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Nothing but the Name of God. Hobbes on Theology and Religion

Gregorio Baldin

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Introduction

- 1 In 1696, Pierre Bayle would write in his Dictionnaire entry dedicated to the late English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes: “De toutes les vertus morales il n’y avoit guère que la Religion qui fût une matière problématique dans la pensée de Hobbes.”¹ Even today, the theological thought of Hobbes is still at the core of a broad and in-depth debate.² Countless studies have been devoted to theological and theologico-political works of Hobbes, but often these texts have been analysed separately from scientific or philosophical-scientific works. On the contrary, to correctly understand Hobbes’s theological thought, it is fundamental that we shine a light on the principles of his so-called “first philosophy.” In this article I will focus on Hobbes’s philosophical notion of God, without directly addressing the problem of the role that God plays in his political philosophy.³
- 2 This study will note to evaluate the truthfulness of Hobbes’ religious faith. Rather, it has the much more modest goal of grasping and underlining the contrast between Hobbes’ philosophical principles and the theological position he supports in many of his writings.

- 3 A brief glance at the book *The Hunting of Leviathan*, by Samuel I. Mintz, offers an idea of the breadth of criticism against Hobbes during his lifetime: more than eighty works had been published against him between 1650 and 1700.⁴ Not even the death of the much-hated “monster of Malmesbury,” which occurred on December 4, 1679,⁵ appeased the storm of attacks. Hobbes was opposed for his mathematical, scientific, and political doctrines, but the most violent attacks addressed his religious ideas. The wave of criticism concentrated against his writings during the Restoration. According to John Aubrey, an English bishop even proposed to Parliament to condemn to the stake the “good old gentleman.”⁶ We cannot ascertain the real consistency of these threats, but it seems that Hobbes feared strongly for his life, enough to actually burn some of his manuscripts, to prevent them from ending into the wrong hands.⁷
- 4 In the 17th century, the name of Hobbes was already surrounded by an aura of irreligiosity. In a letter dated November 30, 1680, and addressed to Thomas Tenison, bishop of Canterbury, John Wallis — the mathematician and member of the Royal Society who had engaged in a long and deleterious scientific altercation with Hobbes — accused the philosopher of atheism.⁸ Some years before, the royalist Edward Nicholas, in a letter to Edward Hyde, described Hobbes as the “great Atheist,” or the “father of atheists.”⁹ This idea is often reiterated, with slight and negligible differences, by many of Hobbes’ critics. Hyde himself, in his work *A Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr. Hobbes Book, entitled Leviathan* (1676), while presenting Hobbes as a man of integrity,¹⁰ writes that the opinions expressed in *Leviathan* subverted the principles of the Christian religion, and observes that, confronted with this text, a shrewd reader could easily assume that its author had no religion at all.¹¹ An analogous opinion shines from William Lucy’s *Observations, Censures and Confutations and Notorious Errors in Mr. Hobbes his Leviathan* (1663), from *The Catching of Leviathan* (1658) by John Bramhall, and from *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined* (1670), by Thomas Tenison.
- 5 In spite of all these accusations, Hobbes always professed himself to be faithful to the “Church of England,”¹² and his biographer, Richard Blackbourne, seems to confirm what he maintained.¹³
- 6 In fact, a significant amount of “anti-Hobbesian” literature includes works that are often limited to the invective. However, some texts are instead interesting, and it is important to check whether some of these criticisms are really based on Hobbes’ works. Among these critical texts, Bramhall’s *The Catching of Leviathan* is particularly interesting. Bramhall was the Arminian bishop of Derry,¹⁴ who engaged Thomas Hobbes in a controversy over issues concerning freedom, necessity, and chance.¹⁵ Bramhall affirms that Hobbes’ theological position is actually conceptually unsustainable and that the philosopher is nothing more than a hidden atheist¹⁶. Gathering some of Hobbes’ more significant reflections on religion, Bramhall offers this summary of Hobbes’ theological thought:

His principles are brim full of prodigious impiety. In these four things, opinions of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion to what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion; the culture and improvement whereof, he referreth only to policy. Human and divine politics, are but politics. And again, mankind hath this from the conscience of their own weakness, and the admiration of natural events, that the most part of men believe that there is an invisible God, the maker of all visible things. And a little after he telleth us, that superstition proceedeth from fear without right reason, and atheism

from an opinion of reason without fear; making atheism to be more reasonable than superstition. What is now become of that divine worship which natural reason did assign unto God, the honour of existence, infiniteness, incomprehensibility, unity, ubiquity? (...) He proceedeth further, that atheism itself, though it be an erroneous opinion, and therefore a sin, yet it ought to be numbered among the sins of imprudence or ignorance. He addeth, that an atheist is punished not as a subject is punished by his king, because he did not observe laws: but as an enemy, by an enemy, because he would not accept laws. His reason is, because the atheist never submitted his will to the will of God, whom he never thought to be. And he concludeth that man's obligation to obey God proceedeth from his weakness, (De Cive, xv. 7: vol. II. p. 336): Manifestum est obligationem ad prestandam ipsi (Deo) obedientiam, incumbere hominibus propter imbecilitatem. (...). First, it is impossible that should be a sin of mere ignorance or imprudence, which is directly contrary to the light of natural reason. The laws of nature need no new promulgation, being imprinted naturally by God in the heart of man. The law of nature was written in our hearts by the finger of God, without our assent; or rather, the law of nature is the assent itself. Then if nature dictate to us that there is a God, and that this God is to be worshipped in such and such a manner, it is not possible that atheism should be a sin of mere ignorance.¹⁷

- 7 In this passage, Bramhall focuses on some fundamental issues of Hobbes' theological and religious thought, which should be examined in detail.

Real causes, and "imagined" ones

- 8 Early in his text, Bramhall quotes a passage from Chapter 12 of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes sums up four anthropological causes of religion. The so-called "Naturall seeds of Religion" are: a) "Opinion of Ghosts"¹⁸; b) "Ignorance of second causes"; c) "Devotion towards what men fear"; and, finally, d) "Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques"¹⁹. The English philosopher, avoid facing accusation of reducing religion to a mere product of human fantasies and aspirations, in his *Answer*, tends to distinguish between the genesis of pagan cults and the origin of belief in one God, proper to the monotheistic religions²⁰. Likewise, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes links the rise of the pagan gods to the fear of invisible powers. However,

[...] the acknowledging of one God Eternall, Infinite, and Omnipotent, may more easily be derived, from the desire men have to know the causes of naturall bodies, and their several vertues, and operations; than from the feare of what was to befall them in time to come. For he that from any effect hee seeth come to passe, should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himselfe profoundly in the pursuit of causes; shall at last come to this, that there must be (as even the Heathen Philosophers confessed) one First Mover; that is, a First, and an Eternall cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the name of God: And all this without thought of their fortune; the solicitude whereof, both enclines to fear, and hinders them from the search of the causes of other things; and thereby gives occasion of feigning of as many Gods, as there be men that feigne them.²¹

- 9 Hobbes seems to establish a *caesura* between paganism and monotheism: while the first is based on fear and ignorance, the latter shows a certain convergence with an inquiry conducted through a philosophical and speculative method. Tracing back the causal chain that links each effect to its cause, the philosopher would inevitably reach a first principle: the first mover, or, *causa prima*. This idea seems to lead to an agreement between philosophy and monotheism, because the notion of a unique God would be conceivable as

a sort of natural fulfillment of philosophical inquiry. In fact, in *The Elements of Law* (1640), Hobbes had already stated that the analysis of the causal chain inevitably leads to the idea of a *causa prima*, or, first mover.²²

- 10 However, if we turn to *De Motu, Loco et Tempore*, or *Anti-White* (~ 1643), we will see that Hobbes' position is remarkably different. Thomas White, in his *De Mundo Dialogi*, defended the possibility of arguing indubitably the existence of God.²³ On the contrary, according to Hobbes, this attempt must be considered "afiloso@fon," that is, non-philosophical, or contrary to philosophy, because "to prove that something exists, there is need of the senses, or experience."²⁴ Moreover, Hobbes openly claims that venturing into philosophical, and rational, demonstrations of the existence of God, as did his adversary, is contrary to both theology and religion:

When a demonstration persuades us of the truth of any proposition, that is no longer *faith*, but is *natural knowledge*. (...) Therefore as soon as any proposition is demonstrated it is no longer an article of faith but is a theorem in philosophy. The inescapable consequence is that, in matters determined by the authority of the Church, as philosophy is acquired, so the same degree is faith eroded. Articles of faith are, however, the limbs of religion; therefore, when the articles of faith desert religion for philosophy, religion cannot but be gradually weakened.²⁵

- 11 Here, the agreement between philosophy and monotheism, present in the *Elements* and in *Leviathan* seems actually to collapse. On the contrary, religion is here rather rigidly opposed to philosophy, and a sort of incongruity in the development of Hobbes' thought emerges. If in the *Elements*, as well as in *Leviathan*, Hobbes maintains an idea of God as *causa prima*, in *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* (which chronologically places between the *Elements* and *Leviathan*), he conversely maintains an opposite idea regarding the demonstration of the existence of God. Is it possible that in *De Motu* Hobbes abandoned the position held in the *Elements*, and finally returned to his steps eight years later?

- 12 To clarify this question it is useful to examine the matter in detail.²⁶ In *Leviathan*, Hobbes states that "For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure, but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect."²⁷ Even more explicit is *De Cive* (1642), where, using the same image, Hobbes clarifies the difference between *faith* and *knowledge*:

[...] the latter proceeds by cutting a proposition into small pieces, then chews it over and digests it slowly; the former swallows it whole. It contributes to knowledge to explain the words in which the subject of inquiry is put forward; in fact, this is the one and only way to knowledge, *the way of definitions*. But it is harmful to *faith*. For things put forward for belief which are beyond human understanding never become clearer by explanation, but to the contrary, become more obscure and more difficult to believe. A man who goes about to demonstrate the *mysteries of Faith* by natural reason, is like a sick man who tries to chew some health-giving but bitter pills before swallowing them; the result is that he throws them up straight away, whereas, if he had swallowed them whole, they would have made him better.²⁸

- 13 Even in *Historia Ecclesiastica* (presumably composed in the 1660s, and published posthumously in 1688), Hobbes reiterates that the articles of revealed religion should not be examined through philosophical analysis. Addressing to the faithful, he warns him to not philosophize about the mysteries of faith: "Don't just taste the remedy to sin with the roof of your mouth. If you / want to be cured, open wide and swallow it like a brave fellow. / For the man who chews the sacred mysteries with a logical tooth, is / seized by dizziness, nausea and vomiting."²⁹ Here too, Hobbes maintains a position which is similar

to that already present in *De Motu*, and in *De Cive*, where the philosopher openly claims that the speculative inquiry to what exceed human understanding turns out to be harmful to the faith. This statement is not *per se* disconcerting, and is typical of some skeptical and fideistic positions. Nevertheless, if reason tried to explain something that exceeds its own abilities, surpassing its limits, its effort should be unproductive and vain for reason itself, rather than for the faith. To clarify this issue it may be useful to use terms and concepts, typical of Locke's lexicon.³⁰ If the mysteries of the faith fell into the field of what we define *above reason*, the application of a philosophical method to these mysteries should be an activity as heavy as unproductive for reason itself, and not for faith.³¹ On the contrary, the rational inquiry would be detrimental to faith, *only* if the matter of its mysteries were *contrary to reason*.

- 14 There is no doubt that Hobbes considered most of the Catholic dogmas unreasonable: in *Leviathan*, for example, he does not spare his criticism to what he considers the numerous absurdities of the Roman creed.³² Moreover, Hobbes tries to reduce the articles of faith to those considered fundamental. This is evident in the *Elements*, but also in *Leviathan* (where all the articles are reduced to an *unum necessarium*³³), in the *Appendix* to the Latin edition of this work (1668)³⁴ as well as in the *Historical Narration Concerning Heresy*,³⁵ published posthumously in 1680.
- 15 However, if we return to the quoted passage of *De Motu*, we see that Hobbes does not define "afiloso@fon" the attempt to rationally explain some articles of revealed religion, but this definition is referred to the same proof of God's existence.
- 16 Finally, the *panorama* surfaced by the comparison of the almost contemporary texts of *De motu* and *De Cive* thus manifests an opposition, rather than a convergence, between philosophy and religion, between rational knowledge and faith. We must consider, however, whether these positions are reflected in other Hobbes' texts. In *An Answer to the Catching of Leviathan*, Hobbes affirms that "Ignorance of second causes," and not philosophical inquiry, "made men fly to some first cause, the fear of which bred devotion and worship."³⁶ If we go back to the chapter 12 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposes a curious amalgam of anthropological, psychological, and rational elements, which oriented men towards the religious phenomenon. First, he claims that "it is peculiar to the nature of Man, to be inquisive into the Causes of the Events they see, some more, some lesse; but all men so much, as to be curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evill fortune."³⁷ Secondly, he adds that "upon the sight of any thing that hath a Beginning, to think also it had a cause, which determined the same to begin, then when it did, rather than sooner or later."³⁸ Finally, he observes that:
- [...] whereas there is no other Felicity of Beasts, but the enjoying of their quotidian Food, Ease, and Lusts; as having little or no foresight of the time to come, for want of observation, and memory of the order, consequence, and dependence of the things they see; Man observeth how one Event hath been produced by another; and remembereth in them Antecedence and Consequence; And when he cannot assure himselfe of the true causes of things, (for the causes of good and evill fortune for the most part are invisible,) he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth to the Authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himselfe.³⁹
- 17 The terminology adopted is important, and it is opportune to dwell on this. The supposition, or conjecture, is a fundamental element of Hobbes' philosophical and scientific thought, and he explicitly recommends to use a hypothetical method in natural philosophy.⁴⁰ However, here the supposition is not founded on a rational conjecture, but

is instead based on imagination and authority.⁴¹ Not by chance, Hobbes actually underlines, from a linguistic point of view, the *fantastic* nature of these images, using the term *fancy*. This is confirmed by a passage from the previous chapter, where Hobbes states that “Want of Science, that is Ignorance of causes disposeth, or rather constraineth a man to rely on the advise, and authority of others.”⁴² Quoting from the *De Cive*, Bramhall accuses Hobbes of bringing back even faith in one God to the fear of natural phenomena, and to the awareness of man’s weakness in front of them. Hobbes, in his *Answer*, has no difficulty in admitting that even faith in the only true God originated from the passion of fear, and particularly from the fear of the power of God,⁴³ and in *De Homine* (1658), he actually maintains the same idea.⁴⁴ However, Bramhall and Hobbes completely differ on the interpretation of this affirmation. If Hobbes declares that he attested within the limits of a pious *timor Dei*, on the contrary, the English bishop assimilates it to a fear generated by the ignorance of the real causes of phenomena. In fact, Bramhall could very easily maintain his interpretation, because it is based on several passages of Hobbes’ works, like this one, taken from chapter 16 of *De Cive*, where Hobbes argued that “Aware of their own weakness and in wonder at natural events, the human race has developed an almost universal belief that an invisible God is the Workman who has made all visible things.”⁴⁵ This passage, as well as many other places mentioned, leads us to a reflection: as Karl Schuhmann observes,⁴⁶ when Hobbes refers to the idea of God conceived as the summit of the philosophical inquiry that investigates the causal chain, he never operates a complete identification of the *causa prima* with God, but rather he identifies it with what men call God, or what men believe to be God. By doing so, Hobbes underlines a psychological need on the part of the human being to make the idea of God coincide with that of a *causa prima*, or first mover.

- 18 Let us momentarily leave aside the philosophical concept of God, and consider religion only, in order to acknowledge the legitimacy of the remarks by William Lucy, in his *Observations, Censures, and Confutations and Notorious Errors in Mr. Hobbes his Leviathan*. In this work, Lucy argues that the four causes of religion, mentioned by Hobbes in Chapter 12 of *Leviathan*, constituted the natural seeds of the *true religion*, as well as of the false ones, that is, the pagan cults.⁴⁷ In the same works, indeed, Hobbes offers a definition of religion that is rooted in ancient literature (in particular in Statius’s *Thebaid*,⁴⁸ and, above all, in Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*⁴⁹), and which eliminates the differences between religion and superstition, by bringing back them to the same, anthropological, and psychological origin: the fear of invisible powers. “*Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION, not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION.*”⁵⁰ If we exclude the official admission by the civil authority, there is evidently no difference between religion and superstition.⁵¹
- 19 The application of philosophical inquiry to religion thus produces problematic outcomes. Hobbes sometimes seems to establish a gap, or even an opposition, between the two separated domains of philosophy and religion: where the first is the search for natural causes, conducted with method, the latter is rooted in the ignorance of the “second causes”.
- 20 This problematic approach to religion leads us to delve deeper into Hobbes’ theological thought, by carefully examining his idea of God, and the attributes of the deity that are accessible to human mind. As it is known, in *De Cive* and in *Leviathan*, Hobbes peremptorily affirms the unknowability of God, and this idea is reaffirmed in *Historia*

Ecclesiastica, where, arguing against people that claims to know the ways of divine action, he identifies only three notions of God intelligible to men.

The hidden nature of God is examined. They try to know what, when, why, and how He wills and acts.
Beyond *his work*, *his sacred laws* and *his name* to be feared, men cannot know anything about the Deity.⁵²

- 21 Hobbes states that *his works*, *his sacred laws*, and *his name* are the three only notions of God knowable to human mind. Indeed, in *De Motu*, he maintains that men know only one attribute of God, that is, *existence*⁵³, but — as Paganini correctly points out⁵⁴ — he declares, in the same work, that existence can only be affirmed empirically, and not logically demonstrated.⁵⁵ Moreover, as we know, to engage in a demonstration of the existence of God is simply “contrary to philosophy”.
- 22 We must return, therefore, to the quoted passage of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and carefully consider separately the three notions of God considered by Hobbes: *his works*, *his laws*, and *his name*. A difficulty immediately emerges about the first aspect. In fact, we can consider a work of God the creation, *i.e.* natural universe, or — according to the medieval tradition of the *potentia Dei absoluta*⁵⁶ — also God’s supernatural and direct action that alter the regular order of nature, *i.e.* the *miracle*. Leaving aside at the moment the problem of miracle (to which we will return later on), and by interpreting the works of God as creation only, we lack of an adequate means of determining whether, and in what way, the natural universe is actually the result of God’s action. In fact, as we have already observed, investigation of the natural world and of its order, on natural causes and their effects, do not lead at all to the knowledge and existence of God and there is, therefore, no way of knowing if the natural world is actually the production of an omnipotent being. This idea, that from the existence of the world we could infer that it is made by God is actually openly contested in Hobbes’ *Objections* (1640) to Descartes’s *Meditations*:

I can construct for myself a sort of image of creation from what I have seen, e.g. a man being born or growing as it were from a single point to the size and shape which now has. This is the only sort of idea which anyone has in connection with the term ‘creator’. *But our ability to imagine the world to have been created is not a sufficient proof of the creation.*⁵⁷

In conclusion, the philosophical inquiry about natural phenomena, and their causes, does not allow to philosophically demonstrate the reality and the existence of God.

Divine laws, prophets, and miracles

Divine natural laws, and prophetic.

- 23 The second attribute of God knowable to man, that Hobbes presents in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* is “*his sacred laws*.” What does he mean by laws of God? In *Leviathan* (Chapter 31), he affirms that “God declareth his Lawes three wayes; by the Dictates of Naturall Reason, by Revelation, and by the Voyce of some man, to whom by the operation of Miracles, he procureth credit with the rest.”⁵⁸ This necessarily implies the existence of different divine laws and, in *De Cive*, as and in the same *Leviathan*, Hobbes distinguishes two categories of *divine laws*: *natural*, and *positive*.⁵⁹ In *De Cive*, he affirms that “*Natural law* is the law which God has revealed to all men through his *eternal word* which is innate in them, namely by *natural reason*.”⁶⁰ On the contrary, “*Positive law* is that law which God has

revealed to us through the *prophetic word* by which he spoke to men as a man; such are the laws which he gave to the *Jews* about their constitution [*politia*] and divine worship.”⁶¹ From that, it follows that two different kingdoms must be attributed to God:

There is the *Natural Kingdom* in which he rules through the dictates of right reason. It is a universal kingdom over all who acknowledge the divine power because of the rational nature which is common to all. And there is the *Prophetic Kingdom*, where too he rules, but by his *Prophetic Word*.⁶²

- 24 The principles of natural law are universal and can be identified with the dictates of natural reason. In the first chapters of *De Cive* Hobbes offers the definitions of natural reason and law of nature, and from these definitions it is clear that the laws of nature coincide with the precepts of right reason.⁶³ However, we must remember what Hobbes means by “right reason:” “By right reason in men’s natural state, I mean, not, as many do, an infallible Faculty, but the act of reasoning, that is, a man’s own true Reasoning about actions of his which may conduce to his advantage or other men’s loss.”⁶⁴ Hobbes thus makes the *right reason* coincide with the individual reasoning that leads each man to evaluate means for obtaining advantage, and avoiding disadvantages.⁶⁵ Although Hobbes argues that natural law is written in our hearts “by the finger of God,”⁶⁶ it is evident from *De Cive* — as well as from *Leviathan* — that this natural law does not at all present that criterion of universality which is required from an innate law, inscribed in human nature directly by God. Hobbes’ natural law is much more a practical and utilitarian principle, which emerges spontaneously in human nature, from the consideration of what is useful or harmful for individual’s well-being. It is Hobbes himself, in his *Answer to the Catching of Leviathan*, who confirms this reading, and radically modifies the interpretation of the laws of nature as divine decrees. Here, he confirms that the laws of nature “were the laws of God, then when they were delivered in the word of God; but before, being not known by men for any thing but their own natural reason, they were but theorems, tending to peace, and those uncertain, as being but conclusions of particular men, and therefore not properly laws.”⁶⁷ In fact, this idea can already be found in *De Cive*,⁶⁸ and we can remark from the quoted passage that the laws of nature configure, therefore, as conclusions of individual men, which acquire the status of laws only through the revelation of God’s word. Indeed, it is only the confirmation by the word of God that remove any doubt about the truth and the validity of these laws of nature. However, this implies a not negligible consequence. If we think that the laws of nature are confirmed in their divine origin only through the revelation of God, this implies a shifting of the *divine natural law* into the sphere of *divine positive law*, which means that the natural kingdom of God is incorporated into the *prophetic* one. It is not by chance that Hobbes repeatedly stresses in *Leviathan* that the natural kingdom does not consist of a real kingdom.⁶⁹ Moreover, since the laws of nature can only ever be conclusions made by individuals, or theorems with a doubtful effect, they are far from exhibiting a criterion of universality required to a law of nature derived from God.
- 25 In conclusion, Hobbes’ attempt to support a convergence between natural and positive laws turns out to be difficult and, instead of confirming the divine origin of the dictates of natural reason, makes the law of nature even more problematic, forcing us to turn our investigation into the second kingdom that Hobbes attributed to God in *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, that is, to the prophetic one.

Prophets, inspiration, and revelation

26 The topics of the prophetic kingdom, of the revelation, and of the miracles have already been extensively discussed in critical literature.⁷⁰ It is not necessary to present and discuss here the whole panorama of different interpretations on this subject, but it is instead useful to highlight some aspects. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes presents three ways God uses to make man know his laws: *natural reason*, *revelation*, and the *voice of some man confirmed by miracles*. To these three forms of communication, Hobbes relates a “triple word of God, Rational, Sensible, and Prophetique, to which Correspondeth a triple Hearing; Right Reason, Sense Supernaturall, and Faith. As for Sense Supernaturall, which consisteth in Revelation, or Inspiration, there have not been any Universall Lawes so given, because God speaketh not in that manner, but to particular persons, and to divers men divers things.”⁷¹ This would seem to exclude that the *sense supernatural*, that is, *revelation*, or *inspiration*, may have been the means through which God communicated its universal laws, because revelation consists in a private phenomenon, reserved to some particular men, who God granted with his favor. Hobbes is even often sceptic and critic about those who “possessed of an opinion of being inspired.” Indeed, “if there were nothing else that bewrayed their madnesse; yet that very arrogating such inspiration to themselves, is argument enough.”⁷² Moreover, inspiration — although indicated by Hobbes as one of the means used by God to manifest his will — is also counted among the kinds of madness accurately described in the Chapter 8 of *Leviathan*, in a passage that reveals all the pungent irony of Hobbes:

If some man in Bedlam should entertaine you with sober discourse; and you desire in taking leave, to know what he were, that you might another time requite his civility; and he should tell you, he were God the Father; I think you need expect no extravagant action for argument of his Madnesse. This opinion of Inspiration, called commonly, Private Spirit, begins very often, from some lucky finding of an Error generally held by others [...]

The opinions of the world, both in ancient and later ages, concerning the cause of madnesse, have been two. Some deriving them from the Passions; some, from Daemons, or Spirits, either good or bad, which they thought might enter into a man, possesse him, and move his organs in such strange and uncouth manner, as mad-men use to do. The former sort therefore, called such men, Mad-men: but the Later, called them sometimes *Daemoniacks*, (that is, possessed with spirits;) sometimes *Energumeni*, (that is, agitated or moved with spirits;) and now in *Italy* they are called not onely *Pazzi*, Mad-men; but also *Spiritati*, men possest.⁷³

27 Again, in Chapter 34, we read that the syntagma “God’s spirit” can sometimes be understood as “*inclination to godlinesse, and Gods service*,” but also it can be interpreted “for any eminent ability, or extraordinary passion, or disease of the mind, as when *great wisdom* is called the *spirit of wisdom*; and *mad men* are said to be *possessed with a spirit*.”⁷⁴

28 In conclusion, inspiration is therefore considered by Hobbes primarily a kind of madness or mental illness, that afflicts those who believe to have spoken with God or to have directly inspired by Him, and it is not by chance that he rules out that revelation or inspiration could be the means adopted by God to communicate its general laws to men. On the contrary, Hobbes identified God’s privileged instrument for the foundation of the positive divine law, and consequently of its prophetic kingdom, in the “*Voyce of some man*, to whom (...) by the operation of Miracles, he procureth credit with the rest,”⁷⁵ that

is, a *prophet*. Hobbes writes that he found three meanings of the term prophet in Sacred Scripture:

The name of PROPHET, signifieth in Scripture sometimes *Prolocutor*; that is, he that speaketh from God to Man, or from man to God: And sometimes *Praedictor*, or a foreteller of things to come: And sometimes one that speaketh incoherently, as men that are distracted. It is most frequently used in the sense of speaking from God to the People. So *Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah*, and others were *Prophets*.⁷⁶

- 29 If we do not want to consider a messenger of God “one that speaketh incoherently, as men are distracted,” we must suppose that the laws of God were communicated by biblical prophets who acted as intermediaries between God and the people, such as Moses, Samuel, and the others. Yet, considering that those who claim to be inspired by God sometimes turn out to be insane, it is evident that even a fool could easily impersonate a God’s messenger. Bramhall underlines this problem, maintaining that Hobbes “maketh very little difference between a *prophet* and a *madman*, and a *demoniac*.”⁷⁷ Hobbes was himself aware of this problem as made evident, in Chapter 32 of *Leviathan*, where he elicits two criteria for distinguishing true and false prophets:

How then can he, to whom God hath never revealed his Wil immediately (saving by the way of natural reason) know when he is to obey, or not to obey his Word, delivered by him, that sayes he is a Prophet? (...) To which I answer out of the Holy Scripture, that there be two marks, by which together, not asunder, a true Prophet is to be known. *One is the doing of miracles; the other is the not teaching any other Religion than that which is already established*.⁷⁸

- 30 Hobbes explicitly recommends that the two marks should be present jointly, and not separately, but the second mark involves a non-negligible difficulty. Indeed, by literally sticking to what Hobbes says, one should consider Jesus Christ a false prophet, for He departed, sometimes openly, from the established religion. Skipping this significant difficulty, it is important, however, to examine the first criterion required by Hobbes to ascertain that under the mask of a self-styled prophet there is no hiding an impostor, that is, *doing of miracles*.

Miracles, marks, and visions

- 31 The notion of the *miracle* is an extremely important issue in Hobbes’ theological thought: the miracle is the pivotal element on which the distinction between true and false prophets is founded. It is, therefore, of a paramount importance to correctly determine the miraculous nature of an event. On the other hand, the problem of determining the truth or falsity of miracles is not, according to Hobbes, a dilemma concerning his epoch:

Seeing therefore Miracles now cease, we have no sign left, whereby to acknowledge the pretended Revelations or Inspirations of any private man; nor obligation to give ear to any Doctrine, farther than it is conformable to the Holy Scriptures, which since the time of our Saviour, supply the place, and sufficiently recompense the want of all other Prophecy.⁷⁹

- 32 Likewise, in his *Answer*, Hobbes denies that ‘true prophets’ still exist in his time. He writes, indeed, that “those prophets that from the mouth of God foretell things future, or *do other miracle* (...) I deny there has been any since the death of St. John the Evangelist.”⁸⁰ Then, to clarify this problem we must investigate what the miracle consists of, and why the contemporary age is completely devoid of miracles. The definition of miracle is offered by Hobbes in *Leviathan*, Chapter 37: “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."⁸¹ This definition—which appeals to the supernatural action of God⁸²—seems to dispel any doubt about what can be considered a miracle. It is not clear, however, why since the death of St. John the Evangelist, God definitively suspended all his supernatural actions. Other passages of *Leviathan* are just as awkward, since Hobbes claims that even “the works of the *Egyptian Sorcerers*, though not so great as those of *Moses*, yet were *great miracles*.”⁸³ This statement completely overthrows the image of miracle, and requires a more in-depth analysis of this issue. Hobbes dedicates an entire chapter of *Leviathan* (Chapter 37), to the topic of *The miracles, and their function*. Here, he argues that “To understand therefore what is a Miracle, we must first understand what works they are, which men wonder at, and call Admirable.”⁸⁴

And there be but two things which make men wonder at any event: The one is, if it be strange, that is to say, such, as the like of it hath never, or very rarely been produced: The other is, if when it is produced, we cannot imagine it to have been done by naturall means, but onely by the immediate hand of God. But when we see some possible, naturall cause of it, how rarely soever the like has been done; or if the like have been often done, how impossible soever it be to imagine a naturall means thereof, we no more wonder, nor esteem it for a Miracle.⁸⁵

- 33 There are thus two requirements in order in defining miraculous an event: firstly, its strangeness, that is, its extreme rarity; secondly, the impossibility to understand its natural cause. This last consideration inevitably recalls the four causes of the origin of religion, and the relationship between religion and philosophy. As we know, faced with inexplicable events or difficult to understand, when it is impossible to discover the real natural causes of phenomena, men are inevitably disposed to imagine, or *fancy*, the existence of a (false?) supernatural cause. Therefore, even to the phenomenology of the miracle it could be applied the same interpretation emerged in considering the genesis of religion. It is not by chance, that “The First Rainbow that was seen in the world, was a Miracle, because the first; and consequently strange.”⁸⁶ In conclusion:

Furthermore, seeing Admiration and Wonder, is consequent to the knowledge and experience, wherewith men are endued, some more, some lesse; it followeth, that the same thing, may be a Miracle to one, and not to another. And thence it is, that ignorant, and superstitious men make great Wonders of those works, which other men, knowing to proceed from Nature, (which is not the immediate, but the ordinary work of God,) admire not at all: As when Eclipses of the Sun and Moon have been taken for supernaturall works, by the common people.⁸⁷

- 34 In other words, whether or not a natural phenomenon is miraculous depends on our knowledge and experience only. Therefore, ignorant and superstitious people are more inclined to consider as a miracle any extraordinary event that goes beyond the limits of their modest understanding. Nonetheless, with the development of philosophy and knowledge, the number of events that can be considered prodigious is greatly reduced, and it is for this reason the miracles have ceased, because there are no such ingenuous people to be influenced by rare natural events. Hobbes is very clear about this when he states: “I do not know one man, that ever saw any such wondrous work, done by the charm, or at the word, or prayer of a man, that a man endued but with a mediocrity of reason, would think supernaturall.”⁸⁸
- 35 From this interpretation of the miracle new difficulties arise. As we know, “doing of miracles” is one of the two requirements for distinguishing true from false prophets, but this explanation of the miracle makes it very difficult – if not impossible – to ascertain the trustworthiness of the self-proclaimed prophet, and thus finally question the

possibility of receiving laws and commands from God. The miracle is actually the only proof that can be given by a supposed prophet to prove to his people that he has the approval of God. Nevertheless, if the miracle consists instead in a natural event, of which man cannot find a plausible explanation, any criterion to determine if a man who presents himself as a prophet is actually a messenger of God is inevitably lacking. To overcome this difficulty, we will examine some passages of *Leviathan*, which are mirrored in other Hobbes' works. In Chapter 37, Hobbes states, with regard to the miracle, that "A private man has always the liberty, (because thought is free,) to believe, or not believe in his heart, those acts that have been given out for Miracles."⁸⁹ But, "when it comes to confession of that faith, the Private Reason must submit to the Publick."⁹⁰ A very similar argument is maintained regarding the contents of the religious creed:

[...] that they to whom God hath no spoken immediately, are to receive the positive commandments of God, from their Sovereign (...) And consequently in every Common-wealth, they who have no supernatural revelation to the contrary, ought to obey the laws of their own sovereign, in the external acts and profession of religion.⁹¹

- 36 Hobbes speaks of "external acts and profession," and it is not by chance, that in *De Homine*, religion is explicitly defined as a practice of external worship.⁹² Moreover, from the *Answer to the Catching of Leviathan* we know that "to obey is one thing, to believe is another", because "belief requires teachers and arguments drawn either from reason,"⁹³ and, the public religion requires, on the contrary, the will to obedience only. This is what Hobbes means in *Leviathan* by "Captivity of our Understanding."

But by the Captivity of our Understanding, is not meant a Submission of the Intellectuall faculty, to the Opinion of any other man; but of the Will to Obedience, where obedience is due. For Sense, Memory, Understanding, Reason, and Opinion are not in our power to change; but always, and necessarily such, as the things we see, hear, and consider suggest unto us; and therefore are not effects of our Will, but our Will of them. We then Captivate our Understanding and Reason, when we forbear contradiction; when we so speak, as (by lawfull Authority) we are commanded; and when we live accordingly; which in sum, is Trust, and Faith reposed in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable of any Notion at all from the Words spoken.⁹⁴

- 37 Hobbes openly claims that even those who believe to have received revelation, that is, the prophets, could not have spoken directly with God. He writes "I find not any place that proveth God spake to them supernaturally."⁹⁵ Therefore, "So that by the Spirit is meant Inclination to Gods service; and not any supernaturall Revelation."⁹⁶ Indeed, he believes that God cannot properly "speak" to men, if not, using *apparitions* or *visions*.⁹⁷ But, what do these visions consist of? Hobbes clearly explains it, by referring to Moses:

And yet this speaking of God to Moses, was by mediation of an Angel, or Angels, as appears expressly, *Acts* 7. Ver. 35. and 53. and *Gal.* 3. 19, and was therefore a Vision, though a more clear vision than was given to other Prophets. And conformable hereunto, where God saith (*Deut.* 13. 1) *If there arise amongst you a Prophet, or Dreamer of Dreams*, the later word is but the interpretation of the former.⁹⁸

- 38 The conclusion of this quotation is decisive: the term prophet is equivalent to the periphrasis "*Dreamer of Dreams*," because "To say that he (*i.e.* God) hath spoken to him in a Dream, is no more then to say he dreamed that God spake to him."⁹⁹ Finally, in Chapter 45, Hobbes clarifies once and for all what dreams and visions consist of, whether natural or supernatural: "*Visions, and Dreams*, whether naturall, or supernaturall, are but

*Phantasms.*¹⁰⁰ He also provides an extensive explanation about the nature of these *phantasms*:

An IMAGE (in the most strict signification of the word) is the Resemblance of some thing visible: In which sense the Phantasticall Formes, Apparitions, or Seemings of visible Bodies to the Sight, are onely *Images*; such as are the Shew of a man, or other thing in the Water, by Reflection, or Refraction; or of the Sun, or Stars by Direct Vision in the Air; which are nothing reall in the things seen, nor in the place where they seem to bee; nor are their magnitudes and figures the same with that of the object; but changeable, by the variation of the organs of Sight, or by glasses; and are present oftentimes in our Imagination, and in our Dreams, when the object is absent; or changed into other colours, and shapes, as things that depend onely upon the Fancy. And these are the Images, which are originally and most properly called *Ideas*, and *IDOLS*, and derived from the language of the Graecians, with whom the word Εἶδω signifieth to *See*. They are also called PHANTASMES, which is in the same language, *Apparitions*. And from these Images it is that one of the faculties of mans Nature, is called the *Imagination*.¹⁰¹

39 Finally, seeming to reiterate the inadmissibility of this sort of supernatural visions, Hobbes states again:

It is also evident, that there can be no Image of a thing Infinite: for all the Images, and Phantasmes that are made by the Impression of things visible, are figured: but Figure is a quantity every way determined. And therefore there can bee no Image of God; nor of the Soule of Man; nor of Spirits; but onely of Bodies Visible...¹⁰²

40 These considerations about the nature of miracles, prophecy, and visions take away any credit to any self-styled prophet, and leave us totally lacking of correct criteria to establish whether or not a doctrine must be accepted as the word of God. How can we determine the content of the true religious doctrine? How to identify the principles necessary for salvation? In Chapter 43 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes identifies a single fundamental article, an *unum necessarium*: “Jesus is the Christ.”¹⁰³ However, even on this element it is opportune to make some clarifications. Firstly, in Chapter 46 of the same work, titled *Of the OFFICE of our BLESSED SAVIOUR*, Christ is considered, in fact, like Moses, simply a lieutenant of God:

Seeing therefore the authority of Moses was but subordinate, and hee but a Lieutenant to God; it followeth, that Christ, whose authority, as man, was to bee like that of Moses, was no more but subordinate to the authority of his Father. (...) Our Saviour therefore, both in Teaching, and Reigning, representeth (as Moses did) the Person of God; which God from that time forward, but not before, is called the Father; and being still one and the same substance, is one Person as represented by Moses, and another Person as represented by his Sonne the Christ. For *Person* being a relative to a *Representer*, it is consequent to plurality of Representers, that there be a plurality of Persons, though of one and the same Substance.¹⁰⁴

41 Secondly, the definition of Jesus as the Christ, according to Hobbes, is taken from the Scriptures, and “it is manifest, that none can know they are Gods Word, (though all true Christians beleve it,) but those to to whom God himself hath revealed it supernaturally.”

¹⁰⁵ Finally, the syntagma “word of God” can be understood in two ways: either as a *word pronounced by God*, or as a *word referring to God*, and, according to Hobbes, Scripture is called word of God only in the second sense.¹⁰⁶

42 Therefore, even the *unum necessarium* proves to be inadequate to express the real content of the “word of God,” forcing us to look elsewhere, to find other more stable principles to determine what must be accepted as a commandment by God.

Every man therefore ought to consider who is the Sovereign Prophet; that is to say, who it is, that is Gods Vicegerent on Earth; and hath next under God, the Authority of Governing Christian men; and to observe for a Rule, that Doctrine, which in the name of God, hee hath commanded to bee taught; and thereby to examine and try out the truth of those Doctrines, which pretended Prophets with miracle, or without, (...) For when Christian men, take not their Christian Sovereign, for Gods Prophet; they must either take *their owne Dreames*, for the Prophecy they mean to bee governed by, and the *tumour of their own hearts* for the Spirit of God...¹⁰⁷

- 43 When men do not turn to the sovereign, and therefore to the laws of the Commonwealth, to determine what they must accept as the word of God, they end up letting themselves be guided by “*their owne Dreames*,” or be governed by “*the tumour of their own hearts*,” that is, by passions. Hobbes coincides the precepts of religious creed with the laws issued by civil authority, an idea re-asserted also in *Behemoth*. In this text, Character B, who embodies Hobbes, affirms:

There is no Nation in the world whose Religion is not established and receiues not its Authority from the Laws of that Nation. It is true that the Law of God receiues no euidence from the Laws of men. But because men neuer by their own wisdome come to knowledge of what God [>hath] spoken and commanded to be obserued, nor be obliged to obey the Laws whose Author they know not, they are acquiesce in some humane Authority or other.¹⁰⁸

- 44 Briefly, there is no possibility at all for men to know directly the commandments and the word of God. They must adhere to human authority, *i.e.* the authority that already holds power, by virtue of a pact previously stipulated at the time of the foundation of the Commonwealth. Moreover, the sovereign must make use of religion because, “it is that the multitude should euer learne their duty but from the Pulpit.”¹⁰⁹ This is also confirmed by *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where Hobbes maintains that “The one and only thing joining those of various opinion together as a / people, is that they think the orders of their king are the orders of God.”¹¹⁰
- 45 This being so, it is not surprising that Bishop Bramhall accuses Hobbes of reducing “the culture and improvement” of religion only to “*policy*.”¹¹¹

Beyond the name of God: unmoved mover, infinite universe, and incorporeal substances

- 46 If we return to the passage of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in which Hobbes indicates the three elements of God knowable by man, we must recognize that the investigation about God’s *works* and *sacred laws* turned out to be vain. The search for the ultimate causes of natural phenomena, and the analysis of laws of Gods, both natural and positive, do not at all reveal their supernatural origin. The third and last attribute quoted by Hobbes is the *name* of God, but it is not very clear what Hobbes means. In *Leviathan*, Chapter 3, he actually states that “the Name of God is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is *Incomprehensible*; and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;) but that we may honour him.”¹¹² The name of God is thus used exclusively to venerate and worship him, but for all that concerns his attributes, he is absolutely *incomprehensible*. This idea is already clearly expressed in Chapter 15 of *De Cive*, where Hobbes affirms that we know absolutely nothing about God, and that we can refer to him only by using *negative expressions* (as *infinite*, *eternal*, *incomprehensible*), *superlative*, or *indefinite*.¹¹³ In these observations, we are confronted with two substantial problems. Firstly, how can we know that God exists, if we

have no knowledge of him? But there is another, even greater difficulty: Hobbes conceives *infinity* and *eternity* exclusively as negative notions, referring to them as that which surpasses a limited human understanding, and, as we shall see, this conception is problematic in relation to his idea of God.¹¹⁴

47 In order to discuss the impossibility of knowing any attribute of God, we must first refer to the principles of Hobbes' gnoseology. According to Hobbes, all knowledge comes from the senses. This idea, already emerged in the *Elements of Law*,¹¹⁵ is restated in his controversy with Descartes, regarding the *Meditations*.¹¹⁶ In his *Objections*, Hobbes presents some cornerstones of his philosophy, proposing his conception of reason as a *logical calculation, operated on the names* (an idea reaffirmed later in *De Motu* and in *Leviathan*),¹¹⁷ and affirms that men can know only finite things. Hobbes elaborates on this idea more in Chapter 3 of *Leviathan*, a few years later, where he argues that "Whatsoever we imagine, is *Finite*. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of any thing we call *Infinite*."¹¹⁸

48 How can we be sure of the existence of God if the senses do not allow us to infer the existence of something infinite? Hobbes explicitly addresses the problem in the fifth objection, addressed against Descartes's third meditation:

It seems, then, that there is no idea of God in us. A man born blind, who has often approached fire and felt hot, recognizes that there is something which makes him hot; and when he hears that this is called 'fire' he concludes that fire exists. But he does not know what shape or colour fire has, and has absolutely no idea or image of fire that comes before his mind. The same applies to a man who recognizes that there must be some cause of his images or ideas, and that this cause must have a prior cause, and so on; he is finally led to the supposition of some eternal cause which never began to exist and hence cannot have a cause prior to itself, and he concludes that something eternal must necessarily exist. But he has no idea which he can say is the idea of that eternal being; he merely gives the name or label 'God' to the thing that he believes in, or acknowledges to exist.¹¹⁹

49 The image of the blind born was already present in the *Elements*,¹²⁰ and more broadly is distinctive of Hobbes' philosophy.¹²¹ However, even if the blind man cannot have any *phantasm* of an object acquired through vision, nevertheless, he may have other phantasms of it, produced by the other senses. On the contrary, men cannot have any perception at all of God's existence. At most, starting from senses, and from the existence of external objects, they could arrive to a "supposition of some eternal cause which never began to exist and hence cannot have a cause prior to itself."¹²² The problem thus comes back to the question of the existence of God, conceived as a *prima causa*, or as the first mover of the universe. This problem has been addressed by several scholars,¹²³ who suggest making a distinction between two different meanings of God in Hobbes' works: the *biblical God*, who is also a pivotal element in Hobbes politics; and the *philosophical God*, a concept that represents an essential element in his natural philosophy. Indeed, in his works, we can also find some rare references to God as a creator; whose the most explicit in a passage from *Decameron physiologicum* (1678), and which seems to anticipate, in some respects, Newton's *design argument*.¹²⁴ However, with regard to our analysis, the philosophical notion of God is undoubtedly the more interesting, and it identifies Him with the first mover, as this passage from the *Elements of Law* clearly states:

For the effects we acknowledge naturally, do necessarily include a power of their producing, before they were produced; and that power presupposeth something existent that hath such power; and the thing so existing with power to produce, if it were not eternal, must needs have been produced by something else before that: till we come to eternal, that is to say, to the first power of all powers, and first cause of

all causes. And this is it which men call by the name of GOD: implying eternity, incomprehensibility, and omnipotency.¹²⁵

50 On the other hand, the possibility to philosophically demonstrate the existence of God is contested by Hobbes, as we know, both in the tenth objection to the third Descartes's meditation,¹²⁶ as well as in the *De Motu*.¹²⁷ Once again, Hobbes seems to contradict himself, and to overcome this difficulty it is necessary to examine the principles of his philosophical system a little more in detail. Since his very first writings, Hobbes maintains that all the universe is purely material, and affirms that it is inhabited by only two principles: *matter* and *motion*.¹²⁸ This materialistic conception of the world, already present in the *Elements* and his *Objections* to Descartes's *Meditations*, is very explicit in *De Motu*, where Hobbes completely identifies the notions of *ens* and *corpus*.¹²⁹ Indeed, he states that *body* and *material* are, ultimately, "names of the same thing – this is because 'thing' is interpreted in different ways."¹³⁰ Indeed, "When considered *simpliciter*, an object that exists is termed 'body', but when considered as capable of assuming a new form or a new shape the same body is called 'material'."¹³¹ To this materialistic approach, Hobbes associates an idea of motion inherited from Galileo,¹³² which leads him to this formulation of the principle of inertia:

First, it is agreed that nothing begins to move of itself, but that everything moves for a reason, and has as the initiator of its own motion the movement of some body that touches it. This is so because – to put it briefly – a body, once it starts to move, has within itself everything necessary for motion. (...) But just as for [generating] motion in a body at rest, so for [generating] rest in a moved body, some agent is necessary that is external to, and with the body.¹³³

51 Therefore, if the universe is composed of *matter* and *motion* only, and the principle of inertia suggests that the motion cannot be transmitted if not by a moved and contiguous body, it follows that the first mover must then also be corporeal. Not surprisingly, in *De Corpore* (where we find a more precise formulation of some ideas already present in *De Motu*), Hobbes reiterates that "*causa motus, nulla esse potest in corpore nisi contiguo et moto,*"¹³⁴ and he openly attacks, in Chapter 26, the Aristotelian conception of the unmoved mover, present in the book L of *Metaphysics*.¹³⁵ He maintains, indeed, that "every object is either a part of the whole world, or an aggregate of parts,"¹³⁶ by reiterating what already claimed in Chapter 46 of *Leviathan*, "every part of the Universe, is Body; and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe: And because the Universe is All, that which is no part of it, is *Nothing*; and consequently *no where*."¹³⁷

52 The universe therefore includes all the *entia*, that is all the bodies. What is not body, is evidently no part of the universe, and, according to Hobbes, is simply *nothing*. As a consequence, even the first mover – in addition to being perpetually in motion – must also necessarily be corporeal. The thesis of the corporeity of God explicitly emerges,¹³⁸ for the first time, in 1668, in the *Appendix* to the Latin edition of *Leviathan*.¹³⁹ Here, citing Tertullian, Hobbes claims that God is also a body, because "Whatever is not a body is not an entity."¹⁴⁰ In fact, he had been forced to affirm the corporeity of God, following the attack of Bramhall, who accused him of confusing God, if not with the universe, at least with nature, because those "who deny all incorporeal substances, can understand nothing by God, but either nature, (not *naturam naturantem*, that is, a real author of nature, but *naturam naturatam*, that is, the orderly concourse of natural causes, as T. H. seemeth to intimate)."¹⁴¹ In his *Answer*, Hobbes admits that his philosophical position necessarily implies the corporeity of God: "I mean by the universe, the aggregate of all things that have being in themselves; and so do all men else. And because God has a being, it follows

that he is either the whole universe, or part of it.”¹⁴² Closed in the grip of Bramhall, Hobbes is forced to recognize that his philosophy left no room for other interpretations: God must coincide with the whole universe, or with a part of it. However, as Thomas Tenison correctly points out in his *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, to safeguard the infinity that is dutifully attributed to God, we must necessarily conclude that the only plausible alternative is that God coincides with the “aggregate of all things that have being in themselves”, that is, with the universe.¹⁴³ Indeed, if the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts, and if we suppose that God corresponds to a part of the universe only, we must necessarily conclude that there is something greater than God. Tenison also underlines another difficulty in Hobbes’ thought: Hobbes maintains that all things are material, but it is impossible for matter to create matter. Consequently, either matter is created by some immaterial entity, which, as we know, is impossible, or matter must necessarily be eternal. Tenison attributes the idea of the eternity of matter to Hobbes, by referring to a passage of chapter 8 of *De Corpore*,¹⁴⁴ where he reveals his sympathies for a Democritean and Lucretian conception of matter:

When we say a living creature, a tree, or any other specified body is *generated* or *destroyed*, it is not to be so understood as if there were made a body of that which is not-body, or not a body of a body, but of a living creature not a living creature, of a tree, &c. that is, that those accidents for which we call one thing a living creature, another thing a tree, and another by some another name, are generated and destroyed; (...). And therefore, philosophers, who tie themselves to natural reason, suppose that a *body can neither be generated nor destroyed*...¹⁴⁵

- 53 This idea is already present in *De Motu*, although expressed in a less explicit form,¹⁴⁶ and in both works Hobbes argues that the individual and corruptible bodies are aggregated composed by a unique eternal matter, which always remains the same, despite the modifications to which transient and corruptible bodies are subjected.
- 54 Hobbes’ considerations about the eternity of matter seem to support the hypothesis that his God coincides with the universe, uncreated and eternal. A passage from Chapter 26 of *De Corpore* apparently seems to confirm that. Here Hobbes writes: “I cannot therefore commend those that boast they have demonstrated, by reasons drawn from natural things, that the world had a beginning.”¹⁴⁷
- 55 An interpretation of Hobbes as a “pantheist” *ante-litteram* was apparently quite diffused in 17th and 18th centuries. François Peleau, a French admirer of Hobbes, in a letter dated March 1, 1657, asked him a confirmation for his argument about the impossibility of distinguishing God from the world.¹⁴⁸ About a century later, in the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot wrote that even if he was not atheist, his religion differed very little from that of Spinoza.¹⁴⁹ Must we conclude, thus, together with Diderot, that Hobbes’ conception of God is comparable to that defended in Spinoza’s *Ethics*?¹⁵⁰
- 56 Without going into the matter concerning Spinoza’s God,¹⁵¹ we must observe, however, that Hobbes has a radically different conception of infinity.¹⁵² Indeed, he considers the concept of infinity as totally inaccessible to man, and he even denies the existence of any positive conception of the infinite. For Hobbes, words like *quidditas*, *nunc stans*, typical of the Scholasticism,¹⁵³ are meaningless, since the idea of temporal infinity can be conceived only as a succession of endless instants, that is, as *indefinite*.¹⁵⁴ This negative conception of infinity is also present in Hobbes’ scientific works, for example in *De Corpore*, where Hobbes states that “Also, *number is infinite*, is a false proposition; for no number can be infinite, but only the word *number* is then called an indefinite name when there is no determined number answering to it in the mind.”¹⁵⁵

- 57 As Bramhall correctly points out, this negative conception of infinity does not square well with the infinity which must be attributed to God. Defending this idea of infinity, we are forced to infer that even God — as well as the universe if the two concepts eventually coincide — is indefinite. In addition to this not inconsiderable difficulty, there are two other passages, respectively from *De Cive*, and from *Leviathan*, which make the identification of God with the universe equally problematic. In *De Cive*, Chapter 15, Hobbes writes:
- 58 What *worship* does *natural reason* assign to God? To answer this question, let us start from his *attributes*; and in the first place, obviously, we must attribute *existence* to him. For there can be no will to honour one whom we do not believe to exist. It is also obvious that the philosophers who have said that the world itself or the soul (i.e. a part) of the world is God, have spoken unworthily of him; for they are giving him no attributes; they are denying his existence altogether. For by the name *God* is meant the *cause of the world*; and those who say that *the world is God*, are saying that *there is no cause of the world*, i.e. that *there is no God*.¹⁵⁶
- 59 Nine years later, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes reiterates the same idea, expressed in almost identical terms. In Chapter 31, we read that,
- [...] those Philosophers, who said the World, or the Soule of the World was God, spake unworthily of him; and denied his Existence: For by God, is understood the cause of the World; and to say the World is God, is to say there is no cause of it, that is, no God.¹⁵⁷
- 60 This leads us to an impasse. Indeed, God must coincide with the first cause of the world, but, as we know, this cause should be material, and all that exists and is material is even necessarily a part of the universe. The focus of the question lies in the concept of cause. Whoever excludes the existence of a cause external to the world, and supposes that the world itself contains all the elements necessary for its genesis and development, must necessarily also exclude the existence of God.¹⁵⁸ In *De Motu*, arguing against White — who claimed to be able to demonstrate that the motion of the universe derives from an external principle¹⁵⁹ — Hobbes affirms that if we accept his conception of motion, based on the principle of inertia, we must necessarily conclude that:
- [...] either the world did not have a beginning or that it had its beginning in something incorporeal or in *incomprehensible ens*. As has now been proved, [the world] cannot have begun of itself or [originated] in another body, because it is impossible to conceive a body outside the world, the world being the aggregate of all bodies.¹⁶⁰
- 61 And, “although each of the separated bodies of the universe is external to every other body, none of them is ‘external’ with respect to the universe.”¹⁶¹ This reduces all possible solutions about the problem of the *causa prima* to two alternatives: either the world is supposed to have originated from an incorporeal body, that is inconceivable, or it must be considered — together with Aristotle, and his Renaissance epigones¹⁶² — that the world is eternal, thesis opposed by the whole Christian tradition and openly condemned in 1277, in Paris.¹⁶³ Of course, Hobbes proposes the first solution, stating that “motion, indeed, can be naturally produced only by motion. The fact that God, being unmoved, yet moves, [others] is not natural, but supernatural, and also above the human understanding.”¹⁶⁴ For this reason, any attempt to demonstrate philosophically the existence of God is considered simply “*afilosofo*,” and, despite the identification of the concept of *ens* and *corpus*, Hobbes argues, in *De Motu*, that the existence of incorporeal substances is a dogma

of faith.¹⁶⁵ In paragraph 7, Chapter 26, he explains how a philosopher should react when he stumbles into an article of faith:

[...] I say the philosopher is indeed free to enquire into the nature and cause of motion, but that as the investigation proceeds, and he wills stumble upon a proposition that is now held by the Christian faith, and thus seems to contradict a conclusion he has established earlier, he can infer (if he has previously reasoned correctly): 'I do not understand under what meaning of terms that proposition is true'. So, for instance, he says: 'I do not see, or it is beyond my grasp, *how that which is not moved moves something else*, or how that which exists is not in a [given] place, or how something incorporeal sees, hears, understands, wills, loves, hates, etc.'¹⁶⁶

- 62 According to Hobbes, philosophers can declare some articles of faith incomprehensible, and therefore above their understanding, as, for example, to explain "*how that which is not moved moves something else*."¹⁶⁷ Thus, the existence of a God, that is an incorporeal body which is the unmoved mover of the universe, cannot be conceived through natural reason, and then must be considered an article of faith, *i.e.* above human understanding. In *De Motu*, indeed, the existence of incorporeal substances is considered one of these articles of faith:

[...] the heathens, noticing that, not only when they slept but also when they were awake, certain spectra appeared in front of their eyes, and since they did not know these were phantasms born from some violent passion of the mind, they were able to consider them as external things, possessing dimensions. However, since these images were seen to fade easily, they did not consider them as bodies, they called them *spirits*, wishing to give them a name for very thin bodies. Indeed, those who are ignorant, consider natural things not by their dimensions, but by their opacity, and thus retain empty which is penetrable to the vision. This could explain how people came to believe in the existence of innumerable daemons, both good and bad ones, and of other *incorporeal substances*. But since it cannot be known by natural reason if some substances are incorporeal or not, it must be accepted as true which is revealed supernaturally by God. Therefore, Christians recognized [the existence] of this sort of substances, pushed by the authority of Sacred Scripture, and not because of the reasons of the philosophers. This is a dogma of faith, and not of science.¹⁶⁸

- 63 In subsequent writings, however, Hobbes openly denies the existence of incorporeal substances, and in 1668, in the cited *Appendix* of *Leviathan*, he even affirms the corporeity of God. Once again, we are faced with an impasse: in *De Motu*, the existence of incorporeal substances — among which Hobbes includes God, incorporeal body and unmoved mover of the universe — is admitted on the basis of the authority of the Scripture, while in *Leviathan* Hobbes declares he does not find any place in Scripture, in which the existence of incorporeal substances is affirmed.¹⁶⁹ However, by comparing these works, an interesting deduction can be made: the explanation of the natural origin of spectra and visions is essentially identical in *De Motu* to the explication in *Leviathan*.¹⁷⁰ In both of these works, visions and spectra are nothing but phantasms generated by some vehement passion of the mind. Consequently, incorporeal substances, whose existence is affirmed in *De Motu* on the basis of Scripture, seem to always have the same natural and anthropological explanation: their existence, as well as that of innumerable demons and ghosts, is a belief generated by human passions.

Conclusion

64 The difficulty to reconcile Hobbes' discordant statements on the subject of the existence of incorporeal substances makes the interpretation of his theological position even more problematic. To overcome this difficulty, it could be assumed that Hobbes defends in *De Motu* a sort of fideism, recommending to rely on revelation for what concerns the existence of God and other problematic articles of faith.¹⁷¹ However, this solution is problematic, since Hobbes is always decidedly skeptical about revelation, particularly in *Leviathan*. Moreover, in *De Motu* — where he affirms, as we know, that “either the world did not have a beginning or that it had its beginning in something incorporeal or in *incomprehensible ens*” — Hobbes already supports the same conception of eternal matter which is present later in *De Corpore*. This means that if the matter is eternal, and all that is body is also part of the universe, it follows that the universe must be *eternal*. An eternity conceived as a succession of endless instants could be problematic if attributed to God, as Bramhall points out, but it is not for the universe. However, if we affirm that the universe is eternal, it means that it cannot originate from a cause external to it, and that it contains in itself all the elements suitable for its development. There is not, in Aristotelian sense, any “unmoved mover,” or an external, incorporeal, and inconceivable cause that produced it.

65 The theological consequences of this conclusion are obvious: if there is something that corresponds to the concept of God, this must necessarily coincide with the corporeal universe. However, Hobbes' position regarding the identification of God within the world: “to say the World is God, is to say there is no cause of it, that is, no God.”¹⁷² How can we then interpret this statement? Bramhall, referring to a passage from *De Cive*, accuses Hobbes of considering atheism more reasonable than superstition. In fact, this idea is not necessarily heterodox in itself, and it is already present in Francis Bacon's *Essays*.¹⁷³ However, in Hobbes this statement assumes a completely different meaning and value, since it must be related to the natural origins of religious beliefs. In the *De Cive*, Chapter 16, we read:

Aware of their own weakness and in wonder at natural events, the human race has developed an almost universal belief that an invisible God is the Workman who has made all visible things; they also fear him, believing that they do not have adequate self-protection in themselves. But their imperfect use of reason and the vigour of their passions have prevented them from worshipping him rightly. The fear of the invisible, when separated from right reason, is superstition. Without special assistance from God, it proved almost impossible to avoid the twin rocks of *Atheism* and *superstition*; for the latter proceeds from fear without right reason, the former from an *opinion of reason* without fear.¹⁷⁴

66 If atheism is an opinion of reason without fear (*rationis opinione sine metu*), and, conversely, superstition proceeds from the fear of the invisible, without right reason, it follows that *religion* must be an opinion of reason accompanied by the fear of the invisible. In *Leviathan*, the origin of religious beliefs is the same, essentially natural and anthropological: religion is nothing but “*Feare of power invisible*,” but here Hobbes is decidedly more radical. He adds that this invisible power is “feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed.”¹⁷⁵ Based on these statements, Leo Strauss and Edwin Curley stress the devastating effect of Hobbes' critique of religion, which would destroy any theistic conception of God.¹⁷⁶ Hobbes must therefore be considered a sort of

“systematic atheist”, or an atheist “by consequence”, as Bramhall suggests,¹⁷⁷ and with him some eighteenth-century readers of Hobbes?

- 67 Despite his caustic claims about religion and concerning the theistic idea of God, Hobbes *never* explicitly denies its existence. This is not, of course, enough to exclude him from the history of modern atheism, because before the late eighteenth century (and, to be precise, before d’Holbach), no philosopher has the audacity to confess *openly*, and *explicitly*, his atheism.¹⁷⁸ Leaving aside the question concerning what modern atheism exactly consists of, we must recognize that some 17th-century critics of Hobbes, despite their cultural prejudices, correctly detect the impossibility of reconciling his philosophical system with a coherent conception of divinity. Perhaps, even the most acute and brilliant of them, Bishop Bramhall, was not wrong, when affirmed that Hobbes’ philosophy “destroys the very being of God, and leaves nothing in his place, but an empty name.”¹⁷⁹

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NOTES

1. BAYLE, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 776. Bayle has undoubtedly a high regard for Hobbes, and considers him “l’un des plus grand esprits du XVII^e siècle.” Ibid., 774.
2. Interpretations of Hobbes’ theology and religion are numerous, and extremely heterogeneous. By simplifying drastically, it is possible to identify two almost perfectly antithetical theses. On the one hand, we find the hypothesis first by Warrender (WARRENDER, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*), and later in a more extreme sense by Hood (Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*), according to which the existence of God would be a necessary postulate of Hobbes’ philosophical and political system. On this side, we find also Martinich (MARTINICH, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*), who affirms that Hobbes’ theological conception is substantially compatible with Calvinism. A moderate version of this thesis is supported by Wright, who, although considers Hobbes’ position undoubtedly “unorthodox” (at least compared to medieval and modern traditional theologies), maintains it compatible with a form of religious belief. See WRIGHT, *Religion, Politics, and Thomas Hobbes*, 175-210. On the other side are the readings by Strauss, *Die Religionskritik des Hobbes*, Polin, *Hobbes, Dieu et les hommes*, and Curley, “I Durst Not Write So Boldly,” who believe that Hobbes’ criticism towards religion, actually undermines any form of theology, and religion.
3. This topic has been addressed, with very different approaches, by several scholars. See Fiaschi, “Hobbes and Theology. Foreword,” and id. “The Power of Words. Political and Theological Science in Thomas Hobbes.” See also Abizadeh, “Hobbes’ Conventionalist Theology.”
4. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 157-60. See also Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*.

5. December 14, 1679, according to the new calendar. See SCHUHMANN, *Hobbes. Une chronique*, 217.
6. AUBREY, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, 235. See also LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity*, 193-4.
7. On the attacks against Hobbes, and his heterodox and dangerous ideas, see SPRINGBORG, "Hobbes on Religion," 346-50.
8. J. Wallis to T. Tenison, 30 Nov./10 Dic. 1680, Bodleian Library, Ms. Add. D.105, f. 70v, cit. in JESSEPH, *Squaring the Circle*, 53. On the attacks against Hobbes' theological and religious ideas, *ibid.*, 49-57. On the different positions of Hobbes and Wallis, about religion and politics, *ibid.*, p. 293 ff.
9. Edward Nicholas to Edward Hyde, 18 January 1652, British Library, Birch MS 4180, f. 54, cit. in Collins, "Thomas Hobbes, 'Father of Atheists,'" 26.
10. HYDE, *A Brief View and Survey*, 6.
11. *Ibid.*, 9.
12. See HOBBS, *Consideration upon the Reputation, Loyalty, Manners, and Religion of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, in *The Collected English Works* (hereinafter *EW*. All Hobbes' works are cited only with their title, without the name of the author), IV, 424 ff. See also *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis Vita Authore Seipso*, in *Opera (OL)*, I, xv, ff.
13. See *Vitae Hobbiana Auctarium, Authore R. Blackbourne, M.A.*, *OL*, I, xxix ff.
14. On Bramhall, see J. CUNNINGHAM, James Ussher and John Bramhall.
15. From the diatribe between Hobbes and Bramhall are born some important Hobbes' works: *On Liberty and Necessity*, *EW*, IV, 229-278, and *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*, *EW*, V. On this debate see JACKSON, *Hobbes, Bramhall and the Politics of Liberty and Necessity*, and CHAPPELL, *Introduction*, in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ix-xxiii.
16. See BHAMHALL, *The Catching of Leviathan*, in *An Answer to a book entitled The Catching of Leviathan*, *EW*, IV, 381.
17. *An Answer*, *EW*, IV, 289-91.
18. In the Latin version: *Metu Spirituum*. Cf. *Leviathan*, XII, 171.
19. *Ibid.*, 170.
20. "Fear of invisible powers, what is it else in savage people, but the fear of somewhat they think a God?" *An Answer*, *EW*, IV, 292.
21. *Leviathan*, XII, 166.
22. See *The Elements of Law*, 1st part, XI, § 2, 53-4.
23. See WHITE, *De Mundo Dialogi*, 265-446.
24. *Anti-White* XXVI, 2, 308-9; Eng. Trans. 305. For a detailed analysis of the theological problems in *De Motu*, see Paganini, "Introduzione," in HOBBS, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, 100-160; and *id.*, *Hobbes' Galilean Project. Its Philosophical and Theological Implications*.
25. *Anti-White*, XXVI, 4, 308-9; Eng. Trans. 306.
26. See PAGANINI, *Hobbes' Galilean Project*, who underlines the evolution of Hobbes' approach to the problem of incorporeal substances. In particular, Paganini highlights the "semantic or linguistic compromise," in *De Motu* (*ibid.*, 45), which allow Hobbes to separate two different domains of faith and philosophy. However, Paganini correctly shows that this strategy turns out to be unsustainable in *Leviathan* (*ibid.*, 45-6). Concerning Hobbes' demonstrations of God's existence see *id.*, *How did Hobbes think of the existence and nature of God?*
27. *Leviathan*, XXXII, 578.
28. *De Cive*, XVIII, 4 284-5; Eng. Trans. 238-9.
29. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vv. 1091-1094, 436-38.
30. See for ex. LOCKE, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book 4, XVIII, §§ 5-9, 691-5.
31. On the other hand, in *Leviathan*, Chapter 12, Hobbes maintains that revelation can teach something above reason, but not something which openly contrasts with it. See *Leviathan*, XII, 182. See also PAGANINI, *How did Hobbes think of the existence and nature of God?*, 301.
32. See *Leviathan*, LXII, 774 ff..

33. “Jesus is the Christ.” *Leviathan*, XLIII, 938. On this topic see MANENSCHIJN, “*Jesus Is the Christ*”, 46 ff.
34. See Appendix in *Leviathan*, 1143-1243.
35. *An Historical Narration Concerning Heresy, and the Punishment thereof*, EW, IV pp. 385-408.
36. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 292.
37. *Leviathan*, XII, 164, my italic.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Cf. *Tractatus Opticus II*, British Library, Ms Harley 6796, Chap. I, § 1, f. 193r, (Alessio ed., 147). On this topic, see PACCHI, *Convenzione e ipotesi*.
41. Recently, Lupoli dwelt on the topic of opinion, bringing the two meanings of the term, philosophical-scientific, and religious, closer together. See LUPOLI, *Hobbes and Religion without Theology*.
42. *Leviathan*, XI, 156.
43. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 292.
44. *De Homine*, OL, II, 106-7.
45. *De Cive*, XVI, 1, p. 234; Eng. Trans. 187.
46. See SCHUHMANN, *La Question de Dieu chez Hobbes*, and LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity*, 201.
47. LUCY, *Observations, Censures and Confutations*, 85.
48. “*Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*,” STATIUS, *Thebaid*, III, v. 661.
49. See LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, vv. 1160-1240. It is curious that Samuel Sorbière, in his letter to Hobbes, dated July 11, 1645, in which he expresses his full esteem to him, turns to Hobbes as a new Epicurus, citing verses 62-78 of *De rerum natura*, where the Latin poet expresses his tribute to the “*Graius homo*.” See *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes* (hereinafter CH), I, 121-2.
50. *Leviathan*, VI, 86.
51. On the “irreligious nature” of Chapter 12 of *Leviathan*, see STAUFFER, “*Of Religion*” in *Hobbes’ Leviathan*.
52. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vv. 21-24, 306.
53. Cf. *Anti-White*, XXXV, 16, 395-6.
54. See PAGANINI, *How did Hobbes think of the existence and nature of God?*, 290.
55. Cf. *Anti-White*, XXVI, 2, 308-9.
56. On the topic of *potentia dei absoluta* in Hobbes’ thought, see M. PÉCHARMAN, *La puissance absolue de Dieu selon Hobbes*, and FOISNEAU, *Le Dieu tout-puissant de Hobbes est-il un tyran?*; ID., *Hobbes et la toute-puissance de Dieu*, but also SPRINGBORG, *Hobbes’ Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle*, 928 ff.
57. *Obiectiones Tertiae*, in DESCARTES, *Œuvres* (hereinafter AT), VII, 187; Eng. Trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (hereinafter DW), II, 131-2.
58. *Leviathan*, XXXI, 556.
59. This theme is addressed by Milner, who stresses the problem of attributing to God, Hobbes’ natural, and prophetic laws. See B. MILNER, *Hobbes on Religion*.
60. *De Cive*, XIV, 4, 207; Eng. Trans. 156. See also *Leviathan*, XXVI, 442.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *De Cive*, XV, 4, 221; Eng. Trans. 173.
63. *Ibid.*, II, 1, 99; Eng. Trans. 33.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Indeed, “The first law of nature (the foundation) is: to seek peace when it can be had; when it cannot, to look for aid in war [*auxilia belli*].” *Ibid.*, II, 2, 100; Eng. Trans. 34.
66. Cf. *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, EW, V, 158.
67. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 284-85.

68. See *De Cive*, III, 33, 121.
69. Cf. *Leviathan*, XXXI, 554-6. Despite this, just a few years earlier, in Chapter 4 of *De Cive* (titled: *That the natural law is the divine law*) Hobbes argued for an identification of natural and positive laws. See *De Cive*, IV, 1, 122.
70. See for ex. SCHUHMANN, *Phantasm and Idols*, and Hoekstra, *Disarming the Prophets*.
71. *Leviathan*, XXXI, 556.
72. *Ibid.*, VIII, 112-4.
73. *Ibid.*, 114-6.
74. *Ibid.*, XXXIV, 612.
75. *Ibid.*, XXXI, 556.
76. *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 658.
77. BRAMHALL, *The Catching of Leviathan*, in *An Answer*, EW IV, 324.
78. *Leviathan*, XXXII, 580-2.
79. *Ibid.*, 584.
80. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 326-7.
81. *Leviathan*, XXXVII, 688.
82. We do not consider here the further difficulty of reconciling the absolute determinism of Hobbes with the omnipotence of God. On this topic See *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, EW, V, 404 ff. For an analysis of this topic, see ALTINI, “*Potentia Dei*” e prescienza divina nella *teologia di Hobbes*.
83. *Leviathan*, XXXII, 582.
84. *Ibid.*, XXXVII, 682.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*, 684.
88. *Ibid.*, 696.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*, XL, 738.
92. *De Homine*, OL, II, 118. On this topic see CURLEY, *Hobbes and the Causes of Religion Toleration*.
93. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 339-40.
94. *Leviathan*, XXXII, 578.
95. *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 670.
96. *Ibid.*, 672.
97. Cf. *ibid.*, 662-4.
98. *Ibid.*, 665-6.
99. *Ibid.*, XXXII, 580.
100. *Ibid.*, XLV, 1042, my italic.
101. *Ibid.*, 1030.
102. *Ibid.*
103. *Ibid.*, XLIII, 938.
104. *Ibid.*, XLI, 772.
105. Cf. *ibid.*, XXXIII, 604-6.
106. Cf. *ibid.*, XXXVI, 650.
107. *Ibid.*, 678-80.
108. *Behemoth*, 167.
109. *Ibid.*, 159.
110. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vv. 2199-2200, 576-7.
111. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 290.

112. *Leviathan*, III, 46.
113. Cf. *De Cive*, XV, 14, 226-7.
114. Cf. LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity*, 212.
115. "Originally all conceptions proceed from the actions of the thing itself, whereof it is the conception. Now when the action is present, the conception it produceth is called SENSE, and the thing by whose action the same is produced is called OBJECT of sense." *The Elements of Law*, 1st part, II, § 2, 3.
116. See *Obiectiones Tertiae*, AT, VII, 178.
117. Cf. *Anti-White*, XXX, 16-18, 357-9. See also *Leviathan*, III, 38-42.
118. *Leviathan*, III, 46.
119. *Obiectiones Tertiae*, AT, VII, 180; Eng. Trans. DW, II, 127.
120. See *The Elements of Law*, 1st part, XI, § 2, 54.
121. Concerning the argument of the blind born, see GIANCOTTI, *La Funzione dell'idea di Dio nel sistema naturale e politico di Hobbes*.
122. *Obiectiones Tertiae*, AT, VII, 180; Eng. Trans. DW, II, 127.
123. See, in part. PACCHI, *Hobbes e il Dio delle cause* (1984), now in *Scritti hobbesiani*, 52-65, and Id. *Hobbes and the problem of God*; HEPBURN, *Hobbes on the knowledge of God*. The topic has been analyzed recently by Paganini, who, however, comes to very different conclusions from that of Pacchi, and Hepburn. See PAGANINI, *How did Hobbes think of the existence and nature of God?*, and Id., *Hobbes' Galilean Project*.
124. "It is very hard to believe, that to produce male and female, and all that belongs thereto, as also the several and curious organs of sense and memory, could be the work of anything that had not understanding." *Decameron Physiologicum*, EW, VII, 176.
125. *The Elements of Law*, 1st part, XI, § 2, 53-4.
126. See *Obiectiones Tertiae*, AT, VII, 187.
127. See *Anti-White*, XIII, 9, 200.
128. Cf. also *Vita carmine expressa*, OL, I, lxxxix-xc.
129. See *Anti-White*, XXVII, 1, 312.
130. *Ibid.*, 312-3; Eng. Trans. 311.
131. *Ibid.*
132. See PAGANINI, "Introduzione," in Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, 24 ff.; BALDIN, *Hobbes e Galileo*, 127 ff.
133. *Anti-White*, XX, 8, 251-2; Eng. Trans. 230.
134. *De Corpore*, IX, 7, OL, I, 110.
135. "*Praeterea etsi ex eo, quod nihil potest movere seipsum, satis recte infertur primum aliquod esse movens quod fuerit aeternum, non tamen inferetur id, quod inferre solent, nempe aeternum immobile, sed contra aeternum motum.*" *Ibid.*, XXVI, 1, OL, I, 336.
136. *Ibid.*, XXVI, 1, OL, I, 335-6; Eng. Trans. EW, I, 410.
137. *Leviathan*, XLVI, 1076.
138. However, as early as 1641, Hobbes have already supported the idea of the corporeity of God, in a missed letter to Descartes, as it can be deduced by the answer of the French philosopher. See Descartes to Mersenne (for Hobbes), Leiden, January 21, 1641, AT, III, 287-8. See also LUPOLI, *Hobbes and Religion without Theology*, 460.
139. On the topic of the corporeity of God see LUPOLI, "Fluidismo" e corporeal deity *nella filosofia naturale di Thomas Hobbes*, and ID., *Nei limiti della materia*, 511-74, and the critical remarks by Leijenhorst: LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes' corporeal deity*, Id., *Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity*, 214 ff.; SPRINGBORG, *Hobbes' Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle*, 916 ff.
140. *Appendix ad Leviathan*, 1229. In fact, some passages in *De Motu* already seem to suggest this idea: in Chapter 35, § 16, after reiterating the thesis of the incomprehensibility of God's nature,

Hobbes declares “I incline to the view that no proposition about the nature of God can be true save this one: God exists, and that no title correctly describes the nature of God other than the word ‘being’ [ens].” (*Anti-White*, 295-6; Eng. Trans. 434). However, as we know, Hobbes identifies the terms *ens* and *corpus*, and therefore, even the divine being must also be corporeal.

141. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 312-3.

142. *Ibid.*, 349.

143. TENISON, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, 12.

144. *Ibid.*, 10-1.

145. *De Corpore*, VIII, 20, OL, I, 103; Eng. Trans. EW, I, 116. Differently from Democritus and Lucretius, Hobbes is however not atomist. On this topic see BALDIN, *Hobbes e Galileo*, 169-206.

146. Cf. *Anti-White*, XXXV, 1, 387-8.

147. *De Corpore*, XXVI, 1, OL, I, 334-5; Eng. Trans. EW, I, 412-3.

148. “J’ay trouué une belle demonstration sur vne des Plus Importantes questions de Physique [...]. Je crains de vous l’enuoyer, parceque c’est sur une Matiere un peu chatouilleuse, telle que la Nullité de l’existence d’un Dieu, distinct et different, du Monde.” CH, I, 450.

149. “S’il ne fut pas athée, il faut avouer que son Dieu diffère peu de celui de Spinoza.” DIDEROT, *Œuvres*, 407.

150. Lupoli argues that the Hobbesian conception of God is actually similar of that of Spinoza. See LUPOLI, *Hobbes and Religion without Theology*, 477.

151. On this topic see GIANCOTTI, *Il Dio di Spinoza*.

152. Cf. SPINOZA, *Ethics*, Pars I, Propositio 6, in *Opera*, II, 45-6.

153. See for ex. *De Corpore*, III, 3, OL, I, 29-30.

154. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 298.

155. *De Corpore*, V, 5, EW, I, 59. The Latin is quite different: “*numerus est infinitus, falsus est, nam numerus nullus est infinitus, sed nomen tantum sive vox haec, numerus, cui cum in animo nullus certus numerus substernitur nomen quidem appellatur indefinitum, non tamen numerus aliquis est infinitus.*” OL, I, 53. See also *Ibid.*, VII, 12, 88-9.

156. *De Cive*, XV, 14, p. 226; Eng. Trans. 178.

157. *Leviathan*, XXXI, 564.

158. Cf. Jesseph, *Hobbes’ Atheism*.

159. See WHITE, *De Mundo Dialogi*, 278 ff.

160. *Anti-White*, XXVII, 5, p. 317; Eng. Trans. 318, slightly modified.

161. *Ibid.*, XXVII, 16, 324; Eng. Trans. 328.

162. On the question of the eternity of the world, in late Renaissance Aristotelians (in particular the School of Padua) and Hobbes, see the interesting and documented Minerbi BELGRADO, *L’eternità del mondo*.

163. On the Condemnation of 1277, see BIANCHI, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle*.

164. *Anti-White*, VII, 1, 146; Eng. Trans. 79, modified. As we have already remarked, this “compromise solution” has been analyzed by Paganini. See PAGANINI, *Hobbes’ Galilean Project*, part. 43-6.

165. *Ibid.*, IV, 3, 127.

166. *Ibid.*, XXVI, 7, 310; Eng. Trans. 307-8, modified (my italic).

167. See MILNER, *Hobbes on Religion*, 406.

168. *Anti-White*, IV, 3, 127, my translation.

169. *Leviathan*, XLV, 1020-2.

170. *Ibid.*, 1030-2.

171. For a critique of Hobbes’ supposed fideism in *De Motu*, see LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity*, 204-6.

172. *Leviathan*, XXXI, 564.

173. See BACON, *Of Superstition*, XVII, in *The Essayes*, 54-6.

174. *De Cive*, XVI, 1, 234; Eng. Trans. 187.

175. *Leviathan*, VI, 86.

176. See STRAUSS, *Die Religionskritik*; CURLEY, “I Durst Not Write So Boldly”, 580. In more recent years, the difficulty of reconciling Hobbesian philosophy with theism has been underlined, in a more articulated and sophisticated way, also by Schuhmann, Leijenhorst, Jesseph, and Paganini.

177. Bramhall supposes that Hobbes’ philosophical system inevitably leads to an “atheism by consequence”. Cf. *An Answer*, EW, IV, 383-4. See LUPOLI, *Hobbes and Religion without Theology*, 456.

178. On this topic see MORI, *L’ateismo dei moderni*, 11-34 (on Hobbes, 65-9). In fact, even a century before d’Holbach, in the middle of seventeenth-century, the author of *Theophrastus redivivus* manifests his adherence to atheism, but the text circulated anonymously. See PAGANINI, *Un athéisme d’ancien régime*.

179. BRAMHALL, *The Catching of Leviathan*, in *An Answer*, EW, IV, 301.

ABSTRACTS

Throughout centuries of scholarship written on Thomas Hobbes, the question of the English philosopher’s religion has always been one of the most attractive and debated issues. Since the 17th century many of his readers, such as Bishop John Bramhall, strongly doubted about his orthodoxy, wondering if Hobbes was not some kind of hidden atheist. Even in 20th century, scholars of Hobbes deeply debated this issue, but many interpreters often focused only on theological and theological-political issues in Hobbes’ philosophy, without carefully considering the relationship between his religious ideas and Hobbes’ so-called “*philosophia prima*”. This article intends to directly address this relationship, firstly, by analysing the different aspects of religion, examined by Hobbes, such as the anthropological analysis of the religious phenomenon, and the foundations of the dual “Kingdom of God,” natural, and prophetic. Secondly, these elements will be compared with the philosophical foundations of Hobbesian thought, present in particular in *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* (or *Anti-White*) and in *De Corpore*. This analysis intends to highlight some fundamental contrasts that make the interpretation of Hobbes’ religious thought decidedly problematic, and lead us to develop some considerations about the possible presence of Hobbes in a history of early modern atheism.

Parmi les sujets examinés par l’historiographie hobbesienne, la religion du philosophe anglais a toujours été l’un des thèmes les plus attractifs et débattus. Cependant, les premiers lecteurs de Hobbes au XVII^e siècle doutaient déjà fortement de son orthodoxie et certains d’entre eux, tels l’évêque John Bramhall, le tenaient pour un athée caché. Les spécialistes hobbesiens du XX^e siècle ont longuement débattu de cette question, mais de nombreux chercheurs se sont souvent concentrés sur les questions théologiques et théologico-politiques présentes dans la pensée hobbesienne, sans considérer soigneusement la relation qui subsiste entre les idées religieuses de Hobbes et la soi-disant « *philosophia prima* ». Cet article vise à aborder directement cette relation, d’une part en analysant les différents aspects de la religion examinés par Hobbes, tels que l’analyse anthropologique du phénomène religieux et les fondements du double « Royaume de Dieu », naturel et prophétique. D’autre part, ces éléments seront comparés aux fondements philosophiques de la pensée hobbesienne, présentés notamment dans le *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* (ou *Anti-White*) et dans le *De Corpore*. Cette analyse a pour but de mettre en évidence certains

contrastes radicaux qui rendent l'interprétation de la pensée religieuse de Hobbes résolument problématique, et qui nous amènent à développer quelques considérations sur la possibilité d'une présence de Hobbes dans une histoire de l'athéisme d'époque moderne.

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