

FINAL CAUSATION AND NORMATIVE POWER

Thomas Pink

1. *The theory of natural law – moral direction and the appeal to moral appraisal*

Hence a human action is worthy of praise or blame in so far as it is good or bad. For praise and blame is nothing other than for the goodness or badness of his action to be imputed to someone. Now an action is imputed to an agent when it is within his power, so that he has dominion over the act. Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, q21, a2, resp.

Since even if God never gave any command about the matter, it would still be bad to kill a human being without reason, to show contempt for one's superiors, or to expose oneself to clear danger of death, therefore even if natural law did not do so by way of any particular commandment given by God, natural law would still forbid such actions. ... for by the natural law we understand that on account of which some action is good or bad independently of any positive law, and so insofar as there would still be very many good and bad actions even if there were no divine commands, there would still be a natural law even in the absence of such commands. John Punch commentary on Scotus on the decalogue, *distinctio* 37 in Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, (ed. Luke Wadding) (Lyons, 1639).

I therefore reply that in a human action there is indeed some goodness or badness by virtue of the object positively aimed at, in as much as that object is compatible or incompatible with right reason, so that by right reason the action can be counted as bad, and a fault and blameworthy in that regard, apart from any relation to law proper. But beyond this a human action has a *particular character of being good or bad* in relation to God, when we add divine law forbidding or decreeing, and in respect of that the human action counts in a particular way as a fault or blameworthy in relation to God by virtue of its breaching of the genuine law of God himself, which *particular badness Paul seems to have referred to by the name of transgression* when he said, 'Where there is not law, neither is there any transgression'. Suarez *De legibus* book 2, chapter 6, §17

2. *Hobbesian scepticism about the appeal to moral appraisal*

- scepticism about self-determination

And if a man determine himself, the question will still remain what determined him to determine himself in that manner. Hobbes in *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance, Clearly Stated between Dr Bramhall Bishop of Derry, and Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, p26

- scepticism about the independent intelligibility of moral goodness

Tis the Law from whence proceeds the difference between the Moral and the Natural Goodness, so that is well enough said by him [Bramhall] that Moral goodness is the conformity of an action with right Reason...From whence it appears that Moral praise is not as he sayes from the good use of liberty, but from obedience to the Lawes, nor Moral dispraise from the bad use of liberty, but from disobedience to the Lawes. Hobbes *Questions*, p146

If the definition of natural law is built upon that foundation of the necessary moral goodness or moral badness of some actions, it cannot avoid obscurity and circularity...in any definition of natural law, 'good' must be understood as natural good and not moral good, since, indeed, it would be absurd to define a thing in terms which presuppose that the thing defined is already known. Pufendorf *De Iure Naturae et Gentium* book 2, chapter 3, §4.

3. Natural law as vis directiva: direction and normative power

Therefore that in created beings acting through intellect and will there occurs final causation, sufficient proof can be found from human actions. Experience shows us that when we act in a human way, that is freely and rationally, we intend some particular end, towards which we direct our actions and for the sake of which we choose means; therefore we are moved by an end, both to the love or intention of that end, and to choosing and executing means for the sake of that end. Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp 23, section 1 §8

The reason is that final causation consists in a metaphorical motion of the will by which the end attracts the will to itself; but nothing attracts the will to itself except in so far as it is good. So goodness is the basis of the will's being moved, and therefore is the basis or principle of final causation...goodness is what constitutes a final cause, imparting (as I shall put it) force to the causation. disp 23, section 5 §2

the state as coercive teacher: law and psychological attitudes

yet, humans as individuals have difficulty in knowing what furthers the common good, and moreover, rarely strive for that good as a primary object; so that, in consequence, there was a necessity for human laws that would have regard for the common good by pointing out what should be done for its sake and by compelling the performance of such acts. Suarez *De legibus*, book 1, chapter 3, §20

The confirmation of our argument is that the purpose of this coercive authority [*potestas*] is to maintain the state in peace and justice, which cannot be done unless the state is also induced to live virtuously; but men cannot live according to moral and natural virtue, without true religion and the worship of the one God; therefore, the natural coercive authority and the jurisdiction of a human state are extended to include this purpose...even a pagan—that is, a non-Christian—king, if he has a knowledge of the true God, may coerce his own subjects into believing that truth (*cogere subditos ad idem credendum*), *either by their own reasoning if they are educated, or by putting human faith in more learned men, if they are ignorant*; and consequently, he may compel those same subjects to cease from the worship of idols and from similar superstitions contrary to natural reason. The proof of this inference is that there resides in such a king all the coercive authority which, according to natural reason, is suitable for a human state. Suarez *De fide* disputation 18, section 4 §§7-8

normative power – natural and supernatural direction

For grace also has an essence and a nature of its own, as an infused light to which it also belongs not only to direct men towards supernatural action that is right, good, and required, but also to dispel darkness and errors relating to the purely natural law itself and to teach on the basis of a higher reason the observance of that same natural law. *De legibus*, book 1, chapter 3 §12

grace as final causation

We should further consider that man can be helped in acts of grace both physically and morally; for these two modes of causation have a place in acts of grace, since these acts are moral acts and performed physically by us through our own capacities, and so can be helped by grace in both ways, indeed, each mode of assistance is necessary according to Catholic teaching... Augustine sets out this help in respect of an object or end in tract 26 *In Joannis evangelium* saying, You hold out a green sprig to the sheep and draw it on, as he states how the will is drawn by grace in this way. Whence he concludes: the revelation of truth is itself an object of attraction which the soul desires even more strongly than truth. Suarez *De gratia* book 3, chapter 15, §1

normative power as causation?

My view is that the issue can be no more than verbal. For if by a true and real cause is understood something producing the effect physically, then neither Father Suarez nor anyone sensible has ever claimed that the end is a true and real cause, since a thing that does not exist, indeed that on the contrary sometimes could never exist, cannot produce something physically, so neither is it a true and real cause in this sense. If however by a real cause is understood a cause that moves, not physically indeed but intentionally by means of cognition, there is no doubt that the end is a real cause, because its goodness existing intentionally within the soul really does attract through cognition, which cognition is real, whence the goodness of the end really does allure what are means to it (and is thus described as moving both intentionally and really, and attracting to itself), and therefore the end is a true and real cause in this sense. This regarding the substance; the manner of speaking is not much worth bothering about. Rodrigo de Arriaga *Cursus Philosophicus* Disputatio viii *Physica* sect vii, *De effectibus et causalitate finis*. §§80-81

4. Hobbes: scepticism about normative power

Moved not by an efficient, is nonsense...Natural efficacy of objects does determine voluntary Agents, and necessitates the Will, and consequently the Action; but for moral efficacy, I understand not what he [Bramhall] means by it. Hobbes in *Questions*, pp59 and 80

[A final cause] in so far as it can be conceived by man, is entirely the same as an efficient cause, for from an agreeable object there arises an imagination of enjoyment, from an imagination of enjoyment arises an imagination of a way, from an imagination of a way there arises a motion towards the desired object; in which series of productions the object or end is an agent, for which reason the act of the object which is the end is an efficient cause of our motion towards the end. Hobbes *Critique du De Mundo* de Thomas White chapter 27, §2

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire, that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*; and the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; and of his Contempt, *Vile* and *Inconsiderable*. For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves... Hobbes *Leviathan*, chapter 6

the rational soul denied

For I do not fear it will be thought too hot for my fingers, to shew the vanity of words such as these, Intellectual appetite, conformity of the appetite to the object, rational will, elective power of the rational will; nor understand I how reason can be the root of true liberty, if the Bishop (as he saith in the beginning) had the liberty to write this discourse. I understand how objects, and the conveniences and inconveniences of them, may be represented to a man by the help of his senses; but how reason representeth anything to the will, I [do not] understand ... Hobbes *Questions* pp35-6

Out of all which we may define, (that is to say determine,) what that is, which is meant by this word Reason, when wee reckon it amongst the Faculties of the mind. For REASON, in this sense, is nothing but Reckoning (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts; I say marking them, when we reckon by ourselves; and signifying, when we demonstrate, or approve our reckonings to other men. Hobbes *Leviathan* chapter 5

the transformation of agency - from motivation by an object to motivation by an appetite

Wherein letting pass that Metaphoricall speech of attributing command and subjection to the faculties of the soul, as if they made a commonwealth or family among themselves, and could speak to one another, which is very improper in searching the truth of this question; you may observe first that to compell a voluntary act, is nothing else, but to will it; for it is all one to say, my will commands the shutting of mine eyes, or the doing of any other action, and to say, I have the will to shut my eyes. So that actus imperatus here, might as easily have been said in English, a voluntary action, but that they that invented the term, understood not anything it signified. Hobbes *Questions* pp217-18

And where he [Bramhall] sayes our wills are in our power, he sees not that he speaks absurdly; for he ought to say, the will is the power... Secondly, you may observe, that actus elicited, is exemplified by these words, to will, to elect, to choose, which are all one, and so to will here is made an act of the will; and indeed, as the will is a faculty or power of a man's soul, so to will is an act of it, according to that power. But as it is absurdly said, that to dance is an act allowed or drawn by fair means out of the ability to dance; so it is also to say, that to will is an act allowed or drawn out of the power to will, which power is commonly called, the will. Hobbes *Questions* pp40 and 217-18

law as directive of the voluntary - the attack on legal direction of attitudes

As for the inward thought, and beleef of men, which humane Governours can take no notice of, (for God onely knoweth the heart) they are not voluntary, nor the effect of the laws, but of the unrevealed will, and of the power of God; and consequently fall not under obligation. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 40

5. The legacy of Hobbes - scepticism about self-determination and normative power

Then *determining our selves freely*, does it mean *acting without any Motive or exciting Reason*? If it did not mean this, it cannot be opposed to *acting from Instinct or Affections*, since all *Motives* or *Reasons* presuppose them. If it do mean this, that "Merit is found only in Actions done without *Motive* or *Affection*, by mere *Election*, without prepollent *Desire* of one *Action* or *End* rather than its opposite, or without *Desire* of that *Pleasure* which some do suppose follows upon any *Election*, by a *natural Connexion*." Then let any Man consider whether he ever acts in this manner by mere *Election*, without any previous *Desire*? And again, let him consult his own Breast, whether such kind of Action gains his *Approbation*? Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, treatise 2, section 5

Now we endeavoured already to shew, that "no *Reason* can excite to Action previously to some *End*, and that no *End* can be proposed without some *Instinct* or *Affection*." What then can be meant by being *excited by Reason*, as distinct from all Motion of *Instincts* or *Affections*? Hutcheson, *An Essay* treatise 2, section 5

The accommodation of scepticism about normative power - appraisal without direction

...to discover the true origin of morals...we shall endeavour to follow a very simple method: we shall analyse that complication of mental qualities, which form what, in common life, we call Personal Merit: we shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners. David Hume *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* section 1