Descartes and Spinoza are two of the pivotal figures in the Western tradition of philosophy. We will examine their views on the nature of God, causation, substance, mind, knowledge, the passions of the soul, the material world, and our place in the universe. We will also consider the ways in which Descartes and Spinoza both drew upon and broke with the orthodox theories of their time.

There are two central learning objectives for the course: (1) to become familiar with the philosophical issues that Descartes and Spinoza confronted, their systematic responses to those issues, and the ways in which their work continues to be influential in philosophy; and (2) to develop critical thinking and writing skills.