

The argument of free will and determinism philosophy essay



Determinism is when a person's behaviour is considered to be affected by internal or external forces while free will is an individual's ability to make most decisions. If we agree to a deterministic description of psychology then we can precisely foretell human behaviour, which results in psychology being in a similar field of science as physics or chemistry. According to Watson, (1982: 2), determinism is "the view roughly, that every event and state of affairs is causally necessitated by preceding events and states of affairs". On the other hand according to Gross, (2009: 210) free will is, "the common sense, lay persons understanding of the term is that the actor could have behaved differently given the same circumstances". This essay will explore the different approaches to free will and determinism from different theorists for example behaviourists, neo-behaviourists and so on.

The argument of free will and determinism between psychologists and philosophers has existed for years. People who are determined assume that behaviour is determined by outside and internal forces performing on the human being. One example of an outside force could be parents supporting a kind of behaviour thereby encouraging it. On the other hand an internal force would be driven by hormones. People who believe in free will assume that things are a bit difficult (Eysenck, 1994). They know that there is external and internal factors but they believe that people are free to choose their own behaviour. The free will and determinism debate could be finished up by the query that "could a person's behaviour have been different in a certain situation if they willed it?" (Eysenck, 1994: 65) People who are deterministic would disagree and those who believe in free will would agree.

Determinism is supported by more theories in psychology than free will. Behaviourists are highly determinists and they argue that the universe is ruled by certain widespread systematic principles (Eysenck, 1994). They believe an action is initiated by a certain presiding cause, and a person's action is no exception. Behaviourists also believe that accurate judgement of people's behaviour is likely, if a person's present stimulus circumstance is recognized, and if their habitual past is recognised. Skinner (1971, cited in Gross, 2009) claimed that behaviour is determined by ecological factors and that people usually replicate behaviours that are rewarded. According to Skinner free will is an illusion.

Bandura, a neobehaviourist, believed in reciprocal determinism and pointed a weakness in Skinner's methodology. If human behaviours are truly determined by the external incentives and retributions, then people would always transform to conform to other people. Bandura specified that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning (Chance, 2009). Children watch the behaviour of people surrounding them and the people being watched are named models. In society children are influenced by many people or models for example parents, actors on televisions and other models they meet at schools. Children copy these behaviours and then practise these behaviours later on in life. Bandura demonstrated with the bobo doll experiment. He illustrated how there can be hidden learning until a reward or stimulus is used to encourage that behaviour. Young children copied to either strike, or not strike the bobo doll. Only the children that witnessed the "model", not

getting positive reinforcement for striking the doll really got involved in that activity.

Skinner concentrated mainly on the concept that people's behaviours are determined by the outside world. When an individual's behaviour is determined by force or punishment it is clear that there is no act of free will. One example of that could be being scared of committing an offence or crime because of the fear of going to prison. Likewise we are also shaped by positive reinforcements, for example being paid a bonus for working overtime (Gross, 2009). However we usually forget about external causes of our behaviour and assume that we are acting freely. When we are determined that we are acting freely this usually implies that we are free from negative reinforcements and this is usually a result of the awards or positive reinforcements we have had in the past. However people's behaviours also influence their surroundings. Skinner ignored the large number of causes of behaviour.

Freud also deeply believed in determinism. According to Freud, people are determined by certain unconscious feelings, outside their consciousness. Minor occurrences like referring to a person with another person's name are a result of fixed causes in the person's motivational system. Freudian slips are involuntary but motivated errors that reveal a person's true desires. According to the Psychodynamic approach internal techniques like defence mechanisms verify the type of behaviours people will have as adults. People are developmentally oriented and will biologically grow in relation to the satisfaction of their natural ability if inner circumstances are positive.

However, this differs with Freud's opinion of humans as basically 'savage'
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beasts', whose hostile drives and volatile sexuality can only be managed by the procedure and arrangement of civilization. Freud was negative towards human nature and saw the instinctive desires of the id as driving people near the self-centred gratification of primitive desires.

According to the biological approach behaviour is determined by a person's chromosome and inner systems (Eysenck, 1994). When looking at mental disorders this method expresses that the patient is not to blame for their illness. Their biology inclines them to certain situations thereby making it unmanageable unless their biological make up is influenced. This has been supported to an extent, with the understanding that schizophrenia is caused by extreme chemicals in the brain that carries messages. The chaos theory and butterfly effect are an example that show that while psychology is deterministic it is best explained as probabilistic.

On the other hand the humanistic approach argues that people have freewill. Carl Rogers argued that people have an inborn desire for positive growth and self-actualisation (Gross, 2009). An individual should be responsible for their behaviour. Rogers suggested client centred therapy where the therapist is known as a "facilitator" whose job is to help patients exercise free will. Humanistic psychologists argue that the notion that people are controlled by external forces is wrong. However Rogers also looked at the bad side of people and he quoted that, "in my experience, every person has the capacity for evil behaviour. I, and others, have had murderous and cruel impulses, desires to hurt, feelings of anger and rage, desires to impose our wills on others ... whether I or anyone, will translate these impulses into behaviour depends, it seems to me, on two elements: social conditioning <https://assignbuster.com/the-argument-of-free-will-and-determinism-philosophy-essay/>

and voluntary choice...I believe that theoretically at least, every evil behaviour is brought about by varying degrees of these elements" (Rogers, 1982 cited in Gross, 2009: 225). A problem for free will is causality. Free will would imply that nothing triggers an action; someone showing only random behaviour would be listed as mentally ill. Free will needs to clarify what triggers actions to occur or else behaviours are predicted to be determined.

The ethical argument assumes people have free will. According to this, in order to expect ethical accountability, people must acknowledge the notion of free will. If a person's behaviour is determined by things that they cannot control then the person cannot be accountable for their actions (Hospers, 1997). However, on the other hand, laws require that grown up people do have individual accountability for their actions and so society is indirectly in favour of free will (Teichman & Evans, 1999). Soft determinism is an approach that argues that " all acts are caused, but only those that are not coerced or constrained are free" (Gross, 2009: 211). William James supported this approach which is average in relation to the two extreme opinions. According to James effort, or the impression of effort, is the main personal sign that free will has taken place. James also specified that , " if our actions have, as their proximate , immediate cause, processing by a system such as conscious mental life, then they count as free , rational, voluntary, purposive actions" (Gross, 2009: 220).

Fromm claims that people are both part of the environment and also unrelated to it. People formed primitive dogmas and religious doctrines to allow them to feel less detached from the world. In Europe until lately the Catholic Church accomplished this position of giving a feeling of security. The <https://assignbuster.com/the-argument-of-free-will-and-determinism-philosophy-essay/>

church intervened between God and humankind, ensuring deliverance but in the course restricting human liberty (Gross, 2009).

I believe we are influenced by our nature which is a combination of what we get from our genes and what we learn from our environment. Sometimes we are forced to make decisions and only get options that are forced upon us by the circumstances we are in. Those circumstances may be a direct result of previous decisions or may largely be decided by luck. Things do not usually turn out the way we really want it. I would agree that people are free to make choices that shape their lives, but, on the contrary people are related to society and consequently ones behaviour can have an effect on others despite the insignificance of the behaviour. I think the notion of cause and effect comes in the picture because there is the notion of “ right and wrong” and the existence of society. For me then, behaviour is significant in both free will and determinism. The way you act is influenced by freedom to make choices in your life, however if put to mind, the decisions are more determined by environment and by current surroundings. (1589)

How I have used feedback

I have changed the way I used to put my full stops after writing a sentence and I have also worked on using shorter and understandable sentences. I have also sorted the areas where writing was in places, over complex and ungrammatical. I have also put references where they were missing and have also put the word count at the end of my essay.