

Book Review: *Towards an Ethics of Autism - A Philosophical Exploration* by Kristien Hens

“Towards an Ethics of Autism: A Philosophical Exploration” is an intricate ten-years exploration book of Kristien Hens on the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence (philosophical) and moral principles (ethical) interpretations to better understand the concept of autism. As a bioethicist, one of many Kristien Hens’s interests is on disabilities and neurodiversity of autism. This book is worth a reading for researchers in autism, autism professional, ethicist, bioethicist and also suitable for parents and individual who seek for in-depth knowledge on autism. Autism is very phenomenal and has been acknowledged for its polysemous concept with several interrelated meanings which may be a futile attempt to reduce autism to a single explanation. In this book, the author introduces the evolutionary dimensions, experiences, and variations of autism. The first part, Dimensions of Autism covers the evolutionary history of autism, the nature of psychiatric diagnoses, the cognitive explanation of autism through the lens of Theory of Mind (ToM), and sociological and historical explanations of autism. In the second part, the author writes about autistic people’s experiences of being different and disabled, the epistemic injustice that autistic people face, and how autism relates to challenges in communication and language, specific accounts of autistic people’s experiences drawn from research conducted in collaboration with Raymond Lagenberg, and an interlude of autistic people, a speculative note that summarizes previous chapters. The third part, Kristien Hens illustrates further the dynamics of autism in terms of label and loop effects, approaches, and genetics. The general view of this book organization is very cohesive, and each part is closely related to another that lead the reader to the right sequel of book chapters.

The author uses the term autism instead of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) since some of the many meanings of autism are covered from perspectives of psychiatrist, cognitive, sociology and history. The author begins with discussing the many levels of meaning and their consequences for autistic ethics. The purpose is to tackle the inextricably linked uncertainties of autism, neither to simplify its many components nor to reduce to one single conclusion of what is meant by autism. The works of two putative founding fathers of autism, Leo Kanner: “Kick-Starting the Field of Child Psychiatry” and Hans Asperger: “A life-long Characteristic” are examined in Chapter 1, showing how autism has taken on several interpretations and acknowledged the difficulty of defining autism. The author shares ample explanation of the origin of autism to the readers. In Chapter 2, psychiatric disorders are defined and what it means to be diagnosed with a mental disorder are further explored. The author used

the work of Nomy Arpaly to show when something deviates from the norm, this is one of many reasons some behavior qualifies for a psychiatric diagnosis. Psychiatric diagnosis’s nature essentializes that mental disorder can be cured by medication, rejecting social constructivist conceptions of autism be at the same standpoint of autistic people that object the idea autism is not ‘real’. To be said, for someone who goes through a diagnosis can be beneficial if the individual is mentally and physically prepared to accept the whatever the result is, and when it certainly helps to unravel the mystery of being different, improve relationships with loved ones and society, and suggest the best solutions to remedy the differences. Nonetheless, some people may require more time to properly comprehend what is going on around them, given what they have endured and struggled with for so many years.

Autism diagnosis is increasing, posing critical challenges about the right way to treat autism for autistic persons, parents, professionals, and policymakers alike. For example, concerns have been raised about the value of early detection, the importance of underlying cognitive theories and their repercussions, and whether autism should be treated as a condition or as a distinct identity to be honored. Some other issues include the concept of autism itself, whether it is primarily an identity or a disorder, the ethical dilemmas faced by parents of autistic children, metaethical issues, the ethical ramifications of epistemological issues, and a variety of social justice, stigma, and paternalism-related issues. In Chapter 3, various cognitive explanatory theories and their implications for meta- and applied ethics and ontological explanations for autism are discussed by the author. The Theory of Mind (ToM) refers to the capacity to draw conclusions about the mental state of others which can be tested using Sally-Anne false-belief test. The author explains how people looked at autism-related behaviors through the lens of a Theory of Mind and show how meta-ethicists often use autism to evaluate moral ideas. A deficient ToM neither is claimed to be the correct explanation for autism nor is the proper way to look at the morality. Autistic people have been criticized the inadequate explanation of this model for autism because they do not find themselves in the description. This group of people simply want to be acknowledged for the things that they did are not intend any harm to anybody because they, themselves even do not understand the effects of their actions to others. In Chapter 4, societal causes of autism growth that led to the less human assumption on autistic people are examined. Non-autistic people often have difficulty to understand the reasoning behind autistic people’s behavior.

Several researchers have examined the circumstances underlying autism diagnoses. For example, in the second half of the twentieth century, children with disabilities were no longer immediately placed in institutions.

In the second segment, Hens talks about how experience helps society to understand conditions like autism. Chapter 5 discusses disability, impairment models including medical, social and poststructuralist and how it relates to autism. Disability is caused by societal institutions, behaviors, and practices that make life difficult for people with certain physical or cognitive characteristics. Hence, a model that focuses on institutions and the environment may overlook a person's unique body or brain. A neurodiversity approach should be applied more extensively as it provides flexibility looking things at different meanings and dimensions of the concept of autism, by taking seriously on the experiences of autistic people. For example, Asperger syndrome or which is also known for high-functioning autistics was no longer considered as an illness or a medical problem to be cured, but it was a form of diversity. In fact, Asperger syndrome was no longer considered as a separate diagnosis because it was assigned under one big umbrella of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Chapter 6 defines epistemic injustice and shows how autism researchers have not taken autistic people's narratives seriously and neglected the perspective from autistic people fact following the fact they have gone through different experiences. For a long time, some scholars assumed that autistic people had no concept of themselves is further discussed by Kristien Hens as a case of epistemic injustice. In such a situation, Hens affirms that supposedly it is our moral duty to look for ways to engage with autistic people better and not make it as the reason to do autistic people a disservice and even worse view them as less trustworthy narrators. Realistically, autistic people speak clearly about their perceptions and thoughts, yet most people tend to misinterpret them.

Chapter 7 summarizes some of the findings of an interview study of the author collaborated with Raymond Langenberg conducted with adults who had been diagnosed with autism. The author revealed how autistic people continue to interact dynamically with their environment despite the widespread notion that autistic people are inflexible. Some participants were confronted with the implications of the test results and some with societal expectations about the meaning of such diagnosis. With the participants being opened about their live stories and experiences, together with the way their shared experiences were written well directly to main messages, really breaking reader's heart. The readers can feel their struggles and the unpleasant moments that they have gone through all these whiles, which actually make them stronger than non-autistic people. Time and autism, and what it means to have a different sense of time are discussed in Chapter 8. A deeper understanding of autistic people is gained by having dialogues and reviewing their experiences with others. Throughout this book and talks on autism in general, biology, particularly genes and neurology, is emphasized. Autism is more genuine and less theoretical when it is viewed from biological perspective. Concurrently,

linking something with DNA or neurology runs the risk of stigmatizing it.

In the third segment, the author dissociates biology from reductionism and provide alternatives to biology. Alternative to reductionist biological and cognitive theories is offered, and to beliefs that autism is purely social or even invented. The concept of "looping effects" proposed by philosopher of science Ian Hacking is elaborated further in Chapter 9. In this chapter, the author returned to the essence of psychiatric diagnosis. Using concepts from labelling theory and Ian Hacking's looping effects, the author showed how diagnostic labels affect how individuals and those around them view them. During this process, both the individuals classified, and the diagnostic criteria evolve. As a result, the concept of autism and the group of individuals labelled autistic continue to evolve. Chapter 10 further examines dynamic biological and mental models. Based on the above considerations, the author believes it is unwise to assume that autism does not exist or that it is exclusively psychological. Utilizing such a dynamic method to examine and comprehend the situation from the standpoints of science and human nature is reassuring and beneficial to autistic individuals. Even though the outcomes of diagnosis seem occasionally too good to be true or too painful to accept, the autistic people, as a human, may wish to proceed differently. Autistic people share experiences that are real and give meaning to autism. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain a clear distinction between psychological and somatic phenomena and viewing autism as a fundamentally medical disorder has several advantages. Autistic people note that a diagnosis relieves them of guilt and allows them to break free of their perfectionism and also parents' expectations.

Chapter 11 discusses exclusively on the genetic aspects of autism. Since the earliest descriptions of autism, there has been a tension between autism as an intrinsic and genetic disorder and autism as a psychogenic disorder. In most countries, the former has prevailed. As a result, genetic research into the causes of autism has gained much popularity. Autism as a genetic phenomenon has several advantages: More than the diagnostic term alone, the fact that autism is considered a genetic condition helps to free people from guilt. Due to society's preconceived notions about genetics, autism can be seen as an individual disease to be prevented or cured. In this chapter, the author has used epigenetics as an example of a more dynamic understanding of human biology and discussed the implications of this approach in the context of autism. Such dynamic approaches can lead to a lessening of the emphasis on simplistic etiological theories for autism. The epilogue explains how the author's views can help clarify ethical dilemmas surrounding autism by overcoming clinical ethical challenges. For many autistic people, prevention is no longer necessary since they need to learn how to manage with their differences, how to integrate into the world of non-autistic people without being labelled as different, and how to feel accepted in the normal world.

The reader is well informed about several aspects of autism, such as its history, forms of diagnosis, and the

cognitive, social, and historical perspectives on the idea of autism. Additionally, to bolster the historical explanation, the author includes the most challenging circumstances encountered by the majority of autistic persons. This book contributes to the current raging discussion over society's view of autism and the examination of the concept's realistic and ethical significance. The author successfully fulfils the goal of incorporating rich experiences from all angles of knowledge and delivering the unheard voices of autistic

individuals to readers through both major queries and germane assertions on the unexplained part of criticism directed at autistic people.

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