**"Free will is incompatible with Determinism." Discuss**

This essay was written last year by one of my students who managed 100% in both AS and A2 (just to encourage you all - it is possible!).

To assess the extent to which free will is compatible with Determinism, one must first consider other approaches to the concept of free will and whether we, in fact, possess it. A Hard Determinist, such as Honderich, would claim that individuals are not free to initiate actions or make moral decisions, thereby making the concept of moral responsibility redundant. Any moral decisions we make have uncontrollable prior causes. Thus, a Hard Determinist would support the premise that free will and Determinism are not compatible with one another. Diametrically opposed to Hard Determinism is Libertarianism, with which free will is closely compatible. Proponents of this position, such as Kant, maintain that we are all free and should, therefore, take full moral responsibility for our actions. Between these two extremes stands [Compatibilism](javascript:void(0)). Classical Compatibilists, such as Hume, state that most moral decisions are the result of both external determined forces and an internal act of volition or will. In fact, they go so far as to say that true freedom requires causation, without which there would be randomness. Undeniably then, the idea of free will is incompatible with Hard Determinism. A Compatibilist or Soft Determinist, however, would refute the claim that the two concepts are incompatible. Arguably then, Libertarianism would seem to present the most convincing approach to the issue of free will, in that it acknowledges the role of the individual in moral decision making because of their free will, while accepting that the person's background will, in part, influence the choices they make.

If you go back to my four colour criteria (see my blog) you will see that Kate follows my advice precisely - she uses technical language correctly, drops some names in and also gives her essay a good twist - meaning, we know the line she's goign tot ake and we also see she understands precisely what issues underlie the essay question.  One technique to practise is to revise a topic in class eg with a whizz thru powerpoint and then make up a question with the word discuss at the end.  Bring some highlighter pens in, then peer mark highlighting where the twist etc occurs in the opning paragraph.  When you get bored with that, do the same with conclusions.  Mark out of ten and read them out to discuss.

Hard Determinism holds that we do not have free will and that all seemingly ‘moral' actions are the consequences of prior events that are out of our control. The incompatibility between this position and freedom results in the assumption that it is unreasonable to hold people responsible for what they do, making praise and blame redundant. Certainly, if no-one is free to do otherwise than they in fact do, it does seem unfair to punish bad actions while rewarding good ones. Furthermore, Science has proved that the world is governed by cause and effect. For a Hard Determinist, human beings are the same as material things, in that they are controlled by the same laws of nature. Our wills, which we believe to be freely gained, are actually the result of a causal chain stretching back into childhood. The fact we are governed by our genes and our environment [means](javascript:void(0)) that our ability to make moral decisions as free agents, is illusory. As such, the Hard Determinist position seems to be incompatible with the concept of free will.

Yes.  It is the scientifc world view which lies at the heart of the determinist view.  Last week I heard a scientist say "the brain is like a computer".  My own view is that this analogy is highly misleading.  Where exactly is the computer screen in your brain, Mr scientist? Um...err.....we're back with metaphysics.

This incompatibility is further demonstrated by Locke's analogy of the locked room, in which he describes a man asleep in a locked room, who, when he awakes, decides to stay there. Although he believes he is using his free will to make this decision, in reality, he could not have done otherwise- "he has not the freedom to be gone." Such an analogy underpins Locke's viewpoint that "liberty is not an idea belonging to volition", making free will "power of doing." Real freedom is more than simply feeling free; we must be able to act on our choices. Absolutely!

Moreover, Honderich, in his rejection of free will as illusory, highlights the incompatibility between the Hard Determinist position and the concept of free will. He claims that we must give up all hope of an individual's ability to originate action, and abandon all hope of determining the future: "there can be no such hope if all the future is just an effect of effects." An implication of this is that criminals should not be punished for the crimes they commit, as they do not possess free will and, therefore, are not morally responsible for their actions. Although Hard Determinists are not in favour of restorative or retributive justice, they do accept that criminals need to be imprisoned to protect society. Clearly then, this incompatibility between Hard Determinism, free will and moral responsibility impacts upon our notion of punishment. If all our actions are determined, and murderers only murder because of faulty genes and poor upbringing, then Hard Determinism takes away our ability to think rationally. Nice use of quotes here.  It's important to bounce of actual quotes in your thinking - if you're ever stuck on how to launch an essay, my advice would be launch it with a quote!

In fact, the American attorney, Clarence Darrow, used this incompatibility as the basis of his defence of two boys on charge for the murder of fourteen year old Bobby Franks. The murderers were both highly intelligent and had carefully planned the attack in order to assert their superior position within society. Although they initially faced the death penalty, Darrow managed to have their sentence reduced to life imprisonment, arguing that the boys were the unavoidable products of their upbringings. While accepting that they should be imprisoned to stop them from committing similar crimes, Darrow claimed that the boys did not possess free will and, therefore, could not be held morally responsible for their atrocious behaviour. Such an example undeniably reinforces the incompatibility between Hard Determinism and the concept of free will. Use examples to illustrate your points - good.

However, Hard Determinism, in its denial of the existence of free will, does not explain our behaviour of praising and blaming. We naturally feel compelled to attribute moral responsibility to others, perhaps indicating that we do, in fact, possess free will and must accept moral responsibility for our actions. There is, in addition, the problem of the consequence argument, which states that the laws of nature are not up to us: "our actions are not more than effects of other equally necessitated events." Hard Determinism undeniably puts doubt in our hopes and fears for the future, affecting the way we consider the [morality](javascript:void(0)) of others. Such problems associated with the incompatibility between free will and Hard Determinism does, arguably, seem to limit its effectiveness when considering the issues of freedom and moral responsibility.  This last sentence needs rephrasing.  No-one is asking Hard Determinism to be effective - the issue is, is it a valid description of volition. Of course, it does have implications for punishment and responsibility - which is your point perhaps.

By contrast, the Libertarianism position is closely compatible with free will It's more than compatible - Kant makes it a central assumption of his [*ethics*](javascript:void(0)), what he calls [*autonomy*](javascript:void(0)) (freedom with reason), maintaining that we are all free and, therefore, morally responsible for our actions. Moral decisions are not random, but the result of the values and character of the individual. Kant, for example, stated that freedom is a necessary pre-condition for all morality. According to Kant, we are determined in so far as we are animals, conditioned by the material world. However, true freedom lies beyond this, in the [noumenal](javascript:void(0)) realm of categories, concepts, reason and ideas. We are right to blame people for acting badly, as they have failed to employ reason, which "could have and ought to have determined the conduct of the person to be other than it is." Giving in to desires is a denial of our ability to use reason, which is essential to our humanity. For Kant, although we are influenced by our background, we are by no means wholly determined by it. Humans are free, making them the originating causes of their actions, for which they must take full moral responsibility. It is then, this close compatibility between Libertarianism and free will that leads proponents of this position to argue that freedom is necessary in understanding morality and attributing praise and blame. Nice discussion of the noumenal.  Without understanding the noumenal you can't understand Kant - see my handout on Kant for a discussion.  Of course, the noumenal is not the realm of scientifc cause and effect.....

The fact we all experience freedom and know what it is to resist temptation is a notable strength of Libertarianism. Similarly, the fact rather a strange word to use for a highly debatable concept - is there any evidence we have souls?  I would have brought in the validity of metaphysics as an explanation of reality here (some things will never be reducible to scientific ideas eg love), rather than an alleged fact of the soul. we are not just physical matter, but have a soul or spiritual dimension, would seem to indicate that we do, in fact, possess free will, and should, therefore, take moral responsibility for what we do. Furthermore, one could argue that the fact we all make conscious ethical choices, is proof that we are not determined, but autonomous moral agents. Equally, however, a Hard Determinist could refute this claim by stating that, just because we think we have free will, doesn't [mean](javascript:void(0)) that we actually do. We may believe we are deliberating over a moral decision, when, in reality, the choice we finally make is the inevitable result of background causes. This argument was outlined by Spinoza in Ethics.

Classical Compatibilism, standing between Hard Determinism and Libertarianism, is, to a certain extent, compatible with the concept of free will. It states that human freedom cannot be understood without Hard Determinism, as choice is one of the causal factors and has to, itself, be caused by a determinant. Most human choices then, are a combination of two factors: volition or will and external factors. Without Hard Determinism, the will would be uncaused, resulting in randomness. Humans are both free and determined, and these concepts are compatible. A Compatibilist would argue, therefore, that, while we do possess moral responsibility, it is inevitably determined by an individual's background, genetics and education. Hume, a key proponent of Classical Compatibilism, produces, in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, a psychological argument, claiming that there is a psychological link between motives and resulting actions. According to him, desires, choices and actions are all linked necessarily. Although we do act according to our free will, we do not originate acts. Because of his belief that, without causation there would be randomness, Hume acknowledges that Determinism is, to a certain extent, true, meaning that we are not fully free and do not, therefore, have full moral responsibility.  
However, Hume does deny that causes and effects are linked necessarily, stating that, although we experience them as linked, there is no clear basis for claiming that a cause results in an effect. So, while being a Compatibilist, Hume was also sceptical about causation and the issue of whether we have free will and moral responsibility, thereby limiting the credibility of his theory. Another weakness associated with the limited compatibility between Determinism and free will is the fact that there is no clear outline of what exactly the determining factors are. Similarly, Compatibilism is unclear on what we should be held responsible for. Moreover, a Libertarian could criticise the position for its failure to realise the extent of our free will, while a Determinist could do likewise for its inability to realise the extent to which our free will is limited. Good essays force the teacher to go back and re-read original sources - which is what I need to do to check whether this is a correct reading of Hume!   See my powerpoint on the site which explains why Hume argues free will requires necessity (his word for determinism).

 Contemporary Compatibilists, such as Kane and Vardy, adapted the Classical Compatibilist position. Kane, for example, in An Introduction to Free Will, outlines five freedoms: self realisation, rational self control, self perfection, self determination and self formation. It is self formation that establishes a sense of free will and moral responsibility, and allows us to act in a way not determined by our pre-existing character, allowing us to make the choice to change. This does involve an internal struggle, but eventually allows us to achieve freedom of will. Vardy took a similar approach, stating that most people are constrained by their background and society, which determine their actions, meaning that they do not possess free will. However, Vardy did claim that it is possible, through hardship and struggle, to attain this freedom. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the effects our genetic dispositions inevitably have on our tendencies, thereby coming to terms with the effects of our parents, childhood and education on our hopes, fears and expectations: "wisdom and freedom are closely linked." This approach, which stresses the limited compatibility between Determinism and free will, could be linked to Plato's analogy of the cave, in which it is the philosopher's task to seek release from the shadows of this world and achieve freedom and clarity. Nice little Platonic twist there!

Arguably then, Hard Determinism does not, in its claim that we are not morally responsible for our actions, provide a satisfactory response to the issues of freedom and morality. As such, it is most certainly incompatible with free will. Moreover, it cannot, ultimately, be proven. As such, Libertarianism, with which free will is closely compatible, would seem to provide the most appealing approach, in that it distinguishes between personality, which is determined by the [phenomenal](javascript:void(0)) world, and the moral self, through which we experience freedom through acts of will and for which we are all individually responsible.

 She might have said a bit more about Kant - but on the other hand the essay is on the long side anyway. I think you can see it is very well structured and goes to the heart of the issues - concluding clearly and strongly - full marks, Kate!