

THE ROLE OF GOD IN HOBBS' PHILOSOPHY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

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San Marcos, Texas  
August, 1998

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1998

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hobbes may be considered one of the most influential philosophers of the modern era. His philosophy offered a revolutionary *weltanschauung* that was deemed subversive of the social, political and religious order by his contemporaries. The new philosophy proffered by Hobbes was sparked debate and controversy that continues to this day. The importance of Thomas Hobbes in the history of political philosophy cannot be denied. Many eminent scholars argue that the worldview of contemporary western society descends partially, if not completely, from Hobbes' thought. Michael Oakeshott, for example, writes that Hobbes' work, *Leviathan*, is "the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language. And the history of our civilization can provide only a few works of similar scope and achievement to set beside it. Consequently, it must be judged by none but the highest standards and must be considered only in the widest context. The masterpiece supplies a standard and a context for the second rate . . . but the context of the masterpiece itself, the setting in which its

meaning is revealed, can in the nature of things be nothing narrower than the history of political philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Leo Strauss writes that:

Hobbes was the first who felt the necessity of seeking, and succeeded in finding, a *nuova scienza* of man and State. On this new doctrine all later moral and political thought is expressly or tacitly based. . . . To give an indication of its philosophical bearing one might point out that the moral philosophy, not merely of eighteenth century rationalism, but also of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel would not have been possible without Hobbes’s work.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of his political and moral philosophy was recognized in his own day, and the publication of his political and moral writings have sparked controversy that continues into the modern era. Quentin Skinner maintains that even in his own time, Hobbes’ theories sparked furious debate between those who thought Hobbes’ ideas subverted a stable moral and civil order, and those who believed he was formulating a new science of man.<sup>3</sup>

To understand why Hobbes’ philosophy and writings had, and have the impact that they do, one must consider the times and events surrounding his life. In addition to his philosophy, one has to look at the era in which Hobbes lived, and which informed his philosophical outlook. It has been written that:

For a full understanding of Hobbes it is necessary to realize the startling impression he made on his contemporaries. One can see how shocked they were by him; how strong their tradition was. Here, they insist is a man who questions basic assumptions; a ruthless critic of immemorial institutions. As for his doubtful theological opinions, an aspect of his thought which loomed largest at the time, all the critics were unanimous that the Leviathan was utterly subversive.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 3.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, Its Basis and Its Genesis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Skinner, “The Ideological Context of Hobbes’s Political Thought,” *The Historical Journal*, IX, 3 (1966) : 286-317.

Hobbes lived during the English Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Restoration—a bloody time in England’s history. The violent situation in England made Hobbes very much concerned with the establishment of peace in the English realm, so the bulk of his intellectual and writing energies was spent searching for a way to establish peace.<sup>5</sup> In his introduction to Hobbes’ *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic, Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, J.C.A. Gaskin writes that Hobbes’ first major work, a translation of Thucydides’ History of the *Peloponnesian War*, was printed as a “cautionary tale of civil war addressed to his increasingly fractious and rebellious countrymen.”<sup>6</sup> Hobbes would eventually create a philosophy of man and government by using mechanistic science to try to show his fellow citizens a logical way to peace. While doing so, Thomas Hobbes would redefine the traditional moral order on which English society was based—to the intellectual and theological dismay of his critics.

Hobbes discovered geometry in 1628. John Aubrey, in his biography of Hobbes, says that the deductive method used by Euclid in the demonstration of geometrical proofs, made Hobbes “in love” with logic and the deductive method.<sup>7</sup> What Hobbes then set out to do was use the precision of geometrical logic to develop his moral and civil philosophy. Hobbes wanted to demonstrate that his philosophy was “occasioned by the disorders of the present time, without partiality, without application, and without other designe, than to set before mens eyes the mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience; of which the condition of Humane Nature and the Lawes Divine . . . require

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<sup>4</sup> John Bowle, *Hobbes and His Critics*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1969) 13.

<sup>5</sup> J.W.N. Gaskins, *Hobbes System of Ideas*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1965) 13-17.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hobbes, J.C.A. Gaskin ed., *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic, Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) xii. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *Elements*.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel I Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 6.

an inviolable observation.”<sup>8</sup> Hobbes took human society apart in his mind and broke it down to its basic component part, which was the individual man in the state of nature. Hobbes hypothesized man in this state would not be restrained by divine or positive law, thereby giving him complete freedom of action. Man in his natural state was, for Hobbes, free to act without the moral restraints placed on man by revealed religion. Anything created or thought, then, would be man-made, and man has only himself to blame for any flaws or errors in his creations.

It follows from this hypothesis that man is chained and controlled by what he creates—especially what man creates in his mind. If Hobbes could show that religion is a matter for the state, and that the state cannot control what is in one’s heart (thereby relieving one from professing his faith in public,) Hobbes could then demonstrate that the religious wars in England made no sense. In addition, Hobbes would show his fellow citizens a “scientific” way to civil order and civil peace. These assumptions taken together, would form the foundation by which would build his philosophical edifice.

Hobbes would spend eleven years in exile in Paris for his first ‘little treatise in English,’ namely *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, first published in 1640. This treatise was soon followed by a more complete explication of his philosophy, *De Cive*, published while Hobbes was in Paris in 1642. Nine years later, Hobbes enduring achievement, *Leviathan*, was published in London in 1651. Hobbes philosophy as set forth in his major works were soon interpreted as being subversive of the civil and religious order of his day. It is Hobbes’ view on religion, theology, natural law and the

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985, repr.) “A Review and Conclusion,” 728. Hereafter *Leviathan* will be noted as *L*.

origins and nature of political obligation that caused the most consternation among his contemporary critics.

Skinner observes that the adherents of Hobbes new political and ethical writings included intellectuals such as Mersenne, Sorbiere, and Spinoza. In addition, Skinner informs us that jurists of Hobbes' era ranked him "to stand with Grotius and Puffendorf."<sup>9</sup> Although Hobbes' works were much better received on the Continent than in England, Hobbes did have students of his philosophy in John Selden and Francis Osborne. Even Hobbes' philosophical opponents of the period, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, conceded that he was "a genius, and even an original among these latter leaders of philosophy."<sup>10</sup> Hobbes' critics, however, were afraid that Hobbes' new science of man and ethics was atheistic; would subvert belief in the Christian religion; and would undermine the morality needed to hold English society together. These criticisms of Hobbes' philosophy will be examined in detail in Chapter II.

Interest in Hobbes' thought seems to be cyclical, but it never wanes; all a student of political theory has to do is peruse a bibliography of the vast literature produced over the past three centuries. This constant interest is due to the revolutionary, thought-provoking and potentially subversive character of his work.

Hobbes was to claim in the Epistle Dedicatory to his book *De Corpore* that he was the first to look at political philosophy through the eyes of the new science; and that his method as put forth in the introduction of a prior work, *De Cive*, would lead men to an

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<sup>9</sup> "Ideological Context of Hobbes Thought," 290.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 292.



understanding of a new civil philosophy based on science.<sup>11</sup> It is Hobbes' method and his new philosophy that has energized the dialogue of political philosophers ever since.

Leo Strauss writes that next to Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes is the originator of modern political thought.<sup>12</sup> It is Hobbes, writes Strauss, who also tries to understand how man's relationship with political authority and society is affected by his human nature; it is Hobbes, writes Strauss, who was the first to clearly enunciate a philosophical break with the ancients. By discovering the true nature of man, Hobbes hoped to provide a civil philosophy that prudent citizens could use to create a world in which men could pursue their enlightened self-interest.

Scholars such as Paul Cooke maintain that because of the violent uncertainty of his time, Hobbes needed to be careful about how he put forth his philosophy. Cooke believes that Hobbes' project was to recreate Christianity in such a way that its foundation would rest on nature and reason, not on faith and God. In order to have his writings printed, and to ensure his own safety, he is said to have couched much of his doctrine in writing about Christian theology.<sup>13</sup> Since much of Hobbes' philosophy is generally considered to be atheistic, some place less importance on his writings about Christianity and religion by claiming that these particular essays and chapters were written to help Hobbes fend off charges of atheism, and that his philosophy may be understood without them. Eldon Eisenach, however, suggests that you cannot separate the two halves of *Leviathan*. He writes:

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Bernard Gert ed., *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1993) 91. Hereafter *De Cive* will be referred to as *DC*.

<sup>12</sup> *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, xv.

The state of nature (a product of reason) and sacred history (the record and prophecy of God" intervention in time) seem so contradictory that contemporary students of Hobbes suggest that one can ignore the latter entirely and still comprehend Hobbes's entire political philosophy . . . But if *Leviathan* is one book and the author a philosopher throughout, the great disjunction ascribed by scholars today might in fact be a greater complementarity.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars such as A.E. Taylor and Howard Warrender suggest that one cannot dismiss parts of his moral philosophy (i.e. his writings on Christianity and religion) without affecting the whole of his philosophy.<sup>15</sup> In addition to Taylor and Warrender, some scholars such as S.A. State and A.P. Martinich hold that when it comes to Hobbes' discourses on Christianity, it is not unreasonable to suggest that he meant much of what he said. This scholarship will also be examined to show that there is a case to be made that his philosophy cannot stand without some sort of theism—monotheism in particular.

Hobbes scholars in this century have been divided essentially into two distinct camps: scholars such as Warrender and Martinich attempt to demonstrate that Hobbes was a believing Christian, albeit an unorthodox one; the second camp includes scholars such as Strauss and Cooke who attempt to illustrate that Hobbes subverts Christianity in order to make it palatable to science and natural religion.

*Leviathan*, is without a doubt, considered Hobbes' most important work.

However, much of the philosophy developed in *Leviathan* had been more clearly laid out in Hobbes' earlier works *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, (containing *Human*

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<sup>13</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity, Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996) 17-38. See also *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 74-75.

<sup>14</sup> Eldon J. Eisenach, *The Two Worlds of Liberalism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) 7.

<sup>15</sup> A.E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," *Philosophy* 13; Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957.) To differentiate this work with that by Strauss' work of the same name, it will be noted *WPPH*.

*Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*) and *De Cive*.<sup>16</sup> These treatises explain his civil philosophy in a much more clear and concise manner than in *Leviathan*. *Leviathan* was written at the height of civil discord in England; so in addition to being an explication of his philosophy, it is also a rhetorical exhortation to his countrymen for peace. Powerful though it is, *Leviathan* must be read with this in mind. For purposes of my analysis of Hobbes' thought, I will draw heavily on *Elements*, *De Cive*, *Leviathan* and the Molesworth collection of Hobbes' writings, *English Works*. In addition to Hobbes' primary writings, I will also use significant works of current scholarship to support my analysis. My thesis is that Hobbes' moral philosophy requires a monotheistic, lawgiving god. I will show that for his philosophy to work, it needs a god who created the universe and who gives man laws by which to live, and by which to order his society. If Hobbes' new science of government and ethics do not have an authority that transcends those created by man, then his philosophy cannot be considered true, since truth would become whatever anyone says it is.

Since Hobbes' critics were concerned with Christianity (indeed, the English Civil Wars were as much about Christian Authority and dogma, as about the English Constitution,) the bulk of their polemics were directed at Hobbes' unorthodox Christian writings. Hobbes' theology parallels Christianity in the sense that both doctrines have a lawgiving creator who instructs man on how to order his society. Since the debate that engaged Hobbes and his critics was argued using the language of Christianity, his works must be viewed through the lens of Christianity.

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<sup>16</sup> *Elements*, liv.

I will begin Chapter two of this thesis by analyzing the contemporary debated which calls into question Hobbes' theology. I will also briefly discuss Hobbes personality. It is generally agreed that Hobbes considered himself a revolutionary thinker and that he suffered from arrogance. It is Hobbes' arrogance which makes his alleged "duplicity" somewhat suspect. Why would someone create a new civil philosophy to end civil strife, and then write it in such a way that only a few could understand it? This subject will be dealt with in Chapter II. I am not trying to prove that Hobbes was a Christian; to my knowledge, nowhere in his writings does he make that claim. I am maintaining that in order for his philosophy to work, there has to be a god who is a creator and lawgiver who requires obedience to his laws. Hobbes consistently makes that assertion. In chapter III, I will discuss Hobbes' theories of natural and civil law; Chapter IV will analyze Hobbes' writings on religion as they pertain to this thesis; and Chapter V will conclude this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE OVER HOBBS THEOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the contemporary debate over Hobbes' theology. The atheistic bent of Hobbes' theology has spurred debate for over three hundred years. The debate essentially turns on whether his philosophy presupposes a lawgiving deity, or rather, does his philosophy stand without any God at all. For all the debate that has surrounded Hobbes over time, it seems ultimately that his moral philosophy needs God in order to work. Hobbes' critics could not overcome their personal Christian beliefs to understand Hobbes' project; they absolutely could not accept Hobbes' heterodox version of Christianity. This idea can be seen clearly in the accusations levelled at Hobbes by his critics—and in Hobbes' own refutation to the charges of atheism.<sup>17</sup> I will discuss Hobbes' debate with his contemporaries in Chapter IV. To be sure, Hobbes probably did hide his unconventional theology in the cathedral of Christianity, however, I do not believe he was being disingenuous in his belief in some sort of God of nature.

Our current understanding of Hobbes' philosophy has been clouded by the various interpretations of his writings over the centuries. Modern scholarship has only clouded the debate. Scholars such as Leo Strauss and Paul Cooke insist that Hobbes was engaged in a duplicitous enterprise, and that the only way to truly understand his teachings is to "read between the lines." The debate over whether Hobbes put hidden meanings into his moral philosophy is important because one's understanding of his philosophy turns on whether or not there *are* hidden messages in his philosophy; messages directed to those who are "enlightened" enough to see behind the shroud, as it were. Understanding Hobbes' theory of moral obligation is important because if one accepts the view that Hobbes' writings are disingenuous, then one must accept the view that moral authority has no foundation other than human convention. If that is the case, then one is obligated to obey the authority that has the power of coercion. Conversely, if moral obligation is owed to an authority that transcends human being, then man can structure his society in accordance to certain eternal "truths."

The latest scholarship advocating the case that Hobbes' writings were filled with hidden meaning so as to advance a new socio-political order has been proposed by Paul D. Cooke in *Hobbes and Christianity, Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan*. I will discuss Cooke's scholarship because it is the latest advocating that Hobbes had ulterior motives in writing his philosophy, and it is best representative of that school of thought, which

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<sup>17</sup> See Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, v. 4 ed. Willaim Molesworth (London: John Bohn; repr., Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1966) 279-384, "An Answer to Bishop Bramhall," where Hobbes refutes charges of atheism. Hereafter citations from *English Works* will be noted *EW*.

builds on the research of Strauss, Harvey Mansfield and others.<sup>18</sup> Cooke begins his thesis by holding that Hobbes used his exegesis of the Bible to promote his new moral order.

Cooke claims that:

Hobbes extensively incorporated the Bible in his work principally because he was aware of the tension between natural rights and biblical revelation and understood the great importance of easing it. In order to ease this tension Hobbes engaged in a kind of “conspiracy” against orthodox Christianity. He reinterpreted the Bible to ally it with the human freedom represented by natural rights, *deliberately disguising* the original tension between Christianity and his new teaching.<sup>19</sup>

Basing a philosophy on natural rights, implies Cooke, contradicts biblical teaching because rights are no longer given to men by God. Rather, rights are then to be derived from nature. Natural rights for Hobbes, asserts Cooke, “mean a complete freedom from thoughts of duty that might interfere with the satisfaction of the demands of the passions.” Furthermore, “Conceiving of ourselves in thoughts that limit our freedom to satisfy our passions for any other reason than maximizing the safe exercise of that freedom is finally, nothing more than a violation of our natural rights.”<sup>20</sup> Revealed religion, however, requires that man be subservient to God, in addition to being bound by duties to God. For Cooke, man in Hobbes’ universe has no other master than himself.<sup>21</sup> Cooke maintains that Hobbes knew his new moral philosophy wrecked the foundation on which Christianity stands. Chapter 12 of *Leviathan*, writes Cooke, forces a “philosophically thoughtful reader” to conclude that religion is born out of man’s darkest

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<sup>18</sup> See Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* and Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, (California: University of California Press, 1975.)

<sup>19</sup> Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity, Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1996) 17. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

fears, and that religion is nothing but a myth created to give man certainty in an uncertain world. This new philosophy, according to Cooke, was completely subversive of Christian teaching and theology in Hobbes' time. As a result, Hobbes had to engage in duplicity in order to present his moral teaching to the world.

The thesis proposed by Cooke contends that Hobbes knew that this new view of the world undermined traditional Christian thinking. Therefore Hobbes had to be careful when advancing his new philosophy, otherwise it would be exposed for what others claim that it is, which is an atheistic view of the world. Leo Strauss writes that "Whatever may have been Hobbes's private thoughts, his natural philosophy is as atheistic as Epicurian physics," and "His philosophy as a whole may be said to be the classic example of the typically modern combination of political idealism with a materialistic and atheistic view of the whole."<sup>22</sup> Harvey Mansfield also believes that Hobbes couched an atheistic philosophy in his religious writings. Writing on how Hobbes said men contract with each other to create a government to represent their will, Mansfield states:

Representative government thus seems to be the metaphor in which we say that the laws imposed on us come from ourselves, because the artificial man acts for the natural man. We say that laws come from us so that we cannot say they come from God, except indirectly through authoritative interpretation. . . . He [Hobbes] maliciously borrows his central metaphors from Christianity and uses them, like Christianity, to disguise his government.<sup>23</sup>

Mansfield implies that Hobbes' new world-view is a construct of man's own making, with the laws of nature being only dictates by which human beings can pursue their ends in relative safety.

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<sup>22</sup> Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 170.



Paul Cooke offers an excellent summary on the atheistic reading of Hobbes' philosophy which deserves to be quoted in full. Man in the state of nature

is not estranged from what he or she ought to be. He sees no golden age behind him and ahead of him he seeks peace, safety, and prosperity, but no change in himself. His being is determined by his passions and his freedom to pursue them, and there is no sense of sin attached to these. He seeks to maximize his freedom to indulge his passions. He is compelled by his desire to live—and by fear of dying—to change his way of living, to make reasonable arrangements, we could say, but he is not asked to change his very being, nor is there a sense in which he understands himself to be estranged from what he ought to be. There is no imperative to become a new sort of person. He is prodded by his own interests not to change himself, but to change the world to make it safe for what he is. The Hobbesian man described in *Leviathan* is not dissatisfied with himself, but with the state of nature, which is to say he is dissatisfied with the world that inhibits his freedom. Reason's role is to show such a person how to escape the extremely inconvenient situation in which he finds himself placed by nature, and still be himself. Thus, we may say Hobbes accepts humans as they are.<sup>24</sup>

This is a typical summary of the Hobbes-as-atheist school of thought. Cooke argues that Hobbes couched his philosophy in Christian doctrine because “he did not want to reveal—for the sake of the stability of rights-based society—that moral order was unsupported by anything higher than man.”<sup>25</sup> The implication is that if the moral order is created by man, why would human beings have any reason, then, to support that order, other than self-interest?

If the moral order is just a human construct, created so that men are relatively free to pursue their desires and passions, there is no reason then why an extremely avaricious and rapacious man should not try to fulfill his nature, for example, by trying to take sovereign power. In a Hobbesian world, the sovereign has the moral authority that men

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<sup>23</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield “Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government” *American Political Science Review*, 65, (1971) : 109-110.

<sup>24</sup> *Hobbes and Christianity*, 105.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

give it, no more, no less. In Chapter Eighteen of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes that it is the sovereign who decides what “Opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to Peace; and consequently . . . [the sovereign] shall examine the Doctrines of all bookes before they are published. For the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of men’s Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord.”<sup>26</sup> When men institute the sovereign, they authorize the sovereign to do whatever is necessary to maintain peace, even to the point of deciding what is to be considered truth.<sup>27</sup> It follows then that the civil morality (represented in the person of the sovereign) will reflect the morality of the men who create the sovereign, as long as the sovereign maintains peace.

Cooke’s thesis is that Hobbes was aware that a moral foundation needs something other than man on which to stand. Should Hobbes nakedly propose his new order, most thinking men would see the implications of a society based solely on convention; any thing could and would be considered moral, and man would find himself once again back in the state of nature.

Since Hobbes’ intent was to proffer a view of society in which human beings could live in relative peace and safety, Cooke’s argument goes, Hobbes wanted to cloak his new theology in the vestments of Christianity. According to Cooke, Hobbes reached three different groups of readers. Apparently, each group arrived at a different interpretation of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.<sup>28</sup> One audience, maintains Cooke, “appreciated Hobbes’s treatment of the Bible . . . as a prudently ambiguous but effective

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson, (London: Penguin Books, 1985, repr. 233. Hereafter *Leviathan* will be noted as *L*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2231-235.

<sup>28</sup> *Hobbes and Christianity*, 18.

demonstration of the questionableness of biblical faith . . . and as an implicit declaration of new liberty from the strictures of Christianity.”<sup>29</sup> Hobbes’ project, however, was “not to help the most knowing know more fully, “ but to “change the world by guiding a wider, more traditional and religiously inclined audience.”<sup>30</sup> This second audience would understand Hobbes’ duplicity because it would “reconcile genuine Christian hope with the new findings of science.”<sup>31</sup> The third audience, Hobbes’ critics, saw through Hobbes’ biblical exegesis and subsequently denounced Hobbes’ theology as heretical and atheistic. I will consider this third audience in Chapter IV.

The first group of readers Hobbes is purportedly trying to reach are those who are of like mind with him. This audience doubts biblical revelation and view Christianity as a kind of myth. Cooke writes of this first group of readers:

The most philosophically attuned readers were not so much shocked as instructed by Hobbes’ exegesis of the Bible. They would not have been blind to the deeper implications of his teaching—such as the religious accounts of the human situation were created out of human fear, as Hobbes wrote in the twelfth chapter of *Leviathan*, and that Christianity was therefore implicitly indicted by such descriptions. This kind of reader may have seen in Hobbes’s work the tension between the claims of reason and the claims of revelation decided in favor of a solvent reason capable of dissolving Christianity into a myth. . . . Hobbes’s treatment of the Bible may also have revealed that religion has a political utility, that it is necessary for the successful management of human passions and the ordering of civil society.<sup>32</sup>

For Cooke, this first group of readers tacitly approved of Hobbes’ theories on civil society. They agreed with what Hobbes had to say on the subject of religion as he laid it

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

out in Chapter Twelve of *Leviathan*. Here, Hobbes argues that man is the sole cause of religion due to his anxiety regarding the future and his fear of “Invisible Agents.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, the underlying message on this view is that human beings can create a relatively peaceful society once they realize that man and man alone creates his world. Once men realize that religion is born out of “idols of the brain,” they can then begin to order their society on their own terms, not on the terms of some fictitious supernatural being.

The first group of readers are brought to realize that there is “political utility” to be found by using religion to control the unthinking masses, concerned with their day to day lives and not much else. Hobbes writes that sometimes men use religion “according to their own invention” to ensure obedience and to provide for the common good.<sup>34</sup> The implication in Chapter Twelve is that religion is just a powerful construct of the human imagination, and it can be used to help control society. This first group of readers may realize that Christianity is just a myth that has historically caused strife and discord for civil society. Of civil strife and discord caused by religion:

Hobbes’s aim is to govern the course taken by the fear of what lies after death, a fear that arises from natural consequences, but which is then aggravated and exploited by powerful religionists who draw on the Bible. Chapter 47, . . . treats those who spread, defend, and generate all the errors of reasoning that blind human beings to their best interests in the world. These are persons who exploit the natural fears of human beings on order to further their own power at the expense of what natural reason teaches concerning the law of nature and human well-being.<sup>35</sup>

On this reading of Hobbes, religion can be used to maintain social control by preying on man’s fear of death.

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<sup>33</sup> *L*, ch. 12, 168-170.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 12, 173.

<sup>35</sup> *Hobbes and Christianity*, 211.

The second group of readers Cooke claims that Hobbes wanted to address was a larger, broader audience who wanted to “reconcile genuine Christian hope with the new findings of science.”<sup>36</sup> Hobbes’ project, according to Cooke, was to reach a wide audience who would not clearly see the implications of his moral philosophy and would instead put his philosophy into practice. Cooke writes:

It was of the highest importance to the fulfillment of Hobbes’s aims to speak to a broad, educated audience, though these readers did not understand him as did either the earliest *philosophes* or his most vehement critics . . . To a great degree, then, Hobbes’s main goal was not to help the most knowing know more fully; he wanted to instead change the world by guiding a wider, more traditional, and religiously inclined audience. Thus, in “Review and Conclusion” at the end of *Leviathan*, Hobbes advised that the work be adopted by the universities of England so that the gentry and clergy who were trained there might benefit from its teaching and then, in turn, employ it in teaching the broader populace their civic duties.<sup>37</sup>

Cooke claims that Hobbes “made the most room for” this second group of readers, because it is implied that they make up the majority of society.

In Cooke’s opinion, the second audience needed to be duped because they had a genuine Christian faith and they would not part with it. Hobbes was aware, writes Cooke, that this, his majority of readers, needed “a religious footing upon which to stand before their full commitment to any new understanding of justice and the moral order could be expected.”<sup>38</sup> Hobbes knew the power religion has over most men, and that its effects could never be eliminated, but they may be controlled. Religion, Hobbes maintained is “an opinion of a Deity, and Powers invisible, and supernaturall; that can

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 20.

never be abolished out of humane nature, but that new Religions may againe be made to spring out of them, by the culture of such men, as for such purpose are in reputation.”<sup>39</sup>

In order to realize his project, Hobbes had to take into account the influence religion has over man and then weave that influence into a veil to disguise his new theology.

Thus, concludes Cooke, “we may assume” that Hobbes

Wanted to communicate knowledge of the true foundations of civil life to those he believed able to receive his teaching, he desired most of all to establish those foundations as the basis for civil association. . . . For Hobbes, philosophy was not therefore about knowing chiefly, but about establishing political power on the surest foundation, the new foundation of political *science*, a science based on the discovery of that state of nature and the natural rights human beings possess there. To do this, the former foundation had to be altered.<sup>40</sup>

Society’s Christian foundation had to be altered if Hobbes’ project was to be achieved.

Cooke suggests that Hobbes’ “allies” saw and approved of his enterprise, and would understand the implications of his philosophy. The general public, however, would see Hobbes’ teachings as a synthesis of Christianity and science. Christianity, for this audience, is reinforced by the “surface” of Hobbes’ writings.

Hobbes’ third audience, his critics will be discussed in Chapter IV, because much of their criticism’s of Hobbes’ philosophy as a whole turns on the question on the importance of Christianity and/or religion in his doctrines. However, it should be noted here that Hobbes’ unorthodox doctrine was considered to be atheistic by most of his contemporaries. This alleged atheism has had an impact on discussion of Hobbes’

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<sup>39</sup> *L*, ch. 12 179.

<sup>40</sup> *Hobbes and Christianity*, 19.

philosophy over the years—so much so that it must be addressed here. If Hobbes himself believed in God, it is contended, then there is no contradiction between the author and his philosophy.

Much of current scholarship holds that Hobbes did believe in a deity; some scholars such as A.P. Martinich speculate that Hobbes was a believing, albeit an unorthodox Christian. Martinich attempts to answer the charges of atheism directed against Hobbes. Martinich points out that the fact that someone isn't a Christian does not reasonably mean that they are an atheist. Martinich has noted

the term 'atheist' was used indiscriminately in Hobbes's day as a term of abuse, as some observers of the contemporary scene recognized. In his essay "Of Atheism," Francis Bacon wrote, "[A]ll that impugn a received religion, or superstition, are, by the adverse part, branded with the name of atheists."<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, Martinich observes that "Protestants and Catholics called each other 'atheists'"<sup>42</sup> and some of Hobbes' critics, notably Ralph Cudworth and Robert Boyle, were accused of atheism. And Robert Boyle was trying to use science to strengthen his Christian faith! The word atheist in seventeenth-century England was primarily used as a disparaging epithet, not as a charge of unbelief. Indeed, Hobbes' attack on Catholicism in Part IV of *Leviathan* is an attack on the *doctrines* of Catholics *not* on their belief in God.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, contends Martinich, even when Hobbes' critics were trying to prove his supposed unbelief, they were trying to demonstrate that Hobbes' unbelief was a

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<sup>41</sup> A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> See specifically Chapters 44 and 45 entire.

logical consequence of his philosophy.<sup>44</sup> In other words, Hobbes' critics were drawing certain conclusions from his philosophy which would lead one to believe that Hobbes' theology was atheistic. Hobbes' detractors then drew the conclusion that Hobbes himself must therefore be an atheist. Bishop Bramhall, one of Hobbes' chief antagonists, "thought that atheism was a logical consequence of some of Hobbes' philosophical principles," and that "a man might be accused of atheism, not because he had ever professed such a view, but because he had espoused a view that led by logical consequence to atheism."<sup>45</sup>

Martinich reminds us that at one time, Lutheranism and Catholicism were considered to logically lead to atheism and unbelief by philosophers such as Montaigne and Lord Chillingworth; in other words, Anglicans tended to view other Christian denominations as being inherently atheistic.<sup>46</sup> Critics such as Bramhall took issue with Hobbes' theology because it did not buttress Anglican dogma and their understanding of Christianity, but then again neither did Catholicism or Lutheranism. The debate between Hobbes and his critics may have shown Hobbes' philosophy to be unorthodox Christianity or even non-Christian, but it did not expose it to be atheistic in the strict sense of the word. Martinich takes Hobbes on his word when considering what Hobbes has to say about religion and his new science of government. Martinich believes that Hobbes was a sincere, believing Christian who was trying to mesh Christianity with the new science. Some scholars, however, such as J.W.N. Watkins and S.A. State view Hobbes as being sincere in his belief that there is a deity, although not the God of the Trinity. These scholars in addition to Martinich, believe that Hobbes essentially meant

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<sup>44</sup> *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 22-30.



what he said. And it is to this trend in contemporary scholarship to which I will now turn.

It is the contention of State and others that in order to understand Hobbes' philosophy, one must understand the whole of his works. Though some, such as Cooke and Strauss, may say that Hobbes' writings on religion are a smoke-screen which hides a greater philosophical project, others say you cannot just simply dismiss his religious writings. As Eldon Eisenach writes, one cannot ignore what Hobbes has to say in the second half of *Leviathan* and still understand the whole of Hobbes' philosophy.<sup>47</sup> The leading defenders of this view are State and Martinich. These two scholars offer the most recent word on the subject, building on the scholarship of A.E. Taylor and Howard Warrender.

State argues that there are essentially two current views regarding Hobbes' theism, one being termed "esoteric" (i.e.: his writings "should not be taken at face value,") and the other view being termed "exoteric" (one should understand Hobbes writings by the meanings of the words.)<sup>48</sup> State claims that authors such as Strauss dismiss what Hobbes has to say on the subject of Christianity. He quotes Strauss as saying that "there are innumerable passages . . . which can be used by everyone else that Hobbes was a theist and even a good Anglican."<sup>49</sup> If Hobbes were not a theist (or even a good Anglican) why would he fill his writings with "innumerable passages" that support a monotheistic world view? State continues by saying that in order to understand Hobbes

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Eldon J. Eisenach, *Two Worlds of Liberalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 7.

<sup>48</sup> S.A. State, *Thomas Hobbes and the Debate Over natural Law and Religion*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1991) 5-9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6. See also Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 199n.

religious writings, it is “not a question of tallying up the passages in support of a particular interpretation, comparing them with the passages opposed and then achieving some kind of quantitative conclusion. Rather the procedure [for esotericists] seems to be to eliminate certain passages from the outset.”<sup>50</sup> The point is that when dealing with a complex philosophy such as Hobbes’, one cannot eliminate certain passages in Hobbes’ writings without changing the meaning of what he has to say. The practice of esotericism in writing was not commonly used in Hobbes’ day, argues State—Hobbes writings and the writings of his time were “forthright.” He points out that even if one takes an esoteric view of Hobbes’ works, Hobbes still retains many elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition of an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent deity who is inherently unknowable.”<sup>51</sup> If this is the case, an esotericist still has to deal with the facts that Hobbes’ “god of nature” still retains many of the features of the Judeo-Christian God.

Even if one takes an esotericist view of Hobbes’ efforts, there are two matters the esotericist must take into consideration. The first is Hobbes’ personality. Martinich cites J.G.A. Pocock’s observation that:

Although esoteric reasons have been suggested why Hobbes should have written what he did not believe, the difficulty remains of imagining why a notoriously arrogant thinker, vehement in his dislike for ‘insignificant speech’ should have written and defended sixteen chapters of what he held to be nonsense, and exposed them to the scrutiny of a public which did not consider this kind of thing nonsense at all.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, writes Martinich, why would “a person as proud and dogmatic as Hobbes . . . deliberately risk submitting himself to public ridicule for expressing contradictory

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 28.

opinions and trust that certain astute readers would see through the contradiction [in his philosophy] and attribute only the controversial and correct position to him.”<sup>53</sup> Hobbes claimed in “A Review and Conclusion” to *Leviathan* that he wanted to offer a doctrine whose “Principles of it are true and proper; and the Ratiocination solid,” and have his doctrine “profitably taught in the Universities,” it would be against his intentions then to write a doctrine rife with double meanings.<sup>54</sup>

If Hobbes wanted his world-view to gain popular, critical acceptance, it makes no sense that he would risk writing in such a way that only a small minority of his readership would understand his doctrines. For Hobbes to realize his project, he had to present it in such a way that the average reader would understand and possibly embrace it. Hobbes places himself among the ranks of the great “natural philosophers” known to his time. Natural science had been “extraordinarily advanced” by the likes of Nicholas Copernicus” and “Johannes Keplerus,” and Hobbes ranks his philosophy with those of the natural philosophers. After praising Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler in the Epistle Dedicatory to *Elements of Philosophy*, Hobbes writes that civil philosophy is “much younger, as being no older . . . than my own book *De Cive*.”<sup>55</sup> Hobbes had no small opinion of his philosophical thought.

Secondly, an esotericist must consider what Hobbes had to say about textual interpretation. If Hobbes’ temperament was “notoriously arrogant,” and if Hobbes truly detested “insignificant speech” then one must assume that Hobbes meant much of what he said—even if his views were considered extremely heterodox. Martinich directs his

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>54</sup> L, “A Review and Conclusion,” 725-729.

<sup>55</sup> EW 1, viii-ix.

readers to consider what Hobbes had to say about interpreting textual meaning in *Human Nature*. Hobbes' principle deserves to be quoted in full:

When it happeneth that a man signifieth two *contradictory* opinions, whereof the *one* is *clearly* and *directly* signified, and the *other* either drawn from that by *consequence*, or not known to be contradictory to it; then, when he is not present to explicate himself better, we are to take the *former* for his opinion; for that is clearly signified to be his, and directly; whereas the other might proceed from error in the deduction, or ignorance of the repugnancy. . . . Forasmuch as whosoever *speaketh* to another, intendeth thereby to *make* him *understand* what he saith, if he speak to him either in a language which he that heareth understandeth not, or use any word in other sense than he believeth is the sense of him that heareth, he *intendeth also not* to make him understand what he saith; which is a *contradiction* of himself. It is therefore always to be supposed, that he which intendeth not to deceivee, alloweth the private interpretation of his speech to whom it is addressed.<sup>56</sup>

Martinich points out that for Hobbes, “an author’s own explicit assertions should be favored over a proposition derived from the author’s principles by an interpreter.”<sup>57</sup> In order for Hobbes to give his philosophy to the public for consideration, he had to write in such a way that his readers would understand him. If his readership concluded that Hobbes intended to deceive them, why should they believe anything that he had to say, or even give credence to his doctrines? Writing in a way that requires an audience to interpret an author’s meaning, necessarily means that someone, somewhere (if not many, everywhere,) may draw the wrong conclusions or “proceed from error in the deduction, or ignorance of the repugnancy.”

Finally, an esotericist reading of Hobbes has to reconcile with the very boldness of Hobbes teaching. “It is hard to credit” the esotericist reading of Hobbes, as Saumual Mintz writes

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<sup>56</sup> EW 4, 75-76.

When we remember that Hobbes's openly-avowed opinions on the nature of God were profoundly unorthodox and aroused the most intense opposition. . . . If safety and a peaceful life were his object he would have had to express his opinions far more circumspectly.<sup>58</sup>

As Mintz intimates, if Hobbes wanted to offer an atheistic philosophy to be studied in the universities, why not do so in such a way that would not question established Anglican doctrine? Hobbes was forced into exile for his beliefs, "the first of all that fled," and by all accounts, Hobbes considered himself timid by nature.<sup>59</sup> Hobbes knew the dangers of publishing unpopular or controversial works. Concerning the situation of his exile, Hobbes writes in his verse autobiography:

And they accus'd me to the King, that I  
Seem'd to approve *Cromwel's* Impiety,  
And Countenance the worst of Wickedness:  
This was believ'd, and I appear'd no less  
Than a Grand Enemy, so that I was for't  
Banish'd both the King's Presence and his Court.  
Then I began to Ruminare  
On *Dorislau*s and on *Ascham's* Fate,  
And stood amazed, like a poor Exile,  
Encompassed with Terroure all the while.<sup>60</sup>

Yet Hobbes for the rest of his life continued to defend his doctrine. Hobbes himself, to my knowledge, never claims that he, or his doctrines, are atheistic in the strictest sense. Hobbes' concern was to create a new science of government grounded in natural law given to man by God. The question that vexed his critics was "what God?" Furthermore,

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<sup>57</sup> *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 25.

<sup>58</sup> *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 44.

<sup>59</sup> *L*, 13-14. See Also John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*.

<sup>60</sup> "The Verse Life" in Gaskin ed. *Elements*, 260. Dorislau and Ascham were assassinated by Royalists.

Mintz claims that there are “no grounds for doubting Hobbes’s theism. It is no doubt unorthodox theism, but not atheism in the strictest sense,” and that “there is no evidence in our present knowledge of Hobbes’s life and thought which can lead us to any certain conclusions about the depth and sincerity of Hobbes’s theism.”<sup>61</sup>

The debate concerning Hobbes’ theology is essentially a debate over how to interpret Hobbes’ works. To truly understand what Hobbes’ wanted to teach his countrymen and posterity, one must understand Hobbes’ writings as he wanted them understood. Scholars such as Strauss, Cooke, and Mansfield are not quite convincing in their argument that Hobbes’ proffered hidden meanings in his writings. His religious unorthodoxy does not lead one to the conclusion that he or his philosophy is atheistic by strict definition, however, one may argue that his theology is not Christian. Hobbes himself supplies evidence concerning how one interprets written works; and I believe one must bear this in mind when reading *his* particular works. I believe that Hobbes was sincere in his belief that his new science of man and government needed to be grounded in a God-based morality. In the next chapter I will discuss Hobbes’ understanding of natural law and reason to demonstrate why his theology needs a lawgiving God.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

### HOBBIAN NATURAL LAW

Hobbes wrote that until his time the laws of nature had not been sufficiently defined. He writes:

Such writers as have occasion to affirm, that anything is against the law of nature, do allege no more than this, that it is the consent of all nations, or the wisest and most civil nations. But it is not agreed upon, who shall judge which nations are wisest. Others make that against the law of nature, which is contrary to the consent of mankind; which definition cannot be allowed, because then no man could offend against the law of nature; for the nature of every man is contained under the nature of mankind. But forasmuch as all men, carried away by the violence of their passion, and by evil customs, do those things which are commonly said to be against the law of nature; it is not the consent of passion, or consent in some error gotten by custom, that makes the law of nature. Reason is no less of the nature of man than passion, and is the same in all men, because all men agree in the will to be directed and governed in the way to which they desire to attain, namely their own good, which is the work of reason. There can therefore be no other law of nature than reason. . . .<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Elements*, ch. 15, art. 1, 81.

Hobbes asserts that there is a certain constancy in man's nature, and this constancy can be seen in the fact that all men have essentially the same passions and men have the use of reason. It is man's use of reason that is going to play a key role in the development of Hobbes' political philosophy. Hobbes defines reason as "*Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agrees upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts; I say marking them, when we reckon by our selves; and *signifying*, when we demonstrate, or approve our reckonings to other men."<sup>63</sup>

"Most human beings desire that which is good for themselves;" and they seek to obtain that good by entering into the social compact. The use of reason facilitates man's movement into civil society, so also through the use of reason, man discovers the natural law. To reiterate, Hobbes maintains that "There can be no other law of nature than reason, nor no other precepts of NATURAL LAW, than those which declare unto us the ways of peace."<sup>64</sup> In *De Cive*, Hobbes expands on his definition of natural law. He writes "*true reason* is a certain law; which since it is no less a part of human nature than any other faculty or affection of the mind, is also termed natural. Therefore the *law of nature*, that I may define it, is the *dictate of right reason*."<sup>65</sup>

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes expands on his definition of natural law by asserting that "A LAW OF NATURE, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may best be preserved. For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound . . . *Right* and *Law*;

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<sup>63</sup> *L*, ch.5, 111.

<sup>64</sup> *Elements*, 82.



yet they ought to be distinguished; because RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; Whereas LAW, determineth and bindeth to one of them . . .”<sup>66</sup> This passage says that, for Hobbes, law is a binding force. All other laws of nature are derived from this one basic precept; including the laws that hold some natural right should be transferred or divested, so that contracts can be honored, and so on. Nature’s laws, for Hobbes, are easily discernable through the use of reason. All one has to do is follow Hobbes’ “golden rule” which states “*Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have doen to thyself.*” A reasonable man will weigh “the actions of other men with his own [and if] they seem too heavy, [he puts] them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place, that his own passions and selfe-love, may add nothing to the weight; and then there is none of these Lawes of Nature that will not appear unto him very resasonable.”<sup>67</sup> By using this simple method, claims Hobbes, “the Lawes of Nature may be easily examined.”<sup>68</sup>

In order to secure peace, human beings are to follow the precepts of natural law. In *De Cive*, Hobbes claims “*that peace is to be sought after, where it may be found; and where not, there to provide ourselves for helps of war.* . . .this precept is a dictate of right reason; [and] . . . the dictates of right reason are natural laws . . .”<sup>69</sup> In addition, the sovereign is also bound to the standards of the laws of nature. According to A.E. Taylor’s reading of Hobbes, “The moral obligation to obey the natural law is antecedent

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, ed. Bernard Gert (New York: Anchor Books, 1972 repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993) ch. 2 art. 1, 123. Italics in the original; italics for “the dictate of right reason” are mine. Hereafter the work will be noted as *DC*.

<sup>66</sup> *L*, ch. 14, 189.

<sup>67</sup> *L*, ch. 15, 214.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> *DC*, ch. 2, art. 2, 123.

to the existence of the legislator and the civil society; even in the state of nature . . .”<sup>70</sup>

Taylor points out that for Hobbes, the law of nature is always binding in *foro interno* (that is, binding in one’s conscience) and that “moral law is violated by an improper thought or purpose, notwithstanding the civil law.”<sup>71</sup> Taylor writes:

Hobbes is thus quite consistent with himself in maintaining that the natural law—unlike civil law—is “immutable and eternal; what they [the ‘laws of nature’] forbid, can never be lawful. For pride, ingratitude, breach of contracts (or injury), inhumanity, contumely will never be lawful, nor the contrary virtues to these ever unlawful, as we take them for dispositions of the mind, that is, as they are considered in the court of conscience, where only they oblige and are laws.”<sup>72</sup>

This means that the natural law transcends even the civil law. Since the natural law is “immutable and eternal” it stands to reason that natural law always is there for human reason to access. It is human society and human governments that change over time, and it is up to man to structure his institutions in accordance to nature’s law. Taylor demonstrates this by showing that with Hobbes, it is up to the sovereign to decide what is to be considered just and unjust; but the sovereign is still constrained by the natural law. For example, Hobbes claims that the law of nature forbids adultery, but it is up to the sovereign to decide “what copulations” are to be regarded as adulterous.<sup>73</sup>

It is now necessary to discuss the role of natural law in Hobbes’ political philosophy. This discussion is important because it will show that natural law is the means by which man is to order his society, once he removes himself from the state of

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<sup>70</sup> A.E. Taylor, “the Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes,” *Philosophy*, vol. xiii (1938): 411.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Taylor is quoting *DC*, ch. 3, arts. 28-29.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

nature. Hobbes' doctrines are built on the foundation of natural law discovered by reason.

Hobbes' first postulate concerning man's natural condition is that all men are by nature equal.<sup>74</sup> What one man has in extraordinary strength, another may have in superior intellect—man has equal “killing” power. Hobbes writes that “when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, . . . For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger as himself.”<sup>75</sup> *Leviathan* is demonstrating that no man is naturally superior to his fellows, so it follows that no man is destined by nature to rule, since nature does not set one man above the others. This is important because it shows that in the state of nature, *everyone* is capable of killing anyone, and this is an insecure and dangerous situation in which to live. The state of nature is a state of war. In man's natural condition there is no government, therefore there is no authority to enforce law (natural or otherwise,) subsequently, “during the time men live without a common Power to keep them in awe, they that are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man against every man.”<sup>76</sup> From this state of war, Hobbes arrives at his second doctrine—that of natural right.

Hobbes derives natural right from man's fear of death. He writes that “every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death; and this he doeth by a certain impulsion of nature, no less

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<sup>74</sup> *L*, ch.13, 183; *DC*, ch. 1, art. 3.

<sup>75</sup> *L*, ch. 13, 183.

<sup>76</sup> *L*, ch. 13, 185.

than that whereby a stone moves downward.”<sup>77</sup> For Hobbes, man is allowed to use whatever means available to avoid this natural evil, in other words, man has the *right* to preserve his condition. A passage from *De Cive* clearly states this doctrine. Concerning the right to self-preservation, Hobbes continues:

But because it is in vain for a man to have a right to the end, if the right necessary means be denied him, it follows, that since every man hath a right to preserve himself, he must be allowed a right *to use all the means, and do all the actions, without which he cannot preserve himself*. . . Nature hath given to *every one a right to all*; that is, it was lawful for every man, in the bare state of nature, or before such time as men had engaged themselves by any covenants or bonds, to do what he would, and against whom he thought fit, and to possess, use, and enjoy all what he would, or could get.<sup>78</sup>

The combination of the state of war with natural right makes the state of nature a very hazardous place indeed. It is not so much natural right that makes the state of nature such a dangerous place, but man’s nature *combined* with natural right that causes men to war with each other. In the state of nature, Hobbes maintains that there are “three principall causes of quarrell. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory. The first make men invade for Gain; the second for Safety; and the third, for Reputation.”<sup>79</sup>

It is at this point that natural law first enters into Hobbes’ philosophy. In Chapter 14 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes the distinction between right and law. “Right,” for Hobbes, consists in the exercise of “liberty.” Liberty is the “absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according to his

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<sup>77</sup> DC, ch. 1, art. 7, 115.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., art. 8, 116-117.

<sup>79</sup> L, ch. 13, 185.

judgement, and reason shall dictate to him.”<sup>80</sup> Law, on the other hand, binds man to the authority of the lawgiver. Hobbes writes that law is “not Counsell, but Command; nor a Command of any man to any man; but only of him, whose Command is adressed to one formerly obliged to obey him.”<sup>81</sup> And in *De Cive*, he writes that “*law is the command of that person, whether man or court, whose precept contains in it the reason of obedience:* as the precepts of God in regard of men, of magistrates in respect of their subjects, and universally of all the powerful in respect of them who cannot resist . . . *Law belongs to him who hath power over them whom he adviseth.*”<sup>82</sup>

Natural right allows one to do whatever is necessary to preserve one’s self; natural law *commands* self-preservation. Hobbes writes in Chapter 14 of *Leviathan* that the law of nature is a “Precept or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.”<sup>83</sup> Hobbes claims that natural law is discovered through man’s use of reason, and reason gives man the content of nature’s law. Since the state of nature is not conducive to self-preservation, natural law commands man to create a situation that is conducive to his preservation. The first law of nature for Hobbes then, is that “*every man ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it . . . [and man] is to seek Peace, and follow it.*”<sup>84</sup> But how does man in the state of nature create a state of peace? The answer lies in Hobbes’ second law of nature, which holds “*That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himselfe he shall think*

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., ch. 14, 189.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., ch. 26, 312.

<sup>82</sup> *DC*, ch. 14, art. 1, 272.

<sup>83</sup> *L*, ch. 14, 189.

*necessary, to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow against himself.*"<sup>85</sup> The second law of nature commands all men to renounce their right to certain things, so as to create a situation that is considerable more stable than in the state of nature. For example, if the right to "all" is renounced and men are allowed to keep certain types of property, say their dwellings, one then becomes somewhat secure that he will ostensibly always have shelter.

However, these two laws of nature taken together, do not ensure the domestic tranquillity. How is one to know that all other men in the state of nature will adhere to the mutual laying down of right? Hobbes partial answer to this question is found in the third law of nature, which essentially states that all men are to abide by contracts or covenants made, and the mutual laying down of certain right is a covenant.

Covenants are the next important element in Hobbes' political philosophy. When men lay down certain of their natural right, there needs to be a power that has the authority to enforce compacts. Some men cannot be trusted to keep their end of a contract, so whatever power that is to be created must have the authority to compel men to keep their end of a bargain. "Justice," for Hobbes, is the "Keeping of Covenant, [which] is a Rule of Reason, by which we are forbidden to do anything destructive to our life; and consequently [the keeping of covenants is] a Law of Nature."<sup>86</sup> Nature commands men to seek peace, lay down the right of nature, and keep covenants, but, "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words."<sup>87</sup> So man in the state of nature must

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., ch. 15, 205.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., ch. 17, 223.

create the “sword” to ensure that men abide by the first three primary laws of nature and all the other laws that subsequently conduce to the end of peace.

The next stage in the evolution of Hobbes’ political doctrine happens when man emancipates himself from the state of nature by creating the sovereign. Hobbes claims that the “Lawes of Nature . . . [in] and . . . of themselves, without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our naturall Passions . . . if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art for caution against other men.”<sup>88</sup> Men, following their reason, then transfer certain of their natural right to a sovereign entity, charged with ensuring that the natural law is enforced. In order to ensure domestic peace, and protection from outside invasion, “*every man should say to every man, I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in the like manner.*”<sup>89</sup> This done, the Multitude so united in one Person is called a COMMON-WEALTH.<sup>89</sup> With the establishment of the sovereign, man has created an institution that has the power to enforce the natural law. The end of the sovereign’s power is to secure peace for its citizens, as required by the fundamental law of nature. Since men cannot establish peace on their own, the sovereign, by accepting the transferring of right from all, takes on that end. The sovereign promulgates the natural law through the civil law.

*Leviathan* states:

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 227.

... every subject in a Common-wealth hath covenanted to obey the Civill Law . . . And therefore Obedience to the Civill Law is part also of the Law of Nature. Civill, and Naturall Law are not different kinds, but different parts of Law; whereof one part being written, is called Civill, the other unwritten, Naturall. But the Right of Nature, that is the naturall Liberty of Man, may by the Civill Law be abridged, and restrained . . . Law was brought into the world for nothing else, but to limit the natural liberty of particular men, in such manner, as they might not hurt, but assist one another . . .<sup>90</sup>

Human beings come out of the state of war and create civil society in which they can attempt to peaceably follow the commands of reason. The sovereign, a creation of reason, is to pursue the end of reason, which is peace, so that those who institute civil society may enjoy their lives in relative safety. The sovereign's duty is to enforce the first of the natural laws "to seek Peace, and to follow it." If this is indeed the case, the sovereign is beholden to the natural law as well, because to seek war for war's sake would be in violation of the fundamental law of nature, thereby giving man no reason to leave his natural condition.

The question must then be asked, *who* commands the sovereign and his citizens to obey the natural law? The multitude of which Hobbes so often speaks comes together in order to ensure their own safety and to "institute a government, that they might, as much as their human condition would afford, live delightfully" and a sovereign that does not provide for the wants and safety of his subjects "would sin against the law of nature."<sup>91</sup>

The binding force of the law of nature does not lie *in foro externo*, but rather, it lies "always *in foro interno*."<sup>92</sup> In other words, man knows the law of nature not only through the use of reason, but through his conscience as well. The natural law binds in the court of conscience. "The law of nature," writes Hobbes, "doth always and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., ch. 26, 314.

<sup>91</sup> DC, 259.



everywhere oblige in the internal court, or that of conscience; but not always in the external court, but then when it may be done with safety.”<sup>93</sup> For Hobbes, there are “two classes of actions,” as pertains to the performance of natural law. Those actions that are performed *in foro interno* (where *intent* has meaning,) and those actions performed *in foro externo*.<sup>94</sup> Actions performed *in foro externo* are those actions commanded by the natural law that are performed when there is sufficient safety to do so. Warrender writes that

An example of the different implication of these two classes of obligations to act, may be taken from the operation of the third law of nature. The law requires that men keep their covenants. An obligation *in foro externo*, under this law, would be satisfied only by a specific fulfillment of the agreements which have been made. In a dangerous situation, however, the corresponding obligation *in foro interno* may be satisfied by not performing the pledge or performing only the safe parts of it . . . these *may* be consistent with endeavouring peace in some circumstances.<sup>95</sup>

Man thereby should follow the dictates of conscience always, but he is permitted not to satisfy the laws of nature if to do so does not tend to peace.

Since the first law of nature according to Hobbes is to “seek peace” man knows in his heart, through the use of reason, what it takes to attain that peace. The reason man seeks peace, however, is to ensure his self-preservation. Sometimes, though, men find themselves in situations where they must act in contravention of the natural law in order to ensure that end. Men, therefore, may seem to act in violation of the natural law in the

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<sup>92</sup> *Elements*, ch. 17, art 10, 97; *L*, ch. 15, 215; ch. 26, 318. Emphasis on the word ‘always,’ in *Elements*, is mine.

<sup>93</sup> *DC*, ch. 3, art. 27, 149.

<sup>94</sup> *W-The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

external court (*in foro externo*,) but only if their actions tend to self- preservation. Thus, one is still obeying the fundamental law by seeking peace wherever it may be found.

The natural law, insists Hobbes, is also binding in one's thoughts and motives, making natural law truly bind *in foro interno*. Taylor points out that Hobbes is consistent in maintaining that the laws of nature may be broken not only by actions, but by thoughts and opinions that go against them.<sup>96</sup> In *De Cive*, Hobbes maintains that

the laws which oblige conscience may be broken by an act not only contrary to them, but also agreeable with them; if so be that he who does it, be of another opinion. For though the act itself be answerable to the laws, yet his conscience is against them.<sup>97</sup>

And in *Leviathan*

And whosoever Lawes bind *in foro interno*, may be broken, not onely by a fact contrary to the Law but also by a fact according to it, in case a man think it contrary. For though his Action in this case, be according to the Law; yet his Purpose was against the Law; which is where the Obligation is *in foro interno*, is a breach.<sup>98</sup>

That the laws of nature exist independently of a sovereign's command is essential to Hobbes' theories because there are some laws the sovereign (claims Hobbes) can never make legal, and these certain natural laws always bind *in foro interno*. Remember, the sovereign is to promulgate the laws of nature in the civil law; it is not the sovereign's duty to create arbitrary positive law. The laws of nature, for Hobbes, are "Immutable and Eternal; For Injustice, Ingratitude, Arrogance, Pride, Iniquity, Acception of persons, and the rest can never be made lawfull. For it can never be that Warre shall Preserve life, and

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<sup>96</sup> *Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes*, 412.

<sup>97</sup> *DC*, ch. 3, art. 28, 149.

<sup>98</sup> *L*, ch. 15, 215.

Peace destroy it.” Since “nothing can be immortal which mortals make,” it follows that the creator of nature, who writes the dictates of reason and immortalizes them, is not a man.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the sovereign is subordinate to the law of nature, since he may not circumvent that particular law. In *De Cive*, Hobbes posited that :

*The laws of nature are immutable and eternal: what they forbid can never be made lawful; what they command can never be unlawful. For pride, ingratitude, breach of contracts (or injury), inhumanity, contumely, will never be lawful, nor the contrary virtues to these unlawful, . . . those virtues of the mind which have declared above, and which cannot be abrogated by any custom or law whatsoever.*<sup>100</sup>

The law of nature binds in foro interno, until the sovereign makes them outwardly binding in the civil law. If one’s actions contravene the way to peace, it may be said that one has transgressed against the natural law.<sup>101</sup> The law of nature is at least binding in the sense that it commands the way to peace, and therefore to self-preservation.

Man in the state of nature is obliged to obey the laws of nature “whensoever their observation shall seem to conduce to the end for which they were ordained,” that is, man is to pursue peace.<sup>102</sup> And it does not matter whether or not the natural law has been circumscribed in the civil law. The laws of nature are binding in one’s conscience, and it is the sovereign who gives the natural law its efficacy in the civil law. The end of all law however, positive or natural, is to ensure peace; if civil law does not conduce toward that end, it is no longer binding. Hobbes allows that most men do not follow their conscience

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., ch. 15, 215-217, ch. 29, 363.

<sup>100</sup> *DC*, 149-150. My bold-face.

<sup>101</sup> *EW* 4, 108.

<sup>102</sup> *DC*., 149

while pursuing their comfortable self-preservation, but when they knowingly violate the dictates of right reason, they commit “injury against God.”<sup>103</sup>

Knowledge of the law of nature is attainable by every man, discernable through the use of reason, with one’s conscience as a guide.<sup>104</sup> Though the sovereign interprets and enforces the natural law through the positive commands of civil law, he cannot change nature’s laws. Hobbes viewed law as command, and the natural and civil law are to be obeyed as such, with the sovereign acting as the intermediary between natural law and man.<sup>105</sup> As I discussed earlier in this chapter, law, for Hobbes, “belongs to him who hath power over them who he adviseth,” and “law which is *natural* and *moral*, is also wont to be called *divine*, nor underservedly; as well because reason, which is the law of nature, is given by God to every man for the rule of his actions.”<sup>106</sup> It follows that God commands the natural law.

In Chapter 26 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes informs us that every man has a different idea concerning what is just and equitable, and it is up to the sovereign to set standards of law (based on natural law) and make them binding with “ordinances of Sovereign Power.” For example, by defining what is to be considered “equitable,” the sovereign is enforcing Hobbes’ eleventh law of nature, which concerns equity. Hobbes writes: “And forasmuch as law (to speak properly) is a command, and these dictates, as they proceed from nature, are not commands; they are not therefore called laws in respect of nature, but in respect of the author of nature, God Almighty.”<sup>107</sup> He continues Chapter 26 by saying the cause and reason for law are dependent on the will of the legislator, and that the authentic

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> *DC*, ch. 2, art.1, 122-123; ch. 4, art. 21, 161.

<sup>105</sup> *L*, ch.26, 314.

<sup>106</sup> *DC*, ch.4, art. 1, 153; ch. 14, art. 1, 272.

interpretation of the law of nature comes from the sovereign, not from moral philosophers. He states that the civil law contains the natural law and “it is by the Sovereign Power that it is Law.”<sup>108</sup>

In *Elements of Law*, Hobbes defines law as:

the command of him, whose command is a law in one thing, is a law in everything. For seeing a man is obliged to obedience before what he is to do be known, he is obliged to obey in general, that is to say in everything.<sup>109</sup>

Hobbes continues in *De Cive* by saying about law “That which is prohibited by the *divine law*, cannot be permitted by the *civil*; neither can that which is commanded by the *divine law*, be prohibited by the *civil*.”<sup>110</sup> The divine law in this particular case is the same as the moral law. The ultimate author of all law then is God.

In *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Howard Warrender notes that

Hobbes puts this supremacy of natural law over the civil law, on some occasions, in uncompromising terms. In his works are to be found a number of passages of which the following may be taken as an example: “But because the law of nature is eternal, violation of covenants, ingratitude, arrogance, and all facts contrary to any moral virtue can never cease to be sin.” . . .

. . . As far as the sovereign is concerned, natural law is the only law by which he is obliged, and such obligation presumably includes an obligation to see that his civil law is not repugnant to natural law as he interprets it.<sup>111</sup>

Again, laws that tend to violence and whose ends are not directed to peace, cannot be promulgated according to Hobbes’ interpretation of natural law.

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<sup>107</sup> *Elements*, ch. 17, art. 12, 97.

<sup>108</sup> *L*, ch. 25, 322-323.

<sup>109</sup> *Elements*, ch. 29, art. 3, 178.

<sup>110</sup> *DC*, ch. 14, art. 3, 274.

<sup>111</sup> *W-The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 169-170.

Hobbes is quite emphatic over and over again in his major works that law is command of both God and the sovereign. It is the sovereign's responsibility to implement the commands of the law of nature. In *De Cive*, Hobbes defines law as "the command of that person, whether man or court, whose precept contains in it the reason of obedience: as the precepts of God in regard of men, of magistrates in respect of their subjects, and universally of all the powerful in respect of them who cannot resist, may be termed laws."<sup>112</sup> Again, in *Leviathan*, "whereas Law, properly is the word of him that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; they are properly called Lawes." Likewise, he insists that "it is manifest, that Law in generall, is not Counsell, but Command; nor a Command of any man to any man; but only of him, whose command is addressed to one formerly obliged to obey him. And as for Civill Law, it addeth only the name of the person Commanding, which is *Persona Civitatis*, the Person of the Commonwealth."<sup>113</sup> The Person of the Commonwealth is the intermediary between God and man, enforcing the laws of nature as he sees fit; but he cannot change the dictates of reason. Over the period of years that Hobbes' philosophy matured, he consistently maintained his command theory of law; if law is not a command, there is no reason to obey the law.

Without God, Hobbes' system dissolves. Natural law is the linchpin that holds his philosophy together; man discovers God's will through the use of reason. It follows that in Hobbes' system, natural law is not then a human convention, it must exist *a priori* any law men make. It is the social contract and the subsequent establishment of

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<sup>112</sup> *DC*, ch. 14, art. 1, 272.

government that create civil law, but civil law is only instituted to give natural law its efficacy. The earthly sovereign is instituted to pursue the ends of peace, any law contrary to the dictates of reason is considered bad or unjust law. Hobbes writes in *De Cive*:

Now all the duties of rulers are contained in this one sentence, the safety of the people is the supreme law. . . . yet it is their duty in all things, as much as they possibly can, to yield obedience unto right reason, which is the natural, moral, and divine law. But because dominions were constituted for peace's sake, and peace was sought after for safety's sake; he, who being placed in authority, shall use his power otherwise than to the safety of the people, will act against the reasons of peace, that is to say, against the laws of nature.<sup>114</sup>

The sovereign is capable of promulgating unjust laws, if those laws do in fact violate the commands of reason. Human beings, though, through the use of reason, know what is just and unjust; and the laws of nature are always just. The next chapter will explore the nature of Hobbes' God and the natural lawgiver.

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<sup>113</sup> *L*, ch. 15, 216; ch. 26, 312.

<sup>114</sup> *DC*, ch. 13, art. 2, 258.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOBBES AND NATURAL RELIGION

Hobbsian natural law, as it was discussed in the last chapter, shows that there must be some sort of transcendent lawgiver in order for the law of nature to have efficacy. This God need not be the Christian God, however, but it must be a monotheistic deity. Hobbes writes that there can only be one omnipotent God, because if there were two, who is to say which omnipotent is to be obeyed? <sup>115</sup> With one God, there can only be *one* voice of reason--so there can be no doubt as to the commands of natural law in Hobbes' system. It follows then, that there can be no two conflicting moral codes.

Hobbes writes

I desire him with a silent thought to consider, if there be two Omnipotents, whether [he] were bound to obey. I believe he will confess that neither is bound. If this be true, then it is true what I have set down . . . <sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *DC*, ch. 15, art. 7, 294. See footnote.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*



For Hobbes moral philosophy to work, the creator of nature must be the sole author of the laws of nature; these are the laws by which human beings order their lives and societies. It is impossible however, to truly know God. Reason in Hobbesian doctrine tells us that there is only one God, and since there is only one God, there can be no conflicting natural laws, if there are no conflicting natural laws, then Hobbes can lay the foundation for his philosophical edifice.

According to Hobbes, there are two ways man can know God—man can know God only through revelation or reason. However, although one may know of God through these two ways, Hobbes asserts the revelation is problematic because of God's incomprehensible nature. Though reason can shed light on the divine law, it cannot determine God's nature. It is God's incomprehensible nature and man's own nature that is the cause of religion; "Beyond that," writes Hobbes, "reason suggesteth nothing."<sup>117</sup> Much of humankind's problems (exacerbated by man's basic nature,) writes Hobbes, begins with man's concerns over various religions and religious doctrine.<sup>118</sup> If man can come to an understanding that God's nature is incomprehensible, man can then start to concern himself with other things. This is not to say that God does not exist in Hobbes' doctrines, but, rather, that man cannot know the true nature of God; and it is this fundamental misunderstanding of the divine nature that has caused man to stray from the path illuminated by reason. In order for Hobbes' philosophy to be implemented, he first had to show how religion has misguided man and how it has caused civil strife. Once Hobbes has done this, he can then substitute his understanding of the God of reason in the place of "false" religion.

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<sup>117</sup> *L*, ch.12, 168-172.

Hobbes begins by attacking the imagination and fears of mankind. Man is superstitious and it is man's superstitions that create religion. *Leviathan* succinctly states:

And they that make little, or no enquiry into the naturall causes of things, yet from the feare that proceeds from the ignorance it selfe, of what it is that hath the power to do them much good or harm, are enclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves, severall kinds of Powers Invisible; and to stand in awe of their own imaginations; and in time of distresse to invoke them; as also in the time of an expected good successe, to give them thanks; making the creatures of their own fancy, their Gods. By which means it hath come to passe, that from the innumerable variety of fancey, men have created in the world innumerable sorts of Gods. And this Feare of things invisible, is the naturall Seed of that, which every one in himself calleth Religion; and in them that worship, or feare that power otherwise than they do, Superstition.

And this seed of Religion, having been observed by many; some of those that have observed it, have been enclined thereby to nourish, dresse, and forme it into Lawes; and to adde to it their own invention, any opinion of the causes of future events, by which they thought they should be able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their powers.<sup>119</sup>

Religion comes out of the "idols of the brain." Although Hobbes maintains that religion is a convention of man, it does not follow however, that there is no God. For Hobbes the seeds of religion begin in the imaginations of men, and because of this, revealed religion becomes problematic. Unless one has direct revelation from God, one must then necessarily rely on the information of others. Hobbes writes that revealed religion allows for two ways that man may know the will of God. First, one may know God through direct communication, and second, one may get God's laws through his chosen prophets. Hobbes had serious objections to these modes of divine knowledge.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., ch. 11, 167-168.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Considering the question of direct communication with God, Hobbes asks whether divine revelation is in reality a dream, or is it the beginnings of madness? Of divine revelation Hobbes writes, “To say he hath spoken to him in a Dream, is no more to say he dreamed God spake to him; which is not of force to win beleef from any man.”<sup>120</sup> One can never know then, whether he has had direct communication with God. And if a person *is* sure that he has been in direct contact with God, there is no way to convince others of that “fact.” If one hears divine revelation from a prophet, who’s to say the prophet is not either lying or evil? Hobbes uses Biblical accounts of deceptive and evil prophets to buttress his argument; for example, he uses the story of the prophet deceiving the “man of God” in I Kings 13 to prove his point.<sup>121</sup> Hobbes writes of this deception “If one Prophet deceive another, what certainty is there of knowing the will of God, by other way than that of reason?”<sup>122</sup> The words of prophets then, are also open to interpretation. Essentially, then, for Hobbes, religion is created in the dreams and minds of men, therefore there is no true way to know God through divine revelation.

All man can really know about God is that He exists and that reason is incapable of understanding the divine nature. First, Hobbes attempts to demonstrate that through the use of reason that God exists; second, God’s nature is mysterious, therefore it is useless to try to create a society based on something one cannot know (or demonstrate) to be scientifically true. I will discuss each in turn. If God exists, then Hobbes’ can place his moral philosophy on a standard that is not created by men. Men, for Hobbes, are vain, competitive, and pursue power; and a moral philosophy based on human nature is

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., ch. 32, 411.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 412.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

doomed to fail--due to man's flawed nature.<sup>123</sup> By demonstrating that there is a God, Hobbes could then build his doctrines on a base that transcends anything humans could create.

Hobbes used what he called the resolute-compositive method to show how one could deductively come to the conclusion that God exists. In the Author's Preface to The Reader to De Cive, Hobbes explains that "everything is best understood by its constitutive causes . . ." and that one can take human society apart to understand how it works.<sup>124</sup> Hobbes' writes that

For the effects we acknowledge naturally, do necessarily include a power of their producing, before they were produced; and that power presupposeth something existent that hath such power; and the thing so existing with power to produce, if it were not eternal, must needs have been produced somewhat before it; and again by something else before that: till we come to an eternal, that is to say, the first power of all powers, and that first cause of all causes.<sup>125</sup>

And in *Leviathan*,

Curiosity, or the love of knowledge of causes, draws a man from consideration of the effect, to seek the cause; and again, the cause of that cause; till of necessity he must come to this thought but is eternall; which is men call God. So that it is impossible to make any profound inquiry into naturall cases, without being enclined thereby to believe there is one God Eternall; though they cannot have any idea of him in their mind, answerable to his nature. For as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to warm himselfe by the same, may easily conceive, and assure himselfe, there is somewhat there, which men call *Fire*, and is the cause of the heat that he feeles; but cannot imagine what it is like; nor have an Idea of it in his mind, such as they have 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.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., ch. 11, entire.

<sup>124</sup> *DC*, 98, 92.

<sup>125</sup> *Elements*, 64.

<sup>126</sup> *L*, ch. 11, 167.

Reason tells man that there is a point at which everything was created, but reason is silent when it comes to who was the creator of everything. Because curiosity is an innate part of man's nature, man will naturally seek the causes of effects and take the causal chain, as it were, back to the point where reason is silenced.<sup>127</sup> This point may be termed "God." Although this method leads man to God, man can have no idea of his nature. Man can only know that God, and therefore, the natural law, exist.

I believe that it is the incomprehensible nature of God that plays a key role in Hobbes' system; Hobbes wanted peace and thought he could provide an answer. Hobbes knew what he was offering was different and novel and that in addition to providing a doctrine that could answer England's political problems, he thought he could shed some light on "truth." Hobbes asserts that

there are some new Doctrines, which, it may be, in a State where the contrary were already fully determined, were a fault for a Subject without leave to divulge, as being an usurpation of the place of a Teacher. But in this time, that men call not onely for Peace, but also for Truth, to offer such Doctrines as I think True, and that manifestly tend to Peace and Loyalty, to the consideration of those that are yet in deliberation, is no more, but to offer New Wine, to bee put into a New Cask, that both may be preserved together. And I suppose, that then, when Novelty can breed no trouble, nor disorder in a State, men are not generally so much inclined to the reverence of Antiquity, as to preferre Ancient Errors, before New and Well proved Truth.<sup>128</sup>

By shedding some light on the religious problems that were affecting the civil disorder of his day, perhaps Hobbes thought he could convert his countrymen to worship his God of nature. To do this, he had to show his fellows not only the error of their ways (as far as

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., "A Review and Conclusion," 726.

religious discord is concerned,) but he also had to show how his God was not very different from theirs. I believe the answer lies in the incomprehensible nature of God.

In *Elements of Law*, Hobbes elaborates on God's divine nature

Forasmuch as God Almighty is incomprehensible, it followeth that we can have no conception or image of the Deity; and consequently all his attributes signify our inability and defect of power to conceive any thing concerning his nature, and not any conception of the same, excepting this: that *there is a God*. For the effects that we acknowledge naturally, do necessarily include a power of their producing, before they were produced; and that power presupposeth something existant that hath such power; and the thing so existing the power to produce, if it were not eternal, must needs have been produced by somewhat before it; and that again by something before that: till we come to an eternal, that is to say, to the first power of all powers, and thje first causes of all causes. And this is it which all men call by the name of God; implying eternity, incomprehensibility, and omnipotency. And thus all men that will consider, may naturally know that God is, though not what he is . . .<sup>129</sup>

Two years later an exiled Hobbes writes in *De Cive*

. . . let us begin from his *attributes*. Where first, it is manifest that *existence* is to be allowed him; for there can be no will to honour him, who, we think, hath no being. Next, those philosophers who said, that God was the world or the world's soul, that is to say, a part of it, spake unworthily of God; for they attribute nothing to him, but wholly deny his being. For by the word *God* we understand the *world's cause*. But in saying the *world is God*, they say *that it hath no cause*, that is as much as *there is no God*. In like manner, they who maintain the world not to be created, but eternal; because there can be no cause of an eternal thing, in denying the *world to have a cause*, they deny also that *there is a God*. . . . No *shape* must be therefore assigned to God, for all *shape* is *finite*; nor must he be said to be conceived or comprehended by imagination, or any other faculty of our soul; for whatsoever we conceive is *finite*. And although this word *infinite* signify a conception of the mind, yet it follows not that we have any conception of an *infinite thing*. For when we say that a thing is *infinite*, we signify nothing really, but the impotency in our own mind.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Elements*, ch. 11, art. 2 64.

<sup>130</sup> *DC*, ch. 15, art. 14, 298.

It is passages such as these that got Hobbes' into trouble with his contemporaries. They were right in their assertions that Hobbes' theology was not Christian.

John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, claimed that Hobbes' philosophy as described in *Leviathan* promotes "atheism, blasphemy, impiety, subversion of religion."<sup>131</sup> Also claims Bramhall, Hobbes proposed "a trim commonwealth, which is founded neither upon religion towards God, nor justice towards man; but merely upon self-interest and self-preservation," and that this commonwealth is held together by "*pacts, and surrenders, and translations of power,*" not by faith in Anglican doctrine.<sup>132</sup> In this sense Hobbes critics were correct, however, they did not understand the role religion played in Hobbes' philosophy. Benjamin Milner points out that

When Hobbes turns his attention from the Commonwealth to the Christian Commonwealth, it is not an afterthought. Every commonwealth will have a religion, although the particular form that this takes will vary as peoples and their histories vary. . . . Hobbes recognizes that the world is religiously pluralistic, but he writes from within and for the Christian civilization. For him, as for his fellow citizens, the question was not whether the commonwealth should be Christian, but, rather, whether it should be Roman, Reformed, or *some other variation on the same theme*. This is not a merely historical intrusion, however, for in his view such questions will always be politically alive. Within the Christian context the question for Hobbes is, who establishes the religion of the commonwealth . . . <sup>133</sup>

Hobbes' God creates the universe and everything in it, including the natural law, human beings and reason. In the above passages, Hobbes implies that everything must have an origin, therefore, natural law, man, and his reason must have a cause. It follows then that there is a time in man's history where nothing exists, except for the creator. Even though

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<sup>131</sup> *EW* 4, 281.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin Milner, "Hobbes on Religion," *Political Theory*, 16, 3 (1988) : 407. Italics are mine.

Hobbes' God has an incomprehensible nature, God must have characteristics other than existence in order for Hobbes' philosophy to work.

If Hobbes' God does indeed exist, why should one obey the commands of natural law? Hobbes discounts the word of prophecy and revelation in *Leviathan*, so Christian sanctions on human behavior lose their force. Man determines that he must obey God, then, through the use of reason. By using reason, man determines God's authority because of his irresistible power. Hobbes continues by saying whosoever rules over man by virtue of his power, rules absolutely. Therefore, "They . . . whose power cannot be resisted, and by consequence God *Almighty* derives his right of sovereignty from the *power* itself."<sup>134</sup>

Man can know the power of the God of nature by recognizing that

The weaker, despairing of his own power to resist, cannot but yield to the stronger. From this last kind of obligation, that is to say, from fear or conscience of our own weakness in respect of the divine power, it comes to pass that we are obliged to obey God in his natural kingdom; reason dictating to all, acknowledging the divine power and providence, that there is no kicking against the pricks.<sup>135</sup>

In Chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes continues to discuss power in the natural kingdom of God:

The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his Lawes, is to be derived not from his Creating them, as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits; but from his *Irresistible Power*. . . . To those therefore whose power is irresistible, the dominion of all men adhaereth naturally by their excellence of Power; and consequently it is from that Power, that the Kingdome over

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<sup>134</sup> *DC*, ch. 15, art. 5 292.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*.



men, and the Right of afflicting men at his pleasure, belongeth to God Almighty; not as Creator, and Gracious; but as Omnipotent.<sup>136</sup>

One may conclude that for Hobbes, there is an authority that transcends the existence of man. This authority is the creator and author of the universe and everything in it, but that is all anyone can really know about God. It is enough for man to know that God *exists* and that he commands obedience to his law by virtue of his power. God's nature, however, is not for man to know.

Reasonable human beings, then, have to believe in a creator, since something must have caused man to come into existence, i.e. man has an origin and something is the source of man's being. Hobbes' moral philosophy is at the very least deistic in the sense that there is a creator, who gives man laws to live by, and man is obliged to obey these laws because of the irresistible power of the creator. This God must speak to man through nature, letting human beings know there is a higher transcendent order, as reason declares there must be. If this is not the case, the laws of nature will not work, since there is no binding force.

The penalty for not obeying one's reason is the state of nature, which is the state of war. Although Hobbes does not explicitly state this, man is sanctioned by God for not using his reason. In the state of nature

men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deale of griefe) in keeping company, where there is no power to over-awe them all. For every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himselfe: And upon all signes of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) . . .

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<sup>136</sup> *L*, ch. 31 397.

. . .Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man against every man.<sup>137</sup>

By failing to follow God's command to seek peace, man is punished by living in the violent, deadly state of nature. Men realize they must acquiesce to God's command to seek peace, otherwise they are doomed to destruction in that intolerable state; men then stand in awe of God in the sense that the consequences of not using reason (the voice of God) may result in their violent death.

Hobbes' theology, then, is based on reason, which he holds to be the commands of God. For his philosophy to be coherent, it must rest on a transcendent morality. Otherwise, when men create religion out of their imaginations, these religions become illegitimate for Hobbes. These religions formed out of the "Idols of the brain" are conducive to civil strife and violence, because men will use religion "to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their powers."<sup>138</sup> By demonstrating that God is knowable through the use of reason, and by showing that reason can only let man know only so much, Hobbes, it seems, was trying to supplant the Anglican doctrine of his time with a religion based on reason. For Hobbes, God is God no matter how he is viewed by society, and men must realize this if they are to have some semblance of civil peace. It did not matter for Hobbes in which vestments God is dressed, all that mattered is that he and his commands are knowable, and that these commands are valid only if they conduce to peace.

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid, ch. 13 185.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., ch. 11, 167.

Arguing over doctrine was useless for Hobbes. He wanted his contemporaries to understand that if they did not recognize the commands of reason to be true-issuing forth from God-then they would be “punished” for their irreverence by civil war and strife. The only way to obviate their condition is to listen to God and enjoin civil laws that mirror the divine law’s commands to seek peace.

## CHAPTER V

### A REVIEW AND CONCLUSION

For Hobbes' philosophy of man, society and nature to work, there has to be a lawgiving deity to give it coherence. If Hobbes' project was what he claimed it was, to offer a doctrine that would "ground the Civill Right of Sovereigns, and both the Duty and Liberty of Subjects, upon the natural Inclinations of Mankind, and upon the Articles of the Law of Nature; of which no man, that pretends but reason enough to govern his private family, ought to be ignorant," he had to offer it up for critical scrutiny.<sup>139</sup> It seems Hobbes must have believed in a divine authority, otherwise, he was offering up a philosophy in which he did not believe.

Hobbes, according to Martinich, was notoriously arrogant, so why give England a moral theory that would not stand up to critical analysis? For example, S.A. State informs us that

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<sup>139</sup> L, "A Review and Conclusion." 725.

Hobbes's intention to lay the proper basis of political life in a true theory of Natural Law is apparent as well in his treatise on *Human Nature* where he asserts, in the first sentence of chapter one, that his "present scope" is the "true and perspicuous application of the elements of *Laws natural and politic*" . . . He suggests that the central problem in the theory of natural law is that all previous writers have, without exception, generated merely doubts and controversies. Since it is the nature of true knowledge to avoid both doubt and controversy, it therefore follows, he continues, that no previous writer can have given us any true knowledge on the subject of Natural Law. He concedes that, in his exposition to follow on the subject of natural law, he may himself be unable to eliminate all controversy and doubt. But he hastens to add that this will not be the result of any failure of his argument; rather it will result from the inability of others to give sufficient attention to his arguments.<sup>140</sup>

In other words, all natural law theorists prior to Hobbes have been mistaken on the subject. If anyone should have a problem with natural law theory as Hobbes sees it, then it is their own fault, not his. This gives one an insight into Hobbes' character—he believed himself to be correct when expounding on natural law theory, so why would he be duplicitous when proposing his philosophy? Cooke believes that Hobbes "recognized" that if he should write what he truly believed, it could have been fatal. Indeed, there was a call in Parliament to have Hobbes burned at the stake for being a heretic. Something else to consider is Hobbes' own admission in *The Verse Life* that he was "Encompassed by Terrour all the while," and by John Aubrey's account of Hobbes "timorous nature" in *The Brief Life*, it does not make much sense that Hobbes would jeopardize his "greatest good" (i.e. life) by writing something he did not believe, much less die for.

I believe Hobbes essentially meant what he said when he put forth his new science of politics, God and man. He was quite clear in how he thought an author should be understood. If Hobbes was writing in an esoteric manner, it seems to me that he

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<sup>140</sup> *Debate over Natural Law and Religion*, 150.

would lead most of his readers astray by being adamant that one should adhere to an opinion that is “clearly and directly signified” and that when reading an author’s works we should assume that we should take for his opinion that it “is clearly signified to be his, and directly; whereas [one] might proceed from error in deduction, or ignorance of the repugnancy.” It would take a very astute (and very rare) reader to read a hidden message into that statement. Also, if Hobbes was concerned with offering the world what he considered to be “true knowledge” concerning natural law, it would defeat his purpose by writing in a cryptic and obscure manner. How, then, would anyone recognize his theory as being true, if he offered it up in such a way that many would necessarily misinterpret it?

Law has to come from somewhere, and if it does not come from God then it comes from man. Cooke’s argument that Hobbes was trying to dupe an unthinking audience into creating a society based on God-given natural law—although Hobbes himself did not believe in natural law—is not persuasive. Since Hobbes professed that he wished his philosophy to be taught in the universities, it is inevitable that his doctrines would be exposed to critical scrutiny and analysis by educated, thinking men. Hobbes must have known that if natural law is a fiction created by men in order to ensure a stable social order, then who is to say that one fiction created by man carries a higher moral authority than another? And if Hobbes was creating a convention in order to ensure peace, he also surely must have known that that fiction would eventually be exposed in the universities.

I believe Hobbes created his doctrines on suppositions he reasoned to be true. He used reason to deduce that everything has an origin, and that man is incapable of knowing

what exists beyond that origin; what exists at that point is beyond the comprehension of man. Man can only know that something *did* cause everything to come into being, and this thing is God. Hobbes used reason to conclude that there is a natural law etched onto the hearts of men by this God.<sup>141</sup> If all men pursue peace, observes Hobbes, man can avoid violent death at the hands of other men. The role of reason in Hobbes' philosophy is to point the way to a relatively safe, civil society in which men can live in security. Reason must come from one single authority, otherwise what may seem reasonable to one man may seem unreasonable to another, and this is a recipe for conflict. By using reason as Hobbes understood it, men realize the way out of their precarious situation in the state of nature by giving up some of their natural right and then coming together in the social contract.

Hobbes understood the power that religion has over men. I do believe that Hobbes thought Christianity was a myth, however, it is a myth that is closely tied to his conception of God. Although Hobbes may very well have been a heterodox Christian, his views on what causes religion seem to undermine Christianity, and other revealed religions as well. In Hobbes' time, it must be remembered that to deviate from established religious doctrine could possibly be fatal. In order to establish a society based on reason and natural law, Hobbes did have to put forth his theology in such a way that it would be understood as being compatible with Christianity. It does not mean however, that Hobbes was being duplicitous. Hobbes claimed to believe in God, and he used reason to explain how he came to the conclusion that God exists.

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<sup>141</sup> *L*, ch. 15, entire.

As Leo Strauss says in *Natural Right and history*, one cannot prove that Hobbes was an atheist, strictly speaking. He also claims that there is enough evidence in Hobbes' works one can use to prove Hobbes "was a theist and even a good Anglican."<sup>142</sup> What is clear is that there is enough evidence in Hobbes' works one can use to conclude that Hobbes was a sincere theist. As far as I am aware, Hobbes never makes the claim in any of his writings that he, himself, was a devout Christian. Hobbes does, however, refute charges of atheism in "An Answer to Bishop Bramhall" and "Considerations Upon the Reputation of Mr. Thomas Hobbes," but he does not claim to be a Christian, he just claims not to be an atheist.

In summary, Hobbes' doctrines are predicated on the existence of God. His philosophy requires a single lawgiving deity because reason tells man there is only one authority, since man cannot serve two masters. This deity is all powerful, since he has the power to create the universe and promulgate the laws by which man is to live. For Hobbes, there is a God, because if there were not, law and morality would then become the conventions of man. These conventions would subsequently have no binding force other than the coercive force of the sovereign. It follows then, that if there is no transcendent lawgiver, one man's laws are as good as another's, and then there is no real reason (other than fear of pain and death) why one should obey a sovereign. If one does not care about his own pain and death, he is then free to pursue whatever ends he chooses, and if all do the same, humankind would once be plunged into "war of all against all."

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<sup>142</sup> *Natural Right and History*, 199n.



One cannot prove or disprove Hobbes' metaphysical and theological beliefs, but I think it is entirely plausible that Hobbes did believe in a God of nature, otherwise, why would he devote most of his life to developing a "true" system to scientifically explain society and its relation to the cosmos? I believe Hobbes was not engaging in duplicity when proposing his civil philosophy. He was intelligent enough to know that if he was creating a philosophy based on straw, it would not hold up over time, and his deontology would eventually be superseded by another. Hobbes surely was not vain enough to think that he could engage in a hidden project that would stand the critical test of time. I also believe that he was sincere in his wish for peace, and that he pursued his project toward that end, grounding his philosophy in what he reasoned to be God. He then offered his doctrines to the world, so that they could be critically analyzed by the public as pointing to a rational way to peace.

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## VITA

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