Course description and goals: Together, we’ll read Spinoza’s *Ethics I* and a selection of some of the most important secondary work on Spinoza’s method and ontology. Through writing and presenting a paper every week, you will become more proficient in identifying, clarifying, criticizing, and defending significant positions on fundamental philosophical issues.

Required text:


Selections from the following:


Schedule of readings and assignments:


*week 2:* *Ethics I* Definitions.  
Douglas Lewis, “On the Aims and Method of Spinoza’s Philosophy” (Shahan and Biro).


*week 4:* *Ethics I* Props. 1–7. Substance.  
Daisie Radner, “Malebranche’s Refutation of Spinoza” (Shahan and Biro).

*week 5:* *Ethics I* Props. 1–7. Substance.  
William A. Earle, “The Ontological Argument in Spinoza: Twenty Years Later,” (Grene).  [FALL BREAK—doesn’t affect our meeting time]

Alan Donagan, “Essence and the Distinction of Attributes in Spinoza’s Metaphysics” (Grene).

*week 7:* *Ethics I* Props. 8–11, and Letter 12. Attributes, infinity.  
A. Wolf, “Spinoza’s Conception of the Attributes of Substance” (Kashap).  

*week 8:* *Ethics I* Props. 12–14. God.
Warren Kessler, “A Note on Spinoza’s Concept of Attribute” (Mandelbaum and Freeman).

Jonathan Bennett, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics” (Garrett).

T. M. Forsyth, “Spinoza’s Doctrine of God in Relation to His Conception of Causality” (Kashap).
H. F. Hallett, “Substance and Its Modes” (Greene).

THANKSGIVING BREAK

William Sacksteder, “Spinoza on Part and Whole: The Worm’s Eye View” (Shahan and Biro).
Martha Kneale, “Eternity and Sempiternity” (Greene).


week 13:  Ethics I Appendix. Perfection.
S. Alexander, “Spinoza and Time” (Kashap).

Evaluation: Your entire grade in the course will be based on your weekly oral presentations and written assignments, one of which you will rewrite and submit as a final paper, in lieu of a final examination.

Policies:

● Do not submit for credit in this course work completed for another course. When you attack or defend someone else’s idea—whether Spinoza’s or one from the secondary literature—always cite your source.

● Assignments must be word-processed and free of spelling and grammatical errors. It’s always a good idea to visit the Writing Center with a draft of your paper, far enough in advance that criticism received can be taken into account. For your own protection, always make a copy of your assignments.