

# ...with Michael Eysenck

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## One person who inspired you

The person who most inspired me was Jonckheere, who was always known as 'Jonck'. I first met him when I was an undergraduate student at University College London, and he was the first academic psychologist who seemed convinced that I had a future in psychology. Since he was in addition an extremely warm and friendly person and one of the cleverest British psychologists I have ever met, it is no surprise that I found him so inspirational.

## One hero/heroine from psychology past or present

My choice of Sir Francis Galton may be misinterpreted. What makes him my hero is not his sometimes unfortunate views on heredity but rather his incredible creative ability to open up major new areas within psychology. Here are a few examples: realising the importance of twin studies; realising the importance

of correlational measures; designing the first (admittedly inadequate) intelligence test; designing perhaps the first psychological questionnaire (on imagery); and developing the method of free association. More generally, he provided a major impetus to psychology to take Darwin and individual differences seriously and was a great polymath.

## One alternative career path you might have chosen

When I was at school, the career that most appealed to me was to become a barrister. This was odd given that I knew very little about what being a barrister involved and had never met one! The expense involved plus my total lack of influential contacts meant that I decided it was too risky to embark on such a career. However, the language skills essential for a barrister are also needed in book writing (I have written nearly 40 books). Intriguingly,

with no pressure on my part, my elder daughter Fleur has become a successful barrister.

## One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Einstein said that the crucial thing in research is to ask the right question. That sounds obvious, but most researchers do not spend enough time making sure they are asking the right question before embarking on their research. What many do is simply to follow the zeitgeist. When I look back at my research career, I only wish I had taken my own advice!

## One thing you would change about psychologists

Most researchers in psychology want to address major issues while adopting a fully scientific approach. However, in my opinion, the great dynamic conflict in psychology is that it is remarkably difficult to achieve both goals simultaneously. What I would change about psychologists is to encourage more of them to focus on the big picture even if some scientific respectability

has to be jettisoned. The world is far too full of beautifully designed and controlled experiments telling us precisely nothing about issues of any consequence.

## One hope for the future of psychology

My main hope for the future of psychology is that it will stop underselling itself. Most non-psychologists regard psychology as an interesting but somewhat trivial subject. In fact, clinical psychologists could enhance the psychological well-being of millions of people, and health psychologists focusing on lifestyle changes could transform preventive medicine. If only politicians and the public realised that psychology could produce huge improvements in mental and physical health (and enormous



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economic benefits) if given the opportunity and resources!

More answers online at [www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk)

### resource

Eysenck, M.W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R. & Calvo, M.G. (2007). Anxiety and cognitive performance: Attentional control theory. *Emotion*, 7, 336-353.

'This includes some of the researchers and friends with whom I have collaborated the most over many years, and the theory put forward represents the culmination of my long-term research efforts.'

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