

DANIEL SCHNEIDER

Faculty of Philosophy
University of Cambridge
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danielcschneider.wordpress.com

AOS: Early Modern Philosophy, Epistemology, Metaphysics

AOC: Philosophy of Science, Ancient Philosophy, Ethics

Academic Employment:

Lecturer (Tenure-Track)	Haifa University	2016
Lecturer (3 year appointment)	University of Cambridge	2015-16
Post Doctoral Researcher	University of Ghent	2014-15

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	2014	Philosophy	University of Wisconsin-Madison
M.A.	2010	Philosophy	University of Wisconsin-Madison
M.A.	2006	Philosophy	Tulane University
B.A.	2003	Philosophy	University of Nebraska-Lincoln

DISSERTATION

Spinoza's Method of Certainty

Steven Nadler, chair; Paula Gottlieb, Alan Sidelle, committee members

PUBLICATIONS

“Spinoza’s Epistemological Methodism,” (forthcoming) 51 pp.

Journal of the History of Philosophy

“Spinoza’s PSR as a Principle of Clear and Distinct Representation,”

Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 95, Issue 1, March 2014, pp. 109-129.

“‘A Spiritual Automaton’: Spinoza, Reason, and the Letters to Blyenbergh”

Society and Politics, Vol. 7, No. 2 (14) November 2013, pp. 160-177.

Under Review:

“Ontological Arguments Don’t Work Except When They Do,” 30 pp.

In Progress:

“Spinoza: A Baconian in the *TTP*, but not in the *Ethics*?” (with Jo Van Cauter)

“Spinoza and the Candle Wax: Extension, Infinity, and Power”

“The Clear and Distinct VS. The Forceful and Vivid: Understanding Empiricism and Rationalism”

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

“An Insubstantial Cogito”

- Immateriality, Thinking, and the Self in Philosophy: East and West, Peking University, 2015

“Spinoza: A Baconian in the *TTP*, but not in the *Ethics*?” (with Jo Van Cauter)

- London Spinoza Circle, Birkbeck College, 2015
- Spinoza Workshop 2, University of Ghent, 2015

“The Clear and Distinct VS. The Forceful and Vivid: Understanding Empiricism and Rationalism”

- Colloquium in Research Methods in the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Ghent, 2014
- University of Haifa, 2015

“Blyenbergh and Spinoza: Revelation vs. the Natural Light”

- "The Bible or Experience: Two Sources of Natural Knowledge in Early Modern Europe," University of West Bohemia, 2014

“Spinoza was a Methodist. No, seriously.”

- South Central Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, Texas A&M, 2014
- Finnish-Hungarian Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, 2014

“A Spiritual Automaton?: Spinoza, Reason, and the Letters to Blyenbergh”

- Meeting of the Descartes Seminar, Paris-Lyon, 2013
- Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, University of Cyprus, 2012

Comments on Allison Peterman’s “Spinoza on Extension”

- APA Pacific Division Meeting, 2013

“Why It Takes an Eternity to Explain Duration in Spinoza’s *Ethics*”

- British Society for the History of Philosophy Conference, University of Dundee, 2012

“An Eternal Truth? Two Puzzles Concerning Spinoza’s Principle of Sufficient Reason”

- New England Colloquium in Early Modern Philosophy, Dartmouth University, 2011
- Atlantic Canada Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, Dalhousie University, 2011

“Ontological Arguments Don't Work, Except When They Do”

- Spinoza Workshop, University of Ghent, 2010
- Iowa Philosophical Society Conference, Grinnell College, 2010

HONORS

Dana-Allen Dissertation Fellowship Nomination Nominated by UW Department of Philosophy for university-wide fellowship	2013
Mosse Graduate Exchange Fellowship (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) Competitive fellowship to spend academic year at the Hebrew University	2011-2012
Templeton Summer Seminar: The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy Selected to participate in week-long seminar on theodicean philosophies	2010
Honored Instructor Award, University of Wisconsin-Madison Housing Selected by undergraduates for excellence in teaching	2010

TEACHING – FULL RESPONSIBILITY

At University of Cambridge:

Lecturer of: **Descartes’s *Meditations*, The Nature of Knowledge, Sources of Knowledge, Particulars and Properties, Epistemology of the Mind, Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*.**

Supervisor of: **Part II Paper 1: Metaphysics; Part IA Paper 4: Set Texts.**

MPhil Supervisor of **Ancient, Kant, Buddhist philosophy**

At University of Ghent: **Early Modern Naturalism: The Ethics of the *Ethics***

A graduate seminar on Spinoza’s attempt to construct a completely naturalistic ethical system: An ethics without revelation, freedom or purpose.

At University of Wisconsin-Madison: **Introduction to Philosophy**

An introduction to the main inquiries of philosophy: Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Ethics.

Taught primarily through historical texts: Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Lucretius, Descartes, Kant, Mill, Russell, and supplementary contemporary works.

At Tulane University: **Introduction to Ethics** (2x)

A survey of several ethical and meta-ethical theories: Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, Deontology, Realism, Quasi-Realism, Constructivism, and Error Theory. Taught primarily through historical texts: Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Kant, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche, and supplementary contemporary works.

TEACHING – TEACHING ASSISTANT

Introduction to Philosophy (Alan Sidelle, Larry Shapiro, University of Wisconsin-Madison) (3x)

An introduction to the main inquiries of philosophy: Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Ethics.

Introduction to Logic (Donald Lee, Tulane University)

An introduction to sentential and predicate formal logic: proofs, truth tables, translations, and models.

Ancient Philosophy (Paula Gottlieb, University of Wisconsin-Madison) (2x)

A study of ancient Greek philosophical approaches to basic metaphysical and epistemological questions. Excerpts from Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle.

History of Modern Philosophy (Steven Nadler, Keith Yandell, University of Wisconsin-Madison) (2x)

A course covering the works of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

Philosophy of Religion (Keith Yandell, University of Wisconsin-Madison)

An advanced undergraduate course. Topics included: Perfect-Being theology, Eternalism, Everlastingism, Freewill, Fatalism, Materialism, Dualism, and Naturalism.

Contemporary Moral Issues (Dan Hausman, University of Wisconsin-Madison)

A course in which philosophical methods are applied to the contemporary moral and political topics of abortion, affirmative action, the death penalty, and surrogate motherhood.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Research Assistant for Steven Nadler

Constructed an exhaustive bibliography of pre-1850 editions of Spinoza's *Political and Theological Treatise*

Research Assistant for Elliot Sober

Researched treatments of the Principle of Parsimony in the Early-Modern Period

Project Assistant for Martha Gibson

Reader/Grader for advanced undergraduate course on Freewill

SERVICE

University of Cambridge Philosophy Faculty Board, 2015-2016

MPhil Advisor, University of Cambridge, 2015-2016

Mphil, Examiner, University of Cambridge, 2015-2016

Paper Coordinator: Part II Paper 1: Metaphysics; Part IA Paper 4: Set Texts

Co-organizer, Research Methods in HPS Speaker Series, Ghent University 2015

Director, 2015 Ghent University, Writing Group for Graduate Students of History of Philosophy/Science

Conference Referee, 2014 Spinoza Leibniz Workshop, Michigan State University

Invited Panelist, UW Center for Early Modern Studies, 2013, 2014

Conference Referee, The 2012 Meeting of the Wisconsin Philosophical Association
UW Philosophy Teaching Oversight Committee, 2011-2013
Joint-Director (with Steven Nadler), The 2011 Midwest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy
Appeared on *Sift* (a popular science/philosophy audio podcast) "Innate Cause," 2011
Editorial Assistant, *The Journal of History of Philosophy*, 2010-2011
Invited Lecturer, "Parts One and Two of the *Ethics*," Mount Allison University, 2010
Organizer, UW Philosophy Department Joint Faculty-Grad Student reading group, 2010
Organizer, UW Philosophy Department Early Modern Reading Group, 2008-2011

LANGUAGES

Latin (reading)
French (reading)
Hebrew

REFERENCES

Steven Nadler

William H. Hay II Professor of Philosophy
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin
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Madison, WI 53706
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Paula Gottlieb

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Spinoza's Method of Certainty

My dissertation explores Spinoza's rationalism. In the early enlightenment, Spinoza's rationalism was interpreted as a radical exaltation of reason over faith. By the twentieth century however, Spinoza's rationalism came to be regarded as an anachronistic approach to philosophy that was itself a form of religious faith. Albert Einstein, for example, a rather sympathetic reader of Spinoza, described Spinozism as "a religious...trust in the rational nature of reality." My dissertation shows Spinoza's commitment to reason to be neither anachronistic nor a form of faith. Instead, I show Spinoza's rationalism to be motivated by a prescient naturalistic approach to epistemology.

I argue that Spinoza's commitment to reason is rooted in the introspective experience of certainty—an experience that Spinoza believes is familiar to anyone who has formed a clear and distinct idea or who has understood a valid demonstration. This certainty should be understood quite literally: Spinoza holds that some of the operations of the mind are indubitable. A geometrician for example cannot doubt that the sum of the interior angles of a Euclidian triangle is equivalent to the sum of two right angles. Spinoza does not treat the assent to these indubitable operations as an act subject to normative evaluation. It is not that it is praiseworthy to assent to our clear and distinct ideas, but rather that we will. From this merely descriptive claim, Spinoza constructs the normative aspect of his epistemology: Spinoza argues that given our desire for peace, joy and cheerfulness, it benefits us to form clear and distinct ideas and to attain certainty in some basic metaphysic truths and principles of ethics.

In Chapter One, I use Spinoza's correspondence with Blyenbergh to show that, at least in these letters, Spinoza claims that the experience of certainty serves as the basis of his own commitment to reason.

In Chapter Two, I discuss three distinct approaches to epistemology: the Particularist approach, which begins epistemic inquiry with particular knowledge claims, the Methodist approach, which begins epistemic inquiry with a method of distinguishing knowledge from mere belief, and the Metaphysicalist approach, which begins epistemic inquiry with assumptions about the metaphysical structure of knowledge. I argue that Spinoza is best read as Methodist: He constructs his philosophy upon a method of certainty.

In Chapters Three and Four, I give a developed account of Spinoza's Methodist approach. I argue that Spinoza's method of certainty is, in several important respects, a naturalized version of Cartesian epistemology. In Chapter Three, I argue that both philosophers seek clear and distinct ideas, and I explain in what sense both philosophers believe clear and distinct ideas to be necessarily certain. In Chapter 4, I explain how both Spinoza and Descartes move from truth as certainty, to truth as correspondence. I argue that Spinoza, like Descartes before him, uses an "indubitable" idea of God to show why our clear and distinct ideas must correspond with their objects. But unlike Descartes, Spinoza does this by appealing to a god that lacks any moral properties and who acts without purpose. In short, where Descartes offers a theological or normative assurance that our clear and distinct ideas agree with their objects, Spinoza offers a naturalist metaphysical proof. This difference makes all the difference in that it gives Spinoza's epistemology an entirely different normative character than Descartes: Spinoza argues that certainty is desirable, not because it can justify our beliefs—he rejects the intelligibility of such justification—but because our eudemonia lies in the exercise of our ability to form indubitable ideas.

In Chapter Five, I argue that many of the “strange” features of Spinoza’s Methodism show up in several familiar Empiricist accounts of knowledge—in Hume’s, Russell’s, etc. Unlike Spinoza however, who locates certainty with our clear and distinct ideas, these Empiricists locate certainty in the forceful and vivid impressions of perception and in the relations discovered therein.

In Chapters Six and Seven, I explain how Spinoza uses his criterion of clearness and distinctness—the marks of a indubitable idea—to undergird his commitment to the distinctive claims of rationalism: That there exists a necessary being and that for any thing there must be a cause or reason for its existence or non-existence.