

## Book Reviews

### Moral Theories and the Concept of a Person

*Jaana Hallamaa: The prisms of moral personhood. The concept of a person in contemporary Anglo-American ethics. Luther-Agricola-Society (= Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 33), Helsinki 1994, 267 p.*

Hallamaa asks in her study “how different kinds of moral theories imply the concept of a person, which kinds of concept of a person are included in such theories and finally, what significance the concept has for understanding the nature of moral theories” (5). The author’s *first* premise is moral language and the institution of morality cannot be explicated “without referring to human beings as moral persons” (5). In her eyes “ethical theories could, thus, be characterized as attempts to express what it is to live as a human being in a moral realm” (13) – or, as she says, “in other words, what it is to be a *moral person*” (13). Hallamaa’s *second* premise is “that we could clarify the nature of ethical theories by studying the concept of a person in them” (13). A *third* premise guiding her thought concerns the ‘nature’ of morality: “morality is a normative system of principles, rules, etc., the purpose of which is to direct people’s behaviour” (13 f.). Moral or ethical

theories can be examined from two “different perspectives” (14): as theoretical models they explain the institution of morality, and, from the second *normative* perspective, the theoretical model can be “developed into an auxiliary for moral reasoning” (14). With regard to this distinction Hallamaa refines her first and second premises and says that “the concept of a person is of relevance from both these points of view” (14). So, for her thinking, “the concept of a person occupies a central position as a theoretical and as a normative notion in the sense that there is some connection between the theoretical definition of the morally relevant, the model for moral reasoning and the concept of a person” (15). Hallamaa’s assumption is that “we can establish this link between the concept of a person and the basic theoretical and normative formulations of any moral theory if we can show that the concepts of a person explicable in moral theories corresponds with the manifest differences between different kinds of moral theories” (15). Her basic idea is that “we should find, to take an example, a utilitarian concept of a person, common to utilitarian moral theories, but different from the concept of a person which is manifest in contractarian models of moral thinking” (15). This, so she argues, “would show that ‘person’ is a central moral concept which is closely connected to the way different ethical theories understand the institution of morality” (15).

To realize her aim Hallamaa initiates an analysis of three different types of normative moral theory: utilitarian, contractarian and (modern) virtue theories. In the work at hand she discusses the utilitarian theories of Richard Brandt, Richard M. Hare and Derek Parfit (Part I), the contractarian theories of John Rawls, David Gauthier and Alan Gewirth (Part II), and the modern virtue theories of Philippa Foot, James Wallace, Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor (Part III). In the fourth and final part she makes some concluding remarks in regard to the concept of a moral person.

In what follows I won’t discuss in any detail Hallamaa’s analysis of these different ethical theories. In studying her book the reader might initially be worried in one particular respect: is it not a very ambitious, and *prima facie*, an overdrawn task to give an adequate analysis of so many complicated and sophisticated theories in one

single study? All of her target authors have been subject to many previous studies: the amount of literature devoted to discussing Rawls, Parfit, Hare or Taylor for example would fill an ordinary sized library. In stark contrast the bibliography of Hallamaa's study is extremely short. Thus one might suppose then that the reader could not hope to find an informed discussion in this respect. Indeed, reading her analysis one is unfortunately confirmed in this surmise: Hallamaa merely gives a kind of summary of the main features of the theories under study, whereby the reader finds no indepth analysis of more specific elements. Thus the strength of the present study doesn't lie here – it must instead, be found, if at all, in the perspective from which the author has chosen to analyse the above-named theories. In the face of these shortcomings I will limit my interest (and criticism) to discussing Hallamaa's three fundamental premises: (1) her concept of the institution of morality, (2) her concept of a person and (3) her understanding of the relation between moral theory and the concept of a person, which she concedes is central to her methodological approach. It should be clear from the outset, that these three topics are interconnected in various ways.

(1) *The institution of morality*. For Hallamaa the institution of morality has the concept of a moral person at its core. She defines morality as an action-guiding set of principles and rules. This ascribed "purpose" (13) of the institution of morality implies, for her, the explicit reference to "human beings as moral persons" (5). That is as such correct. But I think that one nevertheless has to make two qualifying critical remarks. The first one being, that a reduction of the institution of morality to norms and principles guiding personal action is far too restrictive. There is more to ethical life than that! In any case, it is far from evident that rules and principles are the most basic elements in ethical life, or must at all be considered in that way. My second critical qualification to Hallamaa's view of morality is that even if persons are the recipients of moral theories it simply doesn't follow that moral personhood is basic for having moral worth. And as far as moral theories tell us which aspects are morally relevant, it might be that the concept of a person turns out in fact not to be the core notion at all. If one begins with a Benthamian notion of suffering, it isn't obvious that "being a person" has in principle any

moral relevance. I am not denying that many moral theories, especially those of the contractarian tradition, are characterized adequately by Hallamaa's concept of morality. Clearly in these theories the concept of a person has a central status. But I can't find any explicit argument in her study which says that it is impossible to give an analysis of the institution of morality where norms of action and rules for the regulation of interpersonal conflicts have to be taken as the core of morality.

(2) *The concept of a person.* In Hallamaa's study the concept of a person is a central element. In analytical philosophy there are, ordinarily, some other concepts which belong together with the concept of a person: personhood, moral personhood, personal identity or narrative identity of persons, are obvious examples. Undoubtedly, there are many complex connections between these notions which have to be examined carefully if we are to grasp the function of this family of concepts in moral theories (cf. my "'Meine Organe und Ich'. Personale Identität als ethisches Prinzip im Kontext der Transplantationsmedizin." In: *Zeitschrift für medizinische Ethik* 42 (1996), S.103-118). Unfortunately though, Hallamaa doesn't distinguish them in her arguments. Indeed there are problems right from the start – title and subtitle of her book, for example, pose two immediate problems: the first is whether there is a distinction between nonmoral and moral personhood, as her title suggests: without the possibility of nonmoral personhood it would be useless to talk about "moral personhood" (why that is important, I will discuss briefly in the next section, as a key methodological problem arises here). In the subtitle of her book Hallamaa also speaks about the concept of a person. Here it would be essential to know how the concepts "person" and "personhood" are interconnected. Sometimes "person" is, for example, used as a predicate – "being a person". And in this way it comes close to "personhood". Sometimes "person" is used to designate an individual. This use is important if it comes to questions about the diachronic identity of persons as understood by Parfit. Unluckily Hallamaa's discussion of Parfit's theory is not convincing, because she conflates "personhood" and "person" without noticing that Parfit doesn't analyse the former (cf. my "Die Identität der Person: Facetten eines Problems. Neuere Beiträge zur Diskussion um personale

Identität". In: *Philosophische Rundschau* 42 (1995), S.35-59). One further source of problems is her use of the concept of personal identity. She conflates the diachronic identity of an individual, as Parfit analyses it, with the model of narrative identity which is enfolded in MacIntyre's or Taylor's philosophy. In doing this she once more misses the point of Parfit's arguments (cf. 234-237). I would agree that the morally relevant sense of personal identity must be analysed in terms of biographical or narrative models, where "identity" means something like a normative self-conception (I have called this "practical identity"). But this notion of identity has to be distinguished strictly from those questions which are discussed under the topic of personal identity, where conditions are looked for which determine when *a* at one point in time is identical to *b* at another point in time. This – as I have labelled it – "ontological identity" can also be important in ethical reasoning, especially in bioethical contexts (cf. my "'Wann ist ein Mensch tot?' Zum Streit um den menschlichen Tod". In: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 49 (1995), S.167-193). But this concept of identity functions in a very different way than the one particular to moral discourse.

(3) *Hallamaa's methodological approach*. Hallamaa's basic idea is quite convincing. Because personhood is central to the institution of morality, each moral theory has to say something about the concept of a person. Analysing the different theories in this respect we may find that in different theories different aspects of personhood are regarded as important. And so we may understand the different theories's concepts of morality by analysing the differences between their concepts of a person. Perhaps we will find some similarities between all theories belonging to one type and differences between the differing types of moral theories. Analysing the "utilitarian person"(100), the "contractarian person" (170) and the "person in virtue theories" (248) will allow us to understand – and explain – the differences between these types of moral theories. There is no doubt, that personhood is an important element in our moral life, and it is surely right, that the theories under consideration differ with respect to their respective understanding of personhood. Thus far Hallamaa's strategy seems to be quite attractive and convincing. But I think there is a hidden difficulty here which is apparent in the view implied

in the book's title: "The prisms of moral personhood". Speaking of "moral personhood" by means of the metaphor of a "prism" forces Hallamaa to presuppose that there is one basic, theory-neutral concept of moral personhood, which – like the light in a prism – enters the different moral theories. But do we really have such a concept?

Without presuming such a basic concept of moral personhood she would have had to say – as she does in fact – that there are only theory-indexed concepts: the utilitarian concept of moral personhood for example. Going about the matter in this way her methodological approach would lose all its force. All we would get were different theory-dependent concepts without a basic conceptual position against which to compare and evaluate the *adequateness* of the different theories. Avoiding this relativism of the concept of moral personhood Hallamaa must define what the basic concept of moral personhood is which as such would enter into the different theories. But this reader can't find any such normative concept in her book. Therefore it is impossible to decide the intended strength of her comparison. In her work as it stands, she can certainly show some of the basic differences between the models of moral personhood which can be found in virtue ethics, contractarian or utilitarian theories. But that is nothing particularly new. One way out of this dilemma, i.e., theory-dependence on the one hand and a missing basic notion on the other, would be to distinguish between a nonmoral concept of personhood and a moral one. In this way the first concept could be used as the basic notion and one could then go on to ask which features of personhood become morally relevant for different theories. But given *this* differentiation, the concept of moral personhood wouldn't remain the fundamental ground for moral theories; it would instead become a result, not the starting point of moral theory. Besides it remains unclear throughout Hallamaa's study whether there really is a morally neutral notion of personhood. Hallamaa herself touches on this difficult question at the end of her study: "Our conclusion brings us to a further question, beyond the scope of this study: does the concept of a person used in other than moral contexts have these characteristics? Is "person" always an equivocal, implicitly normative concept? Can we, as persons, ever speak about being a person without attaching some evaluative aspect to our speech?"

(257 f.) With respect to these questions of Hallamaa I would like to make three concluding remarks: firstly, there are other evaluative and normative aspects than moral ones; secondly, the description of a given moral practice isn't by itself a moral argument. And finally, these questions really are "beyond the scope of this study" (257). That is the case because they need to be addressed *before* Hallamaa's project can legitimately begin in the first place.

**Michael Quante**

**Postmodern and Political Theory in a New Context**

*Tuija Pulkkinen: The Postmodern and Political Agency. University of Helsinki. Department of Philosophy, Helsinki 1996.*

**T**he *Postmodern and Political Agency* deals with the complex crossing of some of the main issues of contemporary philosophy. First, the dispute between the modern and the postmodern as different and opposite modes of thought. Second, the search for a new conceptual web that is able to define politics in reference to the evident crisis of the classical model of democracy. And last but not least, the contribution of feminist theory to a radical reassembling of the theoretical and political categories involved in both questions.

The analysis is developed by Tuija Pulkkinen with a completeness which is rare in the critical literature. In fact, these different issues are usually discussed by authors from a specialistic and specific perspective. There are, namely, works on the modern and postmodern that ignore both political research and feminist theory. On the other hand, there are works on political theory that ignore feminism and postmodernity, or works on feminist theory that consider postmodernity but neglect the complexity of modern political