"I Durst Not Write So Boldly"
or
How to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise[1]

One of the most tantalizing anecdotes in Aubrey's not so brief life of Hobbes concerns Hobbes' (alleged) reaction to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP). As recently emended, the entire passage runs as follows:

> When Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* first came out [1670], Mr. Edmund Waller sent it to my lord of Devonshire and desired him to send him word what Mr. Hobbes said of it. Mr. H. told his lordship:- *Ne judicate ne judicemini* ["Judge not that ye be not judged"- Matthew 7:1] He told me he had outthrown him a bar's length, for he durst not write so boldly.[2]

The natural reading of this is that Hobbes thought Spinoza had said things which he, Hobbes, would have liked to say, but did not dare say in print, for fear of persecution. Leo Strauss was fond of the passage, since it lends support to his interpretation of Hobbes as an atheist, forced by the repression of his times to conceal his atheism in a cloak of insincere professions of (relative) religious orthodoxy.[3]

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[1] From *Hobbes e Spinoza*, ed. by Emilia Giancotti, Naples: Bibliopolis. I am indebted to a number of people for criticisms and comments on various drafts of this article: Jeffrey Barnouw, Martin Bertman, Heather Blair, Charles Chastain, Alan Donagan, Mike Dunn, Paul Eisenberg, Peter Geach, Shelly Kagan, Michael Lieb, Al Martinich and François Tricaud, to name only those who are at present most prominent in my memory. I have also profited from reading the Ph.D. thesis of Paul Bagley.

[2] *Brief Lives, chiefly of contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the years 1669 and 1696*, ed. from the author's mss. by Andrew Clark, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898, vol. I, p. 357. But Clark reads "he had cut through me a bar's length." After examining Aubrey's ms., V. de S. Pinto proposed substituting "outthrowne" (in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* of 15 September 1950, p. 581). On Pinto's reading, the reference is to "the old game of throwing the bar," a trial of strength in which players contended to see which one could throw the bar the farthest.

[3] Strauss does not always claim that Hobbes was an atheist. In *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, he writes: "From an agnosticism such as that of Hobbes, it is only a step to atheism, a step which this philosopher himself however never took." (New York: Schocken Books, 1965, p. 101, English trans. of *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, Berlin 1930.) The Hobbes of Strauss' *Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (U of Chicago P, 1963, but first published in 1936) is at no point a believing Christian (p. 74), though he is somewhat sympathetic to natural religion (p. 76), acknowledging at all times that we can at least have knowledge of the existence of a first cause. The Hobbes of Strauss' *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1950, pp. 198-99) evidently is an atheist, though not demonstrably so. The Hobbes of "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy" (first published in French in *Critique*, 1954; published in English in *What is Political Philosophy?*, NY: Free Press, 1959) is an atheist, and demonstrably so. Strauss does not discuss the passage from Aubrey in any of the above works, though he refers to it as one he likes to quote in "The Mutual Influence of Theology

Not everyone, however, takes this passage as support for a Straussian reading of Hobbes. The tendency of English-language writers on Hobbes, at least since Oakeshott's influential introduction to his edition of *Leviathan*, has been to accept the sincerity of his professions of theism, and indeed, to represent him as a genuine, if somewhat eccentric, Christian.[4] Most of these writers do not discuss the passage in Aubrey, but those who do, reject any Straussian interpretation of it. Glover, for example, remarks that it is extremely improbable that Hobbes was referring (or understood by Aubrey to be referring) to Spinoza's pantheism when he said this, since Hobbes equated pantheism with atheism,[5] and Aubrey testifies quite

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and Philosophy," *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3(1979): 111-118 (the English original of a lecture first published in Hebrew in *Iyyun* 5(1954):110-126).

[4] See W. Glover, "God and Thomas Hobbes," *Church History* 1960 (references to the reprint in *Hobbes Studies*, ed. by K. C. Brown, Blackwell, 1965); K. C. Brown, "Hobbes's Grounds for Belief in a Deity," *Philosophy* 37(1962): 336-344; M. M. Goldsmith, *Hobbes's Science of Politics*, Columbia UP, 1966, pp. 250-51; J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History*, New York: Atheneum, 1971; H. Schneider, "The Piety of Hobbes," and P. Johnson, "Hobbes's Anglican Doctrine of Salvation," both in R. Ross, H. Schneider and T. Waldman (eds.), *Thomas Hobbes and his Time*, Minnesota UP, 1974; P. Geach, "The Religion of Thomas Hobbes," *Religious Studies*, 17(1981): 549-58; and Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes and the Problem of God" (in G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988). Perhaps Ronald Hepburn's "Hobbes on the Knowledge of God" (in Maurice Cranston and Richard Peters, *Hobbes and Rousseau*, Anchor, 1972) belongs in this list, though I find his support for Hobbes' theism rather equivocal.

A number of writers since Strauss have held interpretations of Hobbes' theory of obligation which prima facie presupposed the sincerity of his professions of theism, but they have generally not treated that issue as one requiring much argument. See A. E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," *Philosophy* 13(1938): 406-24; H. Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957; and F. C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964. Their critics have often granted the sincerity of the theism (if only for the sake of argument), while denying its relevance. Cf., e.g., D. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, pp. 69-71, 179-80, 204-6; J. Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*, Cambridge UP, 1986, pp. 94-96; G. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, Princeton UP, 1986, pp. 361-63.

French scholarship, at least as represented by Raymond Polin (*Hobbes, Dieu et les hommes*, Paris: PUF, 1981; *Politique et philosophie chez Thomas Hobbes*, Paris: Vrin, 1977) has been more sympathetic to a Straussian view.

[5] DCv xv, 14; L xxxi, 15, 401. Since we are presently in transition between the Molesworth edition and the Clarendon edition of Hobbes' works, I adopt a system of reference intended to lead the reader to the right passage no matter what edition he is using. For *The Elements of Law* (abbr. EL) references are to part, chapter and section, and follow Tönnies' text (Frank Cass, 2nd ed., 1969). References to *De cive* (abbr. DCv), *De corpore* (abbr. DCr) and *De homine* (abbr. DH) are to chapter and section number. For *Leviathan* (abbr. L) lower case roman numerals refer to chapters, the first arabic to the paragraph numbers in the Macpherson edition (Penguin 1968), which almost invariably

explicitly that Hobbes was not an atheist (Glover, p. 166). Hood, on the other hand, thinks we ought to be skeptical of the whole story:

> It is not credible that Hobbes ever confessed, even by implication, to such a babbler as Aubrey that he had written much that he did not believe to be true. (p. 1)

It would be rash, he thinks, to treat this remark as giving Hobbes' very words. One major reason for his skepticism is that Aubrey's testimony, "for what it is worth," is that Hobbes was not merely not an atheist, but in fact a sincere Christian.[6]

Now I think the whole question of Hobbes' religious views, of his sincerity in his professions of Christian theism, and of his affinities with Spinoza, is fascinating in its own right. But it is also worth exploring because our answer to these questions may affect the way we conceive the history of moral philosophy. If we ask what defines modern moral philosophy as *modern*, one plausible answer is that in the modern period skepticism about traditional religious beliefs had become sufficiently widespread that it no longer seemed feasible to interpret moral obligation in terms of a fundamental obligation to obey divine law; instead, it had become an urgent matter to account for the notion of moral obligation in purely secular terms.[7] If we then ask where modern moral philosophy begins, it is tempting to say "with Hobbes."[8]

But many passages in Hobbes suggest that he is not trying to give a purely secular foundation for morality, at least not if having a moral theory requires having a theory of moral obligation.[9] E.g., at the end of his discussion of the laws of nature in *Leviathan* he writes:

> These dictates of Reason men use to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the

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correspond to those in Molesworth and other commonly used editions, and the second to the page number in Macpherson. Where the context makes it clear which chapter of L I am referring to, I simply give and page numbers.

6 One minor reason for Hood's skepticism about the accuracy of Aubrey's report is apparently what he calls the odd phrasing of the remark, but I take it that Pinto's emendation removes this difficulty.

7 See, for example, G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," originally published in *Philosophy* (1958), and more recently reprinted in her *Collected Philosophical Papers*, v. 3, U Minnesota P, 1981. Interesting here is David Gauthier, "Why Ought One Obey God? Reflections on Hobbes and Locke," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7(1977): 425-446.

8 At least if we restrict ourselves to those major figures around whom surveys of the history of philosophy are constructed. But see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, Cambridge UP, 1981, p. 76.

9 Anscombe, of course, would deny that it does, citing the example of Aristotle. It is symptomatic of what she would see as a misconception of moral philosophy that most interpreters of Hobbes who have denied that he understood his laws of nature as obligatory have also denied that Hobbes, strictly speaking, had a moral philosophy.

> conservation and defense of themselves; wheras Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes.[10]

This suggests that we can view the laws of nature as dictates of morality, rather than counsels of prudence, only if we conceive of them as divine commands. It would seem to follow that if Hobbes is not serious about his apparent endorsements of theism, he does not really have a moral theory. In this case, he can hardly be the founder of modern moral philosophy. On the other hand, if Hobbes is serious about his endorsement of theism, it appears he is offering a fairly traditional version of natural law theory. In that case, he cannot be the founder of modern moral philosophy because he is not modern enough. So our answer to the question "How do we read Hobbes on the subject of religion?" will affect, not only the way we view his moral philosophy, but also the way we view his place in the history of moral philosophy.

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Let's begin by looking a little further at the biographical evidence. Hood, though

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[10] L xv, 41, 216-7. The Latin version of this would be translated: "These dictates of reason have obtained the name of laws, but are so called improperly. For they are only theorems concerning the things which conduce to men's conservation. But law, properly so called, is the word of one who commands, either orally or in writing, so that all who are bound to obey know it is his word." (OL iii, 122) Note that this does not suggest that we may properly view the laws of nature as laws by conceiving of them as laws of God. That implication *is* present in the parallel passages in EL (I, xvii, 12) and DCv (iii, 33, both English and Latin).

If, as I think, Spinoza knew Hobbes from L, and not only from DCv, he must have read L either in the Dutch translation published in 1667 or (more likely) the Latin translation published in 1668. Wernham's inability to find internal evidence of Spinoza's reading L (Spinoza, *The Political Works*, Oxford: Clarendon P, 1965, p. 47) comes, perhaps, from his neglecting the theological portions of L and the TTP. That seems a sufficient reason for the student of Spinoza to attend carefully to the differences between the English and Latin versions.

But these differences should also interest the student of Hobbes, since they raise questions about the evolution of Hobbes' thought, or at least about how, at different times, he wanted his thought to be presented. The best discussion of these issues is in François Tricaud's French translation, which systematically takes account of the variations (*Léviathan*, Paris: Sirey, 3rd printing, 1983). Tricaud concludes (p. xxvi) that much of the Latin L was written in 1648-49, prior to the English L, though, of course, some parts, which have no analogue in the English, would have been written much later (p. xxi). One argument for this is the tendency of the English L to be fuller at the end of a paragraph (p. xxiii), a pattern exemplified in the passage quoted here. Tricaud takes this tendency as evidence that the English version is expanding on an earlier Latin version. But even if one thinks that the Latin version is contracting an earlier English version, as Raymond Polin does in connection with this passage (see *Hobbes, Dieu et les hommes*, p. 44), the variations are interesting.

skeptical of Aubrey's accuracy when his report suggests that Hobbes may have held unorthodox views, is prepared to appeal to his testimony when his report suggests that Hobbes held orthodox views. Aubrey does indeed testify that Hobbes was a Christian:

> For his being branded with atheism, his writings and virtuous life testify against it. No man hath written better of [God], perhaps not so well. To prevent such false and malicious reports, I thought fit to insert and affirm as abovesaid. And that he was a Christian 'tis clear; for he received the sacrament of Dr. [John] Pierson, and in his confession to Dr. John Cosins, at [St. Germains], on his (as he thought) death-bed, declared that he liked the religion of the church of England best of all other.[11]

Hobbes himself provides at least partial confirmation of this story in his prose autobiography, writing that when he was very seriously ill in St. Germains, near Paris (in 1647),

> Dr. John Cosins, afterward Bishop of Durham, offered to pray with him to God. When he [Hobbes speaks of himself in the third person here] had thanked him, he said, "Yes, if you will conduct the prayers according to the rite of our Church." (OL I, xvi)

We might wonder what rite Hobbes thought Dr. Cosins would have used if he had not set this condition, but Hobbes comments merely that this was a great sign of reverence towards episcopal discipline. Hobbes writes this toward the end of his life, sometime after the publication of his translation of the *Iliad* in 1675, but he had appealed to this incident earlier, in the dedicatory letter to *Seven Philosophical Problems* (1662, EW VII, 5), inviting those who doubted his religiosity to ask the Bishop of Durham about his conduct in 1647.

In the autobiography, he goes on to offer as further evidence of his being, not only disposed to the cause of the bishops, but also a sincere Christian (OL I, xvii), the fact that on his return to England he went out of his way to attend Anglican services, although at that time no one in England was legally obliged to attend any service.[12] So if we argue that Hobbes was not a sincere Christian, we must reject his own, very explicit testimony. Some will no doubt think we cannot do this without impugning Hobbes' moral integrity. I shall return to that question later.

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[11] I, 353. Samuel Mintz (*The Hunting of Leviathan*, Cambridge UP, 1962, p. 19) cites another contemporary source, Southwell, as reporting that Hobbes "died in all the forms of a good Christian." Oakeshott says, in the introduction to his edition of *Leviathan* (Blackwell, 1947, p. lxiv) that Hobbes "died in mortal fear of hell-fire." I do not know what his evidence is for that claim. Aubrey (I, 363) reports that the last two lines of Hobbes' verse autobiography originally read:

> Octoginta annos complevi jam quatuorque
> Et prope stans dictat Mors mihi, Ne metue.

(The version in Molesworth, OL I, xcix, differs, apparently because Dr. Blackburne altered the lines to improve the meter.) So at a fairly late stage, Hobbes thought death not to be feared. In L xxxviii (6-15, 485-490) he seems to want to take Scriptural talk of hell-fire metaphorically.

[12] The Rump had repealed the recusancy acts in September 1650. See S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649-1656*, New York: AMS Press, 1965, II, 3.

For now I simply note that the general tendency of Aubrey's testimony regarding Hobbes' religious beliefs seems to undercut his picture of Hobbes as a pious Christian. Consider the following anecdote:

> When Mr. T. Hobbes was sick in France, the divines came to him and tormented him (both Roman Catholic, Church of England, and Geneva). Said he to them "Let me alone, or else I will detect all your cheats from Aaron to yourselves." (I, 357-58)

It's rather hard to square this with Aubrey's earlier picture of Hobbes cheerfully taking the last rites of the Church of England. Aubrey's source here is Elizabeth, viscountess Purbec, though he remarks that he thinks he himself has heard Hobbes say "something to the same purpose." Perhaps Elizabeth's story is merely a corrupt version of one Hobbes himself tells in the passage from his autobiography cited above. On the occasion of that illness a mutual friend summoned Mersenne to his bedside to try to persuade him to convert to Roman Catholicism, arguing the power of the Church to remit sins. Hobbes replied: "Father, I have debated all that with myself long ago; to debate it now will be tiresome; you have more pleasant things you can tell me; when did you last see Gassendi?" (OL, I, xvi) But even if Aubrey's anecdote is apocryphal, it indicates what Hobbes' friends thought the temper of his mind was. And as we shall see, there's a good deal in *Leviathan* to suggest that his attitude toward the clergy was not one of great reverence.[13]

Certainly some of his friends thought him violently anticlerical. After Hobbes' death Aubrey asked Edmund Waller- the same man who had asked for Hobbes' opinion of Spinoza's TTP- to write some verses in praise of him. Waller declined, explaining that he was

> afraid of the churchmen. He quoted Horace-
>
> Incedo per ignes
> Suppositos cineri doloso-
>
> [I pass through fires
> Buried beneath treacherous ashes]
>
> that what was chiefly to be taken notice of in his elegie was that he, being but *one*, and a private person, pulled down all the churches, dispelled the mists of ignorance, and laid-open their priest-craft. (I, 358)

Of course, it's perfectly possible to accept the Christian religion and to reject all its institutional forms. Milton, whose sincerity in his professions of Christianity admits no rational doubt, was also vehemently anticlerical.[14]

Still, Aubrey's evidence regarding Hobbes' religious views makes it difficult to think of him as someone who could embrace the ceremonies of the Church of England without serious mental reservations. If Hobbes had a deep distrust of the clergy and a low view of

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[13] Elsewhere (II, 221) Aubrey relates the following story: "Hobbes saw a divine coming to administer the last rites to the dying Selden. Sayd Hobbes: `What, will you that have wrote like a man, now dye like a woman?' So the minister was not let in."

[14] See, for example, William Riley Parker's biography, *Milton*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, vol. I, pp. 530-31.

all the major sects of his time, his reported preference for the Church of England might not amount to much. Hobbes' doctrine of civil obedience requires that a loyal subject conform himself externally to the forms required by the sovereign, but leaves him free to think what his reason persuades him of (L xxxii, 5, 411). Though Hobbes was living in exile in France when he followed Dr. Cosins in prayer, he would presumably have regarded Charles I as his sovereign. Even after 1649 he seems to have thought himself bound by obedience to Charles II up to the point when, having been prohibited from the royal court because of the teachings of *Leviathan*, he was no longer under his protection (OL I, xvii).

There is a passage in one of Hobbes' letters which suggests that he may have been sincere in his dealings with Dr. Cosins, if only temporarily. In 1668 Hobbes reports visiting a young woman who had, according to her mother, gone without food or drink for six months. Evidently those around her claimed that this was a miracle, that the young woman's piety enabled her to survive without sustenance, and her mother made a bit of money from those whose curiosity led them to want to see her. Hobbes is clearly skeptical, and thinks the mother may be secretly feeding her, though he does not think the woman and her mother are gaining enough from this "to breed suspicion of a cheat." To determine whether the facts are as they are alleged to be would require an examination of matters which a private citizen who is male cannot decently pry into; the affair is not of sufficient importance to justify state interference; it should be left to the Church to determine whether or not the event is miraculous. Hobbes then compares the young woman's situation with his own at an earlier time:

> I myself in a sickness have been without all manner of sustenance for more than six weeks together: which is enough to make mee think that six months would not have made it a miracle. Nor do I much wonder that a young woman of clear memory, hourely expecting death, should bee more devout then at other times. 'Twas my own case. (EW VII, 464)

Presumably this is a reference to the illness of 1647. Hood cites it as confirmation of Hobbes' piety, but the passage is somewhat double-edged, since it implies that his piety reached that level only when death seemed imminent.

After the great fire in London in 1666 some of the religious concluded that the plague which preceded it was a sign of God's anger against the people of England for the licentiousness of Charles' court and his tolerance of people like Hobbes and Thomas White, a Catholic priest and longtime friend of Hobbes, who held improper views about the immortality of the soul.[15] The House of Commons set up a committee to inquire into "such books as tend to atheism, blasphemy and profaneness, or against the essence and attributes of God," naming *Leviathan* as a work which would require the committee's special attention. Aubrey's version of this is that some of the bishops made a motion in Parliament "to have the good old gentleman burnt for a heretic." (I, 339) Whether or not there was a real danger of this, Hobbes took the threat seriously enough, according to Aubrey, to burn some of his

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[15] See the accounts in George Croom Robertson's *Hobbes* (London: Blackwood, 1886, pp. 193-97) and Leslie Stephen's *Hobbes* (London: Macmillan, 1904, pp. 59-60).

papers. Considering what Hobbes had been prepared to publish in 1651, we must wonder what he was afraid to let the bishops see.

In the end, this action in Parliament did not lead to any prosecution, but it did have two other consequences. First, Charles forbade Hobbes to publish anything further on sensitive subjects. So he was not able to publish his history of the Civil War, *Behemoth*, during his lifetime. And he could not have *Leviathan* reprinted in England, much to the dismay of prospective readers like Pepys, who complained in his diary (3 Sept. 1688) that, because the book was so "mightily called for," he had to pay 24s. for a second hand copy of a work which had sold for 8s. before the bishops decided it could not be printed again. Second, Hobbes was moved to investigate the history of the law regarding heresy, first in an appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, published in Holland in 1668 (OL III, 539-59), and then in an English essay published only in 1680, after his death. In the latter he argues that, after Charles I, under pressure from Parliament in 1641, abolished the High Commission charged with enforcing the English law regarding heresy, there were no "human laws left in force to restrain any man from preaching or writing any doctrine concerning religion that he pleased."[16] So at the time the English *Leviathan* was published there was no valid positive law under which it could have been prosecuted.

Hobbes' account of the English law, however, leaves out a number of relevant developments in the period after 1641. The question of religious toleration was a major political issue throughout this period, and one on which Parliament was sharply divided.[17] The general tendency of the Presbyterians, once they had thrown off the domination of the Anglican Church, was to try to establish their own form of Puritanism and not to tolerate divergence from it; the general tendency of the Independents, and particularly of Cromwell, was to favor a wide-ranging toleration, though this did not, of course, extend to atheists, "papists," or unitarians. Presbyterian intolerance reached its high-water mark in the ordinance against blasphemy of May 1648 when Parliament made it a capital offense to deny the doctrine of the trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the inspiration of the Bible, the day of judgment, or a future state, with lesser penalties for lesser heresies, e.g., an indeterminate prison sentence for holding that a man is bound to believe no more than he can comprehend by reason.[18] As we shall see, what Hobbes wrote in L would certainly have offered at least a pretext for prosecution under this law, had it still been in effect in 1651. But after Pride's purge of the Presbyterians in December 1648, the Independents had the upper hand and in

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[16] EW IV, 407. Hobbes also treats the law of heresy in his *Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*, passim, but see particularly EW VI, 110.

[17] See, for example, W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England, from the convention of the Long Parliament to the Restoration, 1640-1660*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1938. Also helpful is Charles Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England*, London: OUP, 1952.

[18] In addition to Jordan, see also John M. Robertson, *A Short History of Freethought*, London: Watts, 1915, vol. II, p. 76, and J. B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought*, New York: Holt, 1913, p. 86. According to Bury, there were no executions under this legislation.

the blasphemy act of August 1650 they repealed the earlier legislation and passed a much more moderate substitute. Anyone who proclaimed himself to be God, or denied the immorality of such offenses as murder, adultery and incest, or held that there is neither heaven nor hell, salvation nor damnation, might be sentenced to prison for six months, and on a second offense, banished from the Commonwealth. The limits of this toleration were tested early in 1652, one year after the publication of L, when the Racovian Catechism was first published in English, explaining the definitive beliefs of the Socinian sect, a unitarian heresy. Parliament immediately resolved that the book was blasphemous and ordered it to be burned.[19]

Though he chose not to comment on these developments in his history of the law on heresy, Hobbes was at least generally aware of them, as appears from the following passage in *Behemoth*:

> B: What did the Rump at home during this time [in 1650-51, when Cromwell was engaged in subduing Scotland]?
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> A: They voted liberty of conscience to the sectaries; that is, they plucked out the sting of Presbytery, which consisted in a severe imposing of odd opinions upon the people, impertinent to religion, but conducing to the advancement of the power of the Presbyterian ministers. (EW VI, 375)

Perhaps it would not have suited Hobbes to call attention to Cromwell's role in these events, since he was anxious in the 1660s to defend himself against the charge of having written L "in defense of Oliver's title." (EW IV, 413) In any case, the relative toleration existing in England in the 1650s, combined with his fear of persecution by the Roman Catholic clergy in France (OL I, xvii), seems to have been Hobbes' main motive for returning to England after the publication of L.

The biographical evidence in general, and Aubrey's evidence in particular, regarding Hobbes' religious beliefs, is very mixed. But I would agree that we cannot infer much from the reported remark about Spinoza, which is, at best, a cryptic utterance. Though Aubrey knew Hobbes well personally, though he reports the remark I focus on as having been made directly to him and not to a third party (unlike the more cautious comment Hobbes is supposed to have made to Lord Devonshire), and though he obviously took some pains to get his facts right, we have reason to believe he is not always reliable.[20] We must reckon with the possibility that Hobbes did not actually say precisely what Aubrey says he said, but

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[19] Geach has emphasized strongly Hobbes' affinities with the Socinian doctrine, as part of his argument for Hobbes' sincerity. Ironically, the first modern scholar to call attention to these affinities was Strauss (1936), p. 76. Strauss credits Leibniz with recognizing the connection.

[20] See Arnold Rogow's assessment of Aubrey in the preface to his recent biography (*Thomas Hobbes, radical in the service of reaction*, W. W. Norton, 1986, pp. 10-11). Clark's annotations to his edition of Aubrey's life of Hobbes also call attention to errors. On the other hand, Jean Bernhardt, though he recognizes that Aubrey is "un amateur d'anecdotes, qui sait dramatiser, mettre en scène," also thinks he is substantially faithful when he reports something he has gotten directly from Hobbes (*Court traité des premiers principes*, Paris: PUF, 1988, pp. 62-3).

only something rather like it, something which would not lend itself so readily to a Straussian reading.

2.

Hood is surely right to say that Aubrey's report of Hobbes' remark raises more questions than it answers. For that reason alone, quite apart from any doubts we might have about his accuracy as a reporter, we can't attach much weight to what he says, taken in isolation from Hobbes' published works. But we can use his story to pose an interesting question. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Hobbes did say what Aubrey says he said. What might he have meant by it?[21] What could Hobbes have read in the TTP which might have inspired him to say to himself: "I wish I had dared to say that"?

In trying to answer these questions, I shall be arguing for the following theses: (1) that if we compare Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* with Hobbes' theological-political treatise, i.e., with his *Leviathan*, on a variety of topics which they both discuss in the theological portions of their works- specifically, on the topics of prophecy, miracles, and the authority of scripture-we shall find quite a lot in Spinoza's work which Hobbes might have found to be bolder than what he had written on the same topics; (2) that where Spinoza's position is bolder, Hobbes' less radical position is often stated in a way suggesting irony; (3) that since irony can function both as a protective device and as a way of hinting at views one would hesitate to express openly, Hobbes' use of it is evidence that he would have gone further than he did in the direction of unorthodoxy, if the political situation had permitted him to do so safely; (4) that it is entirely credible that Hobbes said to Aubrey what Aubrey says he said; and finally, (5) that Hobbes is properly viewed as a precursor of such Enlightenment figures as Voltaire and Hume, that in spite of the deference he often shows to orthodox Christian doctrines, he is essentially a secular thinker, whose religious views are subversive of those held by most Europeans of his time. Perhaps he was not an atheist, but I do think he was much more radical in his religious views than recent writers on this topic have tended to suggest.[22]

My working hypothesis, as will be clear from this outline of my argument, is that if Hobbes said what he is alleged to have said, he was most likely referring to the theological portions of Spinoza's work and not to its political doctrines. Spinoza's work is first and foremost a defense of freedom of thought and speech, and it's an interesting question whether Hobbes might have been secretly sympathetic to that aspect of Spinoza.[23] When

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[21] So far as I can find, only Glover raises this question (p. 166). But his only answer to it is the negative one mentioned in the text: that it is extremely unlikely Hobbes was implying an approval of Spinoza's pantheism. He does not ask what else Hobbes might have meant.

[22] So of recent writers on the subject of Hobbes' religious views, the one with whom I am most sympathetic is David Johnston. See his *The Rhetoric of* ***Leviathan***, Princeton UP, 1986, passim, but particularly p. 181.

[23] On the usual reading of Hobbes on toleration, this might not even seem a question worth

Spinoza was asked about the differences between Hobbes and himself, he focussed on somewhat different political issues:

> As far as politics is concerned, the difference between Hobbes and me, which you ask about, consists in this: that I always preserve natural right intact, and that I maintain that the supreme magistrate in any state has no more right over his subjects than he has power over them, which in the state of nature is always the case.[24]

Conceivably Hobbes saw the same difference and found that difference attractive.[25] These difficult questions I leave for another day.

Before I undertake argument for my central theses, let me make it clear that I am not claiming that Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* is *consistently* a more radical work than Hobbes' *Leviathan*. There are issues on which Hobbes takes a more radical position than Spinoza is willing to. E.g., he deals much more explicitly with the doctrine of the trinity than Spinoza ever does, and adopts an essentially unitarian position, which provoked heated opposition from his contemporaries.[26] Spinoza has a couple of brief allusions to the doctrine of the trinity in the TTP (III/21, §24) and in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* (I/264, 271), but the furthest he is prepared to go in print during his lifetime is to say that he does not understand the doctrines certain churches maintain concerning Christ. It appears from recently discovered correspondence that the penultimate draft of the *Metaphysical Thoughts* treated the doctrine somewhat more skeptically than the final version does. Spinoza evidently allowed his friend Lodewijk Meyer to alter the text when Meyer warned him that what he had said would lead to trouble with the theologians.[27]

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considering, but see Alan Ryan, "Hobbes, Toleration and the Inner Life," in David Miller and Larry Siedentop (eds.), *The Nature of Political Theory*, Oxford UP, 1982, and "A More Tolerant Hobbes?" in Susan Mendus (ed.), *Justifying Toleration*, Cambridge UP, 1988.

[24] Letter 50, IV/238-39. References to Spinoza are to volume, page, and sometimes line numbers of the Gebhardt edition. Sometimes for the TTP I will also use the section numbers of the Bruder edition.

[25] Again, this would require an unconventional, but not unprecedented reading of Hobbes. Cf. Hampton on Hobbes' "fallback position," pp. 220-55.

[26] Hobbes does not explicitly deny the doctrine of the trinity, but accepts it subject to an interpretation his more conservative contemporaries found appalling: it involves only the claim that God has been represented on earth by Moses (and the high priests) in the Old Testament, by Jesus in the New Testament, and by his apostles (and their successors) thereafter. Otherwise, he suggests, there is no scriptural support for the doctrine. Cf. L xli, 9, xlii, 3, 520-22. The boldness of this interpretation may be measured by the wrath it aroused in Bramhall, who wrote: "What is to become of the great adorable mystery of the blessed undivided Trinity? It is shrunk into nothing..." See John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes* and *The Catching of Leviathan*, London: John Crook, 1658, p. 474. Bramhall's criticism on this issue (seconded by the Bishop of Durham) prompted a rare retraction and significant alterations in the Latin L. Cf. EW IV, 314-18, and OL III, 357-58 (where two whole
paragraphs of the English L are omitted, xli, 9, and xlii, 3) and 563-64.

[27] Cf. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. by Edwin Curley, Princeton UP, vol. I, p. 206.

Again, in *Leviathan* Hobbes denies that man has an immaterial soul, independent of the body, and by its own nature immortal. Man's soul is simply the life of his body. The only hope of eternal life for man, according to Hobbes, is that of a resurrection of the body at the day of judgment, after which those who are found worthy will enjoy an eternal corporeal life, apparently here on earth. Those not found worthy will not spend eternity in hell, but after a period of physical and spiritual torment will die again and remain dead for all eternity.[28] Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind, on the other hand, does seem at least to hold out the hope of something more like an orthodox doctrine of immortality (E VP23); but like Hobbes (though not in the TTP), Spinoza too would deny that there is an eternal punishment for the unworthy, interpreting hell simply as domination by evil passions (I/88); moreover, it seems that the eternity of the mind in Spinoza is not a doctrine of personal immortality.[29]

Hobbes' antitrinitarianism and mortalism were both quite bold positions and in publicly espousing them Hobbes showed more courage than we might have expected from the man who boasted that he had been born the twin of fear (OL I, lxxxvi) and that he was "the first of all that fled" when the Long Parliament assembled in November 1640 (EW IV, 414). I do not think his willingness to avow these doctrines, however, implies anything about what he held on other issues. The fact that Hobbes openly expressed "minority opinions, sure to involve him in some controversy," is sometimes made an argument for his sincerity, apparently on the theory that if Hobbes was prepared to accept the consequences of openly stating *some* unpopular views, he could not have intended to indirectly suggest

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Spinoza is prepared to go further in his correspondence. When Oldenburg heard that Spinoza was thinking of publishing the *Ethics* he wrote to him asking him not to include in it anything which might undermine in any way the practice of religious virtue (Letter 62, IV/273). In reply Spinoza asked what opinions he held which Oldenburg thought might have this effect, and in particular, what passages in the TTP had caused the learned to have misgivings (Letter 68, IV/299). Oldenburg's reply mentioned, among other things, a suspicion people held that Spinoza was concealing his opinion concerning the doctrines that Jesus Christ is the redeemer of the world, sole mediator between God and man, God incarnate, whose death was a satisfaction for our sins (Letter 71, IV/304). In Letter 73 (IV/308-9) Spinoza responded by saying he had stated his opinion about Christ openly in the TTP: that it is not necessary for salvation to know him according to the flesh, but that it is necessary to know "the eternal son of God, i.e., God's eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things, but most in the human mind, and most of all in Christ Jesus." God's wisdom alone teaches what is true and false, good and evil. "As for what certain churches add to this, that God took on a human nature, I warned expressly that I do not know what they mean. Indeed, to confess the truth, they seem to me to speak no less absurdly than if someone were to say that a circle had taken on the nature of a square." This last sentence goes further than anything Spinoza said in print during his lifetime, though I assume he expected this letter to be published after his death.

[28] L xxxviii. On the decay of belief in hell, with particular attention to the need for covert discourse on this topic, see D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell, 17th Century discussions of eternal torment*, U Chicago P, 1964.

[29] For argument here, see my *Behind the Geometrical Method*, Princeton UP, 1988, ch. 2.

others even more unpopular.[30] But this seems to me a complete *non sequitur*.

An author who holds unorthodox views must make some nice judgments about just how far he can go without jeopardizing other interests he may have, particularly in 17th Century England.[31] Even in periods of relative toleration he is at the mercy of a sudden shift in the political winds. Not only may he risk his personal safety, he also risks becoming involved in long and tedious disputes, and giving his opponents a weapon with which they can attack his other, less controversial works. Milton, as we now know from *De doctrina christiana* (probably completed, in all essentials, by 1660, but not published until 1825), also held antitrinitarian and mortalist views. But in the opinion of one judicious student of his work he "preserved a careful ambiguity" on such issues when he published *Paradise Lost* in 1667 (Parker, *Milton*, II, 1057). He did plan to have *De doctrina christiana* published in Holland after his death (1674), a plan which came to nothing when his literary executor found that carrying out this assignment would block his ambitions for political advancement. Parker (I, 612) speculates that had the treatise been published in the way Milton planned, "*Paradise Lost* would probably not have been read for 150 years and more as the greatest religious poem in English," but might well have been dismissed as the work of "a minor poet of most heretical opinions who tried to write a Christian epic." In view of the work's reception when it finally was published, this seems entirely plausible.[32]

To argue, as I shall, that Hobbes frequently writes ironically in *Leviathan*, requires me to have some theory of irony. This is a difficult topic, about which literary theorists have written much, sometimes helpfully.[33] I shall not attempt a general theory, but simply sketch a partial theory by first discussing a related rhetorical device, which I call suggestion by disavowal, neatly illustrated in Anscombe's pamphlet, "Mr. Truman's Degree." Anscombe gives an account of Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

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30 Cf. Glover, p. 148, Mintz, p. 44, Geach, p. 152.

31 Cf. John Toland: "Such is the deplorable condition of our age, that a man dares not openly and directly own what he thinks of divine matters, tho it be never so true and beneficial, if it but very slightly differs from what is receiv'd by any party, or that is establish'd by law; but he is either forc'd to keep perpetual silence, or to propose his sentiments to the world by way of paradox under a borrow'd or fictitious name." *Christianity Not Mysterious*, London, 1696, pp. iv-v. For a more extended treatment of this theme see Toland's *Tetradymus*, London, 1720, esp. Pt. II, "Clidophorus, or of the exoteric and esoteric philosophy..." Annabel Patterson's *Censhorship and Interpretation, the conditions of writing and reading in early modern England* (U Wisconsin P, 1984) is a very interesting exploration of the ways writers and readers dealt with censorship in England from the mid-16th Century to the end of the 17th by developing an elaborate "hermeneutics of censorship." Patterson's focus is on the censorship of literary works for political reasons, rather than philosophical works for religious reasons.

32 For the initial reaction to *De doctrina*, see Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument, A Study of Milton's* ***De Doctrina Christiana*** *as a Gloss upon* ***Paradise Lost***, Princeton UP, 1941, pp. 3-5.

33 See, for example, Wayne Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony*, U Chicago P, 1974, or D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, Methuen, 1969.

in spite of the fact that he knew that the Japanese had made two attempts to negotiate peace. She grants that the decision to drop the bomb pretty certainly saved a great many lives, given that the Allies were determined to insist on unconditional surrender. That result could only be achieved by an invasion of the island, which would have cost many lives on both sides. In explaining the decision, she writes:

> I will not suggest, as some would like to do, that there was an exultant itch to use the new weapons, but it seems plausible to think that the consciousness of the possession of such instruments had its effects on the manner in which the Japanese were offered their `chance.'[34]

Now to write this *is* to suggest, at least in a minimal sense, that there was an exultant itch to use the new weapons. In general, to write "I will not suggest that *p*" is to call the reader's attention to a proposition which might not otherwise have occurred to him. But it also suggests that *p* in the somewhat stronger sense that disavowing *p* implies, conversationally,[35] that the reader might well regard *p* as a reasonable inference to draw from what has been said up to that point. Otherwise, the disavowal violates the communicative maxim that we should avoid irrelevant prolixity. To add, as Anscombe does, that "some people" *would* draw that conclusion from the evidence is to give the reader the comfortable feeling that he would not be alone if he did. But this rhetorical strategy has the advantage that the author is not required to defend the conclusion she disavows. She has what President Kennedy was seeking in the Bay of Pigs invasion: plausible deniability. I.e., if they say we did it, we can deny it and the evidence will be unclear enough that many people will believe us. Even those who don't may still choose to leave us alone.[36]

I do not mean to suggest that whenever an author writes something of the form "I will not suggest that *p*," it is always his intention to encourage his reader to believe the proposition he is disavowing. Earlier I disavowed the claim that Spinoza is consistently more radical on religious matters than Hobbes is. I'm disavowing another claim now. In neither case am I practising any form of indirect communication. How do you know that?

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[34] Reprinted in her *Collected Philosophical Papers*, U of Minnesota P, 1981, III, 62-71.

[35] Cf. H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," which appeared originally in Davidson and Harman's *The Logic of Grammar* (Dickinson, 1975), and has subsequently been reprinted, with helpful analysis, in Robert Fogelin's *Understanding Arguments* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982). Fogelin explicitly mentions the "I am not suggesting that *p*" move on p. 64. I take it that the scare-quotes around "chance" confirm my feeling that this passage is ironic. Patterson formulates the following as a principle of interpretation for the literature she deals with: "Disclaimers of topical intention are not to be trusted, and are more likely to be entry codes to precisely that kind of reading they protest against." (p. 57)

[36] Patterson argues that often censors in the early modern period were prepared to tolerate a certain amount of writing which would otherwise have been censorable, provided the author expressed his heretical thoughts obliquely: "there were conventions both sides accepted as to how far a writer could go in explicit address to the contentious issues of his day, how he could encode his opinions so that nobody would be *required* to make an example of him." (p. 11)

In oral communication my tone of voice or facial expression might give important clues. In writing you must rely on other, generally contextual evidence. One thing favoring a direct reading of my disavowals is that in each case I went on to give reasons against the propositions disavowed. One thing counting against a direct reading of Miss Anscombe's is that she does not. But we can reach a reasonable level of confidence about these matters only by considering the passage in a much larger context. If we do decide that the author's intention in his disavowal was to suggest that the proposition is credible, then we are dealing with a form of irony. So I shall preface my discussion of Hobbes and Spinoza on the topics of prophecy, miracles and scripture with a look at some of Hobbes' more general comments on religion in the first part of *Leviathan*, which sets the tone for Parts III and IV.

3.

Religion in general. One subsidiary, but recurrent, problem of the first part of *Leviathan* is the question why people believe in religion. Anticipating Hume, these portions of L constitute a natural history of religion, and have no strict parallel in Spinoza, though the preface to the TTP preserves their echo. Hobbes first addresses this question in L ii, a chapter whose main subject is imagination. Hobbes counts dreams as a form of imagination and, like Descartes, thinks it can be difficult to distinguish dreaming from waking thoughts. Unlike Descartes, he has a theory about the causes and the possible religious consequences of this phenomenon. He thinks we are most apt to confuse dreams with waking thoughts when we are fearful and our consciences are troubled (¶7), citing the apparition Brutus reportedly saw the night before the battle at Philippi, "which is commonly related by Historians as a vision: but considering the circumstances, one may easily judge to have been but a short dream." And indeed, one *may* easily make the judgment that what historians commonly relate as a vision was in fact a dream, provided the historians are pagans. This is a safe case for Hobbes.

But as Hobbes develops this theme, he moves to ground which is not so safe, to the judgment about human nature that it's not at all rare for people to take a dream to be a vision, particularly if, in addition to being timorous, they are also "supperstitious, possessed of fearful tales and alone in the dark." In these circumstances not only may they be deceived by "their own fancy onely," but also by "the knavery of such persons, as make use of such superstitious fear, to pass disguised in the night..." From this difficulty of distinguishing dreams from visions

> did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, Nymphs, and the like,; and nowadayes the opinion that rude people have of Fayries, Ghosts and Goblins; and of the power of Witches. (¶8, 92)

Hobbes denies that witches have any real power, though he approves of their being punished. Their belief that they have the power to do mischief, conjoined with the intention to do it, is enough to justify their punishment. (cf. DH xiv, 12)

Hobbes surely knows that the belief in witchcraft, widespread in his day, was not

peculiar to the rude (i.e., the uneducated or ignorant), and that it was encouraged by the most natural reading of scripture, with its injunction not to suffer a witch to live (Exodus 22:18) and its tales of women summoning up the dead through the use of familiar spirits (1 Samuel 28:3-25). Even so educated a man as Sir Robert Filmer believed in the reality of Biblical witchcraft. When he came to have doubts about the trials going on in his own day, he felt obliged to distinguish between Biblical witches and the poor victims of the 17th Century witchhunts.[37] Hobbes acknowledges that God *can* make unnatural apparitions, just as he *can* change the ordinary course of nature. But, he says, it is "no point of Christian faith" that God does this so often that men need to fear such things any more than they need to fear a change in the ordinary course of nature:

> Evill men under pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say anything when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue; it is the part of a wise man, to believe them no further, than right reason makes that which they say appear credible. (¶8, 93)

If we could rid men of their superstitious fear of spirits, they would be less likely to be abused by "crafty ambitious men," and would be better citizens. We would have less civil unrest than we now have. Whereas Hobbes had begun by indicating that it was Gentile (i.e., pagan) religion which was caused by timorous and superstitious men's confusing dreams with visions (or by their being taken in by knaves), by the end of the passage Hobbes is implying that much contemporary religious belief in England is no better.

The uses to which Hobbes put his discussion of imagination in L ii led one of his best contemporary critics to some very acute observations on his method. E.g., Hobbes wrote in L ii, 9, that because the schools were ignorant of the nature of the imagination and its causes, they passed on much traditional nonsense about it. Among the teachings he criticized was their doctrine that "Good thoughts are blown (inspired) into a man, by God; and Evill thoughts by the Divell." Clarendon, after commending Hobbes for the general orderliness and clarity of his writing, noted that

> it is some part of his Art, to introduce, upon the sudden, instances and remarques, which are the more grateful [i.e., agreeable], and make the more impression on his Reader, by the unexpectedness of meeting them where somewhat else is talk'd of: for thereby he disposes the fancy to be pleased with them in a more proper and important place. No man would have imagin'd, that in a Philosophical Discourse of Dreams, and Fayries, and Ghosts, and Goblins, Exorcisms, Crosses and Holy-water, he would have taken occasion to have reproved Job for saying that the inspiration of the Almighty giveth men understanding, Job 32.8, which can be no good expression, if it be incongruity to say, *that good thoughts are inspired into a man by God*...[38]

Of course Hobbes does not explicitly reprove Job. But what offended Clarendon was the

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[37] See Sir Robert Filmer, *An Advertisement to the Jury-men of England touching witches, together with the difference between an English and a Hebrew witch*, London, 1653.

[38] Edward (Hyde, 1st) Earl of Clarendon, *A Brief View and Survey of the dangerous and pernicious Errors to Church and State, In Mr Hobbes's Book Entitled Leviathan*, Oxford, 1676, 16-17.

assimilation of incontestably orthodox doctrine to superstition, which he plausibly took to be a way of gradually leading Hobbes' readers to undervalue common notions of God's goodness and assistance, and to see in traditional conceptions of religion and piety nothing but "the artifice and invention of Churchmen, to advance their own pomp and worldly interest..." (p. 18) Clarendon, I suggest, was more sensitive to the meaning of Hobbes' text than many 20th Century commentators have been.[39] Perhaps those of us who live in a time when it is permitted to think what you wish, and to say what you think, are not well-equipped to read the works of writers from less happy times.

If Hobbes were challenged to defend himself, he could, of course, reply that he was criticizing only *superstitious* fear of spirits. So we need to look at what he says later about the distinction between religion and superstition. This comes up first in L vi, again in a context where we might not have expected to find Hobbes making an important statement about religion.[40] The primary subject is the passions of the soul, and for the most part the chapter is a catalogue of the various human emotions, desire, love, hate, jealousy, and so on. Nevertheless, Hobbes finds room to offer the following:

> Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publiquely allowed, [is] Religion; not allowed, Superstition. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, True Religion. (¶36, 124)

Perhaps there need be no offense in suggesting that religion is a form of fear. In the third appendix to the Latin L, where Hobbes is defending his espousal of certain "paradoxes" which he concedes are found in each part of L (OL III, 559), he acknowledges that his definition of religion in L vi is one of them and defends it by citing Ecclesiastes ("the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom") and the Psalms ("the fool has said in his heart, there is no God").[41]

But Hobbes' defense is hardly adequate. The passage from Psalms is simply irrelevant.[42] The (mis)citation of Ecclesiastes is relevant, but it is one thing to say that it is wise (or even the whole duty of man) to fear the Lord, to feel a proper awe at his power, and another to reduce religion to a certain kind of fear of invisible powers. A somewhat

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[39] It's striking that Hood's account of Hobbes' psychology (*Divine Politics*, ch. 5) has no analysis of the chapter on imagination.

[40] So Hood's brief chapter on Hobbes on religion (*Divine Politics*, ch. 6) contains no discussion of this passage.

[41] OL III, 563. It seems, however, that Molesworth's text is not to be trusted at this point. The specific scriptural citations Molesworth gives in the text (Ecclesiasticus 1:16 and Psalms 13:1) are not present in the 1670 edition of the Latin L and apparently represent Molesworth's own conjectures. The first assumes that when Hobbes said Ecclesiastes, he meant Ecclesiasticus. But it seems more likely (as Prof. Tricaud suggests in correspondence) that Hobbes is citing scripture from memory, thinking that Ecclesiastes is the source of this familiar saying, when it would have been more appropriate to cite Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Ps. 111:10, or Job 28:28.

[42] More apt would have been Ecclesiastes 12:13 (the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments) or Philippians 2:12 (work out your own salvation with fear and trembling).

different sensibility, treating religion in the context of a discussion of human emotions, might have stressed the love of God, citing such texts as Deuteronomy 6:5 or Mark 12:5. More crucially, it surely does not bespeak much genuine religiosity to suggest that the distinction between religion and superstition depends on whether the state has authorized the tales causing that fear. Given Hobbes' political theory, and in particular his contention that the sovereign has absolute authority over people's practice of religion, this is only consistent. But prima facie it has unwelcome implications: e.g., that before Constantine authorized Christian worship in the 4th Century, Christianity was a form of superstition, or that it still is a form of superstition in any contemporary state which does not permit Christian doctrines to be propagated. Perhaps the last sentence of the passage quoted makes everything all right, insofar as it suggests that Christianity can claim to be the true religion if God's power is as Christian doctrine represents it. But, on the natural assumption that the true religion is a species of religion, that sentence does not seem compatible with the relativism of the preceding one.[43]

A later attempt to distinguish between religion and superstition is even more relativistic. At the end of L xi, "On the Difference of Manners," a chapter whose main theme is again human psychology, Hobbes derives belief in God from "curiosity, or love of the knowledge of causes." This leads us, when we see an effect, to inquire into its cause, and again into the cause of that cause, and so on, but not *ad infinitum*.

> Of necessity [men] must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall; **which is it men call God**. So that it is impossible to make any profound enquiry into naturall causes, without being enclined thereby to believe that there is one God Eternall. (¶25, 167; clause in bold omitted in Latin)

Hobbes goes on, of course, to insist, as is usual with him, that we can have no idea of God "answerable to his nature," and that, in appealing to God as the ultimate explanation of all other things, we are like a man born blind, who comes to believe that there is such a thing as fire, which causes the heat he feels, even though he cannot imagine what this cause is like. So far there is nothing here which an orthodox Christian need object to. Hobbes does not explain why the search for causes must terminate in an eternal cause, but that is not unusual among exponents of the causal argument. And though Descartes had heatedly rejected Hobbes' claim that we can have no idea of God, the difference between him and Hobbes on this point is partly semantic. They agree on the substantive point that we cannot really grasp the nature of God, and in this they are quite traditional.

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[43] Alexander Ross showed himself a good critic of Hobbes when he asked, in connection with this passage: "What will he say of the Gentiles, among them tales were publicly allowed, were they therefore religious and not superstitious?" (*Leviathan Drawn out with a Hook*,London, 1653, p. 10) Mintz criticizes another contemporary of Hobbes for unscrupulously omitting the last sentence of L vi, 36 (*The Hunting of Leviathan*, p. 41). But Ross shrewdly raises a difficulty about that: "If the power be invisible, how can it be imagined, seeing (as he saith before) imagination is only of things perceived by the sense, and it is so called from the image made in seeing."

But as the argument continues it has more disturbing elements. Hobbes does not think all men are led to belief in God by curiosity. Some "make little or no enquiry into the naturall causes of things." (¶26, 167) But these, in their ignorance of natural causes, will still fear that there may be some power able to do them good or harm, and will be inclined to imagine

> severall kinds of Powers Invisible; and to stand in awe of their own imaginations; and in time of distresse to invoke them; as also in a time of an expected good success, to give them thanks; making the creatures of their own fancy, their Gods. (L xi, 27, 168)

So curiosity is the origin of monotheism, fear of invisible powers, the origin of anthropomorphic polytheism. Then Hobbes concludes this chapter by commenting that

> this Feare of things invisible, is the naturall Seed of that, which every one in himself calleth Religion; and in them that worship, or feare that Power otherwise than they do, Superstition. (L xi, 26, 168)

But this seems to cancel out the suggestion that only polytheistic religion derives from fear. And it makes the distinction between religion and superstition highly speaker-relative. Religion is what fear leads me to believe; if it makes you believe something different, what you believe is superstition.

The central discussion of religion in Part I occurs in L xii, and there is much grist for the Straussian mill there. Hobbes begins with an account of what he calls the natural seeds of religion. He has already laid the groundwork for much of what he says here in earlier chapters of L. All men have at least some inclination to be inquisitive about the causes of things, and particularly of their own good and evil fortune (¶2). They are also naturally inclined to think that anything with a beginning must have had a cause (¶3). Often they are able to work out these causes by observation, but the causes of good and evil fortune are generally invisible; so in the cases that matter most they are forced to rely either on their imaginations or on the authority of others, whom they take to be their friends and wiser than themselves (¶4).[44] Their ignorance of the true causes of good and evil fortune, combined with their belief that these things must have causes, makes them extremely anxious about the future (¶5), fearful of what it may bring and apt to imagine that some invisible power or agent is causing what happens to them, whether it be good or evil. At this point Hobbes again makes a distinction between monotheism and polytheism:

> In which sense perhaps it was, that some of the old Poets said, that the Gods were at first created by humane Feare: which spoken of the Gods, (that is to say, of the many Gods of the Gentiles) is very true. But the acknowledging of one God Eternal, Infinite and Omnipotent, may more easily be derived, from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several vertues and operations; than from the feare of what was to befall them in time to come. (¶6, 170)

This is an interesting passage in a number of respects. First, Hobbes seems anxious to disavow the suggestion that fear might be the cause of monotheistic religion, as if this were

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[44] The Latin does imply that men will often be ignorant of the true causes of good and evil fortune, but does not explain this ignorance by appealing to the invisibility of those causes.

discreditable to monotheism, though he had earlier defined all religion as a form of fear. Second, since Hobbes' God is admittedly one whose nature and actions we cannot comprehend, it is hard to see how postulating him as a cause satisfies the desire for knowledge.

As Hobbes' argument develops, he rather suggests that it will not. In ¶7 Hobbes argues that, in conceiving the invisible agents we postulate, our natural inclination is to think of them as like the human soul. This does not imply thinking of them as immaterial substances, since Hobbes rejects that notion as unintelligible. But we do tend to think of them as being as unlike gross, visible bodies as possible. How, then, can we have any idea how they bring about the effects they cause? The only knowledge of causation most men have is by observation and recollection of past sequences (¶8). If this is the only knowledge of causation we have, then there will be a problem about postulating an invisible cause, whether the invisible cause is one or many. Hobbes is not a Humean about causation. He clearly thinks mere observation of constant conjunctions is a second best, true knowledge of causation requiring us to see the connection between the antecedent and subsequent events (¶8). But even the second best knowledge of causation is not going to be available when the cause is invisible.

In any case, thinking of these agents (or this agent) as being like men, we are naturally inclined to deal with them as we would with men, to try to influence their behavior by gifts, petitions, thanks, and so on. (¶9) But we can never know what to expect from them; since they are invisible, communication is difficult. So we are apt to take a few casual events (i.e., things happening by chance) as prognostics (i.e., predictive) of the future. (¶10) Hobbes concludes his discussion of the natural seeds of religion by giving the following summary:

> And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts [OL: fear of spirits], Ignorance of Second Causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostics, consisteth the Naturall seed of Religion... (¶11, 172)

Note that this list omits the desire to know the causes of things, which had seemed previously to distinguish monotheism from polytheism. Instead the suggestion is: we infer invisible causes we cannot understand because we are ignorant of the true causes, which are second (i.e., natural) causes.[45]

Hobbes recognizes that what he calls the natural seeds of religion provide only the most general explanation of people's religious belief. They explain why people have some belief in some invisible power or agent, but they do not explain why people have the rather specific religious practices they have, practices which vary so much from one society to another "that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another."[46]

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[45] Bramhall found this passage offensive: "What is now become of that dictate or precept of reason, concerning prayers, thanksgivings, oblations, sacrifices, if uncertain opinions, ignorance, fear, mistakes, the conscience of our own weaknesse, and the admiration of natural events be the only seeds of religion?" (466-67) Hobbes' reply (EW IV, 291-95) seems to me evasive.

[46] ¶11, 172-73. OL III, 89: that those which are approved by law in one state are derided in

To explain that we would need to attend to the different ways different kinds of men have cultivated the natural seeds of religion. Hobbes distinguishes (¶12, 173) two kinds of men: those who "have nourished, and ordered [the natural seeds of religion], according to their own invention," and those who "have done it by Gods commandement, and direction." *Both* sorts of men have had, in a quite ordinary sense of the term, political reasons for cultivating the seeds of religion. Both have had "a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity and civill Society." Where the politicians have been acting on their own initiative, Hobbes calls it human politics; where they have been acting on God's instructions, he calls it divine politics. *Most* politicians- "all the founders of Commonwealths, and the Law-givers of the Gentiles"- practice human politics, i.e., they make use of religion only to teach subjects their duty to their earthly king; the founders of Judaism and Christianity- "Abraham, Moses and our Blessed Saviour"- practice divine politics, i.e., in addition to teaching civil obedience, they teach those who have "yeelded themselves" to be subjects in the kingdom of God the laws of that kingdom.

The conclusion of this paragraph certainly sounds pious enough: the passage so impressed Hood that he not only took the title of his book from it, he also used the (Latin version of the)[47] conclusion of the paragraph as his motto. But he does not seem to have appreciated the extent to which Hobbes assimilates the founders of Judaism and Christianity to the founders of the gentile religions (cf. pp. 69-71). Though Hobbes indeed distinguishes the former from the latter in that they had a broader purpose and have been acting on the strength of a divine revelation, it's still true that, according to Hobbes, even the founders of Judaism and Christianity had political ends.[48] Bramhall may have exaggerated when he commented that "humane and divine politics are but politics" (p. 466). Divine politics is not *just* politics, if Abraham, Moses and Jesus were acting at God's direction. But it is still a kind of politics.

As the argument of the chapter goes on, as Hobbes recounts the absurd things the founders of gentile religions have induced their followers to believe (¶¶13-16), and how the founders of those religions have accomplished this by playing on human ignorance and credulity (¶¶17-19), and by persuading their followers that *they* have been the beneficiaries of a divine revelation (¶20), the reader might be led to wonder about the distinctiveness of Judaism and Christianity. *All* "formed Religion" is based on the multitude's faith that the

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another.

[47] In this case the Latin L is more congenial to his reading. Its version of the last three sentences of ¶12 would be translated: "the religion of the former is a part of politics; the politics of the latter is a part of religion and contains such precepts as are suitable to those who are admitted into the city of God. The religions of the former were founded by the lawgivers of the gentiles; the religion of the latter, by Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, who taught us the laws of the kingdom of heaven." Normally Hood finds the English version more authoritative (pp. 54-6).

[48] This is as true in the Latin as in the English: "the purpose of each was to render their initiates more obedient to themselves." When Hood paraphrases this sentence he omits the *sibi* and gives the impression that the sentence applies only to Gentile legislators.

founder was not only wise, but the recipient of a supernatural revelation. If the tokens of that revelation come to be suspected, the religion will be suspected also (¶24). This is one of the natural causes of decline in religion. So if the subsequent argument of L should develop grounds for doubting the tokens of the Judaeo-Christian revelation, the reader might conclude that that religion too was suspect.

4.

Prophecy. I turn now to the first of the three topics which Hobbes and Spinoza both discuss, prophecy. Hobbes conceives a prophet as essentially an intermediary between God and man. Someone capable of predicting the future is not necessarily a prophet. Many a false prophet can do that:

> there be many kinds, who gain in the opinion of the common sort of men, a greater reputation of Prophecy, by one casuall event **that may bee but wrested to their purpose**, than can be lost again by never so many failings. (L xxxvi, 8, 458; phrase in bold omitted in OL)

Hobbes, who was Bacon's secretary for a time, shows himself a good Baconian here, in his sensitivity to the human tendency to focus only on positive evidence, and neglect negative evidence, especially when religious doctrines are in question.[49]

Although the term "prophet" has many meanings, the most common, and most important, is that a prophet is one to whom God speaks immediately, and who communicates that message to man on God's behalf. (¶9) But to say that God speaks immediately to his prophets is somewhat misleading. Hobbes takes it to be the doctrine of scripture that in general when God speaks immediately to one of his prophets, he does so in a vision or a dream, i.e., from

> imaginations which they had in their sleep, or in an extasie, which in every true prophet were supernaturall; but in false Prophets were either naturall or feigned. (¶11, 461)[50]

So most prophetic communication with God involves a medium the prophet himself might misunderstand. The only exception to this rule was Moses, to whom God spoke face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Hobbes can and does cite scriptural authority (Numbers 12:6-8; Exodus 33:11) that Moses was unique among the prophets in this respect.

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[49] Cf. the *Novum organum* xlvi: "And therefore it was a good answer that was made by one who, when they showed him hanging in a temple a picture of those who had paid their vows as having escaped shipwreck, and would have him say whether he did not now acknowledge the power of the gods- "Aye," asked he again, "but where are they painted that were drowned after their vows?" And such is the way of all superstition, whether in astrology, dreams, omens, divine judgments, or the like; wherein men, having a delight in such vanities, mark the events where they are fulfilled, but where they fail, though this happen much oftener, neglect and pass them by."

[50] The quoted passage expands a phrase in the Latin which would be translated simply: "supernatural phantasms." (OL III, 306)

As this last passage implies, false prophets are not distinguished from true ones by insincerity, any more than by an inability to make true predictions. A man may imagine, falsely, that God is speaking to him in a vision, when this imagination has a natural cause and is not merely feigned. But Hobbes tends to emphasize the danger of deliberate deception:

> There is need of [OL: natural] Reason and Judgment to discern between naturall and supernaturall gifts, and between naturall and supernaturall Visions, or Dreams. And consequently, men had need to be **very circumspect, and** wary in obeying the voice of man, that pretending [i.e., claiming] himself to be a Prophet, requires us to obey God in that way, which **he in Gods name telleth us to be** the way to happinesse. For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity, pretends to govern them; that is to say, to rule, and reign **over them**; which is a thing that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of Ambition and Imposture; and consequently, ought to be examined and tryed by every man, before hee yeeld them obedience; unless he have yeelded it to them already, in the institution of a Commonwealth. (¶19, 466; phrases in bold omitted in OL)

I.e., if the person who professes to tell you, in God's name, the way to happiness is the sovereign, whom you have already contracted to obey, there is no need to examine his claims to speak on God's behalf. But otherwise you must, since the incentives to imposture are so strong. A prudent person will be mistrustful of most claims to speak for God.

Distinguishing true from false prophets is as difficult as it is important. Though Hobbes' explicit position grants that there are true prophets- Moses, who spoke to God face to face, and the other prophets, whose dreams and visions were of supernatural origin- ordinarily there are many more false prophets than true, as Hobbes illustrates with citations from Scripture (¶19). He refers repeatedly (L xxxii, 7, xxxvi, 19) to the story of Ahab (1 Kings 22), who encountered 400 false prophets and only one true one, and Hobbes seems to think that is about the usual ratio.

> To say [God] hath spoken to him in a dream is no more than to say he dreamed that God spake to him, **which is not of force to win beleef from any man that knows dreams are for the most part naturall, and may proceed from former thoughts, and such dreams as that, from selfe conceit, and foolish arrogance, and false opinion of a mans own godlinesse, or other vertue, by which he thinks he hath merited the favour of extraordinary Revelation. To say he hath seen a Vision, or heard a Voice, is to say that he hath dreamed between sleeping and waking; for in such manner a man doth many times naturally take his dream for a vision, as not having well observed his own slumbering. To say he speaks by supernaturall inspiration is to say he finds an ardent desire to speak, or some strong opinion of himself, for which he can alledge no natural and sufficient reason**.[51] So that

[51] In the Latin the passage in bold would be translated: "But no one will receive another's dreams as the word of God, especially if he knows that for the most part dreams are natural and can proceed from the arrogance and pride of the dreamer. He who says that he has seen a vision from God or

> though God Almighty can speak to a man by Dreams, Visions, Voice and Inspiration, yet he obliges no man [OL: no one is obliged] to believe he hath so done to him that pretends it, who, being a man, may err, and, which is more [OL: worse], may lie. (L xxxii, 6, 411, but following Molesworth's text in the last sentence, given incorrectly in Macpherson)

Here, again, to impugn the authenticity of a revelation is not necessarily to impugn the integrity of the person who claims to be a prophet, much less the integrity of God.[52] But it is clear that a prudent person will be skeptical of any claims to direct communication with God.

Hobbes does not go so far as to say that we must reject all such claims. In L xxxvi he concludes that in the face of conflicting claims to speak for God,

> every man then [i.e., in the time of the Old Testament] was, and now is bound to make use of his naturall reason, to apply to prophecy those rules which God hath given us, to discern the true from the false. (¶20, 467)

This is a paradoxical passage. It seems to give priority to reason over revelation, since reason is supposed to judge the authenticity of a claimed revelation. On the other hand, the rules reason is to apply in making this judgment are rules God has given us, i.e., rules we owe to revelation itself. This is clear from the continuation of the passage, where Hobbes cites scriptural authority for the rules he gives. Hobbes' solution to the problem of distinguishing true from false prophets, then, seems to involve a vicious circle. Reason must use rules derived from revelation to determine what is a true revelation, but it cannot have confidence in those rules unless it can be confident that the revelation from which they were derived was a true one, which presupposes that it can distinguish true revelations from false ones independently of the rules. Critics have often alleged that a similar circularity infects Descartes' defense of reason in the *Meditations*, and some would go so far as to suggest that the circularity is intended, and intended to be seen as such. That seems to me an entirely unreasonable interpretation of Descartes. It seems to me not at all unreasonable as an interpretation of Hobbes, whose tone, after all, is quite different.

Hobbes suggests various rules God has given us for making the distinction between the true and the false prophet: in the Old Testament the true prophet's doctrine must be consistent with that taught by the sovereign prophet Moses, and he must have a miraculous power of foretelling what God would bring to pass; in the New Testament there is only one mark of the true prophet; he must teach that Jesus is the Christ, i.e., the Messiah.

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heard a voice will be thought to have dreamed. For dreams often and easily deceive vain and inexperienced men. He who says that God has supernaturally inspired him with some new doctrine will be understood by the wise to be raving from admiration of his own cleverness." (OL III, 266)

[52] Cf. L vii, 7: "If *Livy* say the Gods made once a cow speak, and we believe it not; wee distrust not God therein, but *Livy*." The section from which this comes (L vii, 5-7) is an interesting further example of the phenomenon analysed in §3: the interjection of discussions of religion where they might not have been expected. Although Hobbes chooses to focus his skepticism on a pagan historian, the example might remind readers of Balaam's ass (Numbers 22:22-35).

"Whosoever denied that Article, he was a false Prophet, whatsoever miracles he might seem to work; **and he that taught it was a true Prophet**." (L xxxvi, 20, 468) Note that the clause in bold, which is not in the Latin, seems to make teaching that Jesus is the Christ a sufficient condition of true prophecy, independently of any miracles, thereby apparently contradicting other passages which make the ability to perform miracles a necessary condition for prophecy (e.g., L xxxii, 7; EW IV, 330).

However we resolve that contradiction, Hobbes' position so far seems to give us rules only for determining who is a prophet in Scripture and to leave open the question how we are to decide whether or not someone who claims *now* to speak for God really is a prophet. When Hobbes addresses that question in L (xxxii, 7, 412), his answer seems to be that there are two criteria, each necessary and neither sufficient in itself: the performance of miracles and not teaching any religion other than that already established. It seems obvious enough (though Hobbes does not draw this conclusion)[53] that on these criteria someone who is a prophet in one country may not be a prophet in another. It's also unclear how a prophetic religion could have gotten started if this rule had been applied to its first prophet.

But I think the most important consequence of these criteria is that they make the ability to perform miracles quite critical.[54] As we shall see when we discuss Hobbes' doctrine on miracles, this has the effect of depriving us of prophecy as a means of contemporary communication with God. And when Bramhall pressed him to say whether he thought there really was such a thing as prophecy in the world, Hobbes acknowledged this consequence of his views, affirming that there were true prophets in scriptural times, but denying that there had been any since the death of St. John the Evangelist (EW IV, 324-27). It's a nice question why God should have ceased to communicate with us in this way.

Many of these themes recur in Spinoza's discussion of prophecy. Like Hobbes he conceives of the prophet as an intermediary between God and man, a vehicle for the divine revelation. (III/15) Like Hobbes he stresses the difficulty even the prophets had in knowing they were receiving a revelation from God-not that they did not believe in God, but that they required a sign in order to be sure that it was God who was speaking to them. (III/30, cf. I/106) If the prophet himself requires a sign, those to whom he communicates God's revelation will require a sign, except in those cases where the prophet teaches nothing beyond what is already contained in the law of Moses (III/32). But even with a sign, the prophet's certainty is only moral and not mathematical. Like Hobbes Spinoza is fond of citing the case of Ahab, using it to show that God may deceive men by sending them false prophets. (III/31, citing 1 Kings 22:20-23)

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[53] Bramhall did, objecting (inter alia) that "two Prophets prophesying the same thing at the same time, in the dominions of two different Princes, the one shall be a true Prophet, the other a false." (p. 476) Hobbes' reply blatantly evades the issue: "This consequence is not good: for seeing they teach different doctrines, they cannot both confirm their doctrine with miracles." (EW IV, 328)

[54] In DH xiv, 12, Hobbes will compare those who pretend to be prophets without performing miracles to astrologers, who pretend to a science they do not have in order to steal money from foolish people.

Unlike Hobbes Spinoza does not dwell on the ulterior motives men might have to persuade their fellows that they were the bearers of a divine revelation. His main point about prophecy tends to undermine the position even of the true prophets, a step Hobbes, for all his skepticism, was not willing to take. "Everyone has persuaded himself, by a certain strange rashness, that the prophets knew everything." (III/35) But in fact they were ignorant of many things and disagreed among themselves. Even the most authoritative of the prophets, Moses, held false opinions about even the most central of theological issues, the nature of God. He did not understand that God was omniscient, or omnipresent, or that he directs human actions simply by his decree. (III/38, §35, 40, §45) He teaches that God is merciful, gracious and supremely jealous. (38, §36) It is not clear that he teaches that God has created all things *ex nihilo*; in particular it is not clear that he thinks of the other gods to whom he refers as dependent on God. (39, §37) Moses is not clearly a monotheist. This central figure in the prophetic tradition has a very primitive conception of God. And other major prophets held views contrary to his. Ezekiel's opinions were so inconsistent with those of Moses that the rabbis almost excluded him from the canon. (III/41, §49) His works might not have come down to us, had not Chananias undertaken his defense. But Chananias' defense of Ezekiel may have involved tampering with the text to make it more acceptable. There are similar problems about other prophets. (§§50-51)

For Spinoza what is important about the prophets is not their theological beliefs, which are often primitive, but their moral teachings. (III/37, §31; 31, §10) This is a radical position, which, so far as I have been able to discover, Hobbes approaches only in that curious passage in L viii (¶¶21-26, 140-146) in which he assimilates prophecy and madness. This is one of those unexpected digressions on religious topics scattered throughout Part I of L, numerous examples of which I analysed in the previous section. Hobbes has been discussing the intellectual virtues and their defects. Among the latter he gives the greatest attention to madness, which he understands to be a condition in which a person has an extraordinary and extravagant passion, often due to the "evil constitution" of the bodily organs. (L viii, 16-17, 139) He notes that madness does not always express itself in extravagant actions, citing those who believe themselves to be inspired as an example: "if there were nothing else that bewrayed their madnesse; yet that very arrogating such inspiration to themselves, is argument enough,"[55] a judgment which prompted Bishop Bramhall to complain that Hobbes made "very little difference between a *prophet* and a *madman*, and a *demoniac*." (EW IV, 324)

In his defense Hobbes contends that if he had assimilated the prophets to madmen (which he denies), he would only have been following the opinion of the Jews, who, "both under the Old Testament and under the New, took them [i.e., the prophets] to be all one with *madmen* and *demoniacs*." (EW IV, 327) This summarizes- somewhat inaccurately and prejudicially to his own case-a passage in L viii in which Hobbes had claimed that the Jews "called mad-men prophets, or (according as they thought the spirits good or bad)

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[55] OL III, 60: "Even if there were nothing else which indicated madness of this kind, still to me the very arrogation of divine inspiration itself is a great indicator of their madness."

daemoniacks." (¶25) That is, the Jews interpreted madness as a manifestation of possession by a spirit; if they thought the spirit a good one, they called the madman a prophet; if they thought the spirit evil, they called him a demoniac. In the reply to Bramhall Hobbes professes to have proven this by many passages, both out of the Old Testament and out of the New. But in fact, in the relevant paragraph in L viii he cites only three passages, two from the New Testament (Mark 3:21, John 10:20), and one from the Old (2 Kings 9:11). Only in the NT passages is the hypothesis of possession by a spirit suggested (both times regarding Jesus); the OT passage says merely that some of those around Jehu thought the unnamed prophet who came to anoint him was mad.

The approach to Spinoza comes not in anything I have described so far from this passage, but in the way Hobbes treats the hypothesis of possession by a demon. He does not think it strange that the gentiles should have interpreted madness in terms of possession, since, as he points out, they often ascribed "natural accidents" to demons. But he does think it strange that the Jews should have adopted this theory, since none of the prophets of the OT claimed that the spirit of God was literally in them when they prophesied. God did not speak *in* them, but *to* them, through a dream or a vision. And indeed, there seem to be only traces of a belief in evil spirits in the OT, and very little evidence of a belief in possession by such spirits. This seems to be a relatively late development in Jewish thought, though common by the time of the NT.[56] Hobbes explains it by appealing to a common human failing:

> the want of curiosity to search naturall causes... For they that see any strange, and unusuall ability, or defect in a mans mind; unless they see withal, from what cause it may probably proceed, can hardly think it naturall; and if not naturall, they must needs thinke it supernaturall; and then what can it be, but that either God, or the Divell is in him? (¶25, 144)

But this explanation generates a problem for Hobbes. It appears from the NT that even Jesus believed in possession by evil spirits, insofar as he treated madmen as if they were possessed. Hobbes cites no particular text, but presumably he is thinking of stories like that of the Gadarene swine (Matt. 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39; cf. Matt. 12:22-32; Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-23). Hobbes will not treat all belief in spirits as superstitious; he criticizes the Sadducees as "coming very neere to direct atheisme" for their denial that there were any spirits at all. But he seems embarrassed by Jesus' apparent acceptance of the theory of demon-possession:

Why then does our Saviour proceed in the curing of them [i.e., madmen], as if they

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[56] See James Efird's article on demons in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. However, 1 Samuel 18:10-11 is evidence of some OT belief in demon possession. This passage is interesting in other respects: the King James version translates the verb *naba'* so as to make Saul *prophesy* under the influence of the evil spirit from God; more modern translations (e.g., the RSV, the Soncino Bible) say that Saul *raved*. The Soncino commentator acknowledges as the literal meaning: "played the prophet," suggesting that Saul displayed "the manifestations of physical excitement which were associated with the ecstatic frenzies of the prophetic bands."

were possest; and not as if they were mad? (¶26, 145)

Even if this belief is not to be dismissed as superstitious, it will not do to explain Jesus' acceptance of it by a "want of curiosity to search natural causes." Hobbes' solution implies that Jesus did not really share the belief of his audience, but was merely accommodating himself to his audience:

> I can give no other kind of answer, but that which is given to those that urge the Scripture in like manner against the opinion of the motion of the Earth. The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God; and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their naturall reason.

And this is essentially the line Spinoza takes in TTP xiii, though, of course, for him even that position involves some measure of accommodation, since he does not take the notion of obedience to God quite literally. To conceive of the power of God as like that of a human king, only greater, is to conceive of God inadequately, as the *Ethics* will explain (E IIP3S).

Hobbes disavows the suggestion Bramhall found in his writing about prophecy, that there is no such thing as prophecy in the world. Historically, at least, there were true prophets, though now there aren't. Unlike Spinoza, he never explicitly questions the authority of those whom scripture recognized as true prophets. And he might well have found Spinoza's open criticism of their theological beliefs a bolder position than he dared defend. Most of the key elements in his explicit position- e.g., his doctrine that false prophets may deceive us through their ability to work miracles and make true predictions, his contention that God has generally communicated with even his true prophets only in dreams and visions which the prophet might easily have confused with purely natural events, even his assimilation of prophecy to madness, offensive as it was to Bishop Bramhall- are teachings for which Hobbes can plausibly claim scriptural support.[57] So his explicit position is one which may not appear unacceptably unorthodox. Indeed, the epistemological problems he focussed on are sufficiently serious, and sufficiently attested to in scripture, that some contemporary biblical scholars have suggested that the leaders of the early Christian Church may have deliberately suppressed a burgeoning prophetic movement because of the difficulties they experienced in distinguishing between true and false prophets.[58] By sticking close to scripture, and restricting himself to an emphasis on some of its more awkward features, Hobbes provided himself with a useful cover. But why depart from Scripture, when even the prophets tell us, with almost Cretan candor, that the [other] prophets prophesy lies in the name of God and that we should not hearken unto them (Jeremiah 14:14, 23:16, cited by Hobbes L xxxvi, 19, 467)?

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[57] Cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, cited repeatedly by both Hobbes (L xxxii, 7; xxxvi, ¶¶11,19,20, pp. 461, 466, 467) and Spinoza (III/31, 87, 96), Matthew 24:24 (cited in L xxxii, 7; TTP III/31, 69), Numbers 12:6-8 (cited in L xxxvi, 11; TTP III/20).

[58] Cf. Robert Wilson's article on prophecy in the *Harper Bible Dictionary*, p. 830.

Miracles. Hobbes' discussion of miracles (L xxxvii) begins with an informal definition, and then spends some paragraphs working out a more precise account of what a miracle is. Alluding to the etymology of the term, Hobbes first notes that "miracle" signifies an admirable work of God, and is therefore also called a wonder. (¶1, 469) So then the question is: what is it that people wonder at? He suggests two features of an event which are apt to cause wonder: (1) if it is strange, i.e., "such, as the like of it hath never, or very rarely been produced," and (2) if it is such that "when it is produced, we cannot imagine it to have been done by natural means, but onely by the immediate hand of God." (¶2, 470) In the next few paragraphs (3-5) Hobbes argues that each of these conditions is necessary, and he seems at first to regard them as jointly sufficient (cf. ¶3). But then he adds a third condition: (3) if the event is "wrought for the procuring of credit [OL: among the people] to Gods Messengers, Ministers, and Prophets, that thereby men may know, they are called, sent and employed by God, **and thereby be the better inclined to obey them**." (¶6, 471; clause in bold omitted in Latin)

This third condition goes back to a theme Hobbes had introduced in his first paragraph, when he wrote that miracles are also called signs,

> because they are *for the most part*, done, for a signification of his commandement, in such occasions, as without them, men are apt to doubt, (following their private natural reasoning,) what he hath commanded, and what not... (my emphasis)

There is a slight inconsistency here. What Hobbes had originally proclaimed to be only a common, but not universal, feature of miracles has now become an essential feature. But Hobbes has an interesting reason for insisting on this third feature. We do not, he says, regard such things as the creation of the world and the destruction of all life in the flood as miracles

> because they were not done to procure credit to any Prophet, or other Minister of God... **For how admirable soever any work be, the Admiration consisteth not in that it could be done, because men naturally beleeve the Almighty can do anything, but because he does it at the Prayer, or Word of a man**. (¶6, 471-72; sentence in bold omitted in Latin)

If we take our belief in God's omnipotence seriously, we should be surprised at nothing, except that God might act at the bidding of man.

Hobbes' final definition of a miracle, however, is not simply a summation of these three conditions:

> A Miracle, is a work of God, (besides his operation by the way of Nature, ordained in the Creation,) done for the making manifest to his elect, the mission of an extraordinary Minister for their salvation. (¶7, 473)

It might be thought that the first two conditions have dropped out here, though probably both strangeness and our inability to imagine a natural cause are implied in the parenthetical clause. But the most interesting new development lies in the reference to God's *elect*. The purpose of miracles is not to persuade just any naturally skeptical human that a particular

person *is* a representative of God, but to persuade those whom God has antecedently chosen for salvation. So it's not to be expected that everyone who witnesses a miracle will be persuaded by it, and if some people are not, that does not count against the work's being a miracle.

This leads to familiar problems about falsifiability, but Hobbes has scriptural justification for this claim. First (¶6, 472-73) he discusses what seems a fairly straightforward case. In Exodus 4:1, after God has instructed Moses to gather together the people of Israel and lead them out of the land of Egypt, Moses complains that the people will not believe that God has appeared to him. God then teaches Moses how to perform certain wonders, which do succeed in persuading the Israelites to believe in him, though they do not persuade the Pharaoh, whose heart God has hardened. So far so good.

Then Hobbes turns to a problematic passage in Mark (6:1-6a), which tells of Jesus' returning from his ministry to Nazareth, finding himself rejected, and saying that a prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. Mark then reports that:

> 5a He *could do no* mighty works there, 5b except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. 6a And he marveled because of their unbelief.[59] (my emphasis)

Many commentators on scripture have found this passage troublesome. For example, the Anchor Bible calls 5a "the strongest statement in the gospels on the limitations of Jesus, though it is mitigated slightly in the 2nd part of the verse [5b]."[60] Erasmus found more comfort in the qualification:

> Wherefore Jesus, thoughe he were almightye, and desirous to save as many as might be, yet could he not there among his countreymen worke many miracles, for he was letted so to do by the unbelefe of his acquayntaunce and kynneffolkes. For where as being among aliauntes [aliens], he had easilye cured very many of al kyndes of dyseases, cast out dyvels, and healed leapers, here in his owne countrey, he onely healeth a few sicke folkes...[61]

Erasmus does not explain how someone who was almighty could be prevented by the disbelief of his Nazarene audience from working miracles.

Commentators whose concern is to produce a harmony of the gospels generally note that the parallel passage in Matthew reads differently:

> 13:58 And he *did not do many* mighty works there because of their unbelief.[62] (my

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[59] *kai 'ouk 'edunato 'ekei 'oudemian dunamin poiesai, 'eime 'oligois 'arrostois 'epitheis tas xeiras 'etherapeusen. kai 'ethaumazen dia ten 'apistian 'auton*.

[60] *Mark*, tr. with comm. by C. S. Mann, Doubleday/Anchor, 1986, p. 290.

[61] Desiderius Erasmus, *The first Tome or Volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the Newe Testamente*, Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975, orig. ed., 1548.

[62] I cite the RSV. Other translations generally agree, an interesting exception being that by W. F. Albright and C. J. Mann, Doubleday/Anchor, 1971: "And because of their unbelief he was unable to perform many acts of power there." The Greek is: *kai 'ouk 'epoiesen 'ekei dunameis pollas dia ten*

emphasis)

Calvin comments on this that

> Mark says more emphatically that He was not able to do any mighty work. But they agree completely in substance: Christ's own fellow townsfolk by their ungodliness prevented Him from performing more mighty works among them. He had already given them some taste; but they deliberately deaden themselves so as not to perceive it... When the Lord sees that His power is not received by us, He finally takes it away. And yet we complain that He does not give the help which our unbelief drives far from us! By saying that Christ was not able, Mark magnifies the guilt of those who hindered His goodness. For unbelievers do indeed (as far as in them lies) restrict God's hand by their obstinacy. Not that God is overcome as if He were the weaker, but because they will not allow His power to work.[63]

I hope I will be excused for not understanding this. I would have thought that if the unbelievers' not allowing his power to work explained their persistence in unbelief, that would imply that their power was superior to his, at least with respect to the issue at hand. But perhaps my incomprehension just illustrates the maxim *nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*.

In any case, like Erasmus, Calvin goes on to note that, according to Mark, Jesus did perform some miracles in Nazareth, concluding that God's power can overcome our reluctance:

> We learn from this that Christ's goodness fought with their malice and emerged victorious. We experience the same thing with God every day; for although he justly and necessarily restricts His power because it has not an open entrance into us, yet we see that He does not fail to do us good and makes a way where there is none. A wonderful struggle! We try every method of suppressing God's grace and keeping it from us, and yet it breaks through triumphant and does its work in spite of our reluctance.

Ultimately, I think, this is incoherent. If God, in his omnipotence, can *always* win the struggle, then it really is no contest. The pious conclusion that, if God wishes, he can always triumph over our reluctance, leaves us with no explanation for those occasions when our obstinacy seems to triumph, except to postulate that on those occasions he lacked the will.

Some modern scholars have conjectured that Mark is reproducing an earlier narrative

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'apistian 'auton. This translation produces the harmony some commentators have sought, but Albright and Mann do not argue for it and I do not know how they arrived at it.

63 Jean Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, ed. by David and Thomas Torrance, tr. by T. H. L. Parker, Eerdmans, 1972, vol. II, p. 136. The tradition of writing harmonies of the gospels goes back to Augustine, whose object was to reply to skeptics bent on discrediting the gospels as history by pointing out their inconsistencies. Cf. Aurelius Augustinus, *The Harmony of the Evangelists*, in *Works*, ed. by Marcus Dods, Edinburgh, 1873, vol. 8, pp. 148-49. Though Augustine comments on the passages in question here, he does not acknowledge the prima facie inconsistency Calvin seeks to remove.

(perhaps a hypothetical lost ms. known as Q, perhaps an oral tradition) and that he (or a subsequent editor) deals with the awkwardness of 6:5a ("He could do no mighty works there") by introducing the qualification of 6:5b ("except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them"). Matthew, who used both Mark and Q as sources, deals with it by changing the wording from "could not" to "did not."[64] This approach reflects a critical attitude to the texts which Hobbes and Spinoza are sometimes given credit for founding,[65] but it does nothing to resolve the theological difficulties.

How does Hobbes deal with these theological and exegetical issues? Here is what he says:

> So also of our Saviour, it is written, (Mat. 13.58) that he wrought not many Miracles in his own countrey, because of their unbeleef and (in Marke 6.5) in stead of, *he wrought not many*, it is, *he could worke none*.[66] **It was not because he wanted power; which to say, were blasphemy against God; nor that the end of Miracles was not to convert incredulous men to Christ**;[67] for the end of all the Miracles of Moses, of Prophets, of our Saviour, and of his Apostles was to adde men to the Church; **but it was, because the end of their Miracles, was to adde to the Church (not all men, but) such as should be saved; that is to say, such as God had elected**.[68] Seeing therefore our Saviour sent from his Father, hee could not use his power in the conversion of those, whom his Father had rejected. (¶6, 473)

So far we might have the following reactions: (1) it is initially somewhat puzzling that Hobbes should introduce these texts, because they do not obviously allude (as Exodus does) to the doctrine of predestination; (2) though Hobbes makes them relevant by using that doctrine to explain what must otherwise seem rather mysterious in them, viz., the fact that the unbelief of the people of Nazareth was an obstacle to Jesus' performing miracles there, still, the explanation Hobbes suggests is itself puzzling; we are not to say (pace Mark) that Jesus literally *could not* perform miracles in Nazareth, because to do so would be to blaspheme against God; what we are supposed to say, instead, is that Jesus *had the power to perform miracles there in Nazareth, but could not use it because God had not predestined those people for salvation*. The meaning seems to be that Jesus could not use his power to perform miracles because God, by not choosing the people of Nazareth for salvation, had already frustrated the end for which he had given his son that power. To this Clarendon objected that

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64 See *The Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1951, VII, 61-65, 729. But there appears to be no universally accepted solution to the problem of the relationship of the synoptic gospels to each other. So Mann (in the Anchor *Mark*) denies that Matthew depends on Mark, arguing (what Augustine had argued long ago) that Mark depends on Matthew.

65 See *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. I, pp. 127-132.

66 The Latin version quotes the entire passage from Mark.

67 OL: "Far be it from us to think that he lacked the power, or that the end of miracles was not to convert the incredulous."

68 Omitted in OL.

> it is irrational to think that all the People of Nazareth, where our Saviour had vouchsafed to live and converse about thirty years of his life, should be reprobated by God to everlasting damnation. (p. 217)

Hobbes' explanation does seem to require that assumption and it does seem an unpalatable assumption, particularly since the people of Nazareth included members of Jesus' own family, including Mary. (3) Hobbes' explanation of the text also seems to require a distinction between the father and the son which his audience might have found uncomfortable, though I'm not aware that any of them commented on it. Clarendon, however, did call attention to the fact that Hobbes does not mention the exception Mark makes in 6:5b.

In any case, Hobbes is not through with this passage. He goes on to reject an alternative reading:

> They that expounding this place of St. Marke, say that this word, *Hee could not*, is put for, *He would not*, do it [OL: unnecessarily and] without example in the Greek language, **(where *Would not*, is put sometimes for *Could not*, in things inanimate, that have no will; but *Could not*, for *Would not*, never,) and thereby lay a stumbling block before weak Christians; as if Christ could doe no Miracles, but amongst the credulous**. [passage in bold not in OL]

This is puzzling in a number of respects. Who are the "they" who read *could not* as *would not* and who thereby lay a stumbling block before weak Christians? Perhaps he has in mind Calvin, whose claim that Mark and Matthew "agree completely in substance" might be thought to imply that *could not* and *would not* are equivalent.[69] In any case, Hobbes is clearly claiming that this kind of harmonization of the gospels distorts the meaning of the text. These other commentators offer an unnatural interpretation of the language, on the assumption that if the words were taken in the most natural way, they would imply that Jesus' ability to perform miracles depended on the credulity of his audience. The offensive assumption is projected onto these other, unnamed commentators, and insofar as their position is officially rejected, so their assumption is disavowed.

But though traditional commentators clearly were embarrassed by the scriptural suggestion that Jesus' powers might be limited, I have yet to find any of them who took Mark to imply that Jesus' ability to perform miracles depended on the credulity of his audience. That seems to be a peculiarly Hobbesian contribution to the debate. And isn't Hobbes himself offering a reading of the text which denies that *could not* means just what it

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[69] Or perhaps not. Hobbes' Anglican contemporary, John Lightfoot, seems to assume a similar equivalence: "therefore, he did not many great works there, because of their unbelief, which Mark uttereth, `he could do no mighty works there,' ver. 5: which meaneth not any want of power, but it relateth to his will, and to the rule by which he went in doing his works." *The Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the New Testament*, in *Works*, ed. by John Rogers Pitman, London, 1822, vol. 3, p. 89. This work was first published in 1655, four years after the publication of L, so presumably Lightfoot was not the target of Hobbes' criticism here, but this illustrates the kind of thing Hobbes might have heard in sermons.

seems to? Is he then making the same assumption as the anonymous commentators he is criticizing and thereby laying a stumbling block before weak Christians? Is he, in the act of disavowal, making that impious suggestion?

Certainly a number of other passages in this chapter encourage skepticism about reports of miracles and stress the ease with which impostors can take in the credulous. For example, in ¶9 Hobbes lays it down that no created spirit can perform a miracle. When someone like Moses seems to perform a miracle, it is really God who is acting. In the immediately following paragraphs he deals with an apparent counterexample: in Exodus 7-8 the Egyptian magicians are represented as matching (up to a point, at least) the miracles of Moses and Aaron. Hobbes might have replied to this by suggesting that the magicians were endowed with special powers as part of God's plan to harden the heart of Pharaoh, but instead he contends that their acts were:

> so far from supernaturall, as the Impostors need not the study so much as of naturall causes, but the ordinary ignorance, stupidity and superstition of mankind; those texts that seem to countenance the power of Magick, **Witchcraft**, and Enchantment, must needs have another sense, than at first sight they seem to bear... all the miracle consisteth in this, that the Enchanter has deceived a man; which is no Miracle, **but a very easie matter to doe**. (¶¶10-11, 474-75; passages in bold not in OL)

Hobbes goes on to argue that the impostor's task is made all the easier if he has more knowledge of natural causes than his audience does. So an astronomer might easily deceive people ignorant of astronomy by predicting an eclipse, or a ventriloquist make people believe they had heard a voice from heaven. And if we take into account what a number of men working together can do, there is no limit to what we can make people believe: "For two [OL: unprincipled] men conspiring, one to seem lame, the other to cure him with a charme, will deceive many: but many conspiring, one to seem lame, another so to cure him, and all the rest to bear witnesse; will deceive many more." (¶12, 476)

In all Hobbes' talk about people's tendency "to give too hasty beleefe to pretended Miracles," nothing Hobbes says clearly implies that any miracle of any generally accepted prophet was an imposture. He rejects only such works as those of the Egyptian magicians and the witch of Endor. (xxxvi, 8, 458) He can, and does, cite scriptural authority,[70] warning us not to take the performance of miracles as a sure indicator of the authenticity of a putative prophet's mission. But in the end all he officially claims is that we must scrutinize all professed miracles carefully to see whether or not they are really beyond the natural powers of man, and that in the doubtful cases which remain we must accept no claim offered in support of a religion other than that established by "God's Lieutenant," who was originally Moses, and who is now the head of the Church (L xxxvii, 13, 476-77). Without denying that some miracles may have occurred in Biblical times, Hobbes makes it clear that he does not think any occur now. (L xxxvii, 12, 477; xxxii, 9, 414; cf. DH xiv, 4)

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[70] Deut. 13:1-5 again, L xxxvii, 13, 476. Hobbes also cites Deut. 18:21-22, which is somewhat puzzling, since it seems to make true prediction the criterion for distinguishing between true and false prophets, a position Hobbes had earlier rejected.

There is (what I would take to be) a fairly obvious problem of circularity here: in the chapter on miracles we are to judge the authenticity of a miracle by the authenticity of the doctrine it is used to support, but in the chapter on prophecy we had to judge the prophet's claim to be God's spokesman by his performance of miracles. If Hobbes is aware of this circularity, he does not call attention to it. Perhaps he just did not notice it. Perhaps, as Strauss might have suggested, he leaves it to the reader to discover this for himself.

Hobbes' critique of miracles, like Hume's in the first *Enquiry*, is epistemological. He does not deny that miracles have occurred, he merely suggests that we ought not be too ready to accept any particular miracle claim as valid. Unlike Hume he does not have an a priori argument from the nature of miracles to the inherent irrationality of accepting any testimony for any miracle, and he does not define miracles in terms of a violation of the laws of nature. Spinoza's critique anticipates Hume's in bringing in the idea of a violation of the laws of nature, but is more radical than either Hobbes' or Hume's in that it suggests that there is a sense in which no miracle has ever occurred, because a true miracle is a metaphysical impossibility.

Spinoza begins his discussion of miracles (TTP vi),[71] as Hobbes does, by talking about the popular understanding of the term and relating it to etymology. What people call miracles are events whose causes they do not understand, events they therefore imagine happen outside the usual order of nature. What they don't understand, they think wonderful. (§§1-4) They find it very flattering to imagine that the creator holds them so dear that he would interrupt the course of nature so as to arrange things for their advantage. (§§4-5) But this popular conception of a miracle is based on an illicit distinction between the power of nature and the power of God. (§§2-3) Whatever happens according to the laws of nature is an expression of the power of nature, but it is equally, and by that very fact, an expression of the power of God, for the laws of nature just are God's decrees regarding nature. To think of them as expressions of a power which nature has independently of God is to limit God's power. If God were to act contrary to these laws, he would act contrary to his own will, intellect and nature, which is absurd. (§§7-13) If we understand by a miracle an event which is, not merely contrary to our ordinary experience of nature, but actually contrary to the laws of nature themselves, i.e., not merely one which we, at a certain point in the development of human knowledge, cannot understand, but unintelligible, in principle, by any laws of nature, then there can be no miracles. (§§14-15)

So in strictness of speech, it would seem, there can be no miracles and all previous reports of miracles must have been mistaken. Spinoza does not, as Hobbes does, dwell on the possibility of deliberate deception by those who first claimed to perform the miracles. The suggestion is either that the first audiences failed to grasp the true nature of what they were witnessing, failed to understand the laws of nature by which the supposed miracle happened, or else that in reporting the event, the authors of scripture used figurative

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[71] I have discussed this topic more fully, and defended Spinoza's position on miracles, in an article which appeared in the *Proceedings of the First Italian Congress on Spinoza*, ed. by Emilia Giancotti, Naples: Bibliopolis, 1985. But the position I take here is slightly different.

language to describe what they understood to be a perfectly natural event (§§57-64), in order that their narrative might more effectively move men to obedience. (§§49-50)

Nevertheless, this is not Spinoza's final position. Spinoza does, indeed, hold that if we understand miracles in the way so far suggested, there are, and can be, no miracles. But he does not insist on that definition. Instead he seems to prefer as his official definition the following formula:

> the term "miracle" cannot be understood except in relation to men's opinions, and means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of another customary thing, or at least which cannot be so explained by the one who writes or relates the miracle. (III/83-84, §13)

And of course, in this sense of the term, Spinoza will concede that there are miracles. Certainly events occur whose natural causes we cannot explain.

Much of Spinoza's chapter on miracles is devoted to arguing, not that violations of the laws of nature are impossible (though, of course, he does argue that), but that, whether we define miracles as events contrary to the laws of nature, or whether we define them in the way Spinoza suggests is preferable, they have no religious significance, because we can derive no knowledge of God's essence, existence, or providence from them. Spinoza argues for this both from natural reason (§§16-29) and from Scripture (§§30-38). The argument is too complex to summarize here, but I should point out that in confirming his views from Scripture Spinoza emphasizes the same passage Hobbes had, Deuteronomy 13:1-5, to show that even false prophets can perform miracles and that "unless men are well protected by the true knowledge and love of God, miracles can lead them to embrace false Gods as easily the True God." (§31)

For any reader who is not prepared to take the escape clause which Spinoza offers him, and thinks miracles ought to be defined, not in terms of human ignorance, but in terms of a violation of the laws of nature, Spinoza's position does deny the occurrence of miracles. If he were to accept Spinoza's rejection of miracles so understood, he would be obliged to reject all scriptural miracles, even those of Moses and Jesus, and to say that either the first reporters of those miracles misunderstood what they had witnessed, or that we have misunderstood the nature of their reports. That in itself is a fairly radical position, more radical than the position Hobbes takes. But of course Spinoza's chapter on miracles was also one which raised doubts about his pantheism. For his identification of the power of God with the power of nature, and his consequent claim that the better we understood nature, the better we would understand God, did cause some of his first critics to question whether he had drawn a sufficient distinction between God and nature.[72] I will not suggest that that was a step Hobbes wished he could have taken.

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[72] See, for example, the correspondance between Oldenburg and Spinoza relative to the TTP, Letters 68, 71, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, and 79.

The authority of Scripture. Hobbes himself links our three topics together when he writes at the end of L xxxii (¶9, 414) that since miracles have ceased to occur, we are now left without any certifiable living prophets, and must rely on the scriptures to teach us our duty to God and man. Unfortunately his treatment of the authority of scripture tends to undermine this source of knowledge of God also. The question of the authority of Scripture is the subject of L xxxiii, and Hobbes treats it, in the first instance, as a question of the authorship of Scripture. By the end of the chapter, of course, Hobbes will concede, what he says everyone believes, that God is "the first and original author" of Scripture (¶21, 425). But initially the question is "Who were the first (human) writers of the various books the Christian churches now acknowledge as canonical, i.e., as providing the rules of Christian life?" Hobbes begins, notoriously, by questioning what Spinoza will say nearly everyone believes,[73] that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, pointing out that there are passages in which the writer uses expressions which would be natural only from someone writing at some time after the events he is describing, as for example when the writer, speaking of Moses, says that "no man knows the place of his burial to this day." (Deuteronomy 34:6)

It may seem puzzling to us that people could have believed that a work which describes the death of Moses was written by the man whose death it describes, but Hobbes' contemporaries had responses to that, which Hobbes anticipates: "It were a strange interpretation, to say Moses spake of his own sepulcher (though by prophecy), that it was not found to that day, wherein he was yet living."[74] That is to say, even if Moses knew beforehand that his burial place would not be found, this would not be a natural way for him to express that knowledge. Again, it will not do, says Hobbes, to suggest that only the last chapter of the Pentateuch was written by another man, Moses having written the rest,[75] for there are other passages, earlier in the Pentateuch, which also point to an author writing at some remove from the events he is describing, such as Genesis 12:6 or Numbers 21:14, where the writer cites a work earlier than his own, the now lost Book of the Wars of the Lord.

Though Hobbes is unequivocal in saying that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, he does, to some extent, pull his punches. For example, he is equivocal on the question how long after the death of Moses the five books of Moses were written. At first

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[73] 118/18. Whom does Spinoza have in mind as exceptions here? He had a copy of Isaac La Peyrère's *Praeadamitae* (1655) in his library when he died and probably was familiar with its denial of the Mosaic authorship during the period when he wrote the TTP. See *Catalogus van de bibliotheek der Vereniging het Spinozahuis*, Brill, 1965, and Richard Popkin's *Isaac La Peyrère*, Brill. Our list of his library has no mention of the Dutch translation of *Leviathan* published in Amsterdam in 1667, or the Latin translation published there in 1668, though I find it difficult to believe he was not familiar with that work. But for reasons indicated below, I think Spinoza may have been thinking more of Ibn Ezra.

[74] The Latin expresses this sentiment somewhat more sharply, dismissing the opponents' view as *ineptum*, i.e., foolish or silly, not merely as strange (OL III, 271).

[75] Hobbes mentions this objection only in the English *Leviathan*.

he says that though it is "sufficiently evident" that they were written "after his time," it is "not so manifest" how long afterward they were written.[76] But he makes clear his belief that some substantial period of time elapsed when he passes from discussing the Pentateuch to discussing Joshua (in ¶6) by saying that that book "was *also* written *long after* the time of Joshua..." (my emphasis; nothing corresponds to *also* in the Latin).

Again, Hobbes grants that although Moses did not "compile those books entirely, and in the form we have them," he was, nevertheless, the author of everything he is said in Scripture to have written. This is a reference to Deuteronomy 31:9, where Moses is said to have written the law, which he gave to the priests and elders, to be read in its entirety to all the people of Israel every seven years. Here Hobbes identifies this "Volume of the Law" with chapters 11-27 of Deuteronomy[77] and contends that it is the same law "which having been lost, was long time after[78] found again by [the high priest] Hilkiah, and sent to King Josias, who causing it to be read to the people, renewed the covenant between God and them." (¶5, 418, not in Latin)

In identifying the book Hilkiah found with Deuteronomy, or some part of it, Hobbes is embracing a tradition which goes back to Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Jerome in the 4th Century A.D., and seems to be generally accepted now, though contemporary biblical scholars would not identify any portion of Deuteronomy with a work written by Moses himself, since he died in the mid-13th Century B.C., whereas the current scholarly consensus dates the earliest part of Deuteronomy to the 7th Century B.C., i.e., to the period when it was purportedly found by Hilkiah and used by Josiah in his program of religious reform. If Hobbes has doubts about the authenticity of this discovery, he does not mention them. He cites 2 Kings 22:8, 23:1-3 as his source for the story of the discovery, but does not note that 2 Chronicles 34 has a different account of the relationship of the finding of the book to Josiah's reform. Ac-cording to Kings, the reform began when Hilkiah brought Josiah the newly discovered book of the law. According to Chronicles, the reform started six years before the discovery of the book, i.e., the book, instead of generating a reform

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[76] This concession appears only in the English version.

[77] The Latin is clearer than the English about just what chapters Hobbes is referring to. The English leaves some doubt as to whether ch. 27 is included. The selection of just these chapters of Deuteronomy as the "Volume of the Law" (Hobbes' expression) referred to in Deuteronomy 31:9 seems highly arbitrary, since it makes the Volume of the Law begin in the middle of what Deuteronomy reports as a continuous speech, beginning in 5:1. Modern scholarship treats chs. 5-26 and 28 as a unit, with ch. 27, which interrupts the direct address of Moses with a third person narrative, regarded as a misplaced editorial supplement. See *The Interpreter's Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon P, 1981, II, 314-318. When Hobbes returns to this topic in L xlii, 39, 548, he identifies Moses' writing with Deuteronomy 12-26.

[78] In L xxxiii Hobbes is no more precise than that about how long the Volume of the Law was lost. When he returns to this topic in L xlii, 40, 548-49, he conjectures (on the basis of 1 Kings 14:26) that it was lost in the time of Rehoboam, which would imply that it was lost for about three centuries before its discovery by Hilkiah.

movement, served the purposes of a reform movement already under way. Though Hobbes makes no claims to Hebrew scholarship, in general he seems to have a pretty good knowledge of Scripture; so I presume he was aware of this inconsistency and chose not to mention it. Later (¶20, 423) he will discuss the possibility that our text of Scripture may have been corrupted by pious fraud, but he does not raise that possibility here. Still later (xlii, 39, 548), he will ascribe to Josiah the authoritative determination that the Volume of the Law was the work of Moses. He will also contend that this book was lost again in the time of the captivity and not recovered again until after the captivity, by Ezra, this mainly on the basis of a passage in the apocryphal 2 Esdras (14:21).

Hobbes is bold in denying a belief about the authorship of the Pentateuch nearly universally held by his contemporaries. He is bold in suggesting that the bulk of the Pentateuch, at least, was written much later than the events it describes, by an unknown author relying in part on earlier histories, now lost, as the one part of the Pentateuch which on his view does go back to Moses was nearly lost more than once. These things matter because of what they suggest about the fragility of our links with the one prophet who, according to Deuteronomy 34:10, spoke with God face to face.[79]

But Spinoza is much bolder. For one thing, he is more emphatic in his rejection of the usual view, characterizing it as a prejudice (118/16, 22), which is not only without foundation, but completely contrary to reason (124/4-5). Perhaps he is emboldened to speak with more force because he has a wider range of evidence at his disposal. At any rate, his rejection of the Mosaic authorship (118/16-122/8) cites many more texts (nearly two dozen, as compared with Hobbes' three), and cites evidence of a different kind than Hobbes' does: not only does he point out many passages which suggest an author writing about a time in the remote past, he also calls attention to the frequency with which the author of the Pentateuch refers to Moses in the third person. Some of the things the author says about Moses it would be hard to imagine Moses saying about himself, even if he were given, like Caesar, to describing his own actions as if they were those of someone else: e.g., we read in Numbers 12:3 that Moses was the humblest of all men. Presumably if this statement is true, it is precisely the kind of thing Moses would not say of himself. In any case, as Spinoza points out, the Pentateuch does not always describe the actions of Moses in the third person. Sometimes (e.g., Deuteronomy 2:1, 17; 9:6) it presents Moses as describing his own actions in the first person.

Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza is unequivocal about the length of time which passed between the death of Moses and the writing of the Pentateuch: it could only have been written by someone who lived many generations later (*multis post saeculis*- 121/24). Like Hobbes, he will grant that some portions of the Pentateuch may go back to Moses, but he

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[79] Cf. Pocock (pp. 165-66): "This system of authority constituted by faith differs from the system of authority constituted in the erection of the civil sovereign in that historicity is of its essence; it rests upon the transmission of words through time, words which constantly reiterate statements about previous utterances of the same words; and the individual believer becomes involved in this history as he validates and perpetuates it through faith." Similarly, on p. 184.

thinks they constitute only a very small part of the work. He takes Exodus 24:4,7 to establish that Moses wrote a book called the Book of the Covenant (122/17ff), but he argues that this book contains "only a few things," viz. the laws recorded in Exodus from 20:22 through the end of ch. 23. The Book of the Law of God referred to in Deuteronomy 31:9, which he takes to be a more comprehensive and authoritative document (122/31-123/35), he claims has perished (123/7), as had other works he ascribes to Moses, such as the Book of the Wars of God (122/11-17). He does grant that the author of the Pentateuch may have made some use of the Book of the Law of God, inserting it in an orderly way in his own work (123/19-20).

If Spinoza's treatment of these matters is both more thorough and more forceful, perhaps that is because he is the heir of a long tradition of Jewish scholarship which had probed the text of the Old Testament in great detail. In our time scholars have said much about the influence of Isaac La Peyrère on Spinoza,[80] but to judge by the internal evidence of the TTP itself, a more important influence on Spinoza seems to have been Ibn Ezra, a 12th Century Jewish scholar whom Spinoza speaks of frequently and with great respect. He was, Spinoza says, "a man who possessed an independent mind and no slight learning," "the first of all those whom I have read to take note of the prejudice" that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, a man who "did not dare to explain his thought openly, but dared only to indicate the problem in rather obscure terms." (118/20-24) For our purposes, it is particularly interesting that Spinoza reads Ibn Ezra in a Straussian fashion, as someone who saw the falsity of the common beliefs of his time, but dared to attack them only through veiled hints which would be understood by only some of his readers. Spinoza begins his discussion of the authorship of the Pentateuch (TTP viii) with an extended elaboration of various cryptic remarks in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Deuteronomy.

Hobbes' and Spinoza's denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is the best known of their heresies, but their critique of the authority of Scripture extends far beyond that issue. Immediately after dealing with the Pentateuch, each embarks on a systematic discussion of the other books of the Old Testament and of the evidence, in each case, that the books were written later, usually much later, than the events they describe. It would be tedious to follow them in detail through this process, since the evidence tends to be of the same kind, tell-tale phrases which indicate the distance in time between the author and the historical events, and the conclusion they reach on the basis of this evidence would not now be controversial. But some features of this discussion are worth our attention.

Both our authors, for example, devote special attention to the book of Job. Hobbes (L xxxiii, 12) is primarily concerned to argue two things: first, that although Job himself

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[80] Notably Popkin, *op. cit.* and in the *History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, chh. 11-12. Popkin acknowledges that Spinoza's teacher, Menasseh ben Israel, published a work in 1632, *The Conciliator*, which dealt extensively with various prima facie contradictory passages in Scripture and attempted to reconcile them in ways which would not cast doubt on the Bible itself. So it seems fair to infer that Spinoza had been exposed to this sort of controversy long before he ever heard of La Peyrère, whose work was only published the year before Spinoza was expelled from the Synagogue.

appears to have been an historical figure,[81] the book which bears his name is not an historical book, but a philosophical treatise on the problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the good; and second, that its character is indicated by its literary style, i.e., by the fact that the core of the book is conducted in verse, with a preface and an epilogue in prose. "Verse is no usual style of such as either are themselves in great pain, as Job, or of such as come to comfort them, as his friends; but in philosophy, especially moral philosophy, in ancient time frequent." Hobbes seems to take the prose portions of Job to be a later addition,[82] reversing the judgment some modern scholars would make: that the poet of the central portions was elaborating in his own fashion on a tale which had been handed down in the oral or written tradition.[83]

Hobbes does not use this occasion to deal with any of the philosophical issues raised by this book. But he had dealt earlier (xxxi, 6, 398) with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the good, a difficulty, he had noted, which "hath shaken the faith, not only of the vulgar, but also of philosophers, and which is more, of the saints, concerning divine providence." There he had appealed to the book of Job in support of his view that the innocence of the good is irrelevant to their suffering, that God's irresistible power justifies whatever he might do to his creatures. Here he does not ask whether this very plausible reading of the poetic portions of Job is consistent with the theology of the prose portions, or indeed, whether it is suitable for reassuring believers about God's providence, nor does he call attention (as he will do later)[84] to Job's commitment (in chapter 14) to man's mortality, though he might have used this to show the lack of Old Testament support for one popular solution to the problem of evil.

Spinoza is less cautious. He begins (144/10) by noting the controversies which have existed about this book: some have thought that Moses wrote it and that the whole story is only a parable; others have thought that Job was an historical character; of the latter some have thought Job was a Jew, others that he was a gentile, and that this account of his life was

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[81] A supposition for which Hobbes apparently thinks he has sufficient evidence in Ezekiel 14:14 and James 5:11.

[82] But only in the English version; the Latin does not imply this.

[83] Cf. *The Interpreter's Bible* III, 888, pointing out the advantages of separating the prose narrative from the verse: "the theological message of the poet is free from the implications of the tale, such as divine pride in man's integrity or the idea of a God who allows human suffering for the purpose of winning a heavenly wager; and more particularly, it does not make the poet responsible for the fabulous ending with its double portion of sheep, camels, oxen and she-asses." See also Marvin Pope, *Job*, Anchor, 1965, esp. pp. xxi-xxviii. There are, however, some who would defend the unity of the work (e.g., Gerald Janzen, in the *Harper Bible Dictionary*, pp. 492-94).

[84] L xxxviii, 4, 483. Hobbes does not represent Job as denying immortality altogether, nor does he himself adopt that position. His position is that, though man's soul is not "in its own nature" eternal, as it might be if it were immaterial, man can hope for immortality through the resurrection of the body at the last judgment. The interpretation by which he finds evidence for that view in Job seems very dubious.

translated into Hebrew from another language. This last is the opinion of Ibn Ezra, which Spinoza himself favors, though he wishes Ibn Ezra had shown it with greater clarity, for then "we could infer that even the gentiles had sacred books." (144/19-20) But though Spinoza professes to leave the matter in doubt, he goes on to provide reasons for accepting Ibn Ezra's opinion: he conjectures that Job was a gentile, and a man of great strength of character, whose fortunes were first very favorable, then very unfavorable, and finally, very favorable again. Job's story prompted many people to reflect on God's providence, among them the author of the dialogue which is the core of the book.

Here Spinoza agrees with Hobbes that the style (at least of the poetic parts of the book) is not that of one suffering wretchedly in the ashes, but that of one meditating peacefully in his study. But in supporting Ibn Ezra, he goes further than Hobbes had, pointing out that the style of the poetry is gentile in character: "the father of the gods twice calls a council and Momus [i.e., the evil spirit of blame and mockery in Greek mythology], here called Satan, criticises what God says with the greatest freedom, etc." (144/30-32) Having introduced what must have seemed to him a dangerous idea, Spinoza then backs off: "But these are only conjectures, and are not sufficiently solid. I pass to the book of Daniel..." Nevertheless, he has made his point: the theology of the narrative, at least in its prose portion, is polytheistic and foreign to the later Hebrew tradition.[85] It is paradoxical that such a work should have been accepted into the canon, but it is also very suggestive about the judgment of the people who made these decisions.

Spinoza does not question that judgment here, but he has already done so earlier, in quite forceful terms. Commenting on the two books of Chronicles, that he makes no decision about their author, authority, utility and doctrine, he nevertheless adds:

> I cannot sufficiently wonder why these books have been received among the sacred by those who deleted from the canon the books of Wisdom, Tobit, and the others which are called apocrypha. Still, it is not my intention to lessen their authority, but since everyone has accepted them, I too leave them as they are. (141/26-30)

In spite of this disclaimer, however, by the time he has reached the next page, he is at it again. Noting that the Proverbs of Solomon were collected at the same time as the Psalms were (i.e., in the post-exilic period), or at the earliest, in the time of King Josiah, Spinoza observes that he

> cannot pass over in silence the audacity of those Rabbis who wanted to exclude this book, along with Ecclesiastes, from the canon of the sacred books, and to keep it under guard, with others which we are now lacking. And they would simply have done this,

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[85] The idea that Job shows the influence of gentile religious and philosophical traditions is still current (see *The Interpreter's Bible*, III, 878-84; Anchor *Job*, pp. xxxiv-xxxvii, l-lxvi), though the annotation of this passage in Benedetto Spinoza, *Trattato teologico-politico*, trad. e comm. di Antonio Droetto ed Emilia Giancotti Boscherini, Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1984, would suggest that it is not universally accepted. I speak of polytheism as being foreign to the later Hebrew tradition because of the doubts Spinoza raises about the earlier tradition in TTP ii (cf. 37/31-33; and 38/21-39/26).

> if they had not found certain passages where the law of Moses is commended. It is, indeed, deplorable that sacred matters, matters of such great importance, depended on the choice of these men. Still, I am grateful to them for being willing to share even these books with us, though I cannot help wondering whether they have handed them down to us in good faith. But I do not want to subject this matter to a strict examination, so I pass on to the books of the prophets... (142/6-15)

Spinoza can pull his punches too, as he does here by raising an issue and then failing to pursue it. I suspect he also tried to lessen the possible offense of this passage somewhat, for members of his predominantly Christian audience, by limiting his criticism to certain unnamed rabbis.[86] But this is still pretty strong language. Those who established the canon included books there is no good reason to have included, excluded books which deserved inclusion or whose merits we cannot judge because they have not come down to us, came close to excluding others which deserved inclusion, and may have corrupted the texts of the ones they grudgingly handed down.

Hobbes will not go nearly so far as that in raising doubts about the selection of the canon, but what he does say illustrates very nicely the strategy of suggestion by disavowal. He points out (L xxxiii, 20, 423) that the first collection of the books of both the Old and the New Testaments was *supposed* to have been made by Clement, Peter's successor as bishop of Rome. But Hobbes stresses that we don't actually *know* that Clement made this collection-"by many questioned"- and that the first collection we do know about was made by the Council of Laodicea, some three hundred years after the time at which we might presume Clement to have been active.[87] By this time

> though ambition had so far prevailed on the great doctors of the Church, as no more to esteem emperors, though Christian, for the shepherds of the people, but for sheep, and emperors not Christian, for wolves, and endeavored to pass their doctrine, not for counsel **and information, as preachers**, but for laws, **as absolute governors**, and

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[86] Another instance of this, perhaps, occurs in 134/25 where, commenting on the attempts of the commentators to reconcile the inconsistent chronologies in the historical works, Spinoza writes: "Rabini namque plane delirant"- "For the rabbis are completely mad," as I would translate it.

I take it that Spinoza is also displaying deference to Christian sensibilities when he excuses himself from examining the books of the New Testament in the same way as he has the Old, on the grounds that he lacks the linguistic skills and that he has heard a report (*audio*) that the job has already been done by men more competent than he is. Cf. 150/30-33. Hobbes, too, is much less critical of the New Testament than the Old (xxxiii, 20, 422), denying that there is any substantial temporal gap between the writing and the events related, and focussing instead on the issue of the collection of the works of Jesus' disciples into a canon.

[87] 64 A.D. being the traditional date of Peter's death. I might note that the Latin L is considerably less skeptical about Clement's role than the English at this point (cf. OL III, 276). Later (L xlii, 48, 554), in a passage which *is* paralleled in the Latin (OL III, 385), Hobbes will give reasons for questioning the traditional account of Clement's collection, suggesting that the record may have been falsified.

> thought such frauds as tended to make the people the more obedient to Christian doctrine, to be pious,[88] yet I am persuaded they did not therefore falsify the Scriptures, though the copies of the books of the New Testament were in the hands only of the ecclesiastics,[89] because if they had had an intention so to do, they would surely have made them more favorable to their power over Christian princes, and civil sovereignty, than they are.[90] I see not therefore any reason to doubt,[91] but that the Old and the New Testament, as we have them now, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles [OL: and the other writers[92] of Sacred Scripture]. (¶20, 423-24; phrases in bold not in Latin)

I have seen the last sentence of this passage quoted separately from the surrounding context, in support of the judgment that although Hobbes

> displayed a certain degree of independence [on literary and historical matters] when he expressed skepticism over the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in its present form... on the whole he was traditionally conservative. (Samuel Terrien, *Interpreter's Bible*, I, 129)

But before we are reassured by Hobbes' disavowal of the conclusions one might naturally draw from what he has previously said, we need to ask whether he has given us a sufficient reason for not drawing them.

Hobbes has been arguing, not merely that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, but also that each of the books of the Bible was written some time after the events it described, usually long afterward, and often by writers who depended on other sources now lost to us, that some of the most important of the surviving books of the Old Testament were at various times lost and rediscovered by priests, long after their original composition, that the priests who had the books of the New Testament under their control would have had no scruples about altering the text, and that they had the opportunity to do so. Are we really to conclude that they did not do so merely because we find things in the scriptures not congenial to their power? Is deliberate alteration of the text the only way error could have crept in? Might not the descriptions of miracles, for example, have given a misleading account of what happened because the reporters did not understand the natural causes of those events? Would the conclusion that the New Testament is a true register of the deeds and sayings of Jesus and the apostles really be consistent with the assumption earlier in the passage that the priests who had control over the text believed fraud to be pious if it made people more obedient to Christian doctrine? Why ascribe such a belief to them if there is no reason to believe that sometimes they acted on it? Suppose the priests who gathered the books of the New Testament into a canon did not falsify the texts that were

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88 OL III, 276, has simply: "and began to think of pious frauds."

89 OL: "yet I am not led to believe that they corrupted the copies of the New Testament, which at that time existed almost entirely in their hands."

90 OL: "they would have made them more favorable to many of their doctrines."

91 OL: "There is indeed no doubt..."

92 The Latin here, *scriptor*, is ambiguous between an author and a scribe or copyist.

handed down to them. Is that a sufficient guarantee of the integrity of the text of *both* the Old and the New Testament?

Hobbes concludes his discussion of the authority of Scripture (L xxxiii, 21, 425) by noting that while everyone- or at least every true Christian- believes Scripture to be the word of God, no one can *know* this except "those to whom God himself hath revealed it supernaturally." If it should be asked why those of us who are not the beneficiaries of a special revelation do nevertheless *believe* it, Hobbes' answer may be disappointing to those who have the belief, yet seek reasons for it: some are moved by one reason, others by another; there is no general answer.[93] The question we should be asking is: "By whose authority are the Scriptures made law?" And Hobbes' answer to this will come as no surprise to those who are familiar with his political philosophy proper. It is the civil sovereign who must decide for us that Scripture is, or which Scriptures are, the word of God. For all the doubts Hobbes may have raised about the accuracy of the text his political community accepted, he submits himself to the authority of its rulers in deciding what God's revelation to man actually consisted in.

Spinoza concludes his discussion of the authority of Scripture by acknowledging quite frankly that he has written things which to many will seem blasphemous:

> Those who consider the Bible, just as it is, to be like a letter God has sent down from heaven to man, will no doubt cry out that I have committed a sin against the Holy Ghost, in that I have maintained that the word of God is full of faults, mutilated, corrupted, and inconsistent, that we have only fragments of it, and that the written text of the covenant God entered into with the Jews has perished. (158/21-27)

This conclusion is certainly much bolder than the conservative one which is Hobbes' official position. After stating it, Spinoza goes on to argue that the critics should not have this reaction. He has not claimed that Scripture is everywhere faulty and falsified, or that it should have no authority. (159/27-31) Insofar as it deals with the things which are truly necessary for salvation, i.e., with the divine law, it could not have been corrupted. (160/7-8) But Spinoza's conception of what is necessary for salvation is minimal,[94] compared to that of many of the religious of his day: the heart of the divine law is that we should love God above all else and our neighbors as ourselves. (165/11-13)

I close this section by calling attention to the reaction to the TTP of one of Spinoza's other great contemporaries. Leibniz was most distressed by Spinoza's work, which he saw as posing a serious threat to Christianity, and as a development of seeds Hobbes had sown in *Leviathan*. The following is an excerpt from a letter to his former teacher, Jacob Thomasius:

> I have recently seen a pamphlet from Leipzig, doubtless yours, in which you treated according to its deserts an intolerably unrestrained [*intolerabiliter licentiosum*] book

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[93] Elsewhere (L vii, 7, 133; xliii, 8, 614) Hobbes suggests that there is a general answer: that we trust our teachers, i.e., the members of the clergy. But this is very hard to square with the anticlericalism Aubrey reports, and which we have seen manifested throughout L.

[94] Hobbes shows a similar minimalist tendency (in L xliii and elsewhere) requiring basically obedience to the civil law and faith that Jesus is the Christ.

> on the liberty of philosophizing [i.e., Spinoza's TTP]. The author seems to follow not only Hobbes' politics, but also his religion, which he has outlined so adequately in his *Leviathan*, a work monstrous even in what its title suggests. For Hobbes, in a whole chapter of *Leviathan*, has also sown the seeds of that very smart [*bellissima*] critique which this bold man [*homo audax*] carries out against sacred scripture.[95]

It's striking, for our purposes, that, with all the similarities there are between Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Spinoza's TTP, Leibniz should focus particularly on Hobbes' discussion "Of the Number, Antiquity, Scope, Authority, and Interpreters of the Books of Holy Scripture" as sewing the seeds of Spinoza's bolder biblical criticism.

7.

Why does Leibniz think the title of Hobbes' work is monstrous in what it suggests? The Biblical Leviathan appears to be a mythological sea monster whose power is greater than that of anything else on earth, "king over all the sons of pride," a Promethean rebel against God, whom God, in his omnipotence, crushes as easily as he might a plaything.[96] Hobbes is clearly aware of this symbolism, since he alludes to it in L xxviii, 27, 362. Perhaps his choice of a title for his work signifies his own rebellion against the Biblical God. [97] But, it may be said, even if your argument up to this point is correct, even if the thrust and intent of L is to undermine the God of revelation, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, may it not still be the case that Hobbes believes in the God of the philosophers? Perhaps Hobbes, if not quite a sincere Christian, is nevertheless a Deist. He does, after all, regularly present arguments for the existence of God, and sometimes he suggests that these arguments may be demonstrative. Is there a compelling reason not to regard those professions of belief as perfectly sincere?

Given the temper of recent English-language discussions of Hobbes' religious views, I would consider a concession such as I have just described a major accomplishment. But perhaps we can justify a conclusion more favorable to Strauss' reading of Hobbes, i.e., perhaps we can justify agreeing with the later rather than the earlier Strauss. Is Hobbes an atheist after all?

Hobbes' earliest argument for the existence of God comes in the *Elements of Law*, a work written in 1640 and circulated privately at that time, though not formally published until 1650, apparently without Hobbes' participation, from one of the privately circulating copies. There (I, xi, 2) Hobbes offers us a form of the causal argument, like the one we find

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[95] Leibniz writes in the very year in which the TTP appeared (23 September 1670, Akademie edition, II, i, 66) and he does not yet know Spinoza's identity. I discuss Leibniz's reaction to the TTP in detail in "*Homo Audax*: Leibniz, Oldenburg and the TTP," forthcoming in *Studia Leibnitiana*.

[96] See Jeremiah Unterman's entry on "Leviathan," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, relying principally on Ps. 74:13-14, Job 3:8, 26:5-13, 41:1-34, and Isaiah 26:20-21:13.

[97] I owe this nice suggestion to Al Martinich, who makes it in personal correspondence regarding an earlier draft of this paper, but who nevertheless disagrees radically with my reading of *Leviathan*.

in L xi-xii. The things we take to be the effects of natural causes always presuppose the prior existence of some thing possessing the power to produce them. If that thing is not itself eternal, it must in turn be caused by something before it, and so on, until we come to an eternal cause, "the first power of all powers, and first cause of all causes... which all men call by the name of God." But though we can know by natural reason *that* God is, we cannot know *what* he is. When we say something presumptively about God's nature, e.g., that he is incomprehensible, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, just, etc., we are really saying something about ourselves, either that we are incapable of grasping his nature or that we wish to honor him as much as possible. As we have seen in §3, Hobbes takes essentially the same line in 1651 (L xi, 25, 167; xii, 6-7, 169-71; xxxi, 14-28, 401-403), though the first of these passages contains a brief suggestion of the argument from design, the significance of which has been debated by the commentators.[98]

In the first major philosophical work Hobbes published, *De cive* (1642) he offers no arguments for the existence of God, but does, in a number of places (ii, 21; xiv, 19; xv, 14), proclaim that man can know God's existence by natural reason, presumably by the causal argument (cf. DCv xv, 14, which defines "God," nominally, as the cause of the world). He also repeats his earlier position about our knowledge of God's nature. In a note added to the second edition (1647, xiv, 19), he disavows the claim that *all* men are capable of knowing the existence of God by natural reason, comparing this bit of natural knowledge with Archimedes' knowledge of the proportion a circle bears to a square. Those who cannot or will not take pains to reason correctly cannot know this. The comparison suggests that Hobbes may regard knowledge of God as demonstrative, but this is the only passage I know which does.

Hepburn, though he concludes in the end that Hobbes is sincere in his professions of theism, finds his use of the causal argument "not well presented or well defended," noting that Hobbes fails to invoke the standard Thomistic distinction between an infinite regress of causes in time (which Thomas would concede not to be impossible) and an infinite regress of causes operating at the same time (which *is* supposed to be impossible). I agree that the arguments are not well presented. Hepburn also questions the significance of a theism which insists on God's existence, while denying that we can know *anything* of God's nature. But since this is quite a traditional view (cf. Geach 151, Glover 159), I would not insist on that difficulty here.[99]

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[98] K.C. Brown used it, along with two passages from later works (DH i, 4; *Decameron physiologicum* x, EW VII, 176-77), to argue that Hobbes did not sharply distinguish the causal argument from the teleological argument, and made this a key element in his defense of the sincerity of Hobbes' professions of theism. In reply, Hepburn argued persuasively that Brown had exaggerated the importance of teleological considerations in Hobbes. Hepburn might also have cited L xxxi, 13, 401, according to which God has no ends (cf. the Spinozistic DCv xv, 14).

[99] I cannot, however, recall commentators noting the following difficulty. In EL I, xi, 11, Hobbes defines love as being delighted in the image or conception of the thing loved. Since Hobbes holds that we can have no image or conception of God, he is obliged to give the notion of love of God a

The problem which seems to me truly important is to know what we are to make of those passages in which Hobbes denies that we can know God's existence by natural reason. Hepburn considers this primarily in connection with DCr xxvi, 1, asking whether Hobbes has not there completely undermined his use of the causal argument. But there are other troublesome passages in DCr and others still more troublesome in another work whose existence was not generally known when Hepburn wrote.

Consider DCr i, 8, where Hobbes defines philosophy, which he had earlier identified with natural reason (DCr i, 1), as the study of every body which can be generated or which can be understood to have some property. Hobbes is quite explicit that philosophy excludes theology, understood as a doctrine concerning the nature and attributes of God, who is eternal, incapable of generation, and incomprehensible. So far this may seem compatible with earlier works, insofar as it does not explicitly exclude from philosophy knowledge of the existence of God, only knowledge of his nature. But it is hard to see why the exclusion of theology from philosophy should not be extended to the question of God's existence. If the only things natural reason can deal with are those which can be generated or have some property we can understand, then natural reason can no more deal with God's existence than it can with his essence.

Again, in DCr viii, 20, Hobbes argues that we must not understand the generation of a body as involving the body's coming to be out of something which is not a body, or the destruction of a body as involving something which is not a body coming to be from something which is:

> Even if we can hypothesize that a point grows into a huge mass, which again contracts itself into a point, this is to imagine that something is made from nothing and nothing from something. But the mind cannot grasp how this can happen in nature. Philosophers, therefore, who are not permitted to depart from natural reason [EW: who tie themselves to natural reason], suppose that a body cannot be generated or perish, but only appear to us differently at different times... (OL I, 103)

If natural reason must suppose that in the final analysis bodies are neither generated or destroyed, then it seems that the position of natural reason is that the physical world is eternal.

In these two earlier passages from DCr Hobbes seems to set himself inexorably on the path to a fideism which is made explicit in DCr xxvi, 1. There he argues that *if* the world had a beginning, this would raise questions about what cause made it and what matter it was made from; and new questions would arise about that cause and that matter, until at last one arrived at some eternal cause, whether one or many. And *if* we could know as much as we could ask, then those who claim to comprehend the whole of philosophy would have to determine all these things. But in fact, a finite inquirer cannot know the infinite. If a person sets out to trace the causes of causes, she will not be able to proceed to eternity, but must, at some point, stop, not because she knows she can go no further, but simply because she is

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somewhat odd interpretation: "to love God therefore, in the Scripture, is to obey his commandments and to love one another." Cf. DH xiv, 2, where a similar conclusion is reached on different grounds.

exhausted. So questions about the magnitude and origin of the world are not to be determined by philosophers, but by those to whom God, through the civil authorities, has entrusted the regulation of his worship, i.e., the authorized ministers of religion:

> So I purposely pass over questions concerning the infinite and eternal, content with that doctrine concerning the magnitude and origin of the world which holy Scriptures have urged [EW: which I have been persuaded to by the holy Scriptures], and the fame of the miracles which confirms them, and the custom of my country, and the respect owed to the laws. I proceed to other things which it is not wrong to debate. (OL I, 337)

In the end rational theology fails and, to the extent that our religious belief is not conformity to custom and law, we must depend on revelation, confirmed by famous miracles- as if the credibility of the Judaeo-Christian prophets depended on their having better press agents than those of other faiths.

It may be objected that DCr xxvi, 1, challenges only the belief that the world had a beginning in time, and not the belief that the world depends on God as a first cause in the order of simultaneous causes. And it is a perfectly orthodox opinion, endorsed by no less an authority than Aquinas, that natural reason cannot prove that the world had a beginning in time, though it can prove that God is a first cause. But this is to impute to Hobbes a distinction which, as Hepburn observed, he nowhere deploys. Moreover, his rejection here of infinite regress arguments seems to apply to any kind of appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress, and not merely to temporal regresses: however we break off the regress, it will be because of fatigue, not because we know we can go no further.

The passage in question is one Wallis found offensive, charging Hobbes with implicit atheism for holding the following views:

> 1. that besides the creation of the world, there is no argument to prove a deity;
> 2. that it cannot be evinced by any argument that the world had a beginning; and,
> 3. that whether it had or no, is to be decided by the magistrate's authority. (EW IV, 427)

The problem, I take it, is this: on Wallis' reading of Hobbes, if we can't prove by natural reason that the world had a beginning, we can't prove by natural reason that God exists (in virtue of 1); but we can't prove by natural reason that the world had a beginning (by 2); therefore, we can't prove by natural reason that God exists. That, of course, is hardly atheism, since it is compatible with fideism, the view that belief in God is a matter of faith, not reason.

When Hobbes replies to Wallis (in his posthumously published *Considerations upon the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of Thomas Hobbes*), he does not invoke the Thomistic distinction between a first cause in time and a first cause in the series of simultaneous causes. Even those disposed to regard Hobbes as a sincere theist have found his response to this objection very curious, surprisingly "casual" for someone who is "normally an efficient enough controversialist." (K. C. Brown, p. 344). I think they haven't properly analyzed its strangeness. Speaking of himself in the third person, Hobbes writes:

> That *it* may be decided by the Scriptures, he never denied; therefore in that also you slander him. And as for arguments from natural reason, neither you, nor any other, have hitherto brought any, except the creation, that has not made *it* more doubtful to many men that it was before. (EW IV, 427-28, my emphasis)

Then he quotes from DCr xxvi, 1 - or rather paraphrases, omitting, for example, the reference to the fame of the miracles- commenting at the end that what he had said there was not "ill said," and repeating the claim that Wallis is slandering him.

The references of the pronouns I've emphasized in this quote are not immediately obvious, though a little thought seems enough to work them out. Presumably the first "it" refers to the creation of the world. That fits the context of DCr xxvi, 1, and in any case, it would hardly do to let the existence of God be decided by Scripture, since our ground for believing in Scripture is that it is the word of God. Presumably the second "it" refers to the existence of God, not the creation, since Hobbes allows that the creation is a good argument for *it*, indeed, the only good argument for it. But if that's right, then Hobbes' second sentence explicitly concedes Wallis' first point. And if Wallis, in his second point, means by "argument," an argument from natural reason, Hobbes' first sentence seems to concede that point also. Since Wallis needs only his first two points to drive Hobbes into a skeptical view of what natural reason can know about the existence of God, his commitment to fideism seems complete, in spite of a superficial suggestion that the causal argument might give natural reason grounds for belief in God.

Now someone might say "this is no reason to accuse Hobbes of atheism; he is not undermining his earlier arguments; he simply changed his mind; in his earlier works (EL, DCv, L) he believed that natural reason could demonstrate the existence of God; in his later works (DCr, "Considerations") he became skeptical of the soundness of that argument and shifted to a fideistic form of theism; but fideism is a position many Christians have held quite sincerely; there is no reason to suppose that Hobbes is not perfectly sincere when he proclaims himself a Christian, whether because of arguments from natural theology or on faith."

To this objection I have two replies: 1) in effect, the objection withdraws the concession I imagined to have been made at the beginning of this section; someone can say this only if he does not find the main argument of this paper convincing, only if he still thinks, in spite of everything, that Hobbes believed in scripture as a revelation from God; 2) the objection assumes a simple developmental picture undermined by the recent discovery of a previously unpublished Hobbesian work, *Thomas White's **De Mundo** Examined*, a work which has not yet been much discussed by English-language writers on Hobbes.[100]

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[100] This work was first published in 1972, by Jean Jacquot and Harold Whitmore Jones (eds.), under the title *Thomas Hobbes: Critique du **De Mundo** de Thomas White* (Paris: Vrin and CNRS), from a ms. discovered in the Bibliothèque nationale, and then in 1976, in an English translation by Jones, under the title given in the text, by Bradford UP, London. The only work I know which discusses its bearing on the themes of this paper is the article by Pacchi cited in n.4.

It may also count against the simple developmental view assumed in the objection that

There seems to be no doubt that this work is by Hobbes and no doubt about the period from which it dates: late 1642 to early 1643. (See Jones, pp. 2-5.) What's most interesting about the *AntiWhite* (as people are coming to call this work for short) is that it adopts a very strongly fideistic position. White had claimed to demonstrate the existence of God in the Scholastic-Aristotelian manner, positing God as a necessary first cause to explain the existence of motion in the world. Hobbes rejects this as unphilosophical and anti-Christian. According to him, the possibility of demonstrating a truth depends on the possibility of defining the terms in such a way that the meaning of the predicate includes that of the subject, as the meaning of "animal" includes the meaning of "man." This entails that all demonstrable truth must be hypothetical, and excludes the possibility of demonstrating God's existence. Nor can we define "body" in such a way as to show that bodies are created or "the incorporeal" in such a way as to show that it has existed forever. (xxvi, 2) In a remark highly reminiscent of the reply to Wallis, he contends that those who have claimed to demonstrate the existence of God, the creation of the world, or the immortality of the soul

> have only led weak men (such is the nature of the masses) to consider these things false, because the people who wished them to be true could not show that they were. (xxvi, 5)

He offers this as a reason why rulers should not permit their subjects to debate any article of faith. To do so would be to endanger the belief of "countless other Christians."

Not only does Christianity require belief in things which cannot be proven, but those who follow their natural reason where it leads will be led away from Christianity:

> The philosopher is indeed free to enquire into the nature and cause of motion, but... as the investigation proceeds he will stumble upon a proposition that is now held by the Christian faith and that seems to contradict a conclusion he has established earlier. (xxvi, 7)

Of course, the contradiction is only apparent. The philosopher's proper conclusion is that he has not understood the doctrines of Christianity. Similarly,

> almost inevitably, those who subject to their own metaphysical speculations divine matters beyond our understanding come at every step in conflict with the Christian faith. (xxviii, 3)

The fideism of the *AntiWhite* approaches that of Tertullian. Not *credo quia absurdum est*, but *credo quamvis absurdum videatur*.

What are we to make of this? In the same year he was writing the *AntiWhite* Hobbes had published DCv, with its claim that we can know the existence of God by natural reason (and its absence of any argument to support that claim). A few years later he would repeat that claim (and that absence) when he published the second edition of DCv. A few years earlier he had actually presented (but not published) a causal argument for God's existence in EL. He would repeat that argument some years later in L, this time for publication. Is the *AntiWhite* a temporary aberration from these ventures into natural theology, to which

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Hobbes seems to let natural theology back in, in DH xiv, 3.

Hobbes for some reason returned in DCr and "Considerations"?

I think not. I suggest that the *AntiWhite* is rather an experiment[101] with a certain kind of position, an attempt to work out what sort of position on natural religion it would be best for him to take when he decided to discuss those issues in public. I suggest that one reason he did not publish the *AntiWhite* is that he was not really comfortable with that position. It is contrary to a deeply rooted attitude toward reason, exemplified in the famous remark that men set themselves against reason, as often as reason is against them (L xi, 21, 166; EL I, Ep Ded). The strong fideism of the *AntiWhite* also has tactical disadvantages. It brings him dangerously close to the doctrine of a double truth. But those who advocate that there is one truth in philosophy and a contradictory truth in theology have always been more than a little suspicious, as Hobbes will acknowledge in L when he argues that men cannot have a revelation of anything against natural reason, and that enjoining a belief in contradictories takes away the reputation of wisdom and is a cause of the decline of religion (xii, 25, 179; cf. DH xiv, 13).

We can see a similar pattern in Hobbes' cautious handling of the delicate question of God's materiality. Hobbes appears to have been a materialist even in his earliest philosophical works, though the work generally thought to be earliest is not explicit on the subject.[102] The unpublished EL (1640) is pretty explicit: a spirit, such as an angel, is simply a natural body so subtle that it does not affect our senses; to talk of a supernatural spirit, understanding by that a non-extended substance, is to contradict yourself; when we say that God is a spirit we are only signifying our reverent desire to "abstract from him all corporeal grossness." (I, xi, 4) This does not say, in so many words, that God is a subtle corporeal substance, but I think it implies that. Hobbes is at pains to point out that, though Scripture acknowledges the existence of spirits, it nowhere says they are incorporeal (I, xi, 5). In a lost letter to Descartes, dating from January 1641, Hobbes appears to have said quite explicitly that both God and the soul are corporeal. (Cf. Brandt, pp. 93, 111, referring to OL V, 278-79.)

Nevertheless, when Hobbes first publishes on this topic, he is very tentative about his materialism. In the *Third Objections* to Descartes' *Meditations*, which Descartes received in the same month as the lost letter, apparently without knowing the identity of the author in either case (AT III, 287, 293), Hobbes writes that, for all Descartes has proven in the Second Meditation,

> it *may* be that the thinking thing is the subject of the mind, reason, or the intellect, and therefore, something corporeal. The contrary of this is assumed, not proven. (AT VII, 173, my emphasis)

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[101] Also experimental, I think, is Hobbes' way of dealing with the problem of evil in the *AntiWhite*. Cf. xxxviii, 2, with Hobbes' treatment of the book of Job in L.

[102] See Frithiof Brandt, *Thomas Hobbes' Mechanical Conception of Nature*, Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1927, pp. 16-17) on Hobbes' doctrine in the so-called *Little Treatise* (i.e., the work Tönnies printed as an appendix to EL, under the title *A Short Tract on First Principles*, and dated as possibly going back to 1630).

Indeed, Hobbes says, it *seems* to follow from the fact that we cannot conceive any act without its subject,

> that the thinking thing *is* something corporeal. For the subjects of all acts *seem* to be understood only as something corporeal or material. (*ibid*., my emphasis)

A bit later Hobbes rejects the notion that we can have an idea of an angel, partly on the ground that an angel is an immaterial substance:

> When someone thinks of an angel, what comes to mind is sometimes the image of a flame, sometimes [the image] of a handsome winged boy; I seem to myself to be certain, regarding this image, that it has no likeness to an angel, and therefore, is not an idea of an angel. But believing [*credens*] that there are certain invisible and immaterial creatures, ministering to God, we give [*imponimus*] the name angel to the thing we believe in or suppose [*rei creditae vel suppositae*], though the idea by which I imagine [*imaginor*] an angel has been composed of the ideas of visible things. (AT VII, 179-80)

This passage is grammatically awkward. *Credens* ought really to be plural (*credentes*), to agree with *imponimus*. Since it isn't, some translators (Anscombe and Geach, Cottingham) have rendered this passage as a clear affirmation of a belief in immaterial substances: *I* believe, Hobbes is made to say, that there are invisible and immaterial creatures. Other translators (Clerselier, Haldane and Ross) render it as I have, with the implication that it is those of us who have given the name "angel" to these creatures who believe them to be immaterial. On this reading, Hobbes does not explicitly subscribe to the belief, though he certainly does not disassociate himself from it.

The *Third Objections* do not pronounce on the question whether God is a material substance, though they rather suggest that he is not. In the passage just cited, Hobbes goes on to say that the case of God is the same as that of angels and that we have no image or idea of God. If I have construed his discussion of angels correctly, we can supply the following argument for this: we could not have an image of God, since images are composed of the ideas of visible things, and God, as an immaterial thing, is not visible. But Hobbes only suggests this reasoning. He does not present it. And nothing he says subsequently in the *Third Objections* directly addresses the issue of God's immateriality.

In the *AntiWhite* Hobbes' fideism supports an admission that there are immaterial substances. We cannot know by natural reason whether or not any substances are incorporeal. Therefore, we must accept what God has revealed supernaturally in Scripture, viz. that there are incorporeal substances. (This is quite contrary to Hobbes' usual insistence that there is no scriptural support for the existence of incorporeal substances.) People who want to discuss this should not do so, since discussion of such difficult matters tends only to weaken the Christian faith, rather than confirm it. "It is natural for many to consider as false what someone tries to prove true, but cannot." (iv, 3, p. 54 in Jones; cf. xxxi, 2, p. 391)

The *Leviathan* certainly suggests that if God exists, he must be material, but, so far as I can discover, Hobbes refrains from saying that explicitly until the Latin L. In the English L Hobbes does say that the expression "incorporeal substance" is self-contradictory

and hence meaningless (iv, 21, 108; cf. xxxiv, 2). In L xii, 7, he gives this as a reason for not defining God as an incorporeal substance. Better simply to confess that God is incomprehensible. But if we do apply this term to God, we should not do so dogmatically, but "piously, to honour him with attributes, of significations, as remote as [we] can from the grossnesse of bodies visible."

In the Latin L Hobbes added three appendices which have no analogues in the English L, each written in the form of a dialogue between two characters, designated only as "A" and "B." In each case it seems fairly clear that B speaks for Hobbes, though when he speaks *about* Hobbes (e.g., in the third dialogue), he does so in the third person. The first dialogue deals with the interpretation of the Nicene Creed, the second with the law on heresy (essentially anticipating the argument of the posthumously published work on heresy in EW IV, 387-408), and the third with "certain objections against *Leviathan*." In these dialogues, which have not received much attention, at least from English language scholars, Hobbes makes explicit for the first time in a published work his doctrine that God is material.

In the first appendix Hobbes acknowledges that, if someone did hold that God was material, that would be contrary to articles definitive of the Anglican faith. Hobbes' interlocutor, A, has been expounding his concepts of body, the incorporeal and spirit. By body he understands something really existing in itself, and having some magnitude. The appearances (*phantasmata*) he might see in a mirror or a dream he would not class as bodies because of their tendency to vanish mysteriously. They are not something independent, but merely the effects of other things on our sense organs. They are incorporeal. Spirits, like the air and the wind, which can be seen or touched, are very subtle bodies. He has not been able to conceive any nature intermediate between a body and a spirit or between a spirit and an appearance. "Therefore, we must inquire whether the terms *incorporeal substance*, or *immaterial substance*, or *separate essences* are found in holy Scripture." To this Hobbes replies:

> B: Those terms are not in holy Scripture. But in the first of the 39 articles of religion, published by the Anglican Church in 1562, it is said expressly that *God is without a body and without parts*. Therefore, it must not be denied. Indeed, the punishment established for those who deny it is excommunication.
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> A: It will not be denied. Nevertheless, in the 20th article it is said that the Church must enjoin nothing as necessary to be believed which cannot be deduced from holy Scripture. But would that it had been deduced! For I do not yet know in what sense something which is not a body can be said to be the greatest or great. (OL III, 537-38)

If A means by his first statement that the incorporeality of God will not be denied in this work, he is a poor prophet. Within 25 pages Hobbes will deny-or more precisely, permit a character in a dialogue to deny on his behalf- that God is without a body.

In the third dialogue, A reproduces various objections to which B replies. Here is the pertinent exchange:

> A. In Chapter 4... he denies that there are any incorporeal substances. What is this but

either to deny that God exists or to affirm that God is a body?

B. Indeed, he affirms that God is a body. But before him, Tertullian affirmed the same thing... (OL III, 561)

And Hobbes goes on to cite, not very exactly, passages from Tertullian to support this claim (*De carne Christi* xi and *Adversus Praxean* vii. See Tricaud's annotation.)

Perhaps because these passages were buried in a Latin translation which not many scholars have read, the best known Hobbesian acknowledgment of God's materiality occurs in the reply to Bramhall, written in the same year the Latin L was published, but not itself published until after Hobbes' death (cf. EW IV, 307, 313). This work was accompanied by Hobbes' essay on the history of the law regarding heresy, in which Hobbes defended the orthodoxy of Tertullian's materialism. No divines say that his position is heretical. (EW IV, 398) But of course in the first appendix to the Latin L he had made it clear that this doctrine was contrary to that of the Church he is supposed to have liked best of all.

I cannot think that Hobbes' caution about openly proclaiming God to be material- a step he first took at the age of 80, in a work published not only in Latin but in a foreign land- reflects any real indecision on his part, any more than I can think the fideistic affirmation of the existence of incorporeal substances in the *AntiWhite* represents his real, if temporary view. Rather I think Hobbes flirted with immaterialism in the *AntiWhite* (and the *Third Objections*) for the same reason he flirted with extreme fideism there. He was looking for a position which would provide him with a safe enough cover.

Hobbes is reluctant to affirm his materialism about God openly because he knows it is theologically very problematic. Consider the following line of argument:

1. God is corporeal. (OL III, 561)
2. The universe is the aggregate of all bodies. (L xxxiv, 2)
3. Therefore, God is identical either with the whole of the universe or with a part of it. (an inference from (1) and (2) but accepted by Hobbes at EW IV, 349)
4. To hold that God is identical with the whole of the universe is equivalent to atheism, since it denies that the universe has a cause. (L xxxi, 15, 401; DCv xv, 14)
5. If God is identical with a part of the universe, he is finite, since no part of any whole can be infinite. (*AntiWhite* ii, 2)
6. To hold that God is finite is equivalent to atheism, since God, by definition, is infinite. (L xxxi, 18, 402)
7. Therefore, to affirm (3) is to embrace atheism.[103]

Hobbes never puts all these pieces together in one place, but each of them does seem to represent something he holds, and the argument does not appear to be so abstruse that he could not have seen where (3), in conjunction with his other assumptions, leads. Just conceivably he might have expected some of his readers to draw the same conclusion.

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[103] This line of reasoning is suggested by Strauss, in "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy." Goldsmith undertakes to rebut it in *Hobbes's Science of Politics*. (See the citations in n.3) But since the steps are not well laid out either in Strauss or in Goldsmith, neither is very convincing.

Perhaps some of the assumptions of this argument are questionable, e.g., the assumption in (5) that no part of any whole can be infinite. Surely, we would now say, the set of even integers is a part of the set of integers and yet is infinite. But was this clear to Hobbes? What step in this argument is *he* supposed to reject and why? Even if we give up the assumption that every part of every whole is finite, isn't there something uncomfortable about representing God as one material object among others? Perhaps Hobbes' negative theology saves him from being driven from materialism to atheism, but at this point that seems a dubious expedient.

I conclude that Hobbes' periodic experiments with various degrees of fideism suggest that he was not very serious about the reason-based arguments for God's existence which he sometimes advanced, that they were a convenient cover, rather than a doctrine he was committed to. Similarly, I take his sustained attack on revelation- its vehicle (prophecy), its signs (miracles) and its record (scripture)- to indicate that he was not very serious about believing in God on the basis of revelation. So it seems to me rather likely that he was an atheist, at least with respect to the personal God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But if someone were to insist that we'll never really know what Hobbes' religious beliefs were, I would cheerfully concede the point.

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In *Censorship and Interpretation* Annabel Patterson comments that late modern criticism has not

> paid enough attention to the interpretive status of introductory materials in early modern texts. All too often given over to the province of bibliographers, or even omitted from standard editions, dedications, engraved title pages, commendatory poems and epigraphs are lost to sight. Yet often their function is to alert the reader to his special responsibilities. (p. 48)

Happily Molesworth's and Macpherson's editions of L do preserve its wonderful engraved title page, and commentators have not neglected its striking symbolism.[104] The figure of the mortal God, Leviathan, dominates; this greatest power on earth, as the quotation from Job reminds us, unites both church and state, putting an end to their conflicts.

But there is an aspect of the introductory material which I think has not received sufficient attention. In the Epistle Dedicatory to Francis Godolphin Hobbes writes:

> Me thinks the endeavour to advance the Civill Power, should not by the Civill Power be condemned; nor private men, by reprehending it, declare they think that power too great. Besides, I speak not of the men, but (in the abstract) of the Seat of Power... offending none, I think, but those without, or such within (if there be any such) as favour them. (pp. 75-76)

This is not a transparent passage, but perhaps the Latin version makes Hobbes' meaning somewhat clearer: he favors maximizing the civil power, whoever the possessor of that

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[104] See, for example, the interesting discussion in Rogow, pp. 156-60.

power may be, and he will offend only those who lack power. But what is most interesting is the acknowledgement he gives of the potential offensiveness of his religious views:

> That which perhaps may most offend, are certain texts of Holy Scripture, alledged by me to other purpose than ordinarily they use to be by others.

Hobbes goes on to plead in his defense that he risks this offense "with due submission" and only because it is necessary for his purpose, which is to diminish the authority of those who would challenge the civil power (sc. on religious grounds). But the reader has been warned to expect an unconventional, indeed, an offensive reading of scripture, and he should not be surprised if he finds it an attack on Christian dogma.

What are we suggesting about Hobbes' character and purposes if his arguments for theism and his proclamations of adherence to Christianity are not sincere? Can we really, coherently, suppose that Hobbes had the intentions I have ascribed to him? Is it consistent to maintain that Hobbes wanted (a) to undermine the religion of his day, (b) to shelter himself against persecution for disbelief by falsely giving the impression that he was a believer, *and* (c) to appeal to the religious beliefs of his readers to support his political conclusions? (Cf. Grover, pp. 146-47) I think it is.

On my account *Leviathan* is intended to be an ambiguous work, to be read by different people in different ways, as all displays of irony are apt to be. Euthyphro does not appreciate the irony of Socrates because he is firmly convinced of his own religious knowledge. Booth reminds us that some early readers of Swift's *Modest Proposal* failed to appreciate the savage irony of that work. Hobbes' attack on official religion is a sufficiently subtle one that many readers will miss it. A person convinced beyond any doubt, for example, that scripture is a substantially accurate record of the acts and sayings of the prophets and apostles may not examine too closely an argument which professes to have that conclusion. He may accept the disavowal and miss the suggestion. Someone, on the other hand, who is already inclined to doubt may find her doubt fortified. "Gradually the ordinary people are enlightened," as Hobbes says in *De homine* (xiv, 13). Such a reader may sense that the argument does not support the conclusion and be led to reexamine the argument, asking herself what is a reasonable conclusion to draw from those premises. The first reader, when he finds conventional religious assumptions used to support political conclusions, may be moved to accept those conclusions. The second reader, finding that she cannot accept the religious argument for those conclusions, may yet be persuaded by the secular argument. At the very least, she will be innoculated against religious arguments leading her to rebel against the state on the ground that she has a higher duty to God than to man. A third reader, a censor, say, who may well be sensitive to the subversive implications of the work,[105] may still resolve to let it pass, on the ground that not enough people will discount the disclaimers to cause serious trouble, and that attempting to suppress such a

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[105] In *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1988, but originally published by the Free Press in 1952), Strauss contends that "a careful writer of normal intelligence is more intelligent than the most intelligent censor." This may suggest an unwarranted assumption that censors are generally not very perceptive. But Strauss does not need to assume that.

work may be more harmful in the long run than allowing it to go unpunished.

Some writers suggest that to read Hobbes this way is to impugn his character. Here is Peter Geach at his rhetorical best:

> A learned man in the United States recently published a book arguing that Descartes put in all that transparently fallacious argumentation about God and the soul in order to fool the priests: really he was an atheistic materialist, and a study of his writings shows this. This thesis is less likely to become fashionable than the thesis of Hobbes's atheism, because many academics know intelligent Catholics, whereas few are acquainted with intelligent Socinians; but it is not a whit less plausible; indeed it is slightly more so, in that Descartes might impress some people as a shifty character, whereas this is a ludicrously inept epithet for Hobbes. (*op. cit.*, p. 556)

Pointing out that Hobbes was not a shifty character is relevant to the question whether a Straussian reading of him is tenable if, but only if, we assume that *only a shifty character would write in the way Straussians allege that Hobbes wrote*, i.e., with deliberate ambiguity, intending to suggest doubts about religion to his more skeptically inclined readers, while attempting to persuade the less skeptical that his position is not so far beyond the bounds of orthodoxy as to require punishment. If Geach takes what he says to be relevant to the issue at hand, he must be tacitly making that assumption. But I think it an entirely unwarranted assumption. As Leslie Stephen observed in a similar context, if there is any moral fault to be found in these situations, it lies "with those who made plain-speaking dangerous."[106]

To make Geach's assumption is to fail to appreciate the moral position of someone who holds minority opinions in a repressive culture and who believes that he ought, somehow, to try to change the dominant view.[107] Earlier in this paper I gave an account of the complex situation with respect to religious toleration in the Protestant England of Hobbes' time. But we should also remember that Hobbes was living in Catholic France when he wrote and published *Leviathan*, that his complete works had already been put on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1649,[108] presumably because of the much milder *De cive*,

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[106] *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Peter Smith, 1949, I, 105. It's hard, in any case, to see why the conduct I attribute to Hobbes is any shiftier than the "snakish cunning" Geach admires in Joan of Arc. Cf. his *The Virtues*, Cambridge UP, p. 115.

[107] Perhaps it is too much to expect sympathetic understanding of authors holding really radical religious opinions from someone capable of writing that "we dare not accept a tolerant attitude towards errors concerning the Divine Nature, because we are in no position to judge what level of error will entail that a man's worship is wholly misdirected." (Geach, *God and the Soul*, Schocken, 1969, p. 115) On Geach's behalf it should be noted that he does not appear to think this position justifies the activities of the Inquisition, but only non-coercive efforts to convert those who are not worshipping the right God.

[108] Not, of course, that this is any very great distinction. Most of the major figures of the early modern period- Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Rousseau and Kant- had some or all of their works placed on the Index. The only major figure to

and that Hobbes' own official explanation of his return to England after *Leviathan* was published was that he feared persecution by the Roman Catholic clergy in France (OL I, xvii). If criticizing the generally accepted religion is dangerous, then those who hold unorthodox views must either keep silent, or find some some covert way of conveying their message, or speak plainly and take the consequences. Hobbes himself was not unwilling to ascribe dissimulation to Aristotle, without any imputation of moral fault. At the end of an attack on the doctrine of separated essences, Hobbes writes:

> it may be [Aristotle] knew [this doctrine] to be false philosophy; but writ it as a thing consonant to, and corroborative of their religion; and fearing the fate of Socrates. (L xlvi, 18, 692)

If the argument of this paper is correct, Hobbes himself certainly had reason to fear the fate of Socrates.

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escape this fate seems to have been Leibniz.