

IN MEMORIAM  
SIMO KNUUTTLA  
(8.V.1946–17.VI.2022)

VIRPI MÄKINEN  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



Professor Simo Knuuttila, who was one of the leading scholars in the history of medieval philosophy, died at home suddenly at the age of 76 on 17 June 2022, in Helsinki. His death was a huge loss to the international academic community in his field. Knuuttila studied theology and philosophy at the University of Helsinki in the 1960s and 1970s. After completing his dissertation *Time and Modality in Aristotelian Scholasticism* in 1976, he worked as a research assistant in the department of theoretical philosophy with the late Jaakko Hintikka, and for a brief period he was an Acting Professor of Practical Philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Helsinki. Knuuttila was granted the title of docent at the universities of Helsinki and Oulu in 1977. He was appointed Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki in 1981, a position he held until his death.

The scope of Knuuttila's research was wide, spanning from ancient philosophy to the modern philosophy of religion. Internationally he was largely known for his work on the history of logic and modalities, as well as on the history of mind and emotions. During his early career he was concerned particularly with the history of logic, focusing on the concepts of possibility and necessity, for example. His edited works from this period include *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (D. Reidel, 1981), *Modern Modalities: Studies of the History of Modal Theories from Medieval Nominalism to Logical Positivism* (D. Reidel, 1988) and *The Logic of Being*, co-authored with Jaakko Hintikka (D. Reidel, 1986). Knuuttila's monograph *Modalities in Medieval*

*Philosophy* (Routledge, 1993) is a historical-philosophical summary of his research on medieval logic.

Knuuttila's interest in the philosophy of mind was closely connected to his themes of (modal) logic, especially the concept of will and the logical properties of some terms describing emotions. His monograph *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2004) is the first philosophical mapping of the history of emotions. In it, he used the Aristotelian division of emotions into four components, and studied their different manifestations in medieval theories of emotion. He was especially interested in the taxonomy of emotions and their differentiation, descriptions of their physiological aspects and the medical discussions, as well as the impact of Arabic philosophy on theories of emotions. His research on emotions was based on a holistic understanding of philosophical anthropology, giving particular attention to the historical context of the texts. Thus, he came to examine authors who had been almost completely ignored in previous works on emotions such as those of the Church Fathers of late antiquity and mystics of the medieval period.

The *Sourcebook for the History of the Philosophy of Mind: Philosophical Psychology from Plato to Kant* (Springer, 2014), which Knuuttila edited with the late Juha Sihvola, is a collection of translations of texts from the ancient to the early modern period covering themes such as sense perception, imagination and estimation, sleep and dreams, self-consciousness, will and choice, mental disturbances and the psychology of gender. Among Knuuttila's main interests in the 2000s was the moral psychology of Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez, exemplified in his article « Suárez's Psychology » in *A Companion to Francisco Suárez* (Brill, 2015).

The vast majority of Knuuttila's works on the modern philosophy of religion are published in Finnish. They cover several different topics, including the relationship between faith and reason, theological realism, relations between theology and the natural sciences, and between biblical and philosophical studies, as well as theories of the origins of religion.

Prestigious manifestations of Knuuttila's internationally high-level research in his field were his appointments as Academy Professor three times during the years 1994–2009, conferred by the Academy of Finland, as well as the two interdisciplinary Centres of Excellence (CoEs) for which he was responsible, *History of Mind* (2002–2007) and *Philosophical Psychology, Morality and Politics* (2008–2013), both financed by the Academy of Finland. His research in the former focused on conceptual developments and philosophical assumptions related to the intellectual history of knowledge, will and emotions from antiquity to the modern period, including medieval Arabic philosophy. In the latter CoE, *Philosophical Psychology, Morality and Politics*, he extended the perspective to morality and politics as the motivational basis of human activity, focusing on texts from the Renaissance to the Reformation and the early modern age in addition to antiquity

and the (Latin and Arabic) Middle Ages. Both centres gathered Finnish and international scholars from theology, philosophy, history and philology from the postgraduate level onwards to work together. This interdisciplinary collaboration across historical periods was characteristic of Knuuttila's research projects. Thus, he had a wide-ranging influence on the study of intellectual history in Finnish academia. He supervised the dissertations of numerous Finnish postgraduate students in philosophy, theology and intellectual history, as well as the work of international postgraduate students. It was largely due to him that the Department of Systematic Theology was known for its high-quality research in medieval philosophy.

Knuuttila was highly active in many academic organizations and networks. In the field of medieval philosophy, he was a member of the bureau of the *Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale* (1987–1997). He was Vice President of the Institut International de Philosophie (2009–2011) and chair of the Department of Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies of Academia Europea (2009–2015). Knuuttila was also a member of the editorial boards of numerous international and domestic journals and publication series.

In addition to being internationally visible, Simo Knuuttila was among the most respected scholars in Finland and other Nordic countries. He was awarded many major and prestigious prizes for his scientific merits, including the Swedish Gad Rausing prize (2008) and the Finnish Science Award (2011). In 2002 he was nominated for the Professor of the Year in 2002. Knuuttila also served as the head of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters (2004–2006) and led the translation committee covering Aristotle's complete works, during which time he translated *Nicomachean Ethics* into Finnish, with a commentary (Gaudeamus, 1989).

Commemorations of distinguished scholars tend to focus solely on reviewing their academic careers and publications. I would like to end by recalling Simo Knuuttila's warm personality. As a teacher and a mentor he was demanding, but humane. His comments on what were often unfinished and desperately written texts were always benevolent and encouraging. As a social individual, Knuuttila was interested in people, their thoughts and lives, and this interest extended to students. He saw the potential in every student and he knew how to encourage them to proceed and to progress. It was perhaps for this reason that he enjoyed special popularity among those who did poorly in their studies. Knuuttila also encouraged women to do research, which was not self-evident in Finnish academia during the 1980s, especially in the Faculty of Theology. His colleagues knew him as a hardworking person with a sense of drama and a special type of humour. He enjoyed telling (often exaggerated) stories and did not hesitate to admit (with self-irony) that he read absolutely everything, including advertisements.

## Virpi Mäkinen

---

In his several interviews, Knuuttila always remembered to mention the crucial importance of history to modern people, encouraging them also to study the history of philosophy because it goes back to the roots of Western thought and morality. Simo Knuuttila's own career and works promoted and illuminated this in many outstanding ways.