**Arnaud Milanese, *Principe de la philosophie chez Hobbes. L'expérience de soi et du monde*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2011, 366 p.**

Arnaud Milanese's book provides the reader with an insightful reading of Hobbes' philosophy, capable of illuminating some of the most controversial aspects of Hobbes' metaphysics, physics, epistemology and anthropology. The title of the book is meaningful and somehow self-explanatory: Milanese aims to unveil the foundational principle from which the entire Hobbesian system departs and unfolds in its orderliness and consistency. According to the author, the starting point of all of Hobbes' philosophising rests exactly where the knowing subject and the known world meet each other, in a single seminal act of self-revealing existence. That is to say, according to Milanese's interpretation, the true Archimedean point from which we can observe Hobbes' philosophy developing as a coherent system of investigation of nature is to be found in the imaginative processes, which are assumed by Hobbes to be the juncture point where both the self and the world first manifest themselves as the undeniable and only objects of our thoughts.[1] In particular, this foundational principle of the whole of philosophy would correspond in Hobbes to the fundamental concept of "phantasm,"[2] or "fancy."[3] In the existing images we have of the things, Milanese says, the observing self and the observed world, the internal and the external, coexist—insofar as they mutually imply each other in a single existing mental act—yet they are distinct from each other—insofar as they compose the nature of the object of knowledge as being a complex object in itself, revealing therefore an immanent differentiation, which we may grasp through the consideration of our very mental acts. Any object so conceived of is, therefore, capable of being further analysed, thus manifesting its belonging to a framework of causal and epistemological relationships that involve both the knowing self as well as other objects of knowledge, existing in turn in their primordial form as imaginations of things.

This particular approach to the topic allows Milanese to fruitfully differentiate his reading of Hobbes' system of philosophy from some other influential interpretations, which

[1] P. 20: "Cette étude part donc de l'hypothèse que l'*imagination* ainsi comprise est le centre de gravité du système de Hobbes. Tous les domaines auxquels il se consacre y ramènent, et d'abord sa théorie de la connaissance. Qu'on y voie un phénoménisme, un nominalisme radical (et l'on verra que les deux sont le plus souvent liés), ou qu'on y voie une conception *réaliste* de la science, force est de constater que, si Hobbes a bien une théorie du concept, celui-ci n'est pas séparé en nature de l'imagination : il n'y a pas d'extériorité radicale de la raison par rapport à l'imagination."

[2] According in particular to the terminology employed by Hobbes in his *De Corpore*.

[3] More often found in the *Leviathan*, instead of "phantasm."

have conveyed, even recently, the traditional image of Hobbes' philosophising as characterized by an exacerbated nominalism,[4] or else as a radicalisation of Galileo Galilei's mechanisms,[5] or even as a kind of historic precursor of Kant's well known dualism between phenomena and things in themselves.[6] By focusing on the role of phantasms in Hobbes, Milanese is led to unveil what he addresses as "the real foundation of perception" (pp. 81-221) and "the natural roots of reason" (p. 208), in order to revaluate the latent realism which animates Hobbes' epistemology as well as the whole of the Hobbesian philosophical and scientific project: "Comprendre le monde, c'est bien distinguer les corps qui agissent sur nous et leurs effets subjectifs, les phantasmes et les affects : à partir de nos phantasmes, nous pouvons accéder à la connaissance des actions sur nous des corps qui nous entourent, à la connaissance de leurs accidents dont nos phantasmes et affects sont les effets [...]. De là une épistémologie en partie réaliste, étrangère aux distinctions ultérieures des choses en soi et des phénomènes" (p. 12).[7]

Milanese's book begins with a deep and perspicuous analysis of Hobbes' thought experiment concerning the annihilation of the world, which takes into account the several reformulations that this thought experiment underwent (according to the chronology provided by Milanese), starting from Hobbes' *De Principiis*, to the final version present in the *De Corpore*, and passing through the variants found in Hobbes' *Anti-White* and in his *Elements of Law* (pp. 39-80). Milanese correctly stresses how this thought experiment is to be properly

[4] As remarked by Milanese (pp. 147-148), the interpretive tradition which associates Hobbes' philosophy with a particularly radical form of nominalism is long enduring and well documented, starting from Leibniz' definition of Hobbes as a "super-nominalist" (see Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, edited by Leroy E. Loemker, Dordrecht / Boston / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, p. 128: "I believe, Occam himself was not more nominalistic than is Thomas Hobbes now, though I confess that Hobbes seems to me to be a super-nominalist"), passing through John Stuart Mill (see in particular *Book IV* of his *System Of Logic, Ratiocinative And Inductive*), Martin Heidegger (see Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington / Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988 [revised edition], pp. 183-184: "It is no accident that Hobbes elaborated an extreme nominalism. […] This extreme nominalistic formulation of the problem is carried through here with unsurpassable clarity in which—quite apart from the question of its tenability—philosophical power is always manifest"), and it is currently endorsed—at least in the Francophone context—by Yves-Charles Zarka (*La décision métaphysique de Hobbes*, Vrin, Paris, 1987) and Michel Malherbe (*Hobbes ou l'œuvre de la raison*, Vrin, Paris, 1984).

[5] As maintained, for example, by Edmund Husserl, specifically in his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*.

[6] Milanese mentions Paul Natorp and Harald Høffding as examples of philosophers who put forward this peculiar reading of Hobbes.

[7] See also p. 32: "Même si l'étude de la sensation et de l'imagination est centrale dans l'approche de sa pensée, aucune lecture de Hobbes ne peut faire l'économie du réalisme qu'il affirme de façon si évidente. Dire cela n'est pas résoudre le problème, mais le poser correctement. En ce sens, si nous pensons devoir revaloriser l'apparaître comme thème majeur de la pensée hobbesienne, ce n'est nullement pour verser dans une lecture phénoméniste qui simplifie le problème de l'imagination."

understood as a fiction, and not rather as a hypothesis.[8] By this fiction, Milanese says, Hobbes is able to demonstrate how, through the survival of the sole phantasms of the world in our imagination, what shall remain as an impassable element of objectivity is the differentiation between what is immediately grasped by us as the perceiving self and what is perceived as the external world—even though an external world may be fictitiously assumed as non-existent. Therefore, the difference between an interiority and an exteriority, as well as the temporal and spatial positioning of both the knowing subject and the object represented by our fancies, must be assumed as primordial features, which are necessarily contained by any imagination. This conclusion allows Milanese to take his reading of Hobbes to imply a problematic refusal of both any naïve realistic conception of knowledge, traditionally grounded on the pure correspondence between thoughts and things, as well as of any radical phenomenism that denies any element of objectivity to our mental images of the world. The images themselves provide the one and only foundation for our true appreciation of what we conceive of as real and undeniable: "nous paraissent insuffisantes tout aussi bien les lectures qui ne saisissent pas la mise en crise de tout réalisme empirique (avec ou sans ressemblance entre les idées et les choses) qui s'opère dans la fiction de l'anéantissement de toutes choses, que celles qui identifient le phantasme à une sphère de représentations séparées, indépendantes scientifiquement de la nature et métaphysiquement de l'existence des choses. Toutes deux manquent le trouble qu'instaure la fiction de l'anéantissement de toutes choses entre intériorité et extériorité, frontière correctement posée parce que posée comme trouble" (p. 77).[9]

Milanese's analysis of Hobbes' epistemology, which guides the reader to the unveiling of the principles of Hobbes' ontology and of his theory of language, turns therefore into the analysis of the nature of phantasms themselves.[10] Phantasms become, according to Milanese,

[8] Fixing in this way some notable readings concerning the same topic, as the one by Yves-Charles Zarka in his "First philosophy and the foundation of knowledge" (in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 62-85).

[9] See also p. 80: "C'est bien le problème même de l'imagination, dans son rapport au monde extérieur et à l'intériorité du soi, qui est en jeu dans la fiction qui inaugure la pensée hobbesienne."

[10] Pp. 88-89: "Si le réel transparaît de façon problématique dans le phantasme, et que la science se déploie de façon logique, l'examen du phantasme considéré comme espèce des choses doit rendre compte de la possibilité d'une connaissance logique : l'analyse de l'expérience doit pleinement fonder la science et son instrument, la raison, ce qui reconduit le projet baconien d'une logique empirique. Notre hypothèse est que c'est exactement ce que Hobbes propose. L'examen des procédures langagières du raisonnement met à chaque fois en lumière les notions sur lesquelles elles reposent : les *phantasmes* (donc l'espace et le temps) et la *consideratio*, qui offrent quelque chose à nommer, fixent l'extension de la signification des noms et règlent par avance la possibilité des attributions logiques vraies, qu'elles soient nécessaires ou simplement contingentes ; les *corps*, qui sont les choses proprement désignées par les noms, par cela même qu'ils marquent l'ordre des phantasmes dans l'expérience ; et surtout les *accidents* (façon dont Hobbes nomme les propriétés réelles des corps), qui rendent

the one and proper object of our "consideration" (pp. 90-134), understood as a movement which generates in turn "phantasms of phantasms" (pp. 103-104), and by the consideration of the mereological structure of phantasms Milanese demonstrates how we can track the basic elements of human rationality and of our conception of the world in its most basic and fundamental structure. Our faculty of reasoning and the logic structure of our mental discourse,[11] our conceptions of spatiality and temporality (pp. 90-97), our conception of the nature of bodies[12] along with their mathematical and geometric properties (see p. 115), as well as their mutual causal connections—all of them depend on the considerations we may have of the nature of phantasms themselves, which provide the ground for any rational and true discourse on nature. Particularly interesting in this respect is Milanese's investigation of the role of the concept of "accident" in Hobbes, which provides the basis for our understanding of the causal connections between bodies, along with their mutual relationships of activity and passivity (pp. 143-184).

The last part of Milanese's book is devoted to explaining how we understand, through the presence of phantasms in our mind, the subjectivity and the self, conceived of as a sentient body (pp. 223-262), permeated by desire and determined by its affective life (pp. 296-333). The conclusion reached by Milanese confirms the hypothesis from which he departed, that is, the central role played by phantasms in Hobbes' philosophical system, insofar as they provide the only source of knowledge on the one hand, and the concrete and undeniable elements of real existence upon which we are able build the whole of our conception of ourselves and the world: "Toute l'entreprise de Hobbes repose ainsi sur un seul absolu, le *phantasma* ou la *fancy*, c'est-à-dire, au fond, le fait même de l'expérience dont on ne peut douter" (p. 339).

All in all, I highly recommend this book: the perspective adopted by the author is equally as perspicuous as it is effective, and the historical grounding of his study is impressive, involving references to, and comparative conceptual analyses with, Socrates, Aristotle, Augustine, Duns Scoto, Ockam and Descartes, to cite only a few. Given the level of accuracy of Milanese's research, the employed vocabulary and the conceptual cross references he establishes require the reader to be familiar with at least the basic categories of the Western philosophical tradition. In this respect, Milanese's book cannot be appreciated in all of its

compte de la manifestation du réel, c'est-à-dire des phantasmes, et fondent pour cela même les conditions de validité des propositions."

[11] See p. 103: "Avant la structure rationnelle, ou logique, qui suppose la parole, il y a le phantasme de l'expérience, d'emblée synthétique, de sorte que le langage ne construit pas, mais reconstruit ce qui apparaît."

[12] See pp. 142-143: "C'est en ce sens que l'on peut comprendre que pour Hobbes tout est corps. La notion de corps prend sens à partir de l'idée que ce qui résiste à l'imagination *existe* en quelque façon, parce que cela apparaît extérieur : il ne s'agit pas de partir d'une dichotomie chose pensante / chose étendue, et de nier l'existence de la première, mais de partir de l'imagination pour cerner ce qu'elle présente comme réel."

depth if we assume it to be a mere introduction to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Rather, the relevance of this book emerges if we possess the intellectual instruments sufficient to consider the way in which the author effectively puts forward an innovative approach to the understanding of the hidden mechanism underpinning the structure of the whole Hobbesian system. Milanese succeeds in this endeavour, since, starting by a detailed and careful study of a single concept, he is eventually able to cover almost all of the most important topics concerning Hobbes' philosophy, leaving aside only some aspects related to Hobbes' political thought, about which the existing literature is however already more than satisfying.

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