1.2 Explanations for Obedience: Agentic State and Legitimacy of Authority: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Outline the procedure and main implication of Meeus and Raaijmakers' 1986 administrative obedience study for the agentic state explanation.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Outline what is meant by the 'autonomous state' in explanations of obedience, referring to responsibility and conscience.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

3 Using the evidence of Kilham and Mann (1974) and Meeus and Raaijmakers (1986), evaluate briefly whether cultural or situational variation undermines the generalisability of the legitimacy of authority and agentic state explanations. Give two evaluative points.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 Discuss explanations for obedience, focusing on the agentic state (including agentic shift, moral strain and binding factors) and legitimacy of authority. In your answer, consider cross-cultural evidence and research such as Kilham and Mann (1974) and Meeus and Raaijmakers (1986).

(Total for Question 4 is 12 marks)

5 In a study by Hofling et al. (1966), an unknown 'doctor' telephoned nurses on hospital wards and told each to give a patient a drug at twice the stated maximum dose, which also broke hospital rules. Of the 22 nurses, 21 began to prepare the drug. Explain how this finding supports the legitimacy of authority explanation of obedience.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

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6 In Milgram's original study, about a third of the participants did not continue to the highest shock level. Explain one limitation of the agentic state as an explanation of obedience that this finding raises.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Explain what is meant by 'moral strain' in the agentic state and give one reason why it occurs, with brief explanation.

(Total for Question 7 is 3 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.2 Explanations for Obedience: Agentic State and Legitimacy of Authority: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

outlines key procedural point: participants were instructed by an experimenter to harass a job applicant by giving stressful interview questions in the presence of an authority figure, with confederate responses scripted oe — **M1**

explains implication: high rates of compliance under an authority indicate people can act as agents under orders, supporting agentic state ideas about shifted responsibility oe — **A1**

Answer: Meeus and Raaijmakers had participants, under instruction, harass a job applicant with stressful questions; many followed the instructions. The finding supports the agentic state idea that people can carry out harmful acts when acting as agents under authority, transferring responsibility to the authority.

Question 2

states that the autonomous state is when an individual acts according to their own conscience and feels personal responsibility for their actions oe — **B1**

Answer: The autonomous state is when an individual acts according to their own conscience and takes personal responsibility for their actions.

Question 3

points out that Kilham and Mann's lower obedience suggests legitimacy of authority effects vary between cultures, challenging universality oe — **M1**

explains why this matters, e.g. if legitimacy depends on culturally specific acceptance of hierarchies then the explanation lacks cross-cultural generalisability oe — **A1**

points out Meeus and Raaijmakers show situational factors and the presence of an authority can produce high compliance even without extreme physical harm, supporting agentic state mechanisms oe — **M1**

explains implication, e.g. situational details and procedures influence whether agency occurs, so explanations must allow for situational moderators rather than claiming simple universality oe — **A1**

Answer: Kilham and Mann's lower obedience suggests legitimacy of authority may be weaker in some cultures, reducing generalisability. Meeus and Raaijmakers show that situational procedures and authoritative instruction can produce high compliance, supporting agentic mechanisms but indicating that situational details matter. Together they imply the explanations need to account for cultural and procedural moderators.

Question 4

Level 4 Knowledge of explanations for obedience is accurate, relevant and well detailed. Evaluation is thorough and balanced, considering methodological issues, supporting and challenging evidence, and cross-cultural implications. Argument is well developed and applied to research such as Kilham and Mann and Meeus and Raaijmakers. Specialist terminology is used effectively. — **10-12**

Level 3 Knowledge of the agentic state and legitimacy of authority is mostly accurate with reasonable detail. Evaluation is present and reasonably developed, with some reference to supporting and opposing evidence including cross-cultural points. Application to named studies is present but may be less detailed. — **7-9**

Level 2 Basic knowledge of the explanations is present but may be incomplete or partially inaccurate. Evaluation is limited or one-sided, and consideration of cross-cultural evidence is superficial. Answer lacks depth and organisation in places. — **4-6**

Level 1 Very limited knowledge and understanding. Little or no appropriate evaluation. Answer may be mostly descriptive or disorganised with little use of evidence. — **1-3**

Level 0 No creditable content. — **0**

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Indicative content:

- AO1: Agentic state: definition, agentic shift from autonomous to agentic state, moral strain experienced when orders conflict with conscience, and binding factors that reduce disobedience such as denying responsibility, focusing on the task, or incremental commitment.
- AO1: Legitimacy of authority: definition, socially agreed hierarchies give certain figures the perceived right to issue orders, and how this can lead to obedience even when orders are immoral; destructive authority where legitimate power is misused.
- AO1: Clear distinction between explanations: agentic state focuses on cognitive shift and perceived responsibility, legitimacy focuses on social structure and perceived right to command.
- AO3: Supportive evidence: research showing high obedience where legitimate authority or clear authority figures are present, including administrative obedience studies such as Meeus and Raaijmakers (1986) supporting agentic processes in an applied setting.
- AO3: Cross-cultural and replication evidence: Kilham and Mann (1974) found lower obedience in Australia than Milgram in the USA, suggesting cultural variation in acceptance of authority and challenging claims of universality; discuss implications for both explanations.
- AO3: Methodological evaluation: many supporting studies use artificial tasks or lab settings, which may affect ecological validity; Meeus and Raaijmakers used an administrative procedure closer to real-life, increasing ecological validity but raising ethical concerns.
- AO3: Alternative explanations and individual differences: dispositional factors such as authoritarian personality or moral reasoning may moderate obedience, and personality can explain why some resist; discuss interactionist views where both situational legitimacy and personal factors matter.
- AO3: Practical implications and ethical considerations: understanding these explanations helps design systems to reduce destructive obedience, e.g. emphasising individual responsibility and checks on authority; ethical critique that some research methods involved distress or deception.
- AO3: Overall evaluation: weigh strengths and limits, argue that both explanations capture important facets of obedience but must be seen as complementary and moderated by culture, context and individual differences.

Question 5

identifies that a doctor holds a position of legitimate authority in the hospital hierarchy, and nurses are expected to follow doctors' instructions oe **M1**

explains that the nurses obeyed even though the caller was unknown and the order broke the rules, because the role of doctor was accepted as giving the right to command oe **A1**

Answer: A doctor holds a position at the top of the hospital hierarchy that nurses accept as having the right to give instructions; the nurses therefore began to follow an order from an unknown caller even though it broke the rules.

Question 6

identifies that the finding shows a number of people did not obey (about 35% stopped before the highest level) even though they received the same orders, so the agentic state cannot be the whole explanation oe **M1**

explains the limitation, e.g. it cannot account for individual differences in who obeys and who resists, so it is an incomplete explanation and other factors such as personality must be considered oe **A1**

Answer: If obedience were only a shift into the agentic state, everyone given the same orders would obey; because some resisted, the explanation cannot account for individual differences and is incomplete.

Question 7

defines moral strain as the discomfort or tension felt when actions ordered by authority conflict with personal morals oe **M1**

offers a reason, e.g. the person still recognises the action as wrong but feels unable to refuse because responsibility is perceived as belonging to the authority oe **A1**

explains why this matters, e.g. moral strain shows obedience can involve internal conflict rather than absence of conscience oe **A1**

Answer: Moral strain is the tension experienced when someone obeys an authority to do something they recognise as wrong. It occurs because the person still has moral awareness but feels unable to refuse and believes responsibility lies with the authority, showing obedience can coexist with internal conflict.

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