

The Moral Self

Summer 2011



Description

This course will examine the nature of moral status. First, we will ask what it takes to have moral status. Do you have to be alive? Sentient? Autonomous? Second, we will ask whether groups can have moral status. For example, do nations, species, ecosystems, etc. have moral rights and/or duties? Third, we will ask whether parts of individuals can have moral status. For example, if a person has multiple personality disorder (or multiple personalities in a non-pathological sense), do their personalities have moral duties to each other? And do we have moral duties to our past or future selves more generally? Finally, we will ask when in life moral status begins and ends. Do we have moral duties to embryos and corpses? What about past and future generations?

General Information

- Time: M/W 6:00-9:00
- Place: TISC LC1
- Instructor: Jeff Sebo
- Email: jeffsebo@gmail.com
- Office: 285 Mercer, #902
- Office hours: by appointment
- Course website: jeffsebo.net/teaching/

Readings

The required books for this course are:

- David DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics*
- Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*
- John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*

You can find the required books at Bluestockings (172 Allen Street between Stanton and Rivington) as well as online. All readings not from the required book will be posted on blackboard.

Grading

Your grades will be determined as follows:

- **Papers (70%):** You can write either two 10-page papers (35% each) or one 20-page paper (70%) on the topic of your choice. The first 10-page paper will be due 7/24 and the second 10-page paper/20-page paper will be due 8/12. You must submit a proposal for each paper in advance, and, if you write a 20 page paper, you must submit an outline or draft by 8/5.
- **Presentations (10%):** Each student will give a brief summary and commentary on one of the course readings.
- **Daily Questions (10%):** At least two hours prior to each lecture, you will send me an email with (1) a one-sentence description of one of the main claims from each reading and (2) a question or comment about this claim. These will be graded Pass/Fail.
- **Attendance and Participation (10%):** I expect regular attendance and thoughtful participation from all students. My assessment of the quality of your performance on these items will account for 10% of your grade.

Policies

- **Laptops/Cell Phones:** Laptops are allowed, but only for taking notes. Cell phones must be on silent.
- **Special Accommodations:** If you need special accommodations, please let me know so that I can properly assist you.
- **Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. See the NYU College of Arts and Science policy on Academic Integrity for more information.
- **Late Papers/Extensions/Incompletes:** Late papers will be accepted, but will lose 1/3 letter grade for each day late. Extensions and incompletes will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. If you would like to request either, please do it well before the due date.

Schedule

- **7/6 - Life**
Albert Schweitzer, “The Ethics of Reverence for Life”
Fred Feldman, “Life Functional-Theories of Life,” “Vitalist Theories of Life”
- **7/11 - Sentience**
Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”
Colin Allen, “Animal Pain”
- **7/13 - Autonomy**
Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”
John Christman, “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy”
- **7/18 - Collective Duties**
Michael Bratman, “Shared Agency”
Christopher Kutz, “Complicity”
- **7/20 - Collective Rights**
Darlene Johnston, “Native Rights as Collective Rights: A Question of Group Self-Preservation”
Michael Hartney, “Some Confusions Concerning Collective Rights”
- **7/25 - Personal Identity**
John Perry, *A Dialogue Concerning Personal Identity and Immortality*
David DeGrazia, “Human Persons: Numerical Identity and Essence”
- **7/27 - Psychological Continuity**
Derek Parfit, “The Unimportance of Personal Identity”
Derek Parfit, “What Does Matter”
- **8/1 - Narrativity**
Marya Schechtman, “The Narrative Self-Constitution View”
David DeGrazia, “Human Persons: Narrative Identity and Self-Creation”
- **8/3 - Multiplicity**
Carol Rovane, “A Rational Reconstruction of Multiple Personality Disorder”
Jeff Sebo, “Is Self-Binding Morally Wrong?”
- **8/8 - The Beginning and End of Life**
David DeGrazia, “Prenatal Identity: Genetic Interventions, Reproductive Choices”
David DeGrazia, “Advance Directives, Dementia, and the Someone Else Problem”
- **8/10 - Past and Future Generations**
Derek Parfit, “The Non-Identity Problem”
David Velleman, “The Identity Problem”