Imagine No Religion

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REQUIRED TEXTS:

MEETINGS:

M. J. 4 (1 p.m.)  Introduction to the course; What do we think of atheists in the U.S.? (“30 Days: Atheist/Christian” Video)

T. J. 5  Introduction to the Broad Themes of *The God Delusion* (“The Root of All Evil?: Part I” Video and *TGD*, “Preface,” 23-30, and Ch. 1, 31-50)

Optional Supplementary Reading (OSR): Stephen Gould’s “Non-Overlapping Magesteria”
http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html

Th. J. 7  Finish “The God Hypothesis” (*TGD*, Ch. 2, 90 - 99)
“Arguments for God’s Existence” (*TGD*, Ch. 3, 100 -110)
http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm
Anselm’s Ontological Argument: http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/anselm.htm

OSR: Pascal’s Wager (See #233, in particular):
http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/anselm.htm

W. J. 13  “Why There is Almost Certainly No God” (“Naked Science: Was Darwin Wrong?” Video and *TGD*, Ch. 4 137 - 151)

Th. J. 14  “Why There is Almost Certainly No God” (*TGD*, Ch. 4, 151 - top of page 173)

T. J. 19  Assessing Dawkins’ Argument for Why There is Almost Certainly No God (*TGD*, Ch. 4, 173 -189 & “Universe or Multiverse?” Video) First Response Paper Due
The Roots of Morality (*TGD*, Ch. 6, 241 - 249)

W. J. 20  Finish “The Roots of Morality” (*TGD*, Ch. 6, 249 - 267)
The ‘Good Book’ and the Changing Moral Zeitgeist (*TGD*, Ch. 7, 268 - 298)

Th. J. 21  Finish “The ‘Good Book’” (*TGD*, Ch. 7, 298-316)
“What’s So Wrong with Religion?” (*TGD*, Ch. 8, 317-348)
Religion and Child Abuse (*TGD*, Ch. 9, 349 - 387)

T. J. 26  “A Much Needed Gap” (*TGD*, Ch. 9, 388-420)
W. J. 27  Finish ‘Deluded’ (TDD, Ch. 1, 27-31)
“Has Science Disproved God?” (TDD, Ch. 2, 33-51)

Th. J. 28 “Is Religion Evil?” (TDD, Ch. 4, 75-97)

T. F. 2  Third Response Paper Due (10 a.m., my office)

REQUIREMENTS:

1) Read all assigned texts and attend meetings.

As we only have 12 meetings during interim, any absences are significant. If you have to miss a meeting you should contact me (at least leave me a message explaining your situation) no later than the day of that meeting. You will need to write a 5 page summary of that meeting’s reading assignment which will be due as soon as possible (to be decided when you contact me), but no later than the second meeting after your return to class. Failure to turn in the paper in the designated amount of time after missing a class will result in the loss of a full letter grade from your final grade for the course.

2) Quizzes

There will be several very short quizzes on the readings given randomly throughout the course at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be designed simply to determine if you are doing the readings. As such, I will typically ask one very factual question about the text, something I believe anyone should have been able to get from their reading (in other words, nothing involving a careful understanding of difficult ideas - that’s the sort of thing we’ll be working through in class).

All together, the quizzes will count toward 20% of your grade. Everyone will start with a grade of 100 and retain that grade for each question correctly answered or lose 10 points for each question incorrectly answered (or missed because of absence or tardiness the day the quiz was given). I will, however, allow you to write a 4 page summary of the readings for class on a day in which you may have missed a quiz (either by incorrectly answering it or absence or tardiness) for any reason that will enable you to redeem the 10 lost points for one quiz. In addition to this, you are always welcome to make up any quiz missed because of absence due to illness or some sort of personal emergency in the same manner. In order to redeem a missed quiz, the summary should be turned in by the next class period or, if this should be impossible (due to illness, perhaps) at the earliest possible time to be arranged with me. But, in the latter case, such arrangements should be made with me as soon as possible after the missed quiz, at the latest by the day of your return to class (in the case of absence due to illness).

3) Student Presentation of Readings

On one occasion, I will assign a portion of the reading/study guide for you to cover in class, basically a set of questions to answer on the basis of the readings. It will principally concern explaining key concepts or arguments that are being developed in the readings. Though you should also feel free to raise any critical questions you might have of the material as a basis for discussion. Some of the material you are asked to present may not naturally give itself to raising such critical questions for discussion. For this reason you should not feel obliged to raise such questions. But I will always look favorably on a presentation which raises such thoughtful, critical questions whenever appropriate.

Your presentation will count toward 20% of your grade. I will be assessing your presentation on the basis of its 1) clarity and organization, 2) accuracy to the readings, 3) personal engagement with the material you are presenting and, where appropriate, 4) the thoughtfulness of any critical questions you bring to the material being presented. The main thing to keep in mind in preparing for your presentation is to just prepare for it. Make notes for yourself that you can refer to, for instance. Rehearse your presentation before coming to class. Above all, never come to class thinking you can just wing it. A copy of your notes for your
These notes should be intelligible to me and so they should consist of complete prose sentences rather than sentence fragments or bullet points meant to merely jog your memory about a point you want to make.

4) Papers

You will need to write three papers, at least 5 full pages in length. Each should deal with what you believe to be the most significant issue or related set of issues emerging from our readings to that point (for the last two papers, you should focus on the readings done since the last paper). The papers are each due on the dates specified on the syllabus.

The papers will serve two purposes: 1) They will function as exams of sorts in which you will need to demonstrate your understanding of some portion of the material we have studied, that portion, of course, to be determined by you. One of the ways I will be assessing the paper is in terms of how accurately they explain the concepts and arguments from the readings. 2) They will also function as opportunities for you to come to your own tentative conclusions regarding the issues raised by our readings. I will be assessing this on the basis of how well you support your conclusions with reasons, either your own or those provided in the readings. I will also be looking for whether you respond to all of the relevant considerations that have been raised either by the readings or in class. For instance, I would grade a paper down that concluded that Dawkins argument for why there almost certainly is no God is valid without at least trying to respond to criticisms raised in class that argument by myself and other students and, for the last paper, McGrath.

Your papers, all together, will be worth 60% of your grade. Each paper will be worth 20% unless there is improvement from your first to your last two papers (this would be a situation where your first grade is the worst of the three) in which case the first paper’s grade won’t count and your last two papers will count toward 30% of your grade apiece.

Your papers should be expositional and critical. That is they should, 1) present and clarify an idea and the reasons given for that idea by the author(s) you are examining. You should always strive toward a sympathetic presentation of other people’s ideas which casts them in the best possible light (especially, if you are going to go on and criticize the shortcomings of these ideas). Even if you disagree with somebody's ideas, you should present them fairly with an eye toward making whatever positive insights they might contain salient to the reader. 2) The critical dimension of your essay should evaluate the validity of the reasons an author has advanced for her/his claim through an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s reasoning. These criticisms need not be original to you. You could be endorsing the criticisms one of our authors has advanced. But even then, you will need to explain why the criticisms are valid, why they should be taken as convincing.

Hints: An essay in Philosophy is not that different from any other sort of essay, except you deal primarily with ideas and arguments rather than facts, characters, or plots. Rules which apply to writing any other essay apply here as well. For example,

1) Document all references to your author’s work with appropriate citations. Brief quotations will enhance your essay by allowing you to more accurately present your author's position on an issue. But any quotations should be kept brief. The essay should present your understanding (in your own words) of your author's positions.

2) Make sure your writing style is clear. Don't introduce ideas without elaboration. Make sure your sentences make sense. Proofread your paper before handing it in.

3) When you are presenting your position, remember that no one is interested in what you think for its own sake. Your reader wants to know why we should accept your position as an implication of your evaluation of the arguments you have considered. In other words, your essay should not be divided into two parts - 1) What the authors believe and 2) What I believe - with no real connection between the two except, perhaps,
that they both refer to the same issue. Your position should emerge as a reasoned response to the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and arguments of your authors.

**Technical Specifications for Papers:** Your papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, using a size 12 font, allowing you to get at least 23 lines of text per page. Your margins are to be no more than 1 inch, top, bottom and sides. You are to place your name and title of the paper on a separate title page that is not counted in the length of the paper. You are to use endnotes for any substantial notes (beyond very brief bibliographical citations for quotations which may be in the body of the text) that are also not to be counted in the length of the paper. Citations must include complete bibliographical information for any texts used. They may, however, be of any stylistic form as long as they are clear enough to easily lead the reader to the source of the citation. You should refrain from using headers or footers that would prevent you from getting at least 23 lines of text per page.

**Guidelines for Internet Research:** Although research beyond what we have read is not required for these papers, you may want to do some additional research. In case you do research on the internet, remember that anyone can publish anything at all on the internet. As such, the most prudent attitude to take toward the documents you find there is to assume they are worthless unless you have good reason to believe otherwise. For this class, there are two types of acceptable literature to use in writing your papers that you may be able to find on the internet: 1) a document that is merely an electronic version of an article published in a scholarly publication such as an academic journal. In this case, you should provide a citation to the textual publication just as you would if you had found it in the library. If the web version does not provide page numbers which correspond with the original text enabling you to cite specific pages, you should find the original text in the library or through inter-library loan. 2) Documents that have been posted by someone with expertise in the topic of the document. Say, for example, you find an essay on a topic of interest that has been posted by a scholar teaching at a University. It should be a relatively easy matter to document the author's position at her/his institution and, in this way, document her/his expertise in the matter. Any citation of an internet reference that is not an electronic duplication of an article which has already appeared in a scholarly publication should have a brief list of the author's credentials, sufficient to document her/his expertise in the matter. It might look something like this: Troy Polamalu, “Is Belief in God Rational?” http://www.stanford.edu/~polamalu/God.html. Polamalu is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Stanford University. This is a paper he presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December, 2005.

5) **Course Grade:** 20% of your grade will be based on your quizzes, 20% on your class presentation of readings, and 60% on your papers.

I use the college's 100 point scale for grades with 90-100 for As, 80-89 for Bs, 70-79 for Cs, 60-69 for Ds and 0-59 for F. Pluses and minuses (as in B+, B, B-) will be given in the following way: minuses for a score in the bottom 3 points for that grade (e.g., 80-82 = B-), an unqualified grade for a score in the middle 4 points for that grade (e.g., 83-86 = B), pluses for a score in the top 3 points for that grade (e.g., 87-89 = B+).

7) **Turning in Assignments:** All assignments are to be turned in personally by the student at the time it is due. Unless prior arrangements have been made I will not accept any assignments turned in by e-mail. If circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment personally and e-mail is the only feasible way to do it, you must contact me ahead of time and seek permission to do so. If I approve, the student her/himself is responsible for insuring that I have received it. You can verify my receipt of your assignment by looking for a reply from me informing you that I have received it. You should save this reply to verify my receipt of the assignment in case there is any question about it. If you do not receive such a reply, I did not receive it and it is the student's responsibility to determine what the problem is and rectify it. Any student who has not successfully turned in an assignment and when informed of this exclaims, “But I e-mailed that to you!” will be immediately placed in stocks and publicly humiliated for using the high tech version of “the dog ate my homework” excuse (seriously, if I claim I didn't get it and you don't have a copy of my e-mail verifying receipt, then the assignment was never turned in and you will not receive any credit for it).
8) **Late or Missed Assignments**: All work should be done by the time and date specified in class or on the syllabus. I will not consider giving unpenalized extensions except in the case of illness or some sort of personal emergency. To inquire about an unpenalized extension for these sorts of circumstances, you should speak with me ahead of the time the work is due or, in the case of emergencies, as soon as possible (if you have a wreck on the way to turn in a paper, call me right after you call the police!). In the case of **presentations**, I cannot give extensions since we need to cover the material assigned for a presentation on the day it is assigned. In the case of being unable to make a presentation on the date assigned in class due to illness or some sort of personal emergency (discussed with me, of course, ahead of time or, as soon as possible) I will consider assigning another presentation or some other additional alternate work. If I do not approve doing another presentation or additional work to make up for the missed presentation, you will earn a grade of zero for that assignment. In the case of **papers** which are turned in late without an unpenalized extension, the grade will be penalized 10 points if it is turned in less than 1 day (to be precise, 24 hours) late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 1 day but less than 2 days late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 2 days but less than 3 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 3 days but less than 4 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 4 days but less than 5 days late. A paper turned in in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero (in the case of the last paper, it will turn to a zero if it is not turned in by noon, Thursday, Feb. 7 since I need to turn in the final grades for the class by later that day). It is the student’s responsibility to make appropriate arrangements for turning in late papers. You should discuss your plans with me ASAP to make sure I approve of it. If you do not discuss your plans with me and, for instance, simply slip a late paper under the door of my office, I will count it as turned in on the date and time I find it in my office, not the date and time you turned it in.

9) **Messages**: When I am not in my office, I can be contacted by e-mailing me at shendley@bsc.edu. You are also welcome to call me at my office number (4793) and leave a message, but I am much less likely to get this sort of message in a timely manner. With e-mail, you should typically get a response from me in a day and sometimes in just an hour or so.

Though you are always welcome to leave a message for me on voice mail or e-mail, this should not be used as a substitute for contacting me personally regarding any problems that may arise with meeting your course responsibilities. I will always need to discuss these sorts of problems with you, personally, as soon as possible.

10) **Honor Code**: The honor code applies to all work done in this course. A violation of the honor code on any work done for this class will result in a grade of F for the course.