

Philosophy 478/673: Spinoza's *Ethics*
Winter 2008 (held Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:30 – 6 pm in HH 357)

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Office Hours: Mon. and Wed.
10:30-11:30, and by appointment.
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Course Description:

The focus of this course will be a close reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*. This work, arguably, marks the apotheosis of seventeenth century rationalism, and constitutes a purer form of Cartesianism than we find in Descartes himself. It was also vilified for its core thesis – the identification of all of nature with God (Bayle famously labeled this position “the hideous hypothesis”). The *Ethics* itself is a work of considerable ambition, engaging not only ethical issues, but also (and especially) issues in metaphysics, epistemology, moral psychology, and philosophy of the emotions. While we shall supplement the primary text with some secondary material, our primary focus shall be on the *Ethics* itself. No special background – and, in particular, no background in Spinoza – is necessary for this course. However, some familiarity with Descartes is recommended.

Structure of the Course:

Assuming that we can determine mutually agreeable times to do so, and commencing in the second week of the term, this class will meet twice weekly for 1.5 hour sessions. Normally, the first session each week will be taken up with a discussion of that week's reading in the *Ethics*. The professor will lead this discussion. In the second session of the week, a student will give a short (10-15 minutes) presentation (of the CPA commentary variety¹) on an article or book chapter about the section of the *Ethics* that we have just discussed; which *particular* secondary text we will look at each week will be determined by that week's presenter. It is his/her responsibility make this text available to the class no later than the day of the week's first meeting (either by emailing the professor a link to an online version of the paper, or by putting a photocopy of the paper in the relevant file folder in the Philosophy Department office). While the commentary may be either read or extemporized, each week's presenter must turn in a good, written prose version of the commentary at the beginning of class for grading.

Text:

Benedict de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Ed. and Trans., Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton NJ, 1994.

(Note: It's not absolutely essential that you use this particular text. The other reliable standard translation out there is by Samuel Shirley. Either of these will do just fine, and they're both widely available in libraries and used book stores. Having said that, we will

¹ We will discuss what this entails in the organizational meeting for the course. There will also be some guidelines for this on the UW ACE site for the course.

be using some of the front matter and supplementary material in the Curley volume; so if you go with a different version of the text, it's your responsibility to procure copies of this material. As well, beware of condensed versions of the Ethics, such as the one in the old Anchor book, *The Rationalists: Descartes: Discourse on Method & Meditations; Spinoza: Ethics; Leibniz: Monadology & Discourse on Metaphysics*, which many of you likely own. Such condensations often include Spinoza's propositions, but not his demonstrations, and are thus inadequate for senior undergraduate or graduate level study of the text.)

Work required:

Participation	15%
Seminar Presentation and written commentary	25%
Term Paper (about 12-15 pages)	60%

Schedule

This schedule is subject to fine-tuning, with notice. In particular, there is good reason to expect that weekly readings will sometimes be supplemented by other material from the Curley volume. I will post any changes to the syllabus on the course UW ACE site, as well as emailing same to all students enrolled in the course. If you would rather receive these emails at your home account (e.g., hotmail, gmail, rogers...) than your UW one, then you must enter that email address on your UWDir entry. To log on to UWDir and update your entry, follow this link: <https://ego.uwaterloo.ca/~uwdir/Update>. It is your responsibility to stay current with course news by regularly checking whichever email account is listed on your UWDir entry.

Week	Primary Reading
1 (Jan. 7-11)	Organizational and introductory meeting. No reading.
2 (Jan. 14-18)	Curley's Introduction. Selections from Curley – pp. 3-6, 48-61, 64-66 (i.e., <i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i> , 1-29 and 91-104, <i>Short Treatise</i> 1.vii-ix and Second Dialogue).
3 (Jan. 21-25)	Part 1, to P15
4 (Jan. 28-Feb. 1)	Part 1, P15-Appendix [Note: On Feb.1 and 2, students in the Graduate Programmes in Social and Political Thought, Political Science and Philosophy at York University will be hosting a two day interdisciplinary symposium entitled, "Spinoza: Ethics, Interpretation and Power." Perhaps a class road trip is in order?]
5 (Feb. 4-8)	Part 2, to P31
6 (Feb. 11-15)	Part 2, P31-P49
7 (Feb. 18-22)	Reading Week. No class.
8 (Feb. 25-29)	Part 3, to P50
9 (March 3-7)	Part 3, P51-"General Definition of the Affects"
10 (March 10-14)	Part 4, to P18

11 (March 17-21)	Part 4, P19-Appendix
12 (March 24-28)	Part 5, to P20
13 (31- April 4)	Part 5, P21-P42
14 (April 7 – lectures end)	TBA

The fine print:Avoidance of academic offences:

All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). If you need help in learning what constitutes an academic offence; how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission; how to follow appropriate rules with respect to “group work” and collaboration; or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your TA and/or your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean. You may also wish to consult the Arts Faculty Web page, “Avoiding Academic Offences” at http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html.

Students’ right to grieve:

Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>.

Students with disabilities:

The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.