

PHIL-035-301 THE SELF: ASPIRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Professor: Jennifer M. Morton

Email: jmmorton@sas.upenn.edu

Time: T/Th 10:15am- 11:45am

Location: DRLB 3N6

Semester: Spring 2023

Office Hours: T 12:00pm-2:00pm

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:

Weekly Reflection Journal	30%
Paper Plan (Oral)	5%
Paper Draft & Peer Review	10%
Final Paper (5 pages)	35%
Participation & Attendance	20%

JOURNAL: I expect you to keep a weekly reflection online journal (google doc or other online format) that I can access. In this journal, you can (1) reflect on some aspect of the reading (2) draw connections between the reading and some other aspect of your life at Penn or your life outside of Penn (3) tell me a story about something that happened to you that was related to the topic of the class. This is your opportunity to dig deep into what the topic of this class means for YOU. I expect you to write SOMETHING (anywhere from 150 words to 300 words) written by **Thursday** before class. If you take the assignment seriously, you will get a 'PASS' for this assignment. If you are not writing consistently or it's clear from what you write that you haven't engaged with what we have discussed in class, we will need to have a discussion to get you back on track.

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. As part of the paper preparations, I will give you several preparatory assignments. 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, high-quality & consistent journaling, engaged with the material in novel and creative ways, wrote an exceptional final paper, missed fewer than 4 classes
- A- Excellent Work—Completed all assignments and exceeded expectations, high-quality & consistent journaling, 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, consistent journaling, engaged with the material, wrote a very good final paper.
- B Good, consistent work—Completed most assignments and met expectations, participation in class and journal was mostly 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 journal or participate in 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. Missed more than 80% of the classes.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE: 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. ***I expect you to come to every class unless you are ill or you have a personal/family situation that requires it. Of course, you are adults and sometimes other things take priority. However, if you miss more than 4 classes, you endanger your grade in this class. If there is a good reason for you to miss more than 4 classes, you must talk to me and get an accommodation.***

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
GETTING TO KNOW THE COURSE AND EACH OTHER			
Th	1/12	What is this course about?	
T	1/17	Why are we here?	David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"
Th	1/18	Can we change?	Kathryn Schulz, "The Self in Self-Help"
T	1/24	Class Canceled [Rescheduled as Class Field Trip—details TBA]	Reading Response #1
Th	1/26	A story of alteration [Online Class]	Robert Moor, "The Beautiful, Brutal World of Bonsai"
WHAT IS TRANSFORMATION?			
T	1/31	Transformative Experiences	Laurie Paul, Excerpts from <u>Transformative Experiences</u>
Th	2/2	Transformative Experiences continued	Paul continued...
T	2/7	Difficult Choices	Ruth Chang, "Hard Choices" (TED talk)
Th	2/9	Social Selves	Elizabeth Barnes, "Social Identities and Transformative Experience"
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EDUCATION			
T	2/14	Guest Speaker: Dustin Webster	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u> Part One
Th	2/16	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u> Part Two
T	2/21	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u> Part Three
ASPIRATION			
Th	2/23	Aspiration	Agnes Callard, Introduction from <u>Aspiration</u>
T	2/28	Aspiration continued	Agnes Callard, Chapter 1 from <u>Aspiration</u>
Th	3/2	Aspiration continued	Agnes Callard, Chapter 2 from <u>Aspiration</u>
SPRING BREAK			
THWARTED ASPIRATION			
T	3/14	At what price?	Jennifer Morton, Intro & Chapter 1 from <u>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way</u>
Th	3/16	Double Consciousness	W.E. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"
T	3/21	Code Switching	Jennifer Morton, Chapter 4 from <u>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way</u>
AMBIVALENT TRANSFORMATION			
Th	3/23	Ambivalent Transformation	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u> Ch. 1-2
T	3/28	Ambivalent Transformation [Online Class]	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u> Ch. 3-4
Th	3/30	Ambivalent Transformation	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger for Memory</u> Ch. 5-6
T	4/4	Class Canceled [One-on-One Paper Plan Meetings Instead--Sign-up for meetings 10-4pm]	Oral Paper Plan
RECONSIDERING THE SELF			
Th	4/6	Anatta	Walpola, Rahula, Chapter 6 from <u>What the Buddha Taught</u>
T	4/11	Middle Age	Gopnik, Alison, "How an 18th-Century Philosopher Helped Solve My Midlife Crisis"
THE SELF IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA			
Th	4/13	Value Capture	Nguyen, Thi "Value Collapse" (Video Lecture)
T	4/18	The Social Media Self	Renner, Nausicaa, "How Social Media Shapes Our Identity"
WRAPPING UP			
Th	4/20	Writing Workshop	Paper Draft
T	4/25	Wrap-Up	Final Paper Due