Syllabus
Religious Studies 216
Modern Religious Thought:
Faith, Suspicion, and The Meaning of Life

Prof. Tyler Roberts Fall 2006
Department of Religious Studies Class: T, TH 12:45-2:05, Steiner 106
Steiner 203; x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu Office Hours: MWF 1-3 or appointment

Course Description
A study of 19th and 20th century philosophical and theological defenses and
criticisms of religion. Attention will be given to the intellectual currents, social
changes, and historical events of the period in which these views of religion were
articulated. In addition to learning about particular religious and philosophical
thinkers, 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 (35% of final grade):
i) Class attendance. More than two unexcused absences during the course of the
semester will have a significant adverse effect on your final grade.
ii) 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.
iii) Small groups. On occasion, the class divide into small groups for discussion.
Peer evaluation of this work will contribute to your participation grade.
iv) Blackboard Assignments: Each Friday, I will post on our Blackboard site
questions relating to the readings for the next week. By 10:00 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. Offhand observations and simple expressions of opinion or
feeling are not acceptable. 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%). Five papers will be due during the course of the semester. The first
three papers will be assigned as follows: 2-3 pages on Julian young, due Sept 9; 3-4
pages on Kierkegaard, due Sept. 23; 3-4 pages on Nietzsche, due Oct. 14. During
the second half of the semester, you will choose two of the following topics on which
to write: Rosenzweig (due Nov. 4), Judaism and the Holocaust (due Nov. 11),
Liberation/Post-colonial Theologies (due Nov. 23), Evangelical Thought (due Dec.
2), Postmodernism and religion (due Dec. 9). Paper #1 will count for 5% of your
grade; each of the remaining papers will count 10%.
3) Final Exam (20% of final grade). The final will be on Dec. 19 at 9:00 a.m..

Reading and Assignment Schedule
*Readings on E-Reserve
#Readings on Blackboard

Week 1
Aug: 24: Intro
Week 2: Modernity and the Death of God
Aug. 28: Julian Young, The Death of God and the Meaning of Life, 1-20
Aug. 30: Julian Young, The Death of God and the Meaning of Life, 21-7

Week 3: Religion in Modernity: From Schleiermacher and Hegel to Kierkegaard
Sept. 5: Julian Young, pp. 57-77
Sept. 7: Soren Kierkegaard, “Eulogy on Abraham” from Fear and Trembling*
Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 1-45
>>>Paper #1 Due Friday, Sept. 8, by 5:00 pm: Reading Lash

Week 4: Kierkegaard
Sept. 12: Philosophical Fragments, pp. 46-88
Sept. 14: Philosophical Fragments, 89-139

Week 5: The Suspicion of Religion: Marx and Nietzsche
Sept. 19: Julian Young, pp. 78-9;
Karl Marx, from “On the Jewish Question,” 26-46*
Sept. 21: Julian Young, pp. 44-56, 83-96
Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, Preface, Essay I
>>>Paper #2 Due Friday, Sept 22 by 5:00 pm

Week 6: The Suspicion of Religion: Nietzsche
Sept. 26: Genealogy of Morals, pp. 84-145
Sept. 28: Genealogy of Morals, finish

Week 7: Suspicion and Faith
Oct. 5: Paul Ricoeur: “The Language of Faith”*
Paper #3: Due Friday, Oct. 6 by 5:00 pm

Week 8: Buber
Oct. 10: Martin Buber, The Eclipse of God, 3-46
Oct. 12: The Eclipse of God, 49-111, 123-9

Week 9: Christian Theology I: Reading Scripture
Oct. 24: Rowan Williams, The Trial of Jesus, pp. 1-48
Oct. 26: The Trial of Jesus, finish

Week 10: Christian Theology II: Religion and Liberation
Oct. 31: Gustavo Gutierrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology”*
Nov. 2: Rebecca Chopp, “Proclamation as the Word for the World”*

Week 11: Heidegger and Sartre
Nov. 9: Julian Young, pp. 97-124
Nov. 11: Julian Young, pp. 125-159

Week 12: Heidegger and the Postmodern
Nov. 16: Julian Young, pp. 188-196
Regina Schwartz, “The Revelation of Justice”*
Nov. 18: Julian Young, pp. 197-212
Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells”*

Week 13: No Class

Week 14: Postmodern Theology
Nov. 28: Gianni Vattimo, Belief, 1-64
Nov. 30: Belief, finish

>>>Postmodernism Paper due, Friday, Dec. 9 by 5:00 pm

Week 15: Review
Dec. 5: James Edwards, “The Plain Sense of Things”*
Dec. 7: Re-cap and Evaluations

Final Exam

Required Texts
Buber
Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments
Freudrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals
Gianni Vattimo, Belief
Williams
Young

Readings
Rebecca Chopp
James Edwards
Gustavo Gutierrez
Martin Heidegger
Soren Kierkegaard from FT
Karl Marx, Jewish Question
Paul Ricoeur: “The Critique of Religion” and “The Language of Faith”
Regina Schwartz on Derrida