Department of Philosophy Colloquium

Professor Steven Nadler

Vilas Research Professor and William H. Hay II Professor

University of Wisconsin-Madison

will present a talk entitled

"Spinoza on the Unity of the Virtues"

Friday

September

5th, 2025

3:30pm

Helen C White

Hall Room 6191

Abstract: The topic of the unity of the virtues, so prominent in ancient philosophy, is not easily found among texts of early modern philosophy. However, not only was virtue ethics alive and well in the seventeenth century, but so was the question of the unity of the virtues, albeit in a tacit and heretofore unexamined way. I will show that Spinoza, for one, is committed to the unity of the virtues; and, I argue, he is committed to that doctrine in its strong version. An individual's virtue for Spinoza is just one thing. It is what he calls *fortitudo*, or strength of character, the consistent abiding by the dictates of reason in thought, feeling and action. All the particular virtues — courage, temperance, honesty, and so on — far from being distinct states of character each generating its own kind of activity, are nothing but *fortitudo* exhibited in one set of circumstances or another. *Fortitudo* accounts for the fact that the person who acts virtuously in one set of those circumstances (e.g., courageously, in the face of danger) will also act virtuously in all others.

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