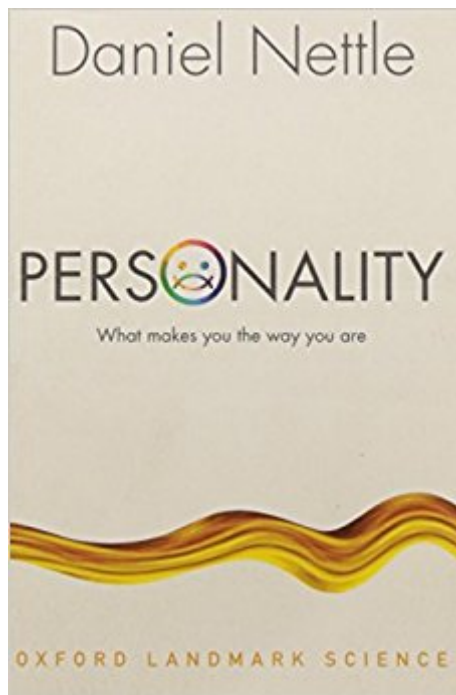




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# **Personality: What Makes You The Way You Are (Oxford Landmark Science)**



## Synopsis

It is one of the great mysteries of human nature. Why are some people worriers, and others wanderers? Why are some people so easy-going and laid-back, while others are always looking for a fight? Written by Daniel Nettle--author of the popular book *Happiness*--this brief volume takes the reader on an exhilarating tour of what modern science can tell us about human personality. Revealing that our personalities stem from our biological makeup, Nettle looks at the latest findings from genetics and brain science, and considers the evolutionary origins and consequences of different personalities. The heart of the book sheds light on the "big five": Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientious, Agreeableness, and Openness. Using a stimulating blend of true-life stories and scientific research, Nettle explains why we have something deep and consistent within us that determines the choices we make and situations we bring about. He addresses such questions as why members of the same family differ so markedly in their natures? What is the best personality to have--a bold one or a shy one, an aggressive one or a meek one? And are you stuck with your personality, or can you change it? Life, Nettle concludes, is partly the business of finding a niche where your personality works for you. "It is a question of choosing the right pond," he notes, "and being mindful of the dangers." There is no ideal personality to have. Every disposition brings both advantages and disadvantages. Full of human wisdom as well as scientific insight, this book illuminates the pluses and minuses of personality, offering practical advice about living with the nature you were born with. It even includes a questionnaire so that you can assess yourself.

## Book Information

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"The author unearths a few everyday characteristics shared by people who say they are happy, including good health, a feeling of autonomy, and social correctiveness. To that list, one might add browsing through this thought-provoking book."--O: The Oprah Magazine, on Happiness"Excellent survey of the subject-a lucid, intelligent, and thoughtful essay."--Lancet

Daniel Nettle teaches psychology at the University of Newcastle. With degrees in both psychology and anthropology, he has written on many aspects of human nature and culture. His previous books include *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile*, *Strong Imagination: Madness, Creativity and Human Nature* and (with Suzanne Romaine) *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*.

What makes you the way you are. The 5-part theory on personality. He proposes a 5 Factor Model that basically says that each person has a personality made up of: 1) genetically inherited tendencies plus 2) environment - related tendencies. And all of these can be boiled down into 5 factors: (all on a continuum, of course) Level of: 1) Extraversion 2) Neuroticism 3) Conscientiousness 4) Agreeableness 5) Openness. There have been many, many models of personality in the past but this one seems to encompass them all and address many issues and questions. The book has a (very) short questionnaire to help you determine your basic level of each area. Have you ever studied evolutionary biology? There's a fascinating chapter in the book that talks about how Darwin came up with some of his theories when he visited the Galapagos islands. There was a certain type of bird whose beak would grow bigger or get smaller over the seasons depending upon if a certain type of food was available or not. Thus, evolution in action! But, an interesting point was that a bigger beak was not necessarily ALWAYS better. Sometimes, when the going got tough, it was necessary to have a smaller beak to root out smaller food. So, evolution goes in cycles depending much upon the atmosphere. It seems this would also work with certain behaviors. In the book, Nettle actually used the example of a sociopath to illustrate that his kind could begin to proliferate because he can bully himself and his genes around. BUT it would make sense that later on, his descendants would meet each other and fight or kill each other off, making the "nice" people more proliferate again. Thus, a cycle. Adaptation. (\*\*\*\* 4 stars out of 5 for the long-windedness and the sometimes boring examples he gives from the animal kingdom)

The science and research presented in this study are impressive, convincing, and actually helpful to me in understanding myself and how I might better manage some of my more unfortunate personality aspects. Moreover, Daniel Nettle has a good sense of humor that comes through. He both and lightens the complex subject matter and enlightens the reader. I was fascinated to learn that different pathways and mechanisms in the brain are important in producing behaviors and characteristics, and that traits I formerly thought were on a continuum of extremes are actually not 'wired up' in that way at all. "I need to be less this way and more that way" no longer seems to me to be the accurate way to think of self-regulation at all. I am continuing to find what I learned helpful to me as I move away from my first quick read of this book, and I expect to return to it many times.

I really enjoyed Daniel Nettle's previous book, *Â Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile*, so I knew I had to read this one as well. Here is the premise: "This book is about the psychology of personality. I aim to vindicate the idea that people have enduring personality dispositions which partly predict what they will do, and which stem from the way their nervous systems are wired up. I also wish to introduce the science behind the study of personality - how we measure personality, what the measures mean, what they predict, and why personality variation exists in the first place." Just as Nettle did in *Happiness*, he takes an evolutionary psychologists approach towards explaining why variation exists within the classic Five-Factor personalities. Each Chapter, from 3 through 7, is devoted to explaining each of the traits (just remember this helpful trick OCEAN = Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). What's more, Nettle believes that there might actually be Neural Correlates for why these five, and only these five, exist in the first place: "Thus, it can no longer be said that the big five personality traits are simply descriptions of behavior or self-image. It is very likely they will turn out to be shorthand for suites of differences in neural structure and function across multiple brain regions." I thought this was a very interesting idea. In sum, I don't believe there are many books like Nettles out there so I would definitely pick this book up. It's very remarkable! I also appreciated Nettles chapter entitled, "The Other Half" which addresses the non-genetic components to personality formation (Twin studies - Identical twins and Fraternal twins, parenting styles, etc.) and environmental influences - it really served to balance out the book. Also included at the end of the book is the Newcastle Personality Assessor (NPA) which is fun to complete so you can see where your personality falls in the full OCEAN spectrum.

I've been a fan of the Myers Briggs and its cousins for years but was disturbed to learn that academics did not respect it. As an educator, I wanted an approach that would be useful in academic, business, and religious settings and well supported by research. Nettle's approach here looks promising. Some religious groups might object to the emphasis on evolution, but few of my fellow Baptists really have any objections to microevolution, so that really should not be an issue. The approach presented here has almost all of the practical benefits of the MBTI and is better supported by research. One area I would like to read more about in the future is interaction between the traits. If I am high in openness, conscientiousness, and Neuro., for example, does that explain why I'm both artistic and morally conventional? Fascinating book!

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