

Outline and evaluate the humanistic approach. (16 marks)

AO1:

1. The humanist approach rejects attempts to establish scientific principles of human behaviour. We are unique and psychology should concern itself with the study of subjective experience rather than general laws – a person-centred approach.
2. Self-actualisation refers to the innate tendency that each of us has to want to achieve our full potential. Maslow's hierarchy of needs requires the four lower levels to be met before the individual can work towards self-actualisation.
3. The self refers to the ideas and values that characterise 'I' and 'me' and includes perception of 'what I am' and 'what I can do'.
4. Rogers argued that personal growth requires an individual's concept of self to be congruent with their ideal self. If the gap is too big, the person will experience a state of incongruence and self-actualisation isn't possible.
5. Issues such as worthlessness and low self-esteem have their roots in childhood and are due to a lack of unconditional positive regard from parents. A parent who sets boundaries on their love for their child (conditions of worth) by claiming 'I will only love you if...' is storing up psychological problems for that child in future.
6. In Rogers' client-centred therapy an effective therapist should provide the client with the following things:
 - Genuineness
 - Empathy
 - Unconditional positive regard

The aim is to increase feelings of self-worth and reduce incongruence between the self-concept and ideal self. Rogers' work transformed psychotherapy and is practiced not only in counselling but within education, health, social work and industry.

AO3:

1. **P:** One strength is humanistic psychology is anti-reductionist.
E: Humanistic psychologists reject any attempt to break up behaviour and experience into smaller components.
E: They advocate holism. This is the idea that subjective experience can only be understood by considering the whole person.
L: This approach may have more validity than its alternatives by considering meaningful behaviour within its real-life context.
2. **P:** One limitation is the approach has limited application in the real world.
E: It is true that Rogerian therapy has revolutionised counselling techniques and Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been used to explain motivation, particularly in the workplace.

E: However, compared to other approaches, humanistic psychology has had limited impact within psychology as a whole. This may be because it lacks a sound evidence base.

L: As a result, the approach has been described not as a comprehensive theory but as a rather loose set of abstract concepts.

3. **P:** Another strength is the approach is positive.

E: Humanistic psychologists have been praised for promoting a positive image of the human condition – seeing people as in control of their lives and having the freedom to change.

E: Freud saw human beings as slaves to their past and claimed all of us existed somewhere between ‘common unhappiness and absolute despair’.

L: Humanistic psychology offers a refreshing and optimistic alternative.

4. **P:** Another limitation is that the approach includes untestable concepts.

E: Humanistic psychology includes a number of vague ideas that are abstract and difficult to test, such as ‘self-actualisation’ and ‘congruence’.

E: Rogers did attempt to introduce more rigour into his work by developing Q-sort – an objective measure of progress in therapy.

L: As would be expected of an approach that is ‘anti-scientific’, humanistic psychology is short on empirical evidence.

5. **P:** A final limitation is the approach may have a Western cultural bias.

E: Many of the ideas that are central to humanistic psychology, such as individual freedom, autonomy and personal growth, would be more readily associated with individualistic cultures in the Western world such as the US.

E: Collectivist cultures such as India, which emphasise the needs of the group and interdependence, may not identify so easily with the ideals and values of humanistic psychology.

L: Therefore, it is possible that the approach would not travel well and is a product of the cultural context within which it was developed.