

Evaluate jung's theory  
concerning  
personality types  
philosophy essay



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During the 1920s, philosophers and scientists had turned their attention to exploring the idea of personality types. It was during this period that Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung wrote his book *Psychological Types* explaining his very detailed understanding of the process of 'Typology' (the study and classification of personality types with common traits or characteristics).

Subsequently, his work has been developed into '... one of the most widely used typologies in the world.' Berens, L. & Nardi, D. (2004)

Jung was first to develop the theory that each of us has our own personality type. He suggested that humans used two basic functions in their everyday lives - the function of 'perception', or how we take in information that is presented to us and the second function of how we make our 'judgements' based on that information. He believed that within these two basic functions there were further dichotomous sub-functions at work. In the case of perception, he believed that we processed information either via any (or all) of our 'senses', or alternatively, by our 'intuition' - our 'gut feeling'. Similarly, with our decision making process, Jung believed that we make our judgements based upon either personal (subjective) 'feelings' or impersonal (objective) logic - or, in other words 'thinking'.

Jung described the perceptive functions of sensing and intuition as 'irrational' as they do not evaluate as such, rather they are concerned with the simple gathering of information and then perceiving the nature of something based upon the information gathered. He did not mean irrational in the sense of being absurd or inconsistent with logic but rather with reference to being removed from 'reason and judgement'. Quite naturally, the judging functions, those of feeling and thinking were considered to be 'rational'. Both

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judging functions having opposite attributes to those of the perceptive functions in that they very much evaluate experiences and they do rely on the use of reasoning and judgment.

Jung's typology bears some semblance, borne from his study of mythology, to the Four Temperaments from Ancient Greek culture, namely Choleric, Melancholic, Phlegmatic and Sanguine. Jung's model however, is considerably more developed and more complex. He theorised that each of us channels our psychic energy (or libido) into each of our four functions of sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling during our normal daily lives. He then went on to suggest that we all apply different levels of that psychic energy to the different functions.

Importantly, Jung believed that it was possible to test, measure and identify a hierarchy of preference that an individual has regarding their personality functions - labelling the favoured function as the 'dominant', the second most frequently used as the 'auxiliary', followed by the 'tertiary' and then finally, the 'inferior' function. This proved fundamental in the formulation of his theories regarding individual personality typology.

Jung suggested that those individuals with a dominant sensing function are generally governed by external facts which are received, as the name implies, through their senses. They will tend to have a natural propensity to live in the present, seeing everyone and sensing all that is going on around them. They tend to be quite practical and proactive about their lives.

Enjoying these traits enables sensing type individuals to be able to quite

naturally adapt quickly to most situations remaining realistic and self-confident as they go about their daily lives.

The naturally opposing function to sensing is intuition. Intuitive type individuals spend far less time in the present, focussing their attention much more on both the past and the future. As such, they have a tendency to worry more about things that may happen or dwell upon things that have already happened in their past and they are often blighted with unnecessary doubts. Avoiding routine, intuitive types are usually only very interested in things that happen in their lives that are either new or unusual. Each aspect of the intuitive individual is the natural polar opposite of the sensing individual.

Of the two other naturally opposing functions, the thinking individual would process information based on structure and functionality. Very intellectual in their approach, they would have a natural tendency to break down everything using logical analysis to try to expose any underlying structures, patterns and systems. Evaluation would be based upon their intellect and the segregation of information into 'rights' and 'wrongs'. Any action taken by a thinking type individual tends to proceed from intellectually based motivation. A frustrating aspect of the naturally thinking type is that they do not place a great deal of importance on getting to the bottom of arguments or quarrels. Thinking types are natural opposites to feeling types and as such, usually have trouble talking openly about their feelings and are relatively emotionally cold.

Jung regarding feeling as an evaluative function, the feeling individual generally being governed by the value associated with the things drawn to them through their feelings. Feeling types are more likely to be interested in other people and other people's feelings rather than their own. They see things not as 'right' or 'wrong' like thinking types do, but more like 'good' and 'bad', they tend to have a more ethical evaluation process. Feeling types tend to pay a lot of their attention to love and passion and can easily use their emotions - consciously or unconsciously - to manipulate people or situations. They also have a tendency to be very comfortably tactile.

Jung posited that the dominant function was very important to each individual and overshadowed all of the other functions when it came to constructing a personality type. He also suggested that improving our awareness of all of the four functions within ourselves, be they dominant (conscious) or inferior (unconscious), was very important in helping us to develop a healthy, balanced existence. He went on to suggest, unsurprisingly, that if any functions were unduly repressed, or not receiving enough psychic energy, this would ultimately lead to problems that would almost certainly arise sooner or later in a person's lifetime.

Jung was very much into the idea of psychic energy and its constant shifting within our psyche. He was of the opinion that we all use psychic energy and as individuals, we consciously and unconsciously channel our psychic energy both internally and out into our external world.

The Society of Analytical Psychology website tells us that; '... Jung drew on the work of the philosopher Nietzsche and the psychologist William James in

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his development of typology...'(2006) resulting in two very different and opposing 'attitudes' which also contribute to our character types - those attitudes being 'introvert' and 'extrovert'. Introversions, where the energy is directed in towards the self, is normally characterised by hesitant, reflective, defensive traits. By contrast, extroverts channel or draw their energy from external sources. They are interested primarily in what is happening outside themselves, in their surroundings, other people or external noises. Extroverts tend not to enjoy spending time alone as they naturally draw their energy from, and channel their energy to, their external world.

Jung concluded that individuals either 'introverted' or 'extroverted' their dominant function creating a total of eight possible psychological types - an example of which might be an 'Extroverted Thinker'.

The healthy, balanced and best example of an Extraverted Thinking type tends to have a good sense of the facts. They are very adept at establishing order in all aspects of their lives '... their benchmarks are justice and truth, based upon what they consider to be the purest conceivable formulation of objective reality...' D. Sharp (1936). At their worst, amongst other things, they are religious zealots or con men (or women). Introverted Feeling would be their inferior functions meaning that anything involving artistic senses, quality time with loved ones and family and loving relationships are liable to suffer. They will tend to come across as cold or unfriendly but this will only be because they will be more interested in 'fact' than 'how their attitude effects the people around them'. In extreme examples, they will neglect their own vital needs and unconsciously compensate by becoming highly oversensitive, petty and mistrustful of others.

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Once the unconscious compensatory process has begun, there is a danger of the collapse of their conscious attitude, resulting in their positivity and creativity becoming stagnant and regressive. In the very extreme case, the individual can become a recluse and/or misanthropic.

Another example of one of Jung's eight psychological types would be the Extraverted Sensation type. This type of person will react to an object, situation or person in a way that '... their response to the object is conditioned by the object.' Sharp (1936). They are drawn to objects, people or situations that excite the strongest sensations within them and because they are still extraverted, they always have a strong sensuous bond to their external world. As Jung (1923) states;

'The sole criterion of their value is the intensity of the sensation produced by their objective qualities... However, it is only concrete, sensuously perceived objects or processes that excite sensations for the extravert... Hence the orientation of such an individual accords with purely sensuous reality.' (p. 363)

Healthy Extraverted Sensing types are great at finding their way around, reading maps and they rarely forget appointments. They are also neat, tidy and punctual individuals who love to socialise and surround themselves with the finer things in life.

The negative aspect of this type is their inferior functions of introverted intuition. In their natural world, the things that cannot be seen, heard or touched - those things that are not fact - are instantly treated as suspect.

Psychic conflicts are dismissed as 'imaginary' and changes in mood will be blamed on seemingly unrelated and trivial things like the weather.

Amongst the worst traits of this individual is related to instances when their attraction and focus upon sensation becomes overwhelming and consuming, extreme cases result in unscrupulous, pleasure-seeking hedonists. In 'Psychological Types', In relation to Extraverted Sensing types, Jung states that '... repressed intuitions begin to assert themselves in the form of projections...' (p. 365). The projections open the door for jealous fantasy, suspicion and anxiety, typically based on quite absurd assumption. The more severe cases producing phobias and compulsions, although this only tends to happen very occasionally '... More usually, the compensating inferior function simply imparts a rather charming air of inconsistency to the personality...' Sharp (p. 58).

A further type, The Introverted Sensing type is guided not by the intensity of the external object as in the previous two examples, but by the intensity of the subjective sensations activated by the object. They pay every attention to what people look like, how they smell, the sounds they make and how they feel rather than the actual person themselves. Introverted sensing artists, for example will bring a unique depth of life to a painting or scene. In extreme examples of Introverted Sensing types, the effect of an object does not penetrate into the individual (subject) at all. They are no longer able to distinguish between the real object and their subjective perception. They have virtually no rational ability to sort problems out and are more likely to '... have dark prophetic fantasies of what might happen in the outside world - to their family or " mankind"...' Sharp (p. 83)

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This type is also prone to becoming 'stuck in a rut' or otherwise 'bogged down' in a routine due to their other functions becoming unconscious. Jung writes;

'... as soon as the unconscious becomes antagonistic, the archaic intuitions come to the surface and exert their pernicious influence, forcing themselves on the individual and producing compulsive ideas of the most perverse kind. The result is usually a compulsion neurosis, in which the hysterical features are masked by symptoms of exhaustion.' (p. 398)

Jung noted that just like the four functions, both attitudes of introversion and extraversion are present in each individual in differing degrees dependant upon the energy dedicated to them. Nobody is either 'purely extrovert' or 'purely introvert', in fact, the vast majority of people have a fairly well balanced mix of the two attitudes although one will always be more dominant and natural than the other in each individual. On discussing Jung's typology theory in her book 'Dryden's Handbook of Individual Therapy', Windy Dryden (2007) notes that;

'...[a] neurotic defence is that of extreme introversion which manifests its narcissistic feelings of grandiosity that act to keep an individual from being involved in interpersonal relationships... Western culture is identified with an extroverted, thinking, sensation way of functioning so that many people feel forced to comply with this. If this compliance becomes pathological, they need to be helped to achieve a better balance...' she goes on to say '... it may be said that extreme extroversion can be as neurotic as extreme introversion.' (p. 107)

Jung said that extraversion and introversion are not mutually exclusive and that they have a natural tendency to self-balance through both conscious and unconscious processes. Therefore, a consciously extravert person will possess a compensatory inwardly unconscious introvert side and vice versa. Jung linked this effect to the repression of natural tendencies and the resulting unhappiness, hysteria and illness, so if the balance gets upset by repression (an unconscious action) our mind would seek to restore the balance in an unconscious manner.

This leads us onto a key component of Jung's theory on personality types - the element of balance. All of Jung's psychology was based upon balance, growth and hope and his personality type theory was no exception. As we know, Jung subscribed to the notion that all attributes of the four functions and the attitudes of introversion and extroversion appear in all individuals to differing degrees. According to Jung, as human beings, the way that we are able to cope with the opposing characteristics to our natural dominant functions and attitudes is by the balance of our psychic energy levels, which we devote to each part at any given time. As far as Jung was concerned, an imbalance of psychic energy ultimately resulted in some form of psychological disturbance, with neurosis over-emphasizing the individual's character traits.

Crucially, that the four functions need to be in balance does not mean that they need to be equal to each other insofar as their psychic energy levels.

Taking the four functions into account, our natural tendency is to adopt one, rather than the opposite. If the thinking function was the most developed in

an individual, it would naturally benefit from having more psychic energy  
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dedicated to it than the feeling function (the other 'judging' function). Being the natural polar opposite to thinking, feeling would then become the inferior function and would remain so for as long as thinking was the dominant function - thus becoming balanced.

Sensation and intuition (the two 'perceptive' functions) would then become the auxiliary and tertiary functions. More energy would be dedicated to thinking and less energy would be channelled to feeling but they would all still, ideally, be within a correct and natural balance relationally. This balance is vital as our dominant function is actually bolstered by our inferior function, however we do only have a finite amount of psychic energy. If we channel too much energy into our dominant function, the inferior function can be at risk of being lost in the unconscious - or the 'shadow' - as an expense, resulting in some form of disturbance.

Our shadow can be described as our 'yet to be realised' area of our mind. It can harbour potential personality disorder or, equally, it can be potentially creative. In therapy sessions, we seek to help our client to rediscover their shadow side and restore their balance. With this in mind, Jung's theory suggests that there always needs to be an unconscious counter-position to keep a balance within the functions. One function (the dominant) is experienced consciously whilst the counter - or inferior function - is experienced unconsciously.

In the 1940s, Isobel Myers and her mother, Katherine Cook Briggs were drawn to the work of Carl Jung and were inspired to try and develop his theory of personality types into a more practical and usable instrument. They

subscribed to Jung's ideas of opposites and crafted some extremely well thought out questions in order to force choices to be made between naturally existing psychological dilemmas. What resulted was a ninety-three point self-questionnaire that enabled people to be categorised into one of a possible sixteen personality types based upon their own answers to a series of carefully constructed questions.

What the MBTI does not do however, is to detect psychiatric disturbances or provide intelligence quotients - it only focuses on a subject's normal behaviour. Jung would never have approved of his work being developed in this way, however, if an individual's normal behaviour is naturally disordered (and therefore consistently so) it can provide useful indicators to potential disturbance-related traits. This underlines the difference between a psychiatric disturbance (non-constant behaviour) and a personality disorder (constant behaviour). This is illustrated nicely in Dr Duane Dobbert's book 'Understanding Personality Disorders' where he writes;

'While many other psychological disorders fluctuate in terms of symptom presence and intensity, as with normal personality, personality disorders typically remain relatively constant throughout life, although they do vary in severity from individual to individual'. (2007).

As previously noted, if any functions are being unduly stifled through lack of psychic energy either consciously or by design, this is expected to lead to problems that will arise at some point in the individual's adult life. An example where we may be likely to see evidence of this is when a parent or guardian continually forces certain uncharacteristic behaviours upon their

children, or when adults consciously inhibit their own feelings. In doing this, they are going against what is natural for the oppressed individual and it will probably eventually lead to some form of psychological disturbance. We also often see evidence of people's unconscious mind reverting from unconscious to conscious behaviour when they are stressed or under the influence of alcohol.

As far as psychological problems are concerned, many are characterized by a lack of control in certain situations. Often, the lack of control is only part of a larger pattern of behaviour, such as substance abuse problems or sexual disorders. There are however, several psychological disorders that are defined primarily by a loss of control and these would include instances of Domestic Violence, Pyromania and Pathological Gambling.

Studies have been performed to try to ascertain if there is any form of notable relationship between certain personality types and certain psychological disturbances. A psychiatric study in the University of Carolina by Janowsky, Morter & Tancer (2000) was carried out whereby a group of sixteen patients with diagnosed Social Phobia were compared to a group of twenty-four hospitalized patients suffering with Major Depressive Disorder. Both groups were compared to a control group of a 'normative' population comprising of nearly fifty-six thousand individuals. Each subject underwent the MBTI survey and results stated that Social Phobia patients were significantly introverted (93. 7%) as opposed to the normative population group (46. 2%). Notably, the Social Phobia patients also scored significantly more introverted than the Major Depressive patients, although the Major Depressive patients still scored as introverted. One conclusion drawn from <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-jungs-theory-concerning-personality-types-philosophy-essay/>

the study was that introversion is a major component of Social Phobia, if nothing else this observation almost certainly has therapeutic significance.

The fact that Carl Jung's 'psychological types' structure continues to provide the basis of many of the leading psychometrics systems and instruments in use today, including Myers-Briggs, is testimony to the enduring relevance and value of Jung's work. Whether it may ever be developed so that we may detect personality disorders before they become apparent will remain to be seen. Ethically, if we got to that stage, who knows how such a test may be exploited? Maybe it would be best if we never found out.