PH-4910-01 (15058) What is a Person?
Anselm Ramelow, O.P.
Dominican School for Philosophy and Theology
Fall 2011
TH 12:40pm-3:30pm
DSPT room 2
3 units

Office Hours:
M 1:15pm-3:15pm or by appointment
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The concept of “Person” has ceased to be of merely theoretical interest. The development in medical and biological ethics largely hinge on our understanding of the human person. What, therefore, is a person? In order to gain greater clarity, we will investigate the history of this concept. This will include its theological roots in Trinitarian controversies and the notion of the Hypostatical Union as well as the differences between Boethius and Richard of St. Victor. The later developments depend largely on Descartes’ understanding of the “Cogito”, of thought and self-consciousness as that which constitutes human identity and existence. John Locke’s as well as David Hume’s radical conclusions from this are echoed in the contemporary theories of Derek Parfit and Peter Singer, which reduce a more substantial and teleological notion of the person to mere acts of consciousness. Phenomenological and “personalist” approaches (Max Scheler and others) oscillate between these alternatives. This seminar will be a critical reading of the history of the concept of person in the light of its modern development.

Intended audience: MA/MTS, PhD/ThD. [PIN code required; Auditors excluded]

The format of the class is a seminar; attendance and participation in the discussion is therefore crucial. Students will take turns in preparing the sessions (introductory comments and 1-page handout). All are expected to develop pertinent questions and observations from their readings.

As an outcome, the student will have gained a deep appreciation and understanding of the existential and ethical implications of the concept of person, and its theoretical and historical complexity.

A further outcome for the student should be an increased ability to articulate him-/herself philosophically in related matters, be it orally or in research and writing.

The student will demonstrate this knowledge through
- Class participation and contribution to the discussions.
- Taking turns in preparing texts that are to be discussed in class and possibly by a presentation on the paper research.
- a 15-20pp research paper (75% of grade)
The research paper is subject to approval and will ideally consist in relating two different authors with regard to our subject matter or a topic of the student’s interest. For this purpose, I ask you to give me a paper proposal by TH 11/3. This proposal should consist of a short paragraph, describing the topic of your choice (it might be good to talk to me about it some time before), and a bibliography. **The bibliography is most important.** Please make your bibliography *as specific as possible*. Do not quote general handbooks or the textbook of the class. As one possible research tool I recommend the “philosopher’s index” that is available on the GTU library website (although this will probably suffice only as a starting point). It is not required – but a good practice – to write an outline as well.

The deadline for the paper is TH 12/15. Out of fairness to other students who submit their work on time, missed deadlines will result in a lower grade.

Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance and participation will impact the grade. It is expected that students develop questions and statements from their reading.

**Bibliography**

Required and available at the GTU bookstore:

prize $40.64

a Reader is required and available at Vick Copy  
(1879 Euclid, corner of Hearst and Euclid)
CLASS SCHEDULE

TH 9/8 Introduction
Bioethical problems as a contemporary context: Peter Singer and Rome
Reader pp. 1-15
Person as concept of religious origin
Buddhism and Christianity
Reader pp. 15-18
and Reader: 162-171 (O’Donovan I)

TH 9/15 The Emergence of the Classical Tradition I
early beginnings
Reader: re-read pp. 162-171 (O’Donovan I)
Boethius and Augustine
Reader: pp. 29-38
(for your interest: Tertullian, Basilius, Reader: 19-28)
Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, Alain de Lille
Reader: pp. 39-43

TH 9/22 The Emergence of the Classical Tradition II
Aquinas
Reader: 51-70
(For your personal interest I am including in the Reader (p. 44-50) untranslated texts
by Gilbert of Poitiers, Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales and St. Bonaventure)

TH 9/29 The Emergence of the Classical Tradition III
Scotus, Ockham, Meister Eckhart and Luther
Reader: 70-92

TH 10/6 Descartes and the Consequences
Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Pascal, Leibniz, Reid and Lichtenberg
Atkins: pp. 7-32
Reader: 92-98, 102-103

TH 10/13 Problems of the Self
Berkeley, Hume and Kant
Reader: 99-102
Atkins: 33-59

TH 10/20 Identifying Persons
Strawson, Shoemaker, Williams, Parfit, “Animalism”
Atkins: 125-138, 153-162, 163-191
Reader: 105-112, 172-177

TH 10/27 Reading Week
no class
TH 11/3 **paper proposal due**  
**Person, Agency and Free Will**  
Nietzsche, Frankfurt  
Atkins: 71-84, 139-152

TH 11/10 **Philosophy, Science and Ethics**  
Helen Watt, Stephen Napier, David Oderberg  
Reader: 113-126, 178-190, 191-206

TH 11/17 **Personalism I**  
Max Scheler  
Reader: 207-223

TH 11/24 **Thanksgiving**  
no class

TH 12/1 **Personalism II**  
John Paul II, Karl Rahner, Levinas, Ratzinger, Norris Clarke  
Reader: 127-135, 224-239, 240-247

TH 12/8 **Communitarianism**  
Hauerwas, Ricoeur and Taylor  
Atkins: 220-234  
Reader: 136-139, 248-258  
(unfortunately some pages of Taylor are cut off; if it becomes unintelligible, you can find the pages online with Google books:  
http://books.google.com/books?id=QVh7vMRCuxAC&pg=PA32&lpg=PA32&dq=%22I+recognize+that+there+is+a+crucial+argument+here%22&source=bl&ots=-tCygxzFJt&sig=Gavii4SeZR5ofSWfvFgfClR8gcE&hl=en&ei=KlRhTqT4JufXiAKAz82uDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&sqi=2&ved=0CBkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22I+recognize+that+there+is+a+crucial+argument+here%22&f=false)

TH 12/15 **exam week**, we will have class  
**Concluding Perspectives**  
Spaemann and O’Donovan II  
Reader: 139-161, 259-265  
**paper due; evaluations**