

GERM/POLI 294-01/ENVI 292-02

## Spinoza's Eco-Society: Contractless Society and Its Ecology

A. Kiarina Kordela

Fall 2020, Module 1

M-W-F, 11:00 – 1:00

[HUM 213]

Office Hours: by appointment

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Spinoza (1632-1677) has been called the “savage anomaly” of the Enlightenment because his philosophy enables an alternative or ‘hidden’ modernity based on the interdependence of beings rather than their hierarchy. Ever more political theorists, environmentalists, and ecologists are turning to Spinoza’s vision of a nonhierarchical union of nature and society that rejects anthropocentrism as the promise for a more equitable and sustainable life. In this course we shall focus on the foundation of Spinoza’s unconventional thesis: his intertwined conceptions of the human being as part of nature – as opposed to the prevailing notion of the human as an autonomous “imperium” in, yet above, nature – and of society as a continuation of nature – as opposed to the dominant theories of the “social contract” that ground society on its break with, or repression of, nature (Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant). We shall examine Spinoza’s entailed radical revision in understanding both the “political” and the “environment.” Beyond Spinoza’s *Ethics* and his *Theologico-Political* and *Political* treatises, we shall read major commentators both on Spinoza’s ethical and political theory and on his role in environmental ethics and Deep Ecology.

- All readings and class taught in English; no pre-knowledge required
- Core course toward the Critical Theory concentration
- Fulfills Internationalism GenEd requirement

### Required Text:

– Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992. ISBN: 0-87220-130-9.

**The rest of the assigned texts will be available on moodle.**

## Course Goals, Requirements and Guidelines

### Course Goals

The main goal of this course is to familiarize students with the work of Spinoza and its influence on other thinkers, particularly thinkers since the twentieth century, regarding philosophy, political, and environmental theories and questions.

On a more general level, emphasis will be placed on cultivating the following skills:

- Critical reading of texts and ability to reconstruct their arguments
- Critical and productive dialogue with the texts
- Analytic ability (to identify the same concept or logical structure in different texts/discourses) and synthetic ability (to combine different concepts and structures towards a further argument)
- Academic argumentation and writing

### General Guidelines & Suggestions:

- Check the syllabus for the exact pages that are assigned for reading from the files posted on moodle.
- When you read the assigned texts, always look up unknown words, including words in foreign languages.
- When I am lecturing feel free to interrupt and comment or ask questions. Do not let things you do not understand just pass by.
- Budget your time. On a day with a light load of reading you may begin reading the texts for the next time.
- Start thinking about and writing the mid-term and final writing assignments way prior to the deadlines.
- Everything we say or write during this course is not private property but public, available for anyone to use productively. Your written work may be shared with your peers.

### Course Requirements:

- **Reading Assignments:** The assignments are mentioned in the daily syllabus. If you are absent, make sure to check with your peers for possible changes.

#### **Reading Performance (or, how to read in preparation for active participation in class):**

You have to be prepared to respond in class to my questions regarding your knowledge and comprehension of the assigned texts. To be able to do so, you have to take notes while you are reading the texts (e.g., give brief titles to paragraphs, so

that you can easily identify and summarize the passage(s) relevant to my questions). Your reading performance can be further enhanced through comments and questions that reflect a serious engagement with the assigned texts. To practice reading we may also use Perusal, an annotation platform on Moodle.

- **Zoom In-class Participation and Oral Presentations:**

- Other electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, tablets) are not allowed in class.
- Arrive to the class zoom space timely (see also “attendance” below)
- Zoom etiquette (from space & attire to no noises)
- We will act as much as possible as if we were in the same space. This includes raising hands (physically and through zoom’s hand symbol) and being in synchronous dialogue.
- In every class we’ll have a ten-minute break, 12:00-12:10.

Your reading performance is a major part of your in-class participation, and you may be asked to make several short oral presentations throughout the semester. Your participation in critical and productive dialogue reflects and refines not only your ability to read and view critically texts but also:

- a) Your ability to be an active listener, which includes listening not only to me but also to your peers.
- b) Your ability to overcome intimidation and ask about words, concepts or arguments you encounter in the texts or in class and you do not understand. Do so even if you have the impression that you are the only person who does not understand only because nobody else asks questions. Most likely this is a wrong impression, and everybody else is in the same situation to one extent or other.

- **Attendance:** If you have to miss a class, make sure to send me an email in advance and to contact another student for notes on the class and for possible changes in the syllabus. Unless you have a medical emergence and/or permission from the dean of students, more than three absences will result in a lower grade: four absences amount to half a grade lower; five absences to a whole grade lower; six absences to one-and-a-half grades lower; seven absences to two grades lower; more than seven absences amount to failing the course. Coming late to class or missing any part of the class also amounts to deduction of attendance points; therefore, let me know in advance if you need to absent yourself for any part of the class. You can make up for an absence by turning in a summary of the reading assigned on that day (300 words, font Times New Roman, size 12; incorporate actual passages from the assigned texts in your own text.), no later than by the next class.

- **Writing Assignments:**

- There are two writing assignments in this class: a midterm paper which, depending on my comments, might be followed by a revision; and a final paper.

Both papers should be 3 double-spaced pages (750 words), font Times New Roman, size 12, emailed as an attached Word document or as Google document.

It is important that you incorporate actual passages from the assigned texts in your own text. Beyond exhibiting good comprehension of the assigned texts, your papers must advance an original thesis. In advancing this thesis, it is best if you draw on different texts assigned for the class.

See the daily syllabus below for deadlines.

### **My Availability**

Office Hours: if you would like us to meet outside our class hours, please send me an email to arrange a Zoom meeting.

### **Grades**

**Class participation (including:  
oral presentations and reading performance):** 30%

**Mid-term Paper:** 35%

**Final Paper:** 35%

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**Total:** 100%\*

\*Attendance is also a factor in the grade (see above).

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### **Additional Services and Information**

#### **Class Recordings**

In order to accommodate students who will not be able to attend synchronous class meetings during this module, I plan to record our synchronous class sessions in a manner consistent with [Macalester's classroom recording policy](#). I will share these recordings in a password-protected (and not public) place. If you download any class recordings, you must store them in a password-protected file or on a password-protected site. Please note that the recording policy clearly states that *you may not share, replicate, or publish any class recording, in whole or in part, or use any of the recordings for any purpose besides knowing what happened during the class period, without my written approval*. If I use any recorded content from any of our classes for purposes beyond our class, I will – in accordance with the policy – obtain your written permission to do so.

#### **Disability Services**

In some circumstances, course design may pose barriers to a student's ability to access or demonstrate mastery of course content. Reasonable academic accommodations can be implemented in such circumstances. If you need an accommodation for a disability, please contact the Office of Student Affairs at 651-696-6220 to arrange for an appointment with the Assistant Dean of Students, DeMethra Bradley, or the Associate Dean of Students, Andrew Wells. Additional resources and information regarding the accommodations process for students with disabilities can be found at: <https://www.macalester.edu/disabilityservices/>

### **Health and Well-Being**

Investing time into taking care of yourself will help you engage more fully in your academic experience. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing, which can be mental, emotional, physical, financial, etc., and how they can have an academic impact. Sleeping, moving your body, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you be resilient at Macalester. If you are having difficulties maintaining your well-being, please reach out to one of the resources listed here: <https://www.macalester.edu/healthandwellness/>

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work. Forgery, cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action. For more information on what precisely constitutes these breaches of integrity and what the consequences of such breaches are, please visit the Academic Programs website: <https://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicpolicies/academicintegrity/>

### **Intellectual Property**

Course materials of published work posted on Moodle and distributed in class are intellectual property belonging to the author. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials without the express permission of the instructor. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

## Daily Syllabus

### Week 1

Sept. 2. – Introduction

Sept. 4. – Lord, Beth, *Spinoza's Ethics* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010], 10-34.

– Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de (Netherlands, 1632-1677), *Ethics* [1677], part of “Part I: Concerning God,” 31-40; def.-prop. 14, cor.2.

### Week 2

**M. Sept. 7: No class (Labor Day)**

Sep. 9. – Lord, Beth, *Spinoza's Ethics* [2010], 38-48.

– Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], rest of “Part I: Concerning God,” 40-62; prop. 15-appendix.

Sept. 11. – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], first part of “Part II: Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind,” 63-82, including prop. 24, proof.

### Week 3

Sept. 14. – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], rest of “Part II: Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind,” 82-101.

Sept. 16. – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], first part of “Part III: Concerning the Origins and Nature of the Emotions,” 102-121.

Sept. 18. – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], continuation of “Part III: Concerning the Origins and Nature of the Emotions,” 122-141, prop.31-prop. 59 scholium.

### Week 4

Sept. 21. – Naess, Arne. 1977. “Spinoza and Ecology.” *Philosophia* 7: 45-54.

Sept. 23 – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) [*A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, New York: Dover, 1951], chapters IV and XVI, 57-68 and 200-213, and (endnotes) 276-277.

Sept. 25. – Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], first part of “Part IV: Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions,” 152-176, including prop. 37, scholium 2.

Week 5

Sept. 28. — **Individual meetings** in preparation for midterm papers

**Sept. 29. Tuesday – Midterm Paper due, via email by 1:00pm.** Word document (not pdf!), 750 words (3 double-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font).

Sept. 30. — Possible individual meetings about papers

Oct. 2. — Balibar, Étienne. *Spinoza and Politics* [Edited by Warren Montag. Translated by Peter Snowdon. London; New York: Verso, (French 1985) 1998], excerpt from chapter 4: “The *Ethics*: A Political Anthropology,” 76-95.

Week 6

Oct. 5. — Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *Ethics* [1677], rest of “Part IV: Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions,” 176-200, prop. 38-appendix.

Oct. 7. — Balibar, Étienne. *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*, [Eburon Delft (Lecture 1993), 1997], first part, 8-31.

Oct. 9. — Lloyd, Genevieve. 1980. “Spinoza’s Environmental Ethics.” *Inquiry* 23: 293–311.

Week 7

Oct. 12. — Næss, Arne. 1980. “Environmental Ethics and Spinoza’s Ethics: Comments on Genevieve Lloyd’s Article.” *Inquiry* 23: 313–325:

Oct. 14. — Spinoza, Baruch/Benedict de, *A Political Treatise* (1670), in *Collected Works* [ed. Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016], chapter IV, 525 – 528; [or in *A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, New York: Dover, 1951, chapter IV, 309-312].

— Macherey, Pierre, *In a Materialist Way: Selected Essays* [ed. Warren Montag, transl. Ted Stolze, London: Verso, 1998], from the essay “Spinoza, the End of History, and the Ruse of Reason” [French 1992], the section “Political Realism,” 139-145.

Oct. 16. — Watson, Richard A., “A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Biocentrism,” in *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 5 (Fall 1983): 245-256.

Week 8

Oct. 19. — **Final Paper due, via email by 10:00am.** Word document (not pdf!), 750-1,000 words (3-4 double-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font).

