Spinoza and Modernity

EUS 346 (36460), HIS 362G (39665), JS 364 (40235), PHL 354 (42770), RS 357 (43935), CTI 335 (34114)

Professor: Tracie Matysik

Course Description:

Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Dutch-Jewish philosopher of Portuguese descent, has been alternately labeled the instigator of the "radical enlightenment" (Jonathan Israel), the "renegade Jew who gave us modernity" (Rebecca Goldstein), the betrayer of the Jewish tradition (Hermann Cohen), a "savage anomaly" in the western intellectual tradition (Antonio Negri), and the theorist of the one kind of god in which a physicist of the twentieth century might conceivably believe (Albert Einstein). In his own seventeenth-century Amsterdam context, his writings – and even mere rumor of them – were enough to earn him full excommunication from the Jewish community. Yet in subsequent centuries those scandalous writings have become a crucial chapter in histories of western philosophy. G. W. F. Hegel, for instance, would argue that only after Spinoza could one really begin to philosophize properly. This course will introduce students to the core of Spinoza's writings that have produced such diverse reactions over the centuries, as well as to exemplary moments in those reactions. We will examine Spinoza's refusal of a transcendent god or ideal, as well as of the mind-body dualism so prominent in western thought, understanding along the way the unique intellectual modernity he made possible.

Course Requirements:

1. Reading: Students are expected to complete and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings as indicated in the Course Schedule and prior to each class session. Assigned books are available at the University Co-Op. In addition, select readings will be available on Blackboard. I request that you please print out the Blackboard readings so that we can attend to them in detail in class.

Books for purchase at the University Co-Op include:

- *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), ISBN: 0872206203.
- •Genevieve Lloyd, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics (New York: Routledge, 1996), ISBN: 0415107822.

Weekly Response Papers and Final Journal: Students should write at least eight short essays in response to weekly readings. These 1- to 2-page papers are due before each class session for which reading is assigned. The papers will not be individually graded throughout the semester, but rather will be marked on a ✓ system. At the end of the semester, students should compile these papers and submit them in sum as a class journal. For the sake of the journal, these papers should be revised both for clarity and content. The final journal will serve in place of a final exam and thus is the means through which students can demonstrate their knowledge of the material from the course. A grade will be given solely to the final journal. The journal will be due on the day and hour that our class would have its final exam, as scheduled by the registrar.

These papers are intended to help you to think about the weekly readings and to foster discussion. In each one you should work through a particularly thorny issue in the reading. Please be prepared to present the contents of your paper to the class. To qualify towards the fulfillment of this requirement, these papers must be ready for submission at the beginning of the class session on the day that we are to discuss the relevant reading. Because these reading-response papers are intended to aid in class discussion, I will not be able to accept late submissions except in the case of excused absences.

Note: Students are responsible for writing a response paper for any missed session, regardless whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Response papers written for a missed session must be submitted within two weeks of the corresponding absence and may be included in the final journal.

Essay: Each student will be expected to write one final seminar paper 12-15 pages in length. This final paper should engage a topic of Spinoza's legacy (e.g., Spinozist characters in a George Eliot novel; or the importance of Spinoza's thought for *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri).

Presentation: Each student will give a 10-minute presentation of his/her research in the last two weeks of the semester. (Note: if our class is a bit big in size, we may need to schedule an extra half hour to accommodate all of the presentations.)

Participation Regular attendance and participation in class discussions is required. Absences will be excused only for **documented** family and medical emergency (doctor's note, obituary, etc.), or religious holiday. Each unexcused absence will result in a full-grade deduction to the participation grade. **No student attending less than ten sessions** *without documented excuse* **will pass the class.** Each participant should come to every class session prepared to pose at least one analytical question for the purpose of class discussion. Questions can be based on response papers.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Absences for religious holidays are excused. I would be grateful, however, if you would alert me in advance in these cases.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students who need special accommodations should notify me at the beginning of the semester (or as soon as possible), and such accommodations will be made. Students with such requests should secure a letter from the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic integrity will be taken very seriously in this course. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For an overview of University policy regarding scholastic dishonesty, see the website of Student Judicial Services: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/

GRADING (using the +/- rubric):

- •12- to 15-page paper: 45% (includes evaluation of outline and/or draft)
- •Presentation: 20%
- Final Journal: 25% (includes credit for timely submission of quality response papers)
- Participation: 10% (includes attendance and regular and constructive contribution to class discussion)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

January 15: Introductory Session

January 22: Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Preface and Chapters 1-6, 14-15, pp. 388-456,

514-526 Lloyd, 1-27

January 29: Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapters 16-20, pp. 526-572

February 5: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, 217-243

Lloyd, 29-48

February 12: Spinoza, Ethics, Part II, 243-277

Lloyd, 48-70

February 19: Spinoza, Ethics, Part III, 277-319

Lloyd, 71-83

February 26: Spinoza, Ethics, Part IV, 320-362

Lloyd, 83-107

March 5: Spinoza, Ethics, Part V, 363-382

Lloyd, 109-131

March 12: SPRING BREAK

March 19: Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, Chapters 1-7, pp. 680-722

March 26: (subject to change) Hegel, Heine, Hess, Auerbach (on Blackboard)

April 2: (subject to change) Althusser, Negri, Deleuze (on Blackboard)

April 9: Research/Writing – meetings with me

April 16: Research/Writing – meetings with me

April 23: Presentations

April 30: Presentations

Final Papers Due

Possible Research Topics (just a sampling - so many more from which to choose, or make up your own....)

George Eliot

Heinrich Heine

Antonio Negri

Antonio Damasio

Leo Strauss

Louis Althusser

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

G. E. Lessing

G. W. F. Hegel

Ernst Haeckel

Arthur Schopenhauer

F. W. Schelling

Friedrich von Schlegel

Friedrich Nietzsche

Lou Andreas-Salomé

Antonio Negri (or Hardt and Negri)

Moses Mendelssohn

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Wordsworth

David Friedrich Strauss

Albert Einstein

Pantheism controversy

Karl Marx

Suggested Supplementary Reading:

Antonio Damasio, Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain (New York: Harcourt, 2003).

Gilles Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1990)

—, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988).

Don Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Moira Gatens, ed., Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza (University Park: Penn State Press, 2009).

Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Willi Goetschel, Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

Rebecca Goldstein, Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity (New York: Schocken, 2006).

Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza and Spinozism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Jonathan Israel, Radical Enlightenment (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

A. Kiarina Kordela, *\$urplus: Spinoza, Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: the Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman, eds., *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

Daniel Schwartz, *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Steven B. Smith, Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Harry Wolfson, The Philosophy of Spinoza (New York: Meridian, 1934).

Yirmiahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 Vols. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).