

Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance

Seminar Series 2009

Tuesday 26 May 2009

The Philosophy of Wellbeing: Aristotle to Sen and back again

Presented by Dr Bill Ransome

Seminar Abstract

Wellbeing has achieved talismanic status in several areas of social research and public policy, but what does it mean? A significant body of research and analysis concerning wellbeing has emerged across a number of research disciplines, yet the concept itself does not admit of any unified or consistent interdisciplinary interpretation. Social researchers and policy makers may look to philosophers for decisive definitional guidance. Yet the nature of wellbeing has been sharply disputed throughout the Western philosophical tradition. Modern philosophical theories of wellbeing fall into three basic categories – ‘hedonistic’, ‘desire’, and ‘objective list’ approaches – which mirror well-established doctrinal divisions between normative theories of utilitarian and deontological ethics. This paper briefly sketches a philosophical history of wellbeing, critically discusses the three competing contemporary specifications of wellbeing, and canvasses philosopher and Nobel economist Amartya Sen’s hybrid freedom-based ‘capabilities’ approach. Sen’s avowedly Aristotelian approach to the question of wellbeing nudges the contemporary philosophical discussion back towards its ancient Greek origins. The paper seeks to ground, strengthen and extend Sen’s capabilities account of wellbeing by returning directly to its source – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* – and especially to the central notions of human flourishing, practical wisdom and virtue.

About the Speaker

Dr Bill Ransome is a research fellow in philosophical ethics at the Law and Justice Research Centre, QUT, and adjunct research fellow and program director for corporate governance and social responsibility at the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University. His research interests in philosophical and applied ethics include moral psychology, ancient Greek and Kantian ethics, virtue ethics, theories of wellbeing, and the ethics of governance and social responsibility. His recently published monograph *Moral Reflection* (Palgrave 2009) breaks fresh ground in the philosophical re-engagement with the virtues, and the forthcoming *Ethics and Socially Responsible Investment: A Philosophical Approach* (Ashgate 2009), co-authored with Professor Charles Sampford, examines socially responsible investment from an ethical point of view.

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12:30pm - 2:00pm

Mt Gravatt Campus, Building M10 Social Sciences, Level 5, Room 5.01

Light refreshments served on arrival.

RSVP preferred - please email kceljag-events@griffith.edu.au or phone 3735 5997 by Thursday 21 May 2009.