

Freud vs. Eysenck

Transcending Categorical Triads and Linear Traits

J. Dana Stoll

University of Liverpool

February 08, 2017

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Introduction

To examine whether Freud or Eysenck's theories better describe personality, both the constituent elements for personality and their developmental trajectories are important. Freud and Eysenck describe models of personality that fit well within their scientific context. However, both appear reductionist from a modern understanding. They particularly differ in their scientific rigor.

Freud's Categorical Triads

Freud's approach at personality is categorical. At the centre of the theory are the triads Id/Ego/Superego and unconscious/preconscious/conscious influences. In an optimally developing person, the Ego becomes successively more conscious of the Id's drives and Superego's oughts, resulting in control. The basic drives libido and death instinct need to be satisfied through developmental stages (oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital). Inadequate strategies in prior stages lead to problems in later stages. Transitioning between the stages (emancipating away from the mother and the family), persons have to master challenges, for example, the Oedipus complex or penis envy. According to Freud, a number of maladaptive strategies may influence personality: repression, fixation, regression, frustration, sublimation, undoing, isolation, identification, and projection. (Freud, 1933, pp. 90-92; Freud, 1935, pp. 253-303; Freud, 1949, pp. 15-123).

As a clinician, Freud focuses on individual behavioural operations and dialectic reasoning. Behaviour is not "the result of efficient causes," but "the opposition of two intentions" (Rychlak, 1968, pp. 309-314). Many of Freud's terms are not well-defined, not causally related, and therefore not empirically testable. From a modern perspective, Freud's triadic categories can be considered reductionist.

Eysenck's Linear Personality Traits

Eysenck's reasoning follows Popper's scientific criticism of Freud. Popper compared Freud's "epic of the Ego, the Super-ego and the Id" to "Homer's collected stories from Olympus" (Eysenck, & Wilson, 1973, p. 2). Building on empirical falsification, Eysenck assumes a linear dimensional model of personality traits: extraversion and emotionality, later adding psychoticism. Eysenck identifies two biological, causative constituents of personality: the reticulo-cortical system when processing external stimuli (extraversion) and the reticulo-limbic system for emotions (neuroticism). Arousal is mediated via the ascending reticular activating system (ARAS). Eysenck's theory is biologically developmental. Changes in personality must be reflected in the underlying biology (Mathews, & Gilliland, 1997, p. 583-584). Although Eysenck's model is testable in theory, his rudimentary attempt at identifying neuronal circuits can be considered outdated. Eysenck's empirical causal model can only explain linear aspects of personality, for example, influences of levels of general arousal.

Discussion: From Linear Causation to Neuro-Constructivism

Transitioning Eysenck's causal model, Gray examines how moderating variables in behavioural models "relate to both personality and neural functioning" (Cooper, 2010, p.212). Allport, who pioneered the lexical approach that is at the roots of linear trait thinking, later became its biggest critic. He questions the usefulness of trait generalizations with regard to the individual as opposed to social entities seeking idealized personnel. Allport proposes to transition from dimensional psychology to a morphogenic approach, identifying individually relevant behavioural patterns and their developmental trajectories (Allport, & Odbert, 1936; Allport, 1962, pp. 405-422). Karmiloff-Smith's (2009) neuro-constructivism, for example, honours this paradigm shift in a biological attempt at personality: Personality as the complex interplay of different neuronal circuits and the environment, each circuit with its own developmental trajectory. Then, categorical triads and linear trait models become purposeful

reductions of personality in particular, bio-psycho-social settings, but no longer describe universal constituents of personality.

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