

# Spinoza: *Ethics*

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**Summary:** An opinionated, advanced, and accelerated survey of Spinoza's masterpiece, *Ethics*.

**Texts:** You need a good translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*. You may take your pick between the translations by Ed Curley (Princeton or Penguin), Matthew Kisner (Cambridge), or George Eliot (ed. Carlisle, Princeton). All other readings will be posted on Canvas.

**Office Hours:** Thursday, 9–11 am, in Stuart 222, or by appointment on Zoom.

**Participation Expectations:** All participants, including auditors, are required to regularly participate; I take this to include completing the readings and engaging in class discussions.

**Course Evaluation:** For students taking the course for credit, you will receive your grade on the basis of an **oral examination** during Finals Week. You may approach this oral examination in two ways: First, you may choose to write a paper for this course on a topic of your choice. In that case, the oral examination will take the form of a defense of your term paper. Second, you may decline to write a paper for this course. In that case, the oral examination will be on a set of topics of my choosing, which I will distribute to you in advance.

**Academic Integrity:** All participants are expected to be respectful classroom and academic citizens. If you have any questions about what this involves, please feel free to contact me.

## **Tentative Schedule, by week:**

1. Spinoza's Geometrical Method
  - Descartes, *Second Replies*, excerpts on geometrical method.
  - Lodewijk Meyer, Preface to the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*.
  - Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §§94–97.
  - Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 1, Definitions and Axioms.
  - Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 4, Definitions and Axioms.
  - Spinoza, *Letter 9*.

- Optional background reading: Lin, “Spinoza’s Starting Points”; Melamed, “The Building-Block of Spinoza’s Metaphysics”.
2. Substance Monism
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p1–1p14.
    - Smith, “Spinoza, Gueroult, and Substance”.
    - Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Substance Monism”.
    - Optional background reading: Garrett, “Spinoza’s Ontological Argument” and “Postscript”.
  3. Mode Pluralism
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p15–1app, Letter on the Infinite.
    - Shein, “Causation and Determinate Existence of Finite Modes in Spinoza”.
    - Primus, “Spinoza’s Monism I” & “Spinoza’s Monism II”.
    - Optional: Primus, “Spinoza’s ‘Infinite Modes’ Reconsidered”.
  4. Parallelisms; The Theory of Body
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2def1–2postulates. Also review 3p2.
    - Douglas, “*Quatenus* and Spinoza’s Monism”
    - Garrett, “The Indiscernibility of Identicals and the Transitivity of Identity in Spinoza’s Logic of the Attributes”.
    - Hübner, “Spinoza on the Limits of Explanation”.
    - Peterman, “Spinoza on Extension”
  5. The Theory of Ideas
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p14–2p49.
    - Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, Chapter 3–6. I know this is a lot. Essential is Chapter 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4. Also try to read Chapter 6, it’s OK to skip ahead to it.
    - Renz, “Spinoza’s Epistemology”.
  6. Conatus
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3pref–3p13. Also review 1app.
    - Garrett, “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument”.
    - Hübner, “The trouble with Feelings, or Spinoza on the Identity of Power and Essence”
    - Carriero, “Spinoza on Final Causality”.
  7. Affections
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p14–3da.
    - Jaquet, “The Definition of ‘Affect’ in *Ethics* III”.
    - Steinberg, “Affect, Desire, and Judgement in Spinoza’s Account of Motivation”.
  8. Reason
    - Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4.

- Kisner, “Spinoza’s Model of Human Nature: Rethinking the Free Man”.
- Rutherford, “Spinoza and the Dictates of Reason”.
- Carlisle, “Spinoza’s *Acquiescentia*”.

9. Eternity

- Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5.
- Matheron, “Eternal Life and the Body According to Spinoza”.
- Garrett, “Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body and the Part of the Mind that is Eternal”.