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“Perhaps the idea of will power or free will is a cultural phenomenon. If so, we must not assign blame to people for personal failures, we should instead understand the larger system and its influence on the individual.”

Areas of expertise

- Ethics and philosophy
- The intersection between neuroscience and emotions
- The notion of free will or willpower

Topics in the News

- Treatment of prisoners
- Religion and ethical values
- Crime, incarceration, and the death penalty

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Biography



Heidi Ravven is an expert on ethics and philosophy. She is writing a book called *Searching For Ethics In A New America*. In it, she will explore how the philosopher Baruch Spinoza's ethics can help us develop a truer and more humane ethical vision

that could enable us to rethink American identity and values. In the last few years, Ravven has discovered that recent neuroscience largely confirms Spinoza's theory of the emotions and the ethical and political theories that Spinoza built upon that basis. Neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, systems theorists, and psychoanalysts have been eager to learn more about Spinoza. Ravven is published widely in interdisciplinary journals and has spoken at conferences around the world. As one of the founding members of the philosophical association, The Society for Empirical Ethics, Ravven has been helping to develop a fruitful dialogue between philosophers and neurobiologists and other scientists about ethics.

Resources by this expert

- Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy (State University of New York Press, 2002)

Recent Interviews & Articles

- *Newhouse News Service*, November 15, 2006, by Dru Sefton, [Grasping the Mysteries of Weak Holiday Willpower](#) 
- *CFA Magazine*, April/May issue, 2006, by Lori Pizzani, "[Missed Behavior; Can cognitive biases explain unethical behavior?](#)" 
- *The New York Times*, April 19, 2003 "I Feel, Therefore I Am."

Organizational links for this expert

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