

PHIL-035-301 THE SELF: ASPIRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Professor: Jennifer M. Morton

Email: jmmorton@sas.upenn.edu

Time: M/W 10:15-11:30am

Location: Cohen 392

Virtual: <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/95111702605>

Semester: Spring 2022

Office Hours: M/W 9:00am-10:00am

Office Location: Cohen 426

Virtual: <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/94486523967>

DESCRIPTION: Novels, memoirs, and aisles of self-help books attest to our desire to transform ourselves. Yet, the idea of self-transformation is puzzling. If a person decides to embark on a new adventure in the hopes of transforming herself, can she really become a new self, or is she merely exhibiting her preexisting adventurousness? What about the aspiring college student hoping that college will change him? How can we make sense of his aspiration? In this class, we will critically examine the idea of aspiration and transformation. Readings for this course will be drawn from philosophy, fiction, and literary criticism.

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES: The first goal of this course is to reflect on the nature of transformation and aspiration. By the end of this course, you will have developed a clearer understanding of these ideas and have developed your own perspective on them. The second goal of this course is to introduce you to philosophical methods of thinking and writing that will allow you to approach the topic of this course critically and rigorously. By the end of this course, you will be able to express your ideas about transformation and aspiration with greater clarity and precision. Finally, I hope that this course will empower you to get the most out of your college education. By the end of this course, you will be able to articulate a vision of your educational trajectory that aligns with your current values and with those of the person you want to become.

READING: You are required to purchase Tara Westover's Educated and Richard Rodriguez's Hunger for Memory. All other readings will be available through the course website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Forum Participation	25%
Paper Summary (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Critique (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Argument (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Draft (1-2 pages)	5%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	35%
Participation & Attendance	20%

CANVAS FORUM: I expect you to keep a lively presence in the canvas forum throughout this course. Your contribution should tell the class what you found challenging, interesting, confusing, or moving about the reading. Questions about the reading are encouraged, as are disagreements, concerns, and any other reactions you have. Of course, I assume that making a substantial contribution requires that you have completed the assigned reading. The shape your contribution makes will vary from week to week. Some weeks you might write one question or comment about the reading; at other times, you might develop an idea in several paragraphs. What I want to see is your **engagement** with the course throughout the semester. I expect you to at least make one **substantial** contribution or comment on someone else's contribution (roughly) every week. Please make sure to read the forum before class so that we are well-placed to have a productive discussion.

PAPER: This is your chance to demonstrate your mastery of the philosophical skills you have developed throughout the course. The paper topic will be distributed far in advance of the due date. You will be grouped with other students in the course who are working on the same topic. I recommend that you work together, talk through the reading, brainstorm, share drafts, etc. This is **not** cheating. I also suggest that you make an appointment to meet with me and discuss how you plan to approach the paper before you sit down to write it. You will turn in several preparatory assignments that will scaffold your writing process. These preparatory assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

LATE POLICY: If something comes up that requires that you turn in a paper late, the best approach is to contact me well in advance and settle on a new due date. You will not be penalized for turning in a paper late if you do this. However, if you turn in a paper late without clearing it with me first, I will be unable to offer you feedback on your paper.

GRADING: I favor grading that encourages engagement with the class material and not one that causes you to focus on your grades. If you put an honest effort and do all of the work for this class, you will get a **good** grade. However, I reserve As for **exceptional** work. This approach allows me to balance rewarding excellence while assuaging the worry that you might get a low grade despite doing the work.

- A Exceptional & Outstanding Work—Completed all assignments and far exceeded expectations, participated actively in the canvas forum and class, engaged with the material in novel and creative ways, wrote an exceptional final paper
- A- Excellent Work—Completed all assignments and exceeded expectations, participated actively in the canvas forum and class, deeply engaged with the material throughout the semester, wrote an excellent final paper.
- B+ Very good, consistent work—Completed all assignments and sometimes surpassed expectations, participated actively in the canvas forum and class, engaged with the material, wrote a very good final paper.
- B Good, consistent work—Completed most assignments and met expectations, participation in class and the forum was consistent, engagement with material remained superficial, final paper met expectations but did not exceed them.
- B- Uneven, sometimes good work—You missed a few assignments but overall completed most of the work, class participation was solid but not consistent, engagement with material sometimes flagged, final paper met expectations.
- C+ Uneven work—Missed a few assignments, didn't participate in the forum or class consistently, had many absences, and the final paper read as rushed and not well-thought-out.
- C Missed critical assignments, didn't fully engage with the course material, other students, or the instructor. Only barely exceeded minimal course expectations. The final paper did not meet expectations.
- C- Barely met expectations, inconsistent engagement with the course, turned in a final paper that fell below expectations.
- D-F Failed to meet minimum expectations for the course.

PARTICIPATION: How well (or badly) this course goes will depend on every person in this class taking ownership for the course. This means that I expect all of you to contribute to the discussion in some way. Talking in class is only one way to participate in the discussion. Others include e-mailing me with questions you would like to see discussed before class, listening to others respectfully, helping a classmate make a point, continuing the discussion with your fellow students outside of class, and coming to office hours when the class discussion sparks an idea that you want to discuss. Some of the topics we will discuss in this class might be emotionally challenging for some of your peers. Please be respectful and mindful of that fact and listen closely to each other. We will have a great class if we all embrace epistemic humility and intellectual curiosity.

COVID (All): I'm very excited to be back in the classroom with all of you. However, I expect this semester will not be entirely 'normal.' We will follow the university's guidance regarding mode of teaching, mask-wearing, etc. However, I expect that some of you will be touched by this pandemic during this semester, whether health-wise, financially, or psychologically. Do not hesitate to reach out and tell me what you need. Your physical and mental health is a priority. I will do my best to connect you to resources and to be flexible about class expectations. I have an unvaccinated child at home, so I'm also bracing myself for what the term will bring. We are all in this together. There might be times when we have to meet online in order to keep us all safe. I will only resort to this when it is absolutely demanded by circumstances. If we keep lines of communication open and we all remain flexible, we will have a great semester.

ELECTRONICS: I encourage you to put your phone and electronics away when we are meeting in person. Look, I get it. I am also tethered to my devices and feel the wave of anxiety when I can't check Instagram or Twitter, but this is a space for you to form an intellectual community with your peers IRL. Your devices will be waiting for you when you're done with class, but this opportunity will not be. Of course, if you must pull out your laptop to look at a reading or take a few notes, you can do so. However, you will lose that privilege if you use them for non-course-related reasons (e.g., news, social media, shopping). If there is an emergency situation and your phone must be on/visible, step outside to use your device so as to not disturb the class.

HONOR CODE: All students are expected to follow the guidelines of Penn's Code of Academic Integrity. In particular, students are expected to refrain from "lying, cheating, or stealing" in an academic context (but it's also probably good to avoid doing these things in general). If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity>. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Always cite any resource that you use (including friends with whom you have worked if cooperation is permitted on an assignment). Do not

reuse papers written for other classes. The internet has made it easier than ever before to catch this sort of thing, so (moral reasons aside) it is not a particularly wise idea.

BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT: It is important to me that you have the resources you need to be able to focus on learning in this course – this includes both the necessary academic materials as well as taking care of your day-to-day needs. Students experiencing difficulty affording the course materials should reach out to the Penn First Plus office (pennfirstplus@upenn.edu). Students who are struggling to afford sufficient food to eat every day and/or lack a safe and suitable space to live should contact Student Intervention Services (vpul-sisteam@pobox.upenn.edu). Students may also wish to contact their Financial Aid Counselor or Academic Advisor about these concerns. You are welcome to notify me if any of these challenges are affecting your success in this course, as long as you are comfortable doing so – I may have resources to support you.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT: The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. To contact the Weingarten Center, call 215-573-9235. The office is located in Stouffer Commons at 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.

DISABILITY SERVICES: The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from Disability Services. Students can contact Disability Services and make appointments to discuss and/or request accommodations by calling 215-573-9235.

MODIFICATIONS TO SYLLABUS: I reserve the right to make changes to the Syllabus, including project due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedules

Class Date		Topic Covered	Reading that must be completed before class	Assignment due
W	1/12	What is this course about?	David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"	
The Self				
M	1/17	MLK No Class		
W	1/19	Is there a self?	David Hume, "On Personal Identity"	
M	1/24	Self as Endorsement	Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"	
W	1/26	Critique of Frankfurt	David Velleman, "Identification and Identity"	
M	1/31	Understanding Philosophical Methods	Hume, Frankfurt, & Velleman Continued	
Becoming a Self				
W	2/2	Parenting for Autonomy	Joel Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future"	Paper Summary
M	2/7	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	
W	2/9	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	
M	2/14	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	
What is Transformation?				
W	2/16	Transformative Experiences	Laurie Paul, "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting"	
M	2/21	Difficult Choices	Ruth Chang, "Hard Choices" (TED talk)	
W	2/23	Developing a Philosophical Critique	Paul & Chang Continued	
Aspiration				
M	2/28	Aspiration	Agnes Callard, selections from <u>Aspiration</u>	Paper Critique
W	3/2	Aspiration	Agnes Callard, selections from <u>Aspiration</u>	
The Bicultural Self				
M	3/14	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u>	
W	3/16	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u>	
M	3/21	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u>	
Social Identities & Transformation				
W	3/23	Social Dimensions of Transformation	Elizabeth Barnes, "Social Identities and Transformative Experience"	
M	3/28	Negotiating Racialized Selves	W.E. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"	
W	3/30	World Traveling	Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception"	
M	4/4	Education for Transformation	James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers"	
W	4/6	Developing a Philosophical Argument	N/A	
Thwarted Aspiration				
M	4/11	Dasani	Andrea Elliot, "Invisible Child" (Part I)	Paper Argument
W	4/13	Dasani	Andrea Elliot, "When Dasani Left Home"	
M	4/18	At what price?	Jennifer Morton, Selections from <u>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way</u>	
W	4/20	At what price?	Jennifer Morton, Selections from <u>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way</u>	
M	4/25	Writing Workshop	TBA	Paper Draft
W	4/27	Final Paper Due	TBA	