

PHIL 481
Topics in Philosophy:
Spinoza on Religion and Politics

Tuesdays / Thursdays, 11:35 – 12:55, Leacock 15

INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Carlos Fraenkel (carlos.fraenkel@mcgill.ca)
Office Hours: Wednesdays 3–4:30; Leacock 823

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this class we will discuss Spinoza's views on religion and the state, in particular how he envisaged their role in the life of the citizen. We will focus on the *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP), published in 1670, and on the *Political Treatise* (PT), left incomplete and published posthumously. The TTP is likely the most scandalous book in the history of philosophy. When it came out, it was denounced as "a book forged in hell ... by the devil himself." Although published anonymously, Spinoza was soon identified as the author and became notorious throughout Europe as a religious subversive and political radical who sought to promote atheism. Some modern scholars have reinforced that image while turning curse into praise and celebrating Spinoza as the founding figure of the "radical" Enlightenment. I think that this is a distortion of Spinoza's project in the TTP and the PT. Be that as it may, we will strive for a sober assessment of his views on prophecy, chosenness, divine law, miracles, holy scripture, true religion vs. superstition, freedom of thought and expression (including, importantly, the freedom to do philosophy), religious pluralism, social contract, political authority, the purpose of the state, and different forms of government.