



PSY.ISS3 Free Will and Determinism: Philosophical Positions

AQA 7182 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer all questions. For short-answer items give concise sentences; the final 16-mark essay should be written in full sentences. Suggested time 60 minutes.

- 1** In the context of psychological approaches, outline the concept of free will as used by humanistic psychologists such as Rogers and Maslow. Name the viewpoint and give its core claim.

Outline the humanistic view of free will and its core claim.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

- 2** Define hard determinism in the context of psychology, naming the position and summarising its claim about human choice and behaviour.

Define hard determinism and summarise its claim.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Define soft determinism, also called compatibilism, and name the psychologist historically associated with a compatibilist stance such as William James.

Define soft determinism and give an associated psychologist.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Rogers and Maslow emphasise personal growth and the individual's capacity to choose. Identify which point on the free will to determinism continuum this represents and justify your choice with a brief reason referring to the humanistic emphasis.

Identify the continuum position for Rogers and Maslow and justify it.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

- 5** William James argued that people can make meaningful choices even within causal limits. Explain why this stance is classified as soft determinism, referring to the balance between constraint and conscious control.

Explain why William James is classed as a soft determinist.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

- 6** Distinguish between hard determinism and soft determinism in two clear differences related to the existence of free will and moral responsibility, in the context of psychological explanation. Distinguish between hard and soft determinism with two differences.

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

- 7** Outline one strength of adopting a free will, humanistic perspective in psychology when explaining behaviour, giving a linked reason why this is valuable in applied practice such as therapy.

Outline one strength of the humanistic free will perspective and its practical value.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Explain one ethical or practical weakness of hard determinism for concepts such as moral responsibility and legal accountability within psychological discussion.

Explain one weakness of hard determinism regarding moral responsibility and legal practice.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** Scenario: At work, a team unanimously predicts next quarter sales will be high. One member, Amina, privately thinks the forecast is too optimistic but states the same high number in the meeting, and later keeps her private view. Identify which philosophical position best describes Amina's behaviour and justify your answer briefly with reference to public versus private belief.

Identify the position shown by Amina and justify with public versus private belief.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Explain how a therapist working from a humanistic free will perspective such as Rogers might conceptualise client change, and give two linked ways this view would influence the therapist's practice in sessions.

Explain how a humanistic free will therapist conceptualises change and give two practice implications.

(Total for Question 10 is 6 marks)

- 11** State one implication for the legal system if hard determinism were accepted as true by psychologists and the general public. Give a brief reason for your answer in the legal context. State one legal implication of accepting hard determinism and give a reason.

(Total for Question 11 is 3 marks)

- 12** A counsellor says: 'Clients choose their goals but their choices are influenced by recent life events and social pressures, so we help them make deliberate choices within those limits.' Identify which position on the free will to determinism continuum this statement illustrates and explain the reasoning with two supporting points.

Identify the position illustrated and explain with two supporting points.

- 13** Discuss the free will versus determinism debate in psychology, focusing on the philosophical positions of free will, hard determinism and soft determinism. In your answer, explain each position, consider implications for moral responsibility and therapy, and evaluate strengths and limitations of each position.

Discuss the free will versus determinism debate in psychology, covering free will, hard determinism and soft determinism, with implications and evaluation.

(Total for Question 13 is 16 marks)

Mark scheme · PSY.ISS3 Free Will and Determinism: Philosophical Positions

Question 1

- **B1** identifies the viewpoint as free will or the humanistic perspective
- **B1** states the core claim that people can make conscious, self directed choices about their behaviour and growth
- **Answer: Free will, as in the humanistic view, holds that individuals can make conscious, self directed choices about their behaviour and personal growth.**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies the viewpoint as hard determinism
- **B1** states the claim that all behaviour is caused by prior events so free will is an illusion
- **Answer: Hard determinism is the position that all behaviour is fully determined by prior causes and therefore true free will does not exist.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies the viewpoint as soft determinism or compatibilism
- **B1** states that behaviour is constrained by causes but that some conscious control or choice can operate within those constraints
- **Answer: Soft determinism, or compatibilism, holds that behaviour is influenced by prior causes but people still have some conscious control; William James is associated with a compatibilist stance.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies the position as free will or emphasising free will
- **M1** justifies by referring to personal choice, self actualisation or conscious agency in therapy and development
- **A1** links the justification to Rogers and Maslow specifically, mentioning self actualisation or client centred focus
- **Answer: Free will: Rogers and Maslow emphasise conscious personal choice and self actualisation, so they position psychology on the free will end of the continuum.**

Question 5

- **M1** states that James accepted some causal constraints on behaviour
- **M1** states that James also argued for a role for conscious decision or will within those constraints
- **A1** explains that this combination of causation plus meaningful choice is the core of compatibilism/soft determinism
- **A1** gives a brief example or consequence, e.g. choosing between options within situational limits
- **Answer: James accepted that prior causes influence behaviour but also argued people can make meaningful conscious choices within those limits; this combination of constraint plus choice is why his view is classed as soft determinism.**

Question 6

- **M1** difference 1: hard determinism denies genuine free will, soft determinism allows limited conscious choice
- **M1** difference 2: hard determinism implies reduced moral responsibility since actions are fully caused, soft determinism preserves a notion of responsibility by allowing deliberate choice within constraints
- **A1** both differences clearly linked to psychological explanation or consequences
- **Answer: Hard determinism denies genuine free will and so challenges moral responsibility, whereas soft determinism accepts causal influences but allows limited conscious choice and so preserves a conditional notion of responsibility.**

Question 7

- **M1** states a plausible strength, e.g. it values individual agency and subjective experience oe
- **A1** explains how this leads to positive practical outcomes, e.g. client centred therapy encourages choice and empowerment, improving motivation and wellbeing oe
- **M1** adds supporting detail such as enhancement of self efficacy or therapeutic alliance oe
- **A1** explains why this matters, e.g. increases likelihood of sustained behaviour change because clients feel ownership of goals oe
- **Answer: A strength is that the humanistic free will perspective values individual agency and subjective experience; applied to therapy this encourages empowerment and self chosen goals, strengthening motivation and the therapeutic alliance and making change more likely to be sustained.**

Question 8

- **M1** identifies a weakness, e.g. it undermines moral responsibility or could excuse harmful behaviour oe
- **M1** explains the mechanism, e.g. if behaviour is wholly caused, blaming or punishing seems unjustified oe
- **A1** applies this to a practical domain, e.g. criminal justice or clinical judgement where responsibility affects sentencing or treatment oe
- **A1** explains why this matters, e.g. social protections and deterrence may be weakened if all actions are seen as unfree oe
- **Answer: A weakness is that hard determinism undermines moral responsibility: if actions are wholly caused, blaming or punishing may seem unjustified, which raises problems for legal sentencing and clinical judgement where notions of responsibility matter for treatment and public protection.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies the behaviour as compliance or as illustrative of normative influence leading to public agreement cao
- **M1** links this to determinism continuum, stating it reflects free will being overridden by social pressure or that private belief remains unchanged oe
- **A1** justifies by noting the public statement differs from the private view, matching the defining feature of compliance within a free will versus determinism discussion oe
- **A1** could alternatively state it fits soft determinism if phrased as choice made within situational constraints, with brief justification oe
- **Answer: Amina shows compliance: she publicly agrees but privately disagrees. This indicates her private belief remains intact while social pressure leads to public conformity, a case where free will is constrained by social context but not fully absent.**

Question 10

- **M1** explains the conceptualisation, e.g. change arises from the client's autonomous choices and striving for self actualisation oe
- **M1** states first practice implication, e.g. therapist offers unconditional positive regard and non directive support to foster client choice oe
- **A1** explains how this fosters change, e.g. reduces conditions of worth so client can choose congruent values and behaviours oe
- **M1** states second practice implication, e.g. focus on empathy and active listening to help client reflect and decide on goals oe
- **A1** explains how this supports autonomous change, e.g. promotes self awareness and commitment to personally chosen goals oe
- **A1** gives a brief consequence or evaluation, e.g. often increases motivation but may be less directive where clients need structure oe
- **Answer: Rogers would see change as arising from the client's autonomous choices towards self actualisation. The therapist provides unconditional positive regard and a non directive stance so the client feels free to choose, and uses empathy and reflective listening so the client gains self awareness and commits to personally chosen goals; this can increase motivation though it may be less directive for clients needing more structure.**

Question 11

- **B1** states an implication such as reduced emphasis on punishment, more focus on treatment or rehabilitation, or a shift in blame allocation cao

Question 12

- **M1** identifies the position as soft determinism or compatibilism
- **M1** supporting point 1: notes that behaviour is influenced or constrained by events or social pressures
- **A1** explains point 1, e.g. these influences set limits on the range of options available to the client
- **M1** supporting point 2: notes that clients still make deliberate or conscious choices within those constraints
- **A1** explains point 2, e.g. deliberate choice preserves a form of agency and responsibility useful in therapy
- **A1** brief evaluation link, e.g. this position reconciles responsibility with causal explanation but may seem vague about the degree of freedom
- **Answer: This illustrates soft determinism or compatibilism: it recognises that life events and social pressures constrain options, but clients still make deliberate choices within those limits. This reconciles a useful form of agency for therapy with acknowledgement of causal influences, though it may be unclear how much freedom remains in practice.**

Question 13

- **Level 4** (13-16): Knowledge is accurate and detailed, showing clear understanding of free will, hard determinism and soft determinism. The discussion is balanced and evaluative, considering implications for moral responsibility and therapy with well developed strengths and limitations. Arguments are supported with examples and the answer is coherent and uses specialist terminology appropriately.
- **Level 3** (9-12): Knowledge is mostly accurate with some detail. There is clear evaluation and consideration of implications, though some points may be less developed. Examples are used and the answer is generally organised with relevant terminology.
- **Level 2** (5-8): Knowledge of the positions is present but limited or partly inaccurate. Evaluation is superficial or one sided. Implications may be stated but not well developed. Organisation and use of terminology may be inconsistent.
- **Level 1** (1-4): Very limited knowledge and little or no evaluation. Points likely to be brief, fragmentary or listed with little development. Specialist terminology is missing or used incorrectly.
- **Indicative content:**
 - AO1: Define free will as the view that individuals can make conscious, self determined choices; humanistic psychologists Rogers and Maslow emphasise personal agency and self actualisation.
 - AO1: Define hard determinism as the view that behaviour is fully caused by prior events and that free will is an illusion; note philosophical implications that blame and moral responsibility are challenged.
 - AO1: Define soft determinism or compatibilism as the view that causal forces constrain behaviour but that conscious choice can operate meaningfully within those constraints, associated historically with William James.
 - AO3: Evaluate free will, strength: supports moral responsibility and underpins therapeutic approaches that empower clients, such as client centred therapy; this matters because it leads to positive personal change and ethical practice.
 - AO3: Evaluate free will, limitation: may lack coherent scientific account of causation and can be accused of being overly optimistic about agency in the face of powerful influences; this matters for explanatory power in psychology.
 - AO3: Evaluate hard determinism, strength: offers clear causal explanations and fits a scientific, predictive model of behaviour, which can help in identifying causes and interventions.
 - AO3: Evaluate hard determinism, limitation: undermines moral responsibility and the practice of blaming individuals, which raises ethical and legal concerns; also it may conflict with ordinary experience of choice.
 - AO3: Evaluate soft determinism, strength: reconciles the need for causal explanation with a preserved notion of agency and responsibility, useful in applied settings where both explanation and choice matter.
 - AO3: Evaluate soft determinism, limitation: may be vague about how much freedom exists and can be accused of accommodating both sides without providing clear criteria, reducing predictive clarity.
 - AO3: Consider implications for therapy and law: free will supports empowerment and responsibility in therapy, hard determinism suggests focus on treatment and mitigation rather than blame, soft determinism supports conditional responsibility and mixed approaches in practice.
 - AO3: Consider empirical and philosophical challenges, such as the intuitions of choice, the need for operational definitions, and how different positions affect research aims and ethical practice in psychology.
 - AO3: Conclude with a balanced judgement, for example that soft determinism offers a pragmatic reconciliation but that acknowledging the strengths and limits of each position is important for ethical and effective psychological practice.