

Philosophy 404: Spinoza

Simon Goldstein
Fall semester 2013-14
TTh 1.10-2.30 pm
Hardenbergh* Hall – A3, College Avenue Campus

*Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh, like Spinoza, was Dutch. Like Spinoza, he died of tuberculosis.

Course Description

The course will study Spinoza's **metaphysics** and **philosophy of mind**. Our main text is Part 1 and Part 2 of *The Ethics*. Our secondary text is *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* by Jonathan Bennett. We will consider Spinoza's answers to questions like:

what is a substance?
how many substances exist?
what is the relation between objects and their properties?
what is the relation between mind and body?

(Note: this course will not contain any discussion of ethics! That is just the name of Spinoza's book.)

Learning Goals

The first goal of this class is to learn how to construct and critically engage with valid philosophical arguments. The second goal of this class is to learn about Spinoza's metaphysics and philosophy of mind.

Reading

There are two required readings for the course:

Spinoza's Ethics (E)
Translated by Curley
ISBN 0140435719
Penguin Classics
2005 Edition

A Study of Spinoza's Ethics (SSE)
Jonathan Bennett
0915145839
Hackett Publishing
2nd edition

The Ethics is very short and very difficult. So it is imperative that you also by *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, since that is merely short and difficult. The readings are extremely short. So it is imperative that you **reread** them many times.

In addition, we will read a few essays that will be uploaded to Sakai.

Assessment (subject to change)

Course grade is a function of course participation plus four short essays. Each essay has the same form:

A four page essay focusing on one argument in Spinoza. This will be an argument for one of Spinoza's propositions. For example, 1p5 / **No Shared Attributes**.

Each essay will have two parts:

A. The essay will begin with a one-two page section consisting of two parts:

(i) a reconstruction of Spinoza's discussion as a valid argument with indented, numbered premises. After each numbered premise of the argument, you must cite in brackets any other premise used to justify this premise. The justification must be transparent, or must be given separately.

(ii) an explanation of your valid, numbered argument in prose.

B. The remaining two-three pages of the essay will contain **only** your original arguments for or against the numbered premises in (i), or against the claim that the conclusion follows from the premises. Ideally, these original arguments will also be presented in the same format as (i) and (ii).

After the submission of each essay, each student will meet with me and will prepare a new version based on the feedback.

Guidelines for the essays:

1. **No essays will be accepted that are not in this format.**
2. **No part of an essay will be read that does not conform to this format.**

In particular, this means that I will not read objections to Spinoza's conclusions that do not object to either (a) his premises; or (b) the claim that the conclusion follows from his premises.

3. **Your reconstruction in (i) must be distinct from any reconstruction on one of the course handouts.**

Attendance

Missing more than three classes is grounds for an automatic failure in the class, unless given special permission by me. Each absence after the first absence from class will result in a 3% deduction from one's final grade, unless given special permission by me.

Contact / Office Hours

My email address is simon.d.goldstein@gmail.com

My office hours are TBD at 106 Somerset St, fifth floor, my office (# on door of department).

Preliminary Schedule (subject to change: each topic should take approximately 1 week)

Topic 1: Two Themes - Rationalism and Dualism

Chapter 2 of *SSE*

Part 1 of *E*: Appendix

Topic 2: Substance

Part 1 of *E*: Definition, Axioms, 1p1-6, 1p11d2

Sections 1-2 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* pp 144-147 (Sakai)

Section 15 (pp 55-60) of *SSE*

Topic 3: Attributes

Part 1 of *E*: 1d3-6, 1p5, 1p10

Part 2 of *E*: 2d2

Section 3 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* pp 147-49 (Sakai)

Section 15 (pp 55-60) of *SSE*

Topic 4: Modes

Part 1 of *E*: 1d5, 1p25 (focus on 1p25c)

Section 4 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* pp 149-end (Sakai)

Topic 5: No Shared Attribute (no two substances share an attribute)

Part 1 of *E*: 1d3, 1d5, 1p1, 1p2, 1p4, **1p5**, **1p8s2**, 1p9, 1p14

Section 17 (pp 66-70) of *SSE*

Section 2.1 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* (Sakai)

Topic 6: God (every substance exists necessarily; every substance has every attribute)

Part 1 of *E*: 1d1, 1a7, **1p7**, 1p7d, 1p8s2, **1p11**, 1p11d2, 1p11d3,

Section 2.1 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* (Sakai)

Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 219f (Sakai)

Lin, *Spinoza's Arguments for the Existence of God* (Sakai)

Topic 7: Monism (only one substance exist)

Part 1 of *E*: 1p12-14, **1p14d**,

Section 2.2 of Lin, *Substance, Attribute, and Mode* (Sakai)

Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 219f (Sakai)

Topic 8: Extension (extended bodies are modes)

Topic 9: Parallelism between mind and body (“the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things”)

Part 2 of *E*: Definitions, Axioms, 2p1-7

Topic 10: Mode Identity (every body x is identical to the idea of x)

Part 2 of *E*: 2p7s

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The end!