Possible Theological Interpretation Of The Materialist Rationalism And Theory Of Obligation Of Thomas Hobbes

A. Brandt Henderson
Carroll College

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POSSIBLE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MATERIALIST RATIONALISM AND THEORY OF OBLIGATION OF THOMAS HOBBES

By

A. Brandt Henderson

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy of Carroll College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for academic honors with a B.A. Degree in Philosophy.

Helena, Montana
April 1, 1975
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of PHILOSOPHY.

Richard T. Lambert, Ph.D.
Director

Francis J. Wiegenstein, M.A.
Reader

Allen Pope, D.Ed.
Reader

APRIL 1, 1975
Date
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CHAPTER I

Hobbes: A Problem of Interpretation

Enlightened by Euclidian Geometry, that was the basis for an entire philosophical system, Thomas Hobbes remains today one of the most controversial figures of the Modern Era. Espousing a rationalistic, mechanistic, and materialist interpretation of the cosmos, Hobbes served as an inspiration to scientific thinkers and as a source of heresy to the institution of the Church. For almost three centuries, his thought has been interpreted as a closed system of an atheistic nature. From the pages of Hobbes' Leviathan, arises a system which he constructed as the most profound materialistic system in the world in regard to physics, biology, psychology, ethics, and politics.

The traditional interpretation of Hobbes' mechanics appears indisputable. But a tension can result if we assert that the basis for Hobbes' theory of ethics and subsequent obligation to the state is in total harmony with the entirety of Hobbes' system. Does man's obligation to God and fellow man result from a mere naturalistic prudence, or does it have a supernatural origin rooted in the fear of God's commands. Here lies a major point of contention to be discussed in this thesis.

History often times shapes an opinion that will affect any interpretations of a man's work. Because, as we shall investigate in
the next chapter, Hobbes was considered an atheist, we must inquire if that was really the case. Having been considered a heretic who reduced God to minimal importance, Hobbes has been interpreted in that light for almost three hundred years. Now in light of contemporary theology and the opportunity of a more objective viewpoint, we shall see if Hobbes was a genuine atheist; and if he was not, we may possibly find out what his theology really meant.

As a final concern, we shall look for any theological insights that may help provide personal fulfillment from the works of Hobbes. As Hobbes did not find intellectual satisfaction in the philosophy of medieval scholasticism, so too, do many modern men find that some lack of satisfaction.

So we shall now embark on a philosophical journey. Put aside twentieth century thought, biases and attitudes, don yourself a powdered wig, and travel to seventeenth century England, a country embroiled in religious, intellectual, and political controversy.
CHAPTER II

Historical Reflections on the Life of Hobbes and his Religious Thought

As noted in the introduction, the analysis of Thomas Hobbes' theology and his philosophical scheme will be examined in light of his personal history and treatment of God, man, and state in the Leviathan. Before we seek to understand his philosophical persuasions, we shall peruse his life in a general overview, searching for insights into his religious convictions through his writings, and also through the contributions of his contemporaries.

Often times, a paradox will result between a philosophers writing and his life style. Socrates, if we are to believe Plato, consummated his own philosophy through his death, yet the great British Empiricist, David Hume, would relax with a game of backgammon following a forboding dissertation or essay on the hopelessness of certain knowledge or the meaningless state of the world. Jean-Paul Sartre has amassed a fortune while painting a sorrowful, absurd existence for man in his literary works. Soren Kierkegaard fanatically lived his religious philosophy to the point of dementia religiosa. With examples such as these, historical investigation would benefit any philosophical commentary on Hobbes. Did Hobbes really believe his philosophy, or was it just an academic amusement for a bored man?

Also, Hobbes has been attacked to this present day as an atheist. The question arises as to whether Hobbes was actually a genuine atheist or whether his critics asserted that claim to discredit him in the eyes
of his readers. Hopefully, we can shed light on this serious charge through historical insight into the religious thought of the time. In this chapter, we shall look for some answers, or at least, some insights.

Seventeenth century biographers apparently exhibited more concern about a man's content and less about his psychological make-up and environment. If Hobbes were alive today as a controversial figure, voluminous works would be written about the man himself; his life styles, personal beliefs, diet, recreational activities, and sex life down to every minute detail. Such was not the case in Hobbes' time. All materials are sketchy and limited. Circumstances also necessitate that we keep in mind that many remarks alluded to have been spoken by Hobbes may merely have constituted the special contributions of his enemies. Historical certainty becomes a formidable obstacle to discovering the real man and his personal beliefs. Let us proceed with healthy caution.

Thomas Hobbes was born on the fifth of April, 1588, in Westport near Malmesbury, the son of Thomas Hobbes, Sr., and Anglican minister. It seems his mother became excited upon hearing of the proposed invasion of the Spanish Armada, and speculating that her home parish would be the logical place for the Spaniards to disembark, gave premature birth to her son in a nervous state. Soon after Thomas' hasty arrival, his father in a fit of rage struck a church elder, and was forced to flee the vicinity. The ear of history remains deaf to his subsequent whereabouts. The horoscope at Thomas' birth, not unlike that of Oliver Cromwell, indicated further eminence. Hobbes himself said that he and terror were born twins.¹

After a period of schooling in his home of Malmesbury, Thomas, sponsored by his uncle, left for Oxford in 1603. By 1608, he completed his B.A. degree. Although Oxford was regarded as England's center of learning, young Thomas did not share that opinion. He despised his teachers as incompetent tutors who let their charges fall into vile and vicious habits. There exists further information that Oxford was floundering in an unacademic, undisciplined atmosphere that begged for reform. Hobbes' observations on his academic upbringing, however, were written late in life. No indication has emerged that Hobbes recognized these feelings at the time of his schooling.

Despite any of Hobbes' adverse feelings about the quality of his education, the school authorities felt him fit to engage in teaching someone else. It was during this time that he became employed by William Cavendish. Cavendish, who would later be raised to the Earldom of Devonshire, brought the fledgling Thomas into a family connection which would be vital to his whole career. Hobbes became "his lordship's page, a rode a hunting and hawking with him kept his privy nurse".² The academics seemed to fall by the wayside but Hobbes read Caesar to escape boredom. In 1610, the young Cavendish, a newlywed to a twelve-year-old wife, decided to proceed with the business of education, and accompanied by Hobbes, departed for France and Italy. Apparently Hobbes picked up little intellectual insight on his journey, but he gained a friend in his patron with whom he would live for 18 years. Books were his for the asking.

Any critic of Hobbes, aside from how he feels about Hobbes' philosophy, will admit that the controversial figure had a clear and forcible style in his English writings. Hobbes attributes his talents to his translation of Thucydides in 1628. Not only was his translation a masterpiece, but Thomas felt that it would serve as a warning to his followers about popular orators, and an admonition against following any democratic tendencies.

Meanwhile, Hobbes' patron died in 1628, and Hobbes became obligated to find temporary employment elsewhere, while he found time to dedicate his labour to "my master now in heaven".\(^3\) Whether Thomas, already at age 40, believed in an afterlife, is not clearly indicated here, but his sincerity is unmistakable. So in 1628, Thomas Hobbes came into the employment of Sir Gervase Clifton of France.\(^4\) The tutorial escapade became a monumental happening in Thomas' life as it was here that he came across a copy of Euclid's *Elements* one day in the family library. His study of the work would lead him to conclude that geometry was the lasting ideal of the scientific method.

By 1634, Hobbes was again a tutor for the Cavendish family, employed on the Continent. In 1636, Hobbes met Galileo in France, then a prisoner of the Inquisition, and the remarkable Englishmen, John Milton. All during his European journey, Hobbes became infatuated in his meditation upon a single topic and concluded that "there was but one real thing in the world, the basis of all that we falsely believe to be things, and which are mere phantasms of the brain. The one reality is motion, and to study the modes of nature there the necessary condition

\(^3\)Ibid, p.15

for all successful researches in science." Returning to Paris, Hobbes was fortunate enough to gain the acquaintance of Marin Mersenne, a man of his own age, who belonged to the Friars Memin of the Franciscan Order and was also a supporter of Descartes. Mersenne welcomed Hobbes and introduced him to a circle of philosophers in which Hobbes was recognized and allowed to speak with authority. Although Hobbes was not nearly as educated as many men of forty today, his talks with Galileo and his translation of Thucydides made him a learned man. Ignorance in the newly opened field of physical science did give Hobbes a disadvantage when compared to Bacon and Descartes, who would rightly claim knowledge of all there was to know at that time. Yet Hobbes pursued his budding philosophy with vigor. When one reads his ethics, it might easily be deduced that Hobbes was egotistical and cynical. But his alliance with the pious Mersenne indicates otherwise. Everything indicates that he was a man of kindly, if not ardent affections. Few men appear to have won so many friends or to have retained them so permanently. His long connection with the Cavendish family proves the existence of a mutual esteem credible to both sides. His language about Mersenne is as warm and sincere as his language about his early friend, the second earl.  

During this period in France, Hobbes met Descartes and challenged his Meditations. Of course, their differences were fundamental. "Hobbes

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6Ibid. p. 23
banished spirit from the universe; Descartes separated it from matter, but never denied that spirit was real."7

Having earlier returned to England, the impending fall of King Charles I and the rise of Oliver Cromwell persuaded Thomas to flee to France for eleven years. Hobbes' position on the sovereignty of the king invited harsh censorship from the House of Commons. Having formed his political theory, Hobbes watched for several years in amusement as his theory of the civil state was working, culminating with the Restoration. During the period of the Commonwealth, Hobbes retained a correspondence with his colleagues, speculating on the causes of the revolt. A point we shall establish later is Hobbes' despising of the clergy, especially the Church of Rome. But in a letter to the Earl of Devonshire in 1641, regarding a petition against bishops, Hobbes took a clout at Puritans who were currently running the government. Hobbes does not argue that many bishops abuse their power favoring greater lay control. He stated that, "ministers should minister rather than govern; . . . the dispute between the spiritual and the civil power has of late, more than anything in the world, been the cause of civil war in the places of Christendom."8 The papacy in Hobbes' eyes is evil, but it can not be responsible for prompting the Puritan revolt. The Puritans were clearly at fault. "After the Bible was translated in English, every man, nay every boy and woman, thought they spoke with God Almighty and understood what He said, when by a

7Samuel I. Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1969) p. 11
certain number of chapters a day they had read the Scriptures once or twice over."^9 The people lost their reverence for bishops and wanted popular religious as well as civil government.

Hobbes railed at the Presbyterian preachers who spoke against Kings and tyrants, who according to Hobbes, played the role of the right and godly men as skillfully as any tragedian in the world. All Presbyterians were found to be detestable as they claimed spiritual authenticity over the state, but would not maintain control of their own flocks as they split into many sects. "There was no dangerous an enemy to the Presbyterians as this brood of their own hatching."^10

Hobbes found the life style as preached by the Puritans rather hypocritical and drab, even though he himself "smoked and drank moderately; Aubrey estimates that he was drunk no more than one hundred times or an average slightly more than once for every year of his life, which in the seventeenth century amounted to almost total abstinence". ^11

Nonetheless, Hobbes held a genuine disgust for the Papacy. In the Leviathan, he equated the current religious practices of the Roman Church with the ancient pagon rituals of the Empire. The intent was to discredit the religious value of holy water, holy days, wakes, carnivals, maypoles, and all other rites thrown out in part by the Anglicans and totally by the Puritans. Ecclesiastics were assumed to be physical manifestations of ghosts and fairies, the stealers of reasons, and the promulgators of metaphysics. Hobbes went as far as to imply that

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9 Ibid. p. 31


celebrate clergy were "incubi", devils that copulated with those of flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{12}

The texts of the previous attacks are obviously aimed at the Church of Rome, but Hobbes no doubt walloped the Protestant clergy as well. He states that the English clergy pretended that the Kingdom of God was of this world, having power distinct from the civil state, the ultimate priority.

As the preceding passages clearly indicate, Hobbes held the ecclesiastical world in scorn. Does this result, as some hold, from Hobbes being an atheist? Is he venting a hatred towards a false, deceiving belief in an Almighty God? Or did seventeenth century Christianity view the faith as an integral, undifferentiated component in the sometimes corrupt religious institution? Evidence from Hobbes' philosophical writings which would prove him to be an atheist seems lacking. In a later chapter, those writings will be investigated to determine Hobbes' stance towards the divine. Nevertheless, Hobbes apparently surmised that the religious structures of his day constituted a corrupt threat to the necessary good of the civil state. His opponents turned a deaf ear to his allegations against corrupt religious institutions and found him a serious threat to Christianity, Christendom, transcendent truths of ethics, and a general awesome challenger to the status quo. He was viewed as an evil enemy by most church men, educated Godfearers, and the laity as well.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid. p. 459
The bugbear to all of all of Hobbes' critics was his literary style. It proved to be an ironic situation for a man so hated to write so well. The wicked quoting tastefully embellished prose was like the devil quoting scripture. Hobbes, "had so fine a pen," wrote John Dowel in 1683, "that by the clearness of his style, and exactness of his method, he gained more Proselytes than by his principles."

"He hath, long ago," said Archbishop Tenison,

"published his Errors in Theologie, in the English Tongue, insinuating himself, by the handsomeness of his style, into the minds of such whose Francie leadeth their judgements, and to say truth of an enemy, he may, with some reason, pretend to 'Mastery' in that language. Yet for this very handsomeness in dressing, his opinions, as the matter stands, he is to be reproved; because by that means, the poysen which he hath intermixed with them is, with more readiness and danger swallowed."

Lord Clarendon recognized that Hobbes' style was quite capable of perpetrating subersive opinions:

"Mr. Hobbes is plentifully endowed with order and method in writing, and his clear expressing his conceptions in weighty, proper and significant words, are very remark-able and commendable; and it is some part of his art to introduce, upon the suddain, instances and remarques, which are the more grateful, and make the impression upon his reader by the unexpectedness of meeting them where somewhat else is talk'd of."

Good literary style sold Hobbes to many. Hobbes' opponents feared that the reader would get in our contemporary vernacular, "sucked in" by the prose of Leviathan, accepting propositions of an evil nature by

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14 Thomas Tenison, The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined (London, 1670) sig. A4

mere semantic deception. Lord Clarendon wrote a commentary concerning the Leviathan's treatment of "Demons and Fayries, and Ghosts, and Goblins, Exorcisms, Crosses, and Holy Water" into which "Philosophical Discoveries" Hobbes gratuitously introduced a "Comical Mention of the power and goodness of God, and the Devil's activity and malignity."
The effect of this intrusion,

"in a place so improper and unnatural for those reflections, will the more incline his Disciples to undervalue those common notions of the goodness and assistance of God, and of the malice and vigilance of the Devil...and to prepare them to believe, that all the discourse of sanctity, and the obligations of Christianity, and the essentials of a Church, Faith, and Obedience to dictates of God's spirit, are but the artifice and invention of Church men, to advance their own pomp and worldly interest, and that Heaven and Hell are but words to flatter and terrify men"16

Hobbes' opponents set out to penetrate the ironical facade of Hobbes' system, so as to expose in all its nakedness the irreligious temper which lies beneath it and to refute those "loose and licentious reflections," which, said Lord Clarendon, Hobbes "collected...into such a mass of impiety, that the very repeating all the particulars, without which they cannot be replied to, must be more grievous and offensive to most devout persons, that the most unclean discourse can appear to the chastest ears."17

Labelling Hobbes as an atheist became the foundation of criticism which sought to counterattack Hobbes' florid pen and shelter the masses from his seemingly deceptive dogmatic propositions. Not only were those in the seventeenth century who denied God's existence dubbed as atheists,

16Ibid. pp. 17-18
17Ibid. pp. 274-5
but also those who may merely have implied such a thought came under the same nomenclature. A selection from the diatribe following gives an insight to seventeenth century thought regarding atheism. This work was direct at Hobbes.

"Q. Do you believe there is a God?  
A. No: I believe there is none.

Q. What is the true ground of your belief?  
A. Because I have no mind there should be one.

Q. What other reason do you give for it?  
A. Because I never saw him."

The discussion continues, labelling religion as a political cheat and claiming that the world happened by chance, and man lives solely for himself.

From passages such as these it is possible to distinguish a number of traditional strands of thought which the seventeenth century controversialist would have catalogued as "skepticism, naturalism, atomism (otherwise called 'Epicureanism' or 'Lucretianism'), blasphemy, and heresy, and certain loosely defined attitudes of mind such as cynicism and general irreverence. All of these were atheism under its various heads, and all were attributed by critics to Hobbes. It is clear that Wolseley's 'Catechism' is supposed to represent the beliefs of a Hobbist."

Whether Wolseley's philosophical assessment was correct is not the point here. Intellectuals of the time who feared Hobbes asserted that he embraced Atheism.

18Sir Charles Wolseley, The Unreasonableness of Atheism made Manifest (2nd ed. London, 1669) pp. 197-9

19Samuel I. Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1961) p. 40
Two questions of historical consequence must be answered. Was Hobbes an atheist? Did he oppose the position of the Church, a state religion which could turn on the state at the whims of its powerful hierarchy? In regard to the latter question, the response appears to be rather obvious when we consider his statements mentioned earlier. The papacy was an ominous threat from the outside to any civil state. Presbyterians sought control from the Anglicans. All religious bodies represented in the eyes of Hobbes a scheming, outside interest group.

Hobbes professed not to be an atheist. Like the scholastics, Hobbes believed God to be the first cause. Going beyond that, Hobbes made the heretical statement that God was material along with all the rest of the usual attributes men tag to his being. To clarify his position, Hobbes published the following in response to his critics:

"There has hitherto appeared in Mr. Hobbes his Doctrine no sign of Atheism; and whatsoever can be affirmed from the denial of 'Incorporeal Substances,' makes Tertullian, one of the ancientists of the Fathers, and most of the Doctors of the Church, as much as atheists as he; for Tertullian in his treatise DeCarne Christi says plainly, Omne quod est, corpus est sui generis, nihil est incorporeale, nisi quod non est..."20

On one occasion, as Hobbes lay on what everyone thought to be his deathbed, he cried out a typical Hobbesian remark about the clergy, admonished the divines as cheats, and ordered them away.

Other critics saw Hobbes as a poor, tormented sinner. But if that be the case, a proud sinner was he. In reply to those who shirked

Leviathan, Hobbes stated:

"I was never dismay'd at the Pulminations or afraid of being toss'd upon the Horns of their Altars; their Ecclesiastical Nets were too weak to resist the power of my Leviathan; and Bramhall and Clarendon were sufficiently assured at the long run, they cou'd not make a "Hook" strong enough to fasten him...

The Clergy of our Nation took me in the right sense...for whilst I spoke against the power of Rome, and the Roman Church, I was shoving at theirs, and striving to overturn both. When I blamed the Aristotelian philosophy and the Doctines and managements of the University beyond Sea, you may easily suppose what my notions were of Oxford and Cambridge. In fine, my aim was to overthrow all models of Religion, and constitutions of all Churches whatsoever...."21

On the verge of Hobbes' actual death, the following quote of dubious historical authenticity has been assigned to him.

"I am one of the most wretched persons in all these sooty territories. Nor is it any wonder that my voice has changed in principles, though changed too late to do me any good. For now, I know there is a God; but oh! I wish there were not! For I am sure He will have no mercy on me, nor is there any reason that he should. I do confess that I was his foe on earth, and he is mine in hell... Oh, that I could but say I feel no fire! How easy would my torments be to that which I find them. But oh, alas. The fire that we endure ten times exceeds all culinary fire in fierceness."22

The above quotation does not seemingly do justice to the previous reflections about Hobbes' life. Nonetheless, Hobbes was undoubtedly one of the most controversial figures of his time. From a historical examination we can deduce few definitive conclusions. If we cite the statements of Hobbes and some of his recent interpreters like Mintz, the obvious inference makes Hobbes to be a very unorthodox, but genuine, religious believer. Critics to the contrary picture

21 (Anon.), Visits from the Shades (London, 1704) pp. 32-4
22 (Anon.), The Visions of John Bunyan (London, 1725) p. 7
Hobbes to be an intellectual handmaid of Satan. Personal inclination leans toward the statements of Mr. Hobbes himself. We have learned an age-old lesson from Scripture that a man of a prophetical nature is most often rejected by his peers with a pharisaical fervor. Short-mindedness has blinded many men to any form of truth since time immemorial. To reach any further conclusive statements about Hobbes and his views of God, man, and the state in a theological context, we must turn to his philosophy in the Leviathan.
CHAPTER III
Traditional Interpretation of Hobbes

In seeking a theological substratum in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, a synopsis of the traditional interpretation of his *Leviathan* would provide an alternate view for a well rounded investigation. The purpose of this chapter is not to discredit this purely rationalistic, egocentric view which has been labelled by W. H. Greenleaf as the "traditional...orthodox interpretation of Hobbes".\(^1\) Rather, the aim is to present to the student of Hobbes an argument of great weight to which he can refer in light of the theological interpretation to be presented in the next chapter.

His history tells us that Hobbes was a born logician. He loved reasoning for its own sake. His great aim was to be absolutely clear, orderly, and systematic. He desired, in modern phraseology, to effect the thorough unification of knowledge.\(^2\) The traditionalist school sees Hobbes' materialism as accepting as reality only that which can be scientifically analyzed. Metaphysics of the scholastic type is nonexistent, a pseudo-science promulgated by deceiving Churchmen. The totality of reality can be defined within the laws governing nature, deductively determining the nature of reality. Subscribing to a


rationalistic, mechanistic concept of reality, Hobbes applied it to empirical data. From the geometry of Euclid, the essence of the world, Hobbes constructed his physics, followed in successive order by biology, psychology, and politics. The same scientific method which applied to Euclidean geometry applied to all science. If the data failed to meet the standards established by the method, the data was discarded rather than the method. When all reality is limited to the corporeal, the scientific method becomes the universal criterion of analyzing the cosmos and all its constituents. The spiritual, since it cannot be perceived, simply does not exist.

Man's sole goal is the egotistical instinct to preserve one's life at all cost. Each man behaves according to his natural tendencies aside from a supra-natural power. Small wonder Hobbes was considered to be an immoral atheist by his contemporaries. Self interest is the sole interest pursuing the satisfaction of the natural appetites.

Morality fails to arise from this system as the ethics of Hobbes become limited to a mere descriptive psychology of man in the state of nature. Many seventeenth century readers of Hobbes believed that such an interpretation of human psychology was insulting, condoned selfish behavior, nurtured atheism, and made ethics relative. Nonetheless, Hobbes' ideas fit the nature of his schema. The question has become one of accepting or rejecting Hobbes methodology. The system does not rely, according to the traditionalist school, on any outside frills such as theology or metaphysics. The system is totally one-sided. All data are forced to fit the system. According to Hoffding, Hobbes instituted the best thought out attempt of modern time to make our knowledge of
existence. The system which he constructed is the most profound materialistic system of the modern world and affected a break with scholasticism similar to that instituted by Copernicus in astronomy, Galilei in physics, and Harvey in physiology. Thus, he put the study of ethics and politics on a naturalistic basis.3

In regard to science, Hobbes was a nominalist. Common nouns are utilized to designate objects in the material world; words do not define the object named, but merely stand as a common relative reference. The name assigned to an object is artificial and conventionally applied. The whole system of science deals with ideas, especially mathematics which is the foundation for Hobbes' system. We state postulates which are assumed, not stated as true. From those postulates we rationally deduce general laws, narrowed to less specific laws; and from these laws we can predict certain events. Obviously, this is an ideal system. And hence, science is an ideal system. At first glance, the system appears empirical, but it rests upon a priori concepts overrule observation instead of observations overriding the concepts. With this a priori nominalist system, we designate particular events with general words, applying merely names, not defining the object observed. Therefore, science deals in names, not thing, a system which exists in the mind, words order the chaos of the world. Certitude relies on our proficiency at using words. Thus this scientific method becomes metaphysical, accounting for the essence of all being. Since all reality is explained by scientific method, a physics, materialism, which account for matter

3H. Höffding, A History of Modern Philosophy (lr. Meyer; London, 1900, repr. 1924), I. 264
in motion, constitutes the philosophical scheme of Hobbes. In
materialism, there can exist only one kind of causality, efficient
mechanical causality. From this arises the determinist slant as the
universe can only move in one direction which is geared by the causes
which are noted in the natural laws.

Hobbes' scheme allows little for certitude about deductions
concluded from observations of the physical world. All observations
may be illusory because we all have encountered many examples of
illusion, e.g. dreams and mirages. What if all life is a dream, all
perception a mirage? We are forced to retreat to idealism because we
fashioned the whole method of interpretation in our minds. Nonetheless,
we can not even be certain that all perception is illusory. But Hobbes'
system does paint a picture of a material world that is infinite (Newton's
notion of the conservation of energy), three dimensional, and homogeneous
as all reality seems to participate in the natural laws. In conclusion,
Hobbes' methodology is summarized in his Doctrine of Names, i.e.
nominalism. Reasoning is reduced to a process in the mind of comparing
the multiple usages of names, agreed upon by common convention, to mark
and signify our thoughts.4

Just as the universe is totally mechanistic, so is man. The body
sums up the totality of humanity. The body contains interacting organs;
and when these organs come into contact with other bodies, motions are
relayed through the nerves to the brain and to the heart. The physical

4Sir Leslie Stephen Hobbes (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor
Paperbacks, 1961) p. 110
agitation of these reactions generate sensations which are the sole constituents of mental activity. Sensations form images in the mind, but images are merely decaying sensations, motions of matter running themselves down. This escapes the problem of Cartesian Dualism, as events in the mind are reduced to minimal importance. Images of the physical world generate in a merely physical body. There results no dualism because there exists no internal dimension to man. Memory resides in the mind as the mere recalling of a sensation still moving in the brain. Thought is a motion in the head, a physiological reaction of molecules in a physical environment. Constant repetition of physical events stored up in the brain makes us expect more repetition, and this knowledge Hobbes calls prudence.

Man soars above the animals because he has a mind and language, the natural consequence of an intellect. Also, man, like an animal, thinks up ways to achieve his desires. But man alone is capable of reversing the method and deducing effects from causes. The prime example is scientific reasoning. Prudence deals with truth necessary for survival, but scientific truth is the Empirical. Science, "after all" is a development of "prudence".5

Concerning pleasure, it is that motion, "not stopping there (the head) but proceeding to the heart, of necessity there it will either help or hinder one motion which is called 'vital': when it helpeth it is called 'delight, contentment, or pleasure', which is nothing really but motion about the heart, as conception is nothing but motion in the head."6

5See Chapter VI of Human Nature and Chapter V of Leviathan
6Ibid.
The hindrance emotion is called pain. Life is a continuous process of pain and pleasure, the balancing of the natural energies. This provides the basis for passions. Man receives a stimulus or sensation which becomes memory. If the stimulus is pleasurable in the case of the passions, the mind deduces its source of pleasure and yearns to return to the cause of the sensation and to enjoy the pleasure we must have power over it. We gain our pleasures solely by overcoming and holding fast to them. The passions rest not only in the sexual realm, but embrace desire for power over others, fortune, riches, or common friendship. Desire for common objects of passion is held by all men. History dictates that there are not enough objects of passion to fully satisfy everyone's desires. A struggle will result in which men will seek to destroy their contenders for what they desire. Power is the ability to get a strongehold on all you desire, even if you have to strangle someone or everyone to get it.

This psychology of man relies on the ethics of egoism, according to the traditional interpretation of Hobbes. The ethics of Hobbes serves as a main point of contention in this thesis. What is the source of man's obligation to himself and the state? Does it arise from a scriptural mandate or within one system? This point will be discussed in the next chapter.

The traditional egotistical interpretation of Hobbes states that any motive a man entertains is self-centered. The goal is to surround one's self with men of power and then devise a means to put them down. Power is honor. Confidence is power as are knowledge, brute but intellectually controlled strength, confidence, riches, authority,
and good fortune which comes from God. Value is placed on a man according to how much power he holds and how he manifests it. The desire for power is the desire for honor and value in the eyes of fellow men.

Self-love, according to the traditional interpretation of Hobbes, is a universally, uncontestable postulate about human nature. We pity others' calamity because we fear it may befall ourselves. The beloved are pitied because we thank them worthy of good and not calamity. Love is an intensity of the vital motion of delight, the pleasure received from the company of others. They are useful to us. To prove one's power one can assist other men achieving their desires after one has secured his own. This assistance makes them one's inferiors. What appears as charity is more than purchasing friendships and exploiting one's dominating power. Pragmatism authors all actions even to the extent of affecting one virtue of Christian charity. This, according to Hobbes, is merely a way of showing one's financial superiority.

In summation of man's nature, Hobbes' doctrine states that each man will do exclusively what pleases him. Hobbes was not ashamed of it and carried it consistently throughout his system. His method was scientific, accepting obvious facts and carrying them out consistently.

Having stated this egotistical nature of man, Hobbes must present a system where men can attain many of their desires without killing or being killed. Before the rise of civilization, man dwelt in the state of nature. A chaotic dog-eat-dog world where the universal struggle for power created a perpetual state of war and mass paranoia. One
never knew the possible actions of other men. The world was merely amoral. The deposing of Charles I, followed by bloody civil war and the establishment of Cromwell's Protectorate, provided sufficient evidence of Hobbes' State of Nature scheme. To avoid such lack of personal security and to establish the right to own property, men laid down their rights to procure a sovereign and police power. This was the social contract in which men traded freedom for security. From this ceding of one's natural rights in the dangerous natural state, man had an obligation to support the sovereign state. The traditional interpretation of Hobbes holds that one must deduce from the facts and consequences of the natural state that man ought to subscribe to the social contract. Here lies the major source of obligation. If we accept the tradional view, we must jump from "fact" to "right". A moral judgement is injected into a supposedly logical system; and logically speaking, this is incorrect method. But the traditionalist desires not to deviate from the system of Hobbes which he holds to be all-inclusive in itself. The traditionalist may hold that this is not a moral judgement. After all, if man is solely interested in personal survival, the right notion becomes the natural notion of what man does to preserve himself. As previously shown, Hobbes holds that his whole schema is naturalistic. But as we shall observe in the following chapter, Hobbes may very well have drawn his theory of obligation from the scriptures, upon which he draws in the Leviathan. If this be the case, Hobbes has a basic support of his philosophy not in reason or Euclidian geometry, but divine revelation. What a setback that would be to those who claimed that Hobbes nurtured atheism. Now let us proceed to further investigate this possibility.
CHAPTER IV
Hobbes as Theologian

In the previous chapter the traditional interpretation of Hobbes' philosophy was presented. Now we shall look at Hobbes' doctrine of God and the social obligation of man to the state in light of divine revelation in the scriptures. Whether any conclusive evidence in favor of this theological position can be raised is doubtful. None-the-less, the traditional interpretation of Hobbes leaves several questions to be answered. What is the real nature of a material God? What is the source of duty to the state? Does that duty arise from natural reason or is it an obligation to obey God in his natural kingdoms, an obedience based on fear of divine power? The aim of this thesis consists in supporting the position that the true nature of Hobbes' ethical and political thinking derives essentially from the Christian natural law tradition and that Hobbes' ethical ideas and scientific system are two independent and incompatible elements in a system which the traditionalists state is all-inclusive in itself.

For this theory to be true, there must be a tension in Hobbes' thought between his scientific and ethical ideas. Revelation does not qualify as an observable constituent of the natural world. Yet passages in Hobbes' works, especially concerning ethics, are worded in language which runs contrary to the naturalistic, egotistical strain; and they also reflect a genuinely moral theory of obligation. The laws of nature are the laws of God. And some kind of theism must be integrated into the philosophy for the social theory to work.
We will now examine Hobbes' doctrine of God. In Chapter II, we found that the greatest source of controversy concerning Hobbes' philosophy was in the realm of his treatment of the divine. Most of his contemporaries considered him to be an atheist simply because he challenged the traditional scholastic analysis of God's attributes and essential nature. Hobbes, however, wrote copiously about the subject of religion. The traditional interpreters hold that Hobbes' ethics and political philosophy are not founded on religion no matter how much he wrote about the subject. But if Hobbes had not intended revelation to be an integral part of his system, why did he pursue such a controversial issue? Influential upon his theology are the writings of Tertullian, upon whom Hobbes relied for support of his materialist deity, as well as Aquinas, whose philosophy he seemingly attempted to discredit, and Calvin, the spiritual father of the Presbyterians he despised. Yet Hobbes remained, in many aspects, very vague about God's nature in the minds of some of today's critics. The natural laws need not be dictated from God. After all, as the traditionalists hold, fear of being destroyed drove many to create the laws. Theologian Ronald Hepburn stated that Hobbes' theory was so weak that it could not serve as the basis for any ethical or political theory, yet it does contain some philosophical interests.¹

Hobbes was far more skeptical about knowledge of God's nature than he was of knowing God's existence. By means of philosophy, we know of God's existence through natural reason, utilizing ideological

argumentation. In a letter to Bishop Bramhall, Hobbes stated, "It is agreed between us, that right reason dictates there is a God." 2

Hobbes tried to avoid going into too much detail about the divine nature, declaring that there are many things whose nature we cannot know by natural reason.

"In this natural kingdom of God, there is no other way to know anything, but by natural reason, that is, from the principles of natural science; which are so far from teaching us anything of God's nature, as they cannot teach us our own nature, nor the nature of the smallest living creature." 3

Like St. Anselm, Hobbes includes existence as one of the divine attributes and borders on the Ontological Argument. "It is manifest, we ought to attribute to him existence. For no man can have the will to honour that, which he thinks not to have any being." 4...There is but one name to signify our conception of his nature, and that is, I AM." 5

Hobbes did designate God to be the first cause, the first link in the chain of causality; and this fits right into his scientific schema. In Leviathan, Hobbes argued about the regress of causal dependence. This regress leads "of necessity...to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternal; which we call God,"..."the acknowledgement of one God eternal may be more easily derived "from desire to know causes of natural bodies." 6 But Hobbes did not give total credence to his causal argument, as

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5Ibid. Vol III, p. 95
demonstration is not what is necessary for belief in God. By causal argumentation we cannot reach proof for God's existence. No one has the time or patience to reason from cause to cause to reach the ultimate cause. And who is to say that the eternal mover does not owe his status to a previous mover? If we want to reach theism, the causal argument fails. St. Thomas Aquinas was just as skeptical as Hobbes for we cannot know by reason if the world had a temporal beginning. We must, like Hobbes and Aquinas, rely on scripture. Thomas merely presented the second way, "causality" argument to disprove the notion of infinite regress in which there is no first cause. Hobbes simply concluded the Leviathan that there is some cause whereof there is no former cause, and it is eternal. "The natural religious arguments presented by Hobbes for God's existence are not well presented or defended. On the other hand, there is no strong case for seeing them so consistently ironical and obliquely skeptical - though the De Corpore passage does make it hard to see him as caring whether his reader retains belief in arguments from the word to God."6

According to Hobbes, although we may know that God is, we cannot know what he is, because we cannot understand the infinite. All our definitions of divine attributes must be considered as imperfect. Philosophical investigation obscures rather than clarifies. We must rely on scripture, much of which is incomprehensible. Also, a great discontinuity results which leaves one suspended in doubt. Hobbes in

his treatment of psychology, does not clearly imply that man can have a religious experience. But man has the task to have "faith in him that speaketh" (in the Scriptures), "though the mind be incapable of any notion at all from the words spoken." In this view, the discourse about God seems to break down.

Hobbes declared that God cannot be labelled with any finite terms such as shape or parts. Only superlative abstract adjectives can be used. But Hobbes assigned a corporeal nature to God, which, however, is qualified almost to nothing by the absence of parts and shape. God, in the Hobbesian scheme, must be corporeal to exist, yet he is not allowed material attributes. God, however, is wise, just, and eternal for this can be reasoned from scripture. And God is not the embodiment of the abstract forms of Plato, that is, God is not wisdom, justice, and eternity per se. It becomes more and more evident that the most conclusive statement we can make about the nature of God is that we know nothing.

If God is to institute the natural laws, we must ponder the age-old question of the transcendent and immanent. But Hobbes fails even to try to unite the two, which makes the premise of this thesis shaky. Yet Hobbes would not allow God to be separated from his creation.

"They...have a wretched apprehension of God, who imputing idleness to him, do take from him the government of the world and mankind...if he mind not these inferior things, (then)...what is above us, doth not concern us. God would be to men "as though he were not at all."8

8 Ibid. Vol II, p. 214
Since God is corporeal, he acts as body upon body. God's irresistible power justifies all acts, a causal agency. So even the resurrection of the dead is not the raising of a glorified spirit-body in orthodox Christian terms, but the reviving of a corpse.

By his own definitions of the divine, Hobbes does not solve the paradox of the transcendent and the immanent; but every theism faces this problem. Christianity tries to solve the problem with the incarnated deity of Jesus, and still fails to show how a transcendent deity can enter the human realms of space and time.

Since Hobbes failed to define an exact role for God in the universe, we shall examine what he viewed faith to be. "Acknowledgement of Scripture to be the Word of God is not evidence, but faith, and faith consisteth in the trust we have of other men;...the men so trusted are the holy men of God's church, succeeding one another from the time of those that saw the wondrous works of God Almighty in the flesh."\(^9\)

We must rely upon the Holy Scriptures in our faith. To doubt the Scripture is to doubt the law.

"He...to whom God hath not supernaturally revealed that (the Scriptures) are his...is not obliged to obey them, by any authority, but his whose commands have already the force of laws."\(^\text{10}\)

Arising from the ancient texts of Scripture are the defenses for Hobbes' statements. God is corporeal because St. Paul said, "In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Hobbes

\(^9\) Ibid. Vol. IV, p. 65

\(^\text{10}\) Ibid. Vol. III, p. 378
remained a fundamentalist throughout his system. Since the word "incorporeal" it does not appear in the scriptures, Hobbes used Scripture to support his doctrine. The whole weight of Hobbes' theology rests in the scriptures. He doubted the possibility of revelation having continued past the apostolic times, spurning those who claimed to have divine visions; he does not, however, doubt the teaching authors of the scriptures. Much of the scriptures is incomprehensible, and Hobbes reverted to his doctrine on the incomprehensibility of God as the basis of fideism. But his whole stand is faith so skeptical, one wonders if faith is possible at all.

Before we proceed to the theory of obligation, that is, the natural law as divine command, let us summarize this short perusal of Hobbes' theology of God. Having reworked scholastic philosophy and overturned severe orthodox ingredients, Hobbes did not successfully explain his theology or form it into a tight system. His proofs are weakened by his own skepticism. God is transcendent, but thoroughly immanent in the causes of the world. Hobbes, nonetheless, failed to find a homogeneous solution of the two ideas. Hobbes' biblical fideism is so opposed to rationalistic system that it is a great wonder that one could be a believer. Hobbes appears to have almost undermined his entire theology. This does not necessarily say that Hobbes was irreligious, but just not very enlightened in theology.

Despite the weakness of the theology, it is evident that Hobbes went beyond a naturalistic system which relied solely on the scientific method. The existence of God is suggested by reason, but it finds a
true foundation only in faith. Hobbesian theology illustrates that
causal relationships must have a source of ultimate causality is
infinite, the means to approach the source is swallowed up in the
vast complexity of the universe. These problems aside, Hobbes' system was still very secure in the realms of his materialism, scientific method, and psychology of man. But in ethics and politics, Hobbes expressed moral convictions which cannot be grounded in his moral theory.

The clue to the understanding of his moral science of civil philosophy lies in the method of Euclid's geometry, the method of science understood by Hobbes. But Hobbes' doctrine of moral obligation was a religious doctrine, and a law of nature outside the divine realm was mere philosophic fiction, comparable with Euclid's fiction of a point. Now we shall seek evidence for these claims in a religious background.

As previously mentioned, Hobbes professed to accord to scripture, and only to Scripture, unquestionable authority over his mind. His sincerity cannot be doubted if we wish to pursue this thesis further, but history cannot do less than add credence to the belief of Hobbes' sincerity. Hobbes would give support not to the School Divines who relied on metaphysics, but to the reformers who drew support from scripture. God was in the Scripture, not science.

This thesis holds that Hobbes would not have tackled civil philosophy had he not believed that men were obligated in conscience. Civil philosophy is not independent of religion, an essential part of every commonwealth. The laws of nature arise from Scripture as the
commands of God, and the civil philosophy is not separated from the Christian religion. Scripture provided the only source of moral convictions. And what Hobbes wrote of obligation by laws of nature is intelligible only in the light of his Scriptural conception of obligation by the Moral Law of God. 11

Hobbes viewed religion through a political scope, trying to sanctify politics. The Old Testament was the source of the Law; and the Moral Law, influenced by the Gospels, was reduced to one commandment of mutual charity. The Moral Law of God is the only law, and civil law finds in its origin in the Moral Law, laws which man cannot transgress. Moral good, being relative to God's laws, is determined for, and not by, man.

"The man who strives with all possible endeavor to fulfill the laws of God is just. The just man does not in fact fulfill the law; there is none who has not transgressed, but God accepts the insufficient plea of the just who believe in Christ. God accepts the will for the work as well in good as in evil men." 12

Yet the law allows man to preserve himself in time of danger. At all times, true fulfillment of the law is an inward as well as outward action. Injustice consists "in the pravity of the will, as well as in the irregularity of the arch." 13 Despite the natural inclination of the passions, God requires man to submit to his Law, sacrificing his will to the will of God revealed in the Law.


13 Ibid, Chapter III, p. 330
The Moral Law is law for the inward as well as for the outward man, and since the inner tests a man's heart, it is the most important. Conscience becomes a man's guide. Also, the Law of God does not demand the willfully impossible. What man ought to do is nothing more than what he can do. But Hobbes believed in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. One cannot change what God has willed, and why God predestines what he does is a mystery beyond human comprehension. Those predestined for damnation cannot do what they ought to do. Free will is given little importance, and man's understanding always dictates that he ought to obey God's Law. God's Law is law for man as man and since man is accountable to the Law, he is only accountable to God. This gives rise to the rights of the sovereign in the commonwealth, that institution which is the divinely appointed cure-all for man's sinfulness. The Commonwealth, while being coercive, must be moral. The mandates of the sovereign are the imperfect extensions of God's Law. Sovereigns exist for the good of the people, and "God made kings for the people, and not people for kings."\(^\text{14}\)

The sovereign makes civil laws, but does not determine morality, which is God's realm; God will deal with its transgressors. The king can only punish on the civil level. Hence, a civil law may be immoral, but it is still law. To ignore an immoral law is to transgress the sovereign; and since the sovereign is divinely appointed, God is transgressed. Thus a man may be guiltless in following the civil law, but God determines whether that man is just. Laws give peace, but morality gives salvation.

\(^{14}\text{Ibid. Chapter VI, p. 13}\)
So we may conclude that Hobbes' morality is traditional and Christian. He draws his doctrine of civil obedience from scripture, concluding that if a Christian is an obedient subject to the state, he does not transgress the Moral Law. So we see that the moral thought of the Leviathan is not an original moral doctrine, but the originality lies in the method of the Leviathan.

In Hobbes' political thought, men have duties, not rights. Man has obligations, an essential part of Christian thought. Obligations imply an obliger, and obliged, and a bond, an instrument by or with which the binder holds the bound. Every law is a bond; God binds men by his moral laws.

All obligations bind man, but not his sense, memory, understanding, reason and opinion. These "are not in our power to change"; they "are not the effects of our will but our will of them." Will also is not bound by obligation. The virtues are bound, but the introduction of a will which is of grace leaves obligation by God's laws an inexplicable mystery.

Moral obligation was for Hobbes one type of obligation, the supernatural obligation bestowed upon man by God, an act which is not voluntary for man, but is incumbent upon him. Hobbes also describes covenants which are man-to-man obligations, and these are totally voluntary. The obligation to perform covenants is moral, or natural obligation by the natural (divinely instituted) law of justice.

\[15\text{Ibid. Chapter III, p. 360}\]
There can be no injustice under this law until men have entered into valid covenants. The moral obligation to perform covenants is obligation by an eternal law; the obligation to perform every valid covenant cannot arise out of particular covenants. The obligation to perform covenants is prior to the making of any covenant. The obligation is always subsequent to the particular covenant out of which it arises. A man cannot bind himself, since he can easily get out of that. He can only be bound by another man to whom the words of covenant are addressed. These man-to-man covenants are obligations of promise. But obligations of man by God are from debt. The Jews and Christians are also bound by obligation of promise from the Old and New Covenants.

The natural obligation imposed by God is the foremost obligation, as civil covenants are imitations of the divine. Thus, there is a natural obligation to live up to the artificial obligations, those covenants which men enact to keep peace and true conscience.

"Artificial obligation is obligation only in virtue of the natural obligation to perform covenants." This lays the foundation for human justice, human artificial rights and obligations, of legal as distinct from moral rights and obligations.

When man enters society, he sacrifices his natural right and creates an obligation not to transgress his fellow members in society,


18Ibid. Volume III., p. 324
because he is morally bound to do so by divine law. A covenant, if lawful, obliges per vim legis naturae, or "in the sight of God."

The covenant transfers right, but not natural right totally. What Hobbes calls a transfer of right is a laying down of a part of his natural right by one party, which makes an artificial right for another party. But no relationship exists between the natural light and the obligations of man, and the rights and obligations of another. No man is accountable to another in these rights. In Hobbes' religious thought, moral right and moral obligations attach to each man solely as the subject of God. The moral ground of each man's artificial right is the natural obligation of the other to perform the covenant. In the Commonwealth, every subject is artificially bound by every other subject to authorize every act of the sovereign, bound by the words of his covenant.

With the background of Scripture, Hobbes shared his opinions about moral obligations as confirmed in Scripture:

"Though a man should make all his actions such as the law of God, revealed in Scripture, commands, so far as outward observance is concerned, but not on account of the law itself, but on account of the punishment annexed to the law, or for the sake of glory, he is, nevertheless, an unrighteous man. God does not accept the lip-service of those who have removed their hearts far from him. This means that the moral law is fulfilled only when it is itself the cause of the act which is in conformity with it. This implies the will to obedience."19

With statements such as these, we can conclude that Hobbes was a very moral man who relied on scripture for the support of his moral system. Man is bound in his covenants, not by strength of his natural reason, but because God commanded that it be so. If we are to believe

that Hobbes' entire system arose from mechanistic, materialistic rationalism alone, we ignore a very obvious source of his thought, the Sacred Scriptures. The system of Hobbesian ethics evolves from the scriptural tradition, and in turn provides the background for the civil philosophy. Moral obligation is a mystery which can only be understood in terms of theistic belief as presented in the *Leviathan*. 
CHAPTER V

Conclusion

As a result of the investigations in the previous chapter, several questions arise. The possibility of Hobbes' being an atheist appears ludicrous to us in light of historical investigation and philosophical inquiry. Why was Hobbes so labelled? Possibly because he threatened the institutional Church and was so branded by the clerics in a defensive move. This becomes understandable when we see that the church in England was not filling its Hobbesian role in society, that being a supportive institution of the civil state.

Nonetheless, the branding of Hobbes as "atheistic" created a school of interpretation of his philosophy that has dominated well into this century. History has done an injustice to man's philosophy. The attitudes of Hobbes' contemporaries incorrectly influenced any future students of Hobbes. With the supposed absence of the divine being, interpreters of Hobbes were forced to make Hobbes' system totally self-contained in a rationalist, mechanist scheme. Obviously they selected the positions of Hobbes which fit their schema and ignored or tried to overrationalize the rest. Not until the work of A.E. Taylor in the 1930's was Hobbes reinterpreted without a rationalistic attitude assumed at the beginning. Since then, a debate between traditionalists and reinterpreters has shed more and more light on the true nature of Hobbes' philosophy. We learn from controversy, and the debate still continues.
The theory of obligation has been clearly shown to be rooted in a theological background. Man may enter into the social contract due to fear, but it is a fear of God. This does not rule out the possibility of man concluding by reason to enter the social contract. But Hobbes determined that the motivating principle had a divine origin.

In an overview of Hobbes' system one finds an attractive element for personal theologizing. Hobbes could not be convinced that something unperceivable exists. The super-empirical principles of ancient and medieval philosophy can appear to modern man as something dated and foreign. Few people can find spiritual consolation in a God whose nature is lost in an arena of Aristotelian terminology. The Church oftentimes fails to provide rituals which convey the mystical element of the divine. God does not seem integrated into a world that immerses itself in existential outlooks. The highly academic deity does not appear immanent in the twentieth century scenario. Hobbes sought a God who could be understood in the terms of his materialism and fit the scientific method outlook. His reasoning was not an attempt to devalue the divinity of God, but to make him more comprehensible to a world infatuated with Newtonian physics and Harvey's biology. In Thomas Hobbes, God was transcendent and immanent both. Scientific discoveries could not undermine the necessity for religious fulfillment in the men of his time or those in the centuries to follow.
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