

# Humanistic and behaviouristic approach to human behaviour



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The humanistic and behaviouristic approaches have different perspectives on the study of human behaviour. This essay will describe and contrast behaviourist and humanistic approaches to the study of human behaviour. It will give a clear description of both theories and describe the main ways in which they differ in their approach to psychology. Behaviourists say people are not inherently good or evil; their behaviour is the result of a continuous interaction between personal and environmental variables. Environmental conditions shape behaviour through learning, in turn; a person's behaviour shapes the environment. Persons and situations influence each other. The behaviouristic approach to psychology was first established by J. B. Watson in 1913, in which he argued that to be truly scientific, psychology should only concern itself with behaviour that could be directly observed, not the mind, (Gross 2005). He thought Wundt's work, based on introspection, that is to introspect about sensations and feelings and to report these accurately as they could, was not scientific enough (Eysenck 2004). Watson thought that eventually all behaviour could be understood through a complex chain of learned stimulus response connections. A major approach in the first half of the 20th century, it ignored cognitive and holistic explanations of human behaviour as they could not be observed explanations of human behaviour as they could not be observed directly/objectively, this earns this approach a lot of criticism as little research was done into cognitive psychology until the 1950's. Watson claimed he could raise an infant to be anything, regardless of the infant's ancestor's talents, tendencies, and abilities. Behaviourists now hold a strong confidence about our capability to change human behaviour by changing the environment we grow up. (E. Smith, et al 2003)The

behaviouristic approach comes the nearest to meeting the criteria of the <https://assignbuster.com/humanistic-and-behaviouristic-approach-to-human-behaviour/>

scientific approach. The behaviourist approach promotes precise control of variables, and replicability. Theories are testable, all data is observable, as it has to be able to be objectively measured. Behaviourists assume we live in order as a result of stimulus-response; our lives are determined, so this fits in well with the scientific approach. (Eysenck 2004) Behaviourists focus only on directly observable behaviour, this is an objective approach. Biological psychologists focus on the physiology of the brain and the nervous system and the relationship between this and behaviour, again this is an objective approach. Cognitive psychologists focus on the study of perceptual processes e. g. attention, memory, imagery, language, concept formation, problem solving, creativity, reasoning, decision-making and cognitive development. This approach is also objective as the research methods are experimental and involve measuring directly observable behaviour.

However, these approaches are using other less scientific methods to add depth and further insight to their findings. For example, asking for verbal feedback from participants and conducting case studies on people who display unusual abilities or disabilities. (Smith et al 2003) There are two different views in behaviouristic psychology, operant conditioning and classical conditioning. Burrhus Skinner (1904-1990) developed the notion of operant conditioning. He used the 'skinner box' to look at the behaviour of pigeons and rats and conditioned their responses. The behaviourist theories basic view in operant conditioning is that people behave in ways that are likely to produce reinforcement; they believe differences in the kinds of learning experiences a person encounters in the course of growing up are the result of individual differences. (Sternberg 1995) Ivan Pavlov created the

behaviouristic approach known as classical conditioning. Classical  
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conditioning is the type of learning that occurs when specific situations become associated with specific outcomes. (E. Smith, et al 2003). Pavlov's study is based on the experiment of animal's responses to conditioning. Pavlov conditioned a dog's response to a bell ringing. Pavlov put a meal in front of the dog and rang the bell whenever food was present and the dogs were fed causing them to salivate. He then took the food away and rang the bell to find the dogs still salivating. This shows how the dogs had been conditioned to salivate at the ringing of the bell. (Sternberg 1995)The behavioural theory has led us to see human actions as reactions to specific environments, and has helped focus on how environments control our behaviour and how they can be changed to modify behaviour. As in the case of pavlov's study above, it shows how we seem to be shaped primarily by forces beyond our control. However, humanistic theorists do not believe that it is sufficient to define mental health as simply an adaptation to the environment. The humanistic approach was founded as an alternative to psychoanalytic and behaviouristic approaches. (E. Smith, et al 2003). It largely rejects the scientific method as humanists see each person as unique so what is the point in trying to find 'laws' about human behaviour when they are not going to apply to most people. Humanists consider what is important is each individual's subjective experience; this data would not be directly observable to anyone else. In other words humanists emphasise the need to see the world through each person's perspective. Experimentation is seen as dehumanising. The idea of determinism is rejected, people have free will and are able to make their own choices, so we would all react differently in an experiment, there wouldn't be the opportunity to be able to make 'laws' about how everyone would respond to the same stimulus/situation. (E. <https://assignbuster.com/humanistic-and-behaviouristic-approach-to-human-behaviour/>

Smith, et al 2003). According to Rogers, the humanistic approach emphasises studying the whole person, not just the mind or focussing on what is directly observable. Humanistic psychologists such as Rogers and Maslow saw human beings as being born with the desire to grow and develop with a natural tendency to be good. The most important part of being human is subjective experience as each individual is unique and what applies to one person will not apply to another. Each individual strives to develop under his or her own control. Each individual is capable of making personal decisions and has free will to do so. Behaviourists however consider that people do not have free will; humans are all conditioned to behave in certain ways as a result of internal or external things acting upon the individual. (Eysenck 2004) Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (1950's) developed the humanistic approach. This approach focuses on free will, personal responsibility and the striving towards personal growth and fulfilment. The approach assumes individuals have a need for self-actualisation, which is the process of individuals discovering and fulfilling their capabilities in all areas of functioning. It is an optimistic approach assuming people are naturally good, with the potential for personal growth in the right circumstances. (Eysenck 2004) According to Rogers, the individual evaluates every experience in relation to his or her self-concept. (Roth, I. 1990). People like to behave in ways that are consistent with their self-image and experiences; feelings that are not consistent are threatening and may be denied entry into consciousness. Rogers believed we all need to receive positive regard (affection) from the most important people in our lives. In the early stages of life, this would tend to be the parents who provide positive regard. In conclusion both the humanistic and behaviouristic approaches

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have very different views on what determines human behaviour.

Behaviourists believe all behaviour is moulded by the environment, and if it was possible to identify all the relevant variables behaviour could be predicted. Behaviourists also believe sex-differences in behaviour to be the result of moulding and reinforcement from parents. This approach takes the view as discussed above, that if we as individuals are reinforced to be friendly and outgoing then this is the sort of person we become. Therefore behaviourists see behaviour as being a result of environmental factors that shape us beyond our control. It takes a scientific approach believing in replicability and that behaviour can be independently measured. The behaviouristic approach balances towards the nature debate of human behaviour, which suggests that we study individuals to find out about all people. On the other hand the humanistic approach balances towards the nurture debate suggesting people are the way they are brought up to be that way. ([http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/barrycomp/bhs/gcse\\_resources\\_pdf/the%20nature%20nurture%20Debate.PDF](http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/barrycomp/bhs/gcse_resources_pdf/the%20nature%20nurture%20Debate.PDF)) In contrast, the humanistic approach is not scientific as it adopts the view that individual's behaviour cannot be measured, as each individual's personal behaviour must be considered. This approach sees human beings as free, capable of choosing what they do. On the basis of Rogers work on self-concept, he became convinced that human beings are free and able to choose. Humanistic psychologists believe human beings are continuously striving for growth, and to make their own choices, which influence the path of their lives. Through these freely made choices, each person grows into a unique individual. Overall the behaviouristic approach could be said to have an advantage due to the fact that it is scientific and behaviour can be observably measured and replicated, <https://assignbuster.com/humanistic-and-behaviouristic-approach-to-human-behaviour/>

whereas the humanistic approach does not allow scope to measure data putting it at a disadvantage.