Course Number: APO 652  
Course Title: The New Atheism  
Term: Summer 2016

Instructors
Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, OP (smahfood@holyapostles.edu) 860-632-3085
Rev. Dr. Donald Sparling (dsparling@holyapostles.edu)

1. Course Description

This course focuses on the nature of the New Atheism and the attempt it is making to secure political power in its assault against the faith.

2. Envisioned Learning Outcomes

1) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for atheism and how the philosophy explains itself.

2) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the new atheism as it manifested itself in the late-20th century and early 21st.

3) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the way atheism is refuted and the various methods by which Christians might confront it.

3. Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

Lectures:
- Welcoming audio from Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, OP, about the counter-cultural phenomenon of the Church. Welcoming audio from Rev. Dr. Donald Sparling about the relationship between faith and science and his coming to awareness of that relationship.

Readings:
- Read Introduction and Chapter 1 of Catholic Realism; Dialogue and Proclamation

Activities:
For the Discussion Board provide 300- to 500-word responses to each question.
- What stood out for you in your professors’ stories?
- What is the relationship between dialogue and proclamation and how have you experienced that relationship in your own ministries?
Week 2: Types of Atheists and Stories of Converts from Atheism

Readings:
- Read Chapter 2 of Catholic Realism;
- Read “Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life”

Activities:
For the Discussion Board provide 300- to 500-word responses to each question
- Have you ever known personally or read about any of the types of atheists described in Chapter 2? How did they respond to your theistic ideas or witness?
- What is your experience of New Age thinking? How does “Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life” ring true with your experience?
- Choose one of the conversion stories and summarize it in your own words as though you were telling it to an atheist.

Week 3: Proof and Attributes of God’s Existence

Readings:
- Read chapter 3 of Catholic Realism;
- View the famous 2-part Russell/Copleston Debate on YouTube – Part 1 and Part 2

Suggested Readings:
- A Reasonable God, “Faith, Reason, and Evidence,” pp. 31-56
- A Reasonable God, “Three Arguments for God,” pp. 57-88
- A Reasonable God, “The Design Argument,” pp. 89-116
- Answering the New Atheism, “Dawkins’ Fallacious Philosophy” pp. 52-74

Activities:
For the Discussion Board provide 300- to 500-word responses to each question
- Of the five ways summarized in Chapter 3 of Catholic Realism, which one do you find most effective?
- Which of Dawkins’ critiques provides the greatest challenge for you, and in what way might you effectively resolve that challenge?

Week 4: Science and Theism

Readings:
- Read Chapter 4 in Catholic Realism
- Read the entirety of Theology and Modern Science

Suggested Readings:

Activities:
For the Discussion Board provide 300- to 500-word responses to each question
• What has been your understanding of the relationship between science and theism? How has chapter 4 of Catholic Realism challenged or affirmed that understanding?

• Summarize the New Story of Science and provide what you perceive to be the most cogent argument for the compatibility between the old story and the new?

**Week 5: New Atheism and The Question of a God**

Readings:

• *Answering the New Atheism*, “Can God’s Existence be Demonstrated?” pp. 75-91

Suggested Readings:

• *A Reasonable God*, “The New Face of Atheism,” pp. 1-6
• *A Reasonable God*, “Science, Religion, and the Claim that God Exists,” pp. 7-30

Activities:

For the Discussion Board provide a 300- to 500-word response to the following question:

• What is Dawkins’ point concerning our ability to demonstrate the existence of God and how adequate is Wiker’s and Hahn’s response?

Assignments:

• **Semester Project Topic Due.** See Section IV below. Students may choose any idea concerning the content of the course for the purpose of researching and articulating it in some form – (e.g., a 5-7 page research paper, a 25-30 slide PowerPoint slideshow, etc.)

**Week 6: Does the Suffering in the World Prove God cannot Exist?**

Readings:

• First part of Chapter 5 of Catholic Realism: the summary of C.S. Lewis.
• Watch any video you can find of C.S. Lewis on YouTube to get a sense of him, or watch the famous movie *Shadowlands*.
• Read C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain* – Chapters 1-3

Activities:

For the Discussion Board provide a 500-word summary of the basic argument.

• For the Discussion Board provide a 300-word statement concerning one idea you would use in talking to a person who disbelieves in God because of suffering.

**Week 7: Suffering and God Part II**

Readings:

• C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* – Chapters 4-10
Activities:
- Write for Discussion Board 300-500 words telling the others why you found one particular idea in each of the Lewis chapters to be thought-provoking (the response should manifest that you read all the chapters assigned.)
- Summarize the entirety of John Paul II’s Salvifici Doloris in fifty (50) words. Then, explain the meaning of to your life (no word limit).

Assignments:
- Annotated Bibliography Due. (See section IV below.) Students should have 5-7 resources independent of the texts already provided in the course.

Week 8: Arguments for Atheism

Readings:
- The God Delusion, “Why there Almost Certainly is No God,” pp. 137-189
- Answering the New Atheism, “Dawkins’ god, Chance” pp. 10-22
- The Last Superstition, “Chapter 2: Greeks Bearing Gifts” pp. 27-73

Suggested Readings:

Activities:
For the Discussion Board provide a 300- to 500-word response to the following questions:
1) Summarize Dawkins’ argument for why there is almost certainly no God and explain, in your opinion, which of his arguments is the least implausible.
2) For the Discussion Board explain which of Wiker’s and/or Feser’s reasons you would use in reply to a person who disbelieves in God because of that particular argument of Dawkins.

Week 9: Morality

Readings:
- Chapter 6 of Catholic Realism, “Morality and Atheism”
- The God Delusion, “The Roots of Morality: Why are We Good?” pp. 241-267
- Answering the New Atheism, “The Problem of Morality” pp. 92-118
- Answering the New Atheism, “Dawkins’ Morality” pp. 119-132
- The Last Superstition, “Ch. 4, “Scholastic Aptitude, Section 2 on ‘Natural Law’” pp. 132-153

Suggested readings:
- Excerpts on morality written by Hitchens, Harris and Dennett (provided in course site)
Activities:
- For the Discussion Board provide a 500-word response using ideas in the readings refuting Dawkins’ skeptical and relativistic ideas.

**Week 10: The “Problem” of Religion**

Readings:
- *Catholic Realism*, second part of Chapter 5
- *The Last Superstition*, “Ch. 1, “Bad Religion” pp. 1-26
- *Answering the New Atheism*, “Pride and Prejudice” pp. 23-51

Suggested Readings:

Activities:
- For the Discussion Board provide a 500-word response using concepts from Mahfood/Chervin, Wiker and Feser to refute Dawkins’ points.

**Week 11: Conclusions**

Readings:
- Chapter 7 of *Catholic Realism*, “Conclusion – Impact of Atheism"
- *Answering the New Atheism*, “King Richard,” pp. 143-ff

Suggested Readings:
- *A Reasonable God*, “A Modest Conclusion,” pp. 177-178
- *The Last Superstition*, “Ch. 6 – Aristotle’s Revenge” pp. 229-268.

Activities:
- For the Discussion Board provide a 300-word response, using arguments from Mahfood and Wiker, to an atheist who says that God is simply a gap that has yet to be filled by science.

**Week 12: Semester Project Rough Draft Due for Peer Review**

Assignments:
- Rough Draft of Semester Project Due by Thursday. Students should have a completed draft that can be peer reviewed and returned with peer comments by Saturday. Students are to integrate the comments into the penultimate draft due in week 13.

**Week 13: Semester Project Faculty Review**

Assignments:
- Revisions of Semester Projects are due by Tuesday for the purpose of faculty review. All projects will be returned with comments by Saturday. Final drafts due in Week 14.
**Week 14: Semester Project Submission**

Assignments:
- Final Draft of Semester Project responding to faculty comments Due by Friday for final evaluation. Also due to be posted back in the group containers for discussion in Week 15.

**Week 15: Semester Project Presentation**

Assignments:
- Live presentations via WebEx. Students will sign up for a session during this final week.

4. **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Discussion Postings – 65%
- Semester Project and Peer Review – 35%

For the second accountability exercise, students will develop a short multimedia project based on some aspect of Atheism and the New Atheism. This project will be divided into four parts, each of which will be due on the dates assigned below.

- The first part is to develop a thesis statement and post a short annotated bibliography concerning some aspect of the New Atheism. The annotated bibliography should include 4-6 resources and conform to the HACS Stylesheet located at http://www.holyapostles.edu/owl/resources/. **Due at the end of Week 7. 25% of the project grade.**
- The second part is to build some kind of presentation concerning the topic with which all students in the class can interact. Any student who needs help with the building of his or her presentation should email the instructors by Week 8. Students are free to determine what exactly it is they will do. **Due by the end of Week 11.**
- The third part is to provide a peer review of another student’s project as assigned. **Due at the end of week 12. 15% of the project grade.**
- The fourth part is to revise the semester project based on the peer review and post for evaluation by the course professors. **Due by the end of week 13. 50% of the project grade.**
- The fifth part is to prepare a 10-minute live presentation explaining the main idea of the project and where the student might take it in the future. (The rubric for the discussion postings applies to this analysis.) **Due during Week 14. 10% of the project grade.**

5. **REQUIRED READINGS and RESOURCES:**

- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain* Used Barnes and Noble $5 ISBN 9780060652968
- *Dialogue and Proclamation; Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life; Salvifici Doloris*
6. SUGGESTED READINGS and RESOURCES:

7. EVALUATION

(Basis of evaluation with explanation regarding the nature of the assignment and the percentage of the grade assigned to each item below). Students who have difficulty with research and composition are encouraged to pursue assistance with the Online Writing Lab.

GRADING SCALE:
A 94-100; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73 D 60-69; F 59 and below

Grading Rubric for the Major Papers and Discussion Board (DB) Postings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>0 pts. – Paper 0 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
<th>3 pts. – Paper 2 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
<th>6 pts. – Paper 4 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
<th>9 pts. – Paper 6 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
<th>12 pts. – Paper 8 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
<th>15 pts. – Paper 10 pts. – DB Posting;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Understanding</td>
<td>Analysis shows no awareness of the discipline or its methodologies as the relate to the topic</td>
<td>Lack of Understanding</td>
<td>Analysis seems to misunderstand some basic concepts of the discipline or lacks ability to articulate them.</td>
<td>Inadequate understanding</td>
<td>Analysis is sometimes unclear in understanding or articulating concepts of the discipline.</td>
<td>Adequate understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH</td>
<td>Missing Research</td>
<td>Paper shows no evidence of research: citation of sources missing.</td>
<td>Inadequate research and/or documentation</td>
<td>Over-reliance on few sources; spotty documentation of facts in text; pattern of citation errors.</td>
<td>Weak research and/or documentation but needs improvement</td>
<td>Inadequate number or quality of sources; many facts not referenced; several errors in citation format.</td>
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**WRITING & EXPRESSION**

| Incomplete writing | Writing difficult to understand, serious improvement needed | Episodic writing, a mix of strengths and weaknesses. | Acceptable writing, but could use some sharpening of skill | Solid writing, with something interesting to say | Command-level writing, making a clear impression |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Analysis is only partially written or completely misses the topic | Analysis fails to address the topic; confusing organization or development; little elaboration of position; insufficient control of sentence structure and vocabulary; unacceptable number of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage | Analysis noticeably neglects or misinterprets the topic; simplistic or repetitive treatment, only partially-internalized; weak organization and development, some meandering; simple sentences, below-level diction; distracting errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage | Analysis is an uneven response to parts of the topic; somewhat conventional treatment; satisfactory organization, but more development needed; adequate syntax and diction, but could use more vigor; overall control of grammar, mechanics, and usage, but some errors | Analysis is an adequate response to the topic; some depth and complexity in treatment; persuasive organization and development, with suitable reasons and examples; level-appropriate syntax and diction; mastery of grammar, mechanics, and usage, with hardly any error | Analysis is a thorough response to the topic; thoughtful and insightful examination of issues; compelling organization and development; superior syntax and diction; error-free grammar, mechanics, and usage |

**COMMUNITY INTERACTION (50-word response)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Inadequate response</th>
<th>Poor response</th>
<th>Weak response</th>
<th>Acceptable response</th>
<th>Individually-conscious contributory response</th>
<th>Community-conscious contributory response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response merely provides laudatory encouragement for original post, e.g., &quot;Excellent post! You really have thought of something there.&quot;</td>
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**8. DISABILITIES ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY**

Holy Apostles College & Seminary is committed to the goal of achieving equal educational opportunities and full participation in higher education for persons with disabilities who qualify for admission to the College. Students enrolled in online courses who have documented disabilities requiring special accommodations should contact Bob Mish, the Director of Online Student Affairs, at rmish@holyapostles.edu or 860-632-3015. In all cases, reasonable accommodations will be made to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to course materials in a mode in which they can receive them. Students who have technological limitations (e.g., slow Internet connection speeds in convents) are asked to notify their instructors the first week of class for alternative means of delivery.

**9. ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY**

Students at Holy Apostles College & Seminary are expected to practice academic honesty.

**Avoiding Plagiarism**

In its broadest sense, plagiarism is using someone else’s work or ideas, presented or claimed as your own. At this stage in your academic career, you should be fully conscious of what it means...
to plagiarize. This is an inherently unethical activity because it entails the uncredited use of someone else’s expression of ideas for another’s personal advancement; that is, it entails the use of a person merely as a means to another person’s ends.

**Students:**

- Should identify the title, author, page number/webpage address, and publication date of works when directly quoting small portions of texts, articles, interviews, or websites.
- Should not copy more than two paragraphs from any source as a major component of papers or projects.
- Should appropriately identify the source of information when paraphrasing (restating) ideas from texts, interviews, articles, or websites.
- Should follow the Holy Apostles College & Seminary Stylesheet (available on the Online Writing Lab’s website at [http://www.holyapostles.edu/owl/resources](http://www.holyapostles.edu/owl/resources)).

**Consequences of Academic Dishonesty:**

Because of the nature of this class, academic dishonesty is taken very seriously. Students participating in academic dishonesty may be removed from the course and from the program.

**10. ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Even though you are not required to be logged in at any precise time or day, you are expected to login several times during each week. Because this class is being taught entirely in a technology-mediated forum, it is important to actively participate each week in the course. In a traditional classroom setting for a 3-credit course, students would be required to be in class 3 hours a week and prepare for class discussions 4.5 hours a week. Expect to devote at least 7 quality hours a week to this course. A failure on the student’s part to actively participate in the life of the course may result in a reduction of the final grade.

**11. INCOMPLETE POLICY**

An Incomplete is a temporary grade assigned at the discretion of the faculty member. It is typically allowed in situations in which the student has satisfactorily completed major components of the course and has the ability to finish the remaining work without re-enrolling, but has encountered extenuating circumstances, such as illness, that prevent his or her doing so prior to the last day of class.

To request an incomplete, distance-learning students must first download a copy of the Incomplete Request Form. This document is located within the Shared folder of the Files tab in Populi. Secondly, students must fill in any necessary information directly within the PDF document. Lastly, students must send their form to their professor via email for approval. “Approval” should be understood as the professor responding to the student’s email in favor of granting the “Incomplete” status of the student.

Students receiving an Incomplete must submit the missing course work by the end of the sixth week following the semester in which they were enrolled. An incomplete grade (I) automatically turns into the grade of “F” if the course work is not completed.

Students who have completed little or no work are ineligible for an incomplete and must receive the grade that they have earned. Students who feel they are in danger of failing the course due to an inability to complete course assignments should withdraw from the course.

A “W” (Withdrawal) will appear on the student’s permanent record for any course dropped after the end of the first week of a semester to the end of the third week. A “WF” (Withdrawal/Fail) will appear
on the student’s permanent record for any course dropped after the end of the third week of a semester and on or before the Friday before the last week of the semester.

12. ABOUT YOUR PROFESSORS

Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, OP, is a Lay Dominican of the Chapter of the Holy Rosary in the Province of St. Albert. Dr. Mahfood holds a master’s in comparative literature from the University of Texas at Arlington, a master’s in philosophy from Holy Apostles College & Seminary, a master’s in educational technology from Webster University and a doctorate in postcolonial literature and theory from Saint Louis University. Among his publications include his book Radical Eschatologies: Embracing the Eschaton in the Works of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Nuruddin Farah, and Ayi Kwei Armah. He lives in St. Louis with his wife, Dr. Stephanie Mahfood, and children, Alexander and Eva Ruth.

Deacon Dr. Donald W. Sparling (titles sometimes are confusing, I have a Ph.D. in biology and I am an ordained deacon in the Catholic Church – so is it Dr. Deacon? Deacon Dr.? Reverend Doctor? Don works fine if you’re comfortable with it).

Current professional address: Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory, MC6504, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. 62901.