Man's Construction of his Alternatives

This paper, throughout, deals with half-truths only. Nothing that it contains is, or is intended to be, wholly true. The theoretical statements propounded are no more than partially accurate constructions of events which, in turn, are no more than partially perceived. Moreover, what we propose, even in its truer aspects, will eventually be overthrown and displaced by something with more truth in it. Indeed, our theory is frankly designed to contribute effectively to its own eventual overthrow and displacement.

We think this is a good way for psychologists to theorize. When a scientist propounds a theory he has two choices: he can claim that what he says has been dictated to him by the real nature of things, or he can take sole responsibility for what he says and claim only that he has offered one man's hopeful construction of the realities of nature. In the first instance he makes a claim to objectivity in behalf of his theory, the scientist's equivalent of a claim to infallibility. In the second instance he offers only the hope that he may have hit upon some partial truth that may serve as a clue to inventing something better and he invites others to follow this clue to see what they can make of it. In this latter instance he does not hold up his theoretical proposal to be judged so much in terms of whether it is the truth

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at last or not—for he assumes from the outset that ultimate truth is not so readily at hand—but to be judged in terms of whether his proposition seems to lead toward and give way to fresh propositions; propositions which, in turn, may be more true than anything else has been thus far.

One of the troubles with what are, otherwise, good theories in the various fields of science is the claim to infallibility that is so often built into their structure. Even those theories which are built upon objective observation or upon first-hand experience make this claim by their failure to admit that what is observed is not revealed but only construed. In fact, the more objectively supported the theory at the time of its inception, the more likely it is to cause trouble after it has served its purpose. A conclusion supported by the facts is likely to be a good one at the time it is drawn. But, because facts themselves are open to reconstruction, such a theory soon becomes a dogmatism that may serve only to blind us to new perceptions of the facts.

Take, for example, the body of theoretical assumptions that Freud propounded out of his experience with psychoanalysis. There was so much truth in what he said—so much new truth. But like most theories of our times, psychoanalysis, as a theory, was conceived as an absolute truth, and, moreover, it was designed in such a manner that it tended to defy both logical examination and experimental validation. As the years go by, Freudianism, which deserves to be remembered as a brave outpost on the early frontier of psychological thought, is condemned to end its days as a crumbling stockade of proprietary dogmatism. Thus, as with other farseeing claims to absolute truth, history will have a difficult time deciding if Freudianism did more to accelerate psychological progress during the first half of the Twentieth Century than it did to impede progress during the last half.

This business of absolutism in modern science and the havoc it creates is a matter that has been given a good deal of thought in recent decades. It has been attacked on several fronts. First of all, modern science has itself attacked dogmatism through its widespread use of the method of experimentation. But experimentation, if assumed to be a way of receiving direct revelations from nature, can often be found living quite happily side by side with dogmatisms of the lowest order.

There is nothing especially revelational about events that happen in a laboratory—other events that happen elsewhere are just as real and are just as worth taking account of. Even the fact that an event took place in a manner predicted by the experimenter gives it no particular claim to being a special revelation from nature. If an experi-
lot of time either in believing that he must construe me as an introvert or in disputing the point.

In clinical interviewing, and particularly in psychotherapeutic interviewing, when the clinician is unable to deal with such a statement as a personal construction rather than as fact or fallacy, the hour is likely to come to a close with both parties annoyed with each other and both dreading their next appointment. But more than this, if I say of myself that I am an introvert, I am likely to be caught in my own subject-predicate trap. Even the inner self—my self—becomes burdened with the onus of actually being an introvert or of finding some way to be rid of the introversion that has climbed on my back. What has happened is that I named myself with a name and, having done so, too quickly forgot who invented the name and what he had on his mind at the time. From now on I try frantically to cope with what I have called myself. Moreover, my family and friends are often quite willing to join in the struggle.

Now back specifically to the law of the excluded middle. Here, too, we find a failure to take into account a psychological fact, the fact that human thought is essentially constructive in nature and that even the thinking of logicians and mathematicians is no exception. I say that I am an introvert, whatever that is. If I now go ahead and apply the law of the excluded middle, I come up with the dilemma that I must continue to claim either to be an introvert or not an introvert—one or the other. But is this necessarily so: may not introversion turn out to be a construct which is altogether irrelevant? If it is not relevant is it any more meaningful to say that I am not an introvert than to say that I am? Yet classical logic fails to make any distinction between its negatives and its irrelevancies; while modern psychology ought to make it increasingly clear to each of us that no proposition has more than a limited range of relevance, beyond which it makes no sense either to affirm or deny. So we now ought to visualize propositions which are not universal in their range of application but useful only within a restricted range of convenience. For each proposition, then, we see three alternatives, not two: it can be affirmed, it can be denied, or it can be declared irrelevant in the context to which it is applied. Thus, we argue, not for the inclusion of the long excluded middle—something between the yes and the no—but for a third possibility that is beyond the meaningful range of yes and no.

Apply this more psychological way of thinking to the proposition, "I am an introvert." Instead of lying awake trying to decide whether I am or am not an introvert, or taking frantic steps, as so many do, to prove that I am not, I simply go off to sleep with the thought
that, until the construct of introversion is demonstrated to be of some practical usefulness in my case, there is no point of trying to decide whether I am or not or what to do about it if I am. Thus we treat the subject-predicate problem and the excluded middle problem in pretty much the same way—we insist on demonstrating relevance before we lose any sleep over a proposition.

Let us try to summarize our criticisms of the two features of Western thought which have gone unchallenged for more than two thousand years. First of all, there is the dogmatism of subject-predicate language structure that is often presented under the guise of objectivity. According to this dogmatism, when I say that Professor Lindzey’s left shoe is an “introvert,” everyone looks at his shoe as if this were something his shoe was responsible for. Or if I say that Professor Cattell’s head is “discursive,” everyone looks over at him, as if the proposition had popped out of his head instead of out of mine. Don’t look at his head! Don’t look at that shoe! Look at me; I’m the one who is responsible for the statement. After you figure out what I mean you can look over there to see if you make any sense out of shoes and heads by construing them the way I do. It will not be easy to do this, for it means abandoning one of the most ancient way of thinking and talking to ourselves.

As far as the law of the excluded middle in this particular context is concerned, it does not matter whether a person has ever heard of this law or not, or whether he has ever sat down to puzzle out a similar notion on his own. The law is an everyday feature of nearly every educated man’s more intellectualized thought processes. The law says, assuming that the term “introvert” ever has meaning, that that shoe, at which we looked a moment ago, has to be construed either as an introvert or as not an introvert; it has simply got to be seen as one or the other. There is no middle ground.

Some people argue against the law of the excluded middle by claiming that the shoe could be a little introvertish, but not completely introvert, or that it could be a little nonintrovertish, though not wholly nonintrovert. This is the notion of shades of gray that can be perceived between black and white. But this notion of reifying the excluded middle by talking about grays is not what we are proposing. In fact, we see this gray thinking as a form of concretism that merely equivocates and fails to get off the ground into the atmosphere of abstraction.

What we are saying, instead, is that “introversion” may well enough be a term that has meaning in some contexts, but that it does not go well with shoes. Since it does not apply to shoes, it makes no more sense to say that Professor Lindzey’s left shoe is not an intro-
vert than to say that it is. Thus we see three possibilities, not two as the law would insist: the shoe is an introvert; the shoe is not an introvert; and the shoes do not fall within the context of the construct of introversion versus nonintroversion. The third possibility is not a middle proposition in any intermediate sense, but rather a kind of outside, beyond the pale, kind of proposition.

So much for a summary of this section of our discourse. In spite of our criticisms let us not say that the inadequacies we have pointed out prevented our language and thought from leading us along a path of progress. Remember that we believe that half-truths serve to pave the way toward better truths. Time spent with a half-truth is not necessarily wasted; it may have been exceedingly profitable. In order to appreciate a half-truth one has to examine two things: what it replaced, and what it led up to. Let us see what the kind of thing we have been criticizing actually replaced. Let us compare it with more primitive modes of language and thought.

Western thinking, which has pretty much overrun the world recently, takes the very practical view that a word is beheld by the object it is used to describe. The object determines it. This is a moderate improvement over the so-called magical way of thinking which has it that the object is beheld by the word. The improvement has been the basis of scientific thinking, particularly the experimentalism that has psychologists and others bubbling with so much excitement these days.

Let us see how the improvement works. Say the word and the object will jump out at you—that is magical thinking; very bad! Prod the object and the word will jump out at you—that is objective thinking; very good! Worth publishing! Say "Genie, come genie" and hope that a genie will pop out of the bottle—that is magical; no good! Kick the bottle until either a genie pops out or does not pop out—now that is science!

But there is something one can do besides shouting, "Genie, come genie," or kicking the bottle through a series of statistically controlled experiments. He can ask himself, and the other people who have worked themselves up over the genie business, just what they are trying to get at. This is what the skilled psychotherapist does in dealing with the thoughts of man. It is based on the notion that "genie" is a construct that someone erected in order to find his way through a maze of events. The approach is not a substitute for experimentation but a useful prelude to it. It is a proper substitute, however, for random measurement of verbalizations.

This is the way we see the matter: magical thinking has it that
the object is beholden to the word—when the word is spoken the object must produce itself. So-called objective thinking, under which it has been possible to make great scientific progress, says that the word is beholden to the object—kick the bottle to validate the word. If, however, we build our sciences on a recognition of the psychological nature of thought we take a third position—the word is beholden to the person who utters it, or, more properly speaking, to the construction system, that complex of personal constructs of which it is a part.

This concern with personal meaning should prove no less valuable to the scientist than it has to the psychotherapist. It stems from the notion that when a person uses a word he is expressing, in part, his own construction of events. One comes to understand the communication, therefore, not by assuming the magical existence of the word’s counterpart in reality and then invoking that counterpart by incantation; nor does he understand it by scourging through a pile of accumulated facts to see if one of them will own up to the word, but rather he understands the communication by examining the personal construction system within which the word arose and came to have intimate meaning for the individual who attempted to communicate.

How does this apply to motives? We have already said that we do not even use the term as a part of our own construction system, yet it enters our system, perforce, as a matter to be construed. If one catches his friends in the act of using such a term as “motives,” how does he act? Does he put his fingers in his ears? Does he start kicking the bottle of reality to see if it produces the phenomenon? If it fails shall he accuse his friends of irrationality? We think not.

Again, if we so much as start to inquire into motivation as a construct, do we not thereby reify it? Or if we deal with a realm which so many believe is essentially irrational in nature, are we not capitulating ourselves to irrationality? And if we attempt to think rationally about the behavior of an individual who is acting irrationally, are we not closing our eyes to an irrationality that actually exists? Are we not hiding behind a safe intellectualism? All of these are questions that rise out of the long-accepted assumptions of a subject-predicate mode of thought that tries to make reality responsible for the words that are used to construe it. Because of the currency of this kind of interpretation we run the risk we mentioned a few moments ago—the risk of being bracketed with either the classic rationalists or the modern intuitionists.

Actually we are neither. Our position is that of a psychology of personal constructs, a psychologist’s system for construing persons who themselves construe in all kinds of other ways. Thus I, Person A,
Construct A', a component construct within my own construction system, to understand Construct B', a component construct within Person B's construction system. His B' is not a truth revealed to him by nature. Nor is my A' revealed to me by his human nature. Construct A' is my responsibility, just as B' is his. In each case the validity of the construct rests, among other things, upon its prophetic effectiveness, not upon any claim to external-origin, either divine or natural.

Now let us hope we are in a safe position to deal with the assessment of human motives without appearing either to reify them or to talk nonsense. Our discussion might as well start where our thinking started.

Some twenty years or more ago a group of us were attempting to provide a traveling psychological clinic service to the schools in the state of Kansas. One of the principal sources of referrals was, of course, teachers. A teacher complained about a pupil. This word-bound complaint was taken as prima facie grounds for kicking the bottle—I mean examining the pupil. If we kicked the pupil around long enough and hard enough we could usually find some grounds to justify any teacher's complaint. This procedure was called in those days, just as it is still called, "diagnosis." It was in this manner that we conformed to the widely accepted requirements of the scientific method—we matched hypothesis with evidence and thus arrived at objective truth. In due course of time we became quite proficient in making something out of teachers' complaints and we got so we could adduce some mighty subtle evidence. In short, we began to fancy ourselves as pretty sensitive clinicians.

Now as every scientist and every clinician knows and is fond of repeating, treatment depends upon diagnosis. First you find out what is wrong—really wrong. Then you treat it. In treatment you have several alternatives; you can cut it out of the person, or you can remove the child from the object, or you can alter the mechanism he employs to deal with the object, or you can compensate for the child's behavior by taking up a hobby in the basement, or teach the child to compensate for it, or if nothing better turns up, you can sympathize with everybody who has to put up with the youngster. But first, always first, you must kick the bottle to make it either confirm or reject your diagnostic hunches. So in Kansas we diagnosed pupils and, having impaled ourselves and our clients within our diagnoses, we cast about more or less frantically for ways of escape.

After persevering in this classical stupidity—the treatment-depends-on-objective-diagnosis stupidity—for more years than we like to count, we began to suspect that we were being trapped in some
pretty fallacious reasoning. We would have liked to blame the teachers for getting us off on the wrong track. But we had verified their complaints, hadn’t we? We had even made “differential diagnoses,” a way of choosing up sides in the name-calling games commonly played in clinical staff meetings.

Two things became apparent. The first was that the teacher’s complaint was not necessarily something to be verified or disproved by the facts in the case, but was, rather a construction of events in a way that, within the limits and assumptions of her personal construction system, made the most sense to her at the moment. The second was the realization that, in assuming diagnosis to be the independent variable and treatment the dependent variable, we had placed the cart before the horse. It would have been better if we had made our diagnoses in the light of changes that do occur in children or that can be made to occur, rather than trying to shape those changes to independent but irrelevant psychometric measurements or biographical descriptions.

What we would like to make clear is that both these difficulties have the same root—the traditional rationale of science that leads us to look for the locus of meaning of words in their objects of reference rather than in their subjects of origin. We hear a word and look to what is talked about rather than listen to the person who utters it. A teacher often complained that a child was “lazy.” We turned to the child to determine whether she was right or not. If we found clear evidence that would support a hypothesis of laziness, then laziness was what it was—nothing else—and diagnosis was complete. Diagnosis having been accomplished, treatment was supposed to ensue. What does one do to cure laziness? While, of course, it was not quite as simple as this, the paradigm is essentially the one we followed.

Later we began to put “laziness” in quotes. We found that a careful appraisal of the teacher’s construction system gave us a much better understanding of the meaning of the complaint. This, together with some further inquiry into the child’s outlook, often enabled us to arrive at a vantage point from which one could deal with the problem in various ways. It occurred to us that we might, for example, help the teacher reconstrue the child in terms other than “laziness”—terms which gave her more latitude for exercising her own particular creative talents in dealing with him. Again, we might help the child deal with the teacher so as to alleviate her discomfort. And, of course, there was sometimes the possibility that a broader reorientation of the child toward himself and school matters in general would prove helpful.

We have chosen the complaint of “laziness” as our example for
a more special reason. "Laziness" happens to be a popular motivational concept that has widespread currency among adults who try to get others to make something out of themselves. Moreover, our disillusionment with motivational conceptualization in general started with this particular term and arose out of the specific context of school psychological services.

Our present position regarding human motives was approached by stages. First we realized that even when a hypothesis of laziness was confirmed, there was little that could be said or done in consequence of such a finding. While this originally appeared to be less true of other motivational constructs, such as appetite or affection, in each instance the key to treatment, or even to differential prediction of outcomes, appeared to reside within the framework of other types of constructs.

Another observation along the way was that the teachers who used the construct of "laziness" were usually those who had widespread difficulties in their classrooms. Soon we reached the point in our practice where we routinely used the complaint of "laziness" as a point of departure for reorienting the teacher. It usually happened that there was more to be done with her than with the child. So it was, also, with other complaints cast in motivational terms. In general, then, we found that the most practical approach to so-called motivational problems was to try to reorient the people who thought in such terms. Complaints about motivation told us much more about the complainants than it did about their pupils.

This is a generalization that seems to get more and more support from our clinical experience. When we find a person who is more interested in manipulating people for his own purposes, we usually find him making complaints about their motives. When we find a person who is concerned about motives, he usually turns out to be one who is threatened by his fellowmen and wants to put them in their place. There is no doubt but that the construct of motives is one which is widely used but it usually turns out to be a part of the language of complaint about the behavior of other people. When it appears in the language of the client himself, as it does occasionally, it always—literally always—appears in the context of a kind of rationalization apparently designed to appease the therapist, not in the spontaneous utterances of the client who is in good rapport with his therapist.

One technique we came to use was to ask the teacher what the child would do if she did not try to motivate him. Often the teacher would insist that the child would do nothing—absolutely nothing—just
sit! Then we would suggest that she try a nonmotivational approach and let him "just sit." We would ask her to observe how he went about "just sitting." Invariably the teacher would be able to report some extremely interesting goings-on. An analysis of what the "lazy" child did while he was being lazy often furnished her with her first glimpse into the child's world and provided her with her first solid grounds for communication with him. Some teachers found that their laziest pupils were those who could produce the most novel ideas; others that the term "laziness" had been applied to activities that they had simply been unable to understand or appreciate.

It was some time later that we sat down and tried to formulate the general principles that undergirded our clinical experiences with teachers and their pupils. The more we thought about it, the more it seemed that our problems had always resolved themselves into questions of what the child would do if left to his own devices rather than questions about the amount of his motivation. These questions of what the child would do seemed to hinge primarily on what alternatives his personal construction of the situation allowed him to sense. While his construed alternatives were not necessarily couched in language symbols, nor could the child always clearly represent his alternatives, even to himself, they nonetheless set the outside limits on his day-to-day behavior. In brief, whenever we get embroiled in questions of motivation we bogged down, the teachers bogged down, and the children continued to aggravate everybody within earshot. When we forgot about motives and set about understanding the practical alternatives which children felt they were confronted by, the aggravations began to resolve themselves.

What we have said about our experiences with children also turned up in our psychotherapeutic experiences with adults. After months or, in some cases, years of psychotherapy with the same client, it did often prove to be possible to predict his behavior in terms of motives. This, of course, was gratifying, but predictive efficiency is not the only criterion of a good construction, for one's understanding of a client should also point the way to resolving his difficulties. It was precisely at this point that motivational constructs failed to be of practical service, just as they had failed to be of service in helping children and teachers get along with each other. Always the psychotherapeutic solution turned out to be a reconstruing process, not a mere labeling of the client's motives. To be sure, there were clients who never reduced their reconstructions to precise verbal terms, yet still were able to extricate themselves from vexing circumstances. And there were clients who get along best under conditions of support and reassurance with
a minimum of verbal structuring on the part of the therapist. But even in these cases, the solutions were not worked out in terms of anything that could properly be called motives, and the evidence always pointed to some kind of reconstruing process that enabled the client to make his choice between new sets of alternatives not previously open to him in a psychological sense.

Now, perhaps, it is time to launch into the third phase of our discussion. We started by making some remarks of a philosophical nature and from there we dropped back to recall some of the practical experience that first led us to question the construct of motivation. Let us turn now to the formulation of psychological theory and to the part that motivation plays in it.

A half century ago William McDougall published his little volume, *Physiological Psychology*. In the opening pages he called his contemporary psychologists’ attention to the fact that the concept of energy had been invented by physicists in order to account for movement of objects, and that some psychologists had blandly assumed that they too would have to find a place for it in their systems. While McDougall was to go on in his lifetime to formulate a theoretical system based on instinctual drives and thus, it seems to us, failed to heed his own warning, what he said about the construct of energy still provides us with a springboard for expounding a quite different theoretical position.

The physical world presented itself to preclassical man as a world of solid objects. He saw matter as an essentially inert substance, rather than as a complex of related motion. His axes of reference were spatial dimensions—length, breadth, depth—rather than temporal dimensions. The flow of time was something he could do very little about and he was inclined to take a passive attitude toward it. Even mass, a dimension which lent itself to more dynamic interpretations, was likely to be construed in terms of size equivalents.

Classical man, as he emerged upon the scene, gradually became aware of motion as something that had eluded his predecessors. But, for him, motion was still superimposed upon nature’s rocks and hills. Inert matter was still the phenomenon, motion was only the epiphenomenon. Action, vitality, and energy were the breath of life that had to be breathed into the inertness of nature’s realities. In Classical Greece this thought was magnificently expressed in new forms of architecture and sculpture that made the marble quarried from the Greek islands reach for the open sky, or ripple like a soft garment in the warm Aegean breeze. But motion, though an intrinsic feature of the Greek idiom, was always something superimposed, something added.
It belonged to the world of the ideal and not to the hard world of reality.

Today our modern psychology approaches its study of man from the same vantage point. He is viewed as something static in his natural state, hence, something upon which motion, life, and action have to be superimposed. In substance he is still perceived as like the marble out of which the Greeks carved their statues of flowing motion and ethereal grace. He comes alive, according to most of the psychology of our day, only through the application of special enlivening forces. We call these forces by such names as "motives," "incentives," "needs," and "drives." Thus, just as the physicists had to erect the construct of energy to fill the gap left by their premature assumption of a basically static universe, so psychology has had to burden itself with a construct made necessary by its inadequate assumption about the basic nature of man.

We now arrive at the same point in our theoretical reasoning at which we arrived some years earlier in appraising our clinical experience. In each case we find that efforts to assess human motives run into practical difficulty because they assume inherently static properties in human nature. It seems appropriate, therefore, at this juncture to reexamine our implied assumptions about human nature. If we then decide to base our thinking upon new assumptions, we can next turn to the array of new constructs that may be erected for the proper elaboration of the fresh theoretical position.

There are several ways in which we can approach our problem. We could, for example, suggest to ourselves, as we once suggested to certain unperceptive classroom teachers, that we examine what a person does when he is not being motivated. Does he turn into some kind of inert substance? If not—and he won't—should we not follow up our observation with a basic assumption that any person is motivated, motivated for no other reason than that he is alive? Life itself could be defined as a form of process or movement. Thus, in designating man as our object of psychological inquiry, we would be taking it for granted that movement was an essential property of his being, not something that had to be accounted for separately. We would be talking about a form of movement—man—not something that had to be motivated.

Pursuant to this line of reasoning, motivation ceases to be a special topic of psychology. Nor, on the other hand, can it be said that motivation constitutes the whole of psychological substance; although from the standpoint of another theoretical system, it might be proper to characterize our position so. Within our system, however, the term, "motivation," can only appear as a redundancy.
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How else can we characterize this stand with respect to motivation? Perhaps this will help: motivational theories can be divided into two types, push theories and pull theories. Under push theories we find such terms as drive, motive, or even stimulus. Pull theories use such constructs as purpose, value, or need. In terms of a well-known metaphor, these are the pitch fork theories on the one hand and the carrot theories on the other. But our theory is neither of these. Since we prefer to look to the nature of the animal himself, ours is probably best called a jackass theory.

Thus far our reasoning has led us to a point of view from which the construct of "human motives" appears redundant—redundant, that is, as far as accounting for human action is concerned. But traditional motivational theory is not quite so easily dismissed. There is another issue that now comes to the fore. It is the question of what directions human actions can be expected to take.

We must recognize that the construct of "motive" has been traditionally used for two purposes: to account for the fact that the person is active rather than inert, and also for the fact that he chooses to move in some directions rather than in others. It is not surprising that, in the past, a single construct has been used to cover both issues; for if we take the view that the human organism is set in motion only by the impact of special forces, it is reasonable to assume also that those forces must give it direction as well as impetus. But now, if we accept the view that the organism is already in motion simply by virtue of its being alive, then we have to ask ourselves if we do not still require the services of "motives" to explain the directionality of the movement. Our answer to this question is, no. Let us see why.

Here, as before, we turn first to our experiences as a clinician to find the earliest inklings of a new theoretical position. Specifically, we turn to experiences in psychotherapy.

When a psychologist undertakes psychotherapy with a client he can approach his task from any one of a number of viewpoints. He can, as many do, devote most of his attention to a kind of running criticism of the mistakes the client makes, his fallacies, his irrationalities, his misperceptions, his resistances, his primitive mechanisms. Or, as others do, he can keep measuring his client; so much progress today, so much loss yesterday, gains in this respect, relapses in that. If he prefers, he can keep his attention upon his own role, or the relationship between himself and his client, with the thought that it is not actually given to him ever to know how the client's mind works, nor is it his responsibility to make sure that it works correctly, but only that he should provide the kind of warm and responsive human setting in which the client can best solve his own problems.
Any one of these approaches may prove helpful to the client. But there is still another approach that, from our personal experience, can prove most helpful both to the client and to the psychotherapist. Instead of assuming, on the one hand, that the therapist is obliged to bring the client's thinking into line, or, on the other, that the client will mysteriously bring his own thinking into line once he has been given the proper setting, we can take the stand that client and therapist are conjoining in an exploratory venture. The therapist assumes neither the position of judge nor that of the sympathetic bystander. He is sincere about this; he is willing to learn along with his client. He is the client's fellow researcher who seeks, first to understand, then to examine, and finally to assist the client in subjecting alternatives to experimental test and revision.

The psychologist who goes at psychotherapy this way says to himself, "I am about to have the rare opportunity of examining the inner workings of that most intricate creation of all of nature, a human personality. While many scholars have written about the complexity of this human personality, I am now about to see for myself how one particular personality functions. Moreover, I am about to have an experienced colleague join me in this venture, the very person whose personality is to be examined. He will help me as best he can, but there will be times when he cannot help, when he will be as puzzled and confused as I am."

When psychotherapy is carried out in this vein the therapist, instead of asking himself continually whether his client is right or not, or whether he himself is behaving properly, peers intently into the intimate psychological processes the unusual relationship permits him to see. He inquires rather than condemns; he explores rather than rejects or approves. How does this creature, man, actually think? How does he make choices that seem to be outside the conventionalized modes of thought? What is the nature of his logic—quite apart from how logicians define logic? How does he solve his problems? What ideas does he express for which he has no words?

Out of this kind of experience with psychotherapy we found ourselves becoming increasingly impatient with certain standard psychotherapeutic concepts. "Insight" was one of the first to have a hollow sound. It soon became apparent that, in any single case, there was any number of different possible insights that could be used to structure the same facts, all of them more or less true. As one acquires a variety of psychotherapeutic experience he begins to be amazed by how sick or deviant some clients can be and still surmount their difficulties, and how well or insightful others can be and yet fall apart at every
turn. Certainly the therapist who approaches his task primarily as a scientist is soon compelled to concede that unconventional insights often work as well or better than the standardized insights prescribed by some current psychological theory.

Another popular psychotherapeutic concept that made less and less sense was "resistance." To most therapists resistance is a kind of perverse stubbornness in the client. Most therapists are annoyed by it. Some accuse the client of resisting whenever their therapeutic efforts begin to bog down. But our own experiences with resistance were a good deal like our experiences with laziness—they bespoke more of the therapist's perplexity than of the client's rebellion. If we had been dependent entirely on psychotherapeutic experiences with our own clients we might have missed this point; it would have been too easy for us, like the others, to blame our difficulties on the motives of the client. But we were fortunate enough to also have opportunities for supervising therapists and here, because we were not ourselves quite so intimately involved, it was possible to see resistance in terms of the therapist's naivete.

When the so-called resistance was finally broken through—to use a psychotherapist's idiom—it seemed proper, instead of congratulating ourselves on our victory over a stubborn client, to ask ourselves and our client just what had happened. There were, of course, the usual kinds of reply, "I just couldn't say that to you then," or "I knew I was being evasive, but I just didn't know what to do about it," etc.

But was this stubbornness? Some clients went further and expressed it this way, "To have said then what I have said today would not have meant the same thing." This may seem like a peculiar remark, but from the standpoint of personal construct theory it makes perfectly good sense. A client can express himself only within the framework of his construct system. Words alone do not convey meaning. What this client appears to be saying is this! When he has the constructs for expressing himself the words that he uses ally themselves with those constructs and they make sense when he utters them. To force him to utter words which do not parallel his constructs, or to mention events which are precariously construed, is to plunge him into a chaos of personal nonsense, however it may clarify matters for the therapist. In short, our experience with psychotherapy led us to believe that it was not orneriness that made the client hold out so-called important therapeutic material, but a genuine inability to express himself in terms that would not appear, from his point of view, to be utterly misconstrued.

Perhaps these brief recollections of therapeutic experience will
suffice to show how we began to be as skeptical of motives as direction-finding devices as we were skeptical of them as action-producing forces. Over and over again, it appeared that our clients were making their choices, not in terms of the alternatives we saw open to them, but in terms of the alternatives they saw open to them. It was their network of constructions that made up the daily mazes that they ran, not the pure realities that appeared to us to surround them. To try to explain a temper tantrum or an acute schizophrenic episode in terms of motives only was to miss the whole point of the client’s system of personal dilemmas. The child’s temper tantrum is, for him, one of the few remaining choices left to him. So for the psychotic; with his pathways structured the way they are in his mind, he has simply chosen from a particular limited set of alternatives. How else can he behave? His other alternatives are even less acceptable.

We have still not quite answered the question of explaining directionality. We have described only the extent to which our therapeutic experiences led us to question the value of motives. But, after all, we have not yet found, from our experience, that clients do what they do because there is nothing else they can do. We have observed only that they do what they do because their choice systems are definitely limited. But, even by this line of reasoning, they do have choices, often bad ones, to be sure, but still choices. So our question of directionality of behavior is narrowed down by the realization that a person’s behavior must take place within the limited dimensions of his personal construct system. Yet as long as his system does have dimensions it must provide him with some sets of alternatives. And so long as he has some alternatives of his own making we must seek to explain why he chooses some of them in preference to others.

Before we leave off talking about clinical experience and take up the next and most difficult phase of our discussion, it will do no harm to digress for a few moments and talk about the so-called neurotic paradox. O. H. Mowrer has described this as “the paradox of behavior which is at one and the same time self-perpetuating and self-defeating.” We can state the paradox in the form of a question. “Why does a person sometimes persist in unrewarding behavior?” Reinforcement theory finds this an embarrassing question, while contiguity theory, to which some psychologists have turned in their embarrassment, finds the converse question equally embarrassing, “Why does a person sometimes not persist in unrewarding behavior?”

From the standpoint of the psychology of personal constructs, however, there is no neurotic paradox. Or, to be more correct, the paradox is the jam certain learning theorists get themselves into rather than
the jam their clients get themselves into. Not that clients stay out of jams, but they have their own ingenious ways of getting into them and they need no assistance from us psychologists. To say it another way, the behavior of a so-called neurotic client does not seem paradoxical to him until he tries to rationalize it in terms his therapist can understand. It is when he tries to use his therapist's construction system that the paradox appears. Within the client's own limited construction system he may be faced with a dilemma but not with a paradox.

Perhaps this little digression into the neurotic paradox will help prepare the ground for the next phase of our discussion. Certainly it will help if it makes clear that the criteria by which a person chooses between the alternatives, in terms of which he has structured his world, are themselves cast in terms of constructions. Men not only construe their alternatives, but they construe also criteria for choosing between them. For us psychologists who try to understand what is going on in the minds of our clients it is not as simple as saying that the client will persist in rewarding behavior, or even that he will vacillate between immediate and remote rewards. We have to know what this person construes to be a reward, or, better still, we can bypass such motivational terms as “reward,” which ought to be redefined for each new client and on each new occasion, and abstract from human behavior some psychological principle that will transcend the tedious varieties of personalized motives.

If we succeed in this achievement we may be able to escape that common pitfall of so-called objective thinking, the tendency to reify our constructs and treat them as if they were not constructs at all, but actually all the things that they were originally only intended to construe. Such a formulation may even make it safer for us to write operational definitions for purposes of research, without becoming lost in the subject-predicate fallacy. In clinical language it may enable us to avoid concretistic thinking—the so-called brain-injured type of thinking—which is what we call operationalism when we happen to find it in a client who is frantically holding on to his mental faculties.

Now we have been procrastinating long enough. Let us get on to the most difficult part of our discussion. We have talked about experiences with clients who, because they hoped we might be of help to them, honored us with invitations to the rare intimacies of their personal lives and ventured to show us the shadowy processes by which their lives were ordered. We turned aside briefly in our discussion to talk about the neurotic paradox, hoping that what we could point to there would help the listener anticipate what needed to come next. Now we turn again to a more theoretical form of discourse.
If man, as the psychologist is to see him, exists primarily in the dimensions of time, and only secondarily in the dimensions of space, then the terms which we erect for understanding him ought to take primary account of this view. If we want to know why man does what he does, then the terms of our why should extend themselves in time rather than in space; they should be events rather than things; they should be mileposts rather than destinations. Clearly, man lives in the present. He stands firmly astride the chasm that separates the past from the future. He is the only connecting link between these two universes. He, and only he, can bring them into harmony with each other. To be sure, there are other forms of existence that have belonged to the past and, presumably, will also belong to the future. A rock that has rested firm for ages may well exist in the future also, but it does not link the past with the future. In its mute way it links only past with past. It does not anticipate; it does not reach out both ways to snatch handfuls from each of the two worlds in order to bring them together and subject them to the same stern laws. Only man does that.

If this is the picture of man, as the psychologist envisions him—man, a form of movement; man, always quick enough, as long as he is alive, to stay astride the darting present—then we cannot expect to explain him either entirely in terms of the past or entirely in terms of the future. We can only explain him, psychologically, as a link between the two. Let us, therefore, formulate our basic postulate for psychological theory in the light of this conjunctive vision of man. We can say it this way: a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events.

Taking this proposition as point of departure we can quickly begin to sketch a theoretical structure for psychology that will, undoubtedly, turn out to be novel in many unexpected ways. We can say next that man develops his ways of anticipating events by construing—by scratching out his channels of thought. Thus he builds his own maze. His runways are the constructs he forms, each a two-way street, each essentially a pair of alternatives between which he can choose.

Another person, attempting to enter this labyrinth, soon gets lost. Even a therapist has to be led patiently back and forth through the system, sometimes for months on end, before he can find his way without the client's help, or tell to what overt behavior each passage-way will lead. Many of the runways are conveniently posted with word signs, but most of them are dark, cryptically labeled, or without any word signs at all. Some are rarely traveled. Some the client is reluctant to disclose to his guest. Often therapists lose patience and
prematurely start trying to blast shortcuts in which both they and their clients soon become trapped. But worst of all, there are those therapists who refuse to believe that they are in the strangely structured world of man, insisting only that the meanderings in which they are led are merely the play of whimsical motives upon their blind and helpless client.

Our figure of speech should not be taken too literally. The labyrinth is conceived as a network of constructs, each of which is essentially an abstraction and, as such, can be picked up and laid down over many, many different events in order to bring them into focus and clothe them with personal meaning. Moreover, the constructs are subject to continual revision, although the complex interdependent relationship between constructs in the system often makes it precarious for the person to revise one construct without taking into account the disruptive effect upon major segments of the system.

In our efforts to communicate the notion of a personal construct system we repeatedly ran into difficulty because listeners identify personal constructs with the classic view of a concept. Concepts have long been known as units of logic and are treated as if they existed independently of any particular person's psychological processes. But when we use the notion of "construct" we have nothing of this sort in mind; we are talking about a psychological process in a living person. Such construct has, for us, no existence independent of the person whose thinking it characterizes. The question of whether it is logical or not has no bearing on its existence, for it is wholly a psychological rather than a logical affair. Furthermore, since it is a psychological affair, it has no necessary allegiance to the verbal forms in which classical concepts have been traditionally cast. The personal construct we talk about bears no essential relation to grammatical structure, syntax, words, language, or even communication; nor does it imply consciousness. It is simply a psychologically construed unit for understanding human processes.

We must confess that we often run into another kind of difficulty. In an effort to understand what we are talking about a listener often asks if the personal construct is an intellectual affair. We find that, willy-nilly, we invite this kind of question because of our use of such terms as thought and thinking. Moreover, we are speaking in the terms of a language system whose words stand for traditional divisions of mental life, such as "intellectual."

Let us answer this way. A construct owes no special allegiance to the intellect, as against the will or the emotions. In fact, we do not find it either necessary or desirable to make that classic trichoto-
mous division of mental life. After all, there is so much that is "emotional" in those behaviors commonly called "intellectual" and there is so much "intellectualized" contamination in typical "emotional" upheavals that the distinction merely becomes a burdensome nuisance. For some time now we have been quite happy to chuck all these notions of intellect, will, and emotion, and, so far, we cannot say we have experienced any serious loss.

Now we are at the point in our discourse where we hope our listeners are ready to assume, either from conviction or for the sake of argument, that man, from a psychological viewpoint, makes of himself a bridge between past and future in a manner that is unique among creatures, that, again from a psychological viewpoint, his processes are channelized by the personal constructs he erects in order to perform this function, and finally, that he organizes his constructs into a personal system that is no more conscious than it is unconscious and no more intellectual than it is emotional. This personal construct system provides him both with freedom of decision and limitation of action—freedom, because it permits him to deal with the meanings of events rather than being helplessly pushed about by them, and limitation, because he can never make choices outside the world of alternatives he has erected for himself.

We have left to the last the question of what determines man's behavioral choices between his self-construed alternatives. Each choice that he makes has implications for his future. Each turn of the road he chooses to travel brings him to a fresh vantage point from which he can judge the validity of his past choices and elaborate his present pattern of alternatives for choices yet to be made. Always the future beckons him and always he reaches out in tremulous anticipation to touch it. He lives in anticipation; we mean this literally; *he lives in anticipation!* His behavior is governed, not simply by *what* he anticipates—whether good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, self-vindicating or self-confounding—but by *where* he believes his choices will place him in respect to the remaining turns in the road. If he chooses this fork in the road will it lead to a better vantage point from which to see the road beyond or will it be the one that abruptly brings him face-to-face with a blank wall?

What we are saying about the criteria of man's choices is not a second theoretical assumption, added to our basic postulate to take the place of the traditional beliefs in separate motives, but is a natural outgrowth of that postulate—a corollary to it. Let us state it so. *A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system.*
MAN'S CONSTRUCTION OF HIS ALTERNATIVES

Such a corollary appears to us to be implicit in our postulate that a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events. For the sake of simplification we have skipped over the formal statement of some of the intervening corollaries of personal construct theory: the corollary that deals with construing, the corollary that deals with construct system, and the corollary that deals with the dichotomous nature of constructs. But we have probably covered these intervening ideas well enough in the course of our exposition.

What we are saying is this crucial Choice Corollary gives us the final ground for dismissing motivation as a necessary psychological construct. It is that if a person's processes are channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events, he will make his choices in such a way as to define or extend his system of channels, for this must necessarily be his comprehensive way of anticipating events.

At the risk of being tedious, let us recapitulate again. We shall be brief. Perhaps we can condense it into three sentences. First we saw no need for a closet full of motives to explain the fact that man was active rather than inert; there was no sense in assuming that he was inert in the first place. And now we see no need to invoke a concept of motives to explain the directions that his actions take; the fact that he lives in anticipation automatically takes care of that. Result: no catalogue of motives to clutter up our system and, we hope, a much more coherent psychological theory about living man.

At this point our discourse substantially concludes itself. What we have left to offer are essentially footnotes that are intended to be either defensive or provocative, perhaps both! Questions naturally arise the moment one begins to pursue the implications of this kind of theorizing. One can scarcely take more than a few steps before he begins to stumble over a lot of ancient landmarks that remain to serve no purpose except to get in the way. Perhaps it is only fair that we spotlight some of these relics in the hope of sparing our listeners some barked intellectual shins.

Is this a dynamic theory? This is the kind of question our clinical colleagues are likely to ask. We are tempted to give a flat no to that question. No, this is not what is ordinarily called a dynamic theory: it intentionally parts company with psychoanalysis, for example—respectfully but nonetheless intentionally. However, if what is meant by a "dynamic theory" is a theory that envisions man as active rather than inert, then this is an all-out dynamic theory. It is so dynamic that it does not need any special system of dynamics to keep it running! What must be made clear, else our whole discourse falls flat on its
face, is that we do not envision the behavior of man in terms of the external forces bearing upon him; that is a view we are quite ready to leave to the dialectic materialists and to some of their unwitting allies who keep chattering about scientific determinism and other subject-predicate forms of nonsense.

Is this rationalism revisited? We anticipated this question at the beginning of our discussion. We are tempted to answer now by claiming that it is one of the few genuine departures from rationalism, perhaps the first in the field of psychology. But here is a tricky question, because it is not often clear whether one is referring to extra-psychological rationalism or to an essential-psychological rationalism that is often imperfect when judged by classical standards and often branded as "irrationality," or whether the question refers simply to any verbalized structure applied to the behavior of man in an effort to understand him.

Certainly ours is not an extra-psychological rationalism. Instead it frankly attempts to deal with the essential rationalism that is actually demonstrated in the thinking of man. In doing so it deals with what is sometimes called the world of the irrational and nonrational.

But in another sense our interpretation, in its own right and quite apart from its subject matter, is a psychologist's rationale designed to help him understand how man comes to believe and act the way he does. Such a rationale approaches its task the way it does, not because it believes that logic has to be as it is because there is no other way for it to be, not because it believes that man behaves the way he does because there is no other way for him to react to external determining forces, nor even because the rationale's own construction of man provides him with no alternatives, but rather, because we have the hunch that the way to understand all things, even the ramblings of a regressed schizophrenic client, is to construe them so as to make them predictable. To some this spells rationalism, pure and simple, probably because they are firmly convinced that the nether world of man's motives is so hopelessly irrational that anyone who tries to understand that world sensibly must surely be avoiding contact with man as he really is.

Finally, there is the most important question of all: how does the system work? That is a topic to be postponed to another time and occasion. Of course, we think it does work. We use it in psychotherapy and in psychodiagnostic planning for psychotherapy. We also find a place for it in dealing with many of the affairs of everyday life. But there is no place here for the recitation of such details. We hope only that, so far as we have gone, we have been reasonably clear, and
a mite provocative, for only by being both clear and provocative can we give our listeners something they can set their teeth into.

ADDENDUM

The invitation to prepare this paper was accompanied by a list of nine issues upon which, it was presumed, would hinge the major differences to be found among any group of motivational theorists. On the face of it such a list seems altogether fair. But one can scarcely pose even one such question, much less nine of them, without exacting hostages to his own theoretical loyalties. And if a correspondent answers in the terminology of the questions posed, he, in turn, immediately bases his discourse on the assumptions of an alien theory. Once he has done that he will, sooner or later, have to talk as if the differences he seeks to emphasize are merely semantical.

Yet the nine questions need to be met, if not head on, at least candidly enough to be disposed of.

1. Is it essential in assessing motives to provide some appraisal of the ego, processes, directive mechanisms, or cognitive controls that intervene between the motive and its expression?

"Ego" is a psychoanalytic term; we still don't know what it means. "Cognitive" is a classical term that implies a natural cleavage between psychological processes, a cleavage that confuses everything and clarifies nothing; let's forget it. The notion of a "motive" on the one hand and "its expression" on the other commits one to the view that what is expressed is not the person but the motivational gremlins that have possessed him. Finally, if the term "directive mechanisms" is taken in a generic sense, then we can say that we see these as in the form of constructs formulated by the person himself and in terms of which he casts his alternatives. What needs to be assessed are these personal constructs if one wishes to understand what a person is up to.

2. How important are conscious as opposed to unconscious motives in understanding human behavior? Are there conditions under which one type of motivation is likely to be of particular importance?

We do not use the conscious-unconscious dichotomy, but we do recognize that some of the personal constructs a person seeks to subsume within his system prove to be fleeting or elusive. Sometimes this is because they are loose rather than tight, as in the first phase of the
creative cycle. Sometimes it is because they are not bound by the symbolisms of words or other acts. But of this we are sure, if they are important in a person's life it is a mistake to say they are unconscious or that he is unaware of them. Every day he experiences them, often all too poignantly, except he cannot put his finger on them nor tell for sure whether they are at the spot the therapist has probed for them.

When does a person fall back upon such loosened thinking? Or when does he depend upon constructs that are not easily subsumed? Ordinarily when one is confronted with confusion (anxiety) the first tendency is to tighten up, but beyond some breaking point there is a tendency to discard tight constructions and fall back upon constructs that are loose or which have no convenient symbolizations. It is in the human crises that it becomes most important to understand the nature of a person's secondary lines of defense.

3. What is the relative importance of direct as opposed to indirect techniques for assessing human motives? Under what circumstances is the contribution of each type of technique likely to be greatest?

Let us change the word "motives" to "constructs." They are not equivalent, of course, but "motives" play no part in our system while "constructs" do. If we ask a person to express his constructs in words, and we take his words literally, then we may say, perhaps, that we are assessing his constructs "directly." If we assume that his words and acts have less patent meanings and that we must construe him in terms of a background understanding of his construct system, shall we say that we have used a more "indirect" technique? But is anything more direct than this? Perhaps the method that takes literal meanings for granted is actually the more indirect, for it lets the dictionary intervene between the client and the psychologist. If time permits we vote for seeking to understand the person in the light of his personal construct system.

4. In assessing human motives how important is it to specify the situational context within which the motives operate?

Each of a client's constructs has a limited range of convenience in helping him deal with his circumstances. Beyond that range the construct is irrelevant as far as he is concerned. This is the point that was so long obscured by the Law of the Excluded Middle. Knowledge, therefore, of the range of convenience of any personal construct formulated by a client is essential to an understanding of the behavior he structures by that construct.
5. How necessary is knowledge of the past in the assessment of the contemporary motivation?

It is not absolutely necessary but it is often convenient. Events of the past may disclose the kind of constructions that the client has used; presumably he may use them again. Events of the past, taken in conjunction with the anticipations they confirmed at the time, may indicate what has been proved to his satisfaction. Again, events of the past may indicate what a client has had to make sense out of, and thus enable us to surmise what constructions he may have had to erect in order to cope with his circumstances. Finally, since some clients insist on playing the part of martyrs to their biographical destinies, therapy cannot be concluded successfully until their therapists have conducted them on a grand tour of childhood recollections.

6. At this time is the area of motivation more in need of developing precise and highly objective measures of known motives or identifying significant new motivational variables?

Neither.

7. Is there a unique and important contribution to the understanding of human motive that can be made to present through the medium of comparative or lower animal studies that cannot be duplicated by means of investigations utilizing human subjects?

No.

8. In attempting to understand human motivation is it advisable at present to focus upon one or a small number of motivational variables or should an effort be made to appraise a wide array of variables?

Human impetus should be assumed as a principle rather than treated as a variable or group of variables.

9. What is the relative importance of detailed studies of individual cases as compared to carefully controlled experimental research and large-scale investigation?

All three have their place in the course of developing psychological understanding. The detailed case studies provide excellent grounds for generating constructs. Experimental research, in turn, permits us to test out constructs in artificial isolation. Large-scale investigations help us put constructs into a demographic framework.