

## **NCH School Certificate in Philosophy**

**NAME:**

**School**

**Set**

**Project Title: Can consciousness be  
proven?**

**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.

<b>TOTAL MARK AWARDED</b>	9
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 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.

Excellent understanding of some difficult philosophical arguments. Lovely use of art. Good research shown and good use of sources. To improve more critical analysis could be used.

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## Project Plan

### **Which question?**

Originally, I wanted to answer an essential question, that cannot be answered so it can be debated in my project. I also wanted it to follow philosophical themes, rather than moral or ethical. My project will come in the format of an essay, since it is independent, and can follow a strict pattern through the whole piece, with an additional section of a watercolour painting, intended to depict my opinions in my conclusion more creatively.

- These are the original three questions I had ideas on:
  - Can we prove consciousness?
  - Is the universe infinite?
  - What is a deity for?

I decided to write my essay on my original question, ‘Can we prove consciousness?’ for I already had experience in researching David Chalmers, a philosopher who has performed many lectures on the topic. I ruled out ‘What is a deity for?’ because I had found the topic very repetitive among philosophers when I had covered it in school, and thought it may be good to do research into a more unfamiliar area. My topics of interest for my project are as follows.

- David Chalmers’ ideas on philosophical zombies
- What is consciousness?
- Being Aware vs Being Conscious
- The reliability of consciousness theories

## Extra Detail on Plans

I then weighed the pros and the cons against one another to decide what structure to use in my project. I finally decided on the essay form as I can fit a large amount of information quickly into my project, but, because it can be lifeless for the examiner, I wanted to make a conscious effort to stop it being so repetitive and wearsome.

Presentation type	Pros	Cons
PowerPoint presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engaging to audience by giving visual and informative presentations.</li> <li>● Simple and doesn’t require tedious writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Could end with reading off the board but this can be easily avoided.</li> <li>● Requires being filmed to be sent and submitted.</li> </ul>
Essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Large amount of straightforward information packed into the writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can take time and be tedious.</li> <li>● Can drop the examiner’s attention from the</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes anxiety out of performing.</li> </ul>	repetitive blocks of writing.
Spoken presentation (filmed and submitted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be re-done so the pressure of performing is lifted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Videos can be very time consuming and could be boring when played.</li> <li>• Ideas can be missed for there is a time limit.</li> </ul>
School-like lesson (filmed and submitted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All ideas can be accessed quickly and explained swiftly.</li> <li>• Provokes focus and holds the attention of the examiner and audience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires resources I cannot access from home.</li> <li>• Could result in awkward pauses between lesson ideas.</li> </ul>
Art piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explores creative outlook.</li> <li>• Shows an alternative method of explanation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't fully show the information you have collected.</li> <li>• Needs a clear source of information.</li> </ul>

## Project Template


Here I show the plan and template of my essay, what it will include, roughly how many words and how it will be structured. This is inspired by the exam board's template.

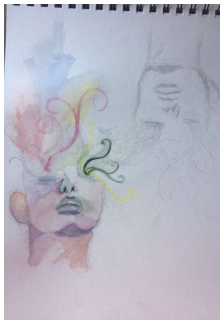
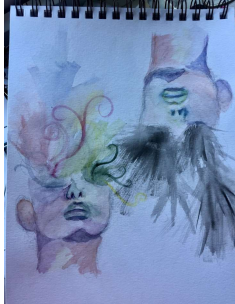
Part	Word Count	Content
Introduction	150-200 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Explanation of question and content of essay</li> <li>-Final conclusion to argue point the whole way through</li> <li>-What ideas the essay will cover</li> </ul>
Research	500 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-in the form of tables and writing, the document being read now</li> <li>-cover references and bibliography</li> <li>-why the question was chose and format of the project</li> <li>-extra detail on what I plan to do and how I</li> </ul>

		have structured everything -basic explanation of main points in reference material
Discussion	500-1000 words	-both for and against points arguing the question -clear references to dates, people and quotations -strengths and weaknesses of each idea - evidence from research will be repeated in my discussion
Conclusion	100 words	-my final opinion and the idea that influenced it -why it was influenced
Art Explanation	150 words	-what my art is supposed to symbolise and how it does that -the process of making my art -the symbolism in the piece

## Art Ideas

For my art project, I plan to back up my written conclusion in my essay, stating that I think that consciousness cannot be proven, due to David Chalmers' theory of philosophical zombies. I want to do a painting demonstrating how a philosophical zombie and a human cannot be distinguished, and how this has led to my conclusion.

Step	Method	Image
1	Sketching out the image with a 3B pencil on my watercolour paper.	

2	Painting the face and a bit of the consciousness of the human qualia brain.	
3	Painting the face of the philosophical zombie and finishing the consciousness of both.	

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

N/A

## Introduction

Consciousness is an ambiguous concept, not yet understood, but debated by many modern philosophers, one of which I will examine. Philosophers have for generations asked ‘What is Consciousness?’<sup>1</sup>, which also has been theorised and attempted to be understood, to no certain avail. For my question touches on this topic, the essay ahead will attempt to stay on track with the intended question, although some different topics will need to be reviewed to help in the

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<sup>1</sup> David Dennett seeking to explain consciousness



understanding of my theme. By 'proven', I aim to show some of the key and opposing views throughout philosophy and science, and then reach a conclusion on how the evidence has influenced my opinions and what these opinions are. I will discuss the definition of consciousness, David Chalmers' philosophical zombies and how they are relevant, and how awareness differentiates from consciousness. I have created an art piece to be explained in the conclusion, to show an example of how I have come to my final opinion ; from the idea of philosophical zombies, consciousness cannot be proven.

## Research

Philosophical zombies are defined as 'creatures designed to illuminate problems about consciousness' and are essentially a human without qualia. Qualia is the state of being conscious, a fundamental fact of human existence, and are individual instances of subjective experiences, making up your consciousness. David Chalmers talks many times about concepts surrounding

philosophical zombies : they are identical to one of humanity but void of consciousness. If tangible, we would not be able to identify a zombie by their outward appearance, or even questioning them, as they display undifferentiated actions and quality of someone who has consciousness. While they will scream if you were to pour a hot drink on them, internally, no pain would be felt and it would be like the 'shell' of man. Chalmers asks us to imagine a human who lacks qualia and other mental states a human would have, and calls this a 'zombie' to clearly show the variance. A simple idea would be to simply ask someone whether or not they possess qualia, though by definition, the zombie is identical to a human, and therefore would act and respond as someone with a conscious mind would. The idea of a 'zombie' is metaphysically possible, but is not a conceivable idea, as someone who possesses qualia cannot grasp the concept of a life without it, similar to life and death.

As of the topic of defining consciousness, it is another philosophical question that could be asked. It is most commonly known as the experience of being aware of the metaphysical world (outside the physical world). Questioning reality brings you closer to consciousness, hence why it is a very 'human' quality. Consciousness is intangible, whereas awareness exists as a tangible experience, clearly dividing the often confused two. Awareness is a physically-related expression, for you are aware of a fact, but will not perceive the outcome or the impact of it. You know what it is, but now it is related to you or anyone else's lives. This is made up of factors

such as sensations, cognitive abilities and knowledge. The difference between consciousness and awareness stands in the depth of your state, and how conscious experience stands apart from the real world ; where learning and interactions take place in the metaphysics of the mind, though awareness is still a prerequisite for consciousness. As consciousness is a subjective experience, the knowledge gained through life changes it, thus the phrase ‘knowledge is power’. You apply your knowledge to situations requiring sentience, you can use it for discernment in both metaphysical and physical realms, and it will connect to your daily life : seeing the reason behind everything, connecting with your purpose of existence and reaching your complete level of awareness.

As of proving consciousness, scientifically there is no set information, sprouting many theories and questions. Integrated information theory talks of explaining consciousness and how it is associated with physical systems. It predicts which systems involve consciousness, to what degree they are conscious and the particular experience occurring within the qualia. IIT, a theory proposed by neuroscientist Giulio Tononi in 2004, determines consciousness by the causal properties of the physical system. This is measured in units of ‘Phi’ (a quantification of the size of a molecule), which is very high in the human brain, but also transpires in every piece of matter in the universe, therefore everything has some integrated information.

Rene Descartes also argues for the proof of consciousness, as he believed that it was taken as given, and we must accept that a physical system, such as the brain, could not perform metaphysical things, like mathematics and questioning. In the time of the theory (17th century), they proceeded to dissect the brain, to no avail, as an attempt to find some sort of organ or physical composition proving that the brain could process the metaphysical.

Michael Graziano, a neuroscientist who specialised in the robotics of the brain, talks of the slippery concept of consciousness, which at the centre lies non-physicality. Though this is countered by Physicalism - the theory that everything is physical and all our emotions and experiences are just chemical reactions in the brain, which is then disproved by Dualism - this says that we are more than physicality, and that we have a soul and such.

## 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.)

‘Consciousness is one of the fundamental facts of human existence’, stated David Chalmers<sup>2</sup>, while describing consciousness as a movie playing within your head, with sense, smell, taste and emotion. Humanity without **qualia** (conscious experience), would not be humanity at all. For what makes us, us, is the understanding that we have a subjective experience of a feeling. We do not just process information fed to us and prompt a natural reaction. Since qualia is a **subjective experience**, it is by definition, nonexistent in a physical dimension, making it metaphysical and a theory of metaphysics. Mainstream science describes it as a ‘riddle of non-physicality’, expressed by a student of Princeton University,<sup>3</sup> studying neuroscience or ‘the robotics of the brain’,<sup>4</sup> The question in person debated in these subjects is ‘How can the brain (a physical thing) generate metaphysical essence?’ and for the sole reason that it hasn’t been answered by many and all philosophers, I will go by the definitions I spoke of, it being a subjective experience.

Often confused with consciousness is awareness, a similar but different ideology. Being aware is tangible, as you know something, but not how it will affect you because of factors like sensation and perception. Consciousness differs where it is an understanding of the metaphysical world, beyond the tangible experiences mentioned in the explanation of awareness, and is more in depth than merely ‘being aware’. Although separate, awareness is considered necessary for consciousness to occur - it is a prerequisite of a qualia, for you cannot have a conscious experience without first being aware of the theme of the subject. You can see a correlation between these two principles and **knowledge**. Knowledge benefits to the tipping point between

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<sup>2</sup> 2013 TedTalk: How do we explain consciousness?

<sup>3</sup> Michael Graziano

<sup>4</sup> New Scientist The Collection: Mysteries of the Human Brain, 2019

being aware of something, and conscious of it. Your decisions will be altered depending on how your knowledge is collected and applied, making consciousness subjective, and validates the theory. This idea is said to prove consciousness because they both are subjective experiences, though this proof is not that strong, as subjective experiences are 'subjective' to the person involved in them, meaning they can go many different directions, and could possibly not link to knowledge. This is also disagreed with by philosophers involved in physicalism<sup>5</sup>, as they believe that all actions performed by the brain are physical and a chemical reaction causing emotion and qualia.

Some may say that consciousness cannot be proven among others, from the principle of **philosophical zombies** by David Chalmers. This theory tells of a human lacking of qualia, hence without conscious experience. This human is outwardly, a fully functioning human and has natural responses to things it cannot feel - while it will yelp if you were to pinch it, no actual pain is experienced by the host, leaving its only difference to be its lack of subjective awareness or consciousness. Going by this definition alone, this clearly tells us that consciousness can not be proven for, by definition, a philosophical zombie is indistinguishable from a human with qualia. This argument is very persuasive, since philosophical zombies can neither be proved or disproved, and we would not know whether they existed or not, and is therefore a clear indication of the unreliability of proving consciousness. Although, this theory was originally concocted to disagree with physicalism - the theory that we are purely physical beings and all our

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Cameron Jackson

features are chemical reactions in the brain. This still continues to pose the question of not knowing of other minds and other's qualia, not dissimilar to my essay's question.

Alternatively, some say consciousness is proven by the Integrated Information Theory, proposed by the neuroscientist Giulio Tononi in 2004. This theory states that consciousness is seen as an emergent property of complex systems, and this system is measured in units called 'phi'. Phi is very high in the human brain but is also present in all matter in the universe, and IIT says everything has at least some integrated information. Consciousness is proven by this because it is measured with what seems to be a measurement of the metaphysical, and is high in locations suspected to be the root of the principle of consciousness<sup>6</sup>. This theory, although viable, can be seen as not reliable, for Phi is the scale of particle size, and possibly could not be related to consciousness at all, as Phi is physical whereas consciousness is metaphysical, and is therefore not as well grounded/proven as the ideas such as the link between subjective experiences.

In addition to that, consciousness can be theoretically proven from Rene Descartes 'proof' of consciousness. For Descartes, consciousness is taken as given ; his conscious thoughts are the proof of his existence, and his existence is the proof of his consciousness, since it is the principle of humanity. This theory was concocted in the seventeenth century, and since then many more in depth theories have arisen, making Descartes a less persuasive idea, but the age of the theory should not be an indicator for its reliability. A similar idea to this is Descartes' other idea that our ability to use language and reason, perhaps in mathematics, is beyond the capacity of the

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<sup>6</sup> 3 principles of the mind, 7 principles of consciousness

physical system, and therefore must be proof of the metaphysical idea of consciousness. This idea is practical, and is validated by Leibniz, a German polymath from the seventeenth century, who agreed that we know all that is possible about the physical systems in the human brain and how that it is only possible consciousness is a metaphysical principle, since it has not been found, and therefore indicates that consciousness can be proven.

## Conclusion

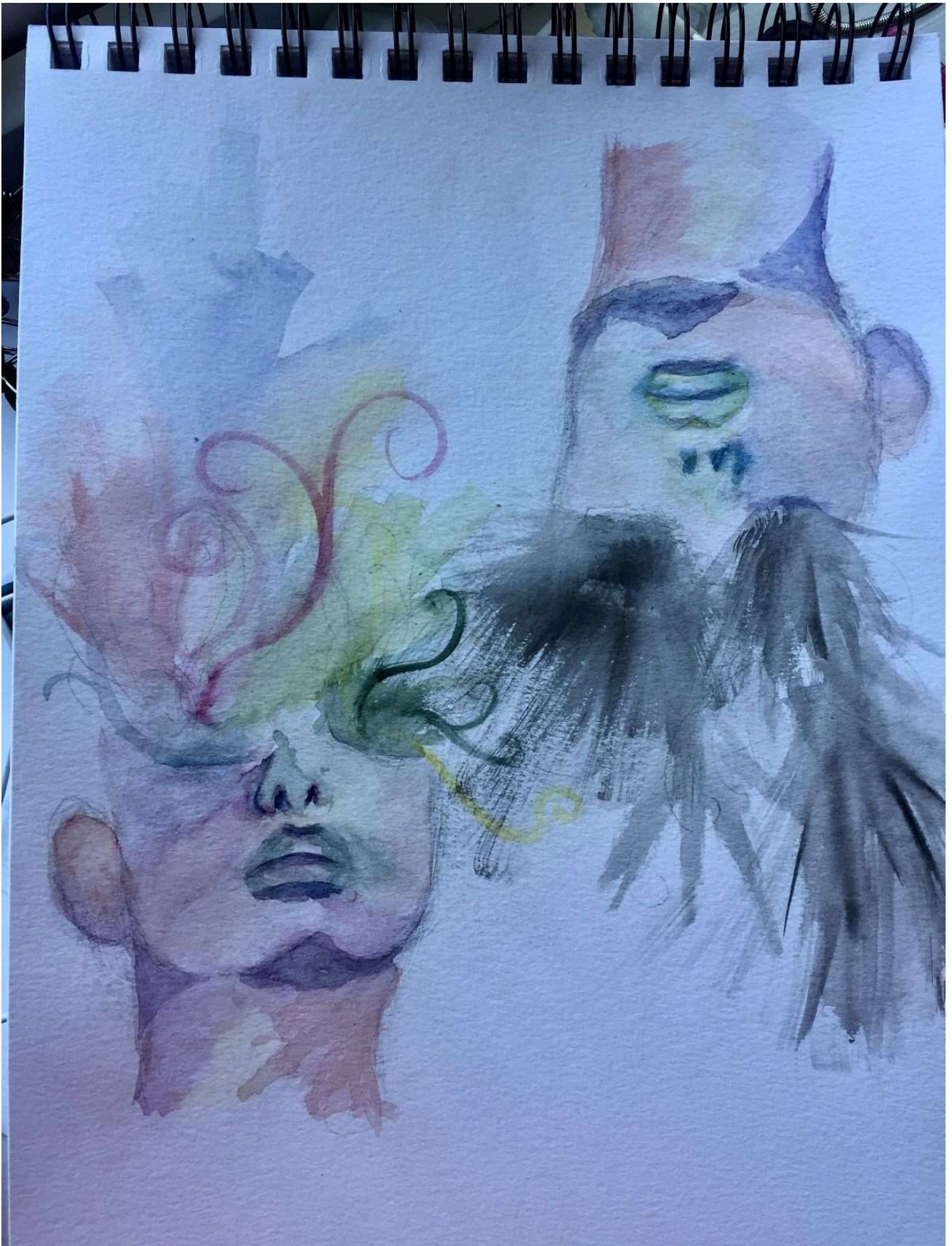
(50 - 100 words. Sum up what you have done in your project.)

Assessing all the present information, if I were to answer the question 'Can consciousness be proven?' I would say 'no'. The theory of philosophical zombies stands out to be as it is very effective at expressing the idea that you cannot tell, physically, the difference between a being with and without a conscious mind. Although the idea that we haven't found anything physical in the brain, fulfilling the theory of the metaphysical concept of a conscience is very persuasive to me, it still cannot be proved and therefore it follows consciousness cannot be proven.

I have attempted to demonstrate why my opinions are what they are with an art piece. Each face in the image is intended to depict a human with a conscious mind and the other as a philosophical zombie - they look outwardly the same (other than some expected artistic mistakes) but inside their minds (implied through the streaks and swirls emitted from their head) one has a human brain with a conscience, making them human, diverse and colourful. The other



has an empty head where they do not feel and have no system of consciousness, meaning their thoughts are programmed and dull. I have represented these through colourful markings for the conscious brain, with swirls to symbolise a question mark, inferring the human nature of questioning surrounds and lifestyles ; the philosophical zombie's head is shown through straight, black streak - the opposite to the conscious brain.



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<https://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~pxc/docs/HO-Zombies.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MASBIB7zPo4>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/physicalism/>

**Books/Magazines:**

[New Scientist The Collection: Mysteries of the Human Brain, Second Edition, 2019 - Section 6, pages 82-84](#)

[AQA A level Hodder Education Philosophy Year 2: Metaphysics of God and Metaphysics of the Mind: pages](#)