
Abstract:

Personality psychology generally involves both describing personality factors and explaining how such factors arise and go on to influence other things. However, since there are various meanings of the term ‘personality’, and the causal role of personality is often ambiguous, there are numerous theoretical and practical problems involved in both of these pursuits. This paper proposes a theoretical framework for clarifying both the descriptive and explanatory tasks within personality psychology. The work of description is discussed here in terms of classifying personality factors in terms of intrinsic properties and relationships. The importance of causal antecedents and mechanisms for explanation in personality psychology is then addressed, and problems with teleology and constitutive relations identified. The ‘self’ is used to illustrate problems in both personality description and explanation and suggestions for avoiding potential theoretical and conceptual problems within personality research are discussed.