

Essay Title: *Outline and evaluate the cognitive approach in psychology. (16 marks)*

The cognitive approach focuses on the examination of mental processes: perception, memory, attention, consciousness. Because these processes are internal, they cannot be studied directly; instead, their operation must be inferred from the observation and measurement of visible human behaviour.

A good introduction to the cognitive approach.

To assist this inference, cognitive psychologists make use of theoretical models. Models enable the representation of complex conceptual processes so that their components can be better understood. An example of this is the multi-store model of memory which presents a picture of memory based on an information-processing analogy. Theoretical models also provide a basis for research.

Knowledge of theoretical models is presented accurately with an example.

Schema theory is another information-processing model that emphasises how perception and memory are shaped by cognitive frameworks built from experience that organise and interpret information in the brain. Schemas allow us to make sense of an often ambiguous world by “filling in the gaps” in our knowledge and thus enable us to act comfortably even when our information is incomplete.

Knowledge of schema theory is clearly evident. An example of schemas would help to demonstrate understanding.

Recent advances in neuroimaging technology, such as Function Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), have lent weight to theoretical models by providing empirical confirmation of brain activity for specific cognitive functions under controlled conditions. However, the precise meaning of this activity is still a matter for debate. Some claim that these techniques provide the cognitive approach with a strong scientific grounding, while others insist that neuroimaging evidence is only correlational, and therefore does not constitute true scientific validation of either theories or models. Nevertheless, the availability of such techniques and their increasing sophistication is one clear strength of the cognitive approach.

While the use of neuroimaging technology provides an interesting evaluation point, an example would add to this point.

An interesting counter-argument is provided and linked to the question.

Another strength of the cognitive approach is its recognition of the complexity of human behaviour, and thus its hesitation to assert a reductionist explanation of mental processes. There can be no doubt that all cognition rests on a biological foundation since it occurs in the brain and is made possible by its operation. But the precise

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nature of consciousness and memory and perception are not easily reducible to purely biological outcomes, as the lived experience of all human beings seems to consistently demonstrate.

mostly effective evaluation point and example would help add clarity.

Ironically, this appreciation of cognitive complexity can also be a weakness of the approach. Not all human behaviour can be captured under the cognitive umbrella; the research in this field has tended to neglect other significant dimensions of behaviour such as emotion and motivation which may be linked to cognition, but are not the same. The cognitive approach is careful to insist that we are more than biological machines, but often overlooks the equally important fact that we are not only cognitive creatures.

The previous evaluation point is developed by outlining a limitation of the cognitive approach effectively.

A third strength of the cognitive approach derives from this 'soft determinist' ontology: It has many real-world applications. For example, cognitive research into memory and the effects of misleading information has reduced the use of eyewitness testimony in court cases, and led to major reforms in police procedure, like the use of the cognitive interview. Additionally, a better understanding of thinking patterns has helped professionals understand and treat mental illnesses such as depression through the use of therapies like CBT. This indicates that cognitive research has made concrete contributions to contemporary society and has developed professional understanding in many fields.

The final evaluation point is excellent, referring to issues and debates and outlining multiple applications of the cognitive approach.

[520 Words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark Band 4**

This is a well-detailed essay which explains the many components of the cognitive approach accurately. The evaluation is generally effective; however, the final evaluation point exceptionally concludes the essay and reinforces the effective nature of the evaluation overall. The use of specialist terminology is consistent throughout.