

NCH School Certificate in Philosophy**NAME****School:****SET:****Project Title:****Do we have free will?**

Consent

This project is the student's own work.

Permission is granted for this work to be used to exemplify School Philosophy Certificate work and in the examining and moderation process.

Student signature (Student should add initials)

Teacher signature (Teacher should add initials)

Assessment

Grade 7 – 9	An impressively managed project, showing commitment and dedication throughout, with a clearly focused aim and careful thought about the choice of question. Sources are analysed carefully (not simply summarized) in connection with the chosen question. Sources are carefully and fully referenced and the bibliography is complete. The student shows care in their choice of sources and uses a good range (10 – 12; not simply easy to access websites but sources with good academic content). They explain the background to the question and summarize arguments for and against in a clear, logical manner. They state a clear conclusion which can be defended using the evidence provided.
Grades 4 – 6	Project management is reasonable, with some degree of commitment shown. There is a reasonably clear aim and some thought goes into the choice of question. There is some analysis of source material and it is largely relevant to their chosen question. There is a reasonable range of sources (7 – 9) and some of these have some reasonable academic content. The project includes some background and presentation of arguments for and against. There is a reasonably clear conclusion
Grades 1 – 3	There is some evidence of project management and a limited degree of commitment is shown. An aim for the project is discernible and a question is chosen. Most of the source material is collated rather than analysed and some of it is not useful or relevant to the chosen question. The source range is modest (up to 6 sources) and the sources tend to be easy to access website with only limited academic content. There is some presentation of arguments and a conclusion is given.

TOTAL MARK AWARDED	9
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Supporting evidence (Drawn from written evidence submitted, creative work and judgements based on oral presentations.)

This was an extremely well managed project, with a wide range of independent research completed by the candidate on the topic of freewill and determinism. The candidate has engaged with difficult, academic material looking at the ideas of philosophers such as Hume, Sartre, Strawson and Van Inwagen. Specialist philosophical terms such as Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, Hard Determinism and Libertarianism are used successfully throughout. Arguments for and against the topic are presented in a clear and logical manner. A good range of sources (15) have formed the basis of the research and these have good academic content including materials used for A Level. These sources are fully referenced and analysed in the discussion part of the project (7-9). A clear judgement is reached in the conclusion based on the evidence and argument outlined previously.

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Project Plan

Project Question: Do we have Free Will?

Form of project (e.g. report, presentation, film or podcast): **Essay**

Topic areas to research:

Different philosophical theories on free and Philosophers will such as Hard Determinism, Compatibilism, Free Will Libertarianism, Existentialism, Incompatibilism, Hume, Frankfurt, G. Strawson.

Initial ideas for resources (e.g. websites, books, articles, magazines, people to interview):

Websites, books, YouTube videos

If you are part of a group project, list the roles and responsibilities for each group member:

Introduction

(100 words - explain why your question is important, define key words, outline what topics you will explore and what sort of project you plan to produce).

In this essay I will be covering the basic theories and arguments of the Free Will debate and on some of them I will look at their most notable philosophers and their major arguments. Free Will is undoubtedly one of the most important philosophical debates there is, as it attempts to answer what free will is, where and if it is possible and its implications for moral responsibility. When I refer to determinism I am talking about causal determinism and when I refer to Libertarians I mean Free Will Libertarians which have nothing to do with their political counterpart.

Research

(10 - 12 sources. Up to 750 words. Summarize information in your own words. Include short quotations. Build a bibliography. Looks for facts, ideas, theories and quotations. For practical projects, look at examples of films, videos, presentations and use them for inspiration.)

The first source I looked at (1), after giving a lengthy introduction into the question of Free Will, the different definitions for Free Will and the different sides in the debate, focused on the main arguments of the Incompatibilists and then the Compatibilists refutation of these arguments, which I will refer to in detail in the next section. Then it went on to the related issues with brief summaries of the positions of Theological Determinism and Logical Determinism.

The next source (2) gave a clear explanation of the basics of the Free Will debate, the main contemporary definitions of Free Will and the different sides in it, with links to more in-depth explanations of the different arguments.

Source 3 gives an in-depth explanation on Hume and his work focused on Free Will, specifically “Of liberty and necessity” and explains the two different interpretations of Hume’s Compatibilist strategy, the classical interpretation and the naturalistic interpretation. The author then goes on interestingly to discuss the link between the contemporary philosopher Peter Strawson and Hume’s naturalistic interpretation.

Source 4 gives an interesting take on whether even if we don’t have free will we should still believe in it for the sake of our society. Source 4 gave some examples of studies that showed the negative effects of not believing in free will and at the end gives a counter argument to the “Illusionism” argument that argued our society would actually become a much more understanding and compassionate place and that the documented negative effects would disappear as people understand their brains better and become less fatalistic.

Source 5 takes two different philosophers and their takes on Compatibilism and Incompatibilism and how they deal with modern science like quantum mechanics in their arguments. It concludes slightly in favour of the Compatibilist as it disagrees with dismissing empirical evidence such as the Incompatibilist almost did.

Source 6 focuses on genetical determinism at the beginning, the idea that our genetics determine us before going on to dismiss this idea and determinism as a whole as “Naive Realism” and doesn’t give very good arguments to support this claim. It ignores Galen Strawson’s view that free will is impossible in any world, and strongly puts its case for free will without much knowledge of the deterministic arguments that quite easily get around the article’s arguments.

Source 7 and 8 are useful videos that clarify the basics of the arguments on Free Will and what the different bodies of opinion think about Free Will in a concise manner, specifically Hard Determinism and Free Will Libertarianism in source 4 and Compatibilism in source 5. These also gave scenarios of the different arguments, and mention the philosophers key to the debate.

Source 9 gives an introduction and explanation of Hard Determinism, its features and its impacts on moral responsibility and religion. Source 10 goes into more detail on Hard Determinism and gives examples of different arguments and a real life scenario where a

lawyer successfully argued that the two defendants should not face the death penalty for the murder they committed due to a series of other factors causally determined that made them act like they did. This also leads on to the following videos which go into more detail of Free Will Libertarianism and Compatibilism and the different philosophers involved.

Source 11 gives an introduction to Free Will Libertarianism (referred to as Libertarianism from now on), their reasons for disputing Hard Determinism and the two different extents to which different Libertarians believe we have Free Will. It also explains the difference between your personality and the “Moral Self” which explains some of the problems with Libertarianism and gives an answer to them. Source 12 continues with Libertarianism but focuses on Existentialism and Jean Paul Sartre and the idea of existence before essence as well as the idea that humans are “Condemned to be Free”.

Sources 13 and 14 introduce and explain the Compatibilist position on Free Will and the basics of its arguments for the co-existence of Free Will and Causal Determinism. Source 14 focuses on David Hume and his ideas about Compatibilism as well as an example to support his argument and the Compatibilist implications on Moral Responsibility.

Source 15 switches from Compatibilism to Galen Strawson, an interesting philosopher who challenges both Libertarianism and Compatibilism while not specifically supporting Determinism either; instead, he argues that Free Will is impossible whether or not we are in a causally determined world. Strawson offers us a view that is called Pessimism. To have Free Will, he argues, you must be ultimately responsible for yourself which is impossible even with reincarnation. The video then goes on to the implications this has on Moral Responsibility which is that Moral Responsibility is impossible if Pessimism is correct.

Discussion / Development

(800 - 1000 words.

For reports, explain your own point of view. Use your sources for supporting evidence. Consider counter-arguments and alternative viewpoints. For creative projects, explain the decisions you make about the design of your project. Include pictures, screen-shots etc.)

I will begin with Compatibilism also known as Soft Determinism; this is the theory that if we live in a causally deterministic world we can still have free will. Its most famous exponent is almost certainly David Hume a Scottish philosopher who lived in the middle of the 18th Century and was very important to the development of Compatibilism over the next two centuries (3). Compatibilism in a sense is the middle ground between Free Will Libertarianism and Hard Determinism, as well as being in opposition to the Incompatibilists who are made up of Free Will Libertarians, Hard Determinists and Pessimists.

Compatibilism distinguishes between internal and external causes to help further its case (13). Compatibilists believe it is possible to be morally responsible for actions that are decided from within you, if you decide to make an action even if you could not have made any other action; in our universe it is still free as it was decided within you, thereby enabling free will which most people consider necessary for moral responsibility. However, most people would probably argue that you must have other free options to take for you to have any moral responsibility, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, if you had a computer chip implanted in your brain that only activates if you try and vote one way in an election where there are only two candidates, and you were a supporter of the other candidate anyway and voted for that candidate. In this scenario, you still had free will and were morally responsible for your action even though you could not have done otherwise as the computer chips would have stopped you, but because you had no intention of voting the other way the computer chip was never activated and therefore you were free (8). This scenario or “Frankfurt case” shows that the idea that you must have other options for you to have moral responsibility, known as the principle of alternate possibilities, is not necessarily the case.

On Hume’s Compatibilist work there seem to be two main ways of interpreting his arguments in “Of liberty and necessity”, the classical way which is the most commonly used interpretation and the naturalistic interpretation which is less widely used but could be argued that it actually gives a better case for Compatibilism (3). In the classical interpretation Hume says that free actions are “caused by the agent’s willings and desires” and we hold an agent responsible because it was their will or desire which caused the action they made, we do not need other options for free will (3). The Naturalist interpretation, however, focuses more on the role of feelings that are

connected to moral responsibility and therefore Free Will. I personally prefer this argument although it could be argued it is outdated and unnecessary but it does fix some of the problems with the classical interpretation and is supported by the contemporary philosopher Peter Strawson who attempts to reconcile both sides of the debate.

Now I will move on to the Free Will Libertarians who also believe we have Free Will. They say that we live in a non-deterministic world and we have Free Will, but if we were to live in a deterministic world then we would not have Free Will. Due to our free will we also have moral responsibility over our actions. There are two different beliefs as to what extent we are free within Free Will Libertarianism; Liberty of Spontaneity and Liberty of Indifference (11). Liberty of Spontaneity says we are influenced by our past experiences and how our personality is shaped but it is by no means insurmountable and we can resist the past's influence on our daily life some of the time. The Liberty of Indifference says that we are indifferent to our past upbringing and genetics and that we are completely unbounded by society, this is pure untainted free will. To me Liberty of Spontaneity seems the most reasonable as I do not believe we are not at least in some way influenced by our past experiences which the Liberty of Indifference claims. The Libertarians also distinguish between our moral self and our personality (11), our personality is shaped by experiences beyond our control but your moral self is not influenced by external factors and can on occasions override your personality and therefore make decisions perhaps not expected of somebody of a certain background and upbringing (8).

Van Inwagen (5), also a Free Will Libertarian, argues that free will and moral responsibility are incompatible with determinism and that we have moral responsibility. Although, as I understand it, he doesn't give a very convincing argument, because he simply asserts that because we can theoretically do otherwise, and we judge people because of this, we have moral responsibility and so therefore determinism must be false.

The Existentialists are also Libertarians that believe in complete free will. As Sartre, the creator of Existentialism, said we are: "Condemned to be Free". The Existentialists believe that existence precedes essence, or in other words we are born before we have meaning, they say there is no meaning to life except what we give it in our own lives

(12). This rejects the idea of Dualism or the soul that exists before you are born and accepts moral responsibility of the individual. Although it has good points, on free will I am inclined to disagree that we are not at least in some way in a deterministic world as the physical world is caused by a change of events such as a bat hitting a ball, which is not probabilistic as the ball will always move when hit by a bat, and our mental states are biological and biological states are physical states so therefore our brain is part of the physical world which is probably deterministic at least in most ways (7).

Another Incompatibilist theory is that of Hard Determinism, a theory that rejects free will and believes we live in a determined world without any moral responsibility, everything we do is “pre-conditioned” from previous events and decisions which were in turn decided due to previous happening all the way back to the Big Bang (9) . This theory is difficult to refute and has two major arguments in the favour of free will being impossible in a determined world: the Origination argument and the Consequence argument (1). The Consequence argument argues that the future is as fixed as the past, if determinism is true then the future is as unchangeable as the past, therefore even if it feels as if we can choose our actions in actual fact they are already decided and so we cannot have free will. The Origination argument argues that to have free will your will has to originate inside you but if determinism is true then everything someone does is caused by events in the past that no one has any control over now. Therefore, no one can be the ultimate source of their will and actions so no one can have free will in a deterministic world (1).

There is also the argument that we don't have free will but we are better off believing that we do anyway, there have been some studies on this which found that those with less belief in free will are more likely to cheat or steal and less likely to volunteer for good causes. However another philosopher, Sam Harris, argues that actually it would be better for society if we embraced the notion of determinism as any reason for hatred would be undermined and we would be a much more compassionate society if we didn't believe in free will and people being ultimately responsible for their actions. Over time, he says, the documented negative effects of belief in no free will would dissipate as people better understand their brains and stopped wrongly becoming fatalistic when they believe in determinism and didn't realise the fine distinction (4).

Another outlook and argument for determinism is the science of our genetics, that most of our self is passed on hereditarily and that we obviously are not responsible for this and neither do we have free will over its influence on us. Though this argument has some merit Free Will Libertarians can get round this by saying our genetics only influence our personality not our moral self and therefore we can still have free will (6).

The Pessimists are also Incompatibilists but have a different outlook to the Hard Determinists. Galen Strawson, a key Pessimist, argued that free will is impossible in a deterministic world and in a non-deterministic world. He agrees with the Hard Determinists that if we live in an entirely determined world we cannot have free will, but he also argues that if our world is probabilistic then we cannot be blamed for our actions either as they are due to random chance (15). It is your personal characteristics that make you the way you are and you are not responsible for them as they are based upon experiences and heredity that you have no control over; to be morally responsible you must have caused yourself which is in turn impossible and even if it were possible by existing prior to your existence you presumably would still have mental states that you could not have caused yourself and therefore you still cannot be responsible for causing your own character and therefore you cannot have free will (15).

Conclusion

(50 – 100 words. Sum up what you have done in your project.)

In Conclusion, I have explored the main theories on free will and looked at some of the different philosophers and their place in the debate. I have come to the conclusion that perhaps rather than us being entirely free or not we are instead more or less free and more or less determined. I am inclined more towards the Compatibilist argument than the Pessimist argument as I would rather believe myself to have some freedom of will, even if it is not what we might expect free will to entail, than believe free will is impossible.

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Videos:

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