**A-grade discussion ideas**

**Obedience and the fundamental attribution error**

The **fundamental attribution error** (Ross, 1977) is the tendency to attribute other people’s behavior to internal, dispositional factors such as personality traits, abilities, and feelings. When explaining their own behavior, on the other hand, people tend to attribute it to situational factors.

**Example**:

*Alexis falls asleep in class. Sean attributes her behavior to laziness. When he fell asleep in class last week, however, he attributed his own behaviour to the all-nighter he pulled finishing a coursework essay.*

OR…

*Theresa is revealed to have participated in the Milgram study, and to have proceeded to 450v without protest. Matthew reads of this and assumes that Theresa must be a strangely cruel and sadistic person. Later on, at his job as a nurse, he unwittingly takes part on a Hofling replication study, and obeys the ‘doctor’, but when told of this he attributes his behaviour to the confusion of the situation and to having been poorly trained by the hospital to deal with such situations.*

We produce ‘**dispositionally-skewed explanations of destructive behaviour’** – perhaps to protect us from the unpalatable suggestions of the research (the idea that *all people* – including us – could do this).

Maybe this is the reason why we are continually surprised by the reliability of obedience effect findings, we are able to dismiss the findings as some dispositional factor of the participants, rather than a consistent indication of the malleability to human behaviour.

Try to think of four aspects of studies into obedience where the fundamental attribution error might have been committed, and which this might have meant for the predictions/results obtained.