

CHC 391AH  
Philosophy of Freedom  
Course Syllabus  
Spring, 2023, Thursdays, 4:00 - 4:50 ET, Elm 214

Chip Weems  
E-mail: [weems@cs.umass.edu](mailto:weems@cs.umass.edu)  
Office Phone: 545-3163 (email for call)

Office: CS-342  
Office Hours: M 10:30 - 11:30  
And drop-ins or by appointment

**Textbook:** Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom, Centennial Edition, Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, 1995, ISBN 0-88010-385-X. **The book will be provided.**

**Course Description:** In 1900, the Austrian philosopher and scientist, Rudolf Steiner, published one of his first books, exploring the basis for free will. His analysis of consciousness found thinking to be the root of the human psyche. In Steiner's view, intuitive thinking, the kind of reflective thinking through which we acquire new concepts, is a fundamental activity of consciousness. Because such thinking can be sense-free and self-aware, it provides the basis for true freedom of choice if we learn to exercise it well. Steiner went on to found numerous movements that are still active today, including Waldorf Education, Camphill communities that serve people with developmental disabilities, biodynamic agriculture, a branch of holistic medicine, and schools of art, artistic movement, architecture, and speech. Although he published many more books, he always urged people to read this one, if they wanted to truly enrich their lives. In this course we will follow Steiner's detailed reasoning to develop an understanding of intuitive thinking and free will.

It should be noted that when Steiner speaks of "spirit," he has something specific and objective in mind. He is referring to self-sustaining, self-directing, independent activities. In Steiner's meaning of spirit, for example, while life has a complex physical-chemical existence, it also exhibits a set of self-directing activities that are not reducible to a mechanistic model. Recent philosophers, such as Robert Rosen and Stephen Talbot, have drawn similar conclusions. Steiner observes that thinking is a distinct, self-directing activity of this kind, and thus it fits his definition of spirit, as a philosophical term. He is not using the word in a religious sense.

**Homework:** The book has numbers corresponding to the paragraphs in the original German. We will use these as signposts in our study. The text is written both to be informative regarding intuitive thinking, and as a series of exercises that develop such thinking, if it is approached with careful scholarship. It is actually written to be challenging to understand, so that deeper thinking capacities are developed in the process. That requires us to digest each of the original paragraphs. One means to do so is to write a summary sentence that states the main point of the paragraph. That is not easy. There will be many times where you get to the end of a paragraph, and think, "What???" It may be necessary to reread it several times and ponder it for a while before the meaning is revealed. By doing this work, we develop a précis of his thesis that we can review, as a way to draw together his many concepts into a coherent picture. More importantly, you will develop new capacities for thinking. Students in prior offerings of this course have reported transformative experiences.

Your summary sentences should not be a simple paraphrase of the content. Instead, they should reflect your understanding of what Steiner is trying to say within the context of the

chapter. Please write the section number with each summary sentence. **In addition to the paragraph summaries, you should also write at least one question from each reading section that you want to bring for discussion.**

It is best if you can hand write the summaries as you are reading, rather than turning away from the book to write on a screen. The more that you can focus on the text, by eliminating outside distractions, the easier it will be to delve into it. The closer you can get to a meditative frame of mind, the better. To that end, we will also be working on some contemplative exercises that will reveal some aspects of consciousness.

**Grading:** Grades will be based half on participation in the discussions, including being prepared for each class, and half on the summaries/questions that are turned in.

### **Accommodation Statement**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to making reasonable, effective and appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities and help create a barrier-free campus. If you have a disability and require accommodations, please register with Disability Services to have an accommodation letter sent to your faculty. Information on services and materials for registering are also available on the [University of Massachusetts Amherst Disability Services page](#)

### **Course Inclusiveness Statement**

No matter who you are or how you define yourself you are welcome in this class. Each person here is a human being deserving of dignity and respect. My goal is to help you learn the subject matter in a way that you will find useful, and to help you have an enjoyable and empowering experience in doing so. It is important to keep in mind that we are all coming to this class with different backgrounds. We are all here to learn together! There are no dumb questions! The class may involve small group discussions, where I encourage you to help each other in your understanding. Remember that we all have different modes of learning, and there is no stigma to be associated with needing assistance. Please reach out to me if you have any concerns.

### **Academic Honesty Statement**

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).

## Reading Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Number of Paragraphs</u>
2/9	Intro., Preface	[22] [5]
2/16	Chapters 1 & 2 Conscious Human Action The Fundamental Urge for Knowledge	[19] [14]
2/23	Chapter 3 Thinking in Service of Understanding the World	[34]
3/2	Chapter 4 The World as Percept	[33]
3/9	Chapter 5 Knowing the World	[33]
3/23	Chapters 6 & 7 [1 - 12] Human Individuality Are There Limits to Cognition? (Part 1)	[18] [12]
3/30	Chapters 7 [13 - end] Are There Limits to Cognition? (Part 2)	[26]
4/6	Chapters 8 & 9 [1 - 17] The Factors of Life The Idea of Freedom (Part 1)	[9] [17]
4/13	Chapter 9 The Idea of Freedom (Part 2)	[31]
4/20	Chapters 10 & 11 Freedom-Philosophy and Monism World Purpose and Life Purpose (Human Destiny)	[13] [10]
4/27	Chapter 12 Moral Imagination	[21]
5/4	Chapter 13 The Value of Life	[53]
5/11	Chapter 14, Final Quest. Individuality and Genus The Consequences of Monism	[8] [7]

Where there are two reading sections for one class, you should write at least one question to accompany each section.