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DOI:

[10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.003)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Perkins, A. M. (2016). The welfare trait: Hans Eysenck, personality and social issues. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 172-178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.003>

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The Welfare Trait: Hans Eysenck, personality and social issues

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Abstract

Inspired by Hans Eysenck's belief that personality research can provide insights on societal problems, this article summarises a theory – the Welfare Trait – which attempts to explain the tendency of the welfare state to erode work motivation. This theory stems from the discovery that exposure to disadvantage during childhood promotes the development of employment-resistant personality characteristics. If true, this discovery matters because it means a welfare state which sets up perverse incentives that cause extra children to be born into disadvantaged households may harm the prospects of the nation by shifting its personality profile towards greater employment-resistance. Although still in need of more refined data, the Welfare Trait theory conforms to Hans Eysenck's belief that psychology in general, and personality psychology in particular, is germane to addressing important issues of widespread social impact. However, as in Eysenck's time, discussion of such 'controversial' issues leads to severe criticism and personal vilification, facilitated today by the ease of communication via social media (e.g., Twitter).

Keywords: Hans Eysenck; personality; the welfare state; reproduction; employment-resistance; work-motivation, Twitter

Introduction

A hallmark of Hans Eysenck's scientific career was his belief that discoveries from individual differences research should be used to help address societal problems. He stuck to this belief even in the face of opposition from vested-interests, some of which had a distinct political agenda (Eysenck, 1997). This philosophy put Eysenck on a collision course with 'political correctness' and as a result he was often attacked verbally and, once even, physically during a lecture he was delivering on the topic of individual differences in brain processes at the London School of Economics on 8th May 1973 (Buchanan, 2010).

Yet Eysenck refused to give in to intimidation and continued to tell the truth as he saw it – a commitment to scientific freedom that was perhaps forged by his experience of growing up in pre-war Germany (Corr, 2016a). It was, therefore, a central irony of Eysenck's life that he fled from Germany to escape fascism in the 1930s, only to fall foul of communism once in Britain (Corr, 2016b). In a convergence of life and science, this irony did not escape Eysenck's attention and he went on to study the personality correlates of political extremism, observing that fascists and communists share a tendency towards authoritarianism (Eysenck, 1954). This notion was ridiculed at the time (e.g., Rokeach & Hanley, 1956), yet it seems Eysenck has the last laugh, as modern research backs up his claim that authoritarian attitudes are not the preserve of the extreme right, but are also found on the extreme left wing of the political spectrum (e.g., de Regt, Mortelsman & Smits, 2011) – a position that even his arch-critic, Rokeach (1973), later conceded.

But the criticism sparked by Eysenck's refusal to acquiesce to the vacillating dictates of political correctness cannot tarnish his towering scientific achievements in the domain of personality research, especially his elucidation in the mid-twentieth century of three robust,

biologically-based, personality dimensions (extraversion and neuroticism in 1944, 1947, and later psychoticism in 1952). This breakthrough is acknowledged as transforming personality psychology from a chaotic, armchair-based guessing-game to standard-issue science, amenable to experimental test under laboratory conditions (Gray, 1997). Indeed, the modern consensus that human personality can be captured adequately by five dimensions (the so-called Big Five personality model; Digman, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993) leans heavily on Eysenck's work, since two of those dimensions (extraversion and neuroticism) are borrowed from his personality model and two more (conscientiousness and agreeableness) can be conceptualised as inverted subdivisions of psychoticism – the final dimension of the Big Five, usually known as openness to experience, is a more multi-faceted beast, with links to cognitive ability. Having elucidated extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism – in both statistical and the biological terms - Eysenck then sought to use this personality model to provide insights into such important societal issues as educational attainment and criminality (e.g., Eysenck, 1964).

Inspired by Eysenck's general approach and its implications for society, I am attempting to follow in his footsteps by showing how we can use discoveries from personality research to improve the welfare state. More specifically, we can increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the welfare state by using discoveries from personality psychology to address its tendency, as suggested by empirical research, to erode work-motivation (Heinemann, 2008; Ljunge, 2011).

Welfare state reform is a hot potato in political terms and anyone publishing on this topic today risks incurring the wrath of anti-reform campaigners. Perhaps unlike Eysenck, I hesitated to go public with my findings, since some of my more politically-savvy colleagues warned that I should remain silent for the sake of my career. In the end, I took inspiration from Eysenck's belief that scientists have a duty to the public to tell the truth as they see it and, in November

2015, published my book, ‘The Welfare Trait: how state benefits affect personality’ (Perkins, 2015). I was, therefore, honoured to be asked to contribute to this special issue which marks the centenary of Eysenck’s birth.

In this article, I present an abridged version of my book, the centrepiece of which is a theory of welfare-induced personality ‘mis-development’, as I call it. This theory is based on the discovery that, in its most general form, exposure to childhood disadvantage promotes the development of a dysfunctional, employment-resistant personality profile characterised by aggressive, antisocial and rule-breaking tendencies which harm life chances in adulthood (Heckman, Pinto & Savelyev, 2013). This finding is crucial to my theory because it means that a welfare state which provides perverse incentives that cause extra children to be born into disadvantaged households risks increasing the number of people who possess employment-resistant personality characteristics as a result of exposure to disadvantage during childhood – and, in consequence, it imposes an ever increasing burden on the welfare state and related social provision (e.g., health care, social services and the criminal justice system).

Whilst I consider myself to be an intellectual midget compared to Eysenck’s impressive scientific stature, The Welfare Trait has stirred up such an intense critical reaction that I have had an inkling of what he must have experienced. At one end of the scale of criticisms are sober, academically-rigorous, *ad rem* comments which I welcome because they highlight aspects of my argument that need refinement. For example, in The Welfare Trait I cited a study by Professor Mike Brewer and colleagues which showed that the approximately 50% rise in child-related benefit generosity that occurred in the UK in late 1990s/early 2000s caused births in disadvantaged households to rise by approximately 15% (Brewer, Ratcliffe & Smith, 2011). In the book, I estimated how many extra births occurred due to this increase in benefit generosity,

arriving at a figure of 14,000 per year. Professor Brewer has since stated on the website of the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) that, while he agrees that increased benefit generosity did indeed cause extra births, he does not agree with the size of my “back-of-the-envelope” estimate (Brewer, 2016).

Professor Brewer’s critique is multi-faceted and has much merit: for example, he states that the 15% figure I used in my estimate was too high – there was actually only a 13% rise in births if the number of extra births is calculated as a fraction of all post-reforms births. He also states that because his analysis was limited to the years immediately following the reforms, some of the observed effect might have been due to bringing forward the timing of reproduction. But Professor Brewer’s criticisms concerning the definitions of disadvantaged households are less convincing, in my view. These centre around his finding that the extra births prompted by welfare increases mostly occurred to couples containing at least one adult working at least 16 or more hours per week, a finding which at first glance seems to counter my position that the welfare state is increasing the number of children born into disadvantaged households.

However if we look more closely at the findings of Brewer and colleagues, it is difficult to view the households that had extra births in response to the welfare reforms of the late 1990s/early 2000s as anything other than disadvantaged. For example, the beneficiaries of the increases in welfare generosity in the late 1990s/early 2000s were concentrated mainly in the lowest two deciles on income (see Figure 1 in Brewer *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the disadvantage experienced by these families extended beyond financial issues: the fourth column of Table 3 in Brewer *et al.* (2011) shows that the “extra births” effect was statistically significant only in those low income households that also possessed low levels of education (i.e., the result only reaches significance at the 5% level when the sample is split by education). Since less

conscientious individuals not only tend to have financial issues (Moffitt *et al.*, 2011) but also are prone to under-achievement in education (e.g., Poropat, 2009), this finding fits with the notion that the lure of increased generosity of per-child welfare benefits is especially strong amongst less conscientious individuals – the very same individuals who are likely to neglect their children.

In the interests of setting a lower bound for the estimated number of extra births, I asked Professor Brewer to provide his own estimate of how many extra births were caused by increased benefit generosity. He replied (via Twitter): “I’ve explained why I don’t agree with how @AdamPerkinsPhD used my figs. I don’t need to provide counter estimate. And counter estimate would not be simple matter of back-of-envelope sums: would need new analysis”.

At the other end of the scale are straightforward *ad hominem* attacks that make no pretence of presenting a reasoned, scientifically meaningful argument: for example, a lecture I was due to give in February at the London School of Economics was postponed when the organisers were threatened with disruption - it should be noted that LSE have now rescheduled the lecture for 29th June. Others seek to portray me as a blinkered, mono-causal obsessive, despite my acknowledgment in the first chapter of *The Welfare Trait* that structural and individual explanations for life outcomes are not mutually exclusive (e.g., socio-economic status, intelligence and personality can all affect an individual’s chances of employment).

But the vast majority of attacks on *The Welfare Trait* occupy a middle ground, in which opponents of welfare state reform conceal *ad hominem* smears beneath the linguistic veneer of factually rigorous *ad rem* attacks. The clever thing about this approach is that there is no need to read *The Welfare Trait*, let alone master the literature in question, nor present peer-reviewed studies that counter the book’s argument, and nor, for that matter, even get out of bed. A few

Google searches will sooner or later reveal typos in a previous paper by the scientist being targeted or methodological limitations in the data they cite – all the critic has to do is highlight these issues in messages on social media that are peppered with melodramatic words like “fraud”, “serious statistical errors” or “flawed research” and abracadabra, the theory is refuted, without any need to publish a cogent, evidence-based counterargument in a peer-reviewed format by a respected academic publisher. Critics of this type have even set up a special website to act as a one-stop shop for anyone wanting to vent their rage at me or The Welfare Trait (Anonymous, 2016). If nothing else, they must consider the issues addressed by The Welfare State as worthy of their time and effort – a compliment, of sorts.

But whatever their motivation, and in the face of extant empirical evidence, those who are serious about trying to refute The Welfare Trait need to cite a critical mass of studies that show personality traits are unrelated to important life outcomes such as employability, reproduction and criminality. This form of counterevidence is a pre-requisite for refutation because the theory in The Welfare Trait is based on the results of over 100 studies – only one of which is mine. I will now attempt to summarise these findings and show how they form my theory of welfare-induced personality mis-development. I will also present relevant research findings that have appeared since the publication of the book and clarify some misunderstandings that have arisen over the book.

Personality and employability

The most basic finding to acknowledge is that personality affects employability. We know this from four main types of evidence. First, neurological case studies of people who have suffered injuries to the prefrontal area of their brains show that such injuries do not usually impair

intelligence but do tend to alter personality in a way that resembles a reduction in conscientiousness and agreeableness (Blumer & Benson, 1975). Crucially, prefrontal brain injuries also tend to transform a person with a good work record into someone who is unemployable (Damasio, 1994). Such case studies, therefore, suggest that conscientiousness and agreeableness play a causal role in determining whether a person will work for their living.

This impression is backed up by the results of longitudinal studies which show that personality measured in childhood predicts occupational outcomes in adulthood, even when controlling for other important variables such as intelligence and socio-economic status. For example, an ongoing study is tracking the lives of approximately 1,000 people born in the New Zealand city of Dunedin during 1972/73. This study has revealed that the lower a participant scored on self-control as measured in childhood, the more prone they were to adverse outcomes in later life, such as teenage parenthood, criminality and – important here – occupational difficulties (Moffitt *et al.*, 2011). Since Moffitt and colleagues view self-control as a composite dimension of personality that approximates to the combined effects of conscientiousness and agreeableness, this finding adds further weight to the notion that conscientiousness and agreeableness affect employability – or, at the very least, that employability is affected by *some* aspects of personality relating to reliability, cooperation and so forth.

A third source of evidence that personality affects employability is provided by cross-sectional studies which examine associations between personality and occupational outcomes. These studies show that both conscientiousness and agreeableness influence job performance in healthy, employed adults in a way that is consistent with the above findings. More specifically, conscientiousness is positively associated with contracted aspects of job performance such as

number of widgets made per hour (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001) whereas agreeableness is positively associated with non-contracted, organizational citizenship-type, helping behaviours that benefit organisational cohesion (Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006).

A fourth source of evidence of links between personality and employability comes from research on what are variously known as ‘problem families’ (an older term) or ‘troubled families’ (a more recent one). One of the most detailed studies of this type was a longitudinal case control research programme conducted in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s by W. L. Tonge and colleagues, who aimed to disentangle the effect of psychological factors on social adjustment from economic or geographical factors. Tonge and colleagues compared two generations of, so-called, problem families with two generations of families who were matched on important variables, such as neighbourhood and income, yet were sufficiently functional not to require the intervention of more than one social service agency (Tonge, James & Hillam, 1975; Tonge, Lunn, Greathead & McLaren, 1981). This research revealed that the chief difference between these families lay in the domain of personality: the adults of the problem families, on average, possessed personality profiles that were significantly more impulsive, irresponsible, apathetic and aggressive than the adults in the comparison families – characteristics which correspond to low scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness in the jargon of modern personality researchers.

In line with the notion that personality influences employability, the adults in the problem families also possessed significantly worse work records: only 9 of the 33 problem families contained parents who had worked for more than ten per cent of the previous three years, compared to 23 out of 33 of the comparison families. Note that these differences cannot be explained away as a result of the comparison families living in more affluent areas with a more

plentiful supply of jobs as Tonge and colleagues took care to make sure that the two groups of families were matched by location. In some cases the control families lived next door to the problem families. This matching is important because it fits with the idea that the employment difficulties of the problem families are primarily caused by a lack of motivation to behave conscientiously and agreeably, rather than a lack of job opportunities in the neighbourhood or financial differences. The follow up study which compared the life outcomes of the second generation of the two groups of families then found evidence that this dysfunctional pattern repeated itself.

The importance of this *convergence* of different types of evidence on personality and employability is that we can be more confident the effect of personality on employability is not an artefact of the methodological flaws of any one specific research design – as is typically the case, each study on its own has limitations and needs to be showcased with inferential caveats. This means that it is reasonable to accept that individuals who happen to score relatively low on both conscientiousness and agreeableness do tend to have more employment difficulties than average and, therefore, can be viewed as possessing what I have dubbed the ‘employment-resistant personality profile’ (Figure 1).

Figure 1 about here

It should be noted that a person who scores low on both conscientiousness and agreeableness equates to a high scorer on psychoticism. The concept of the employment-resistant personality

profile therefore fits well with Eysenck's personality model, since he viewed high scorers on psychoticism as possessing numerous adjustment problems, not only in the domain of employment but also criminality and psychopathology. Eysenck would therefore no doubt have been heartened to know that the concept of psychoticism was recently borne out by a new study from Sweden which showed in a huge national sample (3,475,112 adults) that a general genetic factor exerted a small but significant influence on both crime and psychopathology (between 10 and 36 per cent of the variance; Pettersson, Larsson & Lichtenstein, 2016). This finding leads to an important general point about the employment-resistant personality profile, which I perhaps didn't emphasise enough in *The Welfare Trait*. The point is that while people who are especially un-conscientious and disagreeable tend to have difficulties in holding down a job (hence this personality profile is labelled as employment-resistant), these personality attributes will also cause difficulties in other areas of their lives where it is important to be reliable and cooperative, such as family or law and order contexts.

Personality of welfare claimants

If the above conclusion is valid, we can predict that employment-resistant personality characteristics, approximating to relatively low scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness, should be over-represented amongst welfare claimants. This is, indeed, what is found. For example, the aforementioned research on problem families in Sheffield, Tonge and colleagues found that 58% of the adults in the problem families displayed dysfunctional personality characteristics, such as impulsivity, irresponsibility, aggression or apathy. In comparison, 10.5% of the adults from the control group displayed such characteristics. Since as we have already seen, the adults in the problem families were also predominantly unemployed whereas those in

the control families were predominantly employed, these data allow us to estimate that employment-resistant personality characteristics are approximately six times more common amongst habitual welfare claimants.

This ratio of over-representation shown by the Sheffield studies is echoed by a 2010 survey in the USA of a large and nationally representative sample of 43,093 adults which found that approximately 7% of welfare claimants meet the diagnostic criteria for antisocial personality disorder (Vaughn *et al.*, 2010). This figure contrasts to a prevalence of approximately 1% for antisocial personality disorder in the population in general (Neumann & Hare, 2008). Based on these data, we can estimate that approximately 7% of welfare claimants possess severely employment-resistant personality profiles roughly equivalent to antisocial personality disorder, whereas somewhere around 50% have milder but still troublesome issues with behaving conscientiously and agreeably. Moreover, we can estimate that these employment-resistant personality characteristics are six to seven times more common amongst the sector of the population that is unemployed and claiming benefits compared to the average.

These data showing that employment-resistant personality characteristics are over-represented amongst welfare claimants contribute to a wider debate on the existence of intergenerational worklessness. This debate is important in the present context because if intergenerational worklessness does not exist to any significant degree, it would suggest that employment-resistant attitudes are not being passed on from parents to children – contradicting the theory in *The Welfare Trait*.

In the UK the evidence on intergenerational worklessness is polarised: critics of welfare reform cite reports by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) that suggest intergenerational worklessness is a myth. For example, Shildrick, MacDonald, Furlong, Roden and Crow (2012)

cite data which shows that there are few households in the UK in which three adult generations have never experienced employment. Similarly, Rosso, Gaffney and Portes (2015) concluded that the rise in the number of “never-worked” households that has occurred in the UK since the mid 1990s (Office for National Statistics, 2015) reflects life stages and is not caused by intergenerational worklessness.

But by focussing on households in which three generations have never worked these JRF reports set up a straw man, since it is implausible that there are many UK households in which more than one generation has never had so much as a paper round. A more realistic probe of intergenerational worklessness would be to study families which contain multiple generations who *rarely* work. Studies of this latter type show that intergenerational worklessness is a significant problem in the UK. Early evidence for this comes from the aforementioned Sheffield studies (Tonge *et al.*, 1975, 1981) which show the children of parents who rarely work have higher rates of unemployment than children from households in which work is more common. This finding has been backed up by recent research: for example, Macmillan (2014) showed that in high unemployment areas, sons spend up to 30% more time out of work if their father is workless.

Importantly for The Welfare Trait theory, we also have evidence that suggests employment-resistant attitudes are a contributory factor to this situation. For example, in a recent study by Andrew Dunn (2013), interviews with welfare-to-work industry employees not only showed that between a quarter and a half of the claimants encountered over a six month period by the welfare-to-work employees were reluctant to swap employment for unemployment, but also that these attitudes had become ingrained in them across multiple generations – although it

should be emphasised that not all people are vulnerable to these negative psychological effects (Lykken, 1995).

This finding is backed up by new research which found that, on average, the work-motivation of unemployed people is significantly weaker than that of employed individuals (Dunn, Grasso & Saunders, 2014) – in a nation in which there are more than a million unemployed, yet employers offering basic labouring jobs often have to recruit from abroad, it would perhaps be surprising if it is otherwise. The study compared the responses of employed and unemployed individuals in the UK to the statement “Having almost any job is better than being unemployed” in two waves each of the British Cohort Study and National Child Development Study (10,868 participants in total) – the ‘almost any job’ qualifier is important because it precludes jobs of an exceptionally disagreeable nature. This revealed that the percentage of unemployed respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement was more than twice as high as the percentage for employed respondents. Moreover, the size of the effect was large: approximately 50% of the unemployed respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, in contrast to approximately 20% of the employed respondents. Finally, Dunn and colleagues showed that when other variables were controlled for, unemployed people were still significantly more likely than employed people to prefer unemployment.

Social importance

But so what? Why does it matter that employment-resistant personality characteristics are over-represented amongst welfare claimants? It matters because personality generalises across situations so if, for example, an individual is not sufficiently conscientious enough to work for a living, they are also unlikely to give their children the attention they need to develop a functional

personality profile. This is important because parental inattention causes personality misdevelopment, as demonstrated by evidence from randomised controlled trials that tested the effect of childhood disadvantage on life outcomes in adulthood (Heckman *et al.*, 2013). It is not ethical to inflict disadvantage on children for research purposes and so the way such experiments work is randomly to divide a population of disadvantaged children into two groups: one group receives intensive “in loco parentis” preschool tutoring that resembles the type of guidance that would normally be given to a child by a conscientious parent. More specifically, such an intervention typically entails 3 hours per day of sessions designed to build the children’s skills in planning, executing and reviewing tasks (so called plan-do-review) and also in conflict resolution. The other group does not receive the tutoring. Random assignment means that we can be sure that any differences in life outcomes between the two groups were caused by the tutoring and not genetic differences or other confounding factors.

Experiments of this type began in the 1960s and so the first cohorts of children are now approximately 40 to 50 years of age. They show that the children who received intensive preschool tutoring had significantly better life outcomes than the untutored children, especially in the domains of employability and criminality (Schweinhart *et al.*, 2005). This is an impressive finding for two reasons: first it provides evidence that governments should provide intensive preschool tutoring for disadvantaged children; and, secondly, it shows that the active ingredient by which childhood disadvantage harms life chances is parental inattention rather than financial poverty, because the tutoring programmes did not affect the financial circumstances of the families in these studies.

The importance for pro-social personality development of receiving parental guidance in the early years tallies with the results of a study that was published too recently to be cited in the

book: in a study of 51 nations, Minkov and Beaver (2016) found that the rate of parental absenteeism in a nation was a significant predictor of its rate of criminal violence. This finding in turn converges with evidence that youth crime is over-represented in lone parent families in the UK, since they constitute approximately 25% of households with dependent children (Office for National Statistics, 2015) yet produce approximately 70% of the nation's young offenders (Youth Justice Board, 2002). But what is especially important to the debate of personality and welfare policy is the additional recent discovery that intensive preschool tutoring improved the life outcomes of disadvantaged children by altering their personality development: the tutored children were significantly less aggressive antisocial and rule-breaking than the untutored children (Heckman, *et al.*, 2013) – i.e., they were more conscientious and agreeable, and in terms of Eysenck's personality model, lower on the general factor of psychoticism.

Personality, welfare and differential reproduction

The damage done to personality development by parental inattention means that if a welfare policy causes claimants to have extra children then, due to the over-representation of unconscientious traits amongst welfare claimants, this policy will tend to increase the number of children who suffer personality mis-development. This point is crucial because there is evidence that welfare incentives do, indeed, affect the reproductive choices of claimants. For example, in a study that was too recent to include in the book, Halla, Lackner and Scharler (2015) collated data on welfare spending and fertility for 23 OECD countries between 1980 and 2007. They showed that in this time period, these countries on average increased spending on the welfare state by 21.5%. This increase was associated with a 2.1% increase in fertility (significant at the .01 level) in women between 15 and 44 years old.

The connection between the size of welfare income and reproduction suggested by these OECD data are echoed by UK government data on family size and household employment status that I obtained via a Freedom of Information Request in 2014 and published in the book as Table 1 (see below). These data show that the smaller the proportion of employed adults in a household, the more children (on average) that it contained.

Table 1 about here

It should be noted that this particular analysis caused a furore amongst critics of welfare state reform because it only includes households with children. The critics complained that the analysis should include all households because, when this is done, the gradient shown in Table 1 disappears. In my judgement, this alternative analysis plan is not plausible because it relies on the far-fetched assumption that all households are ready, willing and able to have children and are merely deciding as to how many children to have – also some households will contain people who cannot have children for medical reason and also same-sex couples who are much else likely to have children in the first place. For these reasons, I argue that the comparisons I made were appropriately like-for-like. However, regardless of the particular analysis plan used in Table 1, government statistics such as these or the data presented by Halla and colleagues cannot address causality and only become meaningful if backed up by the results of independent peer-reviewed studies that have explored causality.

One study of this type was conducted by Argys, Averett and Rees (2000), who compared the effects on reproduction of states in the USA with differing policies on the payment of financial benefits for children born to 1,168 unmarried women who reported receiving income from welfare during at least one year between 1979 and 1991. This study revealed that reproduction of claimants tracked the generosity of welfare benefits. This finding is congruent with those of other studies in the US that show a similar tendency for increases in the generosity of welfare payments to be associated with increases in births amongst recipients (e.g., Moffitt, 1998). However, Argys *et al.* (2000, p. 584) additionally found that reductions in child bearing in response to reduced welfare generosity were achieved by a decrease in pregnancies rather than an increase in abortions, concluding that: "Capping benefits will lead to a reduction in births by making women more efficient contraceptors as opposed to increasing abortions."

A similar tendency has also been found in the UK. For example, as has already been mentioned, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s the UK government implemented policy changes that boosted the generosity of per-child welfare payments by approximately 50 per cent in real terms. So generous were these welfare payments that the birth of a first child in a household in the bottom fifth of the UK income distribution would bring a cash benefit increase equivalent to a ten per cent rise in net household income (Brewer *et al.*, 2011)

The effects of this change to UK welfare provisioning have been studied in detail by Brewer *et al.* (2011), revealing that reproduction amongst welfare claimants in the UK is also sensitive to changes in welfare incentives: these increases in the generosity of per-child welfare that happened in the UK from 1999 onwards increased the number of children born to benefit recipients by approximately 15 per cent. Moreover, Brewer *et al.* (2011) presented evidence that the increase in reproduction in response was causally linked to the availability of more generous

benefits, because increases in reproduction were related to reduced contraception usage. This finding dovetails with the earlier conclusion of Argys *et al.* (2000) that reductions in births in response to reductions in welfare benefits are accomplished by increased use of contraception.

A crucial link in the theory is the notion that these effects of welfare generosity on reproduction are driven by the over-representation of relatively un-conscientious individuals amongst welfare claimants. The book cites a number of studies that back up this notion by showing that low scorers on conscientiousness tend to have more children (e.g., Jokela, Hintsanen, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2010; Jokela, Alvergne, Pollet, & Lummaa, 2011; Jokela, 2012). These have since been backed up by more recent studies that were published too recently to feature in the book. For example, Skirbekk and Blekesaune (2014) found that conscientiousness decreases female fertility in Norway. Likewise Yao, Långström, Temrin, & Walum (2014) found that criminal offenders in Sweden had more children than individuals never convicted. Finally, Berg, Lummaa, Lahdenperä, Rotkirch and Jokela (2014) found that lower conscientiousness is linked to more children and grandchildren in both sexes.

Viewed as a whole, these studies suggest that welfare policies which increase the number of children born into disadvantaged households endanger the prospects of society. Moreover this effect of disadvantage is not so much an effect of a low income, but parental inattention which occurs because individuals with relatively un-conscientious and disagreeable “employment resistant” personality profiles are over-represented amongst welfare claimants. Paradoxically, there is evidence that the parents with the most free time (because they are unemployed) speak fewer words to their children than working citizens (Hart & Risley, 1995). Moreover, the lower an individual scores on conscientiousness, the more responsive they are to short term financial incentives (Segal, 2012).

So it seems that the least capable parents (on average) are being incentivised by the welfare state to have extra children, who as a result run a higher risk of being neglected and thus suffering personality damage with all the resultant negative effects on society. Then the story repeats itself. As I (Perkins, 2015, p. 79) say at the start of Chapter 5 in *The Welfare Trait*: "These two findings point to the existence of a trans-generational cycle of maltreatment, in which today's maltreated children become tomorrow's employment-resistant, perpetrators of child-maltreatment."

In terms of socioeconomic impact on society several things are worth noting. For example, the percentage of workless households in the UK has fallen over the last five years from 19.2% to 15.8% (Office for National Statistics, 2015). These statistics have been cited as evidence that all is well with the work ethic of the nation and that *The Welfare Trait* is suggesting solution to either a non-existent problem or one that also already been addressed. However, these very same government statistics contain a sobering message: despite the recent modest falls in the percentage of workless households, the UK still contains approximately 4.5 million working age people who are living in households where no one has a job (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Furthermore, the long term perspective is even more worrying because the percentage of UK households that are workless has approximately trebled since the 1970s (Gregg, Hanson & Wadsworth, 1999).

While some of this rise in worklessness over the last four decades could be explained by changes in government record-keeping or macro-economic changes such as the disappearance of many basic labouring jobs, the work of researchers such as Andrew Dunn makes it clear that there is, indeed, a problem with the nation's work ethic – a finding that accords with more detailed government figures which show that the number of households in which no one has ever

worked has almost doubled since the mid 1990s, rising from 178,000 to 311,000 according to the latest government figures for 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). When these government data are viewed together with the findings of Dunn and colleagues, they suggest my critics are premature to rule out welfare-induced personality mis-development as a contributor to the trebling of worklessness that the UK has experienced over the last forty years or so. Of course, the extent of these socioeconomic trends has yet to be precisely specified.

My experiences since the publication of *The Welfare Trait* have provided an insight into the harassment that Hans Eysenck was forced to endure for much of his professional life. Being a pariah is not comfortable, but it has been cited as necessary for the advancement of science (Corr, 2016c). If, like Eysenck, I have to take some vilification to advance our understanding of links between personality and the welfare state then so be it. Nevertheless being vilified is challenging and the scale with which it was heaped on Eysenck dwarfs anything I have experienced. This is just one of the many reasons I believe Hans Eysenck's adherence to data over dogma deserves our lasting respect.

Acknowledgments

Adam M. Perkins is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Mental Health Biomedical Research Centre at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR, or the Department of Health. The author thanks Palgrave Macmillan for permission to reproduce material from *The Welfare Trait*.

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Figure 1

Employability as a function of the combined scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness in 2,532 UK adults (Figure reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan)



Table 1

Average number of children under the age of 16 in working, mixed and workless households in England and Wales during April-June 2013 (Source: Labour Force Survey Household Dataset; Table reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan).

	Working Households	Mixed Households	Workless Households
Number of Children in:	6,301,178	3,795,829	1,594,427
Number of Households	3,877,455	2,181,509	872,757
Children per Household (mean)	1.63	1.74	1.83