

The Logic of Spinoza's *Ethics*

Johns Hopkins University, Spring 2018

Course Information

Instructors	Yitzhak Melamed Professor Philosophy Department Gilman 274 ymelame1@jhu.edu Office hours: M 10:00am-11:00am & by appt
	Justin Bledin Assistant Professor Philosophy Department Gilman 206 jbledin@jhu.edu Office hours: F 3:00pm-4:00pm & by appt
Class Code	AS.150.447
Class Time	F 10:00am-12:30pm
Class Location	Gilman 288

Course Description

A remarkable feature of Spinoza's major work, the *Ethics*, is its axiomatic structure. While much of modern mathematics turned to axiomatization, the *Ethics* is still the sole philosophical work which dared to claim such rigor. In this seminar, we will scrutinize Spinoza's axiomatic method, look carefully at some of the main arguments of the book, and attempt to present the opening of the *Ethics* in a precise formal manner.

Course-level Learning Goals

By the end of the course, you can expect to have a good knowledge of the logical structure of Part I of Spinoza's *Ethics* and of the nature of his axiomatic method. You will also have some experience reconstructing and formalizing some of the arguments of the *Ethics*. Philosophy courses in general—and this one is no exception—are likely to help your intellectual growth in a number of ways: you will be encouraged to develop your reflective abilities, your skills at scrutinizing arguments and presenting arguments for your own positions (both in writing and in discussion), and at anticipating and responding to counter-arguments to those positions.

Readings

Required texts for the course:

- Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. 1. Princeton UP, 1985.
- Secondary literature distributed in class and/or posted on Blackboard.

Recommended additional reading:

- Della Rocca, *Spinoza*. Routledge, 2008.
- Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*. Oxford UP, 2013.

Schedule

The following schedule projects the lectures over the course of the semester. It is subject to revision as the semester progresses.

Unit 1. Euclid's *Elements* & Peano Arithmetic

Class: Discussion of the beginning of book I of the *Elements* and of PA.

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, Ch. 2. Melamed, “Building Blocks of Spinoza’s Metaphysics”.

Unit 2. Descartes on the Use of Synthetic Method in Geometry & Philosophy

Class: Discussion of Descartes' Second Set of Replies (excerpt).

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I.

Unit 3. Spinoza's Early Axiomatic Writings

Class: Discussion of Selection of Descartes' Principles & Spinoza's Geometrical Presentation of this Selection. Discussion of Appendix I to the *Short Treatise*.

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I.

Unit 4. Spinoza on the Axiomatic Method

Class: Kinds of definitions-Let. 8, Let. 9 (IV/42-44); A definition explicates the essence of a thing-TdIE 95; CM I, i [I/234/26], Let. 9 (IV/42/30), Ep. 34 (IV/179/17); “So far we had no rules for DISCOVERING definitions”-TIE 107; Axiom relying on Proposition-E5a2; Definition may appear in middle of scholium-E5p25d on E2p40s; Definition = Essence = Nature-Let. 12 (IV/53/3-5); The axiom/common-notion from which we prove God’s existence must be incontrovertible-TTP Ch. 6 (S 75 & n. 6); If we connect these universal axioms/common-notions with God’s attributes, God’s nec. existence becomes clear to us-TTP Ch. 6 (S 240); Proof can rely either on sense-perception, or on self-evident intellectual axioms. Men prefer the former (which is easier to grasp)-TTP Ch. 5 (S 67).

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I. Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 211-218. Jarrett, “Logical Structure of Ethics, Part 1”.

Unit 5. Previous Attempts to Formalize the *Ethics*

Class: Discussion of Boole's *Laws of Thought* and Jarrett's "Logical Structure of Ethics, Part 1".

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I.

Unit 6. Formalizing the Definitions & Axioms of *Ethics*, Part I

Class: Discussion of this part of *Ethics*.

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I.

Unit 7. Formalizing E1p1-E1p4

Class: Discussion of this part of *Ethics*.

Read: Garrett, "Ethics E1p5".

Unit 8. Formalizing E1p5-E1p8

Class: Discussion of this part of *Ethics*.

Read: Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism".

Unit 9. Formalizing E1p9-E1p12

Class: Discussion of this part of *Ethics*.

Read: Melamed, "Spinoza's Mereology", Sect. 1.

Unit 10. Formalizing E1p13-E1p16

Class: Discussion of this part of *Ethics*.

Read: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I.

Requirements

There are three requirements for taking this course.

- Term paper, 20 pages double-spaced, due at the end of the semester (worth 70% of your final grade).
- Meeting to discuss your paper topic before you begin writing (worth 0% of your final grade but mandatory).
- Active participation in the seminar (worth 30% of your final grade).

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Do not plagiarize—if you are unsure what counts as *plagiarism*, ask! Students caught cheating may receive an F in the course and can face more serious consequences in extreme cases.

For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics:

[https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/
academic-ethics-undergraduates](https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates).

See also the e-catalog entry on the undergraduate academic ethics board:

<http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>

Disabilities

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain a letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410.516.4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu. Accommodations recommended by SDS will be implemented.

Mental Health

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage them to seek out these services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410.516.8278 and online at

<http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>

Enjoy the course!