Syllabus
Religious Studies 216
Modern Religious Thought

Prof. Tyler Roberts Fall 2007
Department of Religious Studies Class: T, TH 12:45-2:05, Steiner 306
Steiner 203; x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu Office Hours: MW 1-3 or appointment

Course Description
What does it mean to be a religious ‘believer’? To be an ‘atheist’? There are deceptively simple questions and in this course we explore the ways selected 19th and 20th century philosophers and theologians have tried to answer them. In doing so, we will look at the differences between “philosophical” and “theological” approaches to these questions, consider how such thinkers have criticized or defended “religion,” and attend to the intellectual currents, social changes, and historical events of the period in which these views of religion and atheism were articulated. A major goal of the course is to give you the opportunity to develop your ability to engage in critical argumentation—to carefully and fairly listen to or read the arguments of others and to take and defend, in discussion and in writing, clear positions of your own.

Course Requirements and Grading
1) Class Participation (30% of final grade):
   i) Regular participation in class discussions. You are expected to have done all the assigned reading for each class session and to come to class (with the readings in hand) having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading that you are ready to discuss in class. More than two unexcused absences will have a significant adverse effect on your grade.
   ii) Blackboard Assignments: Each Friday, I will post on our Blackboard site questions relating to the readings for the next week. By 11:00 p.m. on either Monday or Wednesday night of the following week, you should post a response to one of these questions. Responses should be relatively brief, about a paragraph, but they should demonstrate real engagement with the text and offer some basic support for the ideas you express. You are encouraged to engage the responses of other students in the class in your postings. On occasion, you may want to pose and discuss briefly one of your own questions. You should come to each class having read all the responses posted for that day.
2) Papers (45%). Four papers will be due during the course of the semester: 2-3 pages on Alister McGrath, due Sept 12; 3-4 pages on Kierkegaard, due Sept. 26; 3-4 pages on Nietzsche, due Oct. 13; 6-7 pages on Rowan Williams, due Nov. 14. Paper #1 will count for 5% of your grade; Papers #2 and #3 will each count 10%; Paper #4 will count 20 %.
3) Take Home Final Exam (25% of final grade).

Reading and Assignment Schedule
*Handout or E-Reserve

Aug: 30: Intro

Week 1: Modernity and the Death of God
Sep. 4: Alister McGrath, The Twilight of Atheism 1-18
Nicholas Lash, “The Question of God Today”*
Sep. 6: McGrath, 21-47
Rene Descartes, “Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne”*
Friedrich Nietzsche, selections from The Gay Science*

Week 2: Religion in Modernity: From Schleiermacher and Hegel to Kierkegaard
Sep. 11: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Apology*
Sep. 13: Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 1-36

>>>Paper #1 Due Monday, Sep. 17, by 5:00 pm

Week 3: Kierkegaard
Sep. 18: Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 36-71
Sep. 20: Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 72-111

Week 4: The Suspicion of Religion: Marx and Nietzsche
Sep. 25: McGrath, 48-67
Karl Marx, from “On the Jewish Question,” 26-46*
Sep. 27: McGrath, 112-154
Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, Preface, Essay I

>>>Paper #2 Due Monday, Oct. 2, by 5:00 pm

Week 5: The Suspicion of Religion: Nietzsche
Oct. 2: Genealogy of Morals, 84-145
Oct. 4: Genealogy of Morals, finish

Week 6: Suspicion and Faith
McGrath, 67-111
Oct. 11: Paul Ricoeur, “The Language of Faith”*

Week 7: Theology I
Oct. 16: Karl Barth, “The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion”*

>>>Paper #3: Due Friday, Oct. 19, by 5:00 pm

Week 8: Theology II
Oct. 30: Rowan Williams, Resurrection, xi-67
Nov. 1: Resurrection, finish

Week 9: Theology III
Nov. 6: Rowan Williams, “The Suspicion of Suspcion”*
Katherine Tanner, “The Nature and Tasks of Theology”*
Nov. 8: Rowan Williams, “God and the Artist”*

Week 10: Atheism
Nov. 13: Julian Baggini, Atheism, 1-56
Nov. 15: Baggini, finish

>>>Paper #4: Due Monday, Nov. 19, by 5:00 pm

Week 11: No Class

Week 12: Religion and the Postmodern
Nov. 27: James K. A. Smith, 9-58
Nov. 29: Smith, 59-108

Week 13: Twilight of Atheism?
Dec. 4: Smith, 109-146
Dec. 6: McGrath, 171-237

Week 14: Review
Dec. 11: McGrath, 238-279
Dec. 12: Re-cap and Evaluations

Final Exam

Required Books (for purchase at the Bookstore)
Julian Baggini, Atheism: A Very Short Introduction
Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments
Alister McGrath, The Twilight of Atheism
Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals
James A. K. Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?
Rowan Williams, Resurrection