Mischel has argued that personality differences are due largely to persona variables – individual differences in cognition. These variables include competences, encoding strategies and personal constructs, expectancies, subjective values and self regulatory systems and plans.

Rotters research has shown that locus of control the extent to which people believe that their behaviour is controlled by person variables or by environmental variables is also an important determinant of personality.

Traits and situations interact: some people are affected more than others by a particular situation, and people tend to choose the types of situations in which they find themselves. Peoples personality traits directly affect situational variables.

The psychodynamic approach

Freud believed that the mind is full of conflicts between the primitive urges of the id and internalised prohibitions of the superego.

According to freud, these conflicts tend to be resolved through compromise formation and through ego defences such repression, sublimation and reaction formation. His theory of psychosexual development, a progression through the oral, anal, phallic and genital stages, provided the basis for a theory of personality and personality disorders.

Freud’s followers, most notably Jung, Adler, Horney and Erikson, embraced different aspects of Freud’s theory, disagreed with other aspects and embellished still other aspects.

Jung disagreed with Freud about the structure of the unconscious and the role of sexuality in personality development, and saw libido as a positive life force. Adler had disagreed the Freud on the importance of sexuality. Instead, adler emphasised the need to compensate for our inferiority and our innate desire to help others as the major forces in personality development.

Horney argued that personality is the result of the strategies and behaviours people use to cope with anxiety which he believed is the fundamental problem that all people must overcome in the course of normal personality development.

Erikson maintained that personality development is more a matter of psychosocial processes than the psychosexual processes. He viewed personality development as involving eight stages, each of which involves coping with a major conflict or crises. Resolution of the conflict allows the person to pass to the next stage; failure to resolve it inhibits normal personality development.

Although freud was a brilliant and insightful thinker his theory has not been experimentally verified, primarily because most of his concepts are unobservable and therefore untestable.

The humanistic approach

The humanistic approach attempts to understand personality and its development by focusing on the positive side of human nature and peoples attempts to reach their full potential: self-actualisation.

Maslow argued that self actualisation is achieved only after the satisfaction of several other important by lesser needs for example physiological, safety and attachment needs.

Maslow’s case study analysis of people whom he believed to be self actualised revealed several common personality characteristics including self acceptance, a focus on addressing cultural problems and not personal ones, spontaneity, preservation of privacy, an appreciation of life and possession of a few very close friends.