



## Raimo Tuomela

\*9.10.1940 † 22.11.2020

**EMERITUS PROFESSOR** Raimo Tuomela died in Helsinki on 22th November 2020, at the age of 80. Tuomela was one of the best-known Finnish philosophers. He held the chair in moral and social philosophy, with special reference to the methodology of the social sciences, at the University of Helsinki in 1971–2008 and was a Research Professor of the Academy of Finland in 1995–2000, as well as a Adjunct Professor at the University of Turku. He started by studying psychology (since a career in philosophy seemed somewhat insecure), taught it at Åbo Akademi University for a semester and was then appointed Assistant Professor in Practical Philosophy, that is, moral and social philosophy, in Helsinki in 1965. His career proceeded swiftly, with an MA and a licentiate degree in 1965 and 1966. He defended his first PhD thesis in Helsinki on the application process of scientific theories, and the second thesis, entitled *Auxiliary Concepts within First-Order Scientific Theories*, in 1968 at Stanford University. He ended up pursuing a career in philosophy by joining the team of Jaakko Hintikka and using the tools adopted there, most importantly the theory of distributive normal forms. The team also included Juhani Pietarinen and Risto Hilpi-

nen, and Tuomela also co-authored, with Ilkka Niiniluoto, a book entitled *Theoretical Concepts and Hypothetico-Inductive Inference* (1973).

His early work was concerned with the general philosophy of science and action theory, where topics ranged from definability and the problem of theoretical terms to theory formation in psychology and action theory. Tuomela defended scientific realism against instrumentalism and other forms of non-realism fashionable at the time. According to this view, non-observational or theoretical terms in scientific theories also aspire to refer to genuinely existent entities and are therefore not just instruments devised by scientists for their own convenience. A realist also thinks that scientific claims that surpass observational control have truth value. There was a turn in Tuomela's understanding of realism in late 1970s, largely inspired by Wildfire Sellars' criticism of the so-called *Myth of the Given*. Tuomela came to think, along with many others such as Hilary Putnam, that the myth entailed that the world is ready-made, carved in the one and only possible way in stone as it were (the phrase "ready-made" was, incidentally, coined by Tuomela and not, as has

been thought, by Putnam). Tuomela was particularly critical of the epistemic version of the Myth, according to which one can be engaged in epistemic dialogue or commerce with the world without having concepts. His version of realism Tuomela called *internal (causal) realism*.

In the last decades of his life, Tuomela concentrated on social ontology and collective intentionality, a new line of research that he initiated in 1984 with his book *A Theory of Social Action* (1984). Some of his numerous monographs worth mentioning are *The Philosophy of Social Practice and The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View* (2007). The last of his great works is perhaps *Social Ontology: Collective Intentionality and Group Agents*, a book where he examined the notions of collective intention and intentionality, as well as fundamental group notions. Where philosophy is often seen as quoting and criticising texts, Tuomela wanted to burrow into the heart of the topic. He was a diligent and systematic scholar and a truly original thinker, someone who built agendas instead of just commenting on others. In the words of a colleague who reviewed his book: "All in all, Tuomela's book stands as a model of excellence in social ontology ... His book is must reading in social ontology."

One overarching feature of Tuomela's work is an emphasis on accuracy and the detailed analysis of concepts. The many definitions needed in such analysis sometimes make his publications hard to read. Another notable feature, one that showed

both in his literary output and his personality, was his insistence on the primacy of the scientific method – and his lifelong opposition of pseudoscience. Indeed, he was one of the founding fathers in 1987 of Skepsis, a Finnish society for the propagation of reason and the method of science, and for opposing pseudoscience.

In the course of his career, Tuomela was a frequent visitor to the major universities and research centres in his field, including Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley. He was a visiting professor at the University of Munich since 2005 where he would spend several weeks each year. In addition to the numerous books he has written or edited, Tuomela published a great many articles in professional journals. Tuomela did not much appreciate public appearances and mostly worked at home. He once commented that it was a good thing so many junior colleagues enjoyed appearing in the media – since this left him ample time to focus on science proper. Academic excellence was indeed everything to him.

For his services to science, Tuomela was awarded the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Prize in 1993. The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters also awarded him its highest honour in recognition of his life's work, the Academy Prize, in 2019. Tuomela was a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters since 1983. Apart from the scientific community, he will be missed by his daughter Laura from his previous marriage, as well as his wife Maj.

*Obituary by Matti Sintonen*