*Fiona Woollard*

[*f.woollard@soton.ac.uk*](mailto:f.woollard@soton.ac.uk)

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*From Morality to the End of Reason* is an ambitious book. Ingmar Persson tackles key issues from across the spectrum of ethical theory and beyond: the nature of rights, self-ownership, killing and letting die, the doctrine of double effect, collective action, freedom and moral responsibility, the nature and ground of practical and epistemic reasons. His conclusions on these wide-ranging issues are woven into an overarching view of morality and rationality.

Persson argues that key parts of commonsense morality depend on the DNR (doctrine of negative rights) and CBR (causally-based responsibility). The DNR states that we have general rights to non-interference but no general rights to positive aid (1). The CBR is a conception of responsibility on which the greater the causal contribution an agent makes to an outcome the greater her responsibility for it (1). Persson argues that both the DNR and the CBR are untenable and must be discarded (48-69; 69-159). The CBR should be replaced with an alternative understanding of responsibility. On this alternative understanding, “the practical reasons-based conception of responsibility”, we are responsible for the outcomes of practical deliberation (166-175). According to Persson, as DNR and CBR underpin both the AOD (act-omission distinction) and the DDE (doctrine of double effect), rejecting these elements of commonsense morality leads to a symmetrical morality on which aiding is as important as avoiding harm (69-94,140-159). This new morality is based on reasons of beneficence rather than reasons of right (160-166). It is far more demanding than commonsense morality (165). Compliance with a more demanding morality is needed if we are to deal with the most serious moral challenges of the 21st century: poverty and disease in the developing world and anthrogenic climate change (302). Unfortunately, reasons of beneficence are understood to be weaker than reasons of right: this new more demanding morality may not be authoritative enough to ensure compliance (314).

Persson’s case that DNR is untenable rests upon four “decisive objections” (2) put forward in Chapter 2. I shall discuss two of these, beginning with the Constitution Argument. Persson takes it that commonsense morality says we have rights to physical objects, in the first instance our bodies, and that such rights are based on (and only on) either our being the first to occupy them or autonomous transfer of rights from first occupiers (50). He argues that we can have a right to our bodies only insofar as we have a right to their parts. If one’s body can be divided into parts, to none of which one has a right, then one cannot have a right to one’s body. For, then, each part could be removed without infringing one’s rights. This would not leave anything of one’s body, so the right to one’s body would be otiose (51). The puzzle arises because the microparticles that make up our bodies, or any macroscopic object, are continuously being replaced. These particles might once have been part of another person’s body. Thus our bodies, and any macroscopic objects, can be divided into parts of which we are not first occupiers and thus, according to the first occupancy account of rights (FO), to which we do not have rights (52).

This argument against DNR encapsulates for me the character of the book as a whole: frequently illuminating but as often frustrating. The argument raises original and significant challenges for anyone who wishes to endorse general rights. Nonetheless, Persson is too quick to conclude that his objections are “decisive”. The Constitution Argument is crucially dependent on the assumption that first occupancy, or a valid chain of transfer leading from a first occupier, is both necessary for rights and decisive in determining rights, so that if there is a first occupier of an object, no one else can have a claim to the object unless the first occupier has autonomously transferred her right. Given the drastic conclusion of the Constitution Argument, this assumption needs a lot more defence than is given in the, mainly expositional, discussion of FO in Chapter 2. Without that, Persson seems to be arguing: “Theory, T, seems initially a pretty good way to underpin claim C. Theory, T, is untenable. Therefore claim C is untenable.” Such an argument is obviously invalid. It needs to be shown that no acceptable alternative theory could justify the claims in question. In this case, it needs to be shown that there are no preferable accounts of the rights of self-ownership.

I hold that a person’s rights over her body are based primary on three aspects of her special relationship to her body: (i) locus of agency: a person can act on the world only through her body; (ii) primary locus of patience: it is (primarily) through a person’s body that the world acts on her; (iii) major locus of interest: what is good/bad for a person’s body is a significant part of what is good/bad for that person (Woollard, *Doing and Allowing Harm* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming], Chapter 10). Persson suggests that a person’s special relationship with her body would make it hers only in a purely descriptive sense (26). Of course, argument is needed to move from the descriptive facts about a person’s relationship to her body to normative conclusions, but it has surely not been “decisively shown” that such argument is impossible. If I am right, the relationship between body and agency is such that a certain desirable type of agency, full-fledged agency, is possible only if the agent has rights over her body. In full-fledged agency, the agent selects her own ends and adopts a settled plan to pursue them. Such settled plans are only possible with the kind of privileged say over one’s body which comes with ownership. If this type of agency can be shown to be morally significant, then the relationship between agent and body has normative, not merely descriptive, implications. I hold that this special relationship to one’s body is decisive when it comes to ownership, so that it trumps first-occupancy claims to body parts.

On this view, the ground of our rights over our bodies is a relationship that we have primarily to our bodies as a whole. We do not have this relationship to each part of our bodies: my finger is not the (sole) locus of my agency. We own these bits of our bodies not in their own right, but in virtue of them being part of a body to which we stand in a normatively significant relationship. This explains why my rights over my body are not undermined by the fact that parts of my body used to be part of someone else’s body. Of course, Persson’s argument still raises important challenges. When does something that was part of my body cease to be part of my body? What rights do I have over former body parts? It will be difficult to give an account that gives the intuitively correct results about all cases from the piece-by-piece body destruction described by Persson through organ theft cases to cases of natural shedding. But it has not been shown that such an account cannot be given. Moreover, even if we cannot give an account that perfectly matches our intuitions about all cases, we should surely be prepared to revise some of our judgments about particular cases rather than rushing to abandon body-ownership, and rights themselves.

My account of body ownership also provides a response to Persson’s General Argument against rights. The General Argument suggests supporters of general rights face difficulties in explaining how our intimate relations to certain physical objects–our bodies–could put others under obligations. These relationships are the result of non-moral forces. Persson claims that “If… we acknowledge that the distribution of our original features is the result of non-moral powers, which cannot make this distribution just, we cannot reasonably see ourselves as being under a duty to respect it and its consequences” (49). This ignores the possibility that our duty to respect persons’ rights over their bodies springs from the normative significance of each person’s present relationship to her body. If the relationship itself is normatively significant, this relationship could give rise to duties even if it is the result of non-moral powers. The ground for the duty lies not in the relationship’s history but in its current features. We may worry that none of us “ultimately” deserve the bodies that we get, but as Persson himself points out, a hankering after ultimate dessert is misguided.

Persson offers two arguments against CBR. The first argument is that the aspects of the AOD which are based on CBR lead to paradox. Persson explores two forms of this paradox. The first form of the paradox is based on the possibility of letting oneself (non-intentionally) kill by failing to resist repressive muscular spasms e.g. you feel the onset of a spasm in your finger, if you do not repress the spasm, your finger will contract around the trigger, setting off a gun, killing Vic (96). The second form of the paradox is based on the possibility of letting oneself kill by failure to intervene in the consequences of earlier intentional actions e.g. you earlier pushed Vic, if you don’t lend a helping hand now, he will fall into the abyss and die (106). Persson originally presents each paradox as follows: suppose you are in a situation such that according to the AOD you are permitted to let Vic be killed but not to kill him, but if you let Vic be killed now, you would let yourself kill Victor, either as a result of a repressible spasm or as a result of past intentional action. The AOD must imply that it is permissible for you to let yourself kill Victor now. However, if it is wrong for you to kill Victor, it is wrong for you to let yourself kill Victor. Thus the AOD yields “the paradox” that “you are permitted to let yourself kill Victor now, and it would be wrong of you to let yourself kill Vic now” (97, 107). This initial presentation is unfortunate. Analyses of the AOD often make clear that its supporters have considered and intend to exclude cases in which a person lets herself kill. For example, Jeff McMahan includes as a condition of letting die that “the agent neither caused the person's need for aid nor caused a further, independent threat to his life” (McMahan, “Killing, Letting die, and Withdrawing Aid”, *Ethics* 103 [1993]: 250-279, 277) The AOD, as understood by most supporters, is perhaps best put forward as a claim about a moral distinction between killing and *merely* letting die. The initial presentation of Persson’s argument obscures the fact that his core point does not rest on ignoring this aspect of the AOD. He anticipates the response that the AOD could be understood so that a permission to let Vic be killed is not seen as implying a permission to let yourself kill Vic (100). His real, and much more interesting, objections come up in discussion of this response.

The first point concerns killing by repressible spasm. Suppose we hold that letting yourself kill now is harder to justify than “merely” letting die, even when the killing would not be intentional under any description. We must place a lot of weight on whether a natural or non-intentional cause of death is external or internal to us. Persson challenges this idea: “The fact that a twitch is internal rather than external to us cannot make any moral difference” (105).

Similarly, responding to the second type of case requires us to give, and defend, an account of the relevance of our past conduct. Persson suggests that this involves choosing between a “present-self-focus”, which gives primary importance to what you do now, and a “self-other divide”, based on the difference between your own agency and agency that is external to you (102-103). He argues that the neither of these is satisfactory. The present-self focus is mysterious: “why should what we are doing at the present time have this special importance?” (110). The self-other divide has “an air of repulsive moral self-indulgence… why be especially concerned about your own rights violations rather than the rights-violations of all people, in proportion to the stringency of the rights violated?”(110).

These objections raises interesting challenges for defenders of the AOD, forcing them to clarify their position on issues that are too easily ignored. I suggest that present-agency is primary, but that the self-other distinction matters too. My reasons not to kill now are stronger than my reasons not to let myself kill through past intentional actions or through repressible body spasms: I am not normally permitted to kill to avoid letting myself kill. Nonetheless, my reasons not to let myself kill are stronger than my reasons not to let others kill: I must make greater sacrifices to save someone if it is my body or my past behaviour that has put them in jeopardy. The primacy of present agency seems to rest on a peculiar relationship to one’s current actions: it is these that are appropriately related to my current practical deliberation: I feel as if what I do now will reflect my decisions about what to do. When I think about letting myself kill, I am assuming that the killing behaviour is not (or no longer) appropriately connected to my current deliberation: it is something that I mitigate the effects of rather than something that reflects my decisions about what to do. Later, Persson himself discusses the contrast between regarding actions as *decidable* by one and as reliably *predictable* by one irrespective of one’s current decision(186). When deliberating, conduct that is viewed as decidable in that deliberation has a special status. Nonetheless, my past agency and the non-intentional actions of my body matter. On my view, the AOD is made up of both constraints against harming and permissions to allow harm: permissions to allow harm prevent agents from being forced to use their bodies and other resources to protect others. A requirement to use your body to protect someone from a threat in which your body plays a significant role does not seem to put your body at the other’s use in the same way as a requirement to protect them from independent threats.

Persson raises a series of fascinating challenges to the defenders of the DNR and the AOD. My responses have been of necessity very sketchy. I hope I have said enough to suggest that Persson’s objections do not decisively show that we must abandon these aspects of commonsense morality. Instead they might stimulate the defender of the AOD to clarify and improve her position. Although I do not think that Persson has shown decisively that we must reject the DNR and AOD, these aspects of commonsense morality are certainly controversial: both Persson’s own arguments and arguments elsewhere in the literature give ample reason for scepticism. Given this, it is well worth exploring the implications of revising commonsense morality. In providing a vision of such a revised morality, and how it would fit with other important aspects of practical reason, *From Morality to the End of Reason* makes a valuable contribution.

Fiona Woollard

University of Southampton