

Spinoza: The Geometry of Freedom

Code:	
Term:	Spring/Fall
ECTS credits:	6
Lessons per week:	90 + 90 min
Language:	Slovak/Eng.
Instructor:	James Griffith
Form of study:	lecture+seminar

Prerequisites

None

Course Objectives

This course focuses on a single text, *Ethics* by Spinoza. We will read this short, but seminal book in its entirety. This book is probably the most radical of the innumerable seventeenth-century adaptations of the methodologies that had been developing in mathematics over the previous century for metaphysical and ethical concerns. Such adaptations are essential for what is known as early modern philosophy (roughly, 1500-1789), but also for the development of the modern world in more general terms.

Contents

Themes and Readings involved

Spinoza takes this geometrical and algebraic approach to questions of God, nature, the mind, the emotions, and society in the most intense and explicit fashion. Because of this relationship to both mathematics and metaphysics, reading *Ethics* requires some background. To that end, we will begin the course with a brief introduction to ancient geometry by reading Euclid and the introductory chapter to Reviel Netz's *The Transformation of Mathematics in the Early Mediterranean World* to gain a sense of how mathematics was practiced and thought in ancient Greece. We will then turn to Aquinas to get a handle on the medieval metaphysical vocabulary that is also essential for understanding Spinoza, and then to a portion of Descartes' *Replies* to objections given for his *Meditations on First Philosophy* for Spinoza's most

immediate and important precursor. After these readings, we will examine his *Ethics* exclusively and closely.

Obligatory Readings

Primary Sources

Aquinas, Thomas, "On Being and Essence," in *Medieval Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary*, ed. Gyula Klima with Fritz Allhoff and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), ISBN: 978-1-405-13565-8.

Descartes, René, *Objections and Replies*, tr. John Cottingham, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ISBN: 978-0521288088.

Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, tr. Sir Robert Heath, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), ISBN: 978-0486600888.

Netz, Reviel, *The Transformation of Mathematics in the Early Mediterranean World: From Problems to Equations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ISBN: 978-0521829960.

Spinoza, Baruch de, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, and Selected Letters*, tr. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), ISBN: 978-0872201309.

Secondary Sources

Supplementary Readings and Sources

Bagby, John, Calvin Morooney, and Ben Shippee, "Mapping Spinoza's *Ethics*," <http://ethica.bc.edu/#/>.

Balibar, Etienne, *Spinoza and Politics*, tr. Peter Snowdon (New York: Verso Press, 1998).

Deleuze, Gilles, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, tr. Martin Joughin (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1990).

Garrett, Don, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Gatens, Moira, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

Irigaray, Luce, "The Envelope," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, tr. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

- Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, tr. George di Giovanni (Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).
- Koistinen, Olli, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Leibniz, G.W.F., "Comments on Spinoza's Philosophy," in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and tr. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, Inc., 1989).
- Lord, Beth, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
- Nadler, Steven, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Negri, Antonio, *Subversive Spinoza*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).
- , *The Savage Anomaly and the Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
- Van Bunge, Wiep, et al., eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).
- Yovel, Yirmiyahu, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics, Ethica I* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991).
- , *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind, Ethica II* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1993).
- , *Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist, Ethica III* (New York: Little Room Press, 2000).
- Yovel, Yirmiyahu, and Gideon Segal, eds., *Spinoza on Reason and the Free Man, Ethica IV* (New York: Little Room Press, 2004).

Evaluation Criteria

40% Writing work – essays (5 -6 short essays (400-500 words), 1–2 should be longer (1000-1200 words))

30% Active participation on classes, class discussions, class preparation

30% Short tests in class

Instructor is expected to provide a midterm evaluation.

Course Evaluation (%)

A – excellent:	100-93%,
B – very good:	92-84%,
C – good:	83-74%,
D – satisfactory:	73-63%,
E – sufficient:	62-51%,

Fx – fail: 50-0%.

Passing a course assumes that student was not absent at more than 4 lessons.