Hope and the Self

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Hope is among the most powerful and significant of human experiences. Recent years have seen a renewed interest in the potency of hope, not only as an effective political tool, as in President Obama’s 2008 campaign, but also as a focus for philosophical investigation. But what accounts for the depth of significance of hope in human experience? And what explains the common, though often unarticulated, intuition that the significance of hope is, at some profound level, moral? This talk begins to answer these questions by drawing out the deep connection between hope and selfhood. A careful analysis of hope reveals that hope functions for the hoper as an organizing principle of selfhood such that one is to some meaningful extent identifiable with one’s hope. Accepting this account of hope has important implications for our view of selfhood, however, and the talk will address some of these issues as well.

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Joshua Thomas is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at St. John’s University, and Faculty Affiliate with the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University. Prior to earning a PhD in philosophy at Fordham University, he earned a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. In addition to examining ethical and philosophical dimensions of hope, his other primary area of research involves investigating a cluster of issues at the intersection of bioethics and philosophy of medicine, particularly, the ethical implications of basic frameworks of health. Joshua has presented his research at numerous international conferences and is currently at work on his first book, which provides a critical analysis of biomedicine and the evidence-based paradigm. He is a recipient of multiple awards, including the prestigious Faculty Recognition Award at St. John’s University, and a research scholarship from the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at Oxford University. Joshua has served on the Harvard Divinity School Alumni/ae Association Council for many years, and is currently Vice-Chair; he is also a founding member of the New York Pragmatist Forum.