

Question - Option B

Outline the key features of the psychoanalytic and humanistic perspectives, and briefly compare and contrast their views on conscious experience, a person as an integrated whole, and the role of therapists in arriving at changes.

Answer

In explaining and predicting animal behaviour, different schools of psychology are of different perspectives; e.g. cognitive approach focuses on the mental processes, behaviourism is based on external stimuli and reinforcement, biological approach is concerned with the relationship between the mind and body and the influence of heredity. However, they are only cope with a specific part of people, but neglect human as a whole. To supplement such deficient, both psychoanalytic and humanistic psychologies have provided their perspectives on it.

Psychoanalytic Perspective

Psychoanalytic approach was advocated by Sigmund Freud, a private practitioner who construct his theory through therapy and self-experience. In his theory, there are three major ideas; they are consciousness, psychosexual stages of development and psychodynamics as well.

Freud split the consciousness into three levels; they are conscious, preconscious and unconscious respectively. The conscious level contains information of which we are aware, alert and awake at the moment, e.g. you can easily answer the question of “What is your name?”. The preconscious level contains the memories and thoughts that are easily remember through a little effort, e.g. in respond to a question of “Where are you last night?”. The unconscious level is the most controversial one amongst the consciousness, it contains the information, including the past unpleasant emotion and experiences which were repressed and we are not aware. We can only access them with great effort; yet, some of them are entirely inaccessible. (Davis & Palladino, 1995).

Freud argued that most of our behaviour is motivated by our unconscious, but how could we know the existence of it. Freud suggested that there are several ways to access the unconscious level. The first one is free association, patients are encouraged to give free rein to their thoughts and feelings, expressing whatever comes into the mind without monitoring its content, it assumed that repressed material would be emerged ultimately. The second one is by dream analysis, he opined that unconscious wishes are often manifested in dreams, sometimes in their true forms, sometimes in symbolic form (Website : Webref), e.g. children's wish of candies or toys would be reflected in the content of their dreams. The last one is named as Freudian slip; he argued that an accidental action would be expressed as the unconscious motivations (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002), e.g. A man who said "Peter is a bad (black) guy!"

But what materials would be repressed to the part of unconscious? Freud considered that part of our unconscious motivations was come from biological drivers, one of these drivers is sexuality or libido in Freud's terms. It refers any forms of body stimulation that create "pleasure" feeling. (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002). Different "sex" organ would sough pleasure in different stage from infancy to adulthood. He have established five psychosexual stages of development :

They are oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage and genital stage, age range from birth to an adult, they all represented the source of 'sex' gratification. (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002) Freud emphasized the importance of the childhood experience which would influence in the adult behaviour. During these stages of development, conflict can be appeared to over frustration or gratification. If such conflicts could not be tackled properly, it can result in fixation. For instance, if a child were deprived of something to suck or to eat in his early life, he would later become orally fixated; he might put something into his mouth in his adult life, e.g. cigarettes.

The last perspective derive by Freud is psychodynamics which is about the structure of personality. It consists of three types; they are id, ego and superego. (OUHK, 2003).

Id consists of biological or instinctual drives that need immediate gratification. e.g. eating, urinating, defecation and etc. The id operates followed by the 'pleasure principle', i.e. the demanding manner by which the id operates, seeking immediate gratification of its needs without considering the needs of reality or morals.

Ego can be interpreted as the buffer between the id and reality, it serves to balance between the demands of biological or instinctual drives (the id) and internalized parental and social prohibitions (the superego).

Superego consists of all the behavioural restrictions and individual has internalized from his social environment. It can be seen as conscience, the sense of right and wrong that a child developed through internalization of parental and social prohibitions.

Freud opined that human behaviour is determined by the interaction between the aforesaid three aspects, thus conflicts are inevitably formed; and these conflicts would result in anxiety. To cope with the anxiety, he has identified nine methods termed as defence mechanism which people used. (Website : Webref) Some examples are i) Denial : the subject completely reject the thought or feeling, ii) Displacement : the subject redirect his feelings to another target, and iii) Suppression : the subject is vaguely aware of the thought or feeling, but try to hide it. (OUHK, 2003)

Humanistic Perspective

On the other hand, humanistic psychology is of different view on human behaviour as a whole. There are three major ideas.

The first idea is about conscious experience which is about how we experience our world, it argued that we are capable to aware of our feelings so that we could actively change the situation. Yet, humanists are also of different perspectives on this conscious. Among the humanists, Abraham Maslow opined that conscious awareness could be emerged in different forms, that is "a specific state of consciousness characterized by a sense of delight, wholeness, meaningfulness and abundant energy". (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002, p. 197), e.g. reading a book, watching TV. He named this as peak experience. Another humanist Csikszentmihalyi suggested another

conscious experience as flow experience which refers to the experience of the whole process of an activity people enjoyed for its own sake (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002), e.g. dancing, diving or playing chess. Apart from the two approaches of conscious awareness mentioned above, George Kelly opined that such experience is very personal, because “our beliefs and feelings about ourselves and the social world through our experiences and interactions, and then modify and extend these by testing them out, thus they are part of the way a particular person makes sense of the world.” (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002, p. 199).

The second idea is about creating ourselves. In response to existentialism, humanists consider that we have free to choose and create what we are. However, we should admitted that something are out of our control, e.g. death, our parents; therefore, we should take responsibilities for all of our acts (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002). They also emphasize the importance for the need that people should make their life meaningful, the four ways to achieve it are through actions, experience of beauty or music; through love, and the last one is fortitude. (Miell, Phoenix & Thomas, 2002)

Maslow argued that there is a hierarchy need for people towards self-actualization, it means people could realize their desire by using their potential in the life. The needs are ranked from bottom to top as physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization need. To achieve self-actualization, the one who must fulfilled the former four levels of need.

Other humanist Carl Rogers focuses on the notion of self, what we feel we are (the self) and what we feel we should be (the ideal self). The sense of ‘self’ is developed by individual who through interaction with other people and different contexts. The ideal self is built by others’ norms and values, e.g. parent, that is depended and conditioned. If the self and ideal self is match, the result is congruence; otherwise, the result is incongruence. He considered that if people could successfully develop ‘self’, he is capable to growth.

The last idea of humanistic approach is it treated a person in a holistic way. This can be reflected in different humanistic psychotherapies. In line with Roger’s person-centered approach, it emphasis the here-and-now, but it is not necessary to ignore the past. Clients are encouraged to express and experience what they feel, but do not try to interpret what they meant, to value the real relationships between

themselves and the facilitator. Another therapy is try to help clients to understand and accept themselves, to appreciate that we have our limitation, many things are inevitable and out of our control.

Psychoanalytic Approach Versus Humanistic Approach

As stated in the psychoanalytic approach, people are capable to experience the materials from the conscious and preconscious levels, however, the materials with the unconscious level is not aware by the thinker and a large part of our motivation is driven by unconscious, which is out of our control. In contrast, humanistic psychology considered that we are entirely capable to aware our feeling, thus, we can actively take action and we are free to change our life.

Psychoanalytic approach opined that people's behaviour is constrained by our basic instinct (id) and motivated by our unconscious and we are all determined by the past experience. There is little room to change it, it towards a pessimistic approach for being a human. In contrast, humanism is rather optimistic, it consider people are kindness in nature, individual are capable to tackle problems by themselves because they are only distorting themselves and they will recover it spontaneously.

In psychoanalytic approach, they labeled their subjects as 'patients' whereas humanists named them as 'clients'. Both approaches believe that through therapy, they can tackle their patients/clients' psychic problems. However, psychoanalytic therapist adopted a dominant role as a specialist during the process of therapy, that means their patients should depended on them. Yet, humanist therapists only take the role as a 'facilitator' or 'leader', their role between the facilitator and the clients are equal and fair. They only encourage their clients to express their feelings and believe that they could solve their problems by themselves.

Even though the psychoanalytic approach was criticized as unobservable and the humanism is over emphasis the ability of individual, but neglect the external factors, e.g. environmental and cultural influences; they indeed made contributions to help people to tackle their psychic/psychological problems.

(1,616 words)

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