Hobbes's Materialism in the Early 1640s

Stewart Duncan

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Hobbes is standardly described as a materialist. In this paper I argue that in his work of the early 1640s he is not a materialist. He does not believe that all substances are or must be bodies, and is even unsure whether the human being is entirely material. In arguing for this I focus on Hobbes's Objections to Descartes's *Meditations*, and look at related passages in *De Cive* and Hobbes's critique of Thomas White's *De Mundo*. I also make some suggestions about the future development of Hobbes's view, but do not here argue in detail for my reading of *Leviathan* and other later works.

Many describe Hobbes's materialism as the view that bodies are the only substances. Thus Daniel Garber, discussing materialist themes in the works of Hobbes and Gassendi, describes materialism as 'the doctrine that asserts, roughly, that the human being is body alone and denies that there is anything in the world that is incorporeal'.[1] That is, Garber takes Hobbes's materialism to be a view about what substances there are in the world. It is, in fact, two views: a view about what the human being is, and a view about what substances there are more generally. Readings such as Garber's are standard. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer gloss one of Hobbes's materialist statements as 'that which is not body does not exist'.[2] John Laird, writing fifty years earlier, says that

[1] Daniel Garber, 'Soul and Mind: Life and Thought in the Seventeenth Century', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge, 1998), 773.

[2] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, 1985), 99.

> Hobbes's interpretation of Body and Accident, together with his interpretation of Cause, defined his materialism. There was nothing except Body with the ingenerable accident of spatial magnitude and the generable accidents of motion, than which there were no other accidents.[3]

The key phrase for my purposes is 'nothing except body'. On Laird's reading of Hobbes's materialism too, bodies are the only substances.

I consider Hobbes's work in the early 1640s, the time of his first significant philosophical writings, and argue for a different approach. Hobbes, at least at this time, does not say that bodies are the only substances. He is not in that sense a materialist. Nor is he certain that the human being is only a body. Hobbes thinks, however, that the only substances of which we can have ideas are bodies, because ideas are images and we can form no images of immaterial things. Thus we cannot form ideas of an immaterial mind or an immaterial God, because we cannot form images of them. Hobbes does not deny that God, for instance, exists, and does not think that God is a body. He does claim that we cannot understand God. We can think about God in a way that does not involve an idea of God, but can neither form an idea of him nor think about any of his intrinsic features.

I

In the Third Objections, Hobbes first suggests materialism when he discusses the Second Meditation. He proposes the following puzzling argument.

> We cannot conceive of jumping without a jumper, or of knowing without a knower, or of thinking without a thinker.
>
> It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal. For it seems that the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of something corporeal or in terms of matter, as the author himself shows later on in his example of the wax: the wax, despite the changes in its colour, hardness, shape and other acts, is still understood to

[3] John Laird, *Hobbes* (New York, 1968), 101.

> be the same thing, that is, the same matter that is the subject of all these changes (CSM II.122).[4]

To think about an act of thinking, or any other act, we must think about it with a subject. From this Hobbes seems to conclude that a thinking thing is corporeal, because 'the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of something corporeal or in terms of matter'. That is Hobbes's key contentious claim here. The further example of the wax is just another case in which we see acts and must think of them as having a corporeal subject.

Hobbes's key principle about the subject of any act is (S):

(S) We can understand the subject of any act only in terms of something corporeal or in terms of matter.

Descartes disagrees. He accepts that we cannot think about an act without a subject. He denies that one should conclude that the subject of an act is corporeal. Thus he says that Hobbes

> is quite right in saying that 'we cannot conceive of an act without its subject'. We cannot conceive of thought without a thinking thing, since that which thinks is not nothing. But then he goes on to say, quite without any reason, and in violation of all usage and all logic: 'It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal.' It may be that the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of a substance (or even, if he insists, in terms of 'matter', i.e. metaphysical matter); but it does not follow that it must be understood in terms of a body (CSM II.123-4).

Descartes is right. It does not follow from 'an act must have a subject' that 'an act must have a corporeal subject'. Nor does 'an act must be thought of as having a subject' imply 'an act must be thought of as having a corporeal subject'. So what is Hobbes up to? We might suggest that Hobbes is a dogmatic materialist, sure that the world contains

[4] Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, 1984), Vol. II, p.122. I refer to this volume as CSM II in giving references.

only bodies, but without an argument for this. Perhaps Descartes believes this: he does not think much of his objector. However, we can discover more about Hobbes's view here. It is not dogmatic materialism.

Consider (M1) and (M2), either of which we might take to be Hobbes's view.

(M1) The only substances are bodies. (In particular, there are no immaterial substances.)

(M2) The only substances of which we can form ideas – the only substances we can imagine – are bodies. (There may well be other substances of which we cannot form ideas. Such substances may or may not be bodies, but we cannot tell.)

(M1) is a view about the ultimate constituents of the world. It conflicts with Descartes's view of the intellect. Many interpreters take a view such as (M1) to capture Hobbes's materialism. However, several passages suggest that Hobbes believes (M2), a view about what we can and cannot imagine. To *imagine* something is just to have an imagistic idea of it. Hobbes contrasts this with *conceiving* something, merely reasoning that it exists: 'there is a great difference between imagining, that is, having an idea, and conceiving in the mind, that is, using a process of reasoning to infer that something is, or exists' (CSM II.125). Hobbes does not, however, use this terminology consistently. Sometimes, as in the passage I quoted above about the Second Meditation, he uses 'conceive' to mean something more general, perhaps just 'think about'. He does consistently make the distinction between imagining and conceiving though, even if he sometimes uses different words.

I argue that Hobbes in the Third Objections accepts (M2) and rejects (M1). We see this when he discusses God, angels, and the soul. Hobbes says that we have no ideas of these things. He nevertheless grants that these things exist. Thus Hobbes does not assert (M1). He thinks we know these things exist, but not what they are like.

Hobbes explicitly contrasts thoughts of God and angels with thoughts of bodies.

> When I think of a man, I am aware of an idea or image made up of a certain shape and colour...
>
> But when I think of an angel, what comes to mind is an image, now of a flame, now of a beautiful child with wings; I feel sure that this image has no likeness to an angel, and hence that it is not the idea of an angel. But I believe that there are invisible and immaterial creatures who serve God; and we give the name 'angel' to this thing which we believe in, or suppose to exist. But the idea by means of which I imagine an angel is composed of the ideas of visible things.
>
> In the same way we have no idea or image corresponding to the sacred name of God. And this is why we are forbidden to worship God in the form of an image; for otherwise we might think that we were conceiving of him who is incapable of being conceived.
>
> It seems, then, that there is no idea of God in us (CSM II.126-7).

We use images when we think of angels, images such as we see in paintings of angels, but those images do not resemble angels. We can form images of human bodies but, Hobbes says, cannot form images of angels. Now, in some sense of 'image of' the images of angels in pictures are images of angels. However, they are not of angels in the sense in which some images of bodies are of those bodies. They represent angels in a roundabout way, not by resembling them. In the sense of 'image of' that Hobbes is using, these images are images of small children with wings, not images of angels. So we can have no images of angels. Ideas are images. Thus we can have no ideas of angels. As we cannot have images of angels, so we cannot have an image of God. Hobbes concludes that we can have no idea of God. Then, always eager to show that his philosophy fits well with Christianity, he makes his point about the worship of God as an image.[5]

Hobbes also argues that we have no idea of the soul. He writes that

[5] This reading relies on taking Hobbes's talk of angels and God literally. That conflicts with those readings of Hobbes that take Hobbes to be ironic or insincere in his religious talk. I consider one of Edwin Curley's arguments for that conclusion in section III.

> the idea of myself ... arises from sight, if we are thinking of 'myself' as the body; and if we are thinking of my soul, then the soul is something of which we have no idea at all. We rationally infer that there is something within the human body which gives it the animal motion by means of which it has sensations and moves; and we call this 'something' a soul, without having an idea of it (CSM II.129).

Descartes replies that,

> as for the further point that we do not have an idea of the soul, but rationally infer its existence, this amounts to saying that although there is no image of the soul depicted in the corporeal imagination, we nevertheless do have what I call an idea of it (CSM II.129).

Hobbes thinks that you can have an idea of yourself, if that idea is an idea of your body. You have no further idea of some thing that gives animal motion to your body, because you have no appropriate image. You have no idea of this soul, but know that something does the work that the soul is said to do. That is, you can conceive of but not imagine the soul. Descartes sees what Hobbes is up to here. Hobbes takes all ideas to be images. Descartes disagrees.

We see from these three cases that Hobbes thinks we lack ideas of some things. We cannot have these ideas, because we cannot form images of such things. Hobbes does not deny that these things exist. Instead he claims that we can form no imagistic ideas of them. That is, Hobbes accepts (M2).

Seeing that helps us to understand the argument with which I began. The puzzle is why Hobbes believes that (S) we can understand the subject of any act only in terms of something corporeal or in terms of matter. The basic answer is that to understand a subject you need, minimally, to have an idea of it. Ideas are images, and because we cannot form images of some subjects, we cannot have ideas of them. The only way we can have ideas of, and thus understand, subjects of acts is as material.

The closest thing to materialism in the Third Objections is the view that we can

only imagine material things.[6] We can think about some things we cannot imagine, but only using conceptions. Conceptions do not allow us to understand their objects, only to direct our thought to them.

II

Why link understanding to imagination (having an imagistic idea) rather than to conception (merely reasoning to the existence of)? Hobbes grants for instance that we can conceive of the soul, and you might think that this is a sort of understanding of the soul. However, conceiving is a highly restricted way of thinking about things. All that conceiving of the soul allows you to do is think that the cause of the animal motions exists. It tells you about only one relational feature of the soul and no intrinsic ones. This lack of access to intrinsic features is why conceiving is not understanding. A conception, roughly speaking, tells you nothing about what a thing itself is like. Ideas allow you to think about intrinsic features, and thus about what a thing itself is like. They thus allow you to give causal explanations in terms of intrinsic features such as shape, size, and motion.

You can think about the thing of which you conceive in one way: as the cause of something else of which you do have an idea. Thus the soul is the cause of animal motions and God is the eternal cause of everything else. Hobbes compares such a conception of God to the thoughts that a man born blind may have of fire.

> 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

[6] Thus Hobbes's main view about bodies in the Third Objections is supported by his theory of ideas and not, say, by a wish to postulate only as many entities as are required for mechanistic explanation, as Tom Sorell suggests in 'Hobbes's Objections and Hobbes's System', in *Descartes and his Contemporaries*, edited by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago, 1995), 87-8.

> 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 (CSM II.127).

The man born blind, although aware of the heat, has no idea of the fire itself. The idea of the heat is not an idea of the fire, but the idea of the fire's colour and shape is. The difference presumably lies, though Hobbes does not explain this, in the nature of heat perception. We perceive colours and shapes as in the thing itself, but can perceive heat as diffused in the surroundings, not in the thing at all. Hobbes allows that this man can think about the fire as *the thing that causes this heat* even though he has no idea of it. Similarly, we have no perceptions or ideas of God, but can think about God as *the thing that causes the things of the world*. In neither case does the thought give insight into the nature of the thing, but it is *of* the thing.

These conceptions that Hobbes invokes are similar to mental items invoked by other modern philosophers who mostly account for thought using ideas. Hume is a good example. He apparently only allows ideas that are copies of impressions. However, sometimes he suggests that there are other mental items, which he at one point calls relative ideas, with which we can think about things that are related to things of which we have ideas.

The clearest passage is the one in which Hume uses the phrase 'relative ideas'. It comes in the *Treatise*'s discussion of external objects that are a different sort of thing than perceptions are. Hume says that

> the farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects.[7]

This relative idea is *of* the external objects. That is, somehow it allows us to think about them. However, it does not allow us to understand them. It gives us no grasp on what they are like, and just enough of a grasp on them to think about them. They are things that are not perceptions that are somehow, presumably causally, related to our perceptions.

Note three points of similarity between Hume's relative ideas and Hobbes's conceptions. First, both Hume's relative ideas and Hobbes's conceptions allow you to think about things of which you have no ideas. Secondly, neither relative ideas nor conceptions allow you to understand the things about which they allow you to think. Thirdly, relative ideas and conceptions are of things that are related to things of which we do have ideas.

I do not want to claim that Hobbes is the one and only source for Hume's talk of relative ideas. He may, for instance, be influenced by Berkeley's talk about notions or Locke's thoughts about the 'obscure and relative *Idea* of Substance in general'.[8] However, the similarities between conceptions and relative ideas are striking, especially given Hume's knowledge of Hobbes's work.

III

In this section I elaborate and defend my reading by answering five questions. (1) Why not say that Hobbes holds (M1) as well as (M2)? (2) Does Hobbes only suggest

[7] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978), 68.
[8] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 296.

these views in these few passages in the Third Objections, or is there other evidence that he holds them? (3) Why does Hobbes say that angels are immaterial, when it seems he ought to say that he does not understand their nature? (4) Is Hobbes in the Third Objections a materialist about the mind? (5) How does this reading affect what we say about Hobbes's religious views?

(1) Why not say that Hobbes holds (M1) as well as (M2)? Someone might grant that Hobbes holds (M2), but speculate that Hobbes also believes (M1). Perhaps he even believes (M1) because he believes (M2). One might move from (M2) to (M1) by claiming that there are only bodies because we can only imagine bodies, or by appealing to (M1) as the best explanation of (M2). However, we can know that Hobbes makes neither of these arguments, because he denies (M1).

How do we know that Hobbes denies (M1)? He says that we know that God exists, but do not know what God is like (CSM II.127). Thus we do not know that God is a body. Hobbes even says that angels are immaterial: 'there are invisible and immaterial creatures who serve God' (CSM II.127). I argue below that he should, to be consistent, just say that he does not know the nature of angels. Either way though, Hobbes is committed to the existence of things he does not know to be bodies. Thus he denies (M1). He denies it, not by saying 'there are things that are not bodies', but by saying 'there are things that we do not know to be bodies'.

(2) Does Hobbes only suggest these views in these few passages in the Third Objections, or is there other evidence that he holds them? I have focused on the views expressed in the Third Objections. However, we should note that Hobbes expresses similar views elsewhere in the early 1640s. The distinction between things of which we have ideas and things of which we can merely conceive is also present in *De Cive* and in

Thomas White's De Mundo *Examined*.

Hobbes argues in *De Cive*, chapter XV, section xiv, that reason tells us of God only that he exists and created the world. 'By the word *God*', he tells us, 'we understand the *World's cause*'.[9] In the terminology of the Third Objections, we can conceive of but not imagine God. Hobbes then argues that particular attributions of attributes to God are mistaken, in order to support his view about our limited conception of God. Moreover, Hobbes repeats that we have no idea of God:

> Neither speak they honourably enough of God, who say we have an *Idea* of him in our mind; for an Idea is our conception, but conception we have none, except of a *finite* thing.[10]

Here Hobbes uses the word 'conceive' in a sense other than that opposed to 'imagine'. We can, however, impose that terminology on this section of *De Cive*. Hobbes says here that we cannot imagine God. In the previous quote he says that we understand God as the world's cause: that is, we conceive of God. In sum, then, this section of *De Cive* expresses the same view of our knowledge of God that the Third Objections expresses. We can have no idea of God. All we can know of him is that he exists.

Then in chapter XXVII, section 1 of *Thomas White's* De Mundo *Examined* Hobbes contrasts *entia* 'of which we retain some kind of picture in the mind' with *entia* 'of which we have no picture in the mind, so that a man is quite unable either to perceive them or to imagine them'.[11] Hobbes gives men, animals, trees, and stones as examples of the first sort of *ens*, and God and angels as examples of the second sort of *ens*. Here too Hobbes distinguishes things of which we can have imagistic ideas from things of which we can

[9] Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: The English Version*, edited by Howard Warrender (Oxford, 1983), 190.
[10] *Ibid*., 191.
[11] Thomas Hobbes,*Thomas White's* De Mundo *Examined*, translated by Harold Whitmore Jones (London, 1976), 310.

have no such ideas. Again he thinks that we can nevertheless in some way think about things of the second sort. However, we cannot know what they are like. In particular, we cannot know whether they are material.

(3) Why does Hobbes say that angels are immaterial, when it seems he ought to say that he does not understand their nature? I need an explanation of Hobbes's statement in the Third Objections that angels are immaterial creatures. That statement is problematic for my reading, even though it might seem to support a reading of Hobbes as not a materialist. I take Hobbes's main line of thought to be that we cannot know the intrinsic features of things we cannot imagine. The passage about angels contradicts that.

We might import Hobbes's theory from *Leviathan* and take 'immaterial' as an honorific term rather than a description. The idea would be that we try to show how much better and grander God and angels are than the things around us by calling them 'immaterial'. However, Hobbes does not suggest this theory in the Third Objections.

We can however explain Hobbes's use of 'immaterial' as an understandable mistake. Lacking ideas of God and angels, we cannot say that they are material. Moreover, they are traditionally described as immaterial. With these points in place, Hobbes slides illicitly from 'we cannot know they are material' to 'we know that they are immaterial'. Elsewhere, in *Thomas White's* De Mundo *Examined* and in *Leviathan*, he is more careful, and does not claim that things of which we merely conceive are immaterial.

The claim that angels are immaterial is, given the rest of Hobbes's position, a mistake. It is not such an unlikely mistake to make. Indeed, Locke seems to make a similar one when he says that 'putting together the *Ideas* of Thinking and Willing, or the

Power of moving or quieting corporeal Motion, joined to Substance, of which we have no distinct *Idea*, we have the *Idea* of an immaterial Spirit'.[12] That putting together gives us the idea of a thinking thing with an unknown underlying substance. It does not give us the idea of an *immaterial* thing though.

(4) Is Hobbes in the Third Objections a materialist about the mind? Hobbes talks of conceiving of the soul as the cause of animal motions:

> the idea of myself ... arises from sight, if we are thinking of 'myself' as the body; and if we are thinking of my soul, then the soul is something of which we have no idea at all. We rationally infer that there is something within the human body which gives it the animal motion by means of which it has sensations and moves; and we call this 'something' a soul, without having an idea of it (CSM II.129).

This suggests that Hobbes thinks we can conceive of but not imagine the soul, and thus not know its true nature. Elsewhere Hobbes seems to contradict this view by asserting that the mind is material:

> If this is so, as may well be the case, reasoning will depend on names, names will depend on the imagination, and imagination will depend (as I believe it does) merely on motions of our bodily organs; and so the mind will be nothing more than motion occuring in various parts of an organic body (CSM II.126).

This seems to contradict the passage I quote above, by saying the mind is material. So does Hobbes think that the mind is material, or that it is a mysterious unimaginable thing?

There are other passages about the mind in the Third Objections, but they do not seem decisive either way. Hobbes says that 'what is nowhere is not anything' (CSM II.135). One might suspect that that implies materialism, as immaterial things are nowhere. However, not only may one believe that immaterial things have locations,

[12] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 305.

Hobbes is not even really committed to there being immaterial things, just to there being things with mysterious natures. He has no reason to think that these mysterious things cannot have locations. We might also consider the view of the mind apparently expressed in Hobbes's comments on the Second Meditation: 'It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal' (CSM II.122). There Hobbes seems to say that the mind is material. However, we could easily understand him only to be expressing a conditional: if we were to understand the mind, it would be as material. That would be compatible with our only actually being able to conceive of the mind.

What then to say about Hobbes's view of the mind? He seems to want things both ways. He is tempted by materialism about the mind, but wants to say there is something unknown behind it all too. Suppose, however, that we take the terminological distinction between 'soul' (*anima*) and 'mind' (*mens*) seriously. This removes the apparent contradiction in the passages quoted above. The soul is contrasted with the perceived body, and is the mysterious source of animal motions. The mind is the imagination, and just is motions of parts of the body. The soul then is not the mind. Even though the mental is accounted for by motions, there is some part of the person – the soul, which gives it life and the power of sensation – that remains mysterious and merely conceivable.

(5) How does my reading affect what we say about Hobbes's religious views? I would like to consider Edwin Curley's discussion of the Third Objections. Curley finds them disappointing. He singles out the argument with which I began for particular criticism, saying, 'I do not find this argument satisfactory. It is Hobbes at his most dogmatic'.[13] I suggest that this argument has more to it than Curley thinks. It may be

[13] Edwin Curley, 'Hobbes versus Descartes', in *Descartes and his Contemporaries*, edited by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago, 1995), 104.

based on a mistaken theory of ideas, but it is not merely dogmatic. It also helps with an issue that Curley discusses at length: what Hobbes thinks about God. Curley sees a dilemma for Hobbes: 'if every subject is necessarily corporeal, and if incorporeal substances are a contradiction in terms, then either God does not exist or he is a corporeal substance'.[14]

In the Third Objections Hobbes stresses what is, and what is not, imaginable. He does not say that incorporeal substances are impossible, but that they cannot be understood because they are unimaginable. We should take this line of thinking seriously, and it dissolves the dilemma. Hobbes does not have to choose between atheism and saying that God is a body. He can take the third position that God is incomprehensible. For Hobbes, our difficulty in thinking of God is not just that God is infinite and powerful beyond our comprehension. The difficulty comes from the imagistic nature of ideas. We can have no idea of God, and thus cannot understand him. In the Third Objections at least, it makes most sense to think of Hobbes as a theist, indeed a Christian, who emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God.

IV

If we look beyond the early 1640s we can, I suggest, see Hobbes developing his materialism while keeping the distinction between things of which we have ideas and things of which we can only conceive. In *Leviathan* Hobbes gives a materialist account of the human mind. He also seems to suggest that angels are material, although he never quite says this. However, his view of God echoes the earlier view: all we can know about God is that he exists and created the world. Indeed, *Leviathan* contains a passage comparing a man born blind's conception of fire with our conception of God that

[14] *Ibid.*, 107.

echoes the passage on that topic in the Third Objections. Hobbes says that

> as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to warm himself by the same, may easily conceive and assure himself there is somewhat there, which men call *fire* and is the cause of the heat he feels, but cannot imagine what it is like, nor have any idea of it is his mind such as they that see it; so also, by the visible things of this world and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God, and yet not have an idea or image of him in his mind.[15]

Thus is is *prima facie* plausible that Hobbes's view of God in *Leviathan* is essentially the same view he held in the early 1640s: we cannot imagine God, only conceive of him. We know of him only that he exists and created the world. The view is, in *Leviathan*, supported by other views that are absent in the Third Objections. Hobbes argues, for instance, that much talk about God is really honorific, rather than genuine description. However, the basic view is the same.

Later still Hobbes's view about God changes. He comes to think that God is a body. This shows up in several passages from 1662 on. Consider the 1668 Latin Appendix to *Leviathan*. The third chapter of that Appendix discusses various objections made to *Leviathan*. In a dialogue between two characters A and B, A raises the apparent dilemma for Hobbes: atheism or the view that God is a body. We might expect to find B answering that Hobbes thinks neither, but that God is unimaginable. Instead, B says that Hobbes 'affirms, of course, that God is a body'.[16] He then defends the view by noting that Tertullian shared it, and was not condemned for it. Hobbes also invokes Tertullian in defence of the view that God is a body in replying to Wallis in 1662.[17] Later, in

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[15] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, 1994), ch. xi, paragraph 25.
[16] *Ibid*., Appendix, ch. iii, paragraph 6.
[17] Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works*, edited by William Molesworth (London, 1839-45), IV.429.

replying to Bramhall, Hobbes describes God as a 'spirit corporeal'.[18]

My claims about *Leviathan* and other later works require, of course, much more defence. Here I want to focus on Hobbes's earlier view. In the early 1640s Hobbes distinguishes between those things of which we have ideas and those things of which we merely conceive. We can know nothing about what things of which we merely conceive are like, even whether they are material. Hobbes puts God, angels, and the human soul in this category. Thus he is not at this stage a materialist. He is agnostic about the nature of these things, allowing that they may be immaterial.[19]

[18] *Ibid.*, IV.313.

[19] My thanks to those who commented on earlier versions of this paper: Martha Bolton, Raffaella De Rosa, John Hawthorne, Doug Jesseph, Antonia LoLordo, Colin McGinn, an anonymous reviewer, and audiences at the University of Iowa, at the First Biennial Margaret Dauler Wilson Conference in Flagstaff, Arizona, and at an NJRPA meeting at Monmouth University.