PHIL 120: Phil of Human Nature
Dr. Donald Abel
4-3-09

PAPER ON FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

TOPIC: Do we have free will?

- When giving your view on this topic (Section II of your paper as specified on the handout entitled “Philosophy of Human Nature: A Style Sheet for Papers”), be sure to state whether you understand free will as the notion that we could have done otherwise in some situations (the libertarian view of Taylor) or as the notion that actions with certain kinds of causes are free, even though we could not have done otherwise (the soft determinist view of Stace and Holmstrom). Be sure that your paper is on the topic of free will, and not on the topic of political freedom (freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and so on.)

- In Section III, present the best challenge (or two challenges) you can think of against your view on free will (as you have defined the term). The challenge does not have to from an author—but if it is, you should make reference to the author. (Note: If you are defending Stace’s version of soft determinism, it would normally be advisable to include in Section III the challenges raised by Taylor and/or Holmstrom.)

- Since this is a philosophy course, your arguments should be based on philosophical reasoning, not on religious belief. (Your religious belief could differ from your philosophical conclusion, and you may state this in your paper if you wish.)

- If your view, or the challenge to your view, is based on the argument that free will is necessary for something else to be the case (for example, for there to be moral responsibility, rewards and punishments, or a meaning to life), be sure to include an argument that this “something else” does in fact exist.

- If your view is that you are not sure whether we have free will or not, you may change the structure of the paper sections. In Sections II and III, respectively, give an exposition of what you consider the most plausible views affirming and denying free will. In Section IV, explain why you cannot decide between the two views. (Sections I and V should, of course, be the introduction and the conclusion, respectively.)

- Somewhere in your paper, you must give an exposition (with page reference[s]) of at least part of one of the philosophical theories on free will and determinism covered in class.

STYLE AND FORMAT: Consult the handout entitled “Philosophy of Human Nature: A Style Sheet for Papers.”

LENGTH: About 4 double-spaced pages (5-page maximum).

DATE DUE: Class time on Friday, April 17.

Note: As stated in the Style Sheet, for this second paper submit two hard copies; there is no need for an electronic copy.