Life Without Free Will

Keeping It Positive

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Introduction

If we accept that free will does not exist, then what will life be like? What are the consequences of rejecting the illusion of free will? The debate about free will and determinism is concerned with the incompatibility of moral responsibility and the idea that we live in a physical world that is governed by deterministic laws. Like Gregg Caruso, I take determinism to be the thesis that every event or action is the inevitable result of preceding events and actions and the laws of nature (Caruso 2013, 2). If we accept the deterministic worldview, it follows that all our choices and actions are causally determined by factors beyond our control. As a consequence, we can no longer be held morally responsible for them.

Many philosophers argue that a life without free will and moral responsibility is not intelligible. Arguments towards this stand might concern two different levels; the first is the level of a whole society that is faced with the non-existence of free will, the second level is that of the personal life that is affected by the supposed threats of determinism. In this thesis I will focus on the consequences of accepting determinism on a personal level.

Several scientists and philosophers have expressed their worries concerning the acceptance of the non-existence of free will. Saul Smilansky (2001) argues that the illusion of free will must be maintained. This, Smilansky writes, is necessary for morality and personal value. Susan Pockett (2013) concludes from scientific evidence that statements concerning the non-existence of free will increase antisocial behavior. However, there are also philosophers who think that life without free will would not be as negative as is suggested by so many. Susan Blackmore (2013) lives happily without the feeling of having a free will. Jan Verplaetse (2011) argues that living without free will is not at all inconceivable at a personal level. And Derk Pereboom (2001, 2013) states that letting go of the illusion of free will can even be beneficial to our lives. My view of life without free will is certainly positive. I will argue that we can have meaningful and positive lives without the illusions of free will and moral responsibility.

The structure of this thesis roughly follows three questions posed by Smilansky. Chapter 1 deals with Smilansky's first question, the *Libertarian Existence Question* (2001, 73): 'Does libertarian free will exist?' In this chapter, I will inquire into the three main positions of the free will debate: libertarianism, compatibilism and hard incompatibilism. Thereafter, I will deal with Smilansky's *Compatibility Question* (2001, 73): 'If libertarian free will does not exist, do we still have moral responsibility and the related notions such as desert?' A prominent problem in the free will debate is whether free will is required for moral responsibility. Libertarianism rejects determinism and defends the existence of free will and moral responsibility. Compatibilism claims that we may have the free will that is required for moral responsibility even if determinism is true. Hard incompatibilism accepts determinism and claims that free will is necessary for moral responsibility, and that we therefore have neither.

Thus, the question at stake in the first chapter is not only whether free will exist, but also whether we would still be morally responsible for our actions if they are produced by factors beyond our control. My answer to these questions is negative. I will argue why I have accepted hard determinism and adopted the hard incompatibilist position. 'Hard' indicates that by accepting determinism, we deny the kind of free will that is

required for moral responsibility. Thus, we are neither blameworthy, nor praiseworthy for our actions in the basic desert sense, the sense that would make us *truly deserving* of blame or praise.

The focus of this thesis is life without free will on a personal level. My inquiry thus resembles Smilansky's *Consequences Question* (2001, 74): 'If we have no moral responsibility in the light of the absence of libertarian free will, […] is this good or bad?' Many philosophers, scientists and others assume that life without free will is not possible. In chapter 2, I give an analysis of the supposed threats of accepting hard incompatibilism. However, with reference to these concerns, I will argue that life without free will is perfectly livable.

The main chapter of this thesis, chapter 3, is dedicated to describing the positive life we can live when we reject the illusions of free will and moral responsibility. Hereby, I focus on different aspects of life: morality, our view of ourselves, meaning in life, and interpersonal relationships and emotions. I will argue that accepting hard incompatibilism does not entail the demolition of morality. Although we must think differently of ourselves when we no longer regard ourselves as morally blameworthy or praiseworthy for our actions, we are still able to have a sense of self-worth. Also, accepting hard incompatibilism will not render life meaningless, because we can still have hopes for the future and we must make efforts to accomplish our goals. And although some of our attitudes towards ourselves and others no longer seem justified given hard determinism, we will be able to maintain interpersonal relationships that are based on love and other emotions. I will explain why accepting hard incompatibilism even has benefits for our personal lives.

Because most of us grew up with the conviction that each person is morally responsible, statements towards the non-existence of free will and moral responsibility must be handled with care. Denying responsibility and flaunting it carelessly will result in confusion and incomprehension. In the last chapter I will briefly explain why society is not ready to accept the non-existence of free will and moral responsibility. A thorough understanding of the consequences of determinism is needed. Moreover, philosophical ideas are unlikely to change laws and policies in society any time soon. However, this does not change my belief that, on a personal level, a life without free will can be a perfectly positive one.

I believe that philosophical ideas must have a chance in real life. It is one thing to say that free will does not exist, but quite another to actually live accordingly. In *Living Without Free Will* (2013), Susan Blackmore describes the effort it takes to let go of the illusion of free will. Reading this essay inspired me to take on the life without free will. This thesis is therefore a sort of personal project. I grew up thinking I had a soul and was morally responsible for my actions, but my study of philosophy has taken away these and other alleged certainties. Nevertheless, I am a positive person and live a happy live without the illusion of free will. I am well aware of the fact that this is a philosophical thesis, not a diary of journal. Therefore I will focus on the arguments that have been given in the debate, and discuss whether I think they are plausible or tenable. On the basis thereof, I argue that life, on a personal level, can be perfectly positive without the illusions of free will and moral responsibility.

1. The Free Will Debate

In the philosophical discussion about free will and moral responsibility, it is not uncommon to address intuitions and feelings people might have concerning the issue of free will. People often believe that their actions are caused by their thoughts and decisions, and that they have control over them. Persons feel as if they have the ability to choose between different options whenever they are faced with a choice. However, many are in addition rationally convinced that we live in a physical world that is governed by deterministic laws. This entails that all our choices and decisions are causally determined by factors beyond our control. The problem of free will and determinism thus consists in trying to reconcile these intuitive ideas concerning free will with the idea that we live in a deterministic world. We are faced with the clash between intuitive feelings about free will and our rational conception of the world we live in.

In this chapter I will discuss the three main positions in this debate; libertarianism, compatibilism and hard incompatibilism. My focus is on the arguments that these different positions provide in the attempt to solve the problem of free will and determinism. It is not my intention to settle the debate; I merely mean to review the arguments that are at hand and indicate where I stand in the debate. By pointing out that some arguments face serious problems, while others seem more acceptable, I argue that hard incompatibilism seems the most viable position.

1.1 Libertarianism

Libertarianism is also called soft incompatibilism. Libertarians acknowledge that *if* determinism were true, we would not have free will. And hence, we would not be morally responsible for our actions. However, libertarians reject determinism and defend a counter-causal sense of free will, which is the unconditional ability to do otherwise. They claim that people have the ability to do otherwise, even if the conditions in which they find themselves remain exactly the same. Thus, the libertarian's answer to Smilansky's *Libertarian Existence Question* (2001, 73) is positive. However, it is this kind of free will that I think is quite problematic. Let me explain why I think that libertarian free will is not the conclusive answer to the free will debate.

Libertarianism attributes a causal power to the agent[1] that enables him to make choices and to act without being determined to do so. Is this kind of free will reconcilable with the prevailing physical theories? Currently, it is widely accepted that our choices produce physical events in the brain and in the rest of the body, and that these events are governed by physical laws. Libertarianism would thus have to explain how our decisions and actions can be free in a physical world that is governed by deterministic laws.

According to Libertarianism, when an agent makes a free decision, he causes the decision without being causally determined to do so. The difficulty is that the undetermined decision, as current physical theories state, brings about changes in the physical world (in the brain or other part in the body); the decision leads to the person's action. Pereboom explains why this is a problem: If this were the case, we would encounter divergences from the deterministic laws. After all, the physical changes that are made cannot be causally determined, because they originated from an undetermined decision, and thus they would not be

[1] When I speak of an agent, it may be a male or a female. Whenever the words 'he' or 'his' are used, one could also read 'she, 'her' or 'hers.'

governed by deterministic laws (Pereboom 2013, 28). This seems to show that current physical theories do not allow a counter-causal kind of free will.

According to current scientific theories, we live in a physical world that is governed by deterministic laws. I seriously doubt whether there are any good reasons to assume that our thoughts and decisions escape this determinacy. It seems unlikely that there can be events that have no causal circumstances and that cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect. Even if we are unable to explain a particular event because we are unable to describe the complete preceding sequence of causal circumstances, it still seems likely that the event is the result of such a deterministic sequence. Every day we experience that we live in a world governed by deterministic laws. As Ted Honderich says: "There has been no chance event in my life, no event not lawful. No spoon has ever levitated at breakfast" (Honderich 2013, 54).

Because we live in a deterministic world, our actions are always causally determined by factors beyond our control, and hence we do not have the kind of free will that is required for moral responsibility. The sense of moral responsibility that is at issue in this debate is closely related to the notion of basic desert. I accept the definition of basic desert given by Pereboom: The agent is morally responsible for an action, in the basic desert sense, if it is his in such a way that he would deserve to be blamed if he understood that it was morally wrong, and he would deserve to be praised if he understood that it was morally good (Pereboom 2013, 19). Thus, the agent would deserve to be blamed or praised because of having performed the action and because he understands whether the action is morally good or bad.

Given the determination of our thoughts, decisions and actions, we cannot be blamed, nor praised for them. However, indeterminacy cannot rescue moral responsibility either. I agree with Pockett that, even if our acts would be undetermined, this would not ensure moral responsibility, for they would be random in relation to the outside world (Pockett 2013, 269). If my action is undetermined, or uncaused, how could I be in control of it? I think it is unfair to hold people morally responsible for things that are not under their control. Besides, things that have no cause must be random, and it seems unjustified to blame or praise people for things that are random. This is an important point of critique for libertarianism, because the denial of determinism seems to be insufficient to grand us moral responsibility.

When we morally judge someone's actions, we are typically interested in the actions that are performed for a reason. We are not concerned with reflexes or mindless habitual actions. For example, we do not speak of moral responsibility when someone has a knee-jerk or when someone puts on his socks. These things are done without thinking about it. In contrast, when we are concerned with moral responsibility, we want to know what someone's reasons are for acting in a particular way. According to Galen Strawson[2], when one acts for a reason, the action is the effect of how one is (Strawson 2013, 42). The reasons that one might have for behaving in a certain way, are thus indicative of his moral character. From this it follows that holding an agent responsible for his actions requires that he is responsible for how he is, morally. Herein lays another difficulty for libertarianism. I will now explain this in more detail.

[2] It is important not to confuse Galen Strawson with Peter Fredrick Strawson. From now on 'Strawson' will refer to Galen Strawson. Peter Fredrick will be named as P.F. Strawson.

Libertarians hold that we can freely make different decisions. For example, a person can decide to steal or not to steal. But as I said earlier, what a person does cannot be random and must follow from his moral character. This means that if an agent is held morally responsible for his actions, he must be responsible for his moral character. The problem for libertarianism is that a person's moral character cannot be under his control, because one can only be responsible for his moral character, if he has created himself. An earlier self would have created the later self, but that earlier self must have been created by an even earlier self. This leads to an infinite regress. Thus, self-determination is impossible because it requires the completion of an infinite series of self-creations. This line of reasoning is further expanded in Strawson's *Basic Argument* (2013, 41-48), but I believe this brief framing of the argument is sufficient here. If we cannot be said to have made ourselves in such a way that we can be held morally responsible for our actions, punishment or reward for our actions never seems to be just or fair.

Libertarianism has tried to secure moral responsibility by granting agents with the power to freely control their decisions and actions. However, as I have suggested, the problem of free will, moral responsibility and determinism still seems to be far from solved. After considering some of the arguments that libertarians give in order to save free will and moral responsible, I think we can conclude that the answer to Smilansky's *Existence Question* might well be negative; there seems to be no free will that makes us morally responsible for our actions.

1.2 Compatibilism

Compatibilism is the view that we can be free and morally responsible even if determinism is true. According to its advocates, the answer to Smilansky's *Compatibility Question* (Smilansky 2001, 73) is positive. The sort of free will that is defended by compatibilists is less ambitious than the one defended by libertarians, because the compatibilist form of free will can be reconciled with determinism. Falsity of determinism is thus not the main focus of compatibilism. Free action is not owed to no causation, but to the right kind of causation. Caruso describes that, according to the compatibilist, free acts must be caused in the appropriate way (Caruso 2013, 2). Being uncaused is not a requirement of compatibilism, instead, free acts must be voluntary and free from constraint and compulsion.

Various philosophers have described the conditions for compatibilisticallly free actions. They claim that an agent can be held morally responsible when he is in control of his actions in the way we take ordinary persons to be responsible under normal circumstances. Compatibilists don't require that the agent is truly responsible for the formation of his moral character. An agent can be held morally responsible if his actions are not caused by certain constraints and compulsions, such as described by Strawson: kleptomaniac impulses, obsessional neuroses, desires that are experienced as alien, or threats (Strawson 2013, 49).

It might seem that we can just drop the requirement that people are morally responsible for their moral character. This is suggested by the next quotation from the compatibilist George Vuoso, cited by Smilansky (2001, 75):

> The incoherence of the libertarian conception of moral responsibility arises from the fact that it requires not only authorship of the action, but also, in a sense, authorship of one's self, or of one's character. As was shown, this requirement is unintelligible because it leads to an infinite regress. The way out of this regress is simply to drop the second-order authorship requirement, which is what has been done here.
> (Vuoso, George. 1987. "Background, Responsibility and Excuse." Yale Journal 96:1681.)

However, as Smilansky argues, we cannot just drop the requirement that people are morally responsible for their moral character, because this requirement has an ethical basis (Smilansky 2001, 76). If we punish someone for an action, even though it is a free action in the compatibilist sense, that person is punished for something which is beyond his control. The suffering that is caused by the punishment might be justified because the wrongful action meets the compatibilist's conditions, but the person is still being punished for something which he could not control, for which was not his fault. I will now elaborate on the compatibilist's conditions of a free action.

I will now present an overview of the most important conditions of moral responsibility advocated by prominent compatibilist, which corresponds to Pereboom's enumeration (2013, 21-22). I describe these conditions in relation to the example of Professor Plum, which I will come back to later in this chapter. Professor Plum decides to kill Ms. White and succeeds in doing so. According to the compatibilist, Plum is morally responsible, if his action meets the following conditions:

(1) According to Hume (1739/1978) the action must not be out of character. This condition entails that the desires that motivate Professor Plum to act are not irresistible for him; that he is not constrained to act.

(2) Harry Frankfurt (1971) states that Plum's will to murder White must conform to his second-order desires. This means that Plum must will to murder her, and he must want to will to do so, and he must will this act of murder because he wants to will to do so.

(3) John Fischer and Mark Ravizza (1998) have set forward the reasons-responsiveness condition. This condition requires that Plum's desires arise from, and can be modified by, rational consideration of the reasons he has. Thus, if Plum knew that killing White would result in severe consequences, he would refrain from the act for that reason.

(4) Jay Wallace (1994) argues that Plum must have the ability to use moral reasons to understand, perform and regulate his actions. Thus, when the reasons Plum has for killing White stand weak against his moral considerations, he will refrain from the murder.

(5) This ability gives Plum the capacity to revise and develop his own moral character, which is a condition posed by Al Mele (1995).

Pereboom has given a *Manipulation Argument* (2013, 21-25) to show that these compatibilist's conditions are not sufficient to grant someone moral responsibility. In my view, this is a viable argument that demonstrates the inadequacy of compatibilism to solve the problem of free will and determinism. I will now illustrate why the incompatibilist's conditions are insufficient to secure moral responsibility with the help of this argument. Pereboom describes four scenarios in which Plum kills White. Each case meets one or more of the five conditions for moral responsibility. However, in each case we intuitively consider Plum *not* to be responsible for his action.

Pereboom's argument begins with the intuition that one is not morally responsible for an action if he is causally determined to act by other agents, for example scientists who manipulate the brain. Then, the argument demonstrates that there are no significant differences between this case and successive cases that are each more similar to an ordinary situation. In the last case Plum's action is causally determined in a natural way, thus not by manipulation. The compatibilist would have to explain which difference can justify why Plum would be held morally responsible in the latter case, and not in the former ones.

In each case, Plum is causally determined to murder White by factors beyond his control, but in each case the causal determination is of a different sort. It is important to remember that in each case Plum's mental states and actions satisfy some of the compatibilist's conditions listed above. In case 1 (Pereboom 2013, 22) neuroscientists directly affect Plum at a neural level through the use of radio-like technology. By pressing a button they manipulate his mental states, which the neuroscientists know will result in his decision to kill White. Although Plum is morally responsible for his action, according to the compatibilist, intuitively he is not morally responsible for his decisions.

Then we are asked to consider case 2 (Pereboom 2013, 23), which is more like an ordinary situation wherein the agent has the capacity to develop and revise his moral character over time. In this second case neuroscientists have programmed Plum at the beginning of his life, so that his reasoning will result in the decision to kill White. Again, Plum satisfies several compatibilist's conditions, but intuitively he is not morally responsible. It seems unjustified to claim that Plum is morally responsible, by contrast with case 1, only because more time has passed between his programming and his decision to kill White.

The third scenario is even more similar to an ordinary situation. In case 3 (Pereboom 2013, 24), Plum is causally determined by the training and practices of his family and community. Plum is brought up in an environment in which self-interest and violence are strongly encouraged. This upbringing and the particular circumstances he finds himself in lead to Plum's decision to kill White. If the compatibilist argues that Plum is now morally responsible, he must indicate what difference between case 2 and 3 can explain why Plum is morally responsible in the third and not in the second case. It seems that such a difference cannot be indicated.

Case 4 (Pereboom 2013, 24) is an ordinary deterministic scenario. Everything in the universe is physical and physicalist determinism is true. This means that everything that happens is causally determined by the past states of the world, together with the laws of nature. Again, Plum is determined to make the decision to kill White. Once more, we must ask the question: What is the difference between case 3 and case 4 that would justify the claim that Plum is responsible in the fourth case but not in the third? Again, it appears that there is

no such difference, because in both cases the professor satisfies the compatibilist's conditions for moral responsibility.

We must conclude that in *each* case Plum cannot be morally responsible, because he is causally determined by factors beyond his control. It is highly intuitive that Plum is not morally responsible in case 1, and there are no relevant differences between 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and 3 and 4 that can justify why Plum would be morally responsible in the former but not in the latter of each pair. I think we can conclude that the compatibilist's conditions are insufficient to secure moral responsibility. It seems that it cannot be explained why an agent cannot be held morally responsible when an action is determined by constraint and compulsion, but can be held responsible when the action is only determined by physical laws. Thus, the answer to Smilansky's *Compatibility Question* (Smilansky 2001, 73) also seems to be negative. In my view, compatibilism does not provide an answer to the problem of free will, moral responsibility and determinism.

1.3 Hard Incompatibilism

As I have indicated above, both libertarianism and compatibilism face serious problems in the attempts of solving the problem of free will, moral responsibility and determinism. I believe that hard incompatibilism is a more defensible position. Hard incompatibilism is closely related to hard determinism. Hard determinism is the view that determinism is true and incompatible with free will and moral responsibility. The hard incompatibilist position holds that libertarian free will is impossible because all human action takes place in a fully deterministic world and compatibilism fails to secure moral responsibility. The sort of free will that is required for moral responsibility cannot be reconciled with the fact that our actions are causally determined by factors beyond our control.

According to the hard incompatibilist, what we do is ultimately the result of factors over which we have no control. To hold someone morally responsible for their actions, would be to hold them responsible for what is morally arbitrary and this would be fundamentally unfair and unjust. We cannot be held morally responsible for our actions in the basic desert sense, the sense that would make us *truly deserving* of blame or praise.

Some philosophers and scientists claim that quantum mechanics undermines, or at least seriously threatens, the thesis of universal determinism. However, this does not mean that determinism has been refuted or falsified. Caruso states that determinism has not been refuted and that the final interpretation of physics has yet to come (Caruso 2013, 3). Theories of quantum mechanics allow some indeterminacy at a microlevel, at the level of atoms and sub-atoms. But even if we allow this indeterminacy, there probably would still be determinism at the macro-level, the level of physical objects, the level of human action, which is the level that actually matters to us. Moreover, while determinism is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility, so is the sort of indeterminacy that is specified by the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics. As I argued in section 1.1 (p.7), indeterminacy does not warrant free will or moral responsibility. An agent cannot be in control over an act that is undetermined, and it seems unfair to hold him responsible for something which is not under his control. Thus, quantum mechanics also seems to be inadequate to solve the problem of free will and determinism.

Developments in the behavioral, cognitive, and neurosciences have strengthened the hard incompatibilist's position. Very important has been the neuroscientific discovery that action is initiated by unconscious brain activity before the person is consciously aware of the intention to act (e.g., Benjamin Libet, John-Dylan Haynes). Research in psychology and social psychology indicates that many of our actions happen automatically, without us being aware of it. As Caruso describes, this has led some to conclude that our commonsense belief that we consciously initiate and control our actions might be mistaken (Caruso 2013, 4). Often we do not know the causes of our actions, even though we think we can explain them to ourselves and others. We seem to have much less control over our behavior then we traditionally assumed.

I agree with Pockett that, if free will requires the conscious initiation of one action rather than another, then research like Libet's shows that neuroscience has killed that kind of free will (Pockett 2013, 267). However, there are arguments claiming that it is not of major importance for free will whether actions are consciously initiated or not. Pockett writes that these scientific results perhaps do not destroy the whole idea of free will; that there might be other senses of free will that are not ruled out. I am aware of the fact that neuro-scientific evidence does not settle the debate of free will and determinism. However, as I said, it is not my intention to settle the debate. I have merely reviewed different arguments in the debate and have indicated which I consider plausible or acceptable. The scientific findings do seem to validate the hard-incompatibilist position.

To conclude this chapter: I have argued that libertarianism seems to be irreconcilable with the physical world's being governed by deterministic laws; current scientific theories don't seem to allow libertarian free will. Libertarianism does not seem to be able to solve the problem of free will and determinism, because is unable to save moral responsibility. After all, we cannot be held morally responsible for things that are not under our control. Compatibilism also seems to be inadequate in solving the problem of free will, determinism and moral responsibility. I have indicated that the compatibilist's conditions are insufficient to ensure moral responsibility. Hard incompatibilism seems to be a more viable option. I think that, as our understanding of the mechanisms that form the basis of human behavior grows, it becomes more obvious that we do not have the kind of free will that is required for moral responsibility. We live in a world that is governed by deterministic laws, and hence, we are – each and every part of us – bound by determinism.

This conclusion is likely to raise numerous questions. I will now focus on these questions and discuss the possible consequences, and feared threats, of accepting hard incompatibilism.

2. Concerns about Negative Consequences

What are the consequences of accepting hard incompatibilism? What does this entail for our personal lives? For morality? For our self-conception and self-respect? For our interpersonal relationships? Would we become amoral, antisocial creatures? Would we become dispirited and indifferent? Thus, what is the answer to Smilansky's *Consequences Question*?

When people are confronted with determinism, their reaction is often one of worry. Blackmore recorded that many of her students, as they learned neuroscience and philosophy, came to the conclusion that free will must be illusory. Yet many of them feared the consequences of accepting this conclusion in their own lives. They asked questions like: "But if I don't have free will why would I ever get up in the morning?" or "Why would I bother to do anything at all?" The students fear that they will make the wrong decisions if they stop exerting their free will. Blackmore suggests that they try the exercise to see what happens (Blackmore 2013, 168). That is what I started doing during my own study of philosophy. Thereby I became motivated to advocate the positive life without free will.

In this and the next chapter I will discuss several kinds of worries concerning the acceptance of hard incompatibilism. First I will discuss the alleged collapse of morality, due to the inexistence of moral responsibility. Thereafter I describe that, if we accept that we do not have libertarian free will, we must change the way we think of ourselves. According to some, the new view of ourselves would be devastating for our sense of self-worth and self-respect. In addition, the absence of free will would deprive our lives of meaning and purpose. Eventually, meaningful interpersonal relationships would be seriously threatened, because the attitudes and emotions that form the basis of human relationships would be negatively affected by the hard incompatibilist position.

After reading this chapter, you might be convinced that a life without free will is impossible. Yet, I hope you will continue reading, for the next chapter will disprove the described fears and worries described. The current chapter aims to clarify what it means to accept hard incompatibilism, even more so, as I will argue, to indicate what it does *not* mean.

2.1 Morality

Not only people who are just introduced in philosophy, like Blackmore's students, are troubled by the non-existence of free will and moral responsibility. Also many philosophers have expressed their worries concerning hard determinism and hard incompatibilism. Even scientific research seems to indicate that people's behavior becomes more antisocial if they are convinced that free will does not exist, or when their belief in the existence of free will is at least weakened. Research by Kathleen Vohs and Jonathan Schooler (2008) shows that participants supported a weaker belief in free will after having read a passage in which Francis Crick (known for his discovery of the structure of DNA) claims that scientists now believe free will to be illusory. This made them cheat more on subsequent tests than subject who had read a similar passage about something neutral. In another test (Baumeister et al. 2009) some participants were assigned to read a text that did support free will, while others were given a text that did not support free will. Afterwards all participants were presented with

scenarios in which they had the opportunity to help other people. Those who had read the text which claimed that free will is an illusion were significantly more aggressive and less likely to help others. Pockett concludes from these results that statements about the non-existence of free will have the effect of increasing antisocial behavior (Pockett 2013, 267).

Like Pockett, Smilansky is convinced that denying free will and moral responsibility will undermine moral behavior. Smilansky writes that people might come to believe that if all is determined, everything is permitted (Smilansky 2001, 88). Scientist and writer Dennis Overbye has stated that "the death of free will, or its exposure as a convenient illusion could wreak havoc on our sense of moral and legal responsibility. According to those who believe that free will and determinism are incompatible. … It would mean that people are no more responsible for their actions than asteroids or planets. Anything would go" (*The New York Times*, 2007). These worries are shared by many scientists and philosophers.

What are the reasons that make these philosophers and scientists expect the demolition of morality? How does the acceptance of hard incompatibilism threaten morality? If all our actions are produced by factors beyond our control, we are no longer blameworthy or praiseworthy for them. It is feared that if people realize that they cannot be truly morally responsible for their actions, then all of morality would collapse. The argument states that if determinism rules out basic desert blameworthiness, it would undermine judgements of moral obligation. For if one could not have avoided acting badly, it must be false that one ought to have acted otherwise. Consequently, if judgements of moral obligation are no longer valid, we could not justly call certain actions right and others wrong.

2.2 View of Ourselves

Accepting hard incompatibilism entails a change in our self-conception. I think it is true that we can no longer think of ourselves as agent causes, because our actions do not result from the indeterministic power that we thought we possessed. However, according to some this poses a threat to our self-conception.

Smilansky argues that hard determinism can be extremely damaging to our view of ourselves, to our sense of achievement, and to our sense of worth and self-respect. The hard determinist perspective is especially harmful to our sense of achievement in the shaping of one's own moral character. According to this perspective all people are morally equal, which means it is impossible to generate real moral value. When we accept the hard determinist position, we will face what Smilansky calls the *Danger of Worthlessness* (2001, 86). According to Smilansky, our moral self-respect is closely connected to our choices, actions and achievements. And if those are no longer truly by our doing, then neither is our moral character. Therefore this important sense of moral achievement would disappear. True appreciation is impossible if the agent and his efforts are merely the products of factors beyond his control.

2.3 Meaning in Life

Another possible reaction to hard incompatibilism is that, if it were true, our lives would have no purpose. Pereboom describes this worry: We would not be able to change our future, because it is determined by factors beyond our control, and therefore our deliberations and actions would not have any effect on it. We

would have no reason to try to accomplish anything, because our thoughts and choices could make no difference (Pereboom 2001, 138). If we do not have the power to affect our future, then the things we do cannot truly count as our achievements. Thereby, the possibility of meaning in life would be jeopardized (Pereboom 2001, 187).

It might be thought that accepting hard incompatibilism leads to a dispirited resignation to one's fate. Smilansky call this the 'argument from fatalism' (Smilansky 2000, 57). This argument holds that the lack of libertarian free will entails a fatalistic attitude. It means that it does not matter what people do or don't do, because the outcome will be the same in any case.

If we realize that one's actions are the unavoidable outcome of the circumstances, we cannot hold that person morally responsible for them. However, according to Smilansky, people should not be fully aware of the ultimate inevitability of their actions, because this would diminish the way in which they hold themselves responsible. This is what Smilansky calls the *Present Danger of the Future Retrospective Excuse* (2001, 85). If an agent knows he will be excused for an action because he will be able to appeal to the inevitability of the action after having performed it, he will not take responsibility for it. Therefore the agent ought not to be aware of the fact that he will be able to escape from responsibility in the future. Moreover, according to Smilansky, the threat of failure is essential to the motivation to make an effort. If people know they will be excused in the future for having failed at something, they will not be motivated to make an effort at all. This argument seems to support the fear expressed by Blackmore's students; why would we make an effort if we know we will not be blamed for our actions after all? Why would we try to accomplish anything if we are no longer praiseworthy for our achievements? What, then, will provide meaning in life?

2.4 Interpersonal Relationships and Emotions

Pereboom describes that it might be thought that our interpersonal relationships would be seriously threatened if we were to take on the hard determinist position (Pereboom 2001, 199). It might be argued that our interpersonal relationships would be at risk because the emotions and attitudes that underlie them are threatened by the hard determinist stance. How can we feel guilt if we do not accept blame? How can we ask for forgiveness if we do not feel guilt? Our every-day interpersonal interactions seem to be at stake. Verplaetse describes how we would have to stop praising and blaming; applause and congratulations seem to become meaningless. Pride, thankfulness and awe no longer seem appropriate, for all these attitudes require responsibility (Verplaetse 2011, 21).

According to Smilansky, the hard determinist perspective poses the *Danger of Retrospective Dissociation.* This is the difficulty of truly feeling responsible after having performed an action (Smilansky 2001, 85). If one looks back at his life, he might come to think of his thoughts and decisions as mere accidental phenomena. They no longer seem to be truly his own, and to genuinely feel moral remorse for them would seem mistaken. He cannot truly own up to what was not ultimately his. This seriously threatens the possibility of reconciliation when a conflict occurs, and of mending broken relationships.

2.5 Illusionism

Smilansky has developed his position, illusionism, as a solution to the threats I have described. This is the position that illusions often play a large and positive role when we are faced with the problem of free will and determinism. Smilansky does not claim that illusory beliefs about free will should be induced, but rather that those beliefs are already there and that their effect is positive. We have certain beliefs concerning free will and moral responsibility, and although they are incompatible with determinism, we ought not to abandon them. Smilansky writes that "humanity is fortunately deceived on the free will issue, and this seems to be a condition of civilized morality and personal value" (Smilansky 2001, 88). Smilansky admits that we cannot live with beliefs we fully realize to be illusory. Therefore we should suspend the insights of the hard determinist position.

In conclusion, accepting hard incompatibilism seems seriously threatening to our lives. Denying moral responsibility seems to break down the foundation of morality. Hard incompatibilism appears to deprive us of self-respect and our ability to connect with others. Life would even become meaningless if we accepted the non-existence of free will.

But are we willing to keep up the illusion of free will? Should we just ignore the insights of hard incompatibilism? Moreover, is it really necessary to do so? I believe not. In the next chapter I will set forth the reasons why I think we do not need to hold on to our illusory beliefs concerning free will and moral responsibility. I will argue that life without free will can be a positive life.

3. A Positive Life

In the previous chapter I have described different worries concerning the acceptance of determinism and hard incompatibilism. In the current chapter, I will argue that accepting hard incompatibilism does not necessarily lead to the feared deterioration of life. My description of the positive life we can have, without free will and moral responsibility, begins with the argument that morality will not collapse if we let go of these illusions. Thereafter, I will describe how our view of ourselves is affected by hard incompatibilism; the new self-conception does not take away our sense of self-worth or self-respect. Then the section follows wherein I argue that the absence of free will does not deprive our lives of meaning and purpose. After that, I will explain why I think that meaningful interpersonal relationships are not threatened when we deny the existence of free will and moral responsibility. Finally, I present some positive consequences of accepting hard incompatibilism.

3.1 Morality

Does the acceptance of hard determinism and hard incompatibilism entail the demolition of morality? People that are confronted with determinism often express the fear that if they stop exerting their free will, because they are said not to have one, they will start making the wrong decisions. Blackmore describes the fear that if we realize that we do not have a free will, we will develop into wicked creatures; we might "go around harming others, stealing, raping, pillaging or committing whatever other evils one can think of." People are afraid that if they no longer consciously control themselves, their evil impulses will take over. This worry is based on the thought that, deep down, we might all be wicked (Blackmore 2013, 171). I will now explain why I believe this fear is unfounded.

Unfortunately not all, but surely most of us, want to be good and there are good reasons for it. Evolution has provided us with such a reason. I think that the theory of evolution says something important about the way humans are constituted, namely that the desire to be good is bred into us. The human species has developed reciprocal altruism, this means that the way an individual is treated is determined by how he treats others. If he is helpful, others will help him in return. The altruistic person will gain friends and allies, will broaden his social circle and will gain status. This increases his chances of producing offspring and passing on his genes. Blackmore describes how cognitive scientist Guy Claxton reassures us that we do not have to be afraid that our "base urges will spill out" and that we will become worse if we accept a deterministic worldview (Blackmore 2013, 173). This quote enforces my argument that giving up the control we thought we could exercise by means of our free will is probably not that dangerous after all, for we are naturally inclined not to do the things that will harm others and will threaten our relationship with them.

It has been argued that if determinism is true, we would have no reason to behave morally. However, as I will now argue, a life without free will and moral responsibility is not a life without morality. Determinism does not take away norms and ideals, and therefore it does not eliminate morality. Those who do not believe in moral responsibility in the basic deserts sense do have desires, they want certain things, while not wanting others. They approve and disapprove. Hard incompatibilists may not be satisfied with the way things are, or with what happens to them or others. They want to realize certain goals and change situations. Thus, there are

plenty reasons to be moral. We have norms and standards and want to live according to them in order to have the lives we desire.

3.1.1 Responsibility and Accountability

That our thoughts and decisions are determined, does not mean that we are not responsive to reasons. I will now explain why hard incompatibilism does not threaten the legitimacy of holding people accountable for their reasons. I use accountability not in the sense of basic desert responsibility, but in the sense of amenability or answerability: holding someone accountable for his actions is asking him to explain his actions by declaring his reasons for acting. There might be good reasons for acting a certain way. If an agent fails to act in accordance with those reasons, he is not blameworthy for it in the basic desert sense. However, he can still be asked to give an account of his actions. As a result, he might realize that the reasons out of which he acted were rationally not the best ones. Thus, in this manner, the agent can be held rationally accountable for his actions.

When we disapprove of someone's behavior, we might ask him to consider his reasons for behaving the way he did. The agent can be asked what those reasons say about his moral character. This might make him realize that the reasons that guided his behavior do not correspond with his moral standpoints and his moral character. He can come to realize that his actions do not agree with what he morally approves of. Thereon he can make a promise to better his behavior. In this way, holding people accountable for their behavior can generate moral improvement.

It might be argued that if we no longer treat people as if they were blameworthy, then we would have no means to reform immoral behavior. But there are forms of moral responsibility, other than the basic desert sense, that can be retained and can facilitate moral improvement. Like Pereboom, I think that given determinism, a forward-looking kind of moral responsibility can be retained (Pereboom 2013, 30). When we think someone behaves immorally, we can ask him to evaluate what his actions indicate about his intentions and moral character. We may demand an apology or ask him to change his behavior in the future. This kind of moral responsibility is, unlike the basic desert sense of moral responsibility, not concerned with what went wrong in the past, but with what can be done better in the future.

Accepting hard incompatibilism does not take away the fact that we require moral behavior. We do expect people to behave responsibly. Although we are not morally responsible for our behavior in the basic desert sense, we must still behave responsibly; our behavior must still be guided by reasons. I think behaving responsibly consists of considering which reasons you have for doing the things you do. It is doing what you think you ought to do; acting in accordance with what seem to be the best reasons for you under the circumstances you find yourself in. Behaving morally and responsibly requires us to consider why we do things and how our actions might affect other people. Hereby we are able to take responsibility for our actions in the forward-looking sense, without actually being morally responsible in the basic desert sense.

We are not faced with what Smilansky calls the *Present Danger of the Future Retrospective Excuse* (Smilansky 2001) (for explanation see 2.3, p.15) . The fact that an agent will not be held morally responsible for his actions in the basic desert sense, does not take away the fact that he can be held morally responsible in the sense I just described; the forward-looking kind of moral responsibility remains. Neither hard determinism, nor

hard incompatibilism (for the explanation of these terms see paragraph 1.3, p.11) provides us with an excuse for bad behavior; in the future we *can* be held accountable and responsible in the forward-looking sense for our present actions.

3.1.2 Right and Wrong

Hard incompatibilism does not take away the possibility of asking someone to give an account of his actions, and neither does it take away the ability to make moral judgements of rightness and wrongness, as I will now argue with the support of Smilansky's argument concerning morality. However, it might seem that if judgements of moral responsibility in the basic desert sense are undermined, then judgements of rightness and wrongness are undermined too.

It seems that judgements of moral obligation and judgements of rightness and wrongness are intimately connected. It can be argued that if judgement of moral obligation disappears (because we do not have the ability to do otherwise), it wouldn't make sense to call certain actions right and others wrong. I will come back to judgements of moral obligation later on, I will now focus on judgements of rightness and wrongness. Pereboom describes that Spinoza, for example, connected judgements of moral responsibility with judgements of right and wrong and argued that notions such as praise, blame, right and wrong came into being because people falsely believe that they are free. [3] Thus, if people no longer believe in free will and moral responsibility, they would no longer be able to make judgement of rightness and wrongness (Pereboom 2001, 142).

But is determinism really incompatible with judgements of rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness? Smilansky argues that it is not clear why denying moral responsibility should entail rejecting these other moral notions.[4] He divides morality into two components: The first component concerns what "morally ought to be done (or not done)". The second element concerns the agent's blameworthiness or praiseworthiness. Smilansky claims that hard determinism undermines the second component, but not the first (Smilansky 1994, 357). Holding people morally responsible for their actions becomes groundless if we accept hard determinism, but we can still determine what ought to be done, or which is the right thing to do. This confirms my standpoint that the belief that people are not praiseworthy or blameworthy for their actions does not prevent us from recognizing the good or bad consequences of their behavior.

3.1.3 Moral Obligation

Pereboom describes that this defense of judgements of rightness and wrongness does not seem to take away an important threat to judgements of moral obligation. Judgements of moral obligation might be imperiled by

[3] Spinoza, Baruch. 1985. "Ethics." In *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, edited by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Appendix to Part 1

[4] Smilansky does not endorse hard determinism, nor the hard incompatibilist position. He maintains that hard determinism lacks any concern for the moral agent itself, because it does not allow a sense of personal achievement, and hence it doesn't permit a sense of moral self-worth. Smilansky describes the possible advantages, but insists on the disadvantages of hard determinism and therefore defends illusionism. At this point I am only concerned with his argument about moral judgements of right and wrong.

determinism, because the “ought implies can” principle seems to be attractive; if one ought to do something, then it must be the case that one can do so. But because all action is causally determined, one can never do otherwise. Thus is seems false that one ever ought to do otherwise (Pereboom 2001, 142).

As I said, it might be thought that if we cannot maintain judgements of moral obligation, we would no longer be able to call certain actions right and others wrong. If it cannot be true that one ought to do otherwise, then what is the point of making these judgements of moral obligation? Hard determinism seems to threaten this part of morality, because if “A ought to do x” is true, it must be true not only when A does x, but also when A fails to do x. But even though judgements of moral obligation are never true, it seems that moral judgements of rightness and wrongness can still be retained. We can still say that “it is morally good for A to do x” and “it is morally bad for A to do Y.” Pereboom acknowledges that these moral judgements of goodness and badness lack the deontic implications that are inherent to the judgments of moral obligation (Pereboom 2001, 143). However, like Pereboom, I think they can be retained even if moral “ought” judgements are undermined: even if one is not blameworthy for his actions, we can still say that it was morally good or bad to act as he did.

Thus, as I have now argued, even though the hard incompatibilist is aware of the fact that he cannot make judgements of moral obligation, he can still make judgements about rightness or wrongness. He can make these judgements based on his norms, values and standards. Hard determinism does not take away his ability to approve and disapprove.

3.2 View of Ourselves

Accepting hard determinism entails an important change in the way we think of ourselves. Although we might be rationally convinced of the inexistence of free will, Blackmore states that “the powerful feelings that “I” can freely cause “my” actions persists” (Blackmore 2013, 162). This sentence shows that when we talk about ourselves, the words we use refer to two different things; “I” refers to a an inner self that has a free will, while “my” refers to the whole human being, brain and body, caused to act by the inner self. The feeling of having a free will comes down to the belief that the inner self can freely cause the body to act.

3.2.1 The Self Is an Illusion

Let me explain why I think this idea of the self is an illusion. Due to scientific progress, our understanding of the mechanisms that form the basis of human behavior grows. What we now know about the brain seems to be incompatible with the existence of a separate self that is immaterial and yet controls the brain and body. There is no center in the brain where this self could live and there are no means by which it could interfere with the neurological processes of the brain. Therefore, it becomes clear that we do not have what Thomas Clark calls “soul control” (Clark 2013, 240). This is the control that would be exerted by a non-physical self that is not bound by the deterministic laws of nature. This mental controller, or soul, would be capable of exercising a counter-causal free will, separately from the brain. While many naturally-inclined philosophers have done away with the idea of soul control, many others are still convinced that they have an immaterial inner self that is capable of making free decisions. Philosophers might be comfortable with this putative loss, but many folk may not.

The experience of being a soul, or a mental self, is powerful for many of us. Blackmore describes how most people confidently claim that they have, or are, a self that thinks and makes decisions. In everyday life, we constantly talk unproblematically about the self, we think of it as a single thing and even accord all kinds of attributes and capabilities to it; 'I' woke up early, 'I' like to drink tea, 'I' can hear music playing (Blackmore 2003, 94). This immaterial self might be connected with the brain – many think it dwells somewhere behind our eyes – but it is supposed to be distinct from it in its discourse. I believe this view of the self is an illusion. However, that something is an illusion, does not means that it is nonexistent. An illusion is not something that does not exist, but rather something that is not what it appears to be. As I will explain, I think that the self is not a non-physical, uncaused entity that controls our thoughts and actions, distinct from our brains and bodies.

Although many philosophers and scientist do not believe in the existence of a soul, many others are convinced they have one. I think that religion has played an important role in the debate about the self. Many religions refer to a soul or a spirit. In both the Christian and Islam religion, the soul is crucial in a person's life and his moral responsibility, but also for his ability to survive the death of the physical body. Buddhism is the only major religion that denies the existence of a soul or enduring self. Today, many people are still under the influence of these religious beliefs. This is probably an important reasons why, especially in the west, many people believe they have a soul that controls their thoughts, decisions and behavior, and grants them moral responsibility, and moreover, a life after this one.

I think that there are no plausible reasons to believe in a non-physical self that is not bound by deterministic laws. I deny the existence of a separate existing non-physical entity. Of course I am not a scientist and my knowledge of neuroscience is quite limited. However, I believe that human brains do not need an inner self to direct them. Our thoughts, decisions and actions are directed by the brain itself, not by a soul or spirit. This means that we are not split into controller and controlled; we are not a self that is in control of the brain and body.[5]

3.2.2 Decisions Are Made

By accepting the naturalistic view of the self, which denies the existence of an immaterial self or soul, the feeling of having to be in control all the time begins to fade. This is a feeling, I think, which people naturally experience when they are convinced that they have an inner self that has a free will. When we let go of these illusions, we no longer need to think that we actively have to control our decisions and actions. To accept that our decisions and actions are determined by factors beyond our control might seem scary; it might be frightening to realize that we cannot exert control. But it might also be a relief, because we no longer have to exert the control we thought we had. Blackmore describes how she noticed that decisions simply made themselves (Blackmore 2013, 174). I believe this is an important step in the process of letting go of the illusion

[5] This standpoint concerning the soul is not only held by hard incompatibilists; many compatibilists also deny the existence of an undetermined non-physical self. Although my position in the free will debate might agree on some points with compatibilism, I argue that compatibilism is not the solution to the problem of free will and determinism.

of free will and of the illusion of the self that is in control. There is no self that must interfere when ideas are competing, there is no soul that eventually has to make the decision.

The idea that decisions make themselves applies to quick and trivial choices, but also to difficult choices that take a long time to resolve. An example of a trivial choice is choosing between two different routes during a run in the park. I no longer have to tell myself that "I" have to make a decision. I just go running and see what happens, sometimes I take the first route, and sometimes the second. The decision is made without interference from an imagined self (cf. Blackmore 2013, 174). This is also how I try to approach more important decisions. When faced with an important choice, I let my thoughts go over the competing ideas, opposite reasons and various possible scenarios. I take some distance from the decision that has to be made, sleep on it, and eventually the decision is made without intervention of an inner self.

When we pay attention to competing ideas, we are said to deliberate. And when the action eventually happens, we are said to have made a decision. Some ideas are called reasons or motives for our decisions. However, letting go of the illusion of a self that has a free will means that we can no longer say that I made the decision. The decision was made, not by my inner self, but by everything in the deterministic universe which resulted in that decision (cf. Blackmore 2013, 174).

Concerns about letting go of the illusion of the self are related to the fears of letting go of free will and moral responsibility. Those who are not familiar with philosophy often think that they can overcome their dispositions by means of a self that can initiate actions. It is thought that the self can overcome the dispositions without being causally determined to do so. Honderich argues that our life-hopes depend on the notion of a self with an indeterministic causal power (Honderich 1988, 386). (See also paragraph 3.3.1 on life-hopes, p. 24.) The challenge of determinism to our life-hopes is that it undermines the claim that we are selves, distinct form our dispositions; there is no inner self that can indeterministically initiate actions in order to overcome our dispositions.

Sam Harris has argued that without soul control we are just the victims of cause and effect; we are "bio-chemical puppets."[6] However, accepting determinism does not entail a fatalistic view like that of Harris, because determinism is not the same as fatalism. Let me explain this with the help of Daniel Dennett, who describes fatalism as the belief that our deliberations and strivings are incapable of making any real difference to the outcomes of events that matter to us (Dennett 1984, 15). It is the view that at any moment in life, we necessarily find ourselves in those particular circumstances we are in, irrespective of our deliberations, strivings, resolutions and struggles (Dennett 1984, 104). It means that whatever situation we find ourselves in, it was determined by our fate.

I think Dennett's argument that determinism does not entail fatalism is sound.[7] A naturalistic understanding of agency, which denies the existence of an undetermined self, does not disempower us. That we do not have soul control does not mean that we have no power to influence our fate. Deliberations are not futile; our decisions and actions do make a difference in determining our futures, even though they may be

[6] Harris, Sam. 2012. *Free will.* New York: Free Press. 47

[7] Note that, although I agree with Dennett on the argument concerning fatalism, we hold different positions in the free will debate. Dennett is a compatibilist, whereas I am a hard incompatibilist.

fully determined themselves. For example, one might consider doing A or B. He might extensively deliberate on arguments in favor of, and against both options. Of course, whether he actually does A of B is causally determined. However, when the agent finally decides to do A rather than B, that decision does follow from his deliberations. It does not just fall from the sky. The deliberations are part of the (determined) causal network that led to the decision. Therefore, I believe that determinism does not rule out effective agency. If we accept determinism, and let go of the illusion of the inner self that is in control, we do not have to think of ourselves as puppets.

3.2.2 Self-worth

According to Smilansky, the hard determinist perspective can be "extremely damaging to our view of ourselves, to our sense of achievement, worth, and self-respect" (Smilansky 1997, 94). Smilansky argues that one's view of oneself cannot stay the same if one realizes that everything one does, every virtue one has ever exhibited, is only the outcome of one's luck. He writes that "we begin to see ourselves in a new light: what we choose … is the unfolding of what we are, the choices result form that which is not under our control (and ultimately is luck)" (Smilansky 1997, 92-93). According to Smilansky, the solution to this problem lies in the maintenance of the illusion of free will.

I do not believe that we must keep up the illusion of free will in order to secure the view we have of ourselves. We can have a sense of self-worth and self-respect without the idea that we have an inner self that freely guides our thoughts and actions. We do not have to face Smilansky's *Danger of Worthlessness (Smilansky 2001)*. Consider Pereboom's argument that the feeling that we have value and that our lives are worth living depends for a large part on factors that are not produced by our volition, let alone free will (Pereboom 2001, 196). We value ourselves and others for things such as natural beauty or native intelligence. People do not have to make efforts for these features, because they possess them naturally. Yet, they are not less valued for it. In addition, we place great value on things that are produced by endeavor, such as altruistic behavior. However, I do not see what value is added if these efforts are also freely willed. A person's achievements and the hard work it took to produce them are valuable whether or not they result from a free will.

Consider, for example, how our moral character is formed. It is largely the result of upbringing, and most of us are aware of that fact. I think that people will not experience dismay when they come to this conclusion. They might need to get used to the idea that they do not deserve praise for their moral character, but I think that the feeling of being thankful to their parents or those who have raised them will dominate. We may deserve diminished respect for having the moral character we do because it is not by our own doing, but I believe this will not be a great loss for most people. I think this also applies to other achievements that we no longer consider to be fully by our own doing. For example, people probably won't get upset when they realize that an achievement in their career depends on the opportunities that were presented to them, due to their upbringing, the help of others, or plain luck. Even if someone does experience dismay for coming to realize this, would he then want to maintain the illusion that he deserves respect for producing his moral character or achievements? I am convinced that many people will be able to accept this truth and let go of the illusion of a

self that has a free will, without losing their sense of self-worth or self-respect, because good moral character and achievements are respectable and valuable without merit or desert.

3.3 Meaning in Life

3.3.1 Life-hopes

It might be thought that hard incompatibilism imperils our sense of meaning in life. Given determinism, we are not praiseworthy for what we do, because our actions are caused by forces beyond our control. This means that we do not deserve credit for our achievements in the basic desert sense. According to Honderich, determinism poses a threat to our life-hopes. These are hopes for the things that would make one's life fulfilled, happy, satisfactory, or worthwhile. According to Honderich, not having life-hopes is barely living a human life (Honderich 1988, 382). Life-hopes are intimately connected with the notion of achievement. Determinism calls into question to which extend agents are capable of initiating their actions. And because the capacity to initiate actions is closely bound to the notion of achievements, determinism provides a potential challenge to our life-hopes.

Moreover, it can be argued that our life-hopes involve an aspiration for praiseworthiness in the basic desert sense. This aspect would obviously be undermined by determinism. Pereboom writes that if life-hopes are aspirations for achievement, and we cannot have achievements for which we can be praiseworthy, then we would be deprived of our life-hopes (Pereboom 2013, 32). But I think that determinism leaves a large part of these hopes intact, because achievement and life-hopes are not as closely tied to praiseworthiness in the basic desert sense as this argument assumes. If one hopes to achieve some goal, and he accomplishes what he hoped for, then intuitively this outcome is still an achievement of his, even though he is not praiseworthy for it. For example, someone might hope that his efforts, all the hours he spent learning, reading and writing, will result in attaining his master's degree. If he does, then there is a clear sense in which he has achieved what he hoped for. This fact remains even though he is not morally responsible in the basic desert sense for his actions and he is not praiseworthy for his efforts. It is his achievement in an appreciable sense nonetheless.

3.3.2 Epistemically Possible Options

The realization that our actions are determined by dispositions and environmental conditions might instill in us an attitude of resignation. When confronted with hard determinism, people often respond that their lives would have no purpose. It might be thought that we would have to wait and see what life has in store for us; that we would just have to accept our fate. But I think that life does not have to be like that at all. Even if what we think we know about our dispositions and environment makes it likely that our futures will turn out a certain way, it is often reasonable to hope that things will turn out differently. It is very important to recognize that we do not have thorough knowledge of what our environments and dispositions are at this moment, nor how they will be in the future. One might be convinced that he has a disposition that will make it very difficult for him to realize one of his life-hopes. But in fact he does not know whether that disposition will actually have the anticipated result. It might very well be possible that one of his other dispositions will help him to overcome the obstacle he is faced with and will allow him to fulfill his dream.

Let me explain this a bit further. Imagine a student who hopes to get good grades, but who is convinced he will not succeed because of his fear of failure. However, because he does not know whether his anxiety will actually result in bad grades, it remains open for him that he will overcome this obstacle by means of another disposition. He might also possess a resolute self-discipline that will help him to conquer his anxiety. Therefore, it is not at all unreasonable to hope that he will overcome his anxiety and succeed in his studies. Thus, determinism does not rule out the possibility to overcome challenges that result from our dispositions and environmental conditions. If the student overcomes his anxiety, this result will be brought about by factors beyond his control. But also when he does not overcome his impediment, it will be the result of factors beyond his control. The key point is that the agent does not know in advance which of these two epistemic possibilities will come true. Hence, he must try to do his very best in order to accomplish his life-hopes.

Hard determinism forces us to accept that, at the moment of choice, the agent can only make one decision. Given his dispositions and environmental conditions, only one choice or action is causally possible at that moment. But although the agent believes that only one option is causally possible, he does not now in advance which option he will choose. Before the choice is made, multiple options are epistemically possible for the agent. This means that more than one choice would be appropriate given his current thoughts, beliefs and desires. Thus, we don't just sit and wait what will happen; we deliberate and consider our options. The different options might not be causally possible, but they are epistemically possible. As I argued earlier on: deliberation is not futile.

3.3.3 Making Efforts

Pereboom articulates how Thomas Nagel describes another reason why determinism poses a threat to meaning in life: If we understand human action simply as part of a course of events in a deterministic universe, it might seem as though we as agents never really contribute anything (Pereboom 2001, 137). When confronted with determinism, people might intuitively respond that we would have no reason to attempt to accomplish anything.[8] They might think that our deliberations and choices would make no difference. If the future is determined by factors beyond our control, then our efforts would not affect it.

However, as I argued earlier, it is a mistake to equate determinism with fatalism. Human action might be determined by factors beyond our control, but that does not mean that what we do has no effect. People are causes too. Our character, abilities and preferences might be fully determined, but they are still causally effective. They influence our future just as much as the genes we inherit and the environments we live in. Pereboom argues that the determination of our deliberations, choices, actions and their consequences does not undermine their causal efficacy (Pereboom 2001, 138). I think Pereboom is right on this point. Given determinism, what happens is not the result of free choices. But what happens can still be caused by our deliberations and the decisions we make. Our deliberations, decisions and actions do not escape determinism, but they can affect the future. Thus, it remains reasonable to make an effort to shape our futures, because determinism does not challenge the causal efficacy of our deliberations and decisions.

[8] Nagel, Thomas. 1986. *The View From Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 113ff.

3.3.4 Existentialism

According to existentialist philosophy, the possibility of meaning in life is closely connected to the idea of free will. Pereboom describes how Sartre has argued that for human beings, existence is prior to essence: Each person can create an essence for himself through his own free choices. The notion of human essence is in turn closely related with the idea of meaning in life (Pereboom 2001, 188). We create meaning for ourselves through the plans we make and through the things we choose to do. According to Sartre, finding meaning in life requires that the choices we make are free in the libertarian sense.[9]

To this existentialist argument the hard incompatibilist can object that causally determined choices can just as well provide meaning in life. For example, one might be determined by his dispositions and environmental conditions to have children, but being a father and raising his children might provide him with a very strong meaning in life. I think that whether we have fee will is irrelevant to meaning in life. We can have hopes for the future and we must make efforts in order to fulfill our dreams. As I argued earlier: we must keep in mind that we do not know how our futures will turn out. Our deliberations and efforts can change our futures, therefore we are perfectly able to live positive lives with purpose and value, but without free will.

3.4 Interpersonal Relationships and Emotions

It might be argued that hard incompatibilism poses a threat to meaningful and fulfilling interpersonal relationships. If the assumption that we are morally responsible in the basic desert sense is required for meaningful and fulfilling human relationships, then these relationships indeed seem to be in danger. I will explain, however, that we can have meaningful interpersonal relationships without moral responsibility by discussing the opposite positions of P.F. Strawson and Pereboom.

P.F. Strawson argues that a theoretical conviction, in this case that of determinism, will not lead us to adopt what he calls a thoroughgoing objectivity of attitude toward one another. He distinguishes two different types of attitudes. In normal involved relationships the attitudes we adopt towards others are based on their attitudes, actions and intentions towards ourselves and others. These participant normal reactive attitudes are, among others, moral resentment, indignation, guilt, forgiveness and gratitude. P.F. Strawson contrasts these attitudes of involvement or participation in human relationships with the objective attitude. To adopt an objective attitude towards someone is to no longer consider him as a normal participant of involved interpersonal relationship, but to see him as an object that has to be dealt with. This attitude rules out the participant reactive attitudes (Strawson 1974, 14).

Accepting determinism does not make us take an objective stance towards one another. P.F. Strawson argues that the human commitment to participation in interpersonal relationships is too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted to be endangered by a theoretical conviction. I agree with P.F. Strawson that people are naturally inclined to engage in involved interpersonal relationships. I accept that good interpersonal

[9] Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1957. "The Humanism of Existentialism." In *Existentialism and the Human Emotions*, edited by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Philosophical Library.

relationships would be imperiled if we were to take on the objective attitude, but I think that accepting determinism does not force us to take on this objective stance.

The question at stake is thus: Is moral responsibility required for meaningful interpersonal relationships? If the assumption of moral blameworthiness and praiseworthiness is required for the reactive attitudes, then meaningful interpersonal relationships might be threatened. I will explain, however, that moral responsibility in the basic desert sense is not required for the attitudes that form the basis of our interpersonal relationships.

Pereboom argues that determinism does not undermine the possibility of meaningful interpersonal relationships (Pereboom 2001, 2013). I agree with Pereboom, that not all reactive attitudes are required for good interpersonal relationships, because the role they play can be taken on by other (aspects of) attitudes. Moreover, those attitudes that are required, and that we want to hold on to, are either not undermined by hard incompatibilism or have analogs that are not impaired by it. The reactive attitudes or analogs we can retain, either directed to oneself or to others, are sufficient to maintain good interpersonal relationships. In the next two paragraphs I explain this in more detail.

3.4.1 Other-directed Attitudes

Indignation and moral resentment are important attitudes in interpersonal relationships. These attitudes seem to be closely connected with moral responsibility; indignation is the anger that one directs to another for having been wronged by him, and moral resentment is the anger directed towards another because he has wronged yet another person. It seems that the notion of blameworthiness is essential to these attitudes, and that they are therefore undermined by hard incompatibilism. On top of that, it might be thought that these reactive attitudes are required for personal relationships because they have a communicative role; they communicate the disapproval of some act. As I said earlier, the hard incompatibilist can approve and disapprove, but if he can no longer communicate his disapproval through these attitudes, interpersonal relationships might be imperiled.

However, I think that indignation and moral resentment are not required for good interpersonal relationships. There are other emotional attitudes that are not threatened by hard incompatibilism, and that can fulfill the communicative role. Feeling hurt or being disappointed by what the other person has done and expressing these emotions is perfectly valid without assuming that the agent is morally responsible, in the basic desert sense, for his actions. Attitudes such as moral sadness or sorrow do not require blameworthiness. These emotions are normally present when a person is wronged, and can take over the role of indignation and moral resentment.

At this point several questions may emerge: Can we really live without blaming? Does hard incompatibilism demand too much of us emotionally, despite all rational arguments? According to Verplaetse, we live in a culture of blame (Verplaetse 2011, 189). We only have to turn on the television, read the newspaper or have a simple conversation and we are confronted with words like guilt and responsibility. I think this remark by Verplaetse is correct. I believe that imputing and blaming is deeply ingrained in our everyday lives. Therefore it is not an easy task to let go of blames and reproaches.

However, it is in times of conflict that the hard incompatibilist might try to make a difference. Precisely during a quarrel, the hard incompatibilist must pay attention to his other-directed attitudes. He does not blame or attack his opponent, but tries to understand the causes that have led to the clash. He might experience anger, but he will try to redirect his feelings of frustration, resentment and wrath in order to solve the problem. Thus, he does not hold on to emotions that are tied up with responsibility and blameworthiness. However, I must make a note at this point; the influence one has on his emotions is probably only limited. There can be a large gap between what one's rational beliefs and the way he actually behaves in the heat of the moment. Nevertheless, the hard incompatibilist is convinced that blames should be avoided, and therefor he tries to control his attitudes towards his opponent.

How does a hard incompatibilism address conflict? He clearly tries not to overload his opponent with blames, but neither does he have to hide the fact that he feels angry or disappointed. A life without moral responsibility is not a life without conflict. As I said before, the hard incompatibilist has norms and values, and those can be violated. He may let his opponent know that a norm was transgressed and that he does not approve of this behavior. The hard incompatibilist may be annoyed by it and experience anger. But his emotions do not allow him to make accusations, because the offender is never blameworthy for his actions. Therefore, in order to prevent the conflict form escalating, the hard incompatibilism must try to control the emotions he experiences. He must not attack his opponent, but attempt to understand the reasons and causes of the conflict.

If a person has violated a norm and has caused conflict, most of the time he will want to make amends in order to maintain the relationship. Forgiveness seems indispensable in the process of reconciliation. However, the attitude of forgiveness might be imperiled by hard incompatibilism. This attitude seems to presuppose that the person that is being forgiven deserves blame in the desert sense, but that the initial attitude of resentment is renounced. Hard incompatibilism would threaten forgiveness, because resentment cannot be justified. Forgiveness, understood as the willingness to overlook deserved blame or punishment, cannot be retained. However, I am convinced that hard incompatibilism does not threaten all features of forgiveness. When someone has wronged us, we can choose to no longer regard his action as a reason to be angry with him or punish him. We can choose to disregard the wrongful behavior as a reason to dissolve our relationship. We can accept his promise to make a commitment to overcome his disposition that made him behave the way he did. These aspects of forgiveness are not threatened by hard incompatibilism and can be retained without the notion of moral responsibility.

Gratitude is another attitude that would be undermined by hard determinism, if it required the presupposition that the person to whom one is grateful is morally responsible, in the basic desert sense, for his act. It might be thought that we would not be able to be grateful if we did not regard others as praiseworthy for their actions. But as in the case of forgiveness, there are certain features of this attitude that are not threatened by hard incompatibilism. An important feature of gratitude is the joy we experience when someone has done something we appreciate. Hard incompatibilism does not at all conflict with one's being joyful and expressing that emotion. Thus, gratitude does not have to involve the believe that one is praiseworthy.

It has been argued that love between mature persons would be undermined if hard incompatibilism were true. But is it actually true that loving someone requires that person to be free in the sense that is required for moral responsibility? Pereboom answers this question by remarking that parents rarely, if ever, love their children because they possess a free will, or because they are morally responsible for their actions, or because they freely choose to do the good (Pereboom 2001, 202). I think that this is a sound argument and that it also applies to love between adults. When they love each other, it is not for these kinds of reasons. Even if we suppose that moral character and action play a very important role in producing and maintaining love, our love would not be undermined if we came to believe that the person we love is not responsible for his moral character and actions. Someone's moral character and good actions are loveable, whether or not that person deserve praise for it.

According to Pereboom Robert Kane argues that love would be endangered if we would be aware of the fact that our lover is determined to love us by factors beyond his control (Pereboom 2001, 203). If we indeed desire freely willed love, we would desire a kind of love that is ruled out by hard incompatibilism. [10] However, I will now explain why I think love does not have to be freely willed.

We typically prefer a situation in which someone does not have to make a decision to love us, but simply does so. That someone has to make an effort to love us, might seem as an indication that the love is not genuine. However, a situation might occur in which you must make the decision to love another. For example, when you do not get along with a relative of your spouse, you might decide to love that person anyway. So, we may desire people to make the decision to love, but that decision does not need to be free in the sense required for moral responsibility. I think it is unclear what value is added if the decision is freely willed. Even if the other person does not freely choose to love us, plenty other aspects of love remain unaffected and they are surely sufficient for good interpersonal relationships.

3.4.2 Self-directed Attitudes

So far I have discussed other-directed attitudes and emotions. However, it has also been argued that self-directed attitudes, such as guilt and repentance, are threatened by hard incompatibilism. Guilt is undermined in so far as it requires a sense of blameworthiness; if one does not feel blameworthy for the wrong he has done, he cannot feel guilt for it. As a result, feeling repentance is no longer possible, because feeling guilty is required to motivate an attitude of repentance. These self-directed attitudes are just as important as other-directed attitudes for good interpersonal relationships. In addition, they are indispensable for the moral development and integrity of an agent. Without guilt and repentance, it might seem very difficult to reestablish relationships after one has wronged another person. Moreover, without these attitudes, the wrongdoer would be incapable of recovering his own moral integrity.

I think that, just as with the other-directed attitudes, there are aspects of the self-directed attitudes that are not threatened by hard incompatibilism. Let me explain this a bit further. A person can accept that he has done something wrong, feel very sad about it and express regret for what he has done. The agent might

[10] Kane, Robert. *The Significance of Free Will*. New York: University Press, 1996. 88

make the commitment to try to find out which of his dispositions has led to his behavior and seek help to prevent it from happening again. This sadness, regret and striving for improvement are not threatened by hard incompatibilism, because they do not involve moral responsibility. Even if feeling sad and regretful are not sufficient to evoke a feeling of guilt, these emotions can be strong enough to generate a repentant attitude. Hard incompatibilism therefore endangers neither relationships, nor personal integrity when it comes to self-directed attitudes.

How does a hard incompatibilist make up for a mistake? He does not accept blame and cannot express feelings of guilt. But to those who are not acquainted with the hard incompatibilist position, feelings of guilt communicate the disapproval of what has happened and one's willingness to prevent it from happening again in the future. For the victim it is important to feel that his hurt is being acknowledged. Reconciliation is impossible without this kind of recognition. Expressing feelings of guilt demonstrates the wrongdoer's sincerity. So how does the hard incompatibilist convey this feeling of acknowledgement when he cannot give a sincere confession of guilt?

I believe that the hard determinist is not confronted with Smilansky's *Danger of Retrospective Dissociation* (Smilansky 2001); he can truly feel remorse for his decisions. (See paragraph 2.4, p. 15 for the explanation of this concern.) The hard incompatibilist can own up to his actions; he can admit that what he did was wrong, that he violated norms and that his actions caused suffering. He can verbalize his regret for the effects of his actions. He can make a sincere promise to live up to the norms in the future. Determinism allows for plenty of emotional space to share feelings, and I believe this is enough for the feeling of recognition and reconciliation with the victim.

The hard incompatibilist does not focus on mistakes made in the past, but on the changes that can be made in the future. After having transgressed a norm, he asks himself how he can influence his dispositions or environmental factors that have caused his bad behavior. Despite of the emotions he might feel, he tries to remain calm and focuses on the causes of the conflict in order to influence the future.

Does this mean that the hard incompatibilist no longer experiences emotions that are related to the idea of responsibility? Should he suppress those emotions? That seems too much to ask, because we do not have enough control over emotions to forbid them. No matter how convinced one might be by the hard incompatibilist view, he grew up in a culture wherein the idea of moral responsibility is deeply ingrained. It is impossible to get rid of the emotions related to responsibility at once. At times people in the environment of the hard incompatibilist might expect him to express these kinds of emotions. When he is not careful and bumps into someone, he'd better apologize for it. And when someone excels at some project, it would be impolite not to congratulate him. We simply have to keep in mind that we life with others who might not be hard incompatibilists. (See also paragraph 4.1, p. 34.) We have to consider other people's feelings and emotions when we live according to the hard incompatibilist stance. However, this does not undo the fact that we can have fulfilling interpersonal relationships without moral responsibility. Although some emotions and attitudes might be challenged by hard incompatibilism, enough emotional space remains to share our feelings.

As I explained earlier, a life without moral responsibility is not a life without norm and ideals, neither a life without emotions and feelings, nor a life without conflict. There are things we want, and things we don't

want. Again, I stress that we approve and disapprove. There are things we want to accomplish and things we want to change. Our likes and dislikes are accompanied by emotions. The more you desire something, the fiercer your emotions concerning it will be. When a goal is met, we feel joyous. If we lose something that matters to us, we feel sad. All of this is perfectly possible without free will or moral responsibility. Therefore, we can maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships without blameworthiness and praiseworthiness.

3.5 Advantages of Hard Incompatibilism

Letting go of the idea that we have a free will and that we are morally responsible for our actions may actually be beneficial for our personal lives. The idea that there is an inner self that can, and has to, take control over each decision and action disappears. Letting go of the illusion of free will comes down to the realization that, ultimately, our decisions and actions are caused by factors beyond our control. This does not have to be scary, it can be liberating.

3.5.1 A Pure Ethical Life

With the support of an argument by Smilansky, I will now explain why a hard incompatibilist can have a life that is ethically more pure than that of the ones that believe in free will and moral responsibility in the basic desert sense. [11] According to Smilansky, holding on to beliefs of free will and moral responsibility entails a less pure ethical life, because if a person beliefs that he is morally responsible, a sort of self-concern arises (Smilansky 1994, 356-359). That person will think that his own moral worth is at stake when he makes a decision that is morally relevant. The agent is convinced that others will consider him praiseworthy or blameworthy for his actions. Also, he considers himself praiseworthy or blameworthy for his behavior. I believe that the hard determinist is less likely to be concerned with himself like this. His behavior is not aimed at praise, but simply at what he ought to do. The hard determinist does what he thinks is the right thing to do, even though he realizes he is not praiseworthy for it.

3.5.2 Acceptance

When we deliberate, we might feel as though several options are open to us. We consider the things that are epistemically possible; ideas seem to compete in our minds. And then, at a certain point in time, a decision is made. As I said before, the decision was not made by an inner self, it was determined by the world we live in. We no longer have to think that an inner self has to settle the inner debate and ultimately choose one course of action over another. If we realize that decisions simply make themselves, it might give a sense of peace to know that we do not have to worry about consciously controlling every thought and decision.

In the past there have been philosophers who have argued that accepting determinism can be beneficial to our lives. It has been argued that accepting determinism might enable a person to remain calm and equanimous during hardship; it would enable him to accept whatever happens. This view has been

[11] As I explained earlier, Smilansky does not accept hard determinism, but merely describes its possible advantages.

developed by the ancient philosophers of the Stoic tradition, but also by Descartes and Spinoza. Pereboom describes how the Stoic position holds that, if determinism is true, everything that happens can be attributed to something encompassing (Pereboom 2001, 207). This entity might be God, or something impersonal, like nature or the universe. Taking this broader perspective can result in acceptance. If we would have libertarian free will, we would not be able to attribute our decisions and actions to this encompassing entity, and therefore we would not come to accept whatever happens.

This position seems promising, but it faces serious problems. The demands of Stoicism might be considered too high for us. Moreover, the tradition is based on controversial theological and psychological assumptions. Hard incompatibilism, however, puts forward a less extensive equanimity than the Stoic tradition does. The hard incompatibilist view concerning equanimity is based on the idea that accepting hard determinism can diminish moral anger. Let me now elaborate on the topic of moral anger.

3.5.3 Moral Anger

Moral anger is the type of anger that is directed towards someone who is blamed for having done something wrong. Expressions of moral anger can have harmful effects, because they are often intended to cause physical or emotional pain. Moral anger therefore tends to damage or even destroy relationships. Precisely because expressions of moral anger are often harmful, we have the feeling that they must be morally justified when we encounter them. They are generally justified by claiming that the person to whom the anger is directed, deserves to be harmed because he has done something wrong. This is called the principle of retributivism, I will come back to this principle in the last chapter (paragraph 4.2, p. 35). However, according to hard incompatibilism, expressions of moral anger are never morally justified, because no one is ultimately blameworthy for his actions.

Anger is a natural emotion and therefore the theoretical conviction of hard incompatibilism might be insufficient to lessen its occurrence. Rational beliefs may not be strong enough to curb emotions. However, moral anger is for a large part based on the assumption that the person to whom it is directed deserves blame for his bad action. The harmful expressions of this type of anger are fueled by the belief that het person is blameworthy for having done wrong. Hard incompatibilism discourages such beliefs and therefore I think that the associated anger can be diminished.

In my view, emotions that are not based on free will and blameworthiness are preferable to those that are. If we give up the idea that one is blameworthy and therefore deserves to endure harmful measures, it might be easier to reconcile after something bad has happened. I agree with Verplaetse that blames and reproaches are by no means always good, and perhaps that will make it easier to let go of them (Verplaetse 2011). The intention behind blaming someone might be positive; reproaches might be meant to correct bad behavior, but often times they do not meet that goal. Even when there was no anger at first, expressions of blame have the tendency to worsen relationships, because they fuel conflict. Reproaches often bring about more reproaches and thereby the conflict can escalate. Only when one withdraws his reproach, it becomes possible to return to a normal conversation and to try to reconcile.

As I explained at the beginning of this thesis, rejecting moral responsibility in the basic desert sense implies that we have to let go of claims of blameworthiness. However, this does not mean we have to avoid conflict altogether. It is important to realize that the one that approaches a conflict with an arsenal of reproaches is unlikely to solve the problem. He will probably only worsen it. Hard incompatibilism tells us that, when we try to work out a conflict, we must focus on the future. We must aim at behavioral changes, without making reproaches towards one another. It is useless to blame someone for what went wrong in the past; we can only try to understand the past. In this way, hard incompatibilism can lessen moral anger and benefit interpersonal relationships.

The conclusion of this chapter is that, on a personal level, life without free will and moral responsibility can be a perfectly positive life. I have showed what it means to accept hard determinism and hard incompatibilism; that it does not entail the worries expressed by several scientists and philosophers. A personal life without free will is a positive life because morality remains, we can have a sense of self-worth, life still has meaning, and we can maintain fulfilling interpersonal relationships. Letting go of the illusion of free will actually has benefits for our lives.

So far, I have focused specifically on life on a personal level, but I will not leave society undiscussed. After all, each person takes part in society.

4. Society

The main focus of this thesis has been the consequences of accepting hard incompatibilism on a personal level. Of course denying the existence of free will also has consequences for society. Therefore I will now briefly explain why I think society is not ready to let go of these illusions. Philosophers may think up wonderful theories about free will and moral responsibility in their comfortable chairs in their attics, but at some point they have to face others in real life. I think that judgements concerning free will and moral responsibility must be handled with care; in society, philosophical freedom has its boundaries.

4.1 Living Together

We live in a society wherein the idea of moral responsibility is deeply ingrained. We cannot just go about and declare that nobody is morally responsible because free will is an illusion. As I have explained, it is a conclusion that has serious consequences. Smilansky even argues that we should retain the illusion and suspend the insights of the hard determinism (Smilansky 2001, 88). I do not think we should ignore the findings of hard determinism or hard incompatibilism, but we must be considerate in expressing our convictions in society: However convinced we might be of our position, we must keep in mind that we live with others who might not be hard incompatibilists. What we rationally think is the truth can clash with other people's intuitions and emotions. We thus have to consider their beliefs concerning moral responsibility and the feelings that are associated with these convictions. We cannot just tell victims of misery that no one is responsible for their suffering and that no one is to blame for their trauma. The hard incompatibilist stance might seem inhuman in their eyes, because they intuitively feel that someone has to pay when damage is done.

Facing the consequences of hard incompatibilism is a challenge, not just on a personal level, but also for society. As I said, the idea of responsibility is highly valued in our community. Every day we are confronted with it; in our interactions with others, and in the rules and laws that regulate those interactions. Thus, would it even be possible to constitute a society without this idea? In the foregoing chapters I described how it might be feared that the hard incompatibilist view will give people the wrong ideas and will lead to criminal behavior. It might be thought that society would collapse and chaos would spread; everything would be permitted and we would no longer be in a position to address each other's behavior. Making reproaches would become impossible. Our society would be out of control, because the end of responsibility is thought to entail the end of punishment and reward. This mean that we would lose these two important means by which we can encourage the good and discourage the bad. I believe these fears are based on a misunderstanding. As I have argued earlier, a life without free will and moral responsibility is not a life without norms and values; it is not a life without morality.

4.2 Governance and Punishment

If you have norms, you typically also have the means to meet them. Hard incompatibilism does not deprive us of the means to reach our ideals. I think that accepting hard incompatibilism will not make society unmanageable. However, the question remains which means might be employed in the governance of society.

Blame and praise have been eliminated, which makes punishment and reward problematic. It seems that we must find other resources to control our society.

Can we still punish people without the notions of free will and moral responsibility? Smilansky argues that it is the paradigm of injustice to punish someone for an act over which he had no control, to punish him for what is ultimately his luck (Smilansky 2002, 498). I think this is a sound argument, because if a person is not morally responsible for his actions, he is not blameworthy for them, and it seems he cannot not be punished for it. The hard incompatibilist certainly doesn't want to create grounds for injustice. However, reforming immoral behavior becomes problematic if we can no longer justify punishment.

Does the acceptance of hard incompatibilism in society really mean that we can no longer punish people for immoral behavior, or reward them for morally exemplary behavior? I believe it depends on what you understand by the notions of punishment and reward. If you think that blame or guilt is a necessary condition for punishment, then a person must have a free will and be morally responsible. Otherwise, he cannot be punished for his actions. According to this definition, punishment is causing suffering as a consequence of making the wrong decision, while it was possible to make the right decision. On the other hand, reward is adding pleasure as a consequence of making the right decision, while it was possible to make the wrong decision. Thus, it seems that if there is no free will, no punishment or reward is ever justified, because it is never deserved.

If hard incompatibilism is accepted, criminal punishment can no longer be justified by the principle of retributivism. According to retributivism, it is justified to punish a criminal because he deserves something bad to happen to him because he has done something wrong. The retribution theory does not appeal to a good; it does not seem to serve any goal, such as the safety of society, or the moral improvement of the criminal. Punishment is solely justified by the appeal to the agent's having knowingly done wrong. This position is undermined if we accept hard incompatibilism, because the wrongdoer does not deserve blame or punishment, for het is not morally responsible for his actions.

However, I think that this does not mean that we are incapable of influencing people's behavior. Oftentimes it is sufficient that one is punished or rewarded for his actions, simply because he has performed them. We can punish and reward people in order to meet a certain goal. We reward to encourage behavior that is desirable and we punish to discourage behavior that we disapprove of. According to this view, it is sufficient that a goal is met by punishing and rewarding people. There are several goals that can be pursued, such as deterrence, education or reeducation, avoidance of vigilantism, repairing the social harmony, protection of society, reducing criminality or rehabilitation. In principle, we can meet these goals without appealing to the notions of responsibility and desert. However, in contemporary society punishment and reward are still closely associated with guilt and merit. A society without free will would thus require a whole new perspective on punishment in order to reform immoral behavior.

I think that the criminal system might even be fairer if it were no longer based on the notion of free will, because the idea of retribution would be abandoned. We would no longer punish people because they have freely and knowingly done wrong, or because they are said to deserve to suffer. Criminals would be sent to prison for other reasons, for example to prevent them from doing any more harm, for rehabilitation, or as a

deterrent to them or others in the future. I think that, with the appropriate rewards and punishments, we can change people's behavior. We should no longer ask "does this person deserve to be punished?" but "would this punishment do any good to them, to their victims, or to society in general?" I think Blackmore was right when she proposed this change of view (Blackmore 2013, 165). If the answer to this new question is affirmative, punishment or imprisonment is justified. However, if the answer is negative, for example when the agent is very young or mentally incapacitated, it would be useless and unjust to punish them or put them in prison.

4.3 Philosophical Influence

These complex issues concerning society go beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, I believe that denying the existence of free will and moral responsibility does not necessarily lead to the collapse of our society and its criminal system. However, the influence of philosophical ideas is probably very limited when it comes to changing laws or policies. Philosophical arguments seem to be useless in court. Lawyers will probably not employ hard incompatibilism in order to plead their clients free. Criminal law is based on criminal responsibility and punishment or acquittal must be based on grounds for exclusion of fault. Arguments that are presented in court are concerned with psychological abilities that are necessary for criminal responsibility, but they (almost) never touch upon the debate of free will. [12] Philosophical arguments are not often brought up in court, because they are too general and too hypothetic. A lawyer generally does not defend his client by saying that not only his client is not morally responsible for his actions, but that *no one* is morally responsible for their behavior.

Philosophical arguments like these might seem ridiculous, but even today laws concerning liability are based on philosophical premises. The current philosophical grounds are just very different from hard incompatibilism. So it does seem that hard incompatibilism might potentially unsettle existing law. But I think that the chance of serious changes being made any time soon is very small. Therefor the gap between law and philosophy is just too big. Philosophers may come up with lovely theories about free will and moral responsibility, and they might even be able to live accordingly on a personal level, but they will probably not influence the law any time soon.

To conclude this chapter: Hard incompatibilism is not widely accepted, and therefore I believe that society is not ready to let go of the illusions of free will and moral responsibility. Philosophers and scientists might be able to understand and appreciate what it means to let go of these illusions, but the public is not there yet. Denying free will and moral responsibility might lead to confusion, incomprehension, hurt and anger, if people do not understand what it actually entails. A thorough understanding of the consequences of determinism is needed in order to let go of the illusion of free will. Only if people can live with it on a personal level, society can be changed accordingly. Changing personal beliefs is hard enough, let alone the laws and policies in society.

[12] There is one famous example of a lawyer defending his clients by appealing to determinism. In 1942 Clarence Darrow averted the death penalty in the trial of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb. Both teenagers were sentenced to life imprisonment for the kidnapping and murder of Bobby Franks.

Conclusion

In the first chapter I have explained why Libertarianism seems to be incapable of saving free will. The reason is that we live in a world that is governed by deterministic laws and we do not have the ability to escape determinacy. Compatibilism appears to be unable to secure moral responsibility, for we cannot hold people ultimately responsible for things that are beyond their control. I have argued that hard incompatibilism is a more plausible position in the debate concerning free will and determinism. The existence of free will is incompatible with our world's being governed by deterministic laws, and therefore we must discard the idea of moral responsibility.

I have argued that life without free will can be a positive life. Accepting hard incompatibilism does not entail a surrender to immorality, because it does not take away our reasons for behaving morally and responsibly in the forward-looking sense. The hard incompatibilist has norms and standards, and lives accordingly in order to live the life he desires. Moreover, he can make moral judgements, because he approves and disapproves. Hard determinism does not provide an excuse for bad behavior, for we can be held rationally accountable for our actions. As I explained, a forward-looking kind of moral responsibility can be retained.

Accepting hard incompatibilism entails a change in the way we think of ourselves. I have explained why, in my view, it is an illusion to think that we have immaterial inner selves that escape determinism. Our brains do not need a soul to control them. Each and every part of us is bound by determinism. This realization, however, does not have to be scary. Letting go of the illusion of free will does not entail fatalism; our thoughts and decisions do affect the future. It can even be liberating to realize that there is no inner self that has to control all of our thoughts and decisions. Moreover, even though the things we do and the things we achieve are no longer fully by our doing, we can still have an important sense of self-worth and self-respect.

Letting go of the illusions of free will and moral responsibility does not deprive us of meaning in life. We do not just sit and wait to see what life has in store for us. Because we do not know what the future will bring, we can have hopes and must make efforts to reach our goals. And when we do, the things we accomplish still count as our achievements.

We are perfectly able to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships without free will and moral responsibility. People are naturally inclined to engage in involved interpersonal relationships, and the theoretical conviction of hard incompatibilism is unlikely to change this. In addition, attitudes that might be imperiled by hard incompatibilism either are not necessary for good relationships, or have analogs that do not require the notion of moral responsibility. We can communicate disapproval or disappointment without the notion of blameworthiness, we can be thankful without the idea of merit, we are able to apologize without having guilt, and we can love without having a free will.

I explained why I think that accepting hard incompatibilism can have a positive effect on our lives. It enables us to let go of the control we thought we had to exert. We might become more accepting if we realize that the things that happen are beyond our control and we can stop blaming ourselves and others for the things that went wrong. Letting go of the illusions of free will and moral responsibility might enable us to let go of moral anger, and perhaps release the frustration that comes with it. This allows us to concentrate on the things we wish for and want to achieve in the future.

Despite this positive outlook, it is not an easy task to let go of the illusions of free will and moral responsibility. We live in a society in which blameworthiness and praiseworthiness are considered very important. We must reckon with the beliefs and feelings of the people we live with. Besides, the laws and policies of our society are for a large extent based on the idea of free will and moral responsibility. As I explained, I do not believe that philosophy is capable of changing this in the near future.

Nevertheless, I wish to conclude this thesis on a positive note. Accepting hard incompatibilism, and letting go of the idea of free will and moral responsibility, is not devastating to our personal lives; it allows us to continue our lives with hopes, love and fulfillment.

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