Spiderman may be a fictional character but he is also one of New York’s most famous heroes. And despite his origins in a comic-book, there is a powerful and realistic story of moral development underlying the story of his transformation from bookish nerd to superhero. Like some of the great myths and legends of the classical world, the story of Spiderman's origin has universal resonance and provides a fruitful focus for the examination of key moral concepts in ethics.

The moral message of Spiderman might seem just to be the slogan of the film and comic: 'with great power comes great responsibility'. But in this paper I won't be concerned to analyse or question the truth of that slogan. Instead, I shall concentrate on issues of moral luck, responsibility and the possibility of interpersonal comparisons of deservingness. Luck, or fate, plays two essential parts in the tale. Being bitten by a mutated spider gave Peter Parker the power. But perhaps more importantly, the murder of Peter Parker's uncle by the thief he could have stopped taught him responsibility. I shall argue that the formation of Spiderman's heroic morality was a product of both luck and the good and bad choices that he should rightly be held responsible for. The first conclusion to be drawn from this is that it is impossible to separate out the influence of luck from choice so as to make meaningful interpersonal comparisons of deservingness – if Peter Parker's luck had been different he might have developed a character like that of the murderer in the story. A secondary conclusion will be that the impossibility of making interpersonal comparisons of desert lends support to utilitarianism.