

Unit I: Sample FRQ

History & Perspectives

Philosophers and psychologists have long debated the relative influences of heredity and environment on behavior. Give an example of how each of the following perspectives would explain their position in what is commonly known as the “nature-nurture controversy.” Students must identify which side of the “controversy” their example is addressing.

Biological/Neuroscience

Behaviorism

Humanistic psychology

Evolutionary psychology

Psychoanalysis/psychodynamic

Developmental psychology

Cognitive psychology

Rubric:

Students do not need to have each perspective choose a side in the nature-nurture controversy. Rather, their explanation needs to reflect a cogent discussion of the central ideas of the perspective in terms of the controversy. However, they do need to identify which side of the controversy they are addressing with their example(s).

Point 1: Biological/Neuroscience

The answer should reflect that biological, neurological, or genetic factors are the primary way to explain behavior. They should cite some form of the following:

- Biological factors (e.g., physical appearance influencing how others treat you, which leads to influencing your behavior)
- Brain chemistry, structure, and/or function [e.g., biological disorders (e.g., bipolar disorder, depression, Parkinson’s disease, etc.) related to chemical imbalances or brain structure/function influence how one behaves.]
- Genetics [e.g., one’s DNA structure (genotype) influences how one behaves in certain situations or influences their phenotype, which influences behavior]

NOTE: Students should not just say “biology” is the way to explain behavior.

Point 2: Behaviorism

The answer should reflect a strong, if not exclusive, reliance on nurture as the primary determiner of behavior. The example should point to how conditioning plays a role in determining behavior.

- Famous examples of behavioristic views about the influence of nurture can score on this point (e.g., Watson’s “dozen healthy infants” quote from 1929, Watson & Rayner’s Little Albert case study showing fear as a learned response, etc.)

Point 3: Humanistic psychology

The answer should reflect a strong belief of humanistic psychology that one possesses a potential that can be uncovered with the right support (nature view).

- Discussion of Maslow’s self-actualization pyramid (where one’s innate needs are met to achieve self-actualization) and/or Roger’s goals of client-centered therapy (unconditional positive regard to help clients realize their own potential to solve their own problems) would score.

Point 4: Evolutionary psychology

The answer can reflect different interpretations of evolutionary psychology:

- Evolution passes on genetic predispositions that promote success (nature view – e.g., people live in families to promote survival of one’s offspring)
- Environmental changes can influence genetic changes that promote success (nurture view – e.g., global warming causes people to have darker eye color which helps them see better at night)
- A combination of the above interpretations (not choosing a particular side, but showing how evolutionary psychology could support a balanced perspective).

Point 5: Psychoanalysis/psychodynamic perspective

The answer should discuss any or all of the following Freudian beliefs:

- We are born a “seething cauldron” selfish desires (Id – nature view)
- We develop realistic and moral sides through life experiences (Ego and Superego – nurture view) that harness the innate selfishness
- Our unconscious is comprised of early childhood experiences that influence our adult behavior (nurture view)

Point 6: Developmental psychology

The answer should reflect either or both of the following perspectives:

- Behavior results from the natural unfolding of developmental milestones that all humans must achieve in a certain order (nature view – e.g. infant development)
- Proper development can be hindered by lack of adequate environmental factors (nurture view – e.g., nutrition, attention from caregiver, etc.)

Point 7: Cognitive psychology

The answer should reflect a belief that one can change thoughts to alter behavior (nurture view).

- Examples can cite cognitive therapeutic techniques (e.g., Beck's Cognitive Therapy, Ellis's RET, etc.) as instances where cognitive psychologists demonstrate their belief in nurture.