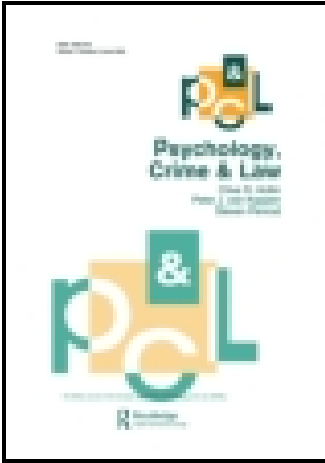


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Crime and personality - A response to H. prins

H. J. Eysenck ^a

^a Institute of Psychiatry, University of London , UK

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CRIME AND PERSONALITY – A RESPONSE TO H. PRINS

H. J. EYSENCK

Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, UK

I am not sure that I would disagree with Prins' cautious words. In a brief article one cannot address all the available evidence, put in all the usual qualifications, and cite all the available references. Let me take his points one at a time.

(1) Time spans. I looked at 1979–1987; Prins argues that *currently* poverty is not declining. He seems to use an even shorter time span than I did. What one would like to see would be a cross-cultural study between the alleged sociological variables and criminality, using where needed non-linear regressions, covering the years from 1900 onwards, and making allowances for changes in laws, definitions of poverty, immigration, etc. In the absence of such a study, I was only arguing that *some* well-known effects did not agree with sociological hypotheses.

(2) We have discussed the evidence for genetic influences on crime in some detail elsewhere (Eysenck and Gudjonsson, 1989); the degree of genetic determination is difficult to establish, but its importance is undoubted. I would not argue with the thesis that there is a *synergistic* relation between nature and nurture; this would agree well with my conscience/conditioning theory.

(3) Recent developments in molecular genetics have opened up a whole new field of research into personality and criminal behaviour. I mentioned one study, but there are now several showing a precise relationship between specific alleles and personality traits related to crime. In a dozen years we will undoubtedly have succeeded in mapping most of the genes relevant to criminality. What we will do with this knowledge is an interesting question.

(4) Female offending is increasing, but still far behind male offending, and most of it is related to victimless crimes like prostitution. Obviously it will be interesting to watch developments over the next dozen years, but I would be surprised if female offending ever came near male offending in "victimfull" crimes.

(5) I was thinking of claims made for probation in which probation was compared with incarceration, and suggesting that such

comparisons are only meaningful if cases are assigned on a random basis. In published comparisons it seems highly likely that probation cases were much less likely to be recidivist than incarceration cases. Randomization may be unethical, but without it the published data are of little scientific interest.

What I want to insist on, really, is that *all* sociological factors *must* act through the individual personality of the person concerned, and that a proper understanding of personality in general, and the specific aspects relevant to crime in particular, is absolutely essential for a scientific understanding of criminality. As Raine (1993) has pointed out, there is very strong evidence for the low arousal/poor conditioning theory I put forward (Eysenck, 1977), and there is no question about the strong heritability of these physiological factors. They are crucial to any theoretical analysis of criminality.

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