

CPHIL 119: Topics in the History of Philosophy
Course Syllabus

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Section Meeting Time: TBD (online)
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

You at least sometimes do what you will. You are held responsible for things you have willingly brought about, and sometimes for things you haven't. Sometimes you are weak and act against your will. Or so it seems! What is our human will? How does it help explain our *freedom*, our *moral responsibility*, and the possibility of our *weak-willed action*? This course examines conceptions of the will in the history of western thought in connection with these questions central to our humanity.

Our primary focus is on treatments of the will offered by Aristotle and the Stoics, Plotinus, and Augustine, the late medievals, Descartes and Cudworth, and on how the conception develops and changes. In our discussion we will relate their positions to those of contemporary philosophers, and see how a conversation between past and present offers insight in both directions -- on these topics central to our life.

Requirements:

- Paper #1: 35%
- Paper #2: 35%
- Reactions: 20%
- Participation: 10%

Descriptions:

Paper #1 and Paper #2:

- You should submit two 1000-1200 words papers in answer to the prompts provided. More information will be given in class.

Reactions:

- You should submit a one-page reaction to one of the readings for four of the six weeks of the session. The responses will be graded as pass/fail and should reflect thoughtful consideration of the text.

Participation:

- Excellent participation can happen in multiple ways and does not require getting things right all of the time or speaking for its own sake. Rather, excellent contribution may be the result of attending office hours, contributing meaningful questions/comments to section discussions, and/or responding to questions given in lecture.
- You are expected to attend all class meetings and regularly contribute during the class. Nevertheless, you may miss up to three meetings without explanation. Feel free to talk to me or your TA if you need to have additional meetings excused due to health or personal reasons.
 - Note: No required reading for the course will exceed 20 pages in length.

Academic Integrity:

- Students are expected to know and to follow the University's guidelines for academic honesty. Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask your TA or the instructor for assistance. Always err on the side of avoiding academic misconduct.
- **Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students. There are no exceptions.**

Communication Protocol

Office Hours:

- The best way to communicate with me outside of classroom hours is to talk to me during office hours. This is the preferred method for asking questions you might not have formulated in class, or to discuss certain details, problems, possible alternatives to what we've discussed in lecture and sections, and more.

Email:

- I check email daily, but not 24/7. If you haven't heard back from me within 48 hours, please send me a reminder email. Email is not a substitute for section or office hours. In other words, I don't discuss substantive philosophical content over email. Please reserve email for scheduling appointments, quick yes/no questions, or suggesting questions to be addressed in class.
- Also, please begin the subject line with "**PHIL C119**" as this allows me to more easily navigate through emails from students and so makes it more likely that I'll be able to respond in a timely manner.

Resources

The Center for Accessible Education (CAE):

- <https://www.cae.ucla.edu/>
- (310) 825-1501

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

- <https://www.caps.ucla.edu/>
- (310) 825-0768

24 Hour Crisis Counseling

- (888) 200-6665

CARE: Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Misconduct:

- <https://www.careprogram.ucla.edu/>
- (310) 206-2465

Writing Programs at UCLA:

- <https://www.wp.ucla.edu/>

Tips for Writing Philosophy Papers:

- <https://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Preliminary Class Plan:

Week 1:

Meeting 1: June 24th (Tuesday)

Course Introduction:

Scope, Sequence, Expectations

What might one mean by 'will'? Why might we care?

Required Reading:

Pamela Hieronymi, "What is a Will?"

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Michael Bratman, "Valuing and the Will"

Meeting 2: June 26th (Thursday)

Ancient Philosophy

How might one explain such salient features of human agency as responsibility, freedom, and *akrasia* without there being a will? Emphasis on *akrasia* this meeting.

Required Reading:

Plato, "Protagoras" (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Donald Davidson, "How is Weakness of the Will Possible?"

Terence Irwin, "Who Discovered the Will?"

Week 2:

Meeting 3: July 1st (Tuesday)

Hellenistic Philosophy

What were the philosophical reasons for first positing the existence of a will in human agency?

Required Reading:

Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (excerpt)

Epictetus, *Discourses* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Rogers Albritton, "Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action"

Michael Frede, "The Emergence of a Notion of Will in Stoicism"

Meeting 4: July 3rd (Thursday)

Late Antiquity

What might an account of freedom theoretically gain by positing the existence of the will?

Required Reading:

Plotinus, *Ennead VI.8*

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (excerpt)

John M. Rist, "Prohairesis: Proclus, Plotinus, et al"

Week 3:

Meeting 5: July 8th (Tuesday)

Ancient Christianity

What might an account of moral responsibility theoretically gain by positing the existence of the will?

Required Reading:

Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (excerpt)

Meeting 6: July 10th (Thursday)

Writing Day

I will make myself available during class hours for anyone who would like to ask questions about their paper or discuss ideas for their paper.

Attendance is optional for this day (absence on this day will not count against your total number of excused absences as it is assumed that you are without questions and working on your paper during this time).

Week 4:

Meeting 7: July 15th (Tuesday)

Late Medieval

How does the will affect the alternatives available to an agent?

Required Reading:

Anselm, *On the Fall of the Devil* (excerpt)

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, *On Truth*, *On Evil* (excerpts)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (excerpt)

Derk Pereboom, *Living without Free Will* (excerpt)

Meeting 8: July 17th (Thursday)

Late Medieval

What is the relationship between the intellect and the will?

What do the reactive attitudes of the will show about the moral responsibility of the agent?

Required Reading:

Peter John Olivi, *Commentary on the Sentences* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Thomas Williams, *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy*

Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

Week 5:

Meeting 9: July 22nd (Tuesday)

Late Medieval/Early Modern

What, if any, are the metaethical implications of accepting the existence of the will?

Required Reading:

J. Duns Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* (excerpt)

William Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions* (excerpt)

Francisco Suarez, *On Law* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Calvin Normore, "Freedom, Contingency, and Rational Power"

Meeting 10: July 24th (Thursday)

Early Modern (Continent)

How much is philosophically new in important early modern conceptions of the will?

Emphasis on Descartes and his reliance on earlier views of the will.

Required Reading:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations* (excerpt)

Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Harry Frankfurt, "Rationality and the Unthinkable"

Donald Rutherford, "Reading Descartes as a Stoic: Appropriate Action, Virtue, and the Passions"

Week 6:

Meeting 11: July 29th (Tuesday)

Early Modern (English)

What, if any, are the normative implications of accepting the existence of the will?

Emphasis on Cudworth and his anticipation of subsequent views of the will.

Required Reading:

Thomas Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* (excerpt)

Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise of Free Will* (excerpt)

Optional Reading of Modern Positions:

Stephan Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (excerpt)

Meeting 12: July 31st (Thursday)

Writing Day

I will make myself available during class hours for anyone who would like to ask questions about their paper or discuss ideas for their paper.

Attendance is optional for this day (absence on this day will not count against your total number of excused absences).

Note: Slight variation on the readings may occur in an attempt to incorporate the relevance of Arabic medieval philosophy on the development of the will and late medieval women philosophers.