HON-H 212 5871 – Ideas & Experience II
Perry Hodges
TuTh 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
HU 108

What is the modern self? Through the eyes of some of the most influential writers of the last three centuries we will explore the new ways of thinking about the individual that emerged during and after the Enlightenment. Beginning with Descartes who gave us the skeptical self, and Rousseau who gave us the inward looking self and its conflicts with society, we will then read texts by Wordsworth, Dostoevsky, Freud, Proust, and Virginia Woolf. We will look at their response to the breakdown of religious and philosophical explanations that had once defined the self’s relationship to its world, and the psychological tension between a belief in an autonomous self at home in its world and the notion of a fragmented, alienated self-buffeted by forces in nature, society, and the unconscious. Through close reading, writing and discussion, students will learn to contextualize these rather broad questions by looking at the ways these writers have directed our attention to the role of memory and narration in reconstructing the self, and to other questions about childhood, deception, sexuality, and language that have come to preoccupy our present culture. Students can expect to write three short papers, regular written exercises, and a final paper.

Texts: Descartes, selection from Meditations; Rousseau, Confessions, volume I; Wordsworth, selections from The Prelude and other poems; Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground; Freud, The Wolf Man; Proust, Swann’s Way; Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway.