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Minding the human being to become an ethical person

(Christopher W. Haley, *The Subject of Human Being*, Routledge Studies in Critical Realism, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2019, 289 p.)

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The author, Christopher W. Haley, is an independent scholar who has a unique and distinct way of presenting his topic. This book challenges reflective and critical thinking. The book title may appear easy to understand, but if one is to read thoroughly, the book has to be read twice or thrice to be fully grasped. Words are carefully used, and sentences were thoughtfully crafted. One has to understand layers of contexts to appreciate it. It may be a challenging book even for philosophy enthusiasts. One must have a good background in philosophy and the social sciences to easily follow his discussions. This is what makes the book unique, laudable, admirable, and interesting. It took me three rounds of reading to appreciate it better. Truly, one of the hardest books I have ever read.

Haley's treatment of the subject is methodical and systematic, a multidisciplinary approach in presenting "overlapping and converging points of agreement from philosophical, psychoanalytic, and socio-theoretical treatments of the self in relation to the social" (4). He divided the book into eight parts, and tackled each part comprehensively with conclusion, end notes, and with excellent bibliography. Each part can stand by itself.

Part one introduces the human being. In his words, the "human being cannot be defined in exclusive terms of being *as is*, whether historical, cultural, or social on the one hand, and certainly not biological, universal, or transcendental on the other" (1). This starting point sets the parameter for the subject of human being. It is a welcome discussion for every philosopher. Any objective characterization of the nature of human being must account for the individual, sociocultural, and universal facets of each

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human being, and provide a theory of how the universal intersects with the concrete, local, idiosyncratic features of all peoples in all times” (1-2). In the succeeding parts of the book, one has to understand the “relations between what is objective and universal to human being and what is subjective and particular to human beings” (3). Thus addressing the time immemorial controversy of the subjectivity and objectivity of truth in philosophy.

Part two discusses philosophical materialism (14-77). The author explains epistemological and material realism. This part is the philosophical foundation for the following parts of the book. The concept of “realist philosophical ontology” is the basis, as it is the general orientation of “philosophical materialism.” Part three explains the ontology of consciousness (78-104). The author brought together the work Searle, Husserl and Sartre to formulate a theory of consciousness that transcends the dualist-reductionist antinomy. The author argues that “consciousness is real by the Dialectical Critical Realist (DCR) causal powers criterion of reality” (79). The dilemma here is the subjectivity of each philosopher about their accounts of consciousness. Philosophy of consciousness, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and phenomenology, each defining in their terms, confront the nature of consciousness. Part four is about the ontology of subjectivity (105-143) and Part five clarifies the subject of psychoanalysis (144-165). Psychoanalysis seeks to find answers by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind. “The goal of existential psychotherapy is to help analysand come to awareness of core powers of human being, of one’s ontological capacities, and how one’s powers bear on the inevitable confrontation with the vagaries of life and death” (159). Part six elucidates the subject of structure (166-190), while Part seven explicates social ontology (191-236).

The last part, which is the Conclusion (237-283), is about applications of the subject to the ethical systems such as deontology, teleology, virtue ethics, etc. In every book review that I do, I always point out the pragmatic implication and relevance of the book. It is here that phronesis (practical wisdom) comes in. Indeed, the moral agent must know who he is and what he is doing to think, judge or act virtuously. Thus I entitled my review as “*Minding the human being to become an ethical person.*” This best describes what to me is the essence of the book.

Searle makes a claim that “human beings are essentially defined by their capacity to make speech acts and this is an ontologically objective fact about the world” (240). “Rather than a list of abstract rules and laws given by an authoritative universal decree, virtue ethics is an earthly project to guide self-direction (by employing practical wisdom or phronesis), to work toward achieving excellence in all practices (to pursue *arete*), to fulfill human potentials (to flourish as a human being, viz., achieve *eudamonia*)” (241).

Searle's account on Virtue ethics and or deontology explains duties, rights, obligations, and meanings. "The *will to flourish* as a *virtue ontology* is the origination of a value that advances the cause of *being* over *non-being* and *well-being* over *ill-being*" (245).

Haley also turned to Christian Smith's informed theory of personalism. "A conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who as the efficient cause of their own responsible actions and interactions-exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world" (262). His ethics of relationality is about our thriving with the world. The human flourishing for all is demanded by a recognition that to be a human being is to be a relational subject. Smith reminds us that "social theory must consider persons as conscious centers of experience and having dignity, and these essentials are emergent features of people and implicated in any discussion about the social world" (277).

The subject of human being is all about the nature of human existence. The book is the opus of philosophical anthropology that analyses the basic powers emerging from the mind, consciousness, intentionality, language, and speech acts theory as applied to the subject of human being. To appreciate it better, one must have good background on Dialectical Critical Realism. My prior knowledge of Roy Bhaskar, Edmond Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Christian Smith and John Searle prepared me to enjoy reading the book. From human person to ethical person is a call to the shared responsibility of the sociocultural worlds we live.

If you want to test and challenge your philosophical reading, try this book. You might not understand at first reading due to the esoteric language used. But if you persist, it might blow your mind. It can be a good tool or textbook in Philosophy. This book is good for both the graduate and advance undergraduate studies. It challenges the reader to go deeper.

In future works or editions, the author might consider reaching out to a broader audience. If he could tone down the language and make it more accessible, that would be good for basic philosophy students or even non-philosophy majors. Otherwise, I salute the author for urging readers to go higher, testing the reader's persistence to read and research more to understand better. For now, this is for those who strive higher and seek academic engagement and challenges.