

Philosophy 31091(001) Philosophers in Depth: Baruch Spinoza
Part I: Syllabus Material Unique to PHIL 31091

Spring 2025
MW 3:45-5:00
Bowman 315

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Office Hours: MW 10:30-11:00, MW 12:15-2:15, and by appointment

Course Description: This course examines the life and philosophical beliefs of Baruch Spinoza, focusing on his monumental *Ethics*. The course begins with the historical background that may have informed Spinoza's philosophical writings. The course then examines in depth his methodology, philosophical views on substance monism, the nature of God and organized religion, the mind-body problem, free will, the nature of human emotions, and the possibility of human happiness and an ethical life. What does Spinoza's substance monism mean for pantheism, and our relationship with God? How do we reconcile his views of the determined and necessary nature of the world with our obligations to lead a good and happy life?

Course Objectives: Students will be able to present and object to several elements of Spinoza's philosophical arguments in *The Ethics*. In its capacity as a writing-intensive course, students will undertake several writing exercises designed to improve the clarity and completeness of their writing on philosophy.

Writing Intensive Element: Philosophy 31091 is a writing-intensive course (WIC), designed to fulfill the WIC requirements for the Philosophy Major. All WIC courses must be upper-division, include content beyond guidance on writing, include a substantial amount of writing, and include at least one assignment which includes substantial feedback before grading occurs. Information about WIC requirements can be found here: <https://provostdata.kent.edu/roadmapweb/06/wic-guidelines.pdf>

The point of WIC courses is for students to improve their own writing. As such, generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT may not be used for any assignments in this course. As specified below this course employs electronic submission via Canvas, which will utilize Turnitin to detect plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. Turnitin will also attempt to detect AI-generated text.

Text:

The Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters, Baruch Spinoza, translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Seymour Feldman, Hackett Publishing Company (Indianapolis, IN), 1992 – Henceforth *Ethics*

Hand-outs may also be made available via Canvas during the course.

Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoint presentations, notes, quizzes, examinations) by the professor remains the intellectual property of the professor. This means that students may not distribute, publish, or

provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor. Additionally, students may not distribute or publish recordings and/or links to live classroom presentations, lectures, and/or class discussions.

Your grade will be based on your performance on the following:

Short Discussion Papers. Students will be assigned 5 short (1-2 page) discussion papers over the course of the semester. You will receive the short assignment the class before the paper is due; typically the assignment will be available on Wednesday and the paper will be due the following Monday by class time (except for the first assignment, which will be due on the following Tuesday).. All Discussion Papers will be submitted to Canvas and will be available for other students to read. Each Discussion Paper submission will be followed by an in-class discussion in which students will review the strength and persuasiveness of their peers' work, and respond to their peers' responses to their own work. Students cannot receive full credit for Short Discussion Papers unless they 1) complete the assignment, 2) hand in the assignment on time, and 3) are present for each Workshop. Discussion Papers will be evaluated based on both the student's work on their own paper (15 points total), on the student's oral feedback on other students' papers (10 points total) and on their responses to feedback on their own papers (5 points total). See the below schedule for due-dates and Workshop dates.

Final Paper. Students will be assigned a final paper which is expected to be between 8-10 pages. A one-paragraph proposal for the paper will be due on April 21. A full draft of the paper will be due on April 23rd. The final week of class will include a Workshop of students' papers. The final version of the paper will be due on May 5th, at 10:00 am (the end of the final exam period for this class).

All late assignments will lose one point per day late. Assignments that are handed in too late to be considered during Workshops will be ineligible for Workshop points.

Attendance and Participation. Since this is a small, seminar-sized class, attendance and participation are of the utmost importance. You cannot participate in class discussions or workshops without attendance. As such, attendance will be taken each day. Students will lose one point towards their attendance points for each day of class they have missed (unless the day missed is a Workshop day, in which case the points missed include missed Workshop points only).

Assignment	Point Total	Percentage of Final Grade
Short Paper #1 and Workshop	30	10%
Short Paper #2 and Workshop	30	10%
Short Paper #3 and Workshop	30	10%
Short Paper #4 and Workshop	30	10%
Short Paper #5 and Workshop	30	10%
Final Paper Proposal	15	5%
Final Paper Draft and Workshop	45	15%
Final Paper	60	20%
Attendance and Participation	30	10%
Totals:	300	100%

Grades will be assessed using the following scale:

Grade	Points	Percentage	Grade	Points	Percentage
A	300-276	100-92%	C	233-216	77.9-72%
A-	275-270	91.1-90%	C-	215-210	71.9-70%
B+	269-264	89.9-88%	D+	209-204	69.9-68%
B	263-246	87.9-82%	D	203-186	67.9-62%
B-	245-240	81.9-80%	D	186-180	61.9-60%
C+	239-234	79.9-78%	F	<179	<59.9%

Extra Credit. Students can receive 15 points of extra credit for coming to my office hours and staying for a substantial conversation. These extra-credit points can be used to make up for missed Workshop Days, but every student is eligible.

Class Schedule (subject to change with advance notice from the professor)

Week #1, January 13 and 15: Introduction, Biography of Baruch Spinoza

Ethics Introduction, pp 1-9

Week #2, January 22: How to Get the Most out of Writing Workshops

Guest Speaker: Andy Farkas, PhD

Associate Professor of Creative Writing, Fiction and English

Washburn University

Short Discussion Paper Due January 21

Workshop #1

Week #3, January 27 and 29: Ethics I, Definitions, Axioms, and Methodology

Translator's Preface, pp. 21-29

Ethics I Definitions 1-6, Axioms 1-7

Week #4, February 3 and 5: The Argument for Substance Monism

Ethics I, especially Propositions 1-14

Short Discussion Paper #2 Due February 3

Workshop #2 February 5

Week #5, February 10 and 12: Attributes and Modes

Ethics I, especially Propositions 1-10, 15-16, 19

Week #6, February 17 and 19: Determinism and Free Will

Ethics I, especially Propositions 16-36

Short Discussion Paper #3 Due February 17

Workshop #3 February 19

Week #7, February 24 and 26: God and Organized Religion

Ethics I, especially Appendix

Week #8, March 3 and 5: Spinoza – Atheist or Pantheist?

Ethics I; *Ethics* II, especially Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-9

SPRING BREAK March 10-14

Week #9, March 17 and 19: The Mind-Body Problem

Ethics II, especially Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-13; *Ethics III* especially Proposition 2

Discussion Paper #4 Due March 17

Workshop #4 March 19

Week #10, March 24 and 26: Mental Representation, Consciousness and Knowledge

Ethics II, especially Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 14-36 and 37-47; *Ethics III* especially Propositions 9-11

Week #11, March 31 and April 1: Mental Representation, Consciousness and Knowledge, continued

Ethics II, especially Propositions 14-36 and 37-47; *Ethics III* especially Propositions 9-11

Discussion Paper #5 Due March 31

Workshop #5 April 1

Week #12, April 7 and 9: The Emotions

Ethics III, especially Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 3-12, 53-59, and “Definition of the Emotions”

Week #13, April 14 and 16: On Human Bondage, Happiness and the Good

Ethics IV, especially Preface, Definitions, Propositions 1-41, 59

Paper Proposal Due April 14

Week #14, April 21 and 23: More on Happiness, the Good, and Immortality

Ethics IV, especially Proposition 67; *Ethics V*, especially Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 11-42

First Draft of Final Paper Due April 23

Week #15, April 28 and 30: In-Class SSIs, Workshop of Final Paper Drafts, Review

Final Paper Due: Exam: Monday, May 5th, 10:00

**Part II: Syllabus Material Common to the College of Arts and Sciences and/or Kent State University
(in alphabetical order)**

Academic Complaints: The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-16 in the University Policy Register. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

Academic Dishonesty: University policy 3342-3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please

read the policy at

http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779

and/or ask.

Attendance: The university policy regarding attendance, 3-01.2 can be found at:

<http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-class-attendance-and-class-absence>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement: Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

Land Acknowledgment Statement: We acknowledge that the lands of Kent State University were the previous homes of people who were removed from this area without their consent by the colonial practices of the United States government. Before removal, these groups created networks that extended from Wyoming to the Florida Coast and Appalachia and to the northern reaches of Lake Superior. These societies included people of the Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, Delaware, Wyandots, Ottawa and Miami. We honor their lives – both past and present – and strive to move beyond remembrance toward reflection and responsibility through honest accounts of the past and the development of cultural knowledge and community.

Registration Deadlines: The official registration deadlines for this course can be found by doing a Detailed Class Search of the Schedule of Classes. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

Religion Accommodations Statement: The University welcomes individuals from all different faiths, philosophies, religious traditions, and other systems of belief, and supports their respective practices. In compliance with University policy and the Ohio Revised Code, the University permits students to request class absences for up to three (3) days, per term, in order to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or other religious or spiritual organization. Students will not be penalized as a result of any of these excused absences.

The request for excusal must be made, in writing, during the first fourteen (14) days of the semester and include the date(s) of each proposed absence or request for alternative religious accommodation. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities. The request must also provide the particular accommodation(s) you desire.

You will be notified by me if your request is approved, or, if it is approved with modification. I will work with you in an effort to arrange a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement. For more information regarding this Policy you may contact the Student Ombuds (ombuds@kent.edu).

The irony of including the above statement in a class about Spinoza is not lost on your professor.

Students with Disabilities: Kent State University is committed to inclusive and accessible education experiences for all students. University Policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to course content. Students with disabilities are encouraged to connect with Student Accessibility Services as early as possible to establish accommodations. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health, chronic medical conditions, or injuries), please let me know immediately. Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Contact Information: University Library, Suite 100; sas@kent.edu ; 330-672-3391; VP 330-968-0490; www.kent.edu/sas