Philosophy in Review

Arash Abizadeh, "Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics"

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Arash Abizadeh. *Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics*. Cambridge University Press 2018. 298 pp. $105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 978110841729); $32.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781108404877).

Arash Abizadeh's 2018 book *Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics* is an expansive experiment in applying contemporary metaethical distinctions to Thomas Hobbes' works. Abizadeh analyzes a broad range of Hobbes' works, notably focusing on his critique of Thomas White. The project is well-conceived: metaethics is a subdiscipline of philosophy that deals in abstractions and umbrella terms, and Hobbes' thematically rich and wide-ranging oeuvre calls for categorization into various -isms. In one book, Abizadeh covers topics as seemingly remote as color theory and projectivism, prudentialism, naturalism, and truth apt normative propositions.

For the most part, the book does not focus on historical questions of influence, that is, on whether and how Hobbes' philosophy may have helped shape the very categories being applied to his work. One exception is when Abizadeh notes, following Ian Hacking (*The Emergence of Probability* 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press 2006), that the notion of probability emerged as a topic of interest in 17th century England—though he acknowledges that Hobbes merely 'circled around' the notion (302/699).

The central argument in the book is that Hobbes's ethics involves two dimensions of normativity comprised by two kinds of reasons: reasons of the right and reasons of the good. The book's title refers to Gary Watson's 1996 essay 'Two Faces of Responsibility' (30/699, n25). Abizadeh's distinction between reasons of the right and good is inspired by a distinction between accountability and attributability in Watson's essay. Reasons of the right, for Abizadeh, are reasons for which agents can praise or censure others in a second-personal capacity. They are reasons for which agents are accountable to others. Reasons of the good, by contrast, are reasons for which agents are held responsible in a first- and third-personal capacity. They are reasons that one can attribute to oneself or others as grounds for counsel, warning and commendation.

Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics is an enjoyable book. However, at times, the reader is left wishing for greater depth relative to breadth. One example of wasted potential for depth is Abizadeh's use of the titular inspiration, Gary Watson's 1996 paper. Thomas Hobbes figures in the background of Watson's debate with Susan Wolf, but Abizadeh fails to address the role of Hobbes in Watson's argument. Watson writes that basing the category of accountability on free will 'depends, I suspect, upon taking real self views as more or less sophisticated variants of a basically Hobbesian picture. In the simplest form of this view, an agent is taken to be responsible for an event when and because it is caused by his desires' (Watson 'Two Faces of Responsibility' Philosophical topics 24(2) 1996, 233). A few paragraphs later, Watson constructs a more sophisticated version of the Hobbesian view, leaving open the question of whether, for Hobbes, humans control their desires. 'On the diagnosis I have in mind, the common defect of views of this kind is that they flout the *control principle*: we can't be rightly blamed unless we have control over the causes of our conduct. If we lack control of our desires, as no Hobbesian view can preclude, we lack control of our wills, thereby violating the control principle.' (Watson 1996, 233)

Nevertheless, having alluded to a potentially fruitful line of questioning about will, freedom and control in Hobbes, Watson shifts the focus and claims that his own concerns about moral responsibility have little to do with the Hobbesian picture. Real self-views and aretaic evaluations, he maintains, are not concerned with the Hobbesian picture of control and accountability, but rather with agency and attributability. Thus, the distinction that Abizadeh borrows from Watson marks a shift away from an orthodox Hobbesian picture, in which the primary stakes of moral responsibility lie in questions of control and accountability, instead looking at an agent's 'fundamental evaluative orientation' (Watson 1996, 234).

Watson considers what Abizadeh calls reasons of the good, or attributability, a departure from the orthodox Hobbesian picture. Abizadeh might have exploited this mention of Hobbes in Watson's paper to enrich his discussion of contracts. After all, Abizadeh aims to give an alternative to orthodox readings of moral responsibility in Hobbes, adding an aspect of attributability to ethics where the common reading stops at accountability.

Watson explicitly disavows the Hobbesian view of responsibility. Yet control reappears later in the paper, in a discussion of 'agreement' that resembles Hobbesian contract theory. Watson writes: '[I]f one is subject to a requirement as part of a noncoercive and nonexploitative agreement, then one might be fairly held responsible for failing to satisfy it even if (as above) one is quite unable to do so. So "demand" does not imply can' (Watson 1996, 237). For Watson, as for Hobbes, the agent's control lies in her initial entry into agreements with others, not in the moment of willing an action.

Mention of this further notion of control in Watson and Hobbes would have improved Abizadeh's argument for non-naturalistic normativity in 5.3 and 5.4. There, adding complexity to simple will theories of direction, Abizadeh argues that being accountable cannot be reduced to a naturalistic concept such as a motivation. Being accountable to others *can* be reduced, however, to the others' '(i) having the normative standing (ii) to hold one accountable' (473/699).

Abizadeh focuses on whether or not the one who is owed an obligation has control, rather than the one owing the obligation. He insists that for Hobbes, being owed an obligation on the part of the one being owed, is not always coextensive with having control over the obligation. Abizadeh does not consider control in the intermediate step between an agent's acting and her being held accountable by others. The intermediate step is the agent's control over whether she enters into a contract in the first place. The agent is accountable to the other people with whom she enters into an agreement because she has control over her entry. For Watson and for Hobbes, the agent's control over her entry into contracts is one face of responsibility.

Though the bulk of the book's argumentative weight lies in Part III, 'Reasons of the Right,' readers will benefit from the lucid discussion of practical deliberation in Part I 'The Metaethics of Reasons,' Chapter 2. Deliberation is a key notion for Hobbes in part because it unifies disparate themes; this unification helps out Abizadeh as well. The notion of deliberation serves as a locus tying together the themes I mentioned earlier: color theory arises in deliberation as visual perception, truth apt normative propositions arise as conceptions of the good, and so on. On the other hand, the salience of deliberation for Hobbes might suggest that metaethics is not the proper

level of inquiry into his works, and that normative ethics, concerned with practical deliberation and action, might be more appropriate.

One especially important feature of this chapter is that Abizadeh makes explicit the link between representation and linguistic reasoning in Hobbes, problematizing simplistic nominalist readings. Abizadeh writes, succinctly, 'Language is […] not necessary for comparing the properties of intentional objects; language simply enables us to do explicitly, in propositional form, what we already did in representational form via consideration' (196/699). In the Hobbesian picture, what reasoners do with language is not merely impose names on objects, as the simplistic nominalist maintains. Reasoners also order names in speech through the syntactic structure of a proposition. This ordering transforms thought from sequences of passive associations to chains of inferential reasoning. 'It is therefore the invention of propositions, not just names, that transforms our thought sequences, by enabling us to have sequences that do not solely follow past associations' (212/699).

Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics is worthwhile and enjoyable reading for anyone interested in Hobbes' philosophy generally, his ethics specifically and his philosophical relation to contemporary debates about naturalism, non-cognitivism and normativity. Arash Abizadeh makes a forceful central argument that there are two dimensions of normativity in Hobbes' ethics. He also applies various distinctions from contemporary metaethics to Hobbes' works.

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