



***PHI 791–Reading Seminar in Philosophy***  
**Course Outline – Fall 2013**  
**Day : Monday, 4:30 – 7:20, Johnson 103**

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## **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the course is to offer students a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of Spinoza. Discussions will aim, in particular, at weighing the complexities of Spinoza's relation to the philosophical tradition (above all to Aristotle, Descartes, and Hobbes), at appreciating his impact on the development of subsequent modern philosophy (on Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, for example), and at the novelty of his philosophical method.

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE**

We will pursue our general objective by reading, as closely and carefully as time permits, Spinoza's masterwork – the *Ethics*. It lays out a metaphysics, a theology, an epistemology, a theory of mind, and a detailed description of imaginative/emotional life, political and moral activity that addresses virtually all of philosophy's traditional questions.

## **CONTENTS**

In the first of our meetings, we will establish both the broad and narrow dimensions of the historical stage upon which the *Ethics* makes its appearance. Thereafter our work will take the following form: i) I will begin each meeting with some summary remarks on materials covered in the preceding session – occasionally responding directly to questions raised by members of the seminar. ii) My summary will be followed by several presentations by members of the seminar on new texts (i.e. sections of the *Ethics*. iii) We will then discuss questions broached by our presenters or by others in the group. Proceeding this way, we will see the arguments in question from three perspectives more or less simultaneously.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates	Description
September 9	Course administration, assignment of seminars, remarks on the philosophical/historical context of Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i>
September 16	Summary remarks, study of <i>Concerning God</i> , Definitions/Axioms, Propositions 1-21
September 23	Summary remarks, study of <i>Concerning God</i> , Propositions 22-36, Appendix
September 30	Summary remarks, study of <i>Nature and Origin of the Mind</i> , Definitions/Axioms, Propositions 1-23
October 7	Summary remarks, study of <i>Nature and Origin of the Mind</i> , Propositions 24-49
October 14	Thanksgiving
October 21	Summary remarks, study of <i>Origin and Nature of the Emotions</i> , Definitions/Postulates, Propositions 1-30
October 28	Summary remarks, study of <i>Origin and Nature of the Emotions</i> , Propositions 31-59
November 4	Summary remarks, study of <i>Of Human Bondage</i> , Definitions, Propositions 1-35
November 11	Summary remarks, study of <i>Of Human Bondage</i> , Propositions 36-73
November 18	Summary remarks, study of <i>Of the Power of the Intellect</i> , Axioms, Propositions 5-16
November 25	Summary remarks, study of <i>Of the Power of the Intellect</i> , Propositions 17-42
November 27	Summary remarks, conclusion

## COURSE EVALUATION

The mark for this course will be based on class seminars (40%), a substantial term paper (50%) and class participation (10%). Graduate students will be expected to supplement their own presentations and (when useful) those of others with brief comments on related texts and relevant secondary literature. Their final papers will be subject to all requirements of the shared Masters Program. The number of seminars will depend on course enrolment. I have divided our text for purposes of presentation and we will distribute the work equally among course members. While undergraduate seminar presentations need not themselves take the form of polished essays, members ought to feel called upon to do something more than summarize the arguments of the assigned texts. Appropriate procedures are discussed in more detail on the seminar guidelines accompanying this outline.

## REQUIRED TEXT

*Ethics*                      Spinoza