

# Department of Philosophy Colloquium Series

## Clarity and Cartesian Freedom

Thursday,  
November 24  
4-6 p.m.

Watson Hall  
Room 517



**Elliot Paul**  
(Queen's University)

According to a common-sense assumption, freedom requires alternate possibilities: you do something freely only if you have a two-way power either to do that thing or to refrain from doing it. I argue that Descartes rejects this assumption in an intriguing way. In his view, clarity compels assent—i.e. when you perceive something with complete clarity, you cannot refrain from assenting to it—and yet, he holds, you assent to it freely. How could this be? The key is to see that clarity is rationally compelling. Clarity does not coerce assent by brute force; rather it provides reason for assent, and so you assent irresistibly because you are, to that extent, rational by nature. Your rational nature makes you what you are (it constitutes a self), so when you assent to clarity, rationally and irresistibly, it is an act of self-determination—and freedom just is the power of self-determination. Clarity simultaneously compels you and sets you free.

**Everyone Welcome!**

For accessibility requirements, please contact [philosophy@queensu.ca](mailto:philosophy@queensu.ca)

Please note that all in-person attendees must conform to the Queen's vaccine policy:

<https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/administration-and-operations/covid-19-vaccination-requirements>