

Re-Imagining the Self

Mark Freeman
Beaven 331/Smith 224

Spring, 2008
ext. 2530

Office hours: Tuesday, 2-3; Wednesday, 11-12;
and by appointment

*Given that we are both products and creators of the world,
how then shall we live?*

Even though we human animals are unquestionably “products” (of a sort) of both nature and nurture, we are also the “creators” of our very selves, re-imagining our identities throughout the course of our lives. Re-imagining the self, however, also occurs on a much broader plane: faced with the challenges and dilemmas of being human, living in a sometimes-difficult world, there emerge new visions of what the self what might be and how, in turn, the world might become a better place. Given the world we live in, what sorts of changes might be called for (and by whom)? How might such changes be brought about? Can human nature itself be altered? Should it be? In this semester, therefore, we will seek to extend and deepen our exploration of the human condition by asking not only who and what we are but who and what we ought to become.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
Krakauer, *Into the Wild*
Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
Skinner, *Walden Two*
Thoreau, *Walden*
Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

NOTE: A number of additional readings are being place on reserve.

OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

Thursday, 1/17: Re-Imagining the Self, Re-Constructing the World

Dying and Living

Tuesday, 1/22: Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

Thursday, 1/24: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, continued

Being-in-the-World

Tuesday, 1/29: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy"

Thursday, 1/31: *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,"
"Reading," "Sounds"

Tuesday, 2/5: *Walden*, "Solitude," "Visitors," "The Bean Field,"
"Visitors"

Thursday, 2/7: *Walden*, "The Ponds," "The Pond in Winter," "Spring,"
"Conclusion"

On the Edge, and Over

Tuesday, 2/12: Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

Thursday, 2/14: *Into the Wild*, continued

Tuesday, 2/19: Cording, "Elegy for Chris McCandless" (poem)

*Wednesday, 2/20: Showing of *Into the Wild* (3 & 8), Kimball Theatre

Thursday, 2/21: to be determined; essays due by day's end

Bug-Being and Human-Being

Tuesday, 2/26: Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

Thursday, 2/28: *The Metamorphosis*, continued; visit to Cantor Art Gallery to see *Zoologia Fantastica* (tentative)

SPRING BREAK!

Breaking the Spell of Alienation

Tuesday, 3/11: Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 19-68

Thursday, 3/13: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 69-140

Tuesday, 3/18: Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

EASTER BREAK!

Eros and Thanatos

Tuesday, 3/25: Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Thursday, 3/27: *Civilization and Its Discontents*, continued

Freud & Einstein, "Why War?"

Engineering the Self I: Behavior

Tuesday, 4/1: Skinner, *Walden Two*

Thursday, 4/3: *Walden Two*, continued

Engineering the Self II: Biology

Tuesday, 4/8: *Walden Two*, continued

Thursday, 4/10: Engineering Immortality: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy (readings in preparation); essays due by day's end

Tuesday, 4/15: Engineering Immortality (readings in preparation)

Thursday, 4/17: Engineering Immortality (readings in preparation)

The Fate of Selfhood

Tuesday, 4/22: Glover, "The Will to Create Mankind Anew: The Nazi Experiment," from *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (ERes)

Thursday, 4/24: Miller, selections from *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (ERes)

Todorov, selections from *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (ERes)

The Ethics of Attention

Tuesday, 4/29 Murdoch, selections from *The Sovereignty of Good* (ERes)

Course Requirements

Requirements for the course consist of:

- 1) An 8-10 page essay due February 21st
- 2) A 10-12 page essay due April 10th
- 3) A final paper or creative project
- 4) A class presentation
- 5) A (truly) reflective journal, addressed to *the readings* and to *your life*
- 6) Active engagement in class and participation in class discussion

The 8-10 page essay, the 10-12 page essay, and the final paper/project will each be worth approximately 25% of your grade. The class presentation, journal, and class participation, taken together, will comprise the remaining portion of your grade (i.e., approximately 25%).

To reiterate: The reflective journal is an opportunity for you precisely to reflect, to *think*, on paper, about what you are reading and how it relates to the life you live. As such, it's an opportunity for you to really "take on" the ideas at hand, to interrogate them – and to have them interrogate you. I will not be collecting these weekly this semester; this seems to turn the journal into "another assignment." Instead, I will give you a brief bit of advance word before I collect them. This, of course, means that you need to keep up with your entries (rather than do a bunch right before I collect them)!

In regard to involvement and engagement in class (and class discussion), my main message to you, again, is that I am much more interested in quality than quantity. At the same time, I want to get more people involved this semester and will therefore be taking some measures to make sure this happens. So, be prepared to chime in!

A Few Words on Academic Integrity

Here is what I want to say, in the simplest of terms: *the work you do for this course must be your own*. This doesn't mean that you can't draw on others' work or be influenced by it; no one expects "one's own" work to be utterly devoid of external influence. What it does mean is that the product you create must reflect *your* efforts, *your* efforts, *your* imagination. This will involve proper citation and so on. As importantly, though, it will also involve a moral promise on your part – a promise that you must uphold and enact as you go about your work. **Please familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy outlined in the College Catalog. You are responsible for knowing the Policy and abiding by it.**

Academic integrity is not only about honesty, however. It is about preparedness for class, intellectual commitment, openness to new ideas, the capacity to listen to others, the ability to engage in sustained dialogue and debate about important issues, and much more. Let's work together to create the best possible learning environment.

As concerns outside-of-class (i.e., co-curricular) events and activities, some will be required of the entire FYP, others will be required of particular sections, and others still will be considered optional (which is not to say unimportant!). Indeed, my main message here is that the co-curricular events and activities are an integral part of the FYP. They are what link together learning and living and are vitally important to our work together.