

Essay title: Discuss free will and determinism in psychology. (16 marks)

In psychology, as in Western philosophy, the free will vs. determinism debate has occupied an important theoretical position. Free will is the view that people control their own behaviour by making real choices amongst alternative possibilities; determinism is the view that free will is an illusion, and that our behavior is governed by internal or external forces over which we have no control, and of which we are often unaware.

An interesting introduction that defines the key terms immediately.

Determinism in psychology takes numerous forms, including biological, environmental, and psychic. Biological determinism claims that our behavior is entirely the result of genetic factors. For example, research has found that a particular gene (IGF2r) is implicated in intelligence (Hill et al., 1999). Psychic determinism, on the other hand, claims that human behaviour is the result of childhood experiences and innate drives, as in Freud's model of psychological development. Environmental determinism posits that our behaviour is caused by previous experience learned through classical and operant conditioning. Humanist psychologists would argue against these views, claiming that humans have self-determination and free will, and that behaviour is not the result of any single cause.

Research is effectively used to support knowledge.

All three types of determinism are outlined and key aspects of humanism are defined.

The evidence for this criticism of determinism is plentiful. For example, identical twin studies typically find an 80% similarity in intelligence scores and a 40% similarity in the likelihood of depression. However, as identical twins share 100% of their genes, these results suggest that 20% is caused by other (environmental) factors. This demonstrates that biological determinism is unable to explain any particular behaviour, in this case, depression and intelligence. The same evidence indicates that no behaviour is completely environmentally determined. If identical twins only show an 80% likeness in terms of intelligence, it is therefore assumed that 20% is caused by the environment.

Twin studies are used to effectively evaluate the idea of both biological and environmental determinism.

Many psychologists, theorists and legal experts do not favour a deterministic point of view. If behaviour is determined by outside forces, that provides a potential excuse for criminal acts. For example, in 1981 Stephen Mobley argued that he was 'born to kill' after killing a pizza

Excellent use of an example to outline

shop manager, because his family had a disposition towards violence and aggressive behavior. This argument was rejected by an American court. Therefore, a truly determinist position may be undesirable as it provides an 'excuse', allowing people to mitigate their own liability and could lead to vexing legal issues regarding the nature of responsibility and intent (*mens rea*).

the issue with a deterministic point of view.

The idea of free will has attracted similar criticisms. Some psychologists, such as Skinner, argue that free will is an illusion. Skinner insisted that our behaviour is in fact environmentally determined, even if we are unable (or unwilling) to admit it. In addition, more recent evidence provides some support for Skinner's claim. For example, Libet et al. (1983) found that the motor regions of the brain become active before a person registers conscious awareness of a decision. i.e. the decision to move the finger was actually a pre-determined action of the brain. This strongly suggests that many responses are biologically determined and that although we may believe that we have free will, Skinner's claim that free will is an illusion, may be correct. It is clear that psychologists do not favour either a "hard" determinist or an entirely free will point of view. Therefore, a 'soft determinism' perspective that recognizes an element of free will is probably the most appropriate.

Further evaluation of free will is presented drawing on key ideas of Skinner and Libet.

An excellent conclusion to this evaluation point.

[547 words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 4:**

The knowledge is well-detailed and accurate and the answer demonstrates a clear understanding of the different types of determinism. The evaluation, while mainly focused on criticisms, is thorough and effective throughout. There is an impressive amount of specialist terminology which is used effectively.