

Outline and compare the cognitive and behaviourist approach in psychology (12 marks)

This essay will outline and compare the cognitive and behaviourist approach to psychology. It will refer to various therapies and practical uses of each approach. I will also refer to the case study of Kohler. I will then outline the similarities and conclude with the differences.

The behaviourist approach is deterministic as it argues all behaviours are determined by past events and that all human behaviour is controlled by external events which means that humans do not have freewill. It supports empiricism and argues that only behaviour that can be observed, measured and recorded should be classed as scientific. It also supports reductionism as complex human behaviour is reduced to simple component parts. Environmentalism is another assumption of the behaviourist approach as behaviourists believe that all learning comes from experience and that heredity has no play.

The cognitive approach believes that mental process can be studied scientifically. It argues that mental processes can be regarded as information processing. The mind operates in a similar way to a computer and introspection can be classed as a valid scientific method of studying cognitive process. The aspects of the organism including conscious and unconscious thought act as a meditational process between stimulus and response.

The similarities between the approaches are that they are both scientific as they both believe that human behaviour can be studied scientifically, they focus on objectivity and they both conduct experiments in laboratory conditions. The strengths of both the approaches are that they are scientific and they allow prediction and replication of studies. They have also produced vast amounts of research in psychology and have influenced it in their own way. For example the information processing approach has implications for eye witness testimony and the behaviourist approach has implications for criminal behaviour e.g. stimulus response in criminal behaviour.

They also both share therapies to change behaviour e.g. the behaviourist approach uses conditioning to shape behaviour, directly or indirectly. And the cognitive approach which uses rational behaviour therapy to change irrational beliefs.

The differences are that the cognitive approach believes that meditational process occur between stimulus and response whilst the behaviourist approach believes that meditational processes do not occur as they are internal and therefore cannot be studied scientifically.

Kohler investigated problem solving behaviour in a chimpanzee called Sultan. The chimpanzee was in a cage and bananas were placed outside the cage out of his reach and in order for him to reach the bananas he had to join two stick together. After a while of trial and error he sat in the corner and thought to himself, he was then able to get in join the sticks together and successfully get the bananas. This supports the idea cognitive approach and goes against the behaviourist approach as the chimps behaviour was more than trial and error it was the process solution of insight.

In conclusion the cognitive approach argues that people are born with pre existing schemas whilst the behaviourist approach disagrees with the idea of innate behaviour or that we have pre existing schemas. Skinner and Watson argued that people are born with a blank slate (tabula rasa) and that all behaviour is learnt from the environment.