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PHIL-92
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Lesson Plan: Free Will

Learning Goals: Have students evaluate their position on whether or not they have free will and examine the implications their position has on moral responsibility

Opening Activity: Simon Says (Blake)

- Play Simon Says with the students, tell them there is an incentive for winning.
- Give more and more outrageous commands, eliminating students as you go.
 - Examples: Simon says spin in a circle, Simon says smack the table, Simon says clap... Simon says eat the gum under the desk (Stop them before they do this! Remaining students win)
- Plot twist! There is no prize. Life is unfair! You did this for nothing.

Post-Activity Discussion: (Blake)

- If they obeyed/won, ask why they wanted to win.
- If they hesitated, ask them why they hesitated.
- If they aren't having fun/taking Simon Says seriously, ask why.
 - Choosing not to play undermines the game, but *is* a matter of free will

Definitions (Zoe)

- Define a few terms:
 - Free will - humans act freely (You choose the route, you are in the driver's seat)
 - Determinism - everything is predetermined (You're in a self driving car)
- **Free write followed by pair share?** - To which side are you inclined?

Discussion - Free will vs. Determinism

- **Arguments (David)**
 - What are some arguments in favor of free will?
 - In favor of determinism?
 - Charles Whitman – went on shooting spree, autopsy found a tumor pressing on his amygdala
 - Was he responsible?
- **Implications**
 - Assume we know that free will is true
 - **Turn and talk:** What implications does this have for us as individuals? For society?

- Free will and Age (Zoe)
 - As a minor, more legal/social restrictions on what you can/can't do
 - Does this mean minors don't have free will? Or is it that minors have free will but external structures impede it?
 - School example: as minors, you are all legally required to go to school. You don't get a choice as to whether you do or do not. As instructors, we all had the choice to go to college. There may have been familial/social pressure, but no legal consequences. If I went to college because my parents expected me to, is that me giving up my free will?
- Assume we know that determinism is true
 - **Turn and talk:** What implications does this have for us as individuals? For society?
 - "Everything happens for a reason!" (Blake)
 - Yes or no? Can we think of any examples?
 - Some people find peace in this kind of helplessness. Why do you think that is?
 - **Illusionism:** determinism absolves people of responsibility/agency and would be so bad for society that we should continue (David)

Discussion - Compatibilism (Zoe)

- Not necessarily a binary!
- **Compatibilism** - free will and determinism are compatible
 - Example: (David)
 - Choosing a banana or an apple:
 - With no one there
 - With someone telling you to choose the banana
 - With someone telling you to choose the banana with a gun to your head
 - You are addicted to bananas

Closing activity (Blake)

- What do you think? In your philosophy journals, write down your philosophy regarding free will, compatibilism, and/or determinism, explaining *why* you believe *what* you believe. Has your viewpoint changed or stayed the same?

(Not in lesson PLAN but thoughts that were part of the planning process)

Working Definition of Free Will:

Power to control one's choices and actions.

Life is like driving a car, you are able to set the route and are sitting in the driver's seat.

At first glance, do you believe you have free will? Why or why not?

Moral Implications of Free Will:

If you are the one who is in control of your actions, you are responsible for the outcomes (positive) and consequences (negative). In a legal setting, *you* are punished due to *your* actions that you chose.

Does free will imply/entail responsibility for all of your actions?

If you do not have free will, are you abdicated of this responsibility?

Free Will/Age:

As a minor, there are more restrictions/regulations on what you can and cannot do. You are legally mandated to go to school, you need parental permission to receive medical treatment, etc. Understandable if students feel as if they do not have free will since they legally are granted less control over their lives. Does this undermine free will?

From my current age/position, I am granted more autonomy over my life and the choices I make. Do you think your position on free will will change as you gain more legal and social autonomy? Is it the case that free will is something that is "earned" as you get older? Or is free will something we all inherently have but is stunted by legal/social interference?

Determinism:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes determinism as "necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with the laws of nature"

- Does this seem attractive to you? Repulsive? Lukewarm?
- "Everything happens for a reason"
 - Yes or no? Can we think of any examples?
 - Some people find peace in this kind of helplessness. Why do you think that is?

Materialism:

- If humans are simply an arrangement of molecules, are we not just an intricate chemical reaction playing out over time?

Illusionism:

- Because the implications of determinism are so harmful to the social fabric, we should persist in believing in free will even if it does not exist.

Observation of thought:

- “idea with roots in Buddhism, and echoed by others, including the philosopher David Hume: when you look within, there’s no trace of an internal commanding officer, autonomously issuing decisions. There’s only mental activity, flowing on. Or as Arthur Rimbaud wrote, in a letter to a friend in 1871: “I am a spectator at the unfolding of my thought; I watch it, I listen to it.””
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/27/the-clockwork-universe-is-free-will-an-illusion>

Degrees of Free Will

- Choosing a banana or an apple:
 - With no one there
 - With someone telling you to choose the banana
 - With someone telling you to choose the banana with a gun to your head
 - You are addicted to bananas
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/27/the-clockwork-universe-is-free-will-an-illusion>
- “The way most compatibilists see things, “being free” is just a matter of having the capacity to think about what you want, reflect on your desires, then act on them and sometimes get what you want.”
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/27/the-clockwork-universe-is-free-will-an-illusion>

Closing activity

- What do you think? Was your position changed or reinforced? In your philosophy journals, write down your philosophy regarding free will and/or determinism, explaining *why* you believe *what* you believe.