be done?
4. Have I a poor memory, and difficulty in applying myself to serious study even for brief periods?
5. Do I instinctively avoid quarreling and altercations, even when I am involved or insulted?

6. Do I find it difficult to work up any interest in imaginative writing or in poetry?
7. Do I like to be comfortable and at ease, and succeed in making myself comfortable even in untoward circumstances?
8. Do I refuse to worry about misfortunes and setbacks?
9. Do scenes of pathos or tragedy or sorrow affect me very lightly, hardly ever moving me to tears?
10. Am I slow and deliberate in my actions, usually behind others in finishing equal tasks?

SANGUINIC

1. Do I love crowds and gay happy gatherings?
2. Do I talk a great deal, and find silence or being alone difficult?
3. When listening to a good speech or sermon, am I quickly aroused to the enthusiasm of the speaker—but quickly restored to normal?
4. Have I set out earnestly to do many things, but accomplished few of them because I lacked perseverance?
5. Do I make friends easily, confide in

- them quickly, and then quite often forget or neglect them?
6. Do I find fasting and abstaining a real hardship?
 7. Do I weep easily over emotional or pathetic scenes in a drama or in real life?
 8. Have I said many things on the spur of the moment that I regretted soon after?
 9. Do I enjoy a good time more when in the presence of others than when alone?
 10. Do I suffer from human respect, being eager to be thought well of?

Having discovered which temperament you have been endowed with at birth, it is necessary next to understand characteristics of this temperament, its predispositions, its most common defects, the virtues to which it is inclined, and the faults into which it frequently falls.

THE CHOLERIC TEMPERAMENT

GOOD MORAL TRAITS: The Choleric is a man of action, aggressive, enterprising, dominating. He wants to do great things, wants to lead others in doing them; never tires, and makes obstacles stepping stones to success. His outstanding virtue is fortitude: he knows no fear, no danger of loss in attaining an end. He is liberal, magnanimous and expansive with those who work under his leadership; spends himself and his goods freely in a great cause.

BAD MORAL TRAITS: His predominant weaknesses are pride, ambition, self-sufficiency. These traits may lead him to frequent and violent anger against those who cross him; to intense jealousy, vindictiveness and fierce revenge. He does not like to accept advice, unless it agrees with

what he has already decided or can be made to appear as his own idea from the start. Against those who disagree with him he does not use reason, but emotional outbursts that display his intolerance of contradiction and his supreme belief in himself. He seeks to lead, in conversation, in honor, in action, in decision.

4 RULES FOR SUCCESS: While using his capacity for leadership to the full, he must learn *humility, humility, humility!* This virtue must teach him to distrust his own arrogant superiority and give some credit to others. It must train him to act and speak deliberately, calmly, rather than explosively and impetuously. It must discipline him to restrain his temper, to give in to others when there is objective reason. In a spiritual way he will do well to learn that in the sight of God, prayer, sacrifice and personal sanctity come before action; without

them action is in vain. Meditation on the meekness of Christ, His success in seeming failure, His submission to others, is most needful for the choleric person.

THE NERVOUS TEMPERAMENT

GOOD MORAL TRAITS: The nervous person is deeply emotional, imaginative, impressionable, and therefore is capable of a strong sense of religion. He finds it easy to realize God's presence and indwelling in the soul; resultant emotions are deep and abiding and active, though they tend toward the impractical. Many of the great mystic saints were of this temperament. Has the qualifications of genius because of great fertility of imagination and keen senses. His likes and loves are deep-rooted and lasting. Can conceal feelings even though they are storming within.

BAD MORAL TRAITS: His great defect is justice, because he tends to so much introspection and subjective thought that he finds it hard to esteem properly the position and rights of others. This makes him impractical in decision and action—he sees too many circumstances that are the creation of his own mind. He is prone to extreme sensitiveness, is easily hurt and the hurt remains, making forgiveness difficult. He is overwhelmed by adversity and sorrow, and in excessive meditation on these things is led to bitter self-distrust and even despair. Hypochondriacs and pessimists are of nervous temperament — they always fear the worst. If not properly guided, may be carried away by fantastic and visionary schemes.

RULES FOR SUCCESS: Because of the constant danger of over-introspection and resulting foolhardiness, the nervous person needs a good ad-

viser and director, and must bind himself to obedience even in small details. To overcome concentration on self and withdrawal from the world, should force self to a moderate amount of work with and for others. In working with others must be ready to discount and despise dislikes and jealousies that will inevitably arise. The study of philosophy is recommended to provide objective principles to counterbalance subjective views. Above all, the nervous person must learn to despise his interior pains and writhings; or at least, to transform them by offering them for souls of others in union with the agony of Our Lord.

THE PHLEGMATIC TEMPERAMENT

GOOD MORAL TRAITS: The Phlegmatic person is seldom influenced strongly by emotion or passion and is therefore usually possessed of

calm and deliberate judgment, of patient, practical reason. He is lacking in imaginative power, and is therefore seldom aroused by great ambitions or desires. He loves to putter about with trifles, can spend hours over little hobbies. Because of lack of emotion is seldom either deeply depressed or highly exalted. He is patient under adversity, unexcited even by imminent misfortune. He is open and frank and guileless, peace-loving towards others, hating dispute and tumult. His great virtue is prudence; what he does, he does thoroughly and well, though disinclined to do much or very important things.

BAD MORAL TRAITS: His outstanding vice is sloth, leading to neglect of important things, procrastination, leaving things to others. He is apathetic and indifferent toward objects that arouse intense enthusiasm on the part of others. He lacks con-

confidence in himself when it comes to action, is slow, faltering, hesitant. Inclined to self-complacency because he is usually regarded as an easy-going person, and is not inclined to great excesses in any way.

RULES FOR SUCCESS: He must recognize that his is a temperament that must be led by others, as it is so lacking in initiative of its own. Therefore he needs strong friends and good models, and must make it his task to imitate them and follow them. He can force himself to overcome sloth by cultivating regular habits and choosing forms of penance that conquer his desire to take the line of least resistance. In spiritual things, he should concentrate on definite methods and forms of prayer such as those provided in the Liturgy, etc.; if he tries to pray spontaneously he will drift into idleness and distraction.

THE SANGUINIC TEMPERAMENT

GOOD MORAL TRAITS: The emotions of the sanguinic person are many and various, but not deep or lasting; they rise quickly, express themselves vividly, change swiftly. His outstanding virtue is charity, because he loves companionship and a good time; he makes friends quickly, indeed is inclined to treat casual acquaintances as long standing friends. He may be hurt by others, but forgives quickly and forgets. He is an interesting conversationalist, cordial, vivacious, frank, open. He is easily aroused to noble tasks, but enthusiasm does not last. He is always the optimist, does not worry long about the past, is trustful of the future; may be deeply oppressed by misfortune, but for a very short time. Memory is facile but not retentive; imagination brilliant but not pene-

trating. Is easily led and directed for good or bad.

BAD MORAL TRAITS: The great weaknesses of the sanguinic temperament are intemperance and inconstancy. He loves distraction, crowds, games, pleasure of all kinds. Has to be particularly on guard against gluttony and sensuality; and to that end must practice genuine mortification until the will is able to control every quickly rising emotion. He is inclined to vanity and conceit on the score that he gets on so well with others, but can overcome this by directing much of his charity towards poor and unattractive types. To overcome his inconstancy, must force himself to finish one task before he starts another, not allowing himself to be sidetracked by new enthusiasms. The sanguinic temperament is capable of great love of God

and religious zeal if he is trained to use properly his many gifts.

RULES FOR SUCCESS: The basic need of a sanguinic person is for regular habits of mortification and self-discipline, which above all can offset his inclinations to give up work for play, and to permit his social instincts to interfere with his necessary duties and tasks. He need not suppress his gay spirits and his love of companionship and fun; indeed these are his greatest charm. But he must use them in the service of some good cause. Sanguinic persons make good salesmen, because they naturally love to meet people, and can wax enthusiastic about anything. Nevertheless it is in that kind of work that they encounter their greatest dangers, e.g. to over-drinking, wasting time, squandering money, etc.



CONCLUSION

It must always be remembered in applying this analysis to self-examination and to evaluating the temperament of others, that education, home training, religious motivation and practices tend to hide the underlying predominant temperament of an individual. Indeed, a person with a well-formed character and strong habits of self-discipline is one in whom the basic temperament is difficult to discover, because its weaknesses will have been brought under the control of reason and faith and free will. But once in a while they will inadvertently appear, and both those who have these weaknesses and those who recognize them in others will be helped by what they reveal.



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