REL 382 Midterm Writing Assignment

Getting to Know an Atheist – Due 2/23/18 by end of day. 5-7 pages dbl spaced (Chicago Style)

A group of people you know have heard about the fact that atheism seems to be gaining in numbers in recent decades. They are also aware that you’re taking a class on atheism and are hoping you might be able to help them understand atheism better. It’s the growth of atheism that’s piqued their interest, but they’re looking to you for some guidance. You decide the best plan is to introduce them to the work of a well-known atheist and help them understand their views according to the history of atheism’s development in the last 500 years—that is, by describing how they fit into the movement of modern atheism. Once you’ve explained this, you’ll be able to give a brief description of atheism as a growing movement.

Some of the best known modern atheists are listed below (choose one):

Madelyn Murray O’Hare
Bertrand Russell
Richard Dawkins
Christopher Hitchens
Sam Harris
Daniel Dennett
Lawrence Krauss
(You may choose someone not listed here ONLY with instructor approval)

For your audience, you’ll have to describe the way one of these thinkers articulates his/her atheism (look for books, journal articles, or newspaper essays [not opinions or editorials]). You’ll have to define any special terms they use, since your audience is unfamiliar with the subject matter of atheism. You’ll also have to distinguish the way these atheists “disbelieve” from other forms of unbelief (i.e., what does it mean that atheism is not homogeneous? where does your thinker stand on the spectrum of belief?).

Next you’ll have to describe how the thought of the atheist you’ve chosen exhibits a form of “modern atheism.” This is best done by referencing the argument of Hyman’s book (ch. 1-3). In other words, what kind of a God (what conception of God) is your thinker rejecting and why? Be sure to include evidence from written works by or about your thinker to demonstrate your point. Support your presentation with any other helpful documents you can find.

Some critical things to think about:

How will you capture the attention of your readers from the very beginning?

How will you help your readers grasp the perspective of the thinker you’ve chosen?

What else do you need to know that might help you give your readers the best possible recommendation?

Some helpful resources:

Your Instructor
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://www.iep.utm.edu/)
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/)
CU Research Librarians
CU Library Collection (should have books by each of the above atheists)
CU Periodical Access
PEW Forum (http://www.pewforum.org/) and Public Religion Research Institute (http://publicreligion.org/) – info and statistics on growth of atheism or non-religion