

College of the Humanities  
HUMS 4902

**Spinoza's *Ethics***  
**Fall 2016**

Prof. Erik Stephenson  
Paterson Hall 2A57  
613-520-2600 ext. 3085  
erik.stephenson@carleton.ca  
Office hours: Tuesday, 10am to 12pm

**Seminar Description:**

This seminar will be devoted to the thorough study of Spinoza's *Ethics* – undoubtedly one of the greatest, most influential, most challenging, and most incendiary works in the history of philosophy. Published posthumously in 1677 – Spinoza having ultimately decided against its publication during his lifetime because of well-founded concerns for both his own safety and that of his circle of friends – the *Ethics* is a supremely systematic work on the Euclidean model that promises to lead its readers “by the hand, as it were”, from an account of the ultimate nature of reality and its causal order “to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness”. In other words, it is a work that seeks to demonstrate the character of the highest human good (or human salvation) and the means to its realization “in geometric order” on the basis of an exposition of all relevant metaphysical, epistemological, physical, and psychological truths. Such a project alone – the outgrowth of a mind steeped in classical Greco-Roman philosophy, but also heavily under Descartes' influence – would have struck some of Spinoza's more conservative readers as deeply problematic. But what ultimately earned Spinoza's *Ethics* such notoriety, and even got it banned, were the claims that began to circulate (even before its publication) regarding its more specific contents. For example, it was reported that: (1) its metaphysics affirms the ultimate collapse of any strong ontological distinction between God and his effects (i.e., the world or Nature as a whole); (2) its theory of mind involves the denial that humans are in possession of free will; (3) its psychological theory implies that we are fundamentally incapable of any purely altruistic act; (4) its moral theory reduces the good to what we desire (and evil to what we have an aversion to), and denies the adequacy of any knowledge of good and evil; and (5) its soteriology rejects the possibility of personal and/or bodily immortality. In carrying out a general, historically informed reading of the *Ethics*, we will seek to determine which of these claims (among others) can legitimately be ascribed to it

and in what precise sense. But we will also probe the soundness and tenability of those doctrines we determine should be attributed to it.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completing this course, students can expect to have achieved:

- A global understanding of Spinoza's *Ethics*;
- In-depth knowledge of a more circumscribed topic pertaining to the *Ethics*, as well as of the secondary literature related to this topic; and
- An awareness of Spinoza's principal philosophical sources, as well as of the history of the reception of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

They can also expect to have progressed in their ability to:

- Distil scholarly arguments and respond to them;
- Unpack and appraise complex philosophical arguments with an appreciation for how they fit into their historical context; and
- Develop original interpretations of (aspects of) a major philosophical work and defend them through rigorous exegesis, methodical scholarship, and sound argumentation.

### **Prerequisites:**

- Fourth-year standing in the Bachelor of Humanities program or special permission from the instructor.

### **Seminar meetings:**

- Fridays, 8:35 a.m. to 11:25 a.m.

### **Required Text:**

- Spinoza, Benedictus. *The Ethics*. Tr. & Ed. E. Curley. London: Penguin Classics, 1996.
- This work is available at Singing Pebble Books (206 Main Street, across from Saint-Paul's University and a few doors down from the Green Door restaurant; tel. 613-230-9165).
- There are other good translations of Spinoza's *Ethics*. I would just recommend avoiding the one by R.H.M. Elwes (which, alas, is the one that is commonly available for free on the Internet).

### **Grades:**

- Grades will be based solely on individual, academic merit as judged against absolute standards. They will not be adjusted to achieve a supposedly normal distribution or manipulated in any other way.
- Grades for the course will be based on the following:

(1) Class participation, for a total of 25% of the final mark;

- (2) One annotated bibliography with 10 entries, due on the final day of class, and worth 25% of the final mark
  - (3) One take-home examination, approximately 10 to 15 double-spaced pages in length, worth 50% of the final mark, due on the last day of the December examination period.
- I will distribute separate handouts describing my expectations for the two written assignments.
  - Your class participation mark will be on 25, and your grades for the annotated bibliography and take-home examination will be on 25 and 50, respectively. At the end of the course, you will be assigned a letter grade corresponding to your final percentage, according to the standard Carleton University grading scale (which can be found in the Undergraduate Calendar online here: <https://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/>).

#### **Course Requirements at a Glance:**

- To pass, you will have to regularly attend, and do the readings assigned for, the seminar meetings, as well as complete all of the course assignments, all unless formally excused by the instructor because of illness or some other legitimate reason. Failure to complete *all* of the course assignments and attend seminar sessions regularly will result in the grade 'FND'.

#### **Attendance:**

- The Bachelor of Humanities official policy on participation and attendance is the following: *"Attendance and participation are critical components of all courses in the Bachelor of Humanities program. As a result, a pattern of non-attendance may in and of itself constitute sufficient grounds for awarding a final course grade of 'F'.*
- This means that you must attend seminar meetings regularly or you will fail the course automatically. If you find yourself having to miss more than one or two sessions, you will have to justify your absences to the instructor. You will not be penalized if there are legitimate reasons for your repeated absences.
- Furthermore, it is your responsibility to stay on top of any materials covered, to find out about and obtain any materials distributed, and to enquire about any announcements made during seminar sessions you must miss for whatever reason.

**Submission Guidelines:**

- All written assignments for this course are to be uploaded to a file folder prepared for that purpose in cuLearn.
- Your assignment will be considered submitted when it is uploaded.
- All uploaded documents must be in MS Word (i.e., .doc or .docx) format. Documents in any other file format will not be considered submitted, and late penalties will accrue, until the MS Word document is submitted.
- Do not upload your document a second time in order to fix a minor issue since the second submission date and time will replace the original one. If you need to re-submit, do so by emailing the document to the instructor directly at erik.stephenson@carleton.ca

**Late Assignments:**

- Assignments will be docked 3% (or one third of a letter grade) for each calendar day after their due-date. Late penalties on assignments accompanied by a medical certificate or other proof of a legitimate reason for lateness will be adjusted accordingly.
- Late assignments will very quickly sink to a grade of 'F'. Hand in your assignments on time.
- Even an assignment that is so late it will merit a grade of 0%(F) must be completed or you will fail the course.

**Plagiarism:**

- Plagiarism is an academic offence. A professor who suspects a student has plagiarized an assignment is required to turn the matter over to the Dean. Students found guilty of plagiarism can receive a 0% for the assignment or a grade of 'F' for the whole course. In extreme cases, they can even be suspended or expelled from the university.
- In this course you will be required to consult secondary sources for both written assignments. However, if you use ideas or language from secondary sources in your assignments without citing those sources properly, you will have committed plagiarism, and I will have no choice but to hand over your work to the Dean for investigation.
- Submitting the same work as another student also constitutes plagiarism. Therefore, although I encourage you to help each other, if you hand in an assignment that is substantially the same as another student's, I will have to turn both of them in to the Dean to be investigated for plagiarism.
- Please read the full College policy on plagiarism, which can be found on the final page of this course syllabus.

**Meeting and Reading Schedule:**

1	9 September	Introduction: Spinoza's life, times, and philosophical project	<i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i> , paragraphs 1-18; pp. 3-12 in Curley
2	16 Sept.	Metaphysics I	<i>Ethics</i> I Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-20; pp.408-429 in Curley
3	23 Sept.	No class.	No required reading.
4	30 Sept.	Metaphysics II	EI Propositions 21-34 & Appendix.; pp. 429-446 in Curley
5	7 October	Epistemology I	EII Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-39; pp. 446-475 in Curley
6	14 Oct.	Epistemology II	EII Propositions 40-49; pp. 475-491 in Curley
7	21 Oct.	Psychology I	EIII Preface, Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-30; pp. 491-511 in Curley
8	4 Nov.	Psychology II	EIII Propositions 31-59 and Definitions of the Affects; pp. 512-543 in Curley
9	11 Nov.	Moral Theory I	EIV Preface, Definitions, Axioms, and Propositions 1-36; pp. 543-564 in Curley
10	18 Nov.	Moral Theory II	EIV Propositions 37-73 and Appendix; pp. 564-594 in Curley
11	25 Nov.	Soteriology I	EV Preface, Axioms, and Propositions 1-20; pp. 594-606 in Curley
12	2 December	Soteriology II	EV Propositions 21-42; pp. 607-617 in Curley

## REGULATIONS COMMON TO ALL HUMANITIES COURSES

### COPIES OF WRITTEN WORK SUBMITTED

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

### PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*”

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course

### GRADING SYSTEM

Letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100 (12)	B = 73-76 (8)	C - = 60-62 (4)
A = 85-89 (11)	B- = 70-72 (7)	D+ = 57-59 (3)
A- = 80-84 (10)	C+ = 67-69 (6)	D = 53-56 (2)
B+ = 77-79 (9)	C = 63-66 (5)	D - = 50-52 (1)

F	Failure. Assigned 0.0 grade points
ABS	Absent from final examination, equivalent to F
DEF	Official deferral (see “Petitions to Defer”)
FND	Failure with no deferred exam allowed -- assigned only when the student has failed the course on the basis of inadequate term work as specified in the course outline.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean.

### WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

The last date to withdraw from **FALL TERM** courses is **DEC. 9, 2016**. The last day to withdraw from **FALL/WINTER (Full Term)** and **WINTER** term courses is **APRIL 7, 2017**.

### REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at: [carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/](http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/)

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by **Nov. 11, 2016** for the Fall term and **March 10, 2017** for the Winter term. For more details visit the Equity Services website: [carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/](http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/)

### PETITIONS TO DEFER

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a **FINAL** assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply a deferral of examination/assignment. If you are applying for a deferral due to illness you will be required to see a physician in order to confirm illness and obtain a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination or assignment deadline. This supporting documentation must specify the date of onset of the illness, the degree of incapacitation, and the expected date of recovery.

If you are applying for a deferral for reasons other than personal illness, please [contact](#) the Registrar’s Office directly for information on other forms of documentation that we accept.

Deferrals of a final assignment or take home, in courses without a final examination, must be supported by confirmation of the assignment due date, for example a copy of the course outline specifying the due date and any documented extensions from the course instructor.

Deferral applications for examination or assignments must be submitted within **5 working days** of the original final exam.

### ADDRESSES: (Area Code 613)

College of the Humanities 520-2809	300 Paterson
Greek and Roman Studies Office 520-2809	300 Paterson
Religion Office 520-2100	2A39 Paterson
Registrar's Office 520-3500	300 Tory
Student Academic & Career Development Services 520-7850	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre 520-6608/TTY 520-3937	501 Uni-Centre
Writing Tutorial Service 520-6632	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Library
Learning Support Service 520-2600 Ext 1125	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Library