

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

Humanistic psychology is intensively focused on one ontological question: What does it mean to be fully human? It recognises the importance and insights of cognitive neuroscience and systematic empirical research but insists that all other approaches are partial and reductionist, and that only its fluid boundaries of theory and practice can provide the conceptual space in which the holistic complexity of human behaviour can be understood.

A well-written introduction that captures the essence of the humanistic approach.

There are many strands of humanistic psychology, but all draw on the work of the field's founding figures, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Maslow's (1943) famous hierarchy of needs is an enduring model of psychological development: The most basic needs are biological – air, food, water, clothing, shelter, sleep; then come safety needs, which include resources, employment, family, and health; next is the need for love and belonging, from friends, family, and a sexual partner. After that comes the need for esteem, both self-esteem and respect from others. Once these 'deficiency needs' have been met, people can turn their attention to self-actualisation, which includes, spirituality, creativity and acceptance of the world as it is. Self-actualisation is rare, but its achievement provides the possibility of true self-awareness and an honest relationship with the realities of an always-imperfect world.

An exceptionally detailed account of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is presented with numerous examples to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

The evidence for the existence of this hierarchy is empirically thin, as would be expected from an approach that disputes the validity of empirical research. There is some validation provided by clinical data, and some surprising confirmation from the realm of management studies (Maslow, 1965; Rogers and Roethlisberger, 1982). But the theoretical emphasis on individual achievement raises significant concerns about possible cultural bias.

A partly effective evaluation point, however further development is required to explain why cultural bias may pose an issue for humanism.

Rogers was primarily interested in just two basic needs: the need for self-worth and the need for unconditional positive regard from other people. Both emerge from good relationships with supportive parents in childhood, and later with friends and partners. For Rogers, unhappiness and dissatisfaction were the outcomes of a psychological gap between self-concept (the way you think you are) and

ideal self (the way you would like to be. When these were congruent, people were healthy; when they weren't, and this was true for most people most of the time, it was necessary to use defence mechanisms to provide protection against feeling bad. It was the purpose of Rogerian therapy to close this gap, and thus allow the troubled individual to recognise both their psychological limits and their strengths, and achieve a realistic balance between them.

An excellent outline of Rogers' work and humanistic therapy is presented.

Humanistic psychology has had a major influence on psychological counselling, and contemporary therapists use Rogers' ideas of unconditional positive regard to help clients work toward self-awareness. This means it is a useful theory with real-world applications: It is, in fact, impossible to imagine modern client-centered therapy without its insights and techniques.

A simple yet effective evaluation point highlight the real-world application of humanism.

However, it is hard to scientifically test the effectiveness of humanistic counselling as it can't be done in an experimental context. People believe they benefit from counselling, and there is considerable empirical evidence available to support the effectiveness of counselling methods derived from Rogers' model, like CBT and ACT. But since one cannot establish a cause-effect relationship between treatment and outcome (i.e. the client may have recovered without the counselling), a narrowly scientific certainty about the validity of the theory is probably impossible. Furthermore, some critics argue that the humanistic approach offers an unrealistic view of human nature. Critics point to the more sinister aspects of human behaviour and argue that humanism focuses on 'growth-orientated' behaviour while ignoring individual capacity for self-destruction. Consequently, such critics argue that a focus on self-development ignores situational forces that may provide a more realistic explanation of everyday human behaviour.

Another effective evaluation point, drawing on the issue of scientific credibility.

A well-developed and effective criticism of humanism, providing an interesting critique of humanistic psychology.

[597 Words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark Band 4**

This is a well-detailed and accurate account of humanistic psychology, referring to the two key theorists, Maslow and Rogers. The evaluation is thorough and effective in most places, and the final paragraph provides an interesting high-level discussion of the humanistic approach.