

THE 2014-2015 SEASON AT THE WASHINGTON SPINOZA SOCIETY

Note: All sessions will be held at the Washington Goethe Institute at 812 7th St., N.W. (on the intersection of 7th and I Streets, one block north of the Chinatown Arch and the Chinatown/Gallery Place subway stop). The sessions begin at 6:30 p.m. and continue for about two hours.

On September 15, 2014, we will hear a presentation from Ken Glazer entitled “How Unreasonably Effective is Math Anyway?” That question is based on a seminal 1967 article by a physicist named Eugene Wigner, entitled “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences.” The article in turn was inspired by Einstein, who once asked: “How can it be that mathematics, being after all a product of human thought which is independent of experience, is so admirably appropriate to the objects of reality?” Einstein’s question has vexed philosophers for a long time, and it has fascinated Ken. On September 15th, we will all be the beneficiaries of Ken’s thinking. Ken Glazer is an attorney who practices law in the Washington, D.C. area. This will be his second presentation at the Washington Spinoza Society.

On October 20th, Professor Greg Derry will be giving a presentation entitled “Scientific Materialism and a Sacred Apprehension of Nature.” Greg is a Professor of Physics at the Loyola University of Maryland, with a strong interest in the philosophical implications of scientific thought in addition to his research programs in ultrahigh vacuum surface physics and nonlinear dynamics. The Washington Spinoza Society is happy to say that Greg is probably the fourth or fifth Loyola professor to speak at our organization, and we certainly hope that this presentation will be just the beginning of his relationship with the Washington Spinoza Society.

On November 17, 2014, Professor Dennis Skocz will be giving a presentation entitled “Spinoza and the Human Body.” Dennis received his degree in philosophy at Duquesne University and is an Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the University of the District of Columbia and the Northern Virginia Community College. A veteran career diplomat, Dennis works as a consultant in strategic planning and professional development. He is a frequent presenter at the Washington Spinoza Society.

On December 15, 2014, Steve Sawmelle will be giving a presentation on Christian Mysticism. He will discuss the views of Augustine, Aquinas, and Eckhart – drawing in part on the writings of William James and Karen Armstrong. Steve studied philosophy as a graduate at Duquesne University and went on to pursue a career in federal service. That career entailed in large part working for the U.S. Public Health Service, ensuring that grant money reached American Indian tribes to treat members’ addictive and mental disorders. His retirement consists first and foremost of coordinating interfaith work in the D.C. area, with a focus on countering anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish language and actions. He’s a faithful member of the Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society. This will be Steve’s second presentation at the Washington Spinoza Society.

On January 26, 2015, Tom Goldring will be giving the presentation. Here's his description of the topic: "Sometime in the late 19th century, the German mathematician Leopold Kronecker proclaimed that "God made the integers, all else is the work of man". This is common knowledge among mathematicians, but I doubt that many of us ever thought about what it really means, why Kronecker bitterly opposed Georg Cantor's set theory, and how the ensuing controversy led to L.E.J. Brouwer's "Intuitionism". In 1905 the French mathematician Jules Richard published a paradox based on Cantor's work; although Richard's Paradox is less well-known than that of Bertrand Russell, it's actually much more difficult (perhaps impossible!) to refute. In this talk I will touch on the following topics: Hilbert's Hotel, why infinities are not created equal, some paradoxes (Richard's, Russell's, and the Barber), Intuitionism, the Law of the Excluded Middle, the Halting Problem and more, and explain what these things have to say about one of the fundamental problems in the philosophy of mathematics: what does it mean for mathematical objects to "exist"? No math background is required, but to help decide whether this subject is entertaining, I suggest watching the short video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92WHN-pAFCs>." Tom is a mathematician by training and profession, with side interests in logic, philosophy, and historical/critical biblical studies. He is also a frequent presenter at the Washington Spinoza Society.

On February 23, 2015, Professor Charles (Chip) Mannekin will present a paper he wrote for Steven Nadler's new volume on Spinoza and medieval Jewish philosophy. Chip calls it "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition in Medieval Jewish Philosophy." He will go back to Avicenna and trace a line to Spinoza through Crescas and others. After this presentation is over and before the Q&A, we will hear a response from Professor Yitzhak Melamed. Professors Mannekin and Melamed are by anyone's assessment, two of the leading Spinozists in the Mid-Atlantic Area. Chip is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maryland and is also Director of the Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center of Jewish Studies. Yitzhak is Professor Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, is the author of *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2013), and has previously spoken at the Washington Spinoza Society. This will be Chip's first presentation at the Society.

On March 16, 2015, Daniel Spiro will be giving a presentation on "Spinoza and Zionism." The author of "Moses the Heretic," Daniel once wrote an entire novel based on speculating about how the Biblical Moses would have lived if he were transported to the present. He now intends to use the same approach with respect to Spinoza, though this time his focus will be limited to the topic of Zionism, a movement that post-dates Spinoza's life. Daniel will address the famous paragraph in the Theological-Political Treatise that addresses the possibility of a Jewish return to Zion. But he will also comb through Spinoza various writings to consider how the Sage of

Amsterdam could be viewed as a precursor of both Zionism and anti-Zionism, depending on which passages one wants to emphasize. Daniel Spiro has served as the Coordinator of the Washington Spinoza Society since its inception, as is frequent presenter at its meetings.

On April 20, 2015, Carolyn Just will be reviewing Nagel's theory on moral luck, and then deconstruct his types of moral luck (causal, resultant, circumstantial, and constitutive). Carolyn will be giving real life examples and then presenting her own theories on why she agrees with Nagel in some instances and disagree in others. Carolyn Just currently works in media at the Glover Park Group. She studied philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh with a concentration in ethics. This will be Carolyn's first presentation at the Society.

On May 18, 2015, we will conclude the 2014-2015 season with our annual Grab Bag session. For those who haven't attended these sessions in the past, they are typically the most stimulating meetings of the year, because everyone in attendance is encouraged to bring up whatever philosophical issues he or she has been wrestling with and discuss these issues with the group.