

Discuss the free will/ determinism debate in Psychology.

The free will/ determinism debate revolves around the discussion over whether human behaviour is the result of forces over which we have no control or whether we have free will to make choices for ourselves. Free will suggests that as individuals we make decisions based on our own choices, that we are all accountable for our own behaviour. This emphasises the importance of individual action and why studying individual differences may be significant. The study on moral development by **Kohlberg (1968)** could be considered free will as the boys were making independent decisions based on the behaviour shown to them in the moral dilemmas. This could also be true of the children in **Lee et al's (1997)** study into evaluation of lying and truth-telling. Both the Canadian and Chinese children had free will over their comments about the people in the pro-social and anti-social stories. One strength of the free will debate is that it fits with social norms about personal responsibility in society. For example, most people would argue that those who break the law should be punished as they chose to commit the crime. However, others would argue that behaviour is not always completely under the control of the individual. For instance, there are both biological and social/ cultural factors which have been identified as contributors in criminal behaviour. In contrast to free will is the argument that behaviour is pre-determined by influences beyond our control. This side of the debate proposes that all behaviour is determined and is therefore predictable suggesting we are all influenced in the same way. One type of determinism is based on the idea that biological factors such as genetics, biochemistry or brain structure control our behaviour. For example, **Blakemore and Cooper (1970)** were able to show how the impact of early sensory deprivation in the brain changes the behaviour of kittens raised in either vertical or horizontal environments. Moreover, **Sperry (1968)** showed how a lack of connection between the two hemispheres in split-brain patients changes their ability to complete visual and tactile tasks. Another type of determinism focuses on the influences in the environment that shape our behaviour for which we have little or no control. For example, **Milgram (1963)** was able to demonstrate how situational factors in his experiment with authority influenced participants' levels of obedience. He suggested they obeyed because of the legitimacy of the authority figure, the fact the experiment took place at a prestigious university and that participants were paid, all factors which increased the sense of obligation. One strength of adopting a deterministic view of behaviour is that these ideas can be tested more objectively to investigate causal explanations. However, taking a deterministic view is very reductionist and fails to account for individual differences and personality in decision making.

