TOPIC: Do we have free will?

- When giving your view on this topic, 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). It would probably be best to state this in your introduction.

- 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).

- 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.)

- In Section III of your paper, present the best challenge (or two challenges; no more than two) you can think of against your view on free will (as you have defined the term). The challenge does not have to be 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 be advisable to include in Section III the challenges raised by Taylor and/or Holmstrom.)

- 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.)
If your view is that we have free will, but you are not sure in which of the two senses (described in the first bullet point) we have free will, present your argument for one sense of free will in Section II, your argument for the other sense in Section III, and explain in Section IV explain why you cannot decide between the two senses of free will.

- 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.

WRITE-TO-LEARN EXERCISE

Submit a draft of your thesis statement and a one-sentence summary of the argument you plan to give to defend your thesis. (You may end up changing your thesis and argument in your paper; that is fine.) This exercise will be written on a sheet or half sheet of paper, and it will be graded on an acceptable/unacceptable basis. Unacceptable submissions, as well as lack of submission or a late submission, will lower the grade on your paper by one-half grade.

STYLE AND FORMAT: Consult the handout “A Style Sheet for Papers.”

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

DUE DATES

Writing-to-learn exercise:

Class time on Friday, November 7. (I will return them on Monday, November 12.)

Final draft:

Class time on Wednesday, November 14.

TWO COPIES

As stated in “A Style Sheet for Papers,” for this second paper submit two hard copies of the final draft; there is no need for an electronic copy.