Why Are People Like This?

Towards a Dynamical Field Theory of Personology

# Introduction

“Why are people like this?” is a question I find myself returning to almost every time I interact with them. And so, I found myself researching answers so much that I developed my own working models that I tweaked as I applied them. I imagine I’m not unusual in this regard; i.e., most people would like to understand the behavior of the people around them.

My goal here is to present a useful model of personality. By “personality”, I simply mean the sum of all of a person’s behaviors over the course of her[[1]](#footnote-0) life. Existing models of personality tend to either be categorizations or trait models. These are fine for, say, differentiating some people by often-salient characteristics at a given time. But I want more from my personology: I want to know how personalities change, and consequently, how to change them.

In a word, the goal here is a scientific groundwork for the continued development of *psychoengineering*: the design and building of minds and mental structures.And for this we need not a static model but a dynamic model. I.e. what we’re modeling here is the behavior of people across time. While you could repeatedly measure people at different times with the existing models to generate a simple representation of their changing behavior patterns, the theories don’t tell us which patterns of behavior pattern changes to expect, nor how to plan out the course of development.

While I use a lot of material from the clinical sciences, I actively aim to bring the knowledge outside of the clinics. While the model I use as a framework is a bioevolutionary model, what I’m developing here is more appropriately understood as a *thermosocial* model: fundamentally, everything is understood as thermodynamic systems, but as a whole, everything is bound by social forces.[[2]](#footnote-1)

I’ve come to believe that nearly everything—stories, histories, institutions—can be viewed as systems of interpersonal interaction. This view, in turn, raises profound philosophical questions: What makes someone a person? What determines whether they are granted rights, recognition, or value? “Personhood” lies at the heart of debates on abortion, animal rights, and end-of-life decisions. A dolphin might be a person without being human. A fetus might be human without yet qualifying as a person. These distinctions matter—and they are more contentious than we often admit.

To explore this terrain, I’m launching a series of essays loosely grouped under four major themes: **Personology**, **Dissociation**, **Context**, and **Evil.**

## Conceptual Overview

#### **🔹 1. Foundational Motivation**

* **Core Aim**: “Understand how people work.”
* **Perspective**: Based on personal introspection (“I experience everything from my own perspective”).
* **Meta-Level Interest**: Understanding how others understand psychology & philosophy.

#### **🔹 2. Metatheory of Personhood**

* **Central Claim**: *Personhood is intersubjective*—“To be considered a person, you need to be seen as such by other people.”  
  + (Philosophically resonant with Dennett’s intentional stance + Strawson’s personhood conditions.)
* **Contrasts**: Distinction between *human* and *person*.  
  + E.g., “Dolphins might be people, but not human; embryos human but not people.”
* **Implication**: Personhood is a **flexible, socially constructed status**, not strictly biological or rational.

#### **🔹 3. Narrative Framing**

* Human understanding is deeply tied to **narratives and characters**.
* Historical and fictional events are seen as sequences of *interactions between people*.
* Suggests a narrative-unity approach to personality.[[3]](#footnote-2)

#### **🔹 4. Chapter Structure**

| **Chapter** | **Focus** | **Subthemes** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Personology | Millon’s model + expansion | Bioevolutionary foundations, spectra, trait domains |
| Dissociation | Self-fragmentation | From general dissociation to DID |
| Context | Science and application of personality | Theoretical positioning, situational/societal dimensions |
| Evil | Normative evaluation | Concepts of virtue/vice, freedom, moral behavior |

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# Personology

## Core Aims & Strategies of Being

### **1. Existence**

**Definition:** Maintaining a distinction between oneself and one’s environment over time.

* **Essence:** Overcoming entropy to generate and maintain ordered life.
* **Dual Strategies:**
  + **Life Enhancement** = increase creation, pleasure, growth, reward
  + **Life Preservation** = decrease destruction, pain, decay, punishment
* **Analogy Chain:**
  + enhancement : preservation  
     :: attraction : repulsion  
     :: life-creation : death-avoidance  
     :: growth : defense  
     :: entropy-overcoming : entropy-circumvention

### **2. Adaptation**

**Definition:** Homeostatic processes that maintain survival in open ecosystems.

* **Essence:** Adjusting to or altering the environment to sustain existence.
* **Dual Strategies:**
  + **Ecologic Accommodation** = passive fitting in, internal change to fit environment.
  + **Ecologic Modification** = active change of external conditions, change environment to fit self.
* **Analogy Chain:**
  + accommodation : modification  
     :: passivity : activity  
     :: fitting : stirring  
     :: autotrophy (e.g., plants) : heterotrophy (e.g., animals)  
     :: conforming : shaping  
     :: input-dependence : output-imposition

### **3. Replication**

**Definition:** Reproductive styles that maximize gene diversification and ecological fit.

* **Essence:** Perpetuating genetic material through strategic energy distribution.
* **Dual Strategies:**
  + **Self-Propagation** = direct reproduction, maximize own gene spread.
  + **Other-Nurturance** = indirect reproduction, invest in offspring survival.
* **Analogy Chain:**
  + self-propagation : other-nurturance  
     :: quantity-focus : quality-focus  
     :: immediate replication : sustained investment  
     :: gene spread : gene stability  
     :: reproduction-through-numbers : reproduction-through-care  
     :: r-selected parenting : K-selected parenting  
     :: male : female

### **4. Abstraction**

**Definition:** Emergence of abilities enabling anticipatory planning and reasoning.

* **Essence:** Mental representation and preemptive response to potential futures.
* **Dual Strategies:**
  + **Feeling** = stimulus-recognition, affective sensitivity.
  + **Thinking** = anticipatory modeling, logical planning.
* **Analogy Chain:**
  + feeling : thinking  
     :: affect : cognition  
     :: reactivity : forethought  
     :: sensory immediacy : symbolic abstraction  
     :: recognition : simulation  
     :: emotional regulation : cognitive modeling

| **Aim** | **Original Definition** | **Essence** | **Dual Strategies** | **Analogy Chains** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Existence** | *“Serendipitous transformation of random or less organized states into those possessing distinct structures of greater organization.”* | Creation and maintenance of order against entropy | **Enhancement** (life creation / growth) **Preservation** (death avoidance / protection) | enhancement : preservation :: attraction : repulsion :: life-creation : death-avoidance |
| **Adaptation** | *“Homeostatic processes employed to sustain in open ecosystems.”* | Sustaining life via internal or external adjustment | **Accommodation** (fit self to world/passive) **Modification** (fit world to self/active) | accommodation : modification :: passivity : activity :: autotrophy : heterotrophy |
| **Replication** | *“Reproductive styles that maximize the diversification and selection of ecologically effective attributes.”* | Perpetuation of life through genetic strategy | **Self-Propagation** (gene-spread/quantity) **Other-Nurturance** (gene-stability/quality) | self-propagation : other-nurturance :: gene-spread : gene-stability :: quantity : quality |
| **Abstraction** | *“Emergence of competencies that foster anticipatory planning and reasoned decision making.”* | Modeling potential futures via affective and cognitive means | **Feeling** (stimulus-recognition / affect) **Thinking** (anticipatory planning / cognition) | feeling : thinking :: affect : cognition :: sensory reactivity : logical simulation |

* All these aims and strategies emerge as adaptive processes shaped by **natural selection**.
* Millon's project secures **Personology** by rooting it firmly in the **laws of evolution**, which have broad applicability beyond biological systems.
* The **Existence** and **Adaptation** aims can be seen as **thermodynamic processes** related to organizing matter and sustaining systems against entropy.
* The **Replication** and **Abstraction** aims likely represent **boundary conditions** that distinguish life and mind from purely physical systems, marking thresholds of complexity and information processing.

## Scientific and Philosophical Commentary per Evolutionary Aim

| **Aim** | **Scientific Angle (Thermodynamics / Systems Theory / Cybernetics)** | **Philosophical Angle (Metaphysics / Epistemology / Mind)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Existence** | **Order creation = negentropy.** Thermodynamically, this is the origin of structure and complexity (Prigogine, Schrödinger). Living systems are dissipative structures that export entropy to sustain internal order. | The metaphysical *fact of being*—existence as defiance of entropy. Ties to Spinoza’s *conatus* or Laozi. Could map to the **existential baseline** of personhood. |
| **Adaptation** | **Cybernetic regulation.** Homeostasis involves feedback loops (first-order cybernetics). Autopoietic systems (Maturana & Varela) adapt via structural coupling. | Epistemic normativity: systems must *know* enough to maintain self-world balance. Kantian conditions of knowledge as a structure of accommodation/modification. Ties to *personal identity as stability through time*. |
| **Replication** | **Gene-centered view (Dawkins)** or **multi-level selection.** Also: information redundancy and error-correction under entropy. Evolution as information persistence across time. | Problem of persistence and *teleology*: why aim to survive or reproduce? May align with virtue ethics (flourishing of kind) or existentialism (what is worth perpetuating?). Axiom of self-worth as essential for personhood. |
| **Abstraction** | **Second-order cybernetics.** Internal modeling of self and world to anticipate outcomes. This may include consciousness, simulation, and predictive coding. | Mental time travel, free will, and representational mind. Key distinction of **persons** vs animals. Philosophically, abstraction = rational agency. Ties to Kant, Dennett, Metzinger. |

### **Additional Cross-Cutting Insights**

* **Thermodynamic Unfolding of Agency**: One could argue that each evolutionary aim represents a deeper embedding of agency within a system. The movement from existence → adaptation → replication → abstraction mirrors the deepening of autonomy and self-reference in complex systems.
* **Boundaries of Life and Mind**: The last two aims (Replication, Abstraction) may mark *thresholds*: replication marks the minimal condition for *life*, while abstraction marks the emergence of *mind* (or proto-personhood). This maps onto both biosemiotics and the enactive approach to cognition.
* **Unified Drive Toward Pattern Retention**: Each aim could be seen as a **strategy for pattern retention** under entropy:  
  + Existence = structural patterning.
  + Adaptation = regulatory patterning.
  + Replication = hereditary patterning.
  + Abstraction = anticipatory/symbolic patterning.
* **Relevance for Personology**: By grounding personality in strategies for resisting entropy and maintaining pattern integrity, you're reframing traits not as surface descriptors but as **adaptive modes** of thermodynamic and epistemic navigation.

1. Whenever referring to a nonspecific person, we use the pronoun “she”. This is to contribute to balancing the hundreds of years of writers using “he” for this purpose. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Future research will push the fundamental boundary further, developing a quantum basis for personality, [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Look into McAdams for comparison [↑](#footnote-ref-2)