



Seminar

# MIKKO YRJÖNSUURI

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*Four Approaches to the Philosophical Explanation of Personhood*

Tuesday, 30 September, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT MIKKO YRJÖNSUURI

Mikko Yrjönsuuri graduated from the University of Helsinki (MA 1988), where he also defended his doctoral dissertation on medieval obligations logic (Ph.D. 1994). In addition to several universities in Finland, he has taught at Uppsala University and the University of California, Los Angeles, and made extended research visits to, for example, Toronto, Genoa and Rome. He has been full Professor of Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä since 2007, where he is the leader of the research cluster Intellectual Traditions in Ethics and Politics (ITEP). He is also the vice-director of the Finnish national doctoral school in philosophy and head of the University of Jyväskylä Ethical Committee. His main research field is late medieval and early modern philosophy of mind and personhood, and he has worked extensively on the history of logic.

Yrjönsuuri is a leading historian of philosophy in Finland, having published Finnish translations of central classics (e.g. Boethius, Olivi, Descartes, Locke), and textbooks on ethics, theory of knowledge and the history of philosophy. His main research publications include the edited books *Norms and Modes of Thinking in Descartes* (1999; with Tuomo Aho), *Medieval Formal Logic: Obligations, Insolubles and Consequences* (2001), *Emotions and Choice: From Boethius to Descartes* (2002; with Henrik Lagerlund) and *Active Perception in the History of Philosophy: From Plato to Modern Philosophy* (2014; with José Filipe da Silva) and a wide variety of articles in journals and books.

During his stay at SCAS, Yrjönsuuri will work on a monograph on human agency in its embodied, reflexive and social aspects, drawing on ancient and medieval philosophical texts.

## ABSTRACT

To be able to fully realize our self-interest, we need to know what is the self whose interest we seek. In Plato's dialogue Alcibiades I, Socrates argues that one must recognize oneself as a psychological entity, a soul (psyche). Since Aristotle this conception of the self has been rejected by many philosophers. The tradition of discussion what exactly we are is very rich one. My way of bringing order to this discussion is the look at the different way in which the concept 'person' has been explained by philosophers. I am thus taking also the stance that the respective discussions on the concept of 'self' and 'person' are not separate but largely come to different way of tackling the same problems.

(1) Thomas Hobbes defines 'person' at that who acts, the agent. This conception follows obvious the line taken by Socrates in Alcibiades I. His conception is obviously social, which gives an interesting twist to interpreting Alcibiades I. With analysis of medieval texts (eg. Thomas Aquinas, it can be seen that Agency was central even in medieval discussions of human nature.

(2) Self-consciousness is the foundation of personhood in John Locke. His account was very influential in the twentieth century discussions of the topic. As I am showing here, the conception can be traced quite explicitly back to Peter John Olivi (1248-1298), who takes self-reflexive determination and responsibility of action to the fundament to personhood.

(3) The so-called Ciceronian conception of personhood takes the concept to refer something that can be translated as 'roles'. This making it the case that personhood comes in the plural. We all have multiple roles in our social networks, which entails that we are many personae. As Cicero argues, some of them are natural, some results from our life.

(4) The so-called Boethian definition of personhood is that person is an individual with a rational nature. The received view is that this was the dominant tradition in the middle ages, and indeed most authors take this definition to be valid. It clearly does not however, tell the whole story of how even medieval philosophy dealt with the problem of what we are.

Each of these four traditions results in different view regarding what is best for, or my self-interest.