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ARTICLE

HOBBS'S CHALLENGE TO DESCARTES, BRAMHALL AND BOYLE: A CORPOREAL GOD

Patricia Springborg

This paper brings new work to bear on the perennial question about Hobbes's atheism to show that as a debate about scepticism it is falsely framed. Hobbes, like fellow members of the Mersenne circle, Descartes and Gassendi, was no sceptic, but rather concerned to rescue physics and metaphysics from radical scepticism by exploring corporealism. In his early letter of November 1640, Hobbes had issued a provocative challenge to Descartes to abandon metaphysical dualism and subscribe to a 'corporeal God'; a provocation to which the Frenchman angrily responded, but was perhaps importantly influenced. Hobbes's minimal realism was consonant with atheism, to which Descartes felt he was being forced. Moreover, Hobbes was unrelenting in his battle against Cartesian dualism, for which he saw Robert Boyle's experimental science as a surrogate.

KEYWORDS: Hobbes; Corporeal God; Descartes; Bramhall; Boyle

1. THE CALVIN AND HOBBS DEBATE – A POSSIBLE RESOLUTION?

To a degree that is not yet appreciated, I believe, the early encounter between Hobbes and Descartes was formative for both philosophers. Not only was Hobbes's first published work his Third set of Objections to Descartes's *Meditations* of 1641, incorporated into the edition; but his 56 page letter to Descartes of 5 November 1640, no longer extant and probably destroyed by the French philosopher who expressed to their mutual intermediary, Marin Mersenne, his outrage at its contents, represented a challenge to Cartesian dualism that seems to have influenced Descartes's subsequent course of development. From what we can reconstruct from the Descartes-Mersenne correspondence, Hobbes in this letter pressed Descartes to conclusions from his corporealism that the French philosopher was unwilling to draw. This little-examined correspondence and its context throw important light on the much debated topic of Hobbes's scepticism, and challenge the obduracy of those who persist in making of Hobbes some

sort of orthodox Christian. Much work has been done in the past ten years on Hobbes's religion and religiosity, or lack of it, but it is notable to what extent commentators go to make of Hobbes a religious conformist. Beguiled by his ambiguous rhetoric, very few are willing to acknowledge just how radical Hobbes's challenge to Descartes really was.

On the basis of this recent work it is now possible, I believe, to bring the long-standing debate about Hobbes's scepticism to a close. Among contemporary commentators, many have put some pieces of the puzzle together but none to my knowledge has put all the pieces together. Unlike metaphysical puzzles, textual puzzles do permit of resolution, and this, I believe, is one of them. The Calvin and Hobbes debate conducted between Al Martinich and Ed Curley in the April 1996 issue of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* turned on Curley's challenge to Martinich that Hobbes, far from being a Calvinist, was in fact a sceptic.¹ Five years later, George Wright entered the fray on Martinich's side, exposing anomalies that arise in maintaining that Hobbes was a radical sceptic, for which he finds a textual basis.² Recently published work by Agostino Lupoli, Luc Foisneau, Cees Leijenhorst, Gianni Paganini and Dominique Weber on Hobbes's materialism, and specifically his 'corporeal God', now allows us to resolve the issue, I submit, although the parties to the original Calvin and Hobbes debate might not necessarily agree.³ In this essay, I suggest that we must distinguish between scepticism and atheism, and that properly framed

¹The sequence of the original 'Calvin and Hobbes' exchange is as follows. Curley wrote an essay, critiquing A. P. Martinich's *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1992): Curley, 'Calvin and Hobbes, or Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34 (1996): 257–71. To this, Martinich responded in the same issue of the journal: 'On the Proper Interpretation of Hobbes's Philosophy', *loc. cit.*, 273–83. To this Curley replied, again in the same issue of the journal, with: 'Reply to Professor Martinich', *loc. cit.*, 285–7. See also Curley's important articles, "'I durst not write so boldly'", or How to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise', in *Hobbes e Spinoza. Scienza e politica*, edited by E. Giancotti (Napoli, 1992) 497–594; and 'Hobbes versus Descartes', in *Descartes and his Contemporaries*, edited by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago, 1995) 97–109.

²George Wright, 'Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 40 (2002): 461–76.

³Agostino Lupoli, "'Fluidismo" e Corporeal Deity nella filosofia naturale di Thomas Hobbes: A proposito dell'hobbesiano "Dio delle Cause"', *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 54, n.s. (1999) 573–610, and *Nei Limiti della Materia. Hobbes e Boyle: materialismo epistemologico, filosofia corpulsolare e dio corporeo* (Milan, 2006); Luc Foisneau, 'Beyond the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Omnipotence of God', *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 1 (2004): 33–49; Cees Leijenhorst, 'Hobbes's Corporeal Deity', *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 1 (2004): 73–95; Dominique Weber, *Hobbes et le Corps de Dieu* (Paris, 2009). I would also like to thank Marco Geuna and Luisa Simonutti for their invitation to excellent conferences of the Gruppo di ricerca sul Settecento britannico, L'Università degli Studi di Milano in 2006 and 2007, at which I became better acquainted with Italian scholarship on Hobbes, and especially the work of Agostino Lupoli. I especially thank Agostino Lupoli for giving me a copy of his book, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, which the 2007 conference addressed, and Maurizio Rosanelli, my Italian teacher, for helping me translate the relevant passages.

it is atheism that the Calvin and Hobbes debate is really about.⁴ Sceptics, as Richard Popkin established so well in his canonical *History of Scepticism*, were typically *theists*, but Hobbes was *a-theist*.⁵

It is certainly true that for an atheist Hobbes wrote a lot about religion and ecclesiology, but he did so, not from the standpoint of a theologian or even an ecclesiastical historian (although he did write an *Historia Ecclesiastica*), but rather from the standpoint of the antiquarians and new scientists among whom, in the Cavendish and Mersenne circles, he moved. Striking features of this new science were its mechanism and its minimalism,⁶ which entailed a strong bias in favour of corporealism. As Richard Tuck has recently emphasized, it was the project to retrieve a minimal realism in the face of scepticism that brought the members of the Mersenne circle together, a circle to which Hobbes and Descartes, along with Gassendi, belonged.⁷ Gianni Paganini, in an important new study of scepticism, also includes Hobbes and Descartes, not among the sceptics, but among those non-sceptics who were nevertheless heavily influenced by contemporary scepticism.⁸ Although the degree of theological commitment differed considerably between the members of this network brought together

⁴This paper grew out of an earlier and rather different paper presented to the international colloquium 'Calvin and Hobbes', organized by l'Institut Protestant de Théologie, Faculté Libre de Théologie Protestante, et le Centre d'Études en Rhétorique, Philosophie et Histoire des Idées de l'Humanisme aux Lumières, École Normale Supérieure-Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Lyon, Paris, 14–16 December, 2009. That paper has now been published in the Summer 2012 special on-line issue (4, 1, 2012) of *Philosophical Readings*, edited by Marco Sgarbi, devoted to 'Hobbes on Religion', with essays by Patricia Springborg, 'Calvin and Hobbes: A Reply to Curley, Martinich and Wright', 3–17; a reply by Martinich, 'On Hobbes's English Calvinism: Necessity, Omnipotence, and Goodness', 18–30; and a rejoinder by Springborg, 'Reply to Martinich on Hobbes's English Calvinism', 31–41. I would like to thank the participants at the Paris 2009 colloquium, Al Martinich, Ed Curley, George Wright and, in particular, Dominique Weber, for an inspirational event. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous readers and John Rogers, editor of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, for their perspicuous comments on this paper.

⁵Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savanarola to Bayle*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2003). It is this paradigm with which Gianni Paganini, in *Skepsis: Le Débat des Modernes sur le Scepticisme, De Pétrarque à Descartes* (Paris 2008), takes issue. See also Michael W. Hickson, 'Review of Paganini, *Skepsis*', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 18 (2010) No. 1: 163–6.

⁶See the recent works on Hobbes's mechanism and scepticism by Gianni Paganini: 'Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo', in *Hobbes Oggi, Actes du Colloque de Milan* (18–21 May, 1988) edited by Arrigo Pacchi (Milan, 1990) 351–446; 'Hobbes, Gassendi e la psychologie dans le project mécaniste', *Kriterion. Revista de Filosofia*, 43 (2002) No. 106: 20–41; 'Hobbes among ancient and modern sceptics: phenomena and bodies', in *The Return of Scepticism. From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, edited by Paganini (Dordrecht, 2003) 3–35; 'Hobbes and the 'Continental' Tradition of Scepticism', in Paganini, *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought. New Interpretations*, edited by J. R. Maia Neto and Richard H. Popkin (Amherst, MA, 2004) 65–105.

⁷Richard Tuck, 'Optics and Sceptics: The Philosophical Foundations of Hobbes's Political Thought', in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Edmund Leites, (Cambridge, 1988) 235–64.

⁸Paganini, *Skepsis*, in his long chapter on Descartes, by careful exegesis of the *Regulae, Discourse on the Method*, and *The Search for Truth*, drives home his thesis that 'Descartes in various presentations of his philosophy, took it upon himself to situate his speculative strategy

by the Minim Friar, and featuring more than one member of the clergy, I am now persuaded that Hobbes shared the basic goals of this programme; and that to his own mind he went a long way towards achieving them. Taking a different path from Descartes, and in opposition to him, Hobbes was able to locate a core of certitude in a minimalist physics and metaphysics that had important implications for theology and the study of human behaviour. But in his case, this minimalism was consonant with atheism, for the very reason that Hobbes saw no reason to subscribe to metaphysical dualism of the Cartesian variety.

Descartes's contribution to the project was certainly not negligible, and his dual claims in the *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences*, published at Leiden in 1637, that man is thinking substance, and that matter is extension in motion, were principles that Hobbes shared and perhaps adopted from him. Indeed, from his first work, *The Treatise of Man*, written before 1637, but published only posthumously, to his last, *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes employed physiology and anatomy in the construction of a mechanistic model of human bodies, claiming at the outset:

These men will be composed, as we are, of a soul and a body. First I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us.⁹

It was a project that, as we know, he never realized, confining himself to a mechanistic model of bodies, with little finally to say about the soul and its operations beyond initially postulating that it exists.¹⁰ 'I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us', he declared rather elaborately,¹¹ insisting further:

it is not necessary to conceive of this machine as having any vegetative or sensitive soul or other principle of movement and life, apart from its blood and its spirits, which are agitated by the heat of the fire burning continuously in its

within a skeptical context' (335), but no longer refers to him as a sceptic as such. See also Hickson, 'Review', 165.

⁹*Oeuvres de Descartes*, C. Adam and P. Tannery, eds (Paris, 1964–74) 13 vols, (AT) 11:119; *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge, 1984) 2 vols, (CSM) 1:99. For Hobbes's debate with Descartes over secondary qualities, we have early evidence in the letter, Hobbes à Mersenne pour Descartes, Paris, March 30, 1641, AT III: 341–8.

¹⁰The hypothesis that Descartes did not elaborate the second dimension of his dualism, the nature of spirit or soul, is standard, and my contribution is only to suggest that Hobbes's intervention was a key cause. See the on-line Stanford Encyclopedia, for instance at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pineal-gland>.

¹¹AT 11:120, CSM 1:99.

heart – a fire which has the same nature as all the fires that occur in inanimate bodies.¹²

Descartes gave a vivid account of the body as a perpetual motion machine, comprising ‘the beating of the heart and arteries . . . the reception of the external sense organs of light, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and other such qualities, the imprinting of the ideas of these qualities in the organs of the “common sense” and the imagination, the retention or stamping of ideas in memory, the internal movements of the appetites and passions, and finally the external movement of all the limbs’.¹³ Of this account Hobbes’s own depiction of the man-machine as a sense-and-memory-receptor in his Introduction to *Leviathan*, ‘the *heart*, but a *spring*; and the *nerves* but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*’, is strikingly evocative.¹⁴ Similarly, Hobbes’s account of ‘spirit’ as subtle or airy substance, evokes Descartes’s description of animal spirits as ‘a very fine wind, or rather a very lively and pure flame’,¹⁵ and again, as ‘a certain very fine air or wind’.¹⁶ Both the airy and flame metaphors were common in Epicurean accounts of the spirits, most notably in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, but Hobbes’s point in evoking them here, like his evocation of the man-machine image, was directed, I believe, squarely at Descartes.

Descartes’s *The Treatise of Man* had been written but not yet published, and *The Passions of the Soul* had not yet been written when in 1640 Hobbes wrote his long letter, basing his remarks on inferences drawn from Descartes’s *La Dioptrique*, one of the three appendices to the *Discours*. Already Hobbes pushed corporealism to limits to which Descartes was not prepared to go, insisting on a ‘corporeal God’, and characterizing divine substance as ‘spirit’ or ‘fluid body’. It is possible to show, I think, on the basis of the reinterpretation of an important piece of evidence, that it was Hobbes whom Descartes had in his sights when, in reply to Bourdin in the Seventh set of Objections, he proclaimed that scepticism ‘is vigorously alive today’, and that ‘its tenor is atheistic’,¹⁷ prompting him to set about to find certain proofs for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Gianni Paganini in *Skepsis* takes this passage as the centre piece in his search for the impetus for Descartes’s attack on the sceptics and the form that it took. Employing, as he notes, ‘the method of exclusion’,¹⁸ he sees Descartes’s target to be La Mothe Le Vayer, the *libertin érudit*, whom he

¹²AT 11:201, CSM 1:108.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, 1. Citations are to *Leviathan [1651], with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, edited Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, 1994) referencing chapter (small Roman numerals) section (§) pagination of the Head edition/and of the Curley edition.

¹⁵AT 11:129, CSM 1:100.

¹⁶AT 11:331, CSM 1:330.

¹⁷AT VII: 548–9; CSM 11:374–5.

¹⁸Paganini, *Skepsis*, 245.

credits as being the first to apply scepticism to the systematic refutation of religion. But Michael Hickson, in an excellent review, finds this implausible, given that the ‘one text in which the incompatibility of scepticism and faith is unmistakably argued for by Le Vayer’, *De la vertu des payens*, was published in the same year as the *Meditations*, and therefore too late.¹⁹ Hickson disqualifies Le Vayer, as a poor candidate, leaving it open to explain ‘what Paganini is ultimately after . . . namely, the motivation behind Descartes’s use of doubt in the *Meditations*, and the centrality he gives to the proofs of God’s existence and the immortality of the soul in the dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne’. My suggestion is that, even were the timing better, Le Vayer could only be an oblique target, but that Hobbes, whose direct challenge to Descartes concerning a ‘corporeal God’ allowed him to be classed with *libertins érudits*, is a much more likely candidate, qualifying in terms of what Descartes stipulated as the criterion for ‘today’s sceptics’, which was ‘excessive doubt’.²⁰

If it could be established that the preponderance of the evidence points to Hobbes as Descartes’s principal target, and not only in the Seventh set of Objections, it would indeed be significant. I believe that it can be done, although I can only sketch the argument here. There is excellent evidence in the *Correspondence* that Hobbes frequented *libertin* circles in Paris to which a surprising number of his friends, including François du Verdus, belonged.²¹ Letter 114, Sorbière to Hobbes, January/February 1657,²² reports an Epicurean coterie of like-minded savants and bon vivants meeting in Paris to discuss the difference between Hobbes’s physics and that of Epicurus on the nature of the vacuum, at a ‘sumptuous’ dinner party that included, significantly, as Sorbière reports, ‘that very learned old man de La Mothe le Vayer’, *libertin érudit par excellence*. Malcolm in his excellent study of ‘Hobbes and the European Republic of Letters’,²³ notes that according to his first German commentator, statesman and polymath, Freiherr Johann Christian von Boineburg, Hobbes headed the list of a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of *libertins* that included ‘Vossius, Caspar Barlaeus, Marc’Antonio de Dominis, Georg Calixtus, Conrad Berg, Grotius, Thomas Browne, Acontius, Scioppius, Casaubon, and La Peyrère’, all of whom he characterized as ‘adher[ing] to no confession, preferring his own beliefs’. For

¹⁹Hickson, ‘Review’, 165.

²⁰Hickson, *ibid.*, citing Paganini, *Skepsis*, 245.

²¹Letter 38, Sorbière to Hobbes, July 11, 1645, in Noel Malcolm, *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. I 1622–1659 (Cambridge, 1994) 122–3, and vol. II (Cambridge, 1994) 1660–1679, 908–9, Biographical Register, for du Verdus’ connections to de Martel, Roberval and the Mersenne circle. Quentin Skinner in ‘Thomas Hobbes and his Disciples in England and France’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8, (1966) No. 2: 153–67, notes that Hobbes and du Verdus were particularly close.

²²*Hobbes Correspondence*, I, 435.

²³Noel Malcolm, ‘Hobbes and the European Republic of Letters’, in his *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002) 478.

Hobbes the Freiherr had stronger language, classing him along with Hobbes's old friend Edward Herbert, among the 'teachers of self-love, licence, and religious indifference'.

2. HOBBES'S CORPOREAL GOD AS A CHALLENGE TO DESCARTES

Samuel Mintz, in his study of Hobbes's reception, lists first among those arguments of Hobbes that gave his contemporaries reason to call him an atheist his corporealism, which committed him to the view 'that the universe is body, that God is part of the world and therefore body', or else there is no God.²⁴ Agostino Lupoli has recently taken up the case of Hobbes's corporealism, and shows it not only to be central to Hobbes's debate with Bramhall over freedom and necessity, but also the basis for the early rift between Hobbes and Descartes,²⁵ and that years later the scientist Robert Boyle, also a Cartesian, was to rehearse Bramhall's arguments against Hobbes the atheist, this time with reference to the 1668 Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*.²⁶

Lupoli frames his case around these two important moments in the development of Hobbes's metaphysics, first his encounter with Descartes, and second, his encounter with Boyle. To take the first, the extreme reaction of Descartes to Hobbes's long letter of 5 November 1640, '56 pages in folio', sent through Mersenne as an intermediary, and upon which Lupoli comments at length,²⁷ is peculiarly instructive. No copy of the letter is extant, which reached Descartes, already in Holland, in two parts, the first 'three folios' (around 15 pages) on 16 January and 'the last eight folios' (around 40–1 pages) on 18 February 1641.²⁸ *La Dioptrique* was also severely criticized by Spinoza and Christian Huygens, but from what we are able to reconstruct through the responses of both Descartes and Mersenne, what most irritated Descartes about Hobbes's letter was the queries it raised about the philosopher's religious beliefs. Descartes wrote two letters immediately upon receiving the first dispatch of Hobbes's letter, both on 21 January, one in French for Mersenne, giving his first negative judgments on Hobbes, and the second in Latin, intended as a repost to Hobbes's first three folios, possibly the only part of the letter Descartes actually read. In the Latin letter, he specifically alludes to Hobbes's 'embarrassing and

²⁴Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1962) 45, with reference to *Lev.* xlvii, §15, 371/459.

²⁵Agostino Lupoli, "'Fluidismo" e *Corporeal Deity*', and *Nei Limiti della Materia*. especially chapter 4, "'Fluidismo" e *Corporeal Deity*', although this version differs significantly from the article.

²⁶Lupoli, "'Fluidismo" e *Corporeal Deity*', 577.

²⁷Lupoli, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, 520–28.

²⁸Lupoli, *ibid.*, 520–1.

inopportune' objections to matters on which he, Descartes, did not touch in *La Dioptrique* and with which he did not intend to deal, 'about the *soul*, a *Corporeal God*, internal spirit and other matters which do not concern me' ('Omittam initium *de animâ* et *Deo corporeis*, de spiritu interno, et reliquis quae me non tangunt').²⁹

In a letter to Mersenne of 4 March 1641, Descartes not only expressed extreme displeasure bordering on contempt for Hobbes, whom he suspected of trying to create a reputation for himself at his expense 'by defrauding him of the more original ideas of his own physics',³⁰ but he clearly stated his intention not to reply to the Englishman, who simply 'calumnifies' him:

J'aurois honte d'employer du tems à poursuivre le reste de ses fautes, car il ny en a partout de mesme. C'est pourquoy je ne croy pas devoir jamais plus respondre à ce que vous me pourriez envoyer de cet home, que je pense devoir mespriser à l'extreme. Et je ne me laisse nullement flater par les louanges que vous me mandez qu'il me donne; car je connois qu'il en use que pour faire mieux croire qu'il a raison, en ce où il me reprend et me calomnie. Je suis marry que vous et Mr. de Beaune en ayez eu bonne opinion. Il est vray qu'il a de la vivacité et de la facilité à s'exprimer, ce qui luy peut donner quelque esclat; mais vous connoistrez en peu de tems qu'il n'a point du tout de fonds, qu'il a plusieurs opinions extravagantes, et qu'il tasche d'acquérir de la reputation par de mauvais moyens.³¹

Lupoli notes an aggressivity in Descartes that suggests he was greatly preoccupied with the challenge Hobbes presented 'of showing the connections between his "true principles" of natural philosophy with a doctrine of a corporeal God, which to him not only appeared obviously incompatible with his own conception of God, but which also, by such philosophical "extravagances" – extravagances that Descartes believed were designed to gain notoriety – 'was however capable of provoking alarm and bringing discredit upon those very "true principles"' in question.³² Descartes's considered judgement, then, was that Hobbes's notion of a corporeal God was simply an attention-grabbing strategy. This was not the end of the matter, in fact, and the three-way conversation between Hobbes, Mersenne and Descartes had a further chapter when Hobbes's *Objections to Descartes's Meditations* appeared in early 1641.³³ As Lupoli notes, the

²⁹Lupoli, *ibid.* 523–4, citing *Correspondence du P. Marin Mersenne*, edited by Cornelis De Waard and Marmand Beaulieu, 17 vols (Paris, 1932–88) X, 427.

³⁰Lupoli, *ibid.*, 522, citing *Remarques sur l'abregé de la vie de Mons. Des Cartes*, in Leibniz, *Die philosophische Schriften*, edited by Von C. I. Gerhardt, 7 vols (Hildesheim, 1960–1) IV, 320–21.

³¹Lupoli, *ibid.*, 523–4, citing *Correspondence Mersenne*, X, 528–9.

³²Lupoli, *ibid.*, 525.

³³Curley in his clever piece, 'Hobbes versus Descartes' (107), believes that Descartes knew Hobbes mainly for his work on optics and, although noting Descartes's letter of 21 January 1641, thinks he did not necessarily know the author of the Third set of *Objections* beyond the calculation that it was the author of *De cive* (98). But I find this quite implausible.

Objections 'did not so much demonstrate a basic divergence between their respective mechanistic models, but rather dramatically brought to light the different explanations of fluidity and of hardness that the two philosophers gave as a starting point for their respective concepts of "internal spirit" and "subtle matter"'.³⁴

We observe in this contest between the two philosophers what was to become a familiar pattern in Hobbes's reception, as Jon Parkin notes with respect to his English critics.³⁵ Descartes's judgments of his rival, at first relatively mild, became increasingly negative as he came to understand the precise implications of Hobbes's daring doctrines for his own position. So, in the first letter of 21 January 1641, written in French, Descartes conceded that Hobbes's principles were also 'true principles': 'Ce sont bien les vrais principes; mais si on commet des fautes en les suivant, ils paroissent si clairement à ceux qui ont un peu d'entendement, qu'il ne faut pas aller si viste qu'il fait, pour y bien reüssir.'³⁶ But by 18 March 1641, Descartes was accusing Hobbes of deducing well but from 'absurd principles':

il n'est pas malaise de bastir des principes absurdes don't on puisse conclure des veritez qu'on a apprises d'ailleurs. Comme si je disois: *omnis equus est rationalis, omnis homo est equus, ergo omnis homo est rationalis*; la conclusion est bonne et l'argument est en forme, mais les principes ne valent rien.³⁷

3. HOBBES'S CORPOREAL GOD, BRAMHALL AND THE TRINITY

It is worth emphasizing how early Hobbes acquired his reputation as an atheist, a reputation that had a long afterlife in clandestine literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Noel Malcolm has discovered.³⁸ So, for instance, Hobbes's debate with Bramhall dating from 1646, shortly after his encounter with Descartes, and almost 30 years before his contest with Boyle, put him under pressure from the bishop to clarify his materialism and corporealism. Here Bramhall finds blasphemous Hobbes's early views, probably already disclosed to Descartes, of God as corporeal spirit, and the characterization of that spirit or divine substance as 'fluid matter', concepts completely at odds with the notion of a personal and beneficent God. Early in *Leviathan*, and consistently, Hobbes had maintained that the term 'incorporeal substance' is a contradiction in terms, a case of the mispairing of words deliberately concocted by Schoolmen to frighten people with invisible and unknowable ghosts and spectres.³⁹ For, '*substance and body*

³⁴Lupoli, *ibid.*, 523–4, citing *Correspondence Mersenne*, X, 427.

³⁵Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2005), 14–5.

³⁶Lupoli, *ibid.*, 525, citing *Correspondence Mersenne*, X, 422.

³⁷Lupoli, *ibid.*, 526, citing *Correspondence Mersenne*, X, 546.

³⁸Malcolm, 'Hobbes and the European Republic of Letters'.

signify the same thing; and therefore *substance incorporeal* are words which, when they are joined together, destroy one another, as if a man should say an *incorporeal body*’.⁴⁰ Second, he maintained, the entire universe is made of body and what is not body is not in the universe, meaning, as Bramhall pointed out, that God, angels, demons, are either bodies or they do not exist. Only bodies can be perceived by the senses, have mass and can move other bodies, Hobbes insisted:

The world (I mean not the earth only, . . . but the *universe*, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal (that is to say, body) and hath the dimensions of magnitude (namely, length, breadth, and depth). Also, every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions. And consequently, 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, nowhere).⁴¹

But according to Hobbes, this theory of a corporeal or material universe does not, as it might seem, rule out spirits, so long as we recognize that these too are corporeal:

Nor does it follow from hence that spirits are nothing. For they have dimensions, and are, therefore, really bodies (though that name in common speech be given to such bodies only as are visible or palpable, that is, that have some degree of opacity). But for spirits, they call them incorporeal, which is a name more of honour, and may therefore with more piety be attributed to God himself, in whom we consider not what attribute expresseth best his nature, which is incomprehensible, but what best expresseth our desire to honour Him.⁴²

Hobbes’s exit strategy is a clever one. The Old Testament is heavily populated with angels and archangels, and spirits of various sorts, and for Hobbes, too, Scripture is authoritative as the basis for Anglicanism as a civil religion.⁴³ Given his general position that ‘incorporeal substance’ is a contradiction in terms, there is as only one rubric under which ‘incorporeal spirits’ might be admitted, and that is as expressions to honour the ‘incomprehensible deity’, whose attributes defy our categories. This is the route Hobbes takes, but it is a concession that has led to much confusion, and from it some commentators (Leijenhorst and Weber)⁴⁴ infer that Hobbes himself subscribes to the existence of such a deity. Others (Lupoli and Wright)⁴⁵ go so far as to conclude that Hobbes too was engaged in the

³⁹Lev. iv, §22, 16/21; viii, 27, 39/47; xii, 7, 53/65.

⁴⁰Lev. xxxiv, §2, 207/262.

⁴¹Lev. xlvi, §15, 371/459.

⁴²ibid.

⁴³See Patricia Springborg, ‘Hobbes’s Theory of Civil Religion’, in *Pluralismo e religione civile*, edited by Gianni Paganini and Edoardo Tortarolo (Milano, 2003) 61–98.

⁴⁴Leijenhorst, ‘Hobbes’s Corporeal Deity’; Weber, *Hobbes et le Corps de Dieu*.

project of natural philosophy to which Boyle was committed and hoped to provide in experimental science and its chains of causes proof for the existence of God as first cause. I build my case on the weakness of this inference, arguing that it was quite possible for Hobbes as an Epicurean to accommodate the impossible language of 'incorporeal spirit' as expressing worship of an incomprehensible deity by the uninitiated, without a sage, such as Hobbes saw himself, having personally to subscribe to such religious suppositions.⁴⁶ Moreover, and this mark of the Epicurean Hobbes many have not observed, he did not see the new science as a search for causes superior to religion in its explanatory power, but simply as another form of religious expression to allay metaphysical angst. Hobbes was not, therefore, a 'new scientist' in the same sense as Boyle, as we shall see.

Bishop Bramhall, still in many ways Hobbes's best critic, was not fooled by Hobbes's concession to the discourse of worship, knowing as he must, that Hobbes could not subscribe to the content of the doctrines that the Church of England prescribed, his principal and most egregious heresy, forced upon him by his corporealism, being denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. There are many Hobbes commentators who still believe that the modifications Hobbes later made in the 1668 Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* to his doctrine of the Trinity,⁴⁷ set out in the English *Leviathan* xvi, §12, got him off the hook, so to speak. But, as I have shown elsewhere,⁴⁸ substitution of his own definition of representation, while apparently reconciling the notion of 'one substance' and three representations, does not allow Hobbes to claim doctrinal orthodoxy, which required him to acknowledge the three persons of God, not as discrete representatives, but as sharing the same *substance*. And this, given his materialist and corporealist notion of substance, no amount of concession to the language of religious worship would allow him to do. All protestations to the contrary, Hobbes does not recant his heresy regarding the Trinity, nor could he. And in the late works he drops the pretense altogether. Bramhall took Hobbes's classification of 'incorporeal spirits' as words 'which destroy one another'⁴⁹ to be evidence that Hobbes found it impossible to believe in the

⁴⁵Lupoli, "'Fluidismo" e *Corporeal Deity*, and *Nei Limiti della Materia*; and Wright, 'Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle'.

⁴⁶For Hobbes's Epicureanism, see Charles T. Harrison, 'Bacon, Hobbes, Boyle, and the Ancient Atomists', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 15 (1933): 191–218; Arrigo Pacchi, 'Hobbes e l'epicureismo', *Rivista Critica di Storia dell'Filosofia*, 33 (1975): 54–71; Gianni Paganini, 'Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism', *Hobbes Studies*, 14 (2001): 3–24; reprinted in *Der Garten und die Moderne: Epikureische Moral und Politik vom Humanismus bis zur Aufklärung*, edited by Gianni Paganini and Edoardo Tortarolo (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2004) 113–37; and Patricia Springborg, 'Hobbes and Epicurean Religion', in *Der Garten und die Moderne*, 161–214.

⁴⁷Latin *Leviathan*, 1668 Appendix (Curley edn), App. ii, §20, §24, §28, §52; App. iii, §§11–14.

⁴⁸Springborg, 'Calvin and Hobbes: A Reply', 10–12.

⁴⁹*Lev.* xxxiv, §2, 207/262.

existence of entities falling under such a description, and therefore as a denial of the existence of God *tout court*:

[H]e destroys the very being of God, and leaves nothing in his place, but an empty name. For by taking away all incorporeal substance, he taketh away God himself. The very name, saith he, of incorporeal substance is a *contradiction*. And to say that an angel or spirit, is an incorporeal substance, is to say in effect, that there is no angel or spirit at all. By the same reason to say, that God is an incorporeal substance, is to say there is no God at all. Either God is incorporeal; or he is finite, and consists of parts, and consequently is no God. This, that there is no incorporeal spirit, is that main root of atheism, from which so many lesser branches are daily sprouting up.⁵⁰

What Bramhall, in his succinct statement, succeeds in showing is that the only alternative to God as ‘incorporeal substance’, deemed by Hobbes an absurdity, is a corporeal God who ‘is finite, and consists of parts’, which to a monotheist is equally absurd, ‘and consequently is no God’. Hobbes knew full well that the first Council of Nicaea of AD 325, among the four Church Councils whose doctrines since Elizabeth I were mandatory for all conforming Anglicans, required that he subscribe to the notion of God as infinite and indivisible. ‘*God hath no parts*’, he thus concedes in his *Answer* to Bramhall:

God is indeed a perfect, pure, simple, infinite substance; and his name incommunicable, that is to say, not divisible into this and that individual God, in such manner as the name of man is divisible into Peter and John.⁵¹

But while seeming to defer to Bramhall’s own definition of God as ‘a perfect, pure, simple, indivisible, infinite essence; free of all composition of matter and form, of substance and accidents’, Hobbes turns the tables on him, pointing out that this indivisible divine substance, the ‘*God [that] hath no parts*’, decreed by Nicaea, must rule out division into persons, and therefore the Trinity of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as being of identical substance.

Despite making a great show of retracting his heretical doctrine of the Trinity of the English *Leviathan* xvi, §12, in his 1668 *Appendix* to the Latin *Leviathan*, Hobbes in his *Answer* to Bramhall clearly reinstates it.⁵² In the English *Leviathan* he had rendered the persons of the Trinity effectively representatives of God, such that, by the terms of his definition, Christ is a prophet of no greater standing than Moses and the Apostles, and therefore

⁵⁰Hobbes, *Answer to Bramhall*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, edited By Sir William Molesworth (London, 1839–45), 11 vols. Republished with a new Introduction by G. A. J. Rogers, 11 vols (London, 1992), (referred to as *EW*), IV, 301–2.

⁵¹Hobbes, *Answer*, 302.

⁵²Hobbes, *Answer*, 314–7.

not divine.⁵³ His *Answer* to Bramhall restates the argument again in the context of his theory of representation, but this time in the form of a syllogism, the first term being that (1) '[a] person is he that is represented as often as he is represented', which taken together with and the second term that (2) 'the God who is always one and the same, was represented by Moses, the person represented by his Son incarnate, and the person represented by the apostles', yields the third term (3): 'And therefore God who has been represented, that is personated thrice, may properly enough be said to be three persons, though neither the word Person nor Trinity be ascribed to him in the Bible'.⁵⁴

Bramhall rightly saw the implications. The persons of God construed as a sequence of representatives could only be finite, and discrete, and therefore neither infinite nor divine. 'What is now become of the great adorable mystery of the blessed undivided Trinity?' he expostulated, answering: 'It is shrunk into nothing. Upon his grounds there was a time when there was no Trinity: and we must blot these words out of our creed, *the Father eternal, the son eternal, and the Holy Ghost Eternal*.'⁵⁵ He shrewdly sees Hobbes turning the patriarchalist argument of kings-in-the image-of-God on its head:

Upon these grounds every king hath as many *persons*, as there be justices of the peace and petty constables in his kingdom. Upon this account God Almighty hath as many *persons* as there have been sovereign princes in the world since Adam.⁵⁶

Bramhall's argument reaches back to Hobbes's remarks in *Leviathan* xxix, §16, where, discussing 'mixarchy' or the sharing of power between king, lords and commons, he dares to make the analogy to the Trinity, claiming that '[i]n the kingdom of God there may be three persons independent, without breach of unity in God that reigneth; but where men reign, that be subject to diversity of opinions, it cannot be so'; the reason being that 'if the king bear the person of the people, and the general assembly bear also the person of the people, and another assembly bear the person of a part of the people, they are not one person, nor one sovereign, but three persons

⁵³ *Lev. xvi*, §12, 82/103:

The true God may be personated. As he was, first by *Moses*, who governed the Israelites (that were not his, but God's people), not in his own name . . . but in God's name . . . Secondly by the Son of man, his own Son, our blessed Saviour *Jesus Christ*, that came to reduce the Jews, and induce all nations into the kingdom of his father, not as of himself, but as sent from his father. And thirdly, by the Holy Ghost, or comforter, speaking and working in the Apostles; which Holy Ghost was a Comforter that came not of himself, but was sent and proceeded from them both.

⁵⁴ Hobbes, *Answer*, 314.

⁵⁵ Hobbes, *Answer*, 315.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

and three sovereigns'.⁵⁷ The implications are clear. For Hobbes the union of the Trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, could never be a matter of substance, but only of purpose. In the same way, because unity of purpose cannot be assumed of a tripartite government constituted by king, lords and commons, each with competing interests, they cannot share in the person of the sovereign. Mindful of the analogue, Hobbes, in his *Answer*, accuses Bramhall of misunderstanding his argument, insisting, 'I never said that a king, and every one of his persons [referring now to the petty constables], *are the same substance*.'⁵⁸ Rather, admitting to a slip of the tongue when in the English *Leviathan* he talked of 'the person of Moses' instead of 'the ministry of Moses' and to a small 'fault in the ratiocination',⁵⁹ when he failed to push home his victory in using 'the true definition of the word person' (i.e. as representative), he restates in unambiguous terms his theory of representation as 'clear proof that it is no contradiction of say that God is three persons and one substance'.⁶⁰

In other words, Hobbes retracts nothing. God is always the same substance because it is always the same God who is being represented, but this is not to say that the substance of the representatives is the same as that of God, any more than to say 'that a king and every one of his persons are the same substance' – as he had already noted. 'The fault I here made, and saw not', Hobbes cheekily boasts, 'was this; I was to prove that there is no contradiction, as Lucian and heathen scoffers would have it, to say of God, he was one and three'.⁶¹ Hobbes's unremitting corporealism and hostility to Cartesian dualism just does not admit of '*the same substance*' being shared by multiple persons. But it does admit of the representation of an authority by corporeal beings, of which the king and his constables are a good example.

4. HOBBS'S CORPOREAL GOD AS FLUID SUBSTANCE

Much of the debate about Hobbes's atheism, although conducted by philosophers, has been about verbal modes and registers as surrogates for arguments. This is true of both the 'Calvin and Hobbes' debate, and the interventions of Leijenhorst and Foisneau. The use of different registers complicates the transmission of the message, and it is possible that readers can be deaf to them. But once the transmission problem has been resolved it is the arguments that must stack up, and it is my view that the undue elaborateness of many arguments made to rescue Hobbes as an orthodox

⁵⁷ *Lev.* xxix, §16, 173/217.

⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Answer*, 316.

⁵⁹ Hobbes, *Answer*, 315.

⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Answer*, 316.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

Christian speak against the case. Occam's razor suggests a simpler solution: by orthodox Christian criteria Hobbes was an atheist. Well read in Patristics, Hobbes believed that the Council of Nicaea, for whatever reason, went for the least plausible solution to the problem of the Trinity as 'one and three', as he expounded at length in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: 'The Greek word for substance is "hypostasis"; one who says there are three hypostases says there are three Gods'.⁶² Yet the Nicene formulation is the one that orthodox Christians are bound under threat of heresy to believe. This paradox also admits of a resolution, as we shall see.

Hobbes's *Answer* does not in fact face Bramhall's principal charges of atheism directly – an admission, perhaps, that Bramhall has reasoned correctly to the stark alternatives of an incorporeal God with no place in a corporeal universe, or a corporeal God who does not meet the stipulations of the Nicene Council and Christian orthodoxy. Rather, Hobbes turns to Bramhall's own definition, that 'God is infinite essence',⁶³ which he declares to be a case in point of the sort of insignificant speech employed by the Schoolmen he is attacking. Later in his *Answer* Hobbes goes to some lengths to make sense of the notion of 'corporeal spirits', but not with much more conviction. Indeed the characterization he gives, if taken as implied as a demonstration of the nature of 'divine substance' as 'fluid matter', borders on the bizarre. Having restated his definition of '*Body*: (Latin, *corpus*, Greek, *σώμα*) [a]s that substance which hath magnitude indeterminate, and is the same with corporeal substance', and '*Matter* [a]s the same with *body*', Hobbes turns to spirit: 'Spirit is thin, fluid, transparent, invisible body. The word in Latin signified breath, air, wind and the like. In Greek *πνεῦμα* from *πνεω*, *spiro*, *flo*'.⁶⁴

And then he gives the strange example of the meeting of waters, sweet and mineral, as a demonstration of how a combination of chemical elements can produce a transformation, apparent to the eye but deceiving:

I have seen, and so have many more, two waters, one of the river, the other a mineral water, so like that no man could discern the one from the other by his

⁶²Hobbes, *Historia Ecclesiastica* lines 751–2, critical edition, including text, translation, introduction, commentary and notes by Patricia Springborg, Patricia Stablein and Paul Wilson (Paris, 2008) 392–3. In the 1668 Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, §82, translated by George Wright, 'Thomas Hobbes: 1668 Appendix to *Leviathan*', *Interpretation*, 18, (1991) No. 3: 324–413, at 364, Hobbes is more explicit: 'For if, with the Greek Fathers, we used the word hypostasis in place of person, since hypostasis and substantia mean the same thing, in place of three persons, we make three divine substances, that is, three Gods.' Jerome, in a well-known passage (Ep. 57 *ad Damasum*), had already expressed reservation about speaking of 'three hypostases for three persons', as Hobbes probably knew from his source, Denys Petau. See Dionysii Petavii, *Opus De Theologicis dogmatibus* (Amsterdam, 1700), II, bk 4, 187b, cited in Gianni Paganini, 'Hobbes, Valla and the Trinity', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 40 (2003): 183–218, at 199.

⁶³Hobbes, *Answer*, 304.

⁶⁴Hobbes, *Answer*, 309.

sight; yet when they have been both put together, the whole substance could not by the eye be distinguished from milk. Yet we know that the one was not mixed with the other, so as every part of the one to be in every part of the other, for that is not possible, unless two bodies can be in the same place. How then could the change be made in every part, but only by the activity of the mineral water, changing it every where to the sense, and yet not being every where, and in every part of the water?⁶⁵

One might guess that Hobbes is trying to conjure up the creator God of Genesis, a dark spirit moving upon the waters, which he does not fail to mention when discussing ‘incorporeal substance’ in *Leviathan* xxxiv, §5. There, remarking of Genesis 1:2. ‘The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’, Hobbes observes that if ‘by the *Spirit of God* be meant God himself, then is *motion* attributed to God, and consequently *place*, which are intelligible only of bodies, and not of substances incorporeal; and so the place is above our understanding, that can conceive nothing moved that changes not place or that has not dimension and whatsoever has dimension is a body.’⁶⁶ Curley sees a momentary lapse here and thinks that Hobbes does seem to be referring to God as an incorporeal substance.⁶⁷ But I disagree, seeing this passage rather as belonging to Hobbes’s interpretation of the first and oldest book of Scripture as an allegorical account of the Creation myth. For he immediately goes on to compare the usage of the term the ‘*Spirit of God*’ in Genesis 1:2, with that in Genesis 8:1, ‘where, when the earth was covered with waters, as in the beginning, God, intending to abate them’, promised: “‘I will bring my spirit upon the earth, and the waters shall be diminished’”. In this case, Hobbes declares, ‘by *Spirit* is understood a wind (that is an air or *spirit moved*), which might be called (as in the former place [i.e. Genesis 1:2]) the *Spirit of God*, because it was God’s work’.⁶⁸ Genesis’s primal language of the *Spirit of God* as a wind, like that of the *Spirit of God* as a watery element, fits with his own expanded allegory of the meeting of the waters as an illustration of the concept of the indivisible God. Note his caution that the milky confluence cannot be due to ‘every part of the one [being] in every part of the other, for that is impossible, unless two bodies can be in the same place’. Hobbes with this allegory targets any account of bodies that might give leverage to the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, a doctrine that was moreover rejected by the Anglican Church.

But Hobbes’s position is still not orthodox by Anglican criteria, and not even as Anglican as it might look at first sight. He makes a point of recording the famed Athanasius, whom he praises as ‘a great and zealous

⁶⁵Hobbes, *Answer*, 309–10.

⁶⁶*Lev.* xxxiv, §5, 208/263.

⁶⁷*Lev.* xxxiv, §5, 208/263, editorial note 5.

⁶⁸*Lev.* xxxiv, §5, 208/263.

doctor in the Nicene Council, and vehement enemy of Arius the heretic', employing to explain how God the Father could be *in* Christ, the precise form of words that Hobbes rejects in explaining the confluence of waters. Commenting upon Paul, *Col. 2:9*, Athanasius had explained: 'The fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in him bodily (Greek, *σώμα τικώς*, id est *θεϊκώς*, *id est, realiter*. So, there is one Father for corporality, and that God was in Christ in such manner as body is in body.'⁶⁹ In effect, '*the fulness of the Deity was bodily in Christ*' as 'spirit' or 'fluid body', an interpenetration of substances in clear violation of the principle Hobbes establishes in the case of the confluence of waters making a milky substance. Of course Athanasius had taken the position on the possible interpenetration of substances that became Catholic orthodoxy, and out of which the doctrine of Transubstantiation was generated. Hobbes was unorthodox either way, either by personally rejecting Athanasius's doctrine as decreed by Nicaea, or by claiming Anglicanism to have erred in rejecting Athanasius's doctrine as decreed by Nicaea. For, this was no passing reflection on the part of Athanasius, it was the very basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, the central doctrine that the Council of Nicaea met to define, incorporated into the Nicene Creed to which conforming Anglicans are bound to subscribe, and vouched for by Scripture according to Athanasius' reading of Paul, *Col. 2:9*.

We see then that Hobbes's example of the confluence of the waters to illustrate the notion of divine substance as 'fluid body' is not arbitrary: it renders this central Christian doctrine a null hypothesis. Applied to the critical Biblical text, Paul, *Col. 2:9*, it shows rather how God could *not* be in Christ, producing one of the disjunctures for which Hobbes is famous, and alerting us to disbelief. This time it is not a case of irony, but rather incongruity and the deliberate use of paradox and contradiction that only careful reading can disclose. The much-ado about quoting the Greek and Latin terms, on which Athanasius' doctrine rests, ought in any event to have given us pause, knowing as we do that Hobbes constantly inveighs against Greekification, praises the Nicene Creed (incorrectly) for containing no Greek words,⁷⁰ and insists that a smoke screen of foreign phrases is not to be found in the Bible. Even more provocative is his resort to God's omnipotence to make up the deficit of our defeated senses with respect to the perception of invisible and non-palpable spirits. Referring once again to the interaction of the sweet water with the mineral water, Hobbes declares:

If then such gross bodies have so great activity, what shall we think of spirits, whose kinds be as many as there be kinds of liquor, and activity greater? Can it then be doubted, but that God, who is an infinitely fine Spirit, and withal intelligent, can make and change all species and kinds of body as he pleaseth? But I dare not say, that this is the way by which God Almighty worketh,

⁶⁹Hobbes, *Answer*, 306–7.

⁷⁰As Curley notes, 'Reply to Professor Martinich', 286.

because it is past my apprehension: yet it serves very well to demonstrate, that the omnipotence of God implieth no contradiction; and is better than by pretence of magnifying the fineness of the Divine substance, to reduce it to a spright⁷¹ or phantasm, which is nothing.⁷²

That the incomprehensible God is corporeal, Hobbes is categorical, proceeding to mock the subtleties of the Scholastics who argue otherwise:

To his Lordship's question here: *What I leave God to be?* I answer, I leave him to be a most pure, simple invisible spirit corporeal. By corporeal I mean a substance that has magnitude, and so mean all learned men, divines and others, though perhaps there be some common people so rude as to call nothing body, but what they can see and feel. To his second question: *What real being He can have amongst bodies and accidents?* I answer, the being of a spirit, not a spright. If I should ask any the most subtile distinguisher, what middle nature there were between an infinitely subtile substance, and a mere thought or phantasm, by what name could he call it? He might call it perhaps an incorporeal substance; and so *incorporeal* shall pass for a middle nature between *infinitely subtile* and *nothing*, and be less subtile than infinitely subtile, and yet more subtile than a thought⁷³

The subtleties spiral out of control, and lest we are persuaded by the Schoolman, that 'most subtile distinguisher', to the regress that, because 'the whole Divine substance is here and there and every where through out the world, and that the soul of a man is here and there and every where throughout man's body . . . we must therefore take it for a mystery of Christian religion',⁷⁴ Hobbes suddenly pulls us back. The 'Christian mysteries' do not require us to believe in nonsense. Moreover, incorporeal substance is not even 'mentioned in the Bible, where to the contrary it is written, *That the fulness of the Deity was bodily in Christ*'⁷⁵ – and contrary also to the very case that Hobbes has made! He concludes with the famous claim: 'When the nature of the thing is incomprehensible, I can acquiesce in the Scripture: but when the signification of words is incomprehensible, I cannot acquiesce in the authority of a Schoolman'.⁷⁶

Hobbes disarms us with his capitulation to Scripture, in the same way that he disarms us with his concessions to the discourse of worship. But in fact

⁷¹The *OED* gives two primary meanings for 'spright' in the 17c, (1) spirit and (2) 'a disembodied spirit, a ghost; a supernatural being, a goblin, fairy, etc.'. Clearly Hobbes has in mind the second.

⁷²Hobbes, *Answer*, 310.

⁷³*ibid.*

⁷⁴Hobbes, *Answer*, 313. 'The Subtle Doctor' was Duns Scotus' nickname, and Hobbes singles him out along with Suarez as first among the hairsplitting logicians. See Dominique Weber, *Hobbes et le Corps de Dieu*, 152.

⁷⁵Hobbes, *Answer*, 314.

⁷⁶*ibid.*

we have to look harder. Could the same philosopher who made such a show of dismissing the doctrine of Transubstantiation on the grounds that the notion that 'the same body can be in many places at once' was one that 'neither Aristotle, nor a philosopher, nor any sane man can think', but yet that it was convenient for the Scholastics to argue 'in order to maintain the real presence of Christ's body in every piece of consecrated bread',⁷⁷ be seriously telling us that the Deity was bodily infused in Christ as 'spirit' or 'fluid body', just as the body and blood of Christ were said to be infused into the Communion wafer? I think not. Hobbes is showing unequivocally that the language of Scripture in this case is a nonsense. Moreover, it is a nonsense which leads to further nonsense in the form of Transubstantiation. Hobbes in the *Answer* taunts Bramhall with heresy, if he is willing to subscribe to the biblical wording '*That the fulness of the Deity was bodily in Christ*', and its corollary, Transubstantiation, noting, 'Our Saviour's blood was most precious, but still it was human blood, and I hope his Lordship did never think otherwise'.⁷⁸

Hobbes had addressed the doctrine of Transubstantiation early in *Leviathan*, with reference to 'the sixth chapter of *Suarez*' first book, *Of the Concourse, Motion and Help of God*, as an example of the worst of scholastic excesses:

When men write whole volumes of such stuff, are they not mad, or intend to make others so? And particularly in the question of transubstantiation, where after certain words spoken, they that say, the whiteness, roundness, magnitude, quality corruptibility, all which are incorporeal, &c., go out of the wafer, into the body of our blessed Saviour, do not they make those *nesses, tudes, and ties*, to be so many spirits possessing his body? For by spirits they mean always things that being incorporeal are nevertheless moveable from one place to another. So that this kind of absurdity may rightly be numbered among the many sorts of madness ...⁷⁹

And yet it is a doctrine that a literal reading of the Bible and, specifically Paul, *Col. 2:9*, as interpreted by the great Nicene Father, Athanasius, decrees. So if Catholicism erred in decreeing a nonsensical doctrine, Anglicanism doubly erred in decreeing Nicene doctrine to be orthodoxy, but refusing to subscribe to Transubstantiation, that nonsensical doctrine that Nicaea decreed.

In fact, Hobbes's position is not as straightforward as it seems. In answer to Bramhall's questions, he made slighting reference to the fact that common people are crude enough to call 'body ... what they can see and

⁷⁷*Lev. xlvii, OL §19, 322/475.*

⁷⁸Hobbes, *Answer*, 324.

⁷⁹*Lev. viii, §27, 39/46-7.* Note that Hobbes's atheism does not commit him to disbelief in the historical Christ, whom he honours with the title 'our blessed Saviour', but only to the denial that Christ is God.

feel'. But can we believe him? He himself in the opening chapter of *Leviathan*, 'Of Sense', insists that '[t]he cause of sense is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense'; and again: '[a]ll which qualities called *sensible* are in the object that causeth them but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely'.⁸⁰ Divine matter by this measure is not 'sensible' (or palpable), the term he uses.⁸¹ How could we know it then? We cannot know it experientially, and this is what Hobbes means by God's ineffability. If we cannot know Divine Substance can we imagine it? Not that either, because Hobbes is clear that perceptions both real and imagined are accessible only by sensation, matter in motion coming into contact with the relevant senses: '(for motion produceth nothing but motion). But their appearance to us is fancy, the same waking that dreaming'.⁸² For Hobbes the objective process, so to speak, is the collision of our senses with external matter, although we experience it subjectively by projecting onto the object the qualities that the senses apprehend. This is to ignore the intermediary, which is our own imagination, but the imagination in turn is only catalyzed by sensation and the memory of sensations:

And though at some certain distance the real and very object seem invested with the fancy it begets in us, yet still the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another. So that sense in all cases, is nothing else but original fancy, caused (as I have said) by the pressure, that is, by the motion of external things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained.⁸³

God, who has no moving parts, cannot therefore be experienced and nor, for the same reason, can he be imagined. Can he be inferred? Clearly Hobbes must concede that much in the gravitational field of matter-in-motion must be inferred, since the collision between matter and our senses is both selective and to some extent arbitrary. Is God also subject to inference and can he be rescued as First Cause?

5. RESCUING GOD AS FIRST CAUSE, HOBBS AND BOYLE

Lupoli's second case, the controversy between Hobbes and Boyle, is occasioned by the Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* of 1668, some twenty-eight years after his letter to Descartes and twenty-two years after his debate with Bramhall. Here again Hobbes seems to subscribe not only to a materialist model of the universe as a perpetual motion machine – 'When a body is once in motion, it moveth (unless something else hinder it)

⁸⁰*Lev.* i, §4, 3–4/6–7.

⁸¹*Lev.* xlvi, §15, 371/459.

⁸²*Lev.* i, §4, 3/7.

⁸³*ibid.*

eternally'⁸⁴ – but also to the notion of the eternity of matter.⁸⁵ Although deemed heretical by the Nicene Creed – which ‘made a heretic out of anyone who would say the world was eternal; and anyone who denies it was the work of the eternal’⁸⁶ – ‘nothing is produced from nothing’, which Diogenes Laertius first attributed to Democritus,⁸⁷ is in fact one of the basic axioms of atomism to which Hobbes subscribes. Hobbes’s position was therefore not significantly different from that of Arius, at whom the Nicene doctrine, which ‘makes a heretic out of anyone’ who denies that the world is the creation of God, was directed. For Arius, the finitude, mutability and corruptibility of the created world put it out of reach of the Eternal Father, as rather the work of an extraordinary intermediary. This raises the deeply problematic question whether Hobbes’s corporeal God allows one to postulate God as first cause, without necessarily subscribing to the creation of the world as a physical event, as Boyle saw.⁸⁸

Hobbes’s attempt to render the corporeal God as a simple, indivisible *plenum*, brought him, by a regress, to the notion of God as fluid matter, as we have seen. But this notion of God as primary matter did not sit easily in a mechanistic system, nor did it furnish the ‘contiguous and moving’ body necessary for a Creator God. ‘The *primum fluidum* was characterized by an absolute stillness’, but God as ‘First Mover’ and the origin of all movement must necessarily be capable of motion.⁸⁹ For, divine matter in order to move physical matter must exist in the world as an ensemble of minute atomic corpuscles and particles, contiguous with, but separate from, the matter it was required to move.⁹⁰ As Lupoli points out, either Hobbes was guilty of a pantheism as radical as that of John Toland, later,⁹¹ or his account of the First Cause is simply incoherent. His notion of God as ‘one pure, simple, and eternal corporeal spirit’,⁹² precisely because that spirit’s absolute corporeal homogeneity does not correspond to the discrete atomic structures of visible bodies, suggests an unbridgeable dualism that does not permit a First Mover.

This is the line of argument Boyle took in his *Animadversions upon Mr. Hobbes’s Problemata De Vacuo*, diagnosing a dualism in Hobbes ‘grosser and more arbitrary than that of Descartes’, as Lupoli notes.⁹³ While ‘not only admitting but making use in his philosophy of the creation of the

⁸⁴ *Lev.* ii, §2, 4/8.

⁸⁵ See the 1668 Appendix, §§7–8, at 350, and 390 n. 20.

⁸⁶ Hobbes, *Historia Ecclesiastica* lines 651–2, Springborg et al., 376–7.

⁸⁷ Diogenes Laertius, 2.60, and Lucretius, 1.2.146–264.

⁸⁸ Lupoli, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, chapter 4, 558ff.

⁸⁹ Lupoli, *ibid.*, 565.

⁹⁰ Boyle *Reconcilableness*, 168/260, Lupoli, 556.

⁹¹ Lupoli, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, 562 n. 149.

⁹² Hobbes, *Answer*, 306/120, Lupoli 561.

⁹³ Boyle, *Tracts III*, 104–5 (BW IV, 79–149, W. VIII, 117–232) cited in Lupoli, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, 556.

world', Boyle charged, Hobbes, just because he subscribed to a corporeal God, was incapable of showing how from God as First Cause (*causa prima*), matter in motion could be derived,⁹⁴ and so his resort to the First Mover as a causal explanation for the existence of the world fails. But in his efforts to overcome this problem with the notion of the 'Corporeal Deity' as '*primum fluidum*', Hobbes only succeeded in reducing divine substance as fluid matter to a form of *mundane* fluid matter, as his example of the confluence of the waters suggests, and nothing that could furnish the *creatio ex nihilo*⁹⁵ – in which, in any case, it seems he did not believe. Even using this similitude he was incapable of showing how the divinity, as 'infinitely subtile substance' could enter the atomic structure of the material world. Much less was he able to credit Divine Substance, as the *primum fluidum* with omnipotence, intelligence and will.⁹⁶ All this Boyle saw, which was sufficient to accuse Hobbes of atheism. Either intentionally, as I believe, or unintentionally, as Boyle perhaps believed, the insuperable paradoxes that Hobbes posed served as pointers to disbelief. Certainly Lupoli and Wright are more cautious in what they conclude about Hobbes's intentions, and this marks our disagreement. Lupoli's position, tacitly endorsed by Wright, is that:

In the last analysis, rather than fill the cognitive gaps concerning the origin of the world – gaps for whose production he himself is in a certain way responsible in that he attempts to give a physical determination of the 'corporeal God' – Hobbes prefers to run the risk of incompleteness, allowing the most obvious and metaphysically attainable thesis to fall, namely the identification of the *primum fluidum* with that of God.⁹⁷

Lupoli's caution appears to match Hobbes's tentativeness: 'Can it then be doubted, but that God, who is an infinitely fine Spirit, and withal intelligent, can make and change all species and kinds of body as he pleaseth?'⁹⁸ But the resort to an Omnipotent God is a weak defense and Hobbes was surely stressing its weakness.⁹⁹ It is true that Descartes and Boyle believed that an omnipotent God has a perfect right to stretch our credulity, as we shall see. But this is the very reason for Hobbes to satirize such a view. Does faith command us systematically to believe in the impossible? And if so, how do we reconcile our perceptions of a material world regulated by rational laws with this ineffable God? Surely Hobbes's whole point in insisting on the 'corporeal God' was to show that if God exists in the universe he cannot violate the laws of that universe. Wright nevertheless suggests that if we grant '[t]he concept of God as first cause does explanatory work in the

⁹⁴Lupoli, *Nei Limiti della Materia*, 558.

⁹⁵Lupoli, *ibid.*, 564.

⁹⁶Lupoli, *ibid.*, 560.

⁹⁷Lupoli, "'Fluidismo' e *Corporeal Deity*", 603 ff.

⁹⁸Hobbes, *Answer*, 309–10, cited by Lupoli, "'Fluidismo" e *Corporeal Deity*', 603.

⁹⁹See Luc Foisneau, *Hobbes et la toute-puissance de Dieu* (Paris, 2000).

natural science, constrained by Hobbes's adherence to the ineffability thesis', we can conclude that '[t]hough indecisive and oscillating, Hobbes is offering a natural analogy for the operation of God in the world'.¹⁰⁰ But, taking a cue from the context in which Hobbes introduces the case for God as first cause in *Leviathan* together with his treatment of 'spirit', 'incorporeal substance', 'soul' and the mind/brain problem more generally, it seems more likely to me that Hobbes is rather affirming his heterodoxy.

6. RESCUING HOBBS AS AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

It is precisely by resisting the evidence of Hobbes's different registers, irony, satire, banality, as well as the rhetorics of systematic philosophy, biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, that some critics fail to see what Hobbes's contemporaries so clearly saw, that the incongruity of many of his theological claims pointed ineluctably to atheism. Among recent commentators, Cees Leijenhorst has taken the strongest stand against claims of Hobbes's atheism, directly addressing Curley, but nevertheless insisting that we respect distinctions he claims that Hobbes does make between discourses, and particularly between the discourse of 'faith', which is 'essentially a matter of law and common public conduct', and that of philosophy, which 'belongs to the sphere of private opinion'.¹⁰¹ This conclusion is sound as far as it goes. Luc Foisneau in the same issue of *Rivista di storia della filosofia* makes the important point that Hobbes's opposition to the experimental philosophy of Boyle, and the whole notion of natural philosophy as a substitute for the traditional scholastic proofs for the existence of God, is due to his insistence on a legal, rather than a scientific, foundation for religion, that might be construed as adding the legal as a third important discourse on which Hobbes insists.¹⁰² But these are not discourses that for Hobbes produce different but parallel truths. When, as noted above, Hobbes speaks in the same breath of 'every part of the universe [as] body, and that which is not body [as] no part of the universe', and that the same goes for spirits, but that people call them incorporeal, 'which is a name of more honour, and may therefore with more piety be attributed to God himself, in whom we consider not what attribute expresseth best his nature, which is incomprehensible, but what best expresseth our desire to honour Him',¹⁰³ he is not acknowledging parallel truths. Rather, in strict Epicurean fashion he is acknowledging that religion requires us to honour deities, and that religious observance is legally binding, but that this does not commit him personally, or anyone else for

¹⁰⁰Wright, 'Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle', 475.

¹⁰¹Leijenhorst, 'Hobbes's Corporeal Deity', 76.

¹⁰²Foisneau, 'Beyond the Air-Pump', 35.

¹⁰³*Lev.* xlvi, §15, 371/459.

that matter, to *believing* the claims of religion as demonstrable truths. So, we cannot infer from his claim that the discourse of faith may employ the terminology of ‘incorporeal spirit’ that these spirits, or indeed the deity, really exist, or that their putative existence is not in conflict with the principle that ‘every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe’. In this respect, Hobbes is indeed consistent, without maintaining ‘faith’ and ‘philosophy’ as autonomous zones of truth. He is consistently Epicurean in maintaining that what the state cult requires in terms of worshipping the gods is one of our public obligations, regardless of its truth content.

Leijenhorst claims the opposite. For instance, he infers from Hobbes’s concession that the demands of religion may conflict with the scientific prohibition against the terminology of ‘incorporeal substances’, that Hobbes accepts that ‘human reason can only infer *that* God exists, not *what* He is’.¹⁰⁴ But such an inference runs directly counter to Hobbes’s often expressed contempt for the misuse of the verb ‘to be’, which derives *existentia* from *essere*, and that he puts right up front early in the English *Leviathan* and at greater length in the Latin.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, it ignores his insistence, which is also one of the strongest claims he made against Descartes in the Third set of Objections to the *Meditations*,¹⁰⁶ that it is absurd to claim existence for what we cannot conceive, because ‘a man can have no thought representing anything not subject to sense . . . but he must conceive it in some place, and endued with determinate magnitude’.¹⁰⁷

Whatsoever we imagine is *finite*. Therefore there is no idea or conception of anything we call *infinite*. No man can have in his mind an image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, or infinite force, or infinite power. When we say any thing is infinite, we signify only that we are not able to conceive the ends and bounds of the things named; having no conception of the thing, but of our own inability. And therefore the name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him (for he is *incomprehensible*, and his greatness and power are unconceivable), but that we may honour him.¹⁰⁸

Leijenhorst seems to overlook, even though he quotes it, that this restatement by Hobbes about the unscientific character of religious language honouring God, far from dignifying it with the status of parallel truth, is rather an instance, to quote Hobbes’s addendum, of ‘absurd speeches, taken upon credit (without any signification at all), from deceived philosophers, and deceived, or deceiving schoolmen’.¹⁰⁹ Seeing a parallel in the case of the blind man warmed by a fire that he cannot conceive, Leijenhorst persists in

¹⁰⁴Leijenhorst, ‘Hobbes’s Corporeal Deity’, 77.

¹⁰⁵*Lev.* viii, §27, 39/46–7; *Lev.* xlvi (*OL*), §16–18, 320–22/473–5.

¹⁰⁶See Objections 5 through 16 of the Third Set of Objections, CSM II: 125–37.

¹⁰⁷*Lev.* iii, §12, 12/15.

¹⁰⁸*ibid.*

¹⁰⁹*ibid.*

interpreting it as evidence that Hobbes believes 'we can arrive at the hypothesis of God's existence' even if 'we do not have a conception of God'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, he makes this argument against Curley, who argues, correctly I believe, that Hobbes's '[putative] causal proof for the existence of God' must be held up to scrutiny in terms of his 'rejection of White's contention that natural reason can prove the existence of God'.¹¹¹

This is a house of cards. Remove the claim that Hobbes offers serious scientific proof for the existence of God, and the arguments about the capacity of humans to hypothesize the existence of entities of which they can have no conception fall with it. This was Hobbes's case against Boyle, the Gresham College naturalist, who claimed that natural philosophy could provide proofs for the existence of God independent of theology; and in whom Hobbes saw evidence of 'a new intellectual clergy – the experimentalist sect', which threatened 'a new Kingdome of Darknesse, in which experimentalists would replace the scholastic philosophers', as Foisneau observes.¹¹² Foisneau is convincing in his conclusion that Hobbes saw in Boyle's project 'an extension of Cartesian metaphysics in its dualism of substances, obviously, but also in the underlying thesis on the omnipotence of God'.¹¹³ And here we have the clue, I believe, to Leijenhorst's persistence in claiming that Hobbes accepts that we can hypothesize the existence of God while having no concept of him. It is only by recognizing philosophy and faith as autonomous discourses with parallel truths that such a reconciliation is possible, and this is tantamount to accepting Cartesian dualism regarding the corporeal science of bodies *accessible* to cognition, together with faith in non-corporeal entities *inaccessible* to cognition. But it was to the refutation of Cartesian dualism that Hobbes's life work was directed, and to an extent that is rarely appreciated, as I say.

To understand this is to read contentious passages in Hobbes differently. Hobbes's Epicureanism is a major piece of the puzzle, and Foisneau notes that Hobbes's '*legalistic foundation of natural religion*' is grounded upon an anthropology containing distinctly Epicurean elements, for which he cites Hobbes's own catalogue: 'And in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of *religion*'.¹¹⁴ Perhaps to the surprise of those who associate the search for causes with an objective experimental science, for Hobbes this impetus is rather proof of the existential fear upon which natural religion and, eventually priest-craft, are parasitic. Thus, his condemnation of the Royal Society and the 'experimentalist sect':

¹¹⁰Leijenhorst, 'Hobbes's Corporeal Deity', 81, with reference to *Lev.* xi §25, 51/62.

¹¹¹Leijenhorst, *ibid.*, citing Curley, 'I Durst not Write so Boldly', 580.

¹¹²Foisneau, 'Beyond the Air-Pump', 34.

¹¹³Foisneau, *ibid.*, 35.

¹¹⁴Foisneau, *ibid.*, 35, citing *Lev.* xii, §11, 54/66.

For he that from any effect he seeth come to pass should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himself profoundly into 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 eternal cause of all things, which is that which men mean by the name of God.¹¹⁵

This text, which has so often been read as proof that Hobbes subscribed to the existence of God as prime mover, must now be read differently, as proof that Hobbes like Epicurus sees the natural curiosity of humans in their search for ultimate causes, not as proof for the existence of God, but to the contrary, proof of their enduring capacity to create gods in their own likeness to relieve metaphysical angst. It is from this Epicurean perspective that he is able to tar Cartesians and experimental scientists like Boyle with the same brush: the search for ultimate causes, and faith in the existence of incorporeal entities, are both salves for human weakness, not without sanction in sacred Scripture, and condoned by the state cult, but they are ultimately religious phenomena. Boyle, who insisted that ‘the experimental philosophy might afford a well-disposed mind considerable helps to natural religion’,¹¹⁶ is condemned out of his own mouth. For, the ‘well-disposed mind’ is for Hobbes the mind already blinded by faith. As Foisneau remarks, ‘Boyle simply transposed the developments of Descartes’ metaphysical experiments into the register of physical experiments’,¹¹⁷ believing these very experiments to be proof of the superiority of the human mind, such that “‘the seat of these spiritual faculties, and the source of these operations, is a substance, that being in its own nature distinct from the body, is not naturally subject to die or perish with it’”.¹¹⁸ For Hobbes it followed that Boyle, like Descartes, suffering all the illusions of natural religion that Epicureanism diagnosed, should subscribe to ‘the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the providential organization of the world’, confident that ‘the systematic organization of such a complex machine as the world leads one to think, first, that this machine must have been produced by “a cause exceedingly powerful, wise and beneficent”, second that this cause could not have abandoned “a master piece so worthy of Him, but does still maintain and preserves it’”.¹¹⁹ Boyle’s unfavourable comparison of the philosopher of Malmesbury with Descartes, could only serve to confirm Hobbes’s belief that both were guilty of the prejudices of natural religion by admitting incorporeal essences on the warrant of blind faith. For, ironically, Boyle praises Descartes for that of which Hobbes had

¹¹⁵ *Lev.* xii, §6, 52/64. Foisneau, *ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁶ Foisneau, *ibid.*, 39, citing Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso*, in *Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, edited by Thomas Birch, 2nd edn, 6 vols (London, 1772; reprint Hildesheim, 1966) V, 522.

¹¹⁷ Foisneau, *ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁸ Foisneau, *ibid.*, 41, citing Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso*, 517.

¹¹⁹ Foisneau, *ibid.*, 41, citing Boyle, *ibid.*, 519.

so early accused him: of refusing to accept the inferences which his investigation of materialism entailed; the accusation, as we have seen, that so enraged the Frenchman:

As then to this grand position of Mr. Hobbes [*i.e.*, 'nothing is removed but by a body contiguous and moved'],¹²⁰ though, if it were cautiously proposed, as it is by Des Cartes, it may perhaps be safely admitted, because Cartesius acknowledges the first impulse, that set matter a moving, and the conservation of motion once begun, to come from God; yet, as it is crudely proposed by the favourers of Mr. Hobbes, I am so far from seeing any such cogent proof for it, as were to be wished for a principle, on which he builds so much (and which yet is not at all evident by its own light,) that I see no competent reason to admit it.¹²¹

The case of Descartes and Boyle was not improved for Hobbes by their extreme positions on the omnipotent God. Boyle, citing article 24 of Descartes's *Principes de la philosophie*, and his 'letter to a learned adversary', subscribed to the French philosopher's position that our incapacity to understand the nature of God should not be a warrant for setting limits to his omnipotence on the basis of human reason. So, "we ought never to say of any thing, that it is impossible to God", because "all, that is true and good being dependent on his all-mightiness", we must not say "that God cannot make a mountain without a valley, or cannot make it true, that one and two shall not make three".¹²² As Foisneau observes, 'Boyle conceives the God of Descartes as the theoretical principle of surpassing the order of nature rather than its guarantor',¹²³ a position that Hobbes explicitly rejects: 'divine almightiness is defined [by Hobbes] not by the opening of the field of possib[ilities] but by God's capacity to fulfill his will: "omnipotence signifieth no more, than the power to do those things that he [*i.e.*, God] will[s to] do".¹²⁴ God on this account is truly a *deus ex machina*, his powers stipulated by the presuppositions of what a legal order based on the sanctions of the state cult requires.

A full understanding of the implications of Hobbes's doctrine of natural religion lays to rest any doubts that Hobbes himself could fall victim to the dualism of which he accuses Boyle and Descartes, or of accepting the conventional scholastic dual zones of faith and reason as admitting parallel truths, postulated by Leijenhorst. But this does not mean that Hobbes cannot accept the zone of religion as a practice, or that he refrains from a discussion of the attributes of the divinities which cultic practice dictates. Quite to the contrary, if natural religion is the cause of superstition, making humans prey to astrologers and those who can promise knowledge of the future, priests and charlatans, it is nevertheless only natural religion that

¹²⁰Boyle, *Some considerations*, 168. Foisneau, *ibid.*, 47.

¹²¹Foisneau, *ibid.*, 47, citing Boyle, *Some considerations*, 168.

¹²²Foisneau, *ibid.*, 48, citing Boyle, *Some considerations*, 163–4.

¹²³Foisneau, *ibid.*, 48.

¹²⁴Foisneau, *ibid.*, 49, citing Hobbes, *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*, EW V, 427.

creates the possibility for a legal order based on divine sanctions, and ultimately the ‘mortal god’, Leviathan. The *deus ex machina* is not ventured lightly. It is important for Hobbes to show how this works, and he does so by precisely specifying the content of natural religion, and the attributes of the divinity that make the creation of the ‘mortal god’ in the image of ‘the God of fear’ of the book of Job, possible.

Seeing this enables us to see the answer to further puzzles. For instance, the puzzle posed by rational choice interpretations of Hobbes,¹²⁵ how to create in the conditions of the ‘war of all against all’ the dispositions to peace upon which the social contract is predicated, can now be seen as falsely posed. The state of nature is not a libertarian regime of free and equal individuals enjoying their untrammelled natural rights. ‘Whether men will or not, they must be subject always to the divine power’,¹²⁶ because they live in fear of it. Already in *De cive*, as Foisneau notes, ‘divine omnipotence imposes an obligation on men to obey the laws of nature because of their weakness (*imbecillitas*)’,¹²⁷ and this is universal. ‘In the realm of God by nature’, as Foisneau further notes, this means that ‘men must obey the laws of nature not only with respect to their proper rationality but also with respect to God’s omnipotence’.¹²⁸ Natural religion, then, and the cult of divine sovereignty give leverage to Leviathan in creating a legal order sanctioned by civil religion. Like the Epicureans, Hobbes sees in the propensity to natural religion the seeds of civilization: ‘Having spoken of the right of God’s sovereignty as grounded only on nature; we are to consider next what are the Divine Laws, or dictates of natural reason; which laws concern either the natural duties of one man to another or the honour naturally due to our Divine Sovereign’.¹²⁹ Bishop Bramhall is one of the very few among Hobbes’s commentators to have seen his account of the attributes of God, including his existence, as generated, not from personal belief, but from the exigencies of this legal order and the state cult which buttresses it, maintaining of Hobbes’s observations about ‘natural worship’:

This is acknowledged by T. H. himself in his lucid intervals. ‘That we may know what worship of God natural reason doth assign, let us begin with his attributes, where it is manifest in the first place, that existency is to be attributed to him’. To which he addeth, ‘infiniteness, incomprehensibility, unity, ubiquity’. Thus for attributes; next for actions. ‘Concerning external

¹²⁵David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: The Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, 1969); Gauthier, ‘Why One Ought to Obey God? Reflections on Hobbes and Locke’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1977) No. 3: 425–45; Gauthier, ‘Hobbes: The Laws of Nature’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2001) Nos. 3–4: 258–84; Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge, 1986); and Hampton, ‘Hobbes and Ethical Naturalism’, *Ethics* 6 (1992): 333–53.

¹²⁶*Lev.* xxxi, §2, 186/234. Foisneau, ‘Beyond the Air-Pump’, 36.

¹²⁷Foisneau, *ibid.*, 36–7, citing *De cive*, edited by H. Warrender (Oxford, 1983) 222–3.

¹²⁸Foisneau, *ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁹*Lev.* xxxi, §7, 188/237. Foisneau, *ibid.*, 35,

actions, wherewith God is to be worshipped, the most general precept of reason is, that they be signs of honour'; under which are contained, 'prayers, thanksgivings, oblations, and sacrifices'.¹³⁰

Foisneau also insists that the attributes of an omnipotent God are dictated for Hobbes first and foremost by the demands of a legal order, which natural religion, prior to the social contract and the inauguration of the state cult, makes possible. It is odd, then, that he should end by accusing him of a kind of dualism similar to that of Descartes, observing that 'what is most surprising is not that Hobbes could thus defend strictly materialist positions but that he could reconcile this strict materialism with a theology of the almightiness of God'.¹³¹ This is once again to fail to see the modalities of Hobbes's language. As Bramhall himself saw, Hobbes's is a set of second order propositions. The attributes of God Hobbes postulates: 'infiniteness, incomprehensibility, unity, ubiquity' are not expressions of personal belief on his part. They are stipulations about the content of natural religion as the presupposition of a legal order, for which Hobbes also claims evidence in the Scriptures, and the doctrines of the established religion of his day, Anglicanism. While bold enough to show that such stipulations cannot be supported by philosophy or science, when discoursing philosophically, he nevertheless endorses religious conformity in the interests of peace and civil order, when discoursing politically.

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¹³⁰Foisneau, *ibid.*, 35–6, citing Bramhall (1842), 519–20.

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