

## **Spinoza's Metaphysics** **Fall 2017**

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Cross-listed as  
Columbia: GR9670: Topics in Early Modern Philosophy  
NYU: PHIL-GA 2320.001: History of Philosophy: Selected Topics

### ***Topic***

Spinoza's metaphysics integrates substance monism (that there is only one substance), necessitarianism (that every state of affairs is metaphysically necessary), pantheism (that God and its states exhaust reality), incremental naturalism (that crucial explanatory aspects of human life such as intentionality and consciousness have a natural basis that is present at least in rudimentary form throughout all of nature), panpsychism (that everything has a mind), and the principle of sufficient reason (that there is a fully sufficient reason for every state of affairs). Even if one disagrees with his conclusions, Spinoza provides a helpful model for studying the interactions among these views, such as whether one can accept the principle of sufficient reason while rejecting necessitarianism, or whether one can accept incremental naturalism while rejecting panpsychism. Spinoza's metaphysics also broadens our philosophical imagination by forcing us to engage with views that at first seem absurd but on closer examination are plausible and attractive, such as substance monism and panpsychism.

In this seminar, we will try to reconstruct Spinoza's metaphysics in a systematic way accessible to those without a background in the history of philosophy. Towards this end, we will frequently compare Spinoza's views to contemporary views. The primary text will be the first two parts of Spinoza's *Ethics* (approximately 65 pages).

### ***Requirements***

Seminar members enrolled for credit have two options:

- (a) Write two short papers, each approximately 3000-4000 words in length, one on a topic related to *Ethics* Part 1 and one on a topic related to *Ethics* Part 2. The first short paper is due on Monday, November 6; the second short paper is due on Friday, December 22. Students may also expand the first short paper into a longer second paper.
- (b) Write one long paper of approximately 6000-8000 words on a topic related to *Ethics* Part 1 and/or Part 2. The long paper is due on Friday, December 22.

Whichever option is chosen, each paper should defend a definite interpretive and/or philosophical thesis and should demonstrate familiarity with the secondary literature included on the syllabus (below) that is relevant to the specific topic of the paper. Seminar members must submit a one-page proposal for each paper, describing a thesis and a possible line of argument for it, at least ten days before the paper submission deadline (i.e., October 27 for the first short paper, December 12 for the second short paper or the long paper). The papers or paper will determine the course grade.

**Office Hours**

John Morrison: Fridays 11:30-12:30, and by appointment  
Milbank 326b

Don Garrett: Mondays 4:00-5:00, Thursdays 11:00-noon, and by appointment  
5 Washington Place, Room 604

**Texts**

The seminar will use Edwin Curley's translation of the *Ethics*. This is available in a compact inexpensive paperback Penguin edition (for sale at the NYU Bookstore) or in hardback and Kindle editions (together with other works and scholarly material) in Volume 1 of *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton University Press). The entirety of this latter work, including the *Ethics*, is also accessible online as a searchable electronic resource as part of the "Continental Rationalists" collection in *Intelix: Past Masters* through the Columbia and NYU university libraries.

Other readings will be available through a shared Dropbox folder as well as (usually) through the Columbia and NYU university libraries.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

\* = optional reading (historically oriented)

+ = optional reading (contemporary metaphysics)

**September 6: Introduction** (attend your home institution for this meeting)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00, 12:10-2:00

**September 13: Spinoza's Concept of Substance** (Morrison)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part I: Definitions and Axioms

Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* Part I: Sections 51-64

Pasnau and Shields, *Philosophy of Aquinas*, Chapter 3

\* Lin, "Substance, Attribute, and Mode in Spinoza"

+ Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole"

**September 20: Arguments for Substance Monism** (Garrett)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part I: Propositions 1-14

Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument"

Garrett, "Ethics Ip5: Shared Attributes and the Basis of Spinoza's Monism"

\* Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism"

**September 27: Finite Modes and Individuation** (Garrett)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part I: Proposition 15

*Ethics* Part II: Axioms and Lemmas between Propositions 13 and 14

Bennett, "One Extended Substance"

\* Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation"

+ Schaffer, "Spacetime, the One Substance"

**October 4: Essences and Infinite Modes** (Morrison)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part I: Propositions 21-26

*Ethics* Part II: Proposition 9

Garrett, "Spinoza on the Essence of the Human Body..."

\* Ward, "Spinoza on the Essences of Modes"

\* Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Chapter 4

**October 11: Necessitarianism** (Garrett)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part I: Propositions 16-36 and Appendix

Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism"

\* Curley and Walski, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered"

\* Lin, "Rationalism and Necessitarianism"

+ Dasgupta, "Metaphysical Rationalism"

**October 18: Free Will and Epistemic Possibilities** (Morrison)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics*, Part I: Propositions 28-33

*Ethics*, Part II: Propositions 48-49

*Ethics*, Part III: Proposition 2, Definitions 2-3

*Ethics*, Part IV: Definitions 3-4

\* Melamed, "The Causes of Our Belief in Free Will"

+ Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will*, Chapter 5

**October 25: Mind-Body Identity** (Morrison)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00

*Ethics* Part II: Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-13

\* Marshall, "The Mind and the Body as 'One and the Same Thing' in Spinoza"

\* Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind Body Problem*, Chapter 7-8

**November 1: Intentionality** (Garrett)

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00

*Ethics* Part II: Propositions 14-36

*Ethics* Part III: Preface, Postulates, Propositions 4-8

Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and 'Minds': Comments on Spinoza's Theory of Mind"

\* Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind Body Problem*, Chapters 3-4

\* Garrett, "Representation, Misrepresentation, and Error in Spinoza's Philosophy of Mind"

+ Rupert, "Causal Theories of Mental Content"

**November 8: Consciousness** (Morrison & Garrett)

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00

*Ethics* Part III: Propositions 9-11

*Ethics* Part V: Proposition 39

Garrett, "Representation and Consciousness in Spinoza's Naturalistic Theory of the Imagination"

\* Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness"

+ Chalmers, "Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism"

**November 15: Kinds of Knowledge** (Garrett)

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00

*Ethics* Part II: Propositions 37-47Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of *Scientia Intuitiva*"\* Soyarslan, "The Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*"**November 22:** No class—Thanksgiving Holiday**November 29: Affirmation and Belief** (Garrett)

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00

Descartes, *Meditations*, Fourth Meditation*Ethics* Part II: Propositions 48-49

Steinberg (D.), "Belief, Affirmation, and the Doctrine of Conatus in Spinoza"

Steinberg (J.), "Two Puzzles Concerning Spinoza's Conception of Belief"

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

+ Gilbert, "How Mental Systems Behave"

**December 6: God's Attributes** (Morrison)

Columbia, Philosophy Hall 716, 12:10-2:00

Lin, *Being and Reason*, Chapter 4**December 13: Identity over Time** (Morrison)

NYU, 5 Washington Place, Room 202, 11:00-1:00 (optional for Columbia students)

Morrison, "Descartes and Spinoza on Numerical Identity and Time"

Morrison, "Three Medieval Aristotelians on Numerical Identity and Time"