

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL*4400*01: SPINOZA'S *ETHICS* [Shirley trans. – Hackett] Fall 2015

Instructor: K. Dorter (kdorter@uoguelph.ca, phone x53218)

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30 to 1:30 (MACK 353)

Also see “COA Standard Statements” (Courselink).

A seminar course on Spinoza's *Ethics*. Depending on enrolment, students will be responsible for two expository seminars or essays of about 25 pages each. Regular attendance is important to give the person presenting the seminar an audience and to create continuity of discussion, and because there's no final exam. Students who don't attend regularly will have to write a final exam. **Essays are due at the beginning of the seminar.** The essay serves two functions: 1) As a backup in case the person scheduled to give the seminar is unavailable. 2) To provide a second person who studied the material carefully and can help forward the discussion. So obviously the essay has to be finished by the beginning of class. And otherwise you'd have the unfair advantage of hearing the seminar and discussion before writing your essay, unless you stayed away from class, which wouldn't be a good thing either. **If you miss the deadline you'll have to choose a later topic.**


The essays should be written as if they were seminars because the essay writer will also be the backup for the seminar in case the scheduled presenter can't make it. The first priority should be a careful explication of the text. **The primary objective is to understand Spinoza as fully as possible**, so don't worry about criticizing what he says until you've given it as sympathetic a reading as possible. That doesn't mean you should read him uncritically, but only that you should start by giving him the benefit of the doubt. If his claims seem problematic, first investigate the possibility that the problem lies with your understanding of his arguments rather than with the arguments themselves. If you start by assuming that the problem is his, you won't have any incentive to probe more deeply, whereas if you start by assuming that he has an answer that you haven't discovered yet, you may discover one.

Work through the text on your own before you look at secondary sources. That way you'll be able to approach the commentaries with a point of view of your own. If you read the commentaries first you'll be coming to the text with preconceived ideas that color your reading. Consult Nadler and at least one other of the five commentaries on reserve.

The seminars needn't be anything more than essays read aloud. Even if you'd rather just speak from notes it's a good idea to write it out in detail and then reduce it to notes, rather than trying to flesh it out for the first time in class, because there are always going to be surprises. The grade will be based only on the content of the seminar (and response to questions) not on presentation, so you don't have to worry about giving any kind of performance.

Seminars should work through the text in order, so that it's easy for the audience to know where you are. Don't expect to read straight through to the end. It's better to be interrupted for questions and discussion.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

DATE		TEXT SELECTION	SEMINAR	ESSAY
	Sep 14	INTRODUCTION	DORTER	
1	21	Part I to proposition 23	Will O'Shea	
2	28	proposition 24 to end of Part I		
3	Oct 05	Part II to proposition 18		
	12	 THANKSGIVING BREAK		
4	19	proposition 19 to 47		Will O'Shea
5	26	proposition 48 to Part III prop 10		
6	Nov 02	Part III proposition 11 to 38		
7	09	proposition 39 to 59 (p141)		
8	16	Definition of Emotions (p141) to Part IV prop 15		
9	23	Part IV proposition 16 to 51		
10	30	proposition 52 to end of IV		
11	Dec 04	Part V from beginning to end		

COMMENTARIES ON RESERVE

Allison, Henry. *Benedict de Spinoza : an introduction* (B 3998.A42 1987)

Curley, Edwin. *Behind the Geometrical Method : a reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (B 3974.C87)

Della Rocca, Michael. *Spinoza* (B3998 .D45 2008)

Donagan, Alan. *Spinoza* (B 3998.D66)

Nadler, Steven. *Spinoza's Ethics : an introduction* (B3974 .N28 2006)*

* Required.