

# Personality: A Cognitive View

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## Introduction

Personality formation in human beings has been a source of intrigue for scientists for many centuries. However, it was not until this present century that concerted efforts backed by empirical evidence has begun to make the study of personality a serious scientific endeavour.

Philosophical exposition concerning personality can be traced as far back as Plato and Aristotle. These two intellectual giants dominated philosophical thought as well as science for more than two-thousand years. In the seventeenth century the main distinction between personality theories was set in motion by a disagreement between John Locke and Wilhelm Leibniz. The stage was thus set to usher in a debate that has been ongoing for nearly four centuries (Forgus, R. and Shulman, B., 1979, pp.23-25).

Gordon Allport explains the two views as follows:

*John Locke, we all recall, assumed the mind of an individual to be a "tabula rasa" at birth. The intellect itself was a passive thing acquiring content and structure only through the impact of sensation and the crisscross of association... The organism (to Locke) was reactive to... internal and external stimulation... To Leibniz the intellect was perpetually active into its own right, addicted to rational problem solving and bent on manipulating sensory data according to its own*

*inherent nature... A person is not a collection of acts... but the source... Activity (of a person) is purposive and not (just) reactive... (Forgus, R. et. al., 1979, p.23).*

From these two traditions have sprung the modern theories of personality. Through the years these theories have plucked the best from both of thought (see Figure 1) (Forgus, R. et. al., 1979, p. 24)

