

Explaining the philosophical base of the social sciences essay sample

[Science](#)



The debate between freewill and determinism has long been discussed in the circles of philosophy but, the freewill and determinism debate has not been exclusively held by philosophers, but has been debated in many of the social sciences. In the context of philosophy though, the term determinism is usually used for the accounts of our human choices and actions that make them into effects of causal sequences. These sequences are of such a kind as to raise the question about the freedom of choices and actions we make. The theory of determinism is that all events are caused, or determined by antecedent conditions. So if the antecedent condition has not occurred then the event would not have occurred. In this it is saying that nothing happens by chance.

Freewill in the context of philosophy can be explained as the power a person has to detach themselves from inner motivation and then choosing from several alternatives. This means that freewill itself can contain decisions that are both controlled by the person and not totally controlled by antecedent factors. Although there may be antecedent factors the person has the ability to step back from any psychological factors, such as desire or an emotion. Even with desires and emotions, the person is free to decide to do what they choose.

From both of these there is a central contradiction. The problem with determinism is that it is totally mechanical. The idea that humans are entirely mechanical and that human behaviour is entirely determined is still questionable. The problem with freewill is that it does not acknowledge that certain things are determined and they can restrict a person's choice. This leads on to another point, that freewill and determinism can coexist. There <https://assignbuster.com/explaining-the-philosophical-base-of-the-social-sciences-essay-sample/>

are things that are determined. Some things that are determined are completely inevitable. However those inevitable circumstances only limit human behaviour, they do not restrict it in one single direction.

This means that humans are still free to act within those inevitable circumstances. For example, there is a person sitting in a rowboat on a river with a very strong current. If the person just sits in the boat and does nothing then the current will carry that person to wherever. The laws of physics could determine where the person would be at any given moment. The laws would determine that the person would end up in a dangerous part of the river and that the person could lose their life. This is determinism. But the person can take the oars and row. Then the person can avoid dangerous spots. The person will say that they can be in whatever position in the river they want to be. The person could even go against the current. This is freewill.

There is a distinction between philosophy and the natural sciences. One of these distinctions is that in the natural sciences, say like physics, chemistry and astronomy, they all rely on the evidence of human senses. Also natural science is considered the final arbiter of truth. Scientists are considered the ultimate seekers of the truth. This is shown by the only meaningful judgement a person can pass on any idea or statement is whether or not it is scientifically valid. The natural sciences are indeed disciplined and it pays attention to the facts, but as human beings we all know that there is something lacking in the natural sciences. This is because it is more technical than meaningful. It concentrates on mathematical correlations

instead of the explanations. We find scientists repeating statements like, “ Science does not ask why, but only how”, “ Science only describes what is, it can not say what should be”. Natural science does not have any theories of the causes of physical phenomenon. Also natural science has not helped human beings to analyze or resolve the biggest problems human beings face, such as poverty, violence, exploitation, war, authoritarianism, etc. This is where social sciences like philosophy come in.

One theory in modern social science that is informed by the concept of determinism is the psychological theory of behaviourism. B F Skinner, professor of psychology at Harvard was the founding father of behaviourist psychology. This form of psychology maintained that all human behaviour is determined by its consequences. This leads on to the theory that human behaviour is shaped by environmental factors (Reinforcement), and is a collection of learned responses to external stimuli. The key to this learning process was thought to be conditioning. The conditioning principle was originated by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian physiologist. He showed that an organism, in this case a dog, could learn to respond to stimulus which, under normal circumstances, it would ignore. For instance, the sound of a bell would have no meaning to a dog unless continually reinforced by the simultaneous arrival of food. Ultimately the dog would respond to the sound as if it was the food itself; its reflexes would be activated by the new stimulus with which it had now made a conditioned food association. In Pavlov’s experiment the organism did nothing to change its environment. Its behaviour was determined by the adaptation to a new factor in its environment, which was artificially introduced from outside.

Skinner showed that what is true of rats, pigeons and dogs, was also true of the human organism. A person's behaviour is determined by the person's capacity to gratify their needs. A hungry person will act to obtain food. A thirsty person performs what is necessary to get a drink. A sex starved person will act to seek sexual satisfaction. The person will behave in such a way as to obtain what they considers desirable, be it money, beauty, love, friendship or acclaim. Success in a person's objectives will reinforce their conduct and increase the likelihood that the person will behave in the same way again when the particular need arises again. The same contingencies, stimulus, response and reinforcement are all interrelated just as a rat. But the concept of stimulus is now broadened to encompass personal history, family background, education, religious experience and culture. They all go to make up the total environment, upon which human behaviour works to obtain agreeable results.

In the case of punishment or a threat of punishment the effect may be to persuade an individual not to act in a particular fashion. But whether desirable behaviour is being encouraged or undesirable behaviour is being suppressed, the principle is the same. The individual is responding to their circumstances according to the consequences of what they do. Thus reinforcement acts as a form of control on the individuals conduct. The individual is in a sense prodded and lashed through life through the process of conditioning, or in other words the individual is behaviour is being determined.

On the other side of this is the humanistic approach to psychology. The humanistic approach is about the uniqueness of the individual. The pioneers of humanistic psychology are Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. According to both Rogers and Maslow, human beings are individual, free, rational and self-determining. Free will and self-actualisation, make human beings distinct from animals and that the present experience is just as important as the past experience. Both Rogers and Maslow believed human beings have basic needs. The first of these concerns basic survival needs such as those relating to physical needs, food, warmth and shelter, plus the need for physical safety. The second concerns the need for self-actualisation. This is the idea that human beings have a basic need to make real, or actualise, the different aspects of themselves. This leads them to seek personal development in different ways, for example, exploring new ideas, developing or perfecting skills, increasing their understanding, pursuing hobbies and other interests in a way of satisfying this need. Both Maslow and Rogers see human beings as in control of their own lives and striving towards the fullest personal growth of which they are capable.

The humanistic approach presents a model of human needs which is based upon observations in different cultures. This has provided the basis of many needs-based models of health care and has proved popular in other professions involved in caring for, or working with people. This approach is valuable for health professionals because they emphasise how important it is to realise that a problem like, for example, anxiety, is likely to be experienced by different individuals in different ways. Human beings in these theories are not as likely to be seen as mere victims of their genes, early

learning experiences, or instincts. Instead human beings are allowed to develop until they feel they have reached their true potentials.

Rogers developed a form of client centred therapy in which clients have the power and motivation to help themselves, given the correct circumstances. There must be a warm, accepting atmosphere in which this can happen. The aim is to help clients clarify their thoughts on problems to gain a greater insight into them. This greater understanding helps the client to recognise their own strengths and limitations and is very often accompanied by an increase in their self esteem. This can eventually help the client to decide how to act. The key factor is that the client becomes more in control of their fate and finds a satisfactory solution to their problems. Or in other words, the person is given the ability to choose freely.