PHI 3700: Philosophy of Religion
## Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo

Course Description:

Welcome to *Philosophy of Religion*! In this course we will be exploring the phenomenon of religion with an emphasis on issues of faith, reason, belief, knowledge, and language. We will examine various traditional philosophies of religion (e.g., the problem of evil, faith and reason, arguments for and against the existence of God, death and the immortality of the soul, etc.) as well as a postmodern philosophy of religion. This course is an invitation to rigorous reading and critical thinking about the ways in which humans encounter religion and assess its significance in relation to issues of value, meaning, and identity.

Required Texts:
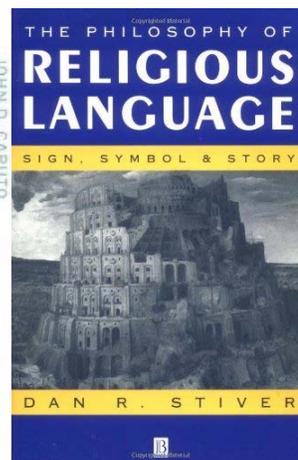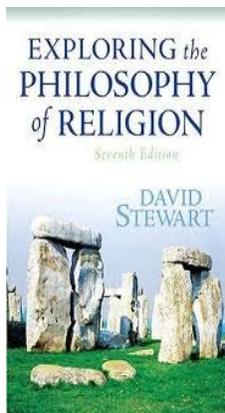
Course Objectives:

To think critically about the following questions:

- What is religion?
- What are some traditional notions of God?
- What are some modern and postmodern criticisms of religion?

- What are some possible relationships between faith, reason, belief, knowledge, and language?
- To introduce students to the academic study of religion and philosophy
- To encourage a close of reading of philosophical and religious texts

To begin go to "modules" and proceed to module 1 (introductory module).

Note: Make sure you go through modules link (rather than clicking assignment links under "coming up" to the right of the home screen), since the modules contain all relevant information, notes, and assignment prompts for each module.

Course Introduction:

Hi, All.

My name is Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo. My academic background is in philosophy of religion and culture; my research focuses on the intersection of philosophy, religion, and popular culture. I'm here to help facilitate your progression through this philosophy of religion course and assist you with any questions you may have as you complete the readings, quizzes, and writing assignments.

Reading Philosophical Texts:

Since my academic background is primarily in philosophy of religion, you can expect that a close reading of each thinker's perspective in a critical fashion will be our main focus (btw, thinking critically does not mean thinking negatively about the perspectives provided). We will do our best to try to understand each perspective; that is, read it in the best possible light before thinking about the consistency, implications, and value of the argument, proposition, position, or perspective being proposed. What unites each of the perspectives through their often diametrically opposed differences is that each makes claims about truth, meaning, and value relative to philosophy and religion.   Although this overview of different philosophies of religion is not comprehensive (how could it be), think of it as a representative sample of different approaches to religion and religious themes through a philosophical lens.
Course Structure:
The course is structured around anthologies of primary philosophical readings from diverse historical, geographical, and religious perspectives. Let me begin by saying that there will be a lot of reading in this course along with quizzes and writing assignments. You should consider the amount of time you have available before proceeding. If you hope to do well in the course, make sure you keep up with the readings, quizzes, and writing assignments. If you encounter any problems or have any questions about the material, don't hesitate to message me through webcourse mail, which is accessed through the inbox icon to the left of the screen (not my UCF email; all course correspondence needs to remain within the Canvas email system). If you have any technical questions, make sure you utilize the Canvas Study Guide (especially if this is your first online course); it includes everything you need to know about navigating an online course.

Note: Do not bypass the modules by going directly to assignment prompts that appear on your homepage (unfortunately, these can't be removed), since **you will be required to read through the instructor's remarks/notes (and submit each module's quiz) in order to proceed to subsequent modules**. My strong suggestion is to progress through each part of a module accessed through the Modules link (left side of the screen) in order to avoid confusion about readings or assignments.

I look forward to reading your posts and thinking through some very interesting philosophical perspectives with you!

Overview of Writing Assignments and Assessments

I. Introductory Posts and Orientation Quiz:

There will be 2 introductory assignments and an orientation quiz during the introductory module. The student-self introductions, which will be used for **evidence of participation** (viz., the university-required financial aid disbursement assignment), will be due by the end of the first week of classes; however, I will accept late submissions without penalty for this assignment. You will not be able to proceed to module 1 without reading through all the information in the introductory module and submitting *both* the student information for instructor assignment *and* the student orientation quiz. Introductory posts will be graded as complete/incomplete (points will be included in your final point total). [Total Points = 10]

Note: the Student Information for Instructor assignment will be used to determine course activity for financial aid purposes.

II. Writing Assignments:

Participation in the course will be determined by student-generated discussion questions, student-to-student responses, and instructor-generated reflection question posts. **Directions and due dates for writing assignments will be provided under the "Assignments" heading in the modules. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all deadlines.** Do not wait until the last day (or closing minutes of the deadline) to respond. Writing assignment prompts will **not** be reopened once closed (**do not submit late assignments through course email or in the comments box for an assignment; they will not be graded**). Make sure you are aware of all deadlines, since some writing assignments will close prior to the close of the module (e.g., student-generated discussion questions will need to be posted prior to the student-to-student responses). To make sure you do not miss a deadline, early posts are strongly encouraged. In some cases you will not be able to view questions or responses until you post your own. **Do not attempt to post something (or a blank submission) to view questions or responses without being ready to post your assignment**, since you will **not** be able to delete or edit your post once submitted (**empty submission will receive a zero for the assignment**). [Total Points = 210]

III. Quizzes:

There will be a quiz in each of the modules to assess your comprehension of the assigned reading material. Quizzes will consist of responding to multiple-choice questions based on the readings. Given the open book nature of the course, **quizzes will be timed**. You will only be allowed **one attempt per quiz**, so make sure you have read the chapters and are prepared before taking the quizzes. I would also suggest making a handy reference guide with names, theoretical positions, beliefs, etc. along with page numbers to reduce page-flipping during the timed assessments. [Total Points = 280]

Extra Credit:

Although there is no extra credit assignment at the end of the course, I have included two forms of what will constitute "extra credit" options throughout the course (i.e., reclaiming points that were otherwise lost):

- Since you must submit the quiz in each module in order to proceed to the next module, **any missed quiz may be taken with a 5 point deduction**. It is the student's responsibility to request this missed quiz option through course email as early as possible after the closing of the module. **If you do not miss any quizzes through and including module 5, you may request one quiz resubmission. This must be requested before completing module 6 assignments.** If you have missed a quiz, this resubmission option is not available.
- Each student is allowed to submit **one** missed **writing assignment or resubmit one writing assignment with the lowest score (not both) without penalty.**

Students should refrain from making requests for additional extra credit. In order to avoid the need for extra credit, make sure you stay on top of the readings and assignment/quiz deadlines.

Regarding the Comments Box in Grading Rubrics:

Any questions about the writing assignments or quizzes should be addressed through course mail. Since the comments box in assignment and assessment rubrics (as it is currently structured in Canvas) does not immediately alert the instructor on her/his dashboard (thereby creating an unnecessary delay in communication), and because it is important to keep all student-instructor correspondence archived in one place, all questions related to writing assignments, quizzes, and course material should be sent to the instructor through course mail (not the instructor's UCF email).

Final grades will be based on the **total number of points earned by the student** out of a total of 500 possible points (not a weighted percentage). For a breakdown of points and letter grades, see the Grading Grid in this module

Grading Grid

A = 448-500 pts.   C = 348-372 pts.
B+ = 423-447 pts.   D+ = 323-347 pts.
B = 398-422 pts.   D = 298-322 pts.
C+ = 373-397 pts.   F = 297 pts. and below

Academic/Personal Conduct

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the *UCF Golden Rule* for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Personal Conduct

You are expected to conduct yourself in a manner that is conducive to the academic ends that we are attempting to achieve (see University standards for personal conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule). This course is an educational safe zone. It welcomes the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, ethnicities, religions, philosophies, and abilities. Consequently, all members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity and to refrain from offensive posts. It is expected that each student will be sensitive to the beliefs/values of others in the course. **Critical thinking should not be understood as "belief bashing."** In the case that this advice is not followed you should expect a lowering of your final grade or, in the event of continuous serious violations, removal from the course.

Student Accessibility Statement

The University of Central Florida considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be a strength and critical to its educational mission. UCF expects every member of the university community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture for all in its classrooms, work environments, and at campus events. Dimensions of diversity can include sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith and non-faith perspectives, socio-economic class, political ideology, education, primary language, family status, military experience, political beliefs, cognitive style,

and communication style. The individual intersection of these experiences and characteristics must be valued in our community.

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at www.shield.ucf.edu

If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible and/or contact Student Accessibility Services.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:
Title IX – EO/AA - http://www.eeo.ucf.edu/ & askanadvocate@ucf.edu
Disability Accommodation – Student Accessibility Services - http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/ & sas@ucf.edu
Diversity and Inclusion Training and Events – www.diversity.ucf.edu
Student Bias Grievances – Just Knights response team - http://jkrt.sdes.ucf.edu/
UCF Compliance and Ethics Office - http://compliance.ucf.edu/ & complianceandethics@ucf.edu
Ombuds Office - http://www.ombuds.ucf.edu

Copyright

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Protocols

The following ground rules will help your work in this course to go more smoothly. Please carefully review these expectations and follow them.

1. Academic integrity will be appraised according to the student academic behavior standards outlined in *The Golden Rule of the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook*. See http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/ for further details.
2. Keep up with the reading. You have quite a few chapters, modules, discussion postings, and e-mail messages to read for the class. Please keep up with the reading. Students who keep up with the reading tend to do much better in this kind of class than those who do not.

Messaging

Make sure you:

1. Check your inbox at least twice per week (more often is better).
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message. Generally, two days is considered reasonable amount of time to receive a reply.
3. Be courteous and considerate. Being honest and expressing yourself freely is very important but being considerate of others online is just as important as in the classroom.
4. Make every effort to be clear. Online communication lacks the nonverbal cues that fill in much of the meaning in face-to-face communication.
5. Do not use all caps. This makes the message very hard to read and is considered "shouting." Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation (you may want to compose in a word processor, then cut and paste the message into the discussion).
6. Break up large blocks of text into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.
7. Never assume that your messages can be read by no one except yourself; others may be able to read or access your mail. Never send or keep anything that you would not mind seeing on the evening news.

Discussion Topics

General "rules of the road" or protocols that apply to messages also apply to the use of discussions. Use the following conventions when composing a discussion posting:

1. During a Discussion assignment, deadlines for posting to and replying will be specified with each assignment. It is a good practice to always check the Discussions multiple times during the week.
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message.
3. Everyone should feel free to participate in class and online discussions. Regular and meaningful discussion postings constitute a substantial portion of your grade.
4. Respect each other's ideas, feelings and experiences.
5. Be courteous and considerate. It is important to be honest and to express yourself freely, but being considerate of others is just as important and expected online as it is in the classroom.

6. Explore disagreements and support assertions with data and evidence.
7. Do not use postings such as "I agree," "I don't know either," "Who cares," or "ditto." They do not add to the discussion, take up space on the Discussions, and will not be counted for assignment credit.
8. Avoid posting large blocks of text. If you must, break them into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.

Word of Caution

Since this course is predominantly self-paced, my **very strong recommendation** is that you keep up with the readings, discussion posts, and quizzes in order to stay on track. It has been my experience that self-paced courses are a double-edged sword. The flexibility that makes online courses popular also brings with it the temptation to procrastinate in the absence of weekly F2F meetings. As a result, withdrawals and failing grades due to the inability to complete work are very high in online courses (especially due to missed quizzes and writing assignments). Given this flexibility as well as the open-book nature of this course, make sure you complete the quizzes and writing assignments on time. It is best not to wait until the last hour, minute, or seconds prior to the deadline.

If you want to avoid undue stress, anxiety, and do well in the course, make sure you take the time to read on a consistent basis and check in on regularly. Keep in mind that students who are actively engaged in the course will fare better at the end of the semester. If you have any questions concerning the course, feel free to email me. If you encounter material in the readings that you do not understand, contact me and I will gladly assist you.

Federal Financial Aid Regulation

All faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the **Student Information for Instructor** assignment included in this module by the date listed in the module (or, if adding the course late, as soon as possible after adding the course). This assignment should be turned in no later than the end of the first (introductory) module. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Support Services

The following services/resources are available to assist students:

- Review the [Academic Engagement for Financial Aid FAQ](#) web page for a list of frequently asked questions.
- Online@UCF Support – Provides technical assistance to students who use Webcourses@UCF.
  - Live support 8:30 to 4:30
    - 407-823-0407
    - Live Chat and online document search: http://online.ucf.edu/support/
  - Email: onlinesupport@ucf.edu

- o Support form: http://online.ucf.edu/support/contact-online-support/
- o Weekend and evening hours: Messages are answered by email.
- Service Desk – Students should contact the Service Desk for issues regarding NID passwords or access to university systems.
  - o Hours: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday-Friday
  - o Call: 407-823-5117
  - o Website: http://www.cst.ucf.edu/service-desk/