

**Essay Title:** Outline the key features of the cognitive approach in psychology. Compare the cognitive approach with the psychodynamic approach. (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.*

Though profoundly different in fundamental ways, the cognitive and psychodynamic approaches do share some unexpected similarities. Both seek nomothetic conclusions about human behaviour, i.e. general laws that can be applied universally. For example, the cognitive models of memory are not specific to populations or locations, and Freud believed his psychosexual stages of development were applicable to all people always. But important evidence for these nomothetic claims is derived in both approaches from case studies: For cognitive psychology, the cases of HM and Clive Wearing are indispensable support for the multi-store model of memory; for psychodynamic psychology, the case study is the primary source of data, as illustrated by Freud’s classic monographs on the Wolf Man and Little Hans. These case studies provide rich data to confirm the presence of internal processes unavailable to direct observation, but suffer from the lack of generalizability common to such idiographic accounts, and thus are susceptible to the charge that they do not meet the standards of scientific credibility.

*An exceptionally well-detailed discussion in relation to the similarity of the cognitive approach and psychodynamic approach is presented. The answer draws on key issues and debates and explains the similarity with clarity and precision.*

Another similarity between the cognitive and psychodynamic approach is that both recognize the influence of experience on our behaviour in later life. According to the cognitive understanding of schemas, past experiences provide the content of the mental representations that inform our expectations of future events, and thus shape our perception of them and our responses to them. This can, of course, lead to the development of stereotypes, and the subsequent disregard for information that does not fit our pre-existing frameworks of knowledge. The psychodynamic approach likewise places great emphasis on the role of childhood experiences in the shaping of adult behaviour. For example, Freud suggested that unresolved conflict that develops during our passage through the psychosexual stages could cause fixations in later life, and the psychological unease that is their result. This demonstrates that both approaches acknowledge the importance of nurture on the operation of internal mental processes. This could indicate, however, that both approaches are limited by a form of determinism, soft determinism for the cognitive approach, and a much stronger psychic determinism for the psychodynamic approach.

*A second similarity is presented with exceptional detail, focusing on the key requirements of this question.*

A final similarity is that both have been practically applied to help people in the real world. The cognitive understanding has enabled psychologists to clinically address psychopathology, i.e. why faulty thinking may lead to psychological disorders; from this has developed treatments, such as CBT, to help people recognise and challenge distorted thinking patterns. Psychodynamic therapy in the form of psychoanalysis has been a central feature in the history of psychiatry as a medical speciality. This therapy can include hypnosis, dream analysis, and other techniques aimed at accessing the unconscious. Whilst this therapy has reduced in popularity over the past few decades, the psychodynamic approach has been an influential element in the development of later therapies such as CBT.

*A third and final similarity draws on the application of the cognitive approach and psychodynamic approach.*

[615 Words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark Band 4**

This is an excellent response to this complex question. The answer provides detailed knowledge of the cognitive approach which is highly accurate. Furthermore, the discussion is centred on three similarities and provides an in-depth commentary that is thorough and effect, with an excellent use of specialist terminology.