

WHAT IS PERSONALITY? THREE MYTHS AND A DEFINITION

"'Personality' refers to a range of facts, not, for example, to a peculiar sort of thing or process."

- --P.G. Ossorio, 1981, p. 57

I. THE PROBLEM

II. GUIDING IDEAS: DP + WITTGENSTEIN'S "THE
MEANING IS THE USE"

III. THREE COMMON MYTHS IN PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

Myth #1: The Term "Personality" Refers to an
underlying causal Entity

Myth #2: The Study Of Personality Is The Study Of The Whole Person.

<PC> = <Ds, P, Dr>, where...

Ds = Dispositions (Traits, Attitudes, Interests, Styles)

P = Powers (Abilities, Knowledge, Values)

D = Derivatives (States, Capacities, Embodiments)

Myth #3: Our most prominent "theories of personality" are actually about personality and actually qualify as scientific theories.

Typical content of *current* personality texts:

Psychoanalytic theories (e.g., Freud,
Jung, Erikson)

Behavioral theories (e.g., Skinner)

Social-cognitive theories (e.g., Kelly, Bandura)

Humanistic-Existential theories (e.g., Rogers,
Maslow)

Trait theories: (e.g., Allport, Cattell, Big 5)

IV. DEFINITION OF PERSONALITY

A. "Personality" is the enduring set of Traits and Styles that a person possesses, which characteristics represent (a) dispositions (i.e., natural tendencies or personal inclinations) of this person, and (b) ways in which this person differs from the "standard normal person" in his or her culture.

Traits = dispositions to engage in a certain kind of behavior (e.g., extraverted, self-critical, or aggressive behavior) (Ossorio, 2013)

Styles = dispositions having to do, not with what a person does, but with how he or she does it (e.g. in a sophisticated, awkward, or gracious fashion (Ossorio, 2013)

B. "ENDURING"

C. "DISPOSITION"

D. RELATIVITY TO CULTURE'S "STANDARD
NORMAL PERSON" (OSSORIO, 1983)

V. SO WHAT?

A. PROVIDES AN ADEQUATE CONCEPTUALIZATION FOR FIELD

B. SHOWS HOW TRAIT EXPLANATIONS (E.G., "BECAUSE SHE IS SHY?") NOT MERELY DESCRIPTIVE, BUT EXPLANATORY

C. SCIENTIFIC UTILITY