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PHI 511
SEMINAR: SPINOZA
Spring 2020

This course will focus on aspects of the philosophy of Spinoza. It is primarily directed at graduate students, but undergraduates with appropriate preparation and interest may be allowed to enroll as well, with the approval of the instructor. The main texts that we shall read are the *Ethics* and, to a certain extent, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), with some excerpts of other texts. This class will offer a serious reading of the *Ethics*, but our reading will be slanted towards understanding the *Ethics* as a foundation for his political theory. Our focus will be on the primary texts. However, some of the principal secondary material will be discussed from time to time.

The following books have been ordered at Labyrinths:

The Collected Works of Spinoza, vols. 1 and 2, ed. and trans. E.M. Curley
(Princeton: Princeton University Press)

There are other translations of both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* available, but I recommend that you use Curley's edition. The original language texts (mostly Latin) are available through the Princeton University Library website on "Past Masters" database, under the title "Spinoza Opera". Volume I of Curley is also available on the "Past Masters" under the title "Continental Rationalists."

Students typically earn credit by attending class sessions and writing a term paper, completing a take-home final exam, with or without an oral exam, or by some other project. For those who would like to take this course for credit, or, if you are a graduate student in Philosophy and want to get a unit for your work in the course, please see me, and we will arrange an appropriate final exercise, based on your interests and your level of preparation. All students participating in the course will be expected to do at least one short in-class presentation of roughly ten to fifteen minutes. For graduate students in Philosophy this can count toward the "in seminar presentation" requirement.

Below are the tentative readings for the term. They may be altered as we go. Before each class, I will send you a long note, with some indication of how to approach the readings and what the emphasis in class will be.

TENTATIVE CLASS TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1: Introduction: Spinoza's ethical and metaphysical project (**Feb. 4**)

Readings: For general background, begin by reading these short excerpts:

Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect §§ 1-14 (Curley I, pp. 7-11); Letter 32 (Curley II, pp. 18-22); *Ethics* Part I, Appendix (Curley I, pp. 439-446); E2p40s2

- (Curley I, pp. 477-78). After you have had a look at those, then go back and begin to read the beginning of *Ethics* I.
- Week 2: Fundamental ontological principles: God, substance, and eternity (**Feb. 11**)
Readings: E1, defs., axioms, and p1-15; E2p7. Supplementary: Letters 9 and 12 (Curley I, pp. 193-96, 200-5).
- Week 3: Fundamental ontological principles: modes, temporality, and necessitarianism (**Feb. 18**)
Readings: E1p15-35; *Short Treatise* part I, chaps. 8-9 (Curley I, pp. 91-92); Letters 63-64 (Curley II, pp. 435-39).
- Week 4: Minds and bodies (**Feb. 25**)
Readings: E2p1-15 (including the “Short Physical Treatise” in Curly I, pp. 258-62.)
- Week 5: Knowledge of self, knowledge of others (**March 3**)
Reading: E2p16-40
- Week 6: Knowledge, will, and eternity (**March 10**)
Reading: E2p41-49.
- FALL BREAK (**March 17**)
- Week 7: Conatus and the affects (**March 24**)
Reading: E3pref. and p1-11. E3, definitions of the affects I-VII (Curley I, pp. 531-33); E3, general definition of the affects (Curley I, pp. 542-43)
- Week 8: Progressing toward greater perfection: sociability (**March 31**)
Reading: E4, pref. and p1-36; *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP) 5.18-22 (Curley II, pp. 143-44); TTP 16 (Curley II, pp. 282-96).
- Week 9: The Free Man (**April 7**)
Reading: E4, pref. and p37-73; E5p10s; *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* §§ 1-14 (Curley I, pp. 7-11).
- Week 10: Beatitude: salvation through reason (**April 14**)
Reading: E5.
- Week 12 Superstition, popular religion, and beatitude on the cheap(er): (**April 21**)
Reading: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP), preface, chaps 1-6 and 14; TTP 16, adn. XXXII (Curley II, p. 289).
- Week 13: Revelation, reason, and the freedom of thought and expression (**April 28**)
Reading: TTP, pref., chaps. 15, 19-20.