VIRTUE ETHICS*

Dr. Kelly Arenson
PHIL 633/490W, Fall 2015
Wednesdays, 5-7:40pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Virtue ethics takes as its foundation Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which emphasizes the role of character and excellence in our moral assessments. This course considers the directions in which contemporary virtue ethicists have taken Aristotle’s character-based ethics as they have attempted to situate his notions of virtue, character, and happiness in a contemporary context and thereby to create an alternative to non-character based ethical systems such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism. The course will focus on the following questions: On what do contemporary virtue ethicists base the virtues (e.g., on some notion of human well-being; on the care of others; on our intuitions)? Which virtues are interesting and important? Are some virtues gender specific? Practice specific? How grounded in Aristotelian moral theory is contemporary virtue ethics? What are the major contemporary critiques of traditional virtue ethics?

READINGS

- ALASDAIR MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*
- ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- IRIS MURDOCH, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*
- IRIS MURDOCH, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”
- SUSAN OKIN, “Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues”
- ANNETTE BAIER, “What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?”
- SUSAN WOLF, “Moral Saints”
- PHILIPPA FOOT, selections from *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*
- G.E.M. ANSCOMBE, “Modern Moral Philosophy”
- THOMAS NAGEL, “Moral Luck”
- Other readings TBA

REQUIREMENTS

- PHIL 633:
  - Term paper; Presentation paper (approximately 5 pages); Lead-questioner of other students’ presentation papers
- PHIL 490W:
  - Paper written in stages over the course of the semester (outline, first draft, rewrite); Peer review of other undergraduates’ papers; Two shorter final essays

* Fulfills the graduate distribution requirement in contemporary philosophy