

(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.

The *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

tradition. The result of these specialistic views is not only limitation typical of every specialism, but most of all it consists in an unavoidable misunderstanding of the different conceptual frameworks that, silently or explicitly, break the boundaries of the analysis.

The completeness of Tuija Pulkkinen's book is constituted therefore of an overview and critical discussion of the relevant literature related to each issue, and, most of all, of a remarkable effort to reconstruct in a coherent map the different paths of these discussions, by focusing on where they cross and by clarifying their misunderstandings. The coherence of this map is nevertheless based on a biased assumption, that is, an evident privilege exclusive, on one hand, to the Anglo-American tradition of "political science", and on the other, to the postmodern point of view.

As far as the first issue is concerned, the authoress correctly depicts the well known distinction between the liberal and the Hegelian-Marxist political tradition. Nevertheless as her analysis proceeds she does not pay sufficient attention to the epistemic perspective of "political theory", which represents the most direct inheritance of the Hegelian-Marxist matrix. In fact, the perspective of "political theory", typical of continental debates, is interesting most of all because it deals with philosophy rather than with sociology and introduces juridical and constitutional questions to the political horizon. For example, thinkers such as Carl Schmitt develop a complex concept of power, as important as Foucault's, in order to analyse contemporary political models.

As far as the second issue is concerned, namely a strong privilege for the postmodern, the authoress is able to discuss the matter with a sharp theoretical intensity but fails to recognize the complexity of thinkers such as Nancy and Arendt whose collocation fits into neither the modern nor the postmodern framework. In other words, the prejudicial and irrevocable distinction between the modern and the postmodern hinders an adequate understanding of those thinkers who overcome this strict and inflexible dichotomy.

The main praise for the book is due to the method through which the mapping of contemporary thought is constructed by the authoress. First of all she takes responsibility for defining the significant meaning of modern and postmodern as modes of thought, in refer-

ence to how contemporary debates produce this meaning by using it. Three authors – Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Judith Butler – are in special focus in Pulkkinen's work, but she stresses her assumption of the modern and the postmodern as terms she uses in a different and innovative way.

In this context, modern is characterized by various figures of dichotomy that reproduce the basic dichotomy of truth/appearance as the opposition basis/surface in a hierarchical order where there functions a valorization of the foundation over the surface's phenomena. According to Pulkkinen, the postmodern escapes this dichotomical game not by a simple inversion of it (that is, a valorization of surface over basis), but by refusing dichotomy itself. By assuming a postmodern perspective, Pulkkinen declares her specific location in the debate as the first step towards exposing and deconstructing the complex language of modernity.

Tuija Pulkkinen, faithful to the method by which the meaning of concepts consists in their usage, explicitly chooses the postmoderns' side and applies it to the context of the analysis. She focuses on the line that proceeds from Foucault to Lyotard, to Butler, gaining an increasingly radical perspective. In fact, as she approaches Judith Butler's thought, her enquiry gets hold of the critical instruments of feminist theory and radical politics. In other words, she achieves a mode of thought that recasts both, the postmodern and politics, in a new context of significance.

The postmodern and politics, as they are rethought in radical feminism, present themselves as two-faced problems that Pulkkinen analyzes and considers in their complexity. Having defined the basic meaning of the modern from the postmodern perspective, she proceeds towards a more detailed approach to the modern itself as a political theory characterized by a transcendental assumption of the subject. Pulkkinen is at her most innovative and original all when she considers the two main traditions that are at work in modern political thought (the Hegelian-Marxist and the liberal) and when she analyzes the recent developments of these traditions, as they find interesting and diverse solutions in the works of contemporary authors. The most outstanding aspect of this proceeding consists of clarifying a terminology, the specificity of which cannot be neglected without a

serious risk of misunderstanding the conceptual frame to which it belongs. The distinction between terms such as “civil society”, “community”, “nation”, “identity” etc., as terms that support different models of political thought, is a good example of the methodological accuracy of this work.

By criticizing modern politics from a postmodern point of view, Pulkkinen is capable of facing the complexity of the matter and of recognizing the specific matrix of some terms – such as “identity” – that the authoress herself recasts in a new signification. It is precisely here that a detailed enquiry into “political theory” could have provided the analysis with further potential for speculative remarks.

The method is coherent, clear, easy to follow but not systematic. Even though it neglects to take into account some theoretical lines that escape the dichotomy of modern/postmodern, it is not enclosed in a univocal perspective. Some words such as “power” cross the text and testify to their Foucauldian source by connecting the various issues of the research and by radicalizing the notion of individual agency and identity as the main problems of contemporary politics. This approach succeeds in showing how the body and sexuality are strictly connected to political matters and constructed by power. This assumption, already made clear by many Foucauldian scholars, is here brilliantly interwoven with the feminist issue of an embodied self that deals with a contingent identity constructed in power.

As far as the propositional content is concerned, the aim of the book consists in stating a strong notion of individual agency as the subject of judgement in politics. On one hand, Pulkkinen’s critical discussion of the concept of individual agency present in the liberal tradition allows her to reject the abstract universality that classically belongs to the transcendental subject of modernity. On the other hand, the critical discussion she conducts on the Hegelian-Marxist tradition allows her to assume the individual agency as based on a contingent identity that, because of its mobile contingency, does not share the modern notion of transcendental identity. This is undoubtedly the most effective section of the work and a definitive step forward in the field of political debate.

Feminist theory, and most of all the American philosopher Judith Butler, are extremely important for supporting this theoretical achieve-

ment. Decisive, in this context, is the strategic positioning of a mobile and contingent identity within an agonistic conception of political subjectivity. Nevertheless, a certain prejudice towards European and French feminism works against a more attentive reading of Luce Irigaray's thought which could have widened the whole rethinking of political subjectivity and thereby offered an interesting recasting of Hegelian categories.

The section on "lesbian identity" is the point at which the analysis condenses its speculative efforts and verifies its intentions. It also exemplifies the completeness of the work mentioned before. Pulkkinen's intellectual and political insight enables her to both utilize the work of important thinkers within the interacting domains of poststructuralist, feminist, and lesbian theory while at the same time establishing her own critical distance from them in order to enforce their transgressive gestures. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to find postmodern feminist works on politics that analyze, as Tuija Pulkkinen does in detail and with competence, the modern political tradition that postmoderns usually reject. It is common, on the other hand, to find modern and postmodern male philosophers that completely ignore feminist thought on politics.

A deep knowledge of the postmodern perspective and a perfect command of American feminist debates allow Pulkkinen to show identity as a narrative entity. Her detailed reconstruction of the narrative of lesbian identity is extremely sharp and innovative in this context. It deals with theoretical issues that break the traditional border both of philosophy and politics, by involving literary matter in the performative effects of power.

Through convincing argumentation and precise analysis, through discussion on relevant literature and correct methodology, the book reaches its goal in an excellent way. This goal is, after all, a question that contemporary political thinkers can all share: could it be possible to think of politics as an agonistic process of judgement by agents conceived as constructed by power? Pulkkinen's answer is positive. It springs coherently from a wide analysis where she investigates the vocabulary of the question – that is, the meaning of each word and each concept – from three different perspectives: the modern, the postmodern and the feminist.

In spite of the objections above, the book constitutes an important contribution to contemporary debates on the matter. It develops an analysis of an intense speculative level and opens up new perspectives on theorizing the political.

Adriana Cavarero

**Introducing the German Genre of Conceptual
History to an Anglo-American Audience**

Melvin Richter: The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 204 pp. Appendices, notes, and index.

In his book *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction*, Melvin Richter sets out to offer English-speaking audiences the possibility to acquaint themselves with history of concepts as written by German historians. He advocates that Anglo-American historians can learn much from the approaches, systematic methods and variety of sources of the German genre. He himself states that the purpose of his book is to provoke methodological debate between Anglo-American and German historians who may not be as familiar with each others' work as they ought to be.

The compatibility of the German and Anglo-American approaches forms the central theme of Richter's book. He stresses the common background of the two traditions in that both have derived from the "linguistic turn" of historical research and the growing interest in the study of meaning. Referring to research that *Begriffsgeschichte* has motivated in The Netherlands, Hungary and the Nordic countries, Richter argues that the methodology developed by linguistically oriented German historians can be applied to the history of any country and any language. He also contends that such an application would enable comparative studies between dif-