

**Spinoza**  
**Christopher P. Noble**  
**T-F 4:00–5:20**  
**cnoble@ncf.edu**

**Virtual Office Hours: M 12-2 and by appointment.**

This course introduces students to the philosophy of the radical Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza argued that the highest good consists in gaining knowledge of our union with Nature, which he identified with God. The course will focus on philosophical works: Spinoza's systematic account of human life, politics, and nature in the *Ethics*, as well as the naturalistic interpretation of Biblical scripture he provides in the infamous *Theological-Political Treatise*. In so doing, we will situate Spinoza's work within its wider seventeenth-century philosophical, religious, and political contexts, as well as explore the relevance his views may have for us today.

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:**

Students will: gain an understanding of Spinoza's philosophical views and how they relate to wider trends in seventeenth-century intellectual history; hone core philosophical skills such as the abilities to analyze arguments; critically reflect on the nature of reality, and engage in fruitful conversation with others; learn methods for conducting research in the history of philosophy.

**Course Evaluation Criteria**

Expectations for a "satisfactory" evaluation include regular attendance (no more than 3 absences during the semester), exhibition of an understanding of course material, participation in class discussion, and on-time completion of assignments.

**Assignments:**

Weekly written reflections posted on Canvas.

Students will be responsible for leading discussion at least once during the semester.

1 short paper (5–6 pages) thoroughly analyzing an argument or textual passage

1 longer research paper (roughly 3,000 words) that investigates one area of Spinoza's philosophy. Students will develop their projects on the basis of feedback from both peers and the instructor,

**Required Textbooks (available at the Bookstore):**

*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Volumes I & II, edited and Translated by Edwin Curley.  
Princeton University Press. (Abbreviated as CWS)  
Additional secondary source readings will be posted on the Course Canvas Page.

### **Disability Services:**

New College of Florida is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its student body. Students are welcome to privately discuss any concerns related to barriers to both fully participating and learning in this course. I highly encourage students with accommodations to meet with me as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may contact the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) in order to request official accommodation(s). Students may contact SDS in-person (HCL3), at 941-487-4496 OR [disabilityservices@ncf.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@ncf.edu). Additional information regarding SDS can be accessed here: <https://www.ncf.edu/student-disability-services/>

### **Academic Dishonesty Policy:**

Students are expected to be familiar with the college's academic dishonesty policy, as described in the General Catalog. Any violation of this policy may result in academic sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the college.

### **Schedule of Readings and Assignments (Tentative):**

#### **Mod I: Infinite Power and Eternity: *The Ethics***

Tuesday 8/25: Introduction to Spinoza/Seventeenth-Century Philosophy

Friday 8/28: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*

Tuesday 9/1: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; Steven Nadler, selections from *Spinoza: A Life* (Canvas)

Friday 9/4: Letter 8/9 (on Definition); Letter 12 (on Infinity), Letter 32 (“Worm in the Blood”)

Tuesday 9/8: *Ethics* Book I, “Of God,” Propositions 1-17 (CWS I 408–428)

Friday 9/11: *Ethics* Book I, “Of God,” Propositions 18–36, Appendix (CWS I 428–446)

Tuesday 9/15: *Ethics* Book II, “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind,” Propositions 1–15 (CWS I 446–463)

Friday 9/17: *Ethics* Book II, “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind,” Propositions 16–49 (CWS I 463–491)

Tuesday 9/22: *Ethics* Book III, “Of the Origin and Nature of the Affects,” Propositions 1 – 28 (CWS I 491–510)

Friday 9/25: *Ethics* Book III, “Of the Origin and Nature of the Affects,” Propositions 29 – 59, Definitions of the Affects (CWS I 510–543)

Tuesday 9/29: *Ethics* Book IV, “Of Human Bondage, or of the Powers of the Affects,” Propositions 1–37 (CWS I 543–568).

Friday 10/2: *Ethics* Book IV, “Of Human Bondage, *or* of the Powers of the Affects,” Propositions 38–73, Appendix (CWS I 568 – 594).

Tuesday 10/6: *Ethics* Book V, “Of the Power of the Intellect, *or* of Human Freedom,” Propositions 1 –21 (CWS I 594–606)

Friday 10/9: *Ethics* Book V, “Of the Power of the Intellect, *or* of Human Freedom,” Propositions 21–42 (CWS I 607–617)

### **Midterm Paper Due on Canvas at 5PM**

### **Fall Break**

### **Mod II: Theology and Politics in the *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus***

Tuesday 10/13: TTP Preface (CWS II 65–76)

Friday 10/16: TTP Chapters (I-II CWS II 76–110)

Tuesday 10/20: TTP Chapters III-IV (CWS II 111–138)

Friday 10/23: TTP Chapters V-VI (CWS II 138–169)

Tuesday 10/27: VII–VIII (CWS II 169 –205)

Friday 10/30: IX–XI (CWS II 206–246)

Tuesday 11/3: XII – XV (CWS II 248–282)

Friday 11/6: XVI – XVII (CWS II 282 –322)

Tuesday 11/10: XVIII–XX CWS II (322–354)

Friday 11/13: TBD/based upon student interest

Tuesday 11/17: TBD/based upon student interest

Friday 11/20: – Presentations

Tuesday 11/24: Presentations/Conclusions (Final Day of Class)

### **Final Paper due Friday 12/11 at 5 PM**

### **Resources/Further Reading**

#### ***Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy***

Features thorough entries with bibliographies on Spinoza and many of the general philosophical themes that we will study in this course: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

#### ***Rules for Studying the History of Philosophy.***

Guidelines on how to read/conduct research in the history of philosophy from Peter

Adamson, host of the History of Philosophy Podcast (“History of Philosophy without any Gaps”): <https://historyofphilosophy.net/rules-history-philosophy>

***Philpapers.org:***

Database of published articles in philosophy (helpful resource for finding secondary reading material)