

Spinoza
PHIL 83278

Professor: Sam Newlands
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Course Description: This seminar will closely and critically examine the views of Spinoza, a controversial but important 17th century philosopher. We will be focusing on his major work, the *Ethics*, with supplemental readings from some of his other writings. Of particular interest will be Spinoza's rationalism, that is, his commitment to and use of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). By seeing how his commitment to the intelligibility of all things shapes his metaphysics, philosophy of mind, psychology, and ethical theories, we will be able to better appreciate the scope and power of Spinoza's philosophy, as well as better understand its relevance to abiding issues in contemporary philosophy.

Proposed Course Requirements:

Written: (1) One seminar length paper (20-30 pages) due on the final day of class (Thursday, April 26). (2) A one-page proposal, due March 29 (at the latest!), outlining your proposed seminar paper

Presentations: One possibility is to have the last week devoted to short presentations of final seminar papers, with some time for discussion of each. Alternatively, we may devote a chunk of time around March 29 for students to present their paper proposals to the class to elicit feedback.

Course Materials:

A Spinoza Reader, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1994) (S)

For all other materials, I will leave two master copy in the department lounge at least one week prior to discussion; please copy and bring to class.

Tentative Schedule (by topics):

(1) **Metaphysics (I):** Substance monism, the PSR, dependence relations, and the conceptual barrier between attributes

Descartes (excerpts from *Principles* and *Replies*)
Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I (all definitions and axioms; propositions 1-15); Letters 2-4 (p66-71), 8-10 (p77-82).

Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism"
Garrett, "Spinoza's Ontological Argument"
[Newlands, "Spinoza's Conceptualism"]

(2) **Metaphysics (II):** Modes, Modality, and Plenitude

Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 16-end of part one; excerpt from *Cartesian Meditations*

Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation of Spinoza's Monism," (Yovel, p 35-51)

Curley, "On God," *Behind the Geometrical Method* p 30-36

Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics"

Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism"

Curley and Walski, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered"

[Newlands, "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics"]

(3) **Philosophy of Mind:** Parellelism, representationalism and the will

Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part II

Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, chs. 2-3

Curley, "Descartes, Spinoza, and the Ethics of Belief"

Della Rocca, "The Power of an Idea: Spinoza's Critique of Pure Will"

(4) **Epistemology:** Certainty, skepticism, and truth

Spinoza, *TIE* 30-48, 77-80 (photocopy); Opening to PP (Curley pp.71-74)

Doney, "Spinoza and Philosophical Skepticism"

Curley, "Spinoza on Truth"

(5) **Psychology and Teleology:** Power, the emotions, and striving for existence and preservation

Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III

Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology"

Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument"

Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza"

(6) **Ethics:** Egoism, Altruism, and Virtue

Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV

Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory"

Newlands, "Spinoza and the Ethics of Individuation"

(7) **Freedom and the Eternality of the Mind:**

Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part V

Garber, “Spinoza on the Eternality of the Mind”
[Newlands, “Spinoza on Identity and Immortality”]

Some other possible topics:

Spinoza’s reception (immediate or 19th century German)

Spinoza’s political theory

Spinoza’s theology / Biblical hermeneutics