PHL 490:03  Spinoza and Berkeley Seminar

fall semester 2006
15:00–17:00 Wednesdays
518 South Kedzie
http://angel.msu.edu

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Course description and goals:  Together, we will read two of the most fascinating and important philosophers of the early modern period: Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and George Berkeley (1685–1753), then some of the important contemporary work addressing their positions. The advantage of the independent course is that we can build into our plans the intention of allowing the work of the first part of the semester to inform the particular selections we decide to discuss during the second half. Through writing for presentation every week, you will become more proficient at identifying, clarifying, criticizing, and defending significant positions on fundamental philosophical issues.

Texts:  Short version: The bookstore will have the Hackett E and Principles in the fall, as well as Anthony Weston’s A Rulebook for Arguments. Here’s the longer version:

Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise (1670, TTP), and The Ethics Proved in Geometrical Order (1677, E). If you want both in one volume, there is only one choice, though it is very good: Complete Works ed. Michael L. Morgan (Hackett Publishing). The standard scholarly translation of E is that of Ed Curley, available from Princeton University Press in The Spinoza Reader and also as vol. 1 of a set of translations that Curley hopes to complete this summer. The translations by Samuel Shirley (Hackett Publishing) and G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford) are also excellent; and there might be something for us all to learn from using more than one translation. For the TTP, Hackett Publishing offers an inexpensive edition, translated by Shirley. Please do not plan to use translations other than the ones mentioned here; there are some atrocious translations by well-intentioned ignoramuses. A secondary source of great value: Stuart Hampshire’s Spinoza and Spinozism (Oxford, 2005).


Summer reading:  Spinoza’s TTP (which was published—though anonymously—earlier than E and is easier to master on one’s own than E); and Berkeley’s Dialogues (more user-friendly than Principles). Note: Because most political work on Spinoza is more indebted to E and to his
unfinished Political Treatise (PT) than to the TTP; and because Berkeley’s Principles covers the same material as the Dialogues, though in greater depth, no one should feel required to do the summer reading; but doing it will give you a much better sense of whether you really want to spend a semester on these issues.

Schedule:

30 August: planning meeting
6 September: Spinoza, Ethics I
13 September: Spinoza, Ethics II
20 September: Spinoza, Ethics III
27 September: Spinoza, Ethics IV–V
11 October: Berkeley, Principles §§1–84
18 October: Berkeley, Principles §§85–156

Chosen as we determined our deepest interests. All available on ANGEL or through the library’s resources.

29 November: research reports

Evaluation (assuming a once-weekly seminar; if it’s necessary to split the course, then we would make adjustments):

For 1 credit hour: (a) attend every class meeting on one of the philosophers, prepared with 100–250 words toward a brief presentation for each class; or (b) attend every class meeting for both philosophers and prepare three brief presentations on each philosopher.

For 2 credit hours: Attend every class meeting and prepare brief presentations for all.

For 3 credit hours: In addition to what is required for 2, write (and rewrite as necessary) a 3,000-word term paper due during or before the time scheduled by the Registrar for the final exam.
**For 4 credit hours:** In addition to what is required for 3, present two research talks, one on a book you read toward your final term paper, and one on your term paper itself.

**Office hours:** Wednesdays 2:30-3:00 and 5:00-5:30; Thursdays by appointment 12:10-12:40; and Fridays by appointment 12:30-1:30.