Descartes and Spinoza (PHIL 312)

Professor Baron Reed
Fall Quarter, 2015
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T/TH 11:00-12:20
office hours: T 12:30-1:30, and by appointment

Course Description:
Descartes and Spinoza are two of the central figures in the history of Western philosophy. Descartes is often regarded as the first Modern philosopher, at least in the sense that he was the first to put forward an entire system of philosophy that captured a new way of thinking about ourselves and our relation to both the world and to God. His impact on philosophy cannot be overstated. Spinoza—notorious and often vilified in his own time—now seems like the Early Modern philosopher closest to being our contemporary. His radically unorthodox views now seem not troubling but innovative. Both Descartes and Spinoza were profoundly systematic thinkers. Learning about their views will not only help you understand how the philosophical tradition has developed but will also provide you two different frameworks for understanding the deepest philosophical problems we still face.

Required Texts:
Spinoza, Benedictus de. 2006. The Essential Spinoza, S. Shirley (tr.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Recommended Texts:

Required Work:
Work for the course will include reading reports and two papers:
- 1st paper: 6-8 pages, worth 30% of the final grade
- 2nd paper: 7-9 pages, worth 40% of the final grade
- Reading reports, together worth 30% of the final grade

Excellent class participation may also factor into the final grade. Regular attendance is expected.
**Course Policies:**

1. Computers, phones, and other electronic devices must be off during class time.
2. In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed.*
3. Extensions must be requested before the due date.
4. I reserve the right to institute an attendance policy.
5. **Very Important:** plagiarism will not be tolerated. All cases of alleged violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity. Possible penalties range from failing the course to permanent exclusion from the university. For more on plagiarism, see [http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/advising/integrity/index.html](http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/advising/integrity/index.html) and [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/plagiarism.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/plagiarism.html).

**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

**Canvas:**

Much of the business of this course will be conducted through Canvas. You are encouraged to check it frequently, as I may post announcements there. To access Canvas, you will need to use your NetID and password: [http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html](http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html).

**Reading Reports:**

The reading assignments must be read before class on the day they are listed. The reports are meant to get you thinking about at least one of the most important issues to be discussed in that day’s lecture. They should have three elements: a statement of the major idea, a summary of the most important argumentation, and a critical reaction. Of these, the summary should be the longest. The reports will be graded on a 5-point scale.

*You may drop your two lowest scores, including instances in which you did not turn one in.

**Schedule of Readings:**

Sept. 22 Introduction: Philosophy in the Early Modern period; political and religious events, 16th & 17th centuries; the “new philosophy”; skepticism; biographical information

1. **Descartes**

Sept. 24 *Meditations on First Philosophy* (part 1)
   - Synopsis, Meditations One and Two (76–86); Cottingham, ch. 1

Sept. 29 *Meditations on First Philosophy* (part 2)
   - Meditations Three and Four (86–105)

Oct. 1 *Meditations on First Philosophy* (part 3)
   - Meditations Five and Six (105–122)
Oct. 6 The method of doubt, skepticism, and the Cogito
   Principles of Philosophy, Part One 1–7, 10 (160–163)
   Objections & Replies to Meditations One and Two (123–131)
   Cottingham, 29–42

Oct. 8 Clear and distinct perceptions and the Cartesian Circle
   Principles of Philosophy, Part One 13, 30, 45–50 (164, 170, 174–176)
   Objections & Replies (139–143)
   Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Rules Three, Five, Seven, and Eleven (2–4, 6, 7–8, 11–12)
   Cottingham, 22–29, 66–73

Oct. 13 God, error, and freedom
   Cottingham, 47–64

Oct. 15 Dualism of mind and body
   Principles of Philosophy, Part One 8–9, 11–12, 51–65 (162, 163–164, 177–183)
   Objections & Replies to Meditation Six (143–150)
   Correspondence with Princess Elizabeth (Canvas)
   Cottingham, 107–118

Oct. 20 Interaction between mind and body: a “substantial union”
   Principles of Philosophy, Part Four 188–198 (200–206)
   The Passions of the Soul, Part One 1–12, 27–50 (218–223, 228–238)
   Cottingham, 119–132

Oct. 22 The material world and causation
   Principles of Philosophy, Part Two 3–23, 64, Part Four 199–207 (190–199, 206–212)
   Optics, Discourse One (57–61)
   Cottingham, 79–95

Oct. 24 First Paper Due (by 5 PM)

II. SPINOZA

Oct. 27 The Nature of Substance
   Ethics I definitions, axioms, p1–15 (3–13)
   Bennett, ch. 1 (7–16), 2 (29–32), and 3 (55–60, 70–79)

Oct. 29 God, or Nature
   Ethics I p16–36, appendix (13–29)
   Bennett, ch. 4 (81–92, 103–110)

Nov. 3 Thought and Extension
   Ethics II definitions, axioms, p1–11 (29–36)
   Bennett, ch. 6 (125–142)
Nov. 5 The Human Mind
   *Ethics* II p12–31 (36–47)
   Bennett, ch. 7 (153–167)

Nov. 10 Knowledge and Volition
   *Ethics* II p32–49 (47–60), Letter 12 (264–268)
   Bennett, ch. 7 (167–184)

Nov. 12 Human Emotions
   *Ethics* III preface, definitions, postulates, p1–18, General Definition of the Emotions (61–72, 101)
   Bennett, ch. 10 (231–246)

Nov. 17 Human Bondage
   *Ethics* IV preface, definitions, axiom, p2–17 (102–111)
   Bennett, ch. 11 (253–262, 271–288)

Nov. 19 Value
   *Ethics* IV 18–28, 35–37, 64, appendix (111–116, 118–122, 134, 138–142)
   Bennett, ch. 12 (289–307)

Nov. 24 Human Freedom
   Bennett, ch. 14 (329–342)

Nov. 30 Reading Period begins

Dec. 7 Final papers due (by 5 PM)