

# Philosophy 57200: Spinoza's *Ethics*

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**Course Time:** Thursday, 9:30 am–12:20 pm, on Zoom!

**Office Hours:** All office hours for this course will be by appointment. But please make appointments, I literally have nothing to do.

**Summary:** An in-depth study of the first half of Benedict Spinoza's major work, the *Ethics*. This course will work through some of the important topics, particularly Spinoza's substance monism, the status of the modes, the nature of causation, Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, the features of extension and thought, Spinoza's account of essence, and idealist readings of Spinoza. A particular emphasis will be put on developments in the most recent literature on Spinoza's thought.

**Texts:** Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. Matthew J. Kisner (Cambridge, 2018), is available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op. I will also post a pdf of it on Canvas so you can have digital access, since I recognize the Co-Op might be a little bit out of the way. Curley's translation is also very good, and available for free from the library: <http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default>. If you would like to consult the Latin or Dutch texts, you can use this website: <https://ethics.spinozism.org/text.php>. It also has a quite old English translation; I would only recommend using this to help orient yourself.

**Term Paper:** Students enrolled in the class for credit will be required to complete a 15–20 page term paper, due on 6/12 at 5 pm (6/5 for graduating seniors). All students taking the course for credit are **required** to meet with me to discuss their paper.

**Presentations:** Each student, including auditors, will be expected to make one presentation over the course of the quarter. I will ask you to make a 8-10 minute presentation on one of our readings for the day, concluding with some possible discussion questions. I will ask you to meet with me digitally before your presentation so we can discuss it. I will model such a presentation in the first class of the quarter.

## Policy Statements

1. Late Papers and Extensions: For each day that a paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade. Late papers will only be accepted up to four days after the assignment is due. I have made the paper deadlines as late as possible for you to have the most time to complete the assignments, therefore, I will *not* be able to grant any extensions.
2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. It is also your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable pdf for all paper assignments.

3. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
4. Auditing: Auditing will be permitted in this class. However, it is my expectation that, with the exception of the term paper, auditors will be full participants in the class. The digital format will already be difficult to manage, and it's important that everyone who joins the course is committed to being fully engaged.

**Tentative Schedule:**

1. 4/9: Definitions, axioms: Please read the file in Canvas *before* class.
  - Optional: Lin, Spinoza's Starting Points
  - Extra Optional: Melamed, The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics
2. 4/16: Substance: 1p1–14
  - Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, Chapter 2.1–3
  - Smith, Spinoza, Gueroult, and Substance
  - Optional: Schechtman, The Allegedly Cartesian Roots of Spinoza's Monism
  - Extra Optional: Carriero, Monism in Spinoza
3. 4/23: Modes: 1p15–36, Letter 12, Letter 64
  - Primus, Spinoza's "Infinite Modes" Reconsidered
  - Douglas, *Quatenus* and Spinoza's Monism
  - Optional: Shein, Causation and Determinate Existence of Finite Modes
  - Extra Optional: Lin, *Being and Reason*, Chapter 5: "Modes"
4. 4/30: Causation: Skim Part 2; Letter 64
  - Wilson, Spinoza's Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4)
  - Hübner, On the Significance of Formal Causes in Spinoza's Metaphysics
  - Optional: Morrison, The Relation Between Conception and Causation in Spinoza's Metaphysics
  - Extra Optional: Sangiacomo and Nachtomy, Spinoza's Rethinking of Activity, §3
5. 5/7: Parallelism: Part 2 through 2p13
  - Shein, The False Dichotomy between Subjective and Objective Interpretations of Spinoza's Theory of Attributes
  - Lin, *Being and Reason*, Chapter 4
  - Optional: Garrett, The Indiscernibility of Identicals and the Transitivity of Identity in Spinoza's Logic of the Attributes
  - Extra Optional: Hübner, Spinoza's Thinking Substance and the Necessity of Modes
6. 5/14: Extension & Mind-Body Relations: 2p13–2p49; Letter 83
  - Peterman, Spinoza on Extension
  - Hübner, Spinoza on Intentionality, Materialism, and Mind-Body Relations
  - Recommended: Schmaltz, The Metaphysics of the Material World, Chapter 7.1.2, pp. 232–237
  - Optional: Wilson, Objects, Ideas, and "Minds": Comments on Spinoza's Theory of Mind
7. 5/21: Thought: Review 2p14–2p49
  - Barry, Spinoza and the Logical Limits of Mental Representation
  - Primus, *Scientia Intuitiva* in the *Ethics*
  - Optional: Della Rocca, The Power of an Idea
8. 5/28: Conatus & Teleology: Part 3
  - Garrett, Spinoza's Conatus Argument
  - Hübner, The Trouble with Feelings, or Spinoza on the Identity of Power and Essence
  - Optional: Carriero, Spinoza on Final Causality
9. 6/4: Idealism
  - Della Rocca, The Elusiveness of the One and the Many in Spinoza: Substance,

Attribute, and Mode

- Renz, Finite Subjects in the *Ethics*
- Optional: Melamed, Why Spinoza is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists)
- Extra Optional: Silverman, Monism and Number: A Case Study in the Development of Spinoza's Philosophy

*6/12: Term paper due, 5 pm. Deadline will be 6/5 for graduating seniors.*