

“There Goes HOBBS, the Atheist!”

On Hobbes on Religion

by Alissa A. MacMillan

B.A., Yale University, 1995

M.A., Union Theological Seminary, 2004

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Date _____

Matthew Bagger, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date _____

Charles Larmore, Reader

Date _____

Mark Cladis, Reader

Date _____

Thomas A. Lewis, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____

Peter Weber, Dean of the Graduate School

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Brown University, Providence, RI, May 2013

M.A., Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, New York, NY, 2004

B.A., Yale University, New Haven, CT, 1995

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Lecturer/Course Instructor

Development of Western Civilization: Modernity (team-taught), Providence

College, Department of Philosophy, Providence, RI, Fall 2011

On the Human Person, Providence College, Providence, RI, Fall 2011

Philosophy of Religion, Wheaton College, Norton, MA, Spring 2009

Teaching Assistant

Research and Methods, Prof. Carrie Spearin, Brown University, Spring 2012

The Family, Prof. Carrie Spearin, Brown University, Spring 2011

Human Sexuality, Prof. Carrie Spearin, Brown University Fall 2010

Religion and Its Critics, Prof. Matthew Bagger, Brown University, Fall 2008

Introduction to Islam, Caleb Elfenbien, Brown University, Fall 2007

Love Its Concept and Practice, Prof. Mark Cladis, Brown University, Spring 2007

Mystical Traditions of Asia, Prof. Harold Roth, Brown University, Fall 2006

Student Advising

Writing Center Associate, Brown University, 2008-2011

Editor, doctoral dissertation and masters theses for international students at Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY, 2004

PRESENTATIONS

“Religion, Naturalisms, and Hobbes on the Body,” presented at the Renaissance and Early Modern Studies Colloquium, Brown University, February 26, 2011, and at the Mid-Atlantic and New England Maritimes Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, March 17-18, 2011

“Hobbes, Religion, and the Rejection of the *Summum Bonum*,” presented at the Mid-Atlantic and New England Maritimes Regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, March 11-12, 2010

“On the Body: Hobbes’s Ontology,” presented to the Religion and Critical Thought Colloquium at Brown University, January 2010

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Publications Manager, The Collegiate School, New York, NY, 2004-2005

Freelance Writer, 2002-2004

Features Reporter, *The New York Daily News*, New York, NY, May 1999-May 2002

Editorial Assistant/Features Writer, *Redbook Magazine*, New York, NY, 1997-1999

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INTRODUCTION

In his own time, Thomas Hobbes was loudly and not so politely declared an atheist. He was referred to as “the Bug-bear of the nation,”¹ “branded with atheism,”² called a heretic and a “father of atheists,”³ and his most famous work, *Leviathan*,⁴ was reported to Parliament as “a most poisonous piece of atheism.”⁵ Indeed, the quirky man from Malmesbury, described by the future Charles II as, “the oddest fellow he ever met with,”⁶ had a reputation like no other. Alongside his case for a single, all-powerful sovereign, many saw in his work the seeds of secularism and atheism, a view that begins to take away authority from traditional forms of Christianity.

Since its original reception, scholars continue to disagree about the role of religion in Hobbes’s writing, whether his work is indeed ushering in atheism, what that might mean, and even how central a place religion, a topic to which he devotes nearly half of *Leviathan*, has in his overall view. And while Hobbes’s star has risen in recent years, with contemporary scholars turning to his political and moral views for promising resources for a contemporary political theory, his views on religion have remained the topic of quieter debate. What attention those views have received is relatively one-sided.

¹ Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 39.

² John Aubrey, his contemporary biographer, wrote short pieces on some famous thinkers, including Hobbes. The full text can be found at: <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/life>.

³ Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1992) 24-25.

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. ed. by C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985 [1651]).

⁵ Sommerville, xiv.

⁶ Sommerville, 21.

Interpreters have examined his views on religion, often indecipherable and certainly complex, but few have explored in depth some of the implications and consequences of his views. And, lately, those who have taken him seriously on what he has to say about religion often read Hobbes as an especially religious thinker while, ironically, overlooking some central aspects of his views on religion.

The so-called “standard” reading of Hobbes on religion often agrees, at the most general level, with the original reception, seeing in his work everything from a subtle but devastating critique of Christianity to a tepid, somewhat agnostic view on the matter. But, in some more recent debate, scholars seek to establish Hobbes’s work as doing quite the opposite. This newer strand of interpretation sees in Hobbes a good Anglican, a “sincere and relatively orthodox Christian,”⁷ a divine command theorist, and a philosopher who was engaging with religion, as these scholars see it, in the only way in which it could be engaged at the time – authentically. The most recent studies of Hobbes on religion more often take this position. Indeed, it seems, scholars only take Hobbes seriously on religion if they see his views as seriously religious.

Those who have most recently treated Hobbes as quite sincere about what he has to say about religion, both in *Leviathan* and throughout the rest of his work, tend to give what is called a “theological” or “religious” interpretation of Hobbes, the less standard but more recently embraced reading. They are interested in what he has to say about religion because they see his views on religion – again, often construed as traditionally Anglican or Calvinist – as foundational to his political and moral projects. They see God at the ground of everything else Hobbes has to say. And in so reading him this way, they

⁷ A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 1.

interpret his work as authentically religious, the political as imbued with the theological, as in line with the Church, and as providing a genuine, if quite typical, theological analysis, for example, in the second half of *Leviathan*.

The more common set of interpreters, including scholars like Richard Tuck, Edwin Curley, David Gauthier, and Leo Strauss, often considered to be maintaining the standard view, are referred to as the “secular” readers of Hobbes. As with some of Hobbes’s contemporaries, many of whom saw atheism and a critique of religion at the center of his work, these readers often see Hobbes as everything from an uninteresting, agnostic theist to ushering in atheism, making moves that will secularize the political and social sphere, and as offering explicit or quite subtle critiques of religion itself, most specifically Christianity. Curley is an example of someone who sees him as utterly insincere in his views on religion: “I prefer a more radical interpretation: that Hobbes is an atheist, and that everything he says about god—that he exists, that he is unknowable, that he is a corporeal spirit—is a subterfuge, necessitated by the possibility of persecution.”⁸ Others view him as a careful skeptic or somewhat agnostic. But, these “secular” readers primarily concentrate on his political and moral visions, considering his work on religion either a dispensable or secondary aspect of his view.

In some important ways, both sets of interpreters are right. This project argues that the so-called secular interpreters have a better reading of Hobbes on religion, seeing in his work an important and somewhat original critique of religion. But, for the most part, they fail to take seriously Hobbes’s work on religion and neglect the role it plays in his broader vision. And while the theological readers are right to take seriously Hobbes’s

⁸ Edwin Curley, “Hobbes versus Descartes,” in *Descartes and His Contemporaries*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene, 97-109 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 106.

views on religion, the major thrust of their interpretation is mistaken. So, scholars focusing on Hobbes on religion end up misinterpreting and misusing his views, and as a result, skew some of his broader political and moral claims.

The main argument of this dissertation is that the original reaction to Hobbes, the concerns that his work might include the seeds of secularism or atheism, was a merited reaction. The original readers may not have seen his views as atheist for the same reasons we do, as will become clear, and the concerns of his contemporaries were certainly of a different ilk, but the best reading of Hobbes on religion sees his view as mainly critical of Christianity and, in its way, quite modern. Hobbes makes the case that religion is a natural, human phenomenon, born from our social and linguistic practices and based in particular features of our human psychology. In order to make sense of religion, Hobbes might say, one first has to make sense of the human being and the human being as a rational, passionate, and social creature. The theological readers fail to recognize this very fundamental aspect of his work.

But this is far from the end of the story. To read Hobbes on religion in this way is to identify a crucial piece of his broader political and moral vision. To miss the story on religion, as many of the secular readers do, is to leave off a substantial component to his view. It is to miss a rich, promising resource for understanding some of our own contemporary questions. Although armed with some blunter tools and less sophisticated resources, Hobbes saw religion in a way that was not considered seriously until over a century later, and is debated even today.

This thesis argues, along the lines of the secular interpreters, that Hobbes is not a plainly theological thinker. But, in agreement with the theological interpreters, he does

not consider religion to be an afterthought. There is more persuasive evidence, based especially on a close analysis of the text, and on some historical considerations, that Hobbes is indeed explaining religion as a natural phenomenon, a specifically human practice based in particular psychological, rational, linguistic, and social features of the human being. While some scholars have argued for this reading based on various facets of his view, this dissertation makes the more thoroughgoing case that his perspective on religion is consistent with his views of the human being, the political, and the social – and, more critically, that a full consideration of Hobbes’s political and moral vision requires this particular reading of religion. Indeed, religion plays a central role in his view of how human beings are best able to achieve peace together.

Hobbes makes some significant claims that establish him as an especially modern thinker whose views on religion might have something to offer us in our own time. Specifically, Hobbes grounds his views in the science of his time, submitting our knowledge to the scientific method, he focuses on human psychology and embodiment, recognizing that understanding the human being and human social practices is the only way to make sense of our religious and political activities, he turns to language and connects it to rationality in a way that only finds footing centuries later. He sees language as a social and socially constitutive system and his view of language, in conjunction with his more robust picture of the human being, provides evidence for a reading of Hobbes as accounting for the social in ways often overlooked by scholars, calling into question some aspects of methodologically individualist interpretations of Hobbes. He also takes up important features of naturalism so understood, anticipating aspects of views currently embraced by philosophers. These general features of Hobbes’s thought provide some of

the basic groundwork for this project. His insights and strategies in these areas are critical for interpreting his views on religion.

While the religious readers of Hobbes often maintain that no 17th century thinker would or could hold the kinds of views attributed to him by some of the secular interpreters, they not only fail to see the room for innovation that exists during this period, but also fail to recognize some of the subtle but major moves Hobbes makes from within the field he inhabits. True, much of his language will echo the language of his own time, as he is indeed a man of time. But that does not mean he cannot offer quite forward-thinking insights about religion, although often still encased in 17th century thought. Indeed, he is writing from and for a particular period, in the only language they have. Hobbes's case for considering religion as something of a natural phenomenon can only be made in the form of discussion used in the period and with the tools at his disposal.

This project makes the case that: 1) Hobbes is offering a naturalized account of religion, rendering it a human social phenomenon, consistent with his materialism, and a consequence of our rational, linguistic, and passionate natures, while importantly grounding it in social practice; 2) to read Hobbes this way on religion is critical for interpreting his political project, as religion plays an essential and parallel part in his story, giving insight into some of the coherence to Hobbes's view; and, 3) that some of the ways in which Hobbes attends to questions about the human being in society and about the definition and role of religion offer promising resources for taking on some of our current concerns in philosophy and religion, especially to do with questions about the task of a naturalistic study of religion.

To look back at Hobbes becomes a matter of not only getting clear on the thought of one of the major figures in the modern period, but also finding in his work tools for shaking up our own perspective on some pressing questions. Indeed, the use of some modern concepts in the study of earlier thought might “facilitate a better understanding of aspects of past thought through the additional explanatory power of our modern devices and terminology,”⁹ and the past might do likewise, helping us to take on some of our own questions in a new way. This project engages this perspective.

Chapter one takes up Hobbes’s ontology, namely his materialism. From its earliest reception, critics saw his materialism as a direct threat to religion in general, and Christianity especially. I argue that this initial reaction, instructive in its own right, is also merited. But the threat to religion posed by Hobbes is somewhat different from what his contemporaries feared, and his materialist view and attendant theory of knowledge provide crucial evidence for Hobbes’s view of religion. In looking closely at Hobbes’s materialism and at aspects of his epistemology, I argue that he was something of a methodological and a metaphysical naturalist, as it would be described in today’s terms, and that echoes of this naturalism in his own work serve as an important key to interpreting his view of religion as stemming from the human being and human nature but also end up serving to identify some limits to his own metaphysical view.

Chapter two turns to Hobbes’s linguistic theory and his theory of the mind. This chapter first makes the case, in agreement with interpreters like Terence Ball and Philip Pettit, that his is a surprisingly modern view of language: for Hobbes, human beings are linguistic creatures, language is a tool created by humans, used in concert with reason,

⁹ Anat Biletzki, *Talking Wolves: Thomas Hobbes on the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997) 18.

and language is the source of agreement and social peace, along with confusion, power struggles, and misunderstanding. Aspects of his view of language, in conjunction with his view on religion, serve to call into question some aspects of interpretation of Hobbes as a methodological individualist, making the case that his is a more socially framed and holistic account. And, with this view of his linguistic theory in hand, his critique of philosophy and religion becomes especially clear. Hobbes's discussion of religion can then be read as consistent with his discussion of political theory – religion, like the social contract, is a product of particular features of the human being and generated by the activity of a linguistic community. Religion, in Hobbes's view, is not a special case, a practice emerging from above, from some divine force, but religion, like any social practice, forms from below, from humanity, from this world, and from the social exchange and activity that takes place in this world. His work on religion, especially in the second half of *Leviathan*, is then a direct application of his theory of language to religious language in particular, seen clearly in his analysis of the “signification” of theological terms, and it is an effort on Hobbes's part to take away some of the force and authority those terms have for the Church.

Chapter three makes the case that Hobbes's definition of religion, and the major claims he makes about religion, are based in his view of the passions, in conjunction with reason. Religion emerges from some of the same human faculties and passions as politics, and religion, like politics, plays a critical role for Hobbes in the quest for a peaceful, secure commonwealth. While secular interpreters rightly take into account the role of the passions in Hobbes, theological interpreters overlook its place, and in doing so, set aside an important key to making sense of his views. While these readers often

focus first and foremost on the law of nature, the divine law and God as existing prior to any activity of the human being, and providing the first and only source of obligation, Hobbes's story of the passions provides a clearer and more complete narrative of what he thinks is the source of religion itself and obligation. The end of this chapter returns briefly to this question of the law of nature.

The fourth chapter turns to Hobbes's citizen and his vision of social practice and exchange. With his more complete account of religion in mind, Hobbes sees religion as a practice explained in a similar way to the political, but encompassed by his account of the political. To be religious, for Hobbes, is a social practical matter of obedience to the sovereign, in service of peace of the commonwealth. Religion and politics are of a piece for Hobbes, systems created by human social activities serving particular purposes. But, religion and politics diverge when considering the consequences of Hobbes's analysis. While politics will survive – even benefit – from Hobbes's description, the fate of religion is significantly less secure, pointing to another strength of the “secular” reading of Hobbes on religion.

The final chapter turns to some contemporary concerns, employing some insights from Hobbes on religion as a way to critique a recent move in the study of religion, that of using the linguistic theory of Robert Brandom in service of a more robust and broad political theory. Having established Hobbes as offering a theory with some important points of contact with Brandom's, a close look at Brandom, alongside Hobbes, helps make the case that Brandom's theory is not equipped to do the kind of political work some scholars of religion so seek. But, Hobbes's engagement with language and human

psychology helps highlight aspects of the important descriptive and explanatory tasks of the study of religion, tasks for which Brandom is an especially useful resource.

The scholarship

Hobbes is known for his materialism and empiricism, his focus on the geometrical method, and his social contract theory. When it comes to human nature, he is commonly seen as maintaining a somewhat negative or individualistic view of the human being, as opposed to Aristotle's view that we are naturally social beings. But, as will become clear throughout this project, Hobbes well accounts for the role of the social as formative and constitutive of the human being and Hobbes conceives of human practices as of a piece, an interconnected whole, its parts isolated for the purposes of analytic clarity. Human beings, for Hobbes, are constituted by language and formed in and through society. All human beings have basic equality, passions are primary, motion is central, and we have aversions and appetites; good is what we have an appetite for, evil is what we have an aversion to. Reason also plays an equally central role as the faculty, tied importantly to language.

In his well-known thought experiment, Hobbes famously describes man in the state of nature,¹⁰ where life without a common power is one of war “of every man,

¹⁰ As will become clear throughout this project, the state of nature is best read as a thought experiment, Hobbes himself admitting there has never truly been such a condition: “It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places, where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small Families, the concord whereof dependeth on naturall lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before. Howsoever, it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common Power to feare; by the manner of life, which men that have formerly lived under a peacefull government, use to degenerate into, in a civill Warre.

“But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of warre one against another; yet in all times, Kings, and Persons of Sovereigne authority, because of their Independency, and in continuall jealousies...” *Leviathan*, 187.

against every man,”¹¹ where perpetual fear reigns, along with the “danger of violent death,” and he see this as a “time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man...no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”¹² Without agreements in place and without a culture to speak of, merely driven by a fear of death or desire for self-preservation, in this state, “nothing can be Unjust. The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have there no place. Where there is no common Power, there is no Law; where no Law, no Injustice.”¹³ Hobbes sees right and wrong as features of society and the consequence of agreement between individuals as to just what constitutes right and wrong.

In this state of nature, human beings have yet to come together and form any kind of agreement and we live in a constant posture of war and state of anxiety. But our passions also incline us to peace (we would prefer to feel secure), and our reason recognizes that peace would be better, so, we come together and agree to lay aside certain rights in order to secure our own peace and security. We are disposed to obey a common power because of our desire for ease and sensual delight, a fear of death and wounds,¹⁴ a desire of knowledge of arts and leisure, a desire of praise, a fear of oppression, and for want of science and understanding.¹⁵

From here, Hobbes constructs the social contract. With the move to take on forms of agreement, we exit this state of nature and the perpetual posture of war and can finally sleep at night. But, to keep to the contract, we need to put an authority in place to keep us

¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 185.

¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186.

¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 162.

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 164-165.

all in awe and to keep people from backing out of the agreement: this is the absolute sovereign, to whom we transfer some of our rights and from whom we gain protection.

Hobbes also spends nearly half of *Leviathan* on religion and theological matters, leading to the intense disagreement among scholars about just what Hobbes is up to when it comes to religion. Debate persists over whether the human being in the state of nature is obliged to no one but himself, and so inclined to obey only his or her passions and reason, or is already always obliged to God.¹⁶ Various versions and readings of this distinction, and of some other aspects of Hobbes's body of thought, lead to the numerous and conflicting interpretations of Hobbes on religion.

The most general distinction often made about interpretations of Hobbes on religion are, as A.P. Martinich and Edwin Curley devise it, one of secular versus religious or theistic readings. The secular interpreters, the more common, standard reading, may have something to say about Hobbes's theism, but more centrally, "argue[] that his moral and political theory is independent of any theistic suppositions."¹⁷ Secular interpreters include figures like Quentin Skinner, David Gauthier, Curley, and Jean Hampton. For the secular interpreters, the primary value in Hobbes's work pertains to morality and politics and what he has to say about religion is independent of those arguments. For these interpreters, the crux of Hobbes's argument does not rest on any theological claims, claims that can, for the most part, be dismissed.¹⁸ Theistic or religious interpretations, meanwhile, with its most recent voice in the work of A.P. Martinich, are something of a

¹⁶ This questions will be dealt with more thoroughly at the end of chapter 3.

¹⁷ Edwin Curley, "Religion and Morality in Hobbes," in Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris (eds.) *Rational Commitment and Social Justice*, 90-121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998) 91.

¹⁸ The point is not to determine whether Hobbes himself was an atheist or an Anglican or anything else, although it is often discussed in that language (even, perhaps, by me), rather whether, in the case of *Leviathan* or any of his other works, his philosophical view necessarily leads to a kind of atheism, whatever that might be, either intentionally or unintentionally.

revival of views held from the 1930s to 1960s by A.E. Taylor, Howard Warrender, and F.C. Hood. The so-called “Taylor-Warrender thesis” reduces “all obligation in Hobbes to an ultimate obligation to obey God, from which all else must be derived.”¹⁹ This interpretation is, most generally, that “the idea of God and other religious concepts plays an important part in Hobbes’s philosophy.”²⁰ Positions among theistic interpreters differ, just as they do among secular interpreters, but in the broadest of strokes, Hobbes is thought of as concerned primarily with religious matters and religion is deemed foundational to his moral and political philosophy.

While many of Hobbes’s contemporaries declared him an atheist, the strand of interpretation that began at the end of the 19th century and is seeing a revival of sorts today, reads Hobbes as decidedly theological, with his moral and political philosophy grounded on religious claims. This religious or theistic group of interpreters holds that Hobbes is a full-blown theist or Christian, this status seen as mattering to his philosophy. The most well known statements of this view come from Taylor, Warrender, and Hood, who find that Hobbes “meant quite seriously what he so often says, that the ‘natural law’ is the command of God, and to be obeyed *because* it is God’s command.”²¹ Taylor sees Hobbes on natural law as claiming: “It is in strict accordance with this recognition of the imperativeness of the law that Hobbes always lays it down that *obligation* is not created by the sovereign when he issues his orders backed by threats and penalties. The moral obligation to obey the natural law is antecedent to the existence of the legislator and the

¹⁹ David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 195.

²⁰ A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 13.

²¹ A.E. Taylor, “The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes,” *Philosophy* 13 406-24 (1938) 418.

civil society.”²² Human beings do not come together to create an obligation; rather, obligation to God specifically already exists in the state of nature. Without this preexistent obligation, Taylor finds, individuals could never have come together in the first place.

Taylor notes that those reading Hobbes as an atheist often point to how he describes God’s nature as incomprehensible. But, Taylor argues, this view was “common stock-in-trade of orthodox Christian scholastics...it was the universal scholastic doctrine that the *essentia* of God cannot be known to us in this life.”²³ Hobbes may find that there are serious problems ascribing intellect and will to God, but so did plenty of Christian orthodox thinkers.

Although departing from Taylor on some points, Warrender later fleshes out his view on what Hobbes meant by the law of nature, more fully arguing: “all obligation in Hobbes’s doctrine reduces to ‘natural obligation.’”²⁴ If the moral obligation is antecedent, as Taylor describes, it must be given from God. Warrender explains, “if the laws of nature in the State of Nature are considered as the commands of God, they may properly be regarded as laws, and it is this factor which is responsible for constituting their obligatory character.”²⁵ The laws of nature oblige because they are God’s commands. If the laws of nature are not considered commands of God, Warrender continues, they are only “rational principles of prudence,”²⁶ useful to the atheist as a guide for preservation, but not obligatory.

²² Taylor, 411.

²³ Taylor, 420.

²⁴ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957) 9.

²⁵ Warrender, 98.

²⁶ Warrender, 99.

Influenced by the Taylor-Warrender line of interpretation, A.P. Martinich's *The Two Gods of Leviathan* is a major contemporary statement of the theistic reading of Hobbes. His thoroughgoing theological interpretation renders Hobbes very much a company man, entirely straight forward, meaning what he says, and neither cynical nor subversive. For Martinich, Hobbes is quite in line with Christian orthodoxy, specifically Calvinism: "Hobbes was a sincere and relatively orthodox Christian."²⁷ Martinich sees Hobbes as having two goals in mind, "to show that the distinctively religious content of the Bible could be reconciled with the new science," and "to prove that religion could not legitimately be used to destabilize a government."²⁸ Hobbes is trying earnestly and truly to reconcile scientific advances with Christianity and disarm religion as a source for revolution. Martinich sees Hobbes's contribution to the secularization of philosophy as unintended²⁹ and explains that Hobbes, "was supporting a case for a state-controlled Church of England that would be episcopal in polity and Calvinist in theology...He was supporting in effect the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church of England, which had become unpopular in the 1640s"³⁰

Within the broader categorization of theological readers, there are some differences in focus. Taylor and Warrender render God foundational to Hobbes's entire body of thought. God lies at the ground of his work through the law of nature. Because the law of nature obliges even in the state of nature, all are obligated to God first and foremost, so all obligation is based in God's existence. Meanwhile, scholars like Martinich, Eric Brandon, and Sharon Lloyd see the second half of *Leviathan* as carrying

²⁷ Martinich, 1.

²⁸ Martinich, 5.

²⁹ Martinich, 8.

³⁰ Martinich, 33.

more weight for Hobbes, in this way trying to establish a coherence to his view. But they see Hobbes as a fundamentally religious thinker, rendering his political philosophy itself religiously inclined.³¹ In some sense they take the theological approach even further, rendering everything Hobbes says a matter of theology.

Within the so-called secular view, folks like Gauthier, Kavka, Watkins, Skinner, and Hampton focus on the “game-theoretic approach”³² to Hobbes’s view, and this in particular is considered the standard view in Hobbes studies,³³ focused most centrally on the political aspects of Hobbes’s work, often its relation to game theory, and the human psychological feature of self-interest. This approach, loosely considered the “secular” approach in the starker categorization of interpreters, then either ignores or misrepresents the second half of *Leviathan*, and is accused of not paying much attention to historical context.³⁴ Religion, for these secular readers, is something of a side-note, and of little interest because it is perceived as having no real influence. Gauthier, for example, might deem Hobbes a theist, but he still considers the sections concerning religion to be merely “secondary.” He explains, “Heroically, one can draw the conclusion that Hobbes’s system presupposes Christianity, as F.C. Hood does. If our interpretation is correct, Christianity is important for Hobbes only in so far as it must be reconciled with his views, which are themselves entirely independent of it.”³⁵ Gauthier recognizes Hobbes’s theism but sees it as entirely independent of his main theory.

³¹ Brandon provides a helpful articulation of some of the subtleties of this distinction. His critique of these views is that they focus on Hobbes’s religion at the expense of his materialism. *The Coherence of Hobbes’s Leviathan* (New York: Continuum, 2007) 11.

³² A categorization offered by Brandon, 11.

³³ Sharon Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes’s Leviathan: The Power of Mind Over Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 6.

³⁴ Brandon, 8. Skinner is an obvious exception to this critique.

³⁵ Gauthier, 187fnt.

A more extreme version of the secular reading, those conceiving of Hobbes as attempting to undermine Christianity and offer a serious and substantial critique of religion, is evident in the views of Leo Strauss, Johnston, Paul Cooke, and Curley. This reading sees Hobbes as maintaining atheist views within his work and providing an overwhelming, if strategically hidden, critique of Christianity.³⁶ These readers, although making claims about Hobbes's view of religion, spend significantly more time focusing on his political or moral vision.

Again, as seen in some of the secondary literature, interpreters of Hobbes on religion get a lot right. But, they also miss crucial pieces, pieces that provide useful resources for making sense of Hobbes more generally and for investigating our own questions. Curley makes the explicit and, I hold, convincing claim that:

Hobbes was probably an atheist, but that at a minimum he was deeply skeptical about Christianity, and about theism in general, and that seeing that is essential to understanding *Leviathan*. I see Hobbes as one member of an underground movement, which also included Spinoza and Hume, whose purpose was to subvert the dominant religion of their culture and to free people from the authority of the priests and their sacred texts.³⁷

Curley's claims are persuasive, but his evidence focuses on historical considerations, namely comparisons to Machiavelli, Pascal, and Spinoza, an exchange with Leibniz, and considerations of interpretations of the law of nature.

Curley draws comparisons to Machiavelli's politically astute and savvy engagement with religion and sees a close kinship in Hobbes with Spinoza, contending that "we may properly conclude that Spinoza, in some respects, represents what Hobbes himself saw as the logical development of his thought,"³⁸ especially related to the logical

³⁶ An example of an objection to this view is Brandon's, who sees this reading as rendering Hobbes just a bit too suspiciously rhetorically masterful. Parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* would be ironic all the way down, and Brandon does not see this as possible.

³⁷ Curley, "Religion and Morality in Hobbes," 91-92.

³⁸ Curley, "Religion and Morality in Hobbes," 100.

impossibility of miracles and interpretations of the natural law. Curley maintains that Hobbes likely found valuable in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, his conclusion that "God cannot be a lawgiver" and that "When we speak of law in connection with God, the only thing we can coherently mean is a necessary truth about how things actually behave and must behave,"³⁹ not a command human beings may or may not disobey, as with a monarch. A command from God can only be something a human being must do, or cannot but do otherwise, not something that the human being could disobey. Curley also appeals to a letter in which Leibniz seems to try and press Hobbes on this point.⁴⁰

Curley's evidence is indeed crucial and compelling. But, I offer another critical approach to this reading of Hobbes, that is, an investigation of Hobbes on rationality and language, the passions, and social exchange, as a way of building the case, not, primarily, through broader contextual concerns and concerns about the law of nature, although these will be considered. And while Curley's focus is centered on morality, I seek more completely to play out the implications of this reading for religion itself and for its role in his vision of the commonwealth.

Meanwhile, as one example of the theological strand of interpretation, Eric Brandon makes the good case that there is an internal coherence to Hobbes's *Leviathan*, with the first half being the secular, the second half the religious. As Brandon reads it, neither part should be considered more important than the other as both are central to his complete vision of a peaceful, unified commonwealth. Brandon sees Hobbes's materialism as grounding the entire project substantively and he sees a "parallel

³⁹ Curley, "Religion and Morality in Hobbes," 102.

⁴⁰ Curley, "Religion and Morality in Hobbes," 103.

argumentative strategy”⁴¹ to both the case for absolutism and the sovereign and his critique of theological metaphysics, with the first half as based in reason, and the second in both reason and revelation.⁴² Brandon rightly points to Hobbes’s materialism as a common foundation to these spheres, but, as with other interpreters, fails to consider some of the consequences of Hobbes’s robust human psychology, especially for his view on religion. He recognizes its importance for Hobbes, but not its centrality to his account of the emergence and evolution of religion and religious practice. And most central to his position, Brandon interprets the law of nature along the lines of the general approach taken by theological interpreters – that the law is divine law and underlies Hobbes’s entire view.

As we will see, Brandon and others argue for variations of these views, Brandon claiming he will avoid the secular or theological question altogether. Indeed, the argument and interpretation offered in his analysis attempts to split the difference – he sees Hobbes as “presenting a political philosophy both secular and religiously oriented because he felt that both were necessary in order to produce a complete political philosophy.”⁴³ Brandon’s impulse seems right here, and I also argue that Hobbes thinks both the so-called secular and religious need to be taken into account for a complete political philosophy. But while Brandon argues that the religious prong of his view is more decisively religious – that is, in line with Suarez and the Radical Reformation – I argue that Hobbes’s view, along the lines of Curley’s reading, is more thoroughly critical and that he recognizes just what religion is socially and psychologically. In light of this, Hobbes’s work on religion, for example in the second half of *Leviathan*, is upheld by or

⁴¹ Brandon, 119.

⁴² Brandon, 121.

⁴³ Brandon, 13.

imbued with this very naturalistic definition of religion. There is indeed “coherence” to Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, but the pieces cohering look somewhat different from those in Brandon’s proposal.⁴⁴

Historical context

The early modern period has all of the makings of a melodrama: an unforgettable cast of characters – Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Gassendi, to name only some of the leads – and a plot line like no other. At stake were questions about the world itself and what we can know of that world, questions that tied together the concerns of science, politics, and religion. Not only were more specific questions debated, for example, about calculus and the vacuum, but our protagonists were also occupied by debates that called into question the very foundations of how the world was perceived and how individuals saw themselves in that world. In epistemology and metaphysics, in ethics and politics, and especially in the realm of religion, long held views were challenged in grand ways.

The early modern period is also one that set the tone and many of the terms of philosophical debate up until now. As scholars today continue to wrestle with the same questions that drove Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, and others, we recognize in their work very different approaches to some of our own questions. There is much to be mined from this period, one in which Descartes is seen as the clearest voice in setting out many of the questions that occupy us to today. But, Hobbes stands out as an especially modern thinker, one who challenged Descartes’ mind-body dualism well before the pragmatists or postmodernists of the last century, and one who, long before Hume and others, saw the

⁴⁴ Another recent example of work seeking to reconcile Hobbes’s religion with his politics, but in a way that employs the “theological” reading of Hobbes on religion, is Andrés Di Leo Razuk’s recent article, “God as the Equilibrium of the Hobbesian Political System,” in *Hobbes Studies* 24 (2011) 24-43. Razuk argues that reason, as it pertains to a recognition of the limits to our knowledge of God, and revelation, are central to the maintenance of Hobbes’s political system itself.

value in taking human nature and human psychology seriously, recognizing that the constraints our own bodies and faculties bring to us very much shape how we navigate and live in the world. Some of Hobbes's instincts, many of which led him down odd paths indeed, in fact take up strands of debate found in contemporary conversations in philosophy and religious studies. To better understand where Hobbes is coming from, it is worthwhile to briefly stage some of the general historical, philosophical, and political background of the period, along with some of the major debates surrounding religion.

Hobbes lived for an exceptionally long time, especially for the 17th century. With a life stretching over 90 years, from 1588-1679, he was witness to and lived through a crucial period in the history of Western thought. He was born in Westport, England, near Malmesbury, to a minor clergyman. As a young talent, deft with languages, Hobbes was translating texts from Greek to Latin as a teenager.⁴⁵ Aubrey writes that Hobbes's classmates noted his "contemplative melancholiness; he would get himself into a corner, and learn his lesson by heart presently." At age 14, funded by his uncle, Hobbes went to Magdalen Hall at Oxford, where he began his university education in the general Arts,⁴⁶ getting the popular schooling in classical languages and literature, especially the works of Aristotle.⁴⁷ While his early influences were primarily humanistic, Hobbes's areas of interest shift and he comes to science and geometry, metaphysics and physics, his own work engaging in a combination of these influences.⁴⁸ Following his graduation, he was set up with a job as the tutor to the Cavendishes, the Earl of Devonshire, of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. First serving as tutor to William Cavendish, it is through these

⁴⁵ Aubrey, <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/life>.

⁴⁶ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989) 3.

⁴⁷ Glen Newey, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 12.

⁴⁸ Tuck, 16.

relations that Hobbes traveled around Europe, his first trip ending in 1615.⁴⁹ Hobbes spent most of his life employed primarily by either the Cavendishes or their close neighbors and cousins, the Earl of Newcastle,⁵⁰ serving as tutor, financial advisor, and secretary, among other things.⁵¹

In 1628/9, he published his first work, an English translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, a translation taken seriously to this day. His interest in history of this sort was a reflection of the early humanist influences in his life, both through his education and thanks to his employer, who provided him with unprecedented access to some of the most renowned intellectuals of the time, including Galileo Galilei and Francis Bacon, the latter for whom he briefly worked as a secretary. Also shaping some of his own concerns was some of the political literature emerging from Europe. After a visit to Venice, the Cavendishes were focused on issues relating to the Republic, and especially with how some political questions played out in Italy, among other things, about the role of religion and papal power in the government.⁵²

A topic of much debate at the time, thanks to the ongoing 30 Years War (1618-1648) was the uneasy relationship between religion and politics. In an environment especially primed for religious conflict, many were engaged in a “general search for a formula of peace,” one that avoided revolutions in Parliament and civil wars, and reconciled matters relating to obedience to authority in the Church and “interpretation of Scripture generally.”⁵³ In this quest to identify an ideal social vision, one that involved

⁴⁹ Tuck, 4.

⁵⁰ Newey, 12.

⁵¹ Tuck, 4. He also briefly sat on the board of the Virginia Company, as a nominee for his master (Tuck, 4).

⁵² Tuck, 5; Sommerville, xii. See Quentin Skinner's essay *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) for a recent discussion on republicanism and liberty.

⁵³ Stephen Menn, “The Intellectual Setting,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Volume 1*, 33-86, ed. by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 68.

some appeal to resources from the past,⁵⁴ self-preservation emerged as a central concern of this line of thought,⁵⁵ and Hobbes would later take this point to the extreme.

From 1634 to 1636, when Hobbes again toured Europe, this time with the third Earl of Devonshire, he met Marin Mersenne, the French priest, mathematician, and philosopher. Mersenne was especially well-connected and it was through him that Hobbes came to know Pierre Gassendi, who would become something of a friend to Hobbes. It was then that he was also put into contact with Descartes. Mersenne asked Hobbes to contribute a response to Descartes' *Meditations*. The text itself was printed in 1641 with Descartes' original essays, the objections from Hobbes along with those of Caterus, Arnauld, Mersenne, and Gassendi, printed with Descartes' own replies.⁵⁶

Hobbes published his first philosophical works in the 1640s, including *The Elements of Law* (1640) and *De Cive* (1642), meant to be the third piece of a three-part work on the body, man, and society. He published *De Corpore* in 1655 and *De Homine* in 1658. He lived in exile in Paris from 1640 until 1651, and published *Leviathan* in 1651, after which he returned to England.⁵⁷ *Leviathan* is his most studied and commended

⁵⁴ Tuck explains that an idea gripping the imagination of Europe in the 16th century was the vision of something like a "Ciceronian republic" for modern Europe, one in which old moral principles were discarded for an ideal, and in response to the fantastic nature of this view, the emergence of skeptical views like those of Montaigne and Lipsius, which was a blend of "Tacitism, skepticism, and Stoicism in an enticing and persuasive mixture." (Tuck, 9)

⁵⁵ Tuck, 10.

⁵⁶ All are printed together in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, ed. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ Sommerville is a good resource for many of the historical details of the political situation of the time. Touching on some of the broader strokes, Charles I ruled from 1629-1649, calling for a Short Parliament in 1640 to raise money to go to war against the Scots. When his request was denied, the Parliament dissolved, and he soon called for the Long Parliament, which "begins constitutional reforms and attacks advocates of absolutist ideas." (Sommerville, xii) At stake were also questions regarding the extent of Church government and the relationship of power between the clergy and the state. (Sommerville, 19) At this point, fearing for his life, Hobbes fled to France. Civil War in England breaks out in 1642 and the king begins faring poorly in 1644; the royalists are defeated in battles in 1644 and 1645, falling to a final defeat in 1646. The war flared up again in 1649, but the Royalists were again defeated. (Sommerville, 20) In 1649, Charles I is executed, the monarchy and the House of Lords is abolished, and a republic is established, ruled by a Rump Parliament, or the remaining members who with stood the oppositionalist purge (21). The

work, but many of the ideas in *Leviathan* are found in his earlier books.⁵⁸ In 1668, Hobbes published a Latin edition of *Leviathan*, followed by several of his own translations of ancient texts, and *Behemoth*, which was published in 1679, the year of his death.

Atheism

The term atheism, one thrown around so readily in Hobbes's own time, is also the subject of much disagreement when it comes to interpretations of Hobbes on religion. Several scholars rightly point out that 'atheism' had a different meaning then from what it implies today, and pertained most commonly to calling someone a heretic or seeing their views as contrary to the dominant form of Christianity. Appealing to this, and appealing to a more thorough historical story surrounding the term and its use, is perhaps more helpful for the religious interpreters of Hobbes. Martinich makes a compelling case for why, looking merely at some choice historical evidence, Hobbes looks like a man of his time, earnestly engaging in theological debates and called an atheist because of the nature of his views, not because he rejects religion altogether.⁵⁹

But others recognize that, perhaps for the first time, something closer to authentic atheism, tending towards our modern conception of either atheism or some uncertainty about God's existence, was a real possibility during this period. Scholars maintain that

son of Charles I, Charles II, attempted to take the throne (Somerville, xiii) but he was defeated by Cromwell in 1651. (Somerville, 21) In 1650, adult males were required to take an "Engagement," or to promise obedience to the new republic and, that same year, Cromwell invades Scotland. The Scots army then invades England and Cromwell soon defeats the Scots and Charles II. Although he had served as his tutor (Somerville, 21), Hobbes had been excluded from the exiled court of Charles II while he was in France and, having recently seen the publication of *Leviathan* (April/May), Hobbes returns to England and "submits to the republican government." (Somerville, xiv) Hobbes later faces threats of condemnation for his religious views, especially because of reactions to *Leviathan*.

⁵⁸ Tuck is known for some of his work on the development of Hobbes's views on religion. See, for example, "The 'Christian Atheism' of Thomas Hobbes," in Michael Hunter and David Wootton (eds.) *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, 111-130. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

⁵⁹ Martinich, 19-30.

during the 17th century, especially in light of the new mathematical and mechanistic view of the universe, the question of God's function was a live one, and debate about the very existence of God "became a legitimate topic of atheist critiques" – in other words, atheism in this new form became "a real epistemological possibility."⁶⁰ Some scholars see in this period a more vibrant scene, one allowing for new forms of thought and for innovation of all kinds, including innovation pertaining to some long-held religious ideas.

Indeed, to call someone an atheist in the seventeenth century meant a number of things. Martinich and others are examples of scholars who hold that the setting in which Hobbes lives is determined in such a way that no individual could see beyond the specific views of the moment. But, this perspective takes from thinkers much of their creativity and foresightedness. To see Hobbes as inhabiting a Christian world and as a man unable to see things otherwise, is to close off important possibilities for the kinds of creative moves Hobbes might be making. If it were truly impossible to see things otherwise, moving out of a Christian world would also be impossible.

Martinich also baldly states, "few philosophers today think that Hobbes was an atheist."⁶¹ Indeed, as many recognize today, the question of Hobbes's own views remains complicated and unresolved. And again, of very little interest is the concern about whether Hobbes himself was, personally, an atheist. But, as the range of scholarship demonstrates, the case on Hobbes's work on religion is far from closed. And it is very much an open question as to whether the substance of Hobbes's philosophical views, and his discussion of religion, lead to something resembling atheism or the seeds of skeptical

⁶⁰ Jean-Robert Armogathe, "Proofs of the Existence of God," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Volume 1*, 305-330, ed. by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 305.

⁶¹ Martinich, 19.

thought. In appealing so single-mindedly to some features of the period, the theological interpreters of Hobbes emerge as somewhat dogmatic in their interpretations of his views. They find that Hobbes's work could be nothing but one with the popular views of the period. They see in his claim that there is a first cause the claim that this can only be God, and often a God that looks Christian. This move seems extreme. We will certainly not find in Hobbes a straight declaration of, for example, the death of God, the explicit evidence some hope to find. Hobbes was working with the only concepts he had at his disposal. But, features of the period should not mean that innovation was impossible and that, in the context of an important, lively moment in the history of western thought, one in which new ways of thinking were indeed influencing other long held world views, Hobbes could be nothing but a man of his time. The story is indeed complex and part of the task of this project is to help make sense of some of the subtler contours of that story.

Although the matter of atheism and the use of the term is instructive and will be taken into account throughout the project, this thesis appeals less to the historical conditions, although they of course need to be well-accounted for, and more to whether the substance of Hobbes's views necessarily make claims about or lead to questions about the role of religion in society and the truth of Christianity and especially certain theological claims, about the specific role religion should or must take in the social and political spheres, and about the existence of God. I will not be making the case that the accusations of Hobbes's atheism serve as evidence for the case that his ideas might lend themselves to atheist or proto-secular thought. Even Martinich holds that the fact that his contemporaries called him an atheist is not strong evidence for his atheism.⁶² Rather, my appeal to their claims of atheism serves only to highlight the justified suspicion that

⁶² Martinich, 19.

Hobbes might be doing something new with religion – and something that might be feared by those who sought to maintain some of the traditional structures and tenets of the Church. Their declaration of atheism is instructive in this way, and I find that this suspicion was, in many senses, correct, even if their reasons and concerns were different.

On Hobbes on Religion

As Richard Popkin points out, the 17th century is “often seen as a march from religious orthodoxy and oppression towards Enlightenment deism, agnosticism, atheism, and toleration.”⁶³ But, as he also reminds us, the story is in fact exponentially more complicated than this. Indeed, “religious issues were deeply intertwined with philosophical conceptions of knowledge, revelation, the importance of scientific inquiry, human nature, and what it is to be reasonable.”⁶⁴ No single aspect of philosophy or religion can be isolated as the final explanation for certain developments. Issues were connected in such a way as to make this all but impossible.

Hobbes’s own work is especially illustrative of this feature of the period. To come to a conclusion about Hobbes’s views on religion is no easy matter, as they are so tightly connected to his philosophy and political vision. Recognition of this connection is also useful for us, as we get from Hobbes’s work some valuable resources for taking on our own questions, his system being a useful resource for approaching, in new ways, some of the complexity of those questions.

A lot of people have written a lot on Hobbes, sometimes overwhelmingly so. But, as scholarship on Hobbes and the early modern period evolves and as questions

⁶³ Richard Popkin, “The Religious Background of 17th Century Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Volume 1*, 393-422, ed. by Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 393.

⁶⁴ Popkin, 393.

compelling us in our own time change, so too do the kinds of perspectives we bring to the text and the new approaches that might be taken. Religion in our own time is worth examining because of its central and often subtle role in so much of our cultural and political practice. In his own time, Hobbes recognized the kind of impact religion could have and he saw the kinds of moves that could be made, perspectives that could be shifted, to loosen religion's grip, to question its force, to recognize it as a human social phenomenon that human beings very much have control over. To understand religion as he does is one way, along with the central project of politics, meant to move us towards the peaceful society he so seeks.

This project offers a reading of Hobbes on religion that sees in Hobbes's work important seeds of thought on religion and secularism that only develop later in the modern period. While the story is a complex one, Hobbes's work proves invaluable as a resource for some of our thinking on religion. He recognizes some critical areas that we need to make sense of in order to make sense of religion – the scientific method, human psychology, language, and social exchange – and these all compel us even in our time. Although the reasons behind this claim will prove to be significantly more complicated, this dissertation holds that the initial reaction to Hobbes should not be ignored. They were on to something right, as the popular tale has it, when he was unable to walk down the street without encountering “the Boys pointing at him saying, ‘There goes HOBBS, the atheist!’”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Cited in Patricia Springborg, “Hobbes on Religion,” in Tom Sorell (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 347.

Chapter One

Religion, Naturalisms, and Hobbes on the Body

Thomas Hobbes is notorious for being a materialist. All that exists is matter in motion, from the inner workings of the mind to the farthest reaches of the universe. On the very first page of *Leviathan* he declares: “life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within...for what is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves*, but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheeles*, giving motion to the whole Body...”⁶⁶ And even matters of the mind, “desire, aversion, love, benevolence, hope, fear, anger, jealousy, envy, and so on,”⁶⁷ are subject to this material explanation. The world is a material one and the workings of the world are explained through this mechanistic vision. His materialism is thoroughgoing, and he sees all that exists as body.

Hobbes has also been, colorfully and not always kindly, accused of atheism. This accusation is often rooted in his materialism, worried readers lamenting that spirit and the incorporeal, and with it the mysterious, have been squeezed out of the scene. In its place is an entirely mechanistic universe composed of atoms and body, a decidedly ungodly

⁶⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985 [1651]) 81.

⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Part I of De Corpore, Computatio Sive Logica, Logic*, trans. and commentary by Aloysius Martinich (New York: Abaris Books, 1981) 299.

vision. Especially in the early reception of Hobbes's work, his materialism appeared to be a dangerous threat to the very core of Christianity. If all is body, if all is matter, and the world is a merely mechanistic one, what room is there for the immaterial, for the spirit and the soul and for Godly conceptions? Even more, how are normative claims, claims about obligation, authority, and morality, to be reconciled with this materialist view?⁶⁸ How are normative religious claims to be accounted for?

The goal of this chapter is to take on and assess some of the consequences of Hobbes's materialist view for religion in particular. While his contemporaries were concerned with the fate of religion and the immaterial, Hobbes's materialist ontology, in conjunction with his view of knowledge, should perhaps be of more concern for the reader interested in preserving an orthodox Christian theology in Hobbes. While the likes of Ralph Cudworth will see in Hobbes's denial of spirit a denial of Christianity itself, a more troublesome claim for the fate of religion is that, as Leo Strauss writes, "he considered any natural knowledge of God which is more than the knowledge that a First Cause exists, completely impossible."⁶⁹ Theological claims cannot be part of what Hobbes thinks we can know, and so theology cannot be part of philosophy itself,⁷⁰ or part of science – the "knowledge of consequences."⁷¹ In light of his materialism, the kinds of limits Hobbes puts on religious knowledge are an even more serious threat to

⁶⁸ This is a question dealt with, in various ways, throughout this dissertation.

⁶⁹ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 76.

⁷⁰ Strauss continues: "For that reason he systematically excluded not only revealed theology but also natural theology from his philosophy. In order to hide the dangerous nature of this skepticism, to keep up an appearance that he attacked only scholastic theology and not the religion of the Scripture itself, Hobbes fought his battle against natural theology in the name of strict belief in the Scriptures and at the same time undermines that belief by his historical and philosophical criticism of the authority of the Scriptures." *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 76. Strauss is an example of a "secular" interpreter who sees Hobbes as insincere in his religious professions.

⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 115, 149.

those seeking a robust defense of traditional religion and religious claims in his work. Not only is spirit gone, but the individual, now rooted in this materialist picture and subject to its attendant epistemology, can no longer make many justifiable claims to religious knowledge.

In this chapter, I argue that his materialism may have indeed been problematic for the reasons his nervous contemporaries feared, but that they might also have been equally concerned about the extent of his doubt regarding just what we can know about religious matters. Not only does Hobbes's materialism lead to the view that spirit is gone, but in light of his materialism and its attendant epistemology, Hobbes argues that we are limited in the kinds of religious claims we can make beyond its natural, very human and social manifestation. This limitation is also a consequence of his treatment of religion as a material social practice, dealing squarely in psychological and rational concerns based in the material world. So, his move that I will focus on in this chapter is not that spirit is gone – the grave concern for so many of his contemporaries – but that religion is, in a certain sense, naturalized or subject to the same explanation, method, and epistemological constraints as any other human practice. Although the loss of spirit and the immaterial is explicit in Hobbes's materialism – if all is matter then nothing is spirit, threatening some central theological tenets – implicit in this position is the view that religion itself is subject to the same epistemological constraints as any other human social practice. His materialism is a threat to the very specific theological views of some of his contemporaries, undermining the “spiritual basis” of religion, but it also poses a deeper threat to the kinds of religious claims that can be made in general. Even further, the

epistemological view emerging from his materialist picture ends up posing a threat to the kinds of ontological claims Hobbes himself makes about that materialist picture.

The first few chapters of this project contend with the overlapping realms of language, reason, and passions, as a way to offer evidence that Hobbes is indeed naturalizing religion in this way; an analysis of the consequences of his materialism are the first piece of that story. To make the case here, I will first describe and clarify the nature of Hobbes's materialism by examining his views on the body, or his ontology, and some aspects of his epistemology, and the place he gives to God on this picture, also looking briefly to some of the initial reception of his materialism. I will then turn to some contemporary distinctions in current work on naturalism, specifically between what's known as methodological and metaphysical naturalism, and a further distinction drawn by the philosopher Huw Price between what he calls subject and object naturalism. These distinctions will, I hope, serve as tools to help make sense of some of Hobbes's views and to elucidate some of the puzzles that emerge in reconciling his materialist position with certain religious claims. In looking at his materialism from this perspective, it becomes clear that the threat to religion, or to the religion of his time, might have been real regarding the immaterial, but the more serious threat is to the kinds of religious claims that are at all available to the materially and socially embedded and embodied individual of Hobbes's account.

Hobbes's Materialism

In the early seventeenth century, French philosophers like Pierre Gassendi and Rene Descartes set much of the agenda for debates about materialist, mechanistic philosophy. Hobbes's own materialist views are in many ways defined through his

engagement in these debates. Gassendi ushered in a revival of the atomist, mechanist views of Epicurus and Lucretius.⁷² Embraced by many philosophers of the time, they were then faced with the difficult task of reconciling these views with Christianity. Both Descartes and Gassendi seek to protect science from religion and religion from science. Hobbes, meanwhile, does not have the same agenda.

Epicurus, and so Gassendi, held that everything is composed of atoms – Epicurus makes the metaphysical statement that the world is made up of only atoms and void.⁷³ The foundation of Epicurus’s own theory of knowledge is sense perception – all human beings have this sense perception, caused by an object external to the self, or actual objects outside the body.⁷⁴ And it is this sense perception, the direct relationship between our faculty and the external world, which provides evidence enough for the existence of the physical world. The “existence of matter,” according to the Roman Epicurean Lucretius, is “proved by universal sensation.”⁷⁵ He adds, “You will find that our conception of truth is derived ultimately from the senses, and that their evidence is unimpugnable.”⁷⁶ For Lucretius, what the senses report is clear evidence of the validity of their reportings: “all sensations are at all times true.”⁷⁷ At root, the senses are the human being’s source for knowledge about objects in the world. The body’s senses deliver that knowledge.⁷⁸ Gassendi also maintains that all we can know is gained through the senses,

⁷² A nice study of this aspect of Gassendi’s thought is Saul Fisher’s *Pierre Gassendi’s Philosophy of Science: Atomism for Empiricists* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁷³ A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1986) 20.

⁷⁴ Long, 21.

⁷⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co.: 2001) Book 1, 421-422, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book 4, 479-480, p. 113.

⁷⁷ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book 4, 499, p. 114.

⁷⁸ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book 4, 499, p. 114.

but with this, he also held that this is where our knowledge ends (apart, in his case, from some theological claims).

Picking up this view from Epicureans and Gassendi, Hobbes also sees our senses as the primary source for our knowledge. In the first chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes the origin of appearances as from “The Original of them all, is that which we call Sense; (For there is no conception in a mans mind, which not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense.)”⁷⁹ Sense is the first and only foundation for the representation and appearance of bodies, and everything is derived from this original, Hobbes says. Our thoughts, single representations or appearances, are only available because of the activity of the sense, which does the work of producing different kinds of appearances.

But, the process by which the sense operates is a completely materialist affair. Thoughts are representations or appearances of qualities or objects outside of us, and our senses are the organs that receive these objects. The cause of sense, Hobbes says, is motion from external bodies that “presseth the organ proper to each Sense,”⁸⁰ be it taste, touch, seeing, hearing, or smelling. When the object has pressed upon the proper organ:

which pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the Brain, and Heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver it self: which endeavour because *Outward*, seemeth to be some matter with out. And this *seeming*, or *fancy*, is that which men call *Sense*; and I consisteth, as to the Eye, in a *Light*, or Colour *figured*; To the Eare, in a *Sound*; to the Nostrill in an *Odour*; To the Tongue and Palat, in a *Savour*; And to the rest of the body, in *Heat*, *Cold*, *Hardnesse*, *Softnesse*, and such other qualities, as we discern by *Feeling*. All which qualities are called *Sensible*, are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely.⁸¹

On his materialist picture, it is motion that underlies and generates all sense, and central to sensing is the relationship between the object in question and the particular organ that

⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85.

⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85.

⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86.

can sense aspects of the object. Different organs are suited to different kinds of sensing, but the basic principle of motion is central to all of them. And the individual takes these motions as fancies or “seemings,” and these are the results or products of the motion engaged in by both the object and the organ. What goes on within the mind of the human being is matter in motion and the pressing of external objects on the senses, which themselves produce motions. As he continues, “Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else, but divers motions; (for motion, produceth nothing but motion.)”⁸² Motion, of external bodies and of those bodies in the sense, is all there is.⁸³ All of the appearances and seemings generated in our living in the world are thanks to motion.

And this extends to moral matters, where “the motions of the mind are considered, namely desire, aversion, love, benevolence, hope, fear, anger, jealousy, envy, and so on: what the causes of the motions are, and of what things they are causes.”⁸⁴ The motion of one object produces that of the next, at every level. Even the imagination is merely the wearing of or obscuring of the eternal motion of body in time, or the “decaying sense.”⁸⁵ All movement in the mind is originally rooted in sense, for Hobbes, and all activity of the mind is perpetual motion of objects on organs of sense.

For Hobbes, there are objects in the world, but what we perceive are the motions of those objects: “whatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they are not there, but are seemings and apparitions only. The things that really

⁸² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86.

⁸³ In Part I of *De Corpore*, Hobbes writes: “For the variety of all figures arises from the variety of motions by which they are constructed, and motion cannot be understood to have any cause other than another motion. And the varieties of things perceived in sense-experience, such as colors, sounds, odors, and so on, have no cause other than motion, concealed partly in objects acting and partly in the objects sensing.” Hobbes, *Part I of De Corpore, Computatio Sive Logica, Logic*, 295.

⁸⁴ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 299. This is in the context of an explanation of a precise philosophical method.

⁸⁵ Hobbes *Leviathan*, 88.

are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused.”⁸⁶

Our senses may deceive us, and we may, for example, conceive of color as being in an object, then realize it is not. But things or objects are in the world and all of these objects are in motion. Color is “not inherent in the object,” as an Aristotelian at the time might have held,⁸⁷ but is instead “an effect thereof upon us, caused by such motion in the object.”⁸⁸ These motions are what press on our sense organs. So, Hobbes holds that there is something outside of our minds, something serving as a cause for the senses.⁸⁹

The human being is constitutive of this materialist picture. We can have knowledge about the world, and interact with the world through the senses and motion, but only as part of that world. Indeed, Hobbes’s vision rests on a conception of the embodied individual. Not only do senses decay in men, but bodies themselves change, helping to account for some of the change in senses. “For the continuall change of mans body,” Hobbes holds, “destroyes in time the parts which in sense were moved: So that distance of time, and of place, hath one and the same effect in us. For as at a distance of place, that which wee look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts; and as Voyces grow weak, and inarticulate: so also after great distances of time, our imagination of the Past is weak...”⁹⁰ Not only does the original sense impression itself lose its force, but the senses themselves will change, too. Just like distance and time wear on the senses delivered, so too does the body of man, and his senses, change in time. There is nothing fixed and eternal about the body’s faculties and capacities.

⁸⁶ Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1969) 1.2.10, 7.

⁸⁷ Tuck, 20.

⁸⁸ Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 1.2.9, 6.

⁸⁹ Although Hobbes steers clear of skeptical debates, apart from his engagement with Descartes’ engagement with skeptical strategies.

⁹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

With senses as the original source of appearances, the account of engagement in the world, of objects pressing on organs, is an entirely embodied and closed picture. There is no source for appearances or original “seemings” outside this material motion. And, because the human being is part of this account, there is nothing about the human being that stands outside or has its source outside the material world, as there is nothing beyond the material world.

For example, in his objections to Descartes’ *Meditations*,⁹¹ an exchange that is notoriously plagued by misunderstanding, Hobbes takes issue with Descartes’ distinction between mind and body in part because he fears Descartes attributes something of the mind to a non-material realm. Hobbes’s concern is that the “thought” that Descartes has isolated, the point of certainty from which he builds his view, is immaterial. As Hobbes sees it, there is an “inability to separate thought from the matter that is thinking”⁹² – so, a corporeal being is required to make any claim at all about what that being is thinking. While Descartes clarifies that part of his method is to take the intellect and “strip away from it everything that did not belong to it,”⁹³ pointing to a methodological difference in their approaches, he does distinguish for Hobbes different types of matter. For Descartes, there is “spiritual” matter and there is “corporeal” matter, thought and extension, and both needn’t be described as body.⁹⁴ Here, it seems, is a point on which Hobbes and Descartes disagree. While Descartes will differentiate between these kinds of substances, Hobbes maintains that the matter of the mind, and with it the workings of the mind, are

⁹¹ Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume II, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof, Dugald Murdoch. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁹² Hobbes in Descartes, 123.

⁹³ Descartes, 123.

⁹⁴ Descartes, 124.

the same as that of the body and of objects in the world, as they are all of a piece with body.

From the nature of the mind to the edges of the universe, Hobbes's materialism encompasses all that there is, the world, and the universe:

The World, (I mean not the Earth only...but the Universe, that is, the whole masse of things that are) is Corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of Magnitude, namely, Length, Breadth, and Depth: also every part of Body, is likewise Body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe.⁹⁵

All is body and all is corporeal – everything in the universe has length, width, and height. Even spirits cannot be incorporeal and must be actual bodies.⁹⁶ The notion of ghosts or un-embodied spirit does not enter the mind of the human being by nature because they are not real, says Hobbes, but are rather the result of putting together contradictory words. True, people claim to have seen spirits or ghosts, and the Church relies on the work of the incorporeal spirit for activities like exorcisms, but these are really only what are seen in a dream or vision, says Hobbes.⁹⁷

Hobbes says, “I find in Scripture that there be Angels, and Spirits, good and evil; but not that they are Incorporeall, as are the Apparitions men see in the Dark, or in a Dream, or Vision; which the Latines call *Spectra*, and took for *Daemons*. And I find that that there are Spirits Corporeall, (though subtile and Invisible;) but not that any mans body was possessed or inhabited by them.”⁹⁸ Hobbes even thinks that Scripture itself is mistaken in its interpretation of spirits as something immaterial. He even goes so far as to wonder, “if there be no Immaeriall Spirit, nor any Possession of mens bodies by any Spirit Corporeall, it may again be asked, why our Saviour and his Apostles did not teach

⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 689.

⁹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 689.

⁹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 664.

⁹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 664.

the People so; and in such cleer words, as they might no more doubt thereof.”⁹⁹ The mistake in understanding goes all the way to the stories of Scripture and to the very authorities supposedly central to those stories. Hobbes’s own interpretation of Scripture itself, against all theological authority – Jesus’ authority included – is that understanding spirit as immaterial is a mistake in understanding.

Even further, the very functioning of our minds, the very process by which our brains take in sensory images and the ways in which they fade or persist, that itself contributes to false religious practice:

Before our Saviour preached, it was the generall Religion of the Gentiles, to worship for Gods, those Appearances that remain in the Brain from the impression of externall Bodies upon the organs of their Senses, which are commonly called *Ideas, Idols, Phantasmes, Conceits*, as being Representations of those externall Bodies, which cause them, and have nothing in them of reality, no more than there is in the things that seem to stand before us in a Dream.¹⁰⁰

Hobbes holds that it is something of a cognitive mistake to take these images in our minds for anything more than fading sense impressions. When these “representations” are taken as more than merely the material outcome of the motion between the object and sensory organs, it is idolatry. There is again nothing special about this cognitive activity and to grant to these sensory images anything more is mistaken.

As for his view of God, Hobbes’s materialism extends even this far. Calling God incorporeal is part of a confusion in definitions, he says; God should really be considered incomprehensible.¹⁰¹ Not the metaphysical, incorporeal spirit so imagined by theologians

⁹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 663.

¹⁰⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 665.

¹⁰¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 171. As noted in the introduction, the “theological” interpreters of Hobbes on religion appeal to his claim about the incomprehensibility of God as evidence for his orthodoxy. See Taylor, 420. This point will be dealt with more fully in the discussion of Martinich’s interpretation.

and others of his time, with a perspective much inspired by Aristotelian and Epicurean thought,¹⁰² God is a name given to the original cause of which we cannot know.

In his reading of Hobbes as a theologically by-the-book thinker, A.P. Martinich's discussion of God in Hobbes seeks to establish him as "in line with the tradition of Christian theology,"¹⁰³ and he differentiates between a few specific claims about God in order to clarify Hobbes's position. As Martinich sees it, Hobbes maintains the two points that "People have no idea of God" and "People have no knowledge of God's nature or essence,"¹⁰⁴ but that these two claims are standard theological positions. Hobbes "inherited"¹⁰⁵ the first point from mainstream medieval theology, Martinich explains, that an idea of God, as infinite, cannot be reconciled with our finite sense experience. All of our knowledge is sensory and "God cannot be an object of sensation."¹⁰⁶ Martinich sees an ally in Hobbes's in Gaunilo, Anselm's contemporary critic, as both maintain that we cannot have an idea of God, so putting Hobbes squarely in the Catholic debate. But, Martinich also holds, the Calvinist tradition actually picks up this view and finds that we can know very little about God.¹⁰⁷ So, Martinich claims here that this first seemingly skeptical move on Hobbes's part is actually a debate happening within the theological tradition. On the second point, that people have "no knowledge of God's nature or essence," Martinich also maintains that this denial is central to the conversation within the tradition and that "Virtually every medieval and modern theologian affirmed" that

¹⁰² As for God, as Lucretius puts it, "the nature of the gods is so tenuous, and so far removed from our senses, that it is scarcely perceptible even to the mind; and since it eludes the touch and impact of our hands, it cannot touch anything that is tangible to us; for what is itself intangible cannot touch. Therefore the gods' habitations also must be dissimilar to our habitations and as tenuous as their bodies." (p. 141/v 150)

¹⁰³ Martinich, 185.

¹⁰⁴ Martinich, 185. His defense of these two claims is found on pages 185-194.

¹⁰⁵ Martinich, 186.

¹⁰⁶ Martinich, 187.

¹⁰⁷ Martinich, 189.

“No human can know the real essence of God, because no one can be acquainted with him.”¹⁰⁸

Martinich then finds that the third major claim, that “People have no knowledge of God,”¹⁰⁹ is one that he sees Hobbes as denying, providing evidence for his theological commitment. Martinich sees Hobbes as making both an ontological claim about God’s infinite nature and an epistemological claim about his incomprehensibility.¹¹⁰ He sees these as affirmations on Hobbes’s part “that human knowledge does not adequately represent the nature of God” and that the claim to incomprehensibility is “partially to affirm one’s creatureliness and subordinateness to God.”¹¹¹ Claims to comprehensibility would be blasphemy and to deem God incomprehensible was, again, an orthodox position.

Martinich then differentiates between two approaches to the problem, “whether there can be a proof for the existence of God” and concerns “less formally for the basis upon which one can confidently believe that there is a God.”¹¹² Martinich thinks Hobbes provides both, the first through his causal argument, and the second by comparing knowledge of God to knowledge of bodies, in which case believing in God is like believing in bodies. As Martinich writes, “Our limited knowledge about God is similar to our limited knowledge of the nature of bodies.”¹¹³ When it comes to both God and ourselves, our knowledge is limited.

¹⁰⁸ Martinich, 190.

¹⁰⁹ Martinich, 185.

¹¹⁰ Martinich, 191.

¹¹¹ Martinich, 191.

¹¹² Martinich, 192.

¹¹³ Martinich, 193.

But, here there does seem to be an important difference. Hobbes appeals to the causal proof, akin to one of Aquinas's Five Ways, as Martinich is happy to point out.¹¹⁴ But, the only "proof" Hobbes offers is the very basic claim, intimately tied to his account of human rationality and language, that the name God is the name we give to that first cause of which we have no knowledge and of which we cannot have much knowledge. God is the name given to the place where our inquiry ends. God is, at root, what "men call God" – a product of inquiry and the last, or first, unknowable point of that inquiry.

For he that from any effect hee seeth come to passe, should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himselfe profoundly in the pursuit of causes; shall at last come to this, that there must be (as even the Heathen Philosophers confessed) one First Mover; that is, a First, and an Eternall cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the name of God.¹¹⁵

Rational inquiry, fueled by the human psychological feature of curiosity, leads us to ask of any given cause what might be the cause of that cause. If this line of inquiry is taken seriously and engaged persistently, Hobbes holds, we will come to the point at which we realize that there is a first cause of some kind. This cause, of which we know little, is what men give the name God.

Hobbes's "proof" then contains features of one of Aquinas's Five Ways, but Hobbes is more centrally engaging in an inquiry into the consequences of inquiry itself. He never engages in the kind of metaphysical proof for the existence of God that would really establish him as the orthodox thinker of Martinich's reading. In fact, in his objections to Descartes' *Meditations*, Hobbes seems convinced of the impossibility of achieving these kinds of metaphysical proofs, proofs that Descartes offers in his third and fifth meditations. Hobbes is especially critical of Descartes' claim that we have an idea of God and is adamant that "there is no idea of God in us," reiterating his view that "he

¹¹⁴ Martinich, 194.

¹¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 170. Hobbes provides a few different versions of the same account.

merely gives the name or label 'God' to the thing that he believes in, or acknowledges to exist."¹¹⁶ Hobbes also takes issue with Descartes' reliance on "true knowledge of God,"¹¹⁷ which Hobbes takes to be not only impossible but an impossible foundation or base for any kind of knowledge. His account is also very much based first in the social and linguistic activity of the human being, in relation to objects in the world, giving priority to that experience of the world over ideas:

A man born blind, who has often approached fire and felt hot, recognizes that there is something which makes him hot; and when he hears that this is called 'fire' he concludes that fire exists. But he does not know what shape or colour fire has, and has absolutely no idea or image of fire that comes before his mind. The same applies to a man who recognizes that there must be some cause of his images or ideas, and that this cause must have a prior cause, and so on; he is finally led to the supposition of some eternal cause which never began to exist and hence cannot have a cause prior to itself, and he concludes that something eternal must necessarily exist.¹¹⁸

Not only does Hobbes here object to the claim that we have in our minds an idea of God, prior to any experience of either the world or of the thing that we might call God, but his account is again based in the rational and linguistic activity of the human being, not in a logical metaphysical proof. The very attribution of a thing called God emerges from human inquiry. God does not provide the base for that inquiry. God is the name given in answer to the question of original cause, based on the existence of causes in our own experience. But, this does not provide a proof for God's existence.

Hobbes continues, in response to Descartes' engagement with more traditional proofs: "But our ability to imagine the world to have been created is not a sufficient proof of the creation. Hence, even if the existence of something infinite, independent, supremely powerful etc. had been demonstrated, it still would not follow that a creator

¹¹⁶ Hobbes's objection in Descartes, 127.

¹¹⁷ Hobbes's objection in Descartes, 137.

¹¹⁸ Hobbes's objection in Descartes, 127.

exists.”¹¹⁹ To engage in the rational inquiry into causes, and to come to a first cause which we might call God, is one thing. But, to imagine that a God with specific features created the world – even to put this upon the very idea of God encountered through one’s causal inquiry – is mere speculation.

Methodologically, Hobbes is aware that there is only so much that might be said about God, so conceived, and that the kinds of metaphysical claims made by the tradition are already overstepping the bounds of what we can know. Hobbes may be on board with many of the limitations to knowledge of God so apparent in the orthodox tradition, but while theologians, in light of these claims, will use these in an effort to make a case for God’s existence, Hobbes ends with his thin account, attributing the name of God to a particular consequences of human linguistic practice and a temporary answer to the question about how we exist in the first place. In some sense, Hobbes engages with some of the skeptical spirit of the theological tradition, but never returns to the more constructive piece of the story.

In his analysis of Hobbes’s claims about God, Martinich never accounts for Hobbes’s more specific definition of God, tied crucially to his theory of language, nor does he satisfactorily account for the more complete contextual and psychological story of the human being.¹²⁰ Behind Hobbes’s account of religion and the role of God in that account, are certain psychological tendencies that then lead to the formation of the seeds of religion. As noted, the “ignorance of remote causes,” leads men to attribute immediate causes to any given event.¹²¹ Hobbes also holds that, “Anxiety for the future time, disposeth men to enquire into the cause of things,” so as to better maintain their present

¹¹⁹ Hobbes’s objection in Descartes, 132.

¹²⁰ This is the focus of Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

¹²¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 166.

security.¹²² A love of “knowledge of causes,” one of our innate psychological tendencies, leads men to seek the cause of any effects considered, and, from there, to seek the cause of that cause, and so on, until, “of necessity he must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall; which is it men call God.”¹²³ Again, the human being cannot inquire into causes without soon coming to the idea of one, eternal first cause, but there is no notion or idea of God in ones own mind, “answerable to his nature.”¹²⁴ There is no notion of God that might be inquired into and given attributes of any kind.¹²⁵ God is merely an indescribable first cause and the name or placeholder we have given to this indescribable cause.

It is the human being’s perpetual fear, present with the ignorance of causes, that requires an object of some kind – “when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or evill fortune, but some *Power*, or Agent *Invisible*.”¹²⁶ This fear, says Hobbes, first created Gods, and the desired for knowledge of cause upon cause led to “one God Eternall, Infinite, Omnipotent,”... “one First Mover; that is, a First, and an Eternall cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the name of God.”¹²⁷ God then, for Hobbes, is given a psychological explanation, both born from fear and made singular and eternal through man’s curiosity, a name given to the first cause of all things, but one that is unknown and unable to be described.

¹²² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

¹²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

¹²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

¹²⁵ Unlike Descartes’ argument for the existence of God in the fifth meditation.

¹²⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 170.

¹²⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 170.

So, without any spirit to speak of, and only a distant God as a name for what accounts for the unknowable, his materialist foundation and its epistemological consequences led, in the minds of many of Hobbes's contemporaries, straight to irreligion.¹²⁸ His view became the source of doubt on issues like the existence of divine providence, the immortality of the soul, and good and evil.¹²⁹ And at the time of its original reception, scientists and theologians saw clearly the worrisome consequences of his view.¹³⁰ Although taken seriously for his philosophy, critics saw Hobbes's work as the sure path to "the disavowal of the deity and the undermining of Christian faith."¹³¹ The logical consequence of materialism was the end of religion itself and the rejection of God as he was so understood. Speculation on Hobbes's less than peaceful experience in the afterlife wasn't uncommon, and he was popularly seen as a heretic, an anti-Christian, and a danger to the health of religion.¹³² As Edwin Curley maintains, "To say that no immaterial substance is even conceivable, as Hobbes has suggested in his second objection, is to say something very radical. It is also to say something dangerous, since this thesis seems to imply a rejection of the existence of the substance who is, in the tradition, the most important example of a spiritual substance."¹³³ This was a threat to the very existence of God.

¹²⁸ As Mintz explains of Hobbes's reception: "To uphold belief in God. That was the fundamental motive behind all the attacks on Hobbes's materialism...Materialism was a dangerous doctrine as well as an invalid one because it undermined the spiritual basis of religious belief." Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 23.

¹²⁹ Mintz, 23.

¹³⁰ So, while Martinich offers an extensive defense of the religious orthodoxy of Hobbes's views, even Hobbes's own contemporaries questioned his orthodoxy.

¹³¹ Mintz, 39.

¹³² When Hobbes died, an anonymous elegy was published, reading: "Here lies *Tom Hobbes*, the Bug-bear of the Nation, Whose *Death* hath frightened *Atheism* out of *Fashion*." Mintz, 39.

¹³³ Edwin Curley, "Hobbes versus Descartes," in *Descartes and His Contemporaries*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene, 97-109 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 105.

Critics at the time were also explicit in their view that it was his materialism, at root, that led to what they saw in him as atheism.¹³⁴ One of Hobbes's most famous opponents, Bishop John Bramhall, recognized the disturbing, irreligious implications of Hobbes's materialism as, "that main root of Atheisme, from which so many lesser branches are daily sprouting up."¹³⁵ In Bramhall's mind, if spirits or angels were considered corporeal, they simply weren't spirits or angels.¹³⁶ As Mintz explains, "The problem of the critics was therefore to establish the absolute, independent existence of spirit."¹³⁷ Proofs for the existence of God were harnessed in this quest, also worried in showing that "consciousness, reasoning, memory and moral judgments are essentially non-material phenomena, belonging to the activity of the soul, even if these phenomena are accompanied by bodily movements."¹³⁸ Without the immaterial, everything from the soul to matters of morality is seen as being at risk.

Thinkers associated with the Cambridge Platonists, like Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, similarly saw in Hobbes's denial of spirit a denial of religion itself. They thought his materialist view "undermined the foundation of all religious belief,"¹³⁹ so took up arms against it. More declared, "'No spirit'... 'No God,'"¹⁴⁰ claiming that spirit is required for religious belief.¹⁴¹ Cudworth goes on at length about the insupportability of the materialist view and how it undermines belief in God: "For they who are thorough-paced and Genuine Atheists indeed, will bogle at neither of those forementioned things,

¹³⁴ Mintz offers both a broad and detailed picture of some of the initial receptions of Hobbes's work, especially its perceived implications for religion. See especially pages 55-62.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Mintz, 67.

¹³⁶ Mintz, 67.

¹³⁷ Mintz, 67.

¹³⁸ Mintz, 67.

¹³⁹ Mintz, 81.

¹⁴⁰ Mintz, 109.

¹⁴¹ Mintz, 153.

but contend that whatsoever, they cannot grasp with their hands, is altogether Nothing. That is, that there is no other Substance nor Entity in the World, but only Body, that which is Tangible, or Resists the Touch.”¹⁴² The materialist view could only be that of an atheist, which could only lead to moral and spirit problems. As Mintz explains of Hobbes’s reception: “To uphold belief in God. That was the fundamental motive behind all the attacks on Hobbes’s materialism...Materialism was a dangerous doctrine as well as an invalid one because it undermined the spiritual basis of religious belief.”¹⁴³

Contemporary Naturalism

In light of Hobbes’s materialism, that God might be rendered corporeal is indeed worrisome to those trying to square materialism with immaterial claims, but thinkers like Gassendi and even Spinoza seek other ways to reconcile this vision with religion. Perhaps even more worrisome for those seeking an incorporeal but metaphysically substantial God in Hobbes’s work are some of the epistemological consequences of his views – consequences that are made especially clear by looking to some contemporary characterizations.

“Materialist” is not a word Hobbes and his contemporaries would use to describe themselves, although many now discuss Hobbes as a “mechanistic materialist,” maintaining the view that all that exists is matter in motion.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, “naturalism” is not a word that would have been used in Hobbes’s time, but his own materialism and his empiricism echo in important respects aspects of contemporary naturalism. Naturalism

¹⁴² Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1964 [1678]) 768.

¹⁴³ Mintz, 153.

¹⁴⁴ Unlike physicalism, the view that maintains that all that exists are physical objects.

itself is a term that is subject to much debate, there being “a plethora” of naturalisms.¹⁴⁵

Most generally, naturalism is seen as the view that all that exists or can be studied are objects of natural science, including psychological and physical objects, but, as will be discussed, it can be either a methodological or metaphysical position.

For contemporary philosophers, a form of naturalism, especially one that sees the supernatural as something that neither can be studied nor can be appealed to for evidence in any way, as an object of knowledge, is considered something of a given. Many see the old conflict in which Hobbes himself was engaged, so much tied to the debate between theology and science and between monist and dualist perspectives, as having been resolved in many ways. Hobbes sought to squeeze out the supernatural, revelation, and the divine as forces in the material world, and, as Richard Rorty notes, “mechanistic materialism” has triumphed¹⁴⁶ and modern philosophers have done much to escort it along. Jaegwon Kim calls naturalism the current “philosophical ideology,” if there is one,¹⁴⁷ and others declare that many Anglo-American philosophers would not deny that they are naturalists.¹⁴⁸ For at least the last one hundred years, philosophers “have taken it for granted that any satisfactory account of how human belief and knowledge in general are possible will involve only processes and events of the intelligible natural world, without the intervention or reassurance of any supernatural agent.”¹⁴⁹

But, contemporary debates still center around just what people mean when they talk about naturalism and whether there aren’t some views among naturalists that contain

¹⁴⁵ Jaegwon Kim, “The American Origins of Philosophical Naturalism,” www.pdcf.org/PDF/7kim, 84.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Rorty, “Naturalism and Quietism,” online (Oslo, 2005), 1.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, *Naturalism In Question* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004) 2.

¹⁴⁹ Barry Stroud, “The Charm of Naturalism,” 21-35 in De Caro and Macarthur, 23.

seemingly non-natural components, for example, consciousness, aspects of the mental, identity, or value,¹⁵⁰ facets which might in some ways be antithetical to or irreducible to, for example, a materialist view. In a different guise from the one encountered in his own time, contemporary naturalists encounter consequences similar to those resulting from Hobbes's own materialism. So, by looking to a contemporary articulation of this debate, we get a resource for thinking about Hobbes's version of a similar problem.

In the contemporary setting, naturalism is broadly considered either “methodological” or “substantive,” nature being the universe or the natural world, governed by natural laws. Methodological naturalism is the view that the scientific method, or an empirical, a posteriori inquiry, is the only valid, unproblematic form of inquiry.¹⁵¹ On this view, naturalism is “typically, in the first instance, a *methodological* view about how one should do philosophy: philosophical inquiry, on this view, should be continuous with empirical inquiry in the sciences.”¹⁵² Debates then surround questions about just what that continuity consists of and one task of methodological naturalism becomes that of defining the terms of the scientific method. But here methodological naturalism is most importantly a tool for inquiry and the only legitimate tool that might lead to any kind of knowledge.

Substantive or metaphysical naturalism makes the substantive claim that nature is all there is. This view can be “ontological,” that is, “the view that the only things that exist are *natural* (or perhaps simply *physical*) things,” or this view can be “semantic,” or that “a suitable philosophical analysis of any concept must show it to be amenable to

¹⁵⁰ Essays in De Caro and Macarthur take on several of these questions.

¹⁵¹ De Caro and Macarthur, *Naturalism In Question*, 7.

¹⁵² Brian Leiter, “Neitzsche, naturalist or postmodernist?,” in *The Future for Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 3.

empirical inquiry.”¹⁵³ What scientific explanation provides, or the results of scientific inquiry, is all there is – these are the only genuine entities.¹⁵⁴ Substantive naturalism then makes a stronger claim about what there is in reality.

Naturalism, conceived as a methodological doctrine, is seen by some as leading to substantive philosophical claims. In light of this, scholars sought to delineate the reach of its methods, many taken up with the question of whether and how methodological naturalism might lead to substantive naturalism. Leiter notes that philosophers are often drawn to substantive naturalism in virtue of their methodological stance but reminds us that “a commitment to M-naturalism [methodological naturalism] does *not* entail this conclusion: methodologically, it is an open question whether the best philosophical account of morality or mind or knowledge must be in substantively naturalistic terms.”¹⁵⁵ To make some more substantive naturalist claims often appears, to those who view naturalism as primarily a method, to take matters too far. One charm of naturalism and of the appeal to the scientific method as a tool for inquiry, several find, is this very refusal to make any kind of sweeping, universal, or metaphysical claim, a denial built into the method itself. To make final claims of this kind is against the very spirit of naturalism, in some sense. Instead, some of the results of the scientific method, and naturalist assumptions, can be considered, at most, more reasonable than the alternatives. The method itself must be subject to its own test, but it too seems to be the best and most

¹⁵³ Leiter, 5.

¹⁵⁴ De Caro and Macarthur, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Leiter, 6.

reasonable alternative as a tool for the study of the human being and the natural world of which that person is a part.¹⁵⁶

On first pass, Hobbes appears to be both a methodological and metaphysical naturalist, so understood. Hobbes makes the case that we should only appeal to forces in the world, or to nature and the human being, as evidence for our explanations of moral, political, and religious questions. The invisible, the spirit, and the incorporeal, far from being the source for explanation and the source of comfort in this world, are instead mistakes in language and a mistaken tendency of the mind.¹⁵⁷ Methodologically, Hobbes is a man of his time, a scientist taken up by the geometrical method and convinced that there are universal truths of science to be discovered through definitions, these coming through a search for causes in nature,¹⁵⁸ so someone who shares some of the same impulses as contemporary methodological naturalists.

Hobbes wants to set the same kinds of limits on inquiry that the contemporary methodological naturalist has set: knowledge is only encountered through observation of consequences, from looking to effects in the world, by the senses, and then drawing conclusions about the causes. There simply is nothing outside the material and outside the accidents of bodies and the causal system to which to appeal for any kind of knowledge of any sort, because the material simply is all there is. For Hobbes, even the “consequences from the passions” fall under the rubric of science, leading to the science

¹⁵⁶ Sidney Hook, “Naturalism and First Principles,” in Sidney Hook on *Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, ed. Robert Talisse and Robert Tempio (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002) 173.

¹⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 664. They are also a source for control by the Church.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (UK: Penguin Books, 1967) 69.

of ethics, along with the consequences of speech, which leads to the science of just and unjust.¹⁵⁹

Knowledge is acquired primarily by reasoning and is a linguistic endeavor, dealing in names. In defining the task and role of philosophy, or science,¹⁶⁰ Hobbes writes:

By Philosophy, is understood *the Knowledge acquired by Reasoning, from the Manner of the Generation of any thing, to the Properties; or from the Properties, to some possible Way of Generation of the same; to the end to bee able to produce, as far as matter, and human force permit, such Effects, as humane life requireth.*¹⁶¹

A pragmatic affair, aimed at the what human life requires, or human needs, philosophy deals in the knowledge of consequences and uses the results of reasoning as new insights or effects for consideration in new requirements of human life. Through the use of reason, an ever-uncertain affair that Hobbes defines as “nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts,” or the noting them to ourselves and demonstrating it to others,¹⁶² we acquire knowledge. Only that which is acquired by right reasoning, not by “supernatural Revelation”¹⁶³ or any other false source, is suited to philosophic endeavor, or constitutes the kind of knowledge we seek to acquire through a scientific method.

Revelation – the ultimate non-natural source of knowledge – does get some air time for Hobbes, but is eliminated from consideration as a source for knowledge. Hobbes talks of God speaking to man, and claims this may happen in an immediate fashion, but

¹⁵⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 149. Here he offers an elegant diagram of what falls under the rubric of philosophy, or “the knowledge of consequences.”

¹⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 149.

¹⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 682.

¹⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111.

¹⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 683.

that it is “impossible to know,” as someone claiming to have received revelation, whether there is any truth to it.¹⁶⁴ It is impossible, Hobbes says, to be sure about someone’s declaration.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, all we have to go on is our belief in other people and the opinion of other people, and all of this comes through language.

Only that which is acquired by right reasoning, not by “supernatural Revelation”¹⁶⁶ or any other false source, is suited to philosophic endeavor, or constitutes the kind of knowledge we seek to acquire through a scientific method. Hobbes denies that we can use any kind of appeal to the supernatural or to non-causal fact as a way of acquiring knowledge. God is not an explanatory tool – there is no role for God in explaining nature or human nature – nor does some moral law residing outside the world take on this role. God and morality can only be explained in and through the natural world.

So, all claims to knowledge begin with the senses, and all are subject to reasoning as they are dealt with in linguistic exchange, religious claims included. The kinds of limits Hobbes puts on knowledge are not unique to his view, but this is a critical piece of his philosophical system. Importantly, religious matters are no different. God is subject to these epistemological limitations.

As regards more substantive claims, Hobbes indeed says that the material or body is all there is. Everything that there is in the world is subject to causal laws, or is part of the material and motion of matter. So, Hobbes seems to be a metaphysical materialist in the same way that some contemporary naturalists might be metaphysical naturalists. He makes an ontological claim, one seemingly central to his perspective. All is body in this

¹⁶⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 410.

¹⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 331.

¹⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 683.

substantive sense. Hobbes is often seen as a system builder, producing both an epistemological and a metaphysical view.¹⁶⁷ He begins with epistemological and methodological concerns and makes substantive metaphysical claims, claims that would presumably emerge from a proper method.

But, Hobbes's claims are deceptively limited. While he makes a declaration of what is in the world – the material – he also carefully lays out the limits to the kind of knowledge we can acquire about that world, especially as related to the role of reason and language. In some sense, many of his own claims about the world overstep what he thinks we can really know of that world. What we have access to is through our causal relation with objects, and the reception by the senses of the motion of those objects. Sense is the main and original source for our knowledge of objects in the world and this only takes place when the body – the human body, itself a material being – encounters the world, from within a world which the body already inhabits. And our less original source of knowledge for the individual is through language or discourse.

But this common method for seeking knowledge cannot lead to anything absolute. “No Discourse whatsoever, can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, past, or to come. For, as for the knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and ever after, Memory.”¹⁶⁸ The knowledge of consequence is merely conditional and, Hobbes continues, “No man can know by Discourse, that this, or that, is, has been, or will be; which is to know absolutely: but onely, that if This be, That is; if This has been, That has been; if This shall be, That shall be: which is to know conditionally.”¹⁶⁹ The individual can never get to some matter of fact through discourse, only through his or her own sense. And our other source of

¹⁶⁷ J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes's System of Ideas* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973) 6.

¹⁶⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

¹⁶⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

knowledge, discourse or language, contains its own limits, as reason is simply this very activity of negotiating the names given to consequences. And again, revelation is subject to the same human limitations. A revelatory experience, for example, might constitute knowledge for the individual who experiences the revelation, but it would be subject to the same linguistic process to which any other sensory fact is subject, with the special problem that it cannot be backed up by the sensory experience of others. It could never count as the sort of scientific knowledge that can be backed up by the beliefs and experiences of other members of the community.

Hobbes's claims might appear substantive in this sweeping sense implied, but he has set considerable limits on what we can know. Hobbes's substantive metaphysical claim, his materialism, appears to be very much at odds with his epistemology. While human beings are creatures of the natural world and importantly shaped by language, a social tool human beings have forged to make sense of and live in the world,¹⁷⁰ we are, in light of this, perhaps not equipped to make the kinds of sweeping metaphysical claims Hobbes both critiques and himself makes. When thinking on the kind of proof Hobbes offers for his materialist view, Mintz points out that Hobbes in fact, had none: "His materialist assumptions rested on no surer foundation than his sincere belief that they were true. He identified matter with substance, and on the basis of this was able to show that 'immaterial substance' is a contradiction in terms. But his assumption that there can be no other substance but matter is gratuitous and unproved."¹⁷¹ So, while Hobbes forcefully offers a materialist ontology, ruffling the feathers of his contemporaries with the claim that all is body, it seems that his own methodological naturalism and his

¹⁷⁰ This claim is the focus of the next chapter of this project.

¹⁷¹ Mintz, 66-67.

epistemology do not have within them the resources to make that very kind of metaphysical claim.

Subject vs. Object Naturalism

Contemporary philosopher Huw Price offers a distinction that might be of some help in working through what is at stake with the category of metaphysical naturalism. Price points to a difficulty associated with the metaphysical position – what he calls a “representationalist” dilemma. The problem, he argues, is that self-proclaimed naturalists may be approaching questions about the world from a problematic perspective.

To make clear the confusion, Price draws a distinction that helps to highlight some of the complexities in interpreting Hobbes’s view. Price suggests a way to sidestep representational dilemmas by articulating a difference between “object” and “subject” naturalists.”¹⁷² Object naturalists, the more common view according to Price, hold both that “all there *is* is the world studied by science” and that “all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge,”¹⁷³ maintaining some representationalist assumptions about the relationship between words and the world. So this view begins with a turn to the world and seeks to describe it correctly, or get the right metaphysical picture about that world. The task, then, is to use language to get to substantive claims about the world. Although natural, the task ends up being an awkward one, Price finds. In seeking to pinpoint just what is in the natural world, this view harnesses the “representationalist assumption” that linguistic items “stand for” or “represent” something that is non-linguistic.¹⁷⁴ This

¹⁷² Huw Price “Naturalism Without Representationalism,” in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario de Caro and David MacArthur, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2004) 71-88.

¹⁷³ Price, 73.

¹⁷⁴ Price, 78. As I argue in Chapter 3, Hobbes has something like an antirepresentationalist view of language in the sense implied here. He begins his account with inferential practice, language based in social agreement.

strategy results in what he calls “placement problems,”¹⁷⁵ or, doomed attempts to place a term’s reference in the natural world rather than locate a term in our linguistic framework. Object naturalists are then caught in attempts to descend from a linguistic to a non-linguistic reality, a move Price calls a “change in subject matter.”

Subject naturalists, meanwhile, hold that “philosophy needs to begin with what science tells us about ourselves,” and what it tells us is that “we humans are natural creatures.”¹⁷⁶ Subject naturalists then begin analysis with the human being within the realm of the linguistic, avoiding some of the problems encountered by object naturalists when trying to connect words and objects in the material world.¹⁷⁷ For the subject naturalist, inquiry about the world emerges from the talk and thought of human beings, which is itself an inquiry into nature; but materialist questions about the world itself don’t look the same. Talk is not about getting the world right or establishing a metaphysical view, talk is grounded in a practice perspective, based within a given activity, and grounded in linguistic practice itself. Language is a human practice, arising from human activity, and is the basis of and only means to inquiry about the natural world.

For Price, object naturalists would be better off beginning with a subject naturalist stance, one that they seek validation from anyway in their move from words to objects in the world. Price explains, “Object naturalism thus rests on substantial theoretical assumptions about what we humans do with language—roughly, the assumption that substantial ‘word-world’ semantic relations are a part of the best scientific account of our use of the relevant terms.”¹⁷⁸ The subject naturalist view does not deny that there is a

¹⁷⁵ Price, 74.

¹⁷⁶ Price, 73.

¹⁷⁷ Price, 73.

¹⁷⁸ Price, 78.

world, but it does place the starting point for inquiry with human beings and connects them most squarely with human purposes alone. What is most important for human beings and their endeavors is then how concepts are used in our practices, not whether those concepts match up to some object or idea lying somewhere outside those practices. Words do not need to be matched up to the world. Words are generated socially and acquire meaning through their use.

In some ways, Price's subject naturalist then avoids making the substantive naturalist claim that the world is all there is. Although a human being is part of the natural world and its causes, the subject naturalist cannot answer the kinds of questions that look to know just what is in the world in a total sense. The human being is in no position to make these kinds of claims, always rooted in her own perspective and beginning her inquiry from where she stands.

Hobbes, Naturalism, & Religion

With Price's distinction in mind, Hobbes seems to take on some important characteristics of the subject naturalist, characteristics that are useful for interpreting his views on religion. Hobbes makes claims about nature, or what there is, but they emerge explicitly from science or scientific inquiry. Ideally for him, it is only with the results of his scientific method that substantive claims about the world can be made. And religious claims are subject to this as well. What we can know about the world is what can be studied by science, or philosophy, or the consequences we can observe or sense in the world and information gathered through discourse from the same done by others. But this is a project, or an inquiry, that begins with the human being who is him or herself situated in and very much part of the world. So, like the subject naturalist, Hobbes never loses the

subject as central, and what we know of the human being is seen as the starting point for inquiry into the world in which we find ourselves. Although Hobbes makes substantive claims about the world, his starting point for inquiry is not the world, rather, the human being, and human reason and language are then the practices that generate claims, including normative claims.

Religion and God, then, are not *in the first instance*, for Hobbes, objects about which we are trying to make certain metaphysical claims. Hobbes even turns away from any attempts to make metaphysical claims about God. Religion is instead a product of and part of human practice, understood as emerging from practice.

Hobbes is a methodological naturalist, and the nature of his methodology extends to the realm of religion. But the category of metaphysical naturalist is one that both Price and Hobbes help to point out, is troubling in its scope when considered from the perspectival starting point of the human being. For the naturalist to consider the world and what's in it as a fixed object, waiting to be discovered and gotten correct through language, there will always be an uncomfortable gap between language and the world.

For those seeking a religious Hobbes, one whose views can sustain a Christian or theological picture, a concern may be that incorporeal spirit is gone, replaced by the material. But for those looking for a theological Hobbes, another concern is that religion, as Hobbes reads it, is a social practice like any other, formed from and in the activity of very natural, very human societies, accounted for by and through the terms of that practice. The worry is not then that immaterial spirit is gone; rather, the worry is that religion has been relegated to the natural world, subject to the same epistemological limits as any other natural human practice.

Chapter Two

On Language and Religion

For Hobbes, ghosts, spirits, and all things immaterial, “signifieth nothing, neither in heaven, nor earth, but the Imaginary inhabitants of mans brain.”¹⁷⁹ His materialist view is some of the fuel behind this claim, as seen in the previous chapter, but his theory of language and of the role, task, and limits of language are also central to making sense of these “mistaken significations.” What the mind is up to – just how those “inhabitants” of the brain operate – and how the human being communicates with others, is central to Hobbes’s naturalized account of the human being and of religion and, from this, his critique of certain religious claims.

“Speech,” for Hobbes, or the means to understanding, is “the most noble and profitable invention of all other.”¹⁸⁰ Generated by human beings for the betterment of their lives, speech is crucial, “without which, there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons,

¹⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 433.

¹⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 100.

Bears, and Wolves.”¹⁸¹ Language is what takes human beings out of the state of nature, what renders them more than mere animals, and what facilitates, even serves as, reasoning itself. As a human invention, language is a tool we have forged ourselves – we are the ones who collectively grant words their authority.

His theory of language is an important component of his account of what human social activity and rationality look like, so central to making sense of his views on religion. As part of his explanation of religion, his account of language and his application of his own theory of language to a critique of religious language in particular, gives some more evidence for the overall argument of this project: that Hobbes considers religion to be a human social practice like any other, part of a more complete social whole, and subject to the same criteria for examination and further understanding as any other social practice in that system. Armed with his theory of language, Hobbes is in a position to critique theological language and, in turn, some of the content of religious claims. Even further, looking to Hobbes on language, it becomes clear that at this level of analysis, Hobbes is far from the methodological individualist some interpreters make him out to be – he is not talking about a private language nor is his account based on the isolated individual. He may spend time describing specific aspects of language, but he sees language as a single system, a means through which individuals are formed and the medium through which we reason. As such, his view well accounts for the social forces at work on the human being. Beyond his theory of language, it becomes clear that Hobbes accounts for the social and sees us as socially formed in important ways – to understand society and political systems is not simply a matter of understanding any given individual that makes up that society.

¹⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 100.

As the subject of some relatively recent scholarly interest, Hobbes's theory of language has increasingly been treated as a crucial element for understanding his larger philosophical project.¹⁸² When it comes to a theory of language, "Hobbes is at once cursory, repetitious, and inconsistent in his treatment of the subject,"¹⁸³ and scholars manage to get from Hobbes any number of linguistic approaches. But some clarity is emerging from the debates. The most recent trend – and the one to which I align myself in this chapter – sees Hobbes as engaging in a kind of "linguistic turn,"¹⁸⁴ or shift to the perspective in which language is considered central to our understanding of the social world and ourselves and in which our social lives and social realities are, in some important respects, linguistically made. This view is also one in which linguistic activity itself, the actions and active engagement by speakers, is given priority over fixed meaning or the consequences of the act of signifying. The practical uses of language become the focus of study, not the quest to identify meanings of words in some fixed and final way. This set of views also considers language as of a piece with rationality and the human being is seen as being constituted by language.¹⁸⁵ Speaking, or linguistic communication, is considered not only a medium for rationality itself but is also the very faculty that makes us human and sets us apart from other creatures. In and through language use and the rationality that comes with language use we are rendered human.

¹⁸² One of the main recent analyses of this kind is Philip Pettit's *Made With Words* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁸³ Stephen K. Land, *The Philosophy of Language in Britain: Major Theories from Hobbes to Thomas Reid* (New York: AMS Press, 1981) 26.

¹⁸⁴ As Terence Ball will call it in "Hobbes' Linguistic Turn," *Polity*, 17, 4 (Summer 1985) 739-760. Also cited throughout this chapter, Anat Biletzki's *Talking Wolves: Thomas Hobbes on the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997) and "Hobbes's Theory of Language, Speech, and Reasoning" by Isabel Hungerland and George Vick, 7-169, in *Part I of De Corpore*, Hobbes, ed. Aloysius Martinich (New York: Abaris Books, 1981).

¹⁸⁵ This is the main claim of Pettit's book.

The task of this chapter will be to establish the strength of this reading of Hobbes on language and then turn to the consequences for his explanation of religion in light of this reading. I will first return briefly to Hobbes's view of the mind, especially in contrast to Descartes', as a way of elucidating some of his claims and then look to their disagreement about the function of language and its relationship to rationality, appealing to recent scholarship as a way to ground the discussion. After establishing Hobbes's view on language, I will focus on his analysis of religious language in particular, one that not only occupies Hobbes for most of the second half of *Leviathan*, but one that helps to make clear the extent to which his view of language informs his account and critique of religion.

On the mind

Hobbes complains at length about the linguistic mess that is the philosophy of the inherited traditions: "The naturall Philosophy of these Schools, was rather a Dream than a Science, and set forth in senselesse and insignificant Language."¹⁸⁶ He goes on, "I believe that scarce any thing can be more absurdly said in naturall Philosophy, than that which now is called *Aristotles Metaphysiques*,"¹⁸⁷ the "Schoole of the Jews" is also filled with "false Commentaries, and vain Traditions,"¹⁸⁸ and the added errors of the Church lead to "Blindnesse of Understanding."¹⁸⁹ These traditions are then saddled with mistaken understandings that impact both government and ethics. Much of the linguistic jumble of the philosophy of his time can be blamed on the extent to which the content of language is misunderstood, along with the signification or agreed upon sign or meaning of terms.

¹⁸⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 686.

¹⁸⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 687.

¹⁸⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 687.

¹⁸⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 688.

Underlying all of this is a basic misunderstanding of the role of language itself and a mistaken view of the mind.

To misunderstand the functioning of the mind, as do “the Philosophy-schools, through all the Universities of Christendome,”¹⁹⁰ leads straight to what Hobbes calls “insignificant Speech.”¹⁹¹ This misunderstanding includes views that veer from a consistent materialist view of the human being and from a recognition of the foundational role of the senses, which then leads to the mistakes often made in speech. So, centrally connected to his theory of language is his view of the mind. His perspective on the kind of rational creatures we are provides the key to our facility with language, itself a component of that rationality. Matters of the mind are essential for making sense of the linguistic, “The faculty of Reasoning being consequent to the use of Speech,”¹⁹² says Hobbes. We may have some degree of rationality in the state of nature – the kind we share with animals – but speech is what catapults us forward, rendering our rationality specifically human.

In the very first chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes, like Descartes, sets himself apart from Aristotle on the matter of the senses. Aristotle’s view, one maintained by the “Universities of Christendome,” is that what is seen by the eyes is the visible aspect of an object, emitted by that object. What is heard is also something apart from the thing actually being heard, or the “audible aspect.” And an “intelligible species” is the thing received by the understanding.¹⁹³ In the functioning of the senses, what the human being contends with is not the object itself but some receivable aspect of the object, distinct

¹⁹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86.

¹⁹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 87.

¹⁹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 683.

¹⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 87.

from both the object itself and the senses. Hobbes takes steps to reject this traditional view.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Hobbes's materialism extends from the natural world to the very inner workings of the mind. Again, an external body or object is itself the cause of particular sensations, and is itself what presses on the organs of sense.¹⁹⁴ Even within the mind of the human being, all that is taking place is matter in motion and the pressing of external objects on the senses, which themselves produce motions. As Hobbes says, "Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else, but divers motions; (for motion, produceth nothing but motion.)"¹⁹⁵ This motion of external bodies and the organs in our own bodies, along with the various motions of the mind, including desires of every sort, is the activity or movement of matter.

For Hobbes, the object itself does not send out something to be received by the eye or ear, rather, the cause of the sense, the cause of hearing or seeing or understanding, is the very object itself. Aristotle, according to Hobbes, added an unnecessary intermediary.¹⁹⁶ All of the appearances and "seemings" generated in the world are there because of the material motion.

Hobbes's view stands in stark contrast to one of the reigning pictures of the human mind in the seventeenth century, which found its clearest expression in the work of Descartes. Moving away from the received view, held by the Scholastics and Aristotle, in which the animal and human mind is a hierarchy of faculties,¹⁹⁷ Descartes replaces this with a dualist model. For Descartes, there is a material world consisting of body or

¹⁹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85.

¹⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86.

¹⁹⁶ According to Pettit, Hobbes was not the only one to turn from this view. The rejection of the belief in this level of appearance was part of the revolutionary move of the new scientific worldview. (10)

¹⁹⁷ Pettit, 9.

matter, and there is mind, something distinct from the material world. The mind, for Descartes, is something that can be talked about and described completely independently of the material world. Indeed, through the method used in his *Meditations*, he manages to doubt the very existence of the material world but maintain that there is a thought, or a kind of mental matter.¹⁹⁸ Descartes introduces a theory of mind as consciousness rather than matter, or something we might have and be able to characterize separately from any knowledge of the world outside us. Descartes is one of the first philosophers to clearly articulate and codify a theory of mind that distinguishes the material from the mental,¹⁹⁹ and in doing so, leaves room for things like God and the soul.

Hobbes's materialism, meanwhile, as established in the previous chapter, lends itself to a theory of the mind that rejects any place for the immaterial and renders notions like an immaterial God subject to critique. The mind, for Hobbes, is not something that takes part in its own independent activity, an activity distinct from the body. The mind is very much part of the material world and constituted through activity in that world. Although he does not engage in this kind of language, it can be said that there is only one substance for Hobbes, corporeal substance.

Unlike Descartes, Hobbes is a thoroughgoing materialist – both the body and mind are merely matter. There is no “ghost in the machine,”²⁰⁰ or mind as some kind of inner realm, as Descartes has it. The mind, along with everything else in the external

¹⁹⁸ This is part of the argument made in Descartes' Second Meditation, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. II*, ed. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 16-23.

¹⁹⁹ Descartes did not get this notion from nowhere. Although in less crystallized form, the Scholastics and others danced around theories that included the material and the sensible or the “sensible species” transmitted from external objects. See pgs. 148-151 in Tad Schmaltz, “The Science of Mind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Donald Rutherford, 136-169 (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁰⁰ A phrase taken from Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2000[1949]).

world, is material and can be explained through this picture. So, Hobbes's picture of the mind is especially mechanistic, with external bodies pressing on organs proper to each sense and this, in turn, creating a representation of that object, but one that remains part of the material activity of the mind itself. Here, Hobbes resists the turn to a dualism between mind and matter, or between something ideal and something material. There are no differing substances on his account; all is body.

On language and rationality

In their respective accounts of the human being, language is central for both Hobbes and Descartes, as language is the faculty that sets human beings apart from animals. But Hobbes and Descartes differ in some ways on how they conceive of the relationship between rationality and language. For Descartes, as with Hobbes, the mind of the human being looks somewhat different from that of animals, in part because of language. But, for Descartes, rationality exists in the human being independently of language.

Of animals, Descartes declares, "they have no intelligence at all."²⁰¹ But, our own "rational soul" is of a completely different nature from the "souls of the beasts."²⁰² And, he emphasizes, understanding this difference is essential for making sense of the dualism between the mind and the body. For Descartes, then, language emerges from the rational mind, which is unique to human beings. The mind, and for him the rational mind, is the source of language. Descartes, as Pettit explains, "took the mind's capacity to be the

²⁰¹ Descartes, "Discourse on the Method," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. I*, ed. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 141.

²⁰² Descartes, *Discourse*, 141.

source of speech, not the other way around.”²⁰³ Because we have the rational minds that we do, we have language.

So, while for Descartes, the mind and language are independent of one another, the mind as primary in some sense and language secondary, for Hobbes language is constitutive of the kind of rational thought that makes us human or that human beings engage in. Hobbes sees himself as taking the idea from the Greeks that there is “no Speech without Reason; but no Reasoning without Speech.”²⁰⁴ The way we reason is with language itself, and this is something that happens within the species. Reason or rationality come from nowhere but our own industry. In *Leviathan*, he explicitly pairs language and reasoning, going so far as to state that reason, an ever-uncertain affair, is: “nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of general names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts,” or the noting them to ourselves and demonstrating it to others.²⁰⁵ Reasoning in this more complicated way is to deal in language. In both *Leviathan* and *De Corpore*, Hobbes describes reasoning as nothing more than adding or subtracting in the mind, or “computation.”²⁰⁶ The model, for Hobbes, is the kind of computation we do with numbers, but with reasoning at a more complex level, we perform this process with names.²⁰⁷

While Descartes’ human being is distinct from animals, in part, thanks to a rational soul that exists, in some sense, prior to language, for Hobbes, human beings and animals share a relatively like mind, with some capacity for reasoning in basic,

²⁰³ Pettit, 28.

²⁰⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 106.

²⁰⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111.

²⁰⁶ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 177.

²⁰⁷ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 179/181. In this passage, Hobbes holds that it is possible to do this sort of computation without words, but with proportions, conceptions, bodies, motions, degrees of quality, and the like, and this would be a part of some “silent reasoning” of the mind which can be done to some degree as a form of this process of addition and subtraction.

immediate ways. But it is language and the kind of reason and thought that emerges with the invention and use of language, that works to set human beings apart from animals. So, for Hobbes, language is an addition or creation that is part of the creation of rationality itself, or the kind of rationality that makes us human. Unlike Descartes, Hobbes does not hold that human beings have a robust rational nature that exists independent of language; instead, speech itself, or language, is the source of reasoning and thinking in the distinct way that we do.

Hobbes explains:

There is no other act of mans mind, that I can remember, naturally planted in him, so, as to need no other thing, to the exercise of it, but to be born a man, and live with the use of his five Senses. Those other faculties, of which I shall speak by and by, and which seem proper to man onely, are acquired, and encreased by study and industry; and of most men learned by instruction, and discipline; and proceed all from the invention of Words, and Speech. For besides Sense, and Thoughts, and the Trayne of thoughts, the mind of man has no other motion; though by the help of Speech, and Method, the same Facultyes may be improved to such a height, as to distinguish men from all other living Creatures.²⁰⁸

The human being, like animals, has basic faculties, including the senses and simple thoughts. But, the faculties beyond this, everything from language to rationality itself, are acquired, Hobbes says. From study, industry, instruction, and discipline, the human being is differentiated from animals. And only through cultivation, or improvement of these faculties “to such a height,” does the human being finally diverge from other creatures.

Here, crucially, Hobbes stresses the social aspect of this formation. Linguistic practice and the use of words and all aspects of speech can only happen in the context of a community or in the kind of social setting in which study, instruction, and industry are possible. Again, for Hobbes, there is “no place for Industry”²⁰⁹ except in the context of a social community, outside the state of nature. Hobbes provides some evidence here that his is not a methodological individualism, the view that takes literally his claim that we

²⁰⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 98-99.

²⁰⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186.

should “return once again to the natural state and to look at men as if they had just emerged from the earth like mushrooms,”²¹⁰ considering the individual as a distinct unit, able to be fully understood as such. Hobbes very much conceives of the individual as formed, through language use and rationality, in and through the social. To look at the individual like a mushroom is best read as an analytical device, helpful for isolating and elucidating aspects of the human being, but not to be read as more than this.

Hobbes again describes this feature of his view:

By this it appears that Reason is not as Sense, and Memory, borne with us; nor gotten by Experience onely; as Prudence is; but attained by Industry; first in apt imposing of Names; and secondly by getting a good and orderly Method in proceeding from the Elements, which are Names, to Assertions made by Connexion of one of them to another; and so to Syllogismes, which are the Connexions of one Assertion to another, til we come to the knowledge of all Consequences of names appertaining to the subject in hand; and that is it, men call SCIENCE.²¹¹

For Hobbes, sense experience and memory, unlike reasoning, are inborn faculties, found in both human beings and animals.²¹² They are “given immediately by nature, and are not acquired by reasoning.”²¹³ Memory and sense experience are not part of philosophy, or science, because they are innate in both human beings and animals and are not a product of reasoning.²¹⁴ Reason, meanwhile, the ability and means to engage in reasoning, is arrived at through industry – the imposing of names by human beings and the subjecting those names to a particular method, to assertions and connections, and finally to knowledge of consequences. To engage in language and reasoning in this way again requires the kind of study and instruction found only in and through a community. Science, and the method that forms science, is social in that no single individual is seen

²¹⁰ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 102.

²¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 115.

²¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 115.

²¹³ Hobbes, *Part I of De Corpore, Computatio Sive Logica, Logic*, trans. and commentary by Aloysius Martinich (New York: Abaris Books, 1981) 175.

²¹⁴ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 177.

as generating this method; it must be social by virtue of what is required for its emergence. The social nature of linguistic activity – a point to be contended with more fully below – is then an important feature of Hobbes’s theory.

So, reasoning only takes place through the use of language, which is itself a human invention, a practical affair of computation among names and, later, assertions. Unlike Descartes, for whom reason is part of the soul somehow, or what makes humans distinctive prior to their interactions with one another, for Hobbes, reason is a faculty invented and cultivated by the particular animals we are. This form of rationality, as linguistic, sets us apart from other animals, so making us human.

Hobbes also notes that children “are not endued with Reason at all, till they have attained the use of Speech.”²¹⁵ Only with language can the individual reason in a specifically human way. And only by being instructed as to the rules and uses of language, as a child – as Pettit claims, only by being “inducted into language”²¹⁶ – can we engage in the kinds of questions and exchanges that happen through fully formed language use.

The “industry” that produces reasoning is itself part of the process of the very birth of language, so language and reason are co-conspirators of a kind. Reason itself takes us to Science, which happens in this imposing of names, engaging in proper methods, and connecting names to form assertions from these connections. Reason encompasses the process of language use and science, which itself deals in the knowledge of consequences that emerge from this industry.²¹⁷ As Hobbes continues,

²¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 116.

²¹⁶ Pettit, 38.

²¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 115.

And whereas Sense and Memory are but knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable; *Science* is the knowledge of Consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another: by which, out of that we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will, or the like, another time: Because when we see how any thing comes about, upon what causes, and by what manner; when the like causes come into our power, wee see how to make it produce the like effects.²¹⁸

Science, this knowledge of consequences, is then intimately tied to both rationality and language. While sense and memory present us with facts from experience, language gives names to those facts and, with reason, works to connect those names and engage them in a method. From this industry, the product or consequence of this method, is then science.

As Pettit points out, the form of reasoning Hobbes is interested in at this level is inferential reasoning – this is not about “recognizing one truth after another”; instead it involves “the connection that ties different truths together.”²¹⁹ As Pettit defines inferential reasoning: “It consists in seeing that one proposition entails another, and on that ground, in moving from an acceptance of the first proposition to an acceptance of the second, or from a rejection of the second to a rejection of the first.”²²⁰ The focus of Hobbes’s view is on this level of inference, and the kinds of connections human beings make.

As Hobbes holds, human beings have invented or made language, itself “a transformative technology”²²¹ that explains, as a naturalistic account, what sets us apart from nonhumans. So, for Hobbes, human beings are constituted by language in important ways and this is again consistent with his materialist view and with his naturalist account of human beings and human social activity. Recent scholarship has looked to Hobbes as someone who focuses on the social and political use of language,²²² and as someone who

²¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 115.

²¹⁹ Pettit, 42.

²²⁰ Pettit, 42.

²²¹ Pettit, 2.

²²² A major area of scholarship on Hobbes focuses on rhetoric, or his work as a form of rhetoric. While these readings deal explicitly with Hobbes as engaged in the language game, and see Hobbes as consciously aware of the importance of language, the issues contended with by these scholars are

makes an early turn to language, recognizing its centrality,²²³ but Pettit's recent work most explicitly argues for the view that Hobbes sees human beings as "made with words" in a more substantive sense.

In keeping with this interpretation, Pettit makes the case that, for Hobbes, language "provides the magic that enables us to jump the limitations of the natural, animal mind,"²²⁴ again a departure from the standard conception of the mind. According to Pettit, Hobbes introduces a new model that is rendered consistent with his own materialist picture – the mind is continuous with that of animals and the rest of nature – and portrays it, in this sense, as in contrast to Descartes' view.²²⁵ For Hobbes, as Pettit argues, we are constituted by language and this is what makes us human, as opposed to animal, or sapient and sentient as opposed to merely sentient. For Hobbes, "speech is at the origin of people's capacity to think."²²⁶ Specifically human rationality and language are born together in this way and lead us to think in the particular way we do.

Pettit argues his case by pointing to aspects of Hobbes's theory of mind and human psychology: the distinction Hobbes draws between cognitive and motive powers of the mind. Cognitive powers are those continuous with that found in animals and the motive are those that set human beings apart from animals. The cognitive powers have

somewhat different from those discussed here, with focus on different historical questions and things like style and the role of various expressions. The most well known study of Hobbes on rhetoric is Quentin Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²²³ While many scholars focus on his rhetoric and questions surrounding Hobbes as theorist of rhetoric or rhetorician, fewer focus on his theory of language itself. Pettit's project stands out, and others have noted his "linguistic turn," for example, Ball's "Hobbes' Linguistic Turn," J.W.N. Watkins' *Hobbes's System of Ideas* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1973), Yves Charles Zarka's *Hobbes et la pensée politique moderne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), and Whelan's "Language and its Abuses in Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *American Political Science Review* 75: 59-75, 1981.

²²⁴ Pettit, 25.

²²⁵ Pettit, 11-12; 27-29.

²²⁶ Pettit, 26.

only to do with the senses, or with “sensory representation, memories, and imaginings.”²²⁷ This first kind of power of the mind is basically determined, a power responsive in an immediate way to the world. The motive powers, meanwhile, are where the will lies and this is connected to desire and appetite.²²⁸ Hobbes’s picture of the mind, as Pettit argues, leads to his story of language – the motive powers of the mind can move from particular to classificatory thought, from having a conception of a thing to, through the use of names, having a general conception of something.²²⁹ The mind, with the help of speech, goes from registering things to classifying them.²³⁰

So, again, Hobbes is here differentiating between thought associated with the natural mind, or what human beings share with animals, and the kind of thought that comes with the particular industry that is language. As Pettit interprets Hobbes, the sorts of connections that happen in the mind between current moments and past experiences – the level of complexity to the kinds of memories and advanced planning we might have – do not take place in the same way in the natural mind as they do in the mind shaped by language. The natural mind will merely have a subliminal set of expectations about what is happening, but the mind shaped by language will be “active” and “voluntary,”²³¹ one with the ability to pose questions, consider truth claims, and act intentionally.²³² The natural mind is only “subliminally” aware of background properties in the world – these properties only become concepts or objects of attention for us when we have the language to classify them as more than particulars.²³³ The natural mind still has expectations of

²²⁷ Pettit, 16.

²²⁸ Pettit, 16-17.

²²⁹ Pettit, 31.

²³⁰ Pettit, 32.

²³¹ Pettit, 37.

²³² Pettit, 37.

²³³ Pettit, 36.

some kind but not the sort constituting what we consider human or sapient mentality. The natural mind can still respond to stimuli and reason in the immediacy of those stimuli, even respond based on some amount of conditioning,²³⁴ but this is still a singularly first person perspective, one engaged in the moment and unable to also step back and take a third person perspective, or the long view, on the world.²³⁵

So, while the natural mind can engage in reasoning to some degree, it is limited to the present, to first-order concerns, and to the immediate. Meanwhile, we are future-thinkers and, so, worriers, but we also have the ability to plan, plot, and get nervous about what is to come. Language is central, again, “without which there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves.”²³⁶ The kinds of claims and commitments that need to be made for a commonwealth, society, or peace to exist, require a means to reason about the future in a way that is impossible without the use of language.

Hobbes is then distinguishing between something like a first person perspective, one that is immediate, natural, and not especially reflective, and the inclusion of a more reflective, third person stance, one that is, importantly for Hobbes, active and voluntary. With this perspective, engagement with the world is no longer merely relative to the perspective of the individual or the ‘I,’ instead a kind of objectivity is generated through the engagement of both kinds of perspective. It is no longer simply desires and passions that shape our activity; the additional perspective attained with this level of reasoning and language changes our very engagement with the world, language itself generating objectivity. As Pettit describes it, what might be considered the purely first person

²³⁴ Pettit, 30.

²³⁵ Pettit, 36.

²³⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 100.

perspective is one of “Prearticulate, particularistic thinking,” which, as he says, “involves the involuntary succession of conception after conception, whether in an unordered fashion or one that is regulated by some organizing desire...it is a case of vital or organic motion.”²³⁷ But, with language, a third person perspective is added to this primarily first person stance, and Pettit points to signs, in language, as making this possible.²³⁸ With signs “thought can become not just general or classificatory in character; it can also assume an active, voluntary profile.”²³⁹ The individual can step back from his or her actions and decisions, augmenting our capacity for volition, our passions and desires then informed by that volition. In this way, a level of objectivity is generated through language use. The world is no longer a merely relative one, with actions taking place in the moment, rather the individual can take a stance on his or her world that brings to it a perspective engaging a kind of objectivity. As will become clear in chapter five, Robert Brandom will appeal to aspects of this kind of distinction as a way to account for objectivity in linguistic exchange.

In this way, Pettit explains, for Hobbes, mastery of access to words then “transforms the capacity to think.”²⁴⁰ More will be required of Hobbes’s story to arrive at the full picture. Language is social in this sense, and involves a level of agreement with others, but it is also a skill, learned and mastered, making reasoning something shaped through prudential concerns.²⁴¹ Language gives us the means to take on the third person perspective and the means to consider our well-being (or, for Hobbes, our preservation) over the long term.

²³⁷ Pettit, 37.

²³⁸ Pettit, 37.

²³⁹ Pettit, 39.

²⁴⁰ Pettit, 39.

²⁴¹ Pettit, 45.

While animals continue to live in the moment and are confined to living in the present time, human beings, through language, can pull themselves out of the present, can think about the future, and can plan for and negotiate about that future. Without language, we would be no more than animals, with a rudimentary capacity for reasoning, existing in and for the particulars alone and unable to make moves to plan, go into contract, and make peace with one another.²⁴² Language gives human beings the ability to discuss options that are temporally removed from the present, allowing for a level or type of social communication and coordination not available to animals. Language makes us able to negotiate the future, plot and plan for that future, and think about ourselves as creatures who will continue to exist in that future.

The individual is rendered sapient, constituted by rationality and language, and this is itself an inherently social activity. If we are constituted by language in our reasoning within ourselves and with others, we are fundamentally social creatures in important ways. As Hobbes says, man might have innumerable marks in his own mind, but “unless the tokens which he may have invented for himself be common to others also, his scientific knowledge will perish with him.”²⁴³ Marks only mean something, can only be made sense of, when they are seen as part of the wider linguistic system.

Marks, signifying, and names

Hobbes examines specific aspects of speech, but he does so as an analytical exercise, meant to clarify aspects of a larger system. As a practice into which individuals must be inducted – again, for example, children acquire both reason and speech through their participation and activity in society – Hobbes’s vision is a holistic one. He sees the

²⁴² This distinction will be important in chapter four, on social exchange and agreement.

²⁴³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 195.

social as a robust system, with parts of the system pulled out for examination, but these parts are still aspects of that system. This reading of Hobbes goes up against those who see his focus as first and finally on individual components and an explanation of those individual components as sufficient for an explanation of society itself. For Hobbes, isolating aspects of the system in this way, either parts of language of the individual himself, serves as a useful heuristic device for his larger explanatory project. Hobbes's overall task, he says, is "to fill each part of my present method"²⁴⁴ or to break down his system, one which is held together with the help of each of its parts. The case is especially clear for Hobbes when it comes to language. Here, he explicitly states, "our own discourse, which being derived from the custom and common use of speech, representeth not unto us our own conceptions."²⁴⁵ Language itself is social in a fundamental way, acquired by immersion in that social setting. The language used in a community will be based on the practices and norms of that community – the "custom" and "common use" – not on the decisions of any given individual. But, to look to the parts of language remains an instructive task for Hobbes.

To make sense of these specific features of language is essential for getting out of the mess Hobbes sees, out of the "*Jargon*,"²⁴⁶ the errors, and the mistakes in signification, that only add to a "Blindenesse of understanding."²⁴⁷ Reason, again, was "*Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts" – and, he then continues, "I say *marking* them, when we reckon by ourselves; and *signifying*, when we demonstrate, or approve

²⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85.

²⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 21.

²⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 689.

²⁴⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 688.

our reckonings to other men.”²⁴⁸ So, his account of language includes both the act of any individual’s engagement with objects and ideas she encounters in the world, and the process of sharing or communicating the results of that engagement.

Hobbes’s discussion of some more specific aspects of language, his distinguishing between marks, signs, and names, the fundamental features of his theory of language, is found briefly in *Leviathan* and more completely in *De Corpore*. Hobbes talks of marks and names as independent activities, but they are best seen as aspects or functions of a more complete system, parts of one and the same activity.

Some of the details of his view provide support for the reading of his theory of language as one grounded from within practice or as based in use. Not only is it a social activity, but importantly connected to this, the most basic aspects of that activity are practical moments of linguistic exchange. As Ball describes it, speech and language are a practice for Hobbes and the foundation of his account of language is the activity of connection and inference, not a description of context-free elements of language. For Hobbes, “our language does not merely mirror the world but is instead partly constitutive of it.”²⁴⁹ Because we are formed through language, this formation takes on a different character from the view that sees language as an attempt to get the world right, or mirror it in some way. Language is a social practical activity that shapes who we are. With language, human beings have the faculty to think and reason in a particular way, or a way that renders us human. Language isn’t merely a tool for identifying objects in the world and communicating that experience to others; through language use and the kind of rationality engaged in through its use, we are formed and shaped as human beings. With

²⁴⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111.

²⁴⁹ Ball, 740.

language use, and with access to new words, we are able to think in new ways. Orwell's "newspeak" is again illustrative on this point – to limit language, to eliminate words from our vocabulary, Orwell finds, will limit our very capacity to think about the world creatively. The words we choose to use, the significations or meanings that we agree upon, shape an individual's life as well. As Hobbes claims of the uses and abuses of language – for example, that there is an immaterial substance in the form of a ghost – how we speak about these matters leads us to act in certain ways, for example, to obey certain theological authorities and act based on the belief that spirits are part of the world. Our very language use ends up shaping our world.

As Hobbes explains, the mark, a note of remembrance²⁵⁰ for the individual, is primarily used so she can recall to her own mind particular thoughts and why those thoughts arise. Pointing to the weakness of man's memory – that it is "fluctuating and frail"²⁵¹ – Hobbes sees a need for getting some kind of assistance in remembering experiences and filing them away in the mind in some fashion. He defines marks again as tokens, or "*sensible things employed by our own decision, so that at the sensation of these things, thoughts can be recalled to the mind, similar to those thoughts for the sake of which they were summoned.*"²⁵² A mark is merely a token, serving as something like a memory tool. Marks would theoretically work as a memory aid, even if an individual were alone in the world.²⁵³ Instituted for their own sake,²⁵⁴ marks are, more centrally, part

²⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 101.

²⁵¹ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 193.

²⁵² Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 195.

²⁵³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 197.

²⁵⁴ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 197.

of the broader, communal system of language, signifying to oneself certain conceptions of the mind.²⁵⁵

But, Hobbes continues, a mark must be rendered social for it to have any role in communication and to be of any real service to the individual, again reflecting his view that language is one system. Signs are the common form of marks, or those instituted for the sake of others.²⁵⁶ With signs, knowledge can be shared amongst human beings. When we signify our thoughts, we then show or demonstrate them to others, “approve our reckonings to other men,” or take them public.²⁵⁷ As he said, if these marks are never shared, the individual will take them to the grave with him.

Marks and signs work together for the benefit of human beings, a mark serving a man as a memory tool and a sign as a way for those marks to be made known to others. Hobbes specifies that signs are generally “antecedents of consequences or consequences of antecedents” – one following the other in similar fashion, for example, a cloud is a sign of coming rain, and rain is a sign there is a cloud.²⁵⁸

Marks are, in the end, useless on their own for anyone but the individual himself, so useless for scientific knowledge of any sort, unless they are made common, or rendered as signs. Neither a mark nor a sign on its own constitutes what Hobbes considers language in a more thorough sense. These are pieces of the larger linguistic system that work only in that system. Biletzki, who argues that Hobbes’s theory of language is a pragmatic one, based in use, explains, “Marks and signs are not there to be used, thereby proclaiming their independent existence. Rather, they become marks and

²⁵⁵ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 193/195.

²⁵⁶ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 197.

²⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111.

²⁵⁸ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 195.

signs when they are made so by the speaker for his use.”²⁵⁹ Marks and signs are aspects of language but are understood to be what they are only in the context of linguistic practice itself. Signs are passed on for the benefit and usefulness of mankind.²⁶⁰

As another aspect of the same process or system, names, for Hobbes, are a combination of marks and signs, serving as another one of the parts that make up speech. Names “have arisen from a decision of men,”²⁶¹ serving as a mark for thoughts that might relate to or be like previous thoughts. But, the “decision” or process of naming must be a social one as signs already incorporate the recognition of other human beings. Names are then provided in speech to serve as a sign for others about thoughts that may or may not have occurred in the speaker.²⁶² Names, he says, come about by the decision of human beings, as it makes no sense to assume that “the nature of things display themselves in their names, when he sees new words born daily, old ones destroyed, different words in use in different nations, and, finally, when he sees neither any similarity between words and things nor any establishable comparison.”²⁶³ Names are then dependent on the decisions and activity of a social community, not on a particular object, although objects can constrain that activity.

Empirical evidence for the fluidity and evolution of names provides some justification for his view that names are quite flexible tools, and part of a larger linguistic system, invented and used by human beings for communicative purposes. Hobbes also

²⁵⁹ Biletzki, *Talking Wolves: Thomas Hobbes on the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997) 43.

²⁶⁰ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 195.

²⁶¹ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 199.

²⁶² Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 199.

²⁶³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 199. Hobbes then claims that God first taught mankind names of things, this only to be destroyed with the tower of Babel and with the passage of time. Some explanation for turns like this, to an explicitly religious explanation, will be contended with in the conclusion. It remains that names as they are used in practice, Hobbes holds, are instituted by the decision of man.

specifies that names are signs not of things but of thoughts; as he says, they are signs of conceptions, not of things themselves,²⁶⁴ and to think otherwise is another one of the common mistakes of the erring metaphysician. What needs to be remembered needs to be marked with a name, even the idea of “nothing.” So names apply to both what exists and to what is invented by the mind. Hobbes distinguishes between several kinds of names, like common and universal, univocal and equivocal, absolute and relative, and composite names that include more than one conception.²⁶⁵

Descartes and Hobbes also differ, then, in what reason deals in, so they differ on this particular matter of language. While Descartes sees reasoning as “linking of things signified by names,”²⁶⁶ Hobbes views reasoning as links between names themselves. For Hobbes, reasoning or ratiocination, deals in words, or the adding and subtracting of terms, names. For Descartes, the thing itself is what it at issue.

As Hobbes tells it, in his fourth objection to Descartes:

Now, what shall we say if it turns out that reasoning is simply the joining together and linking of names or labels of meaning by the verb ‘is’? It would follow that the inferences in our reasoning tell us nothing at all about the nature of things, but merely tell us about the labels applied to them; that is, all we can infer is whether or not we are combining the names in accordance with the arbitrary conventions which we have laid down in respect of their meaning.²⁶⁷

This explicit statement of his view of language puts the burden of truth or meaning on what comes from language itself, not, finally, on the nature of the object being referred to. Meaning will only be found in the activity of reasoning, which is this joining and linking of names. The names given are only conventions, but this remains the medium through which we will reason – indeed, to use language is what it is to reason.

Descartes, meanwhile, couldn’t disagree more:

²⁶⁴ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 201.

²⁶⁵ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 205-215.

²⁶⁶ Pettit, 29.

²⁶⁷ Hobbes in Descartes, 125-126.

As for the linking together that occurs when we reason, this is not a linking of names but of the things that are signified by the names, and I am surprised that the opposite view should occur to anyone...For if he admits that the words signify something, why will he not allow that our reasoning deals with this something which is signified, rather than merely with the words?²⁶⁸

Descartes and Hobbes's fundamentally different starting points become clear through this debate. Again, reason, for Descartes, was something that exists in the human being prior to or in a way distinct from language. So, to reason in this more sophisticated way about objects, even without language, must be possible to a degree. While Hobbes will of course maintain that something is signified in the act of signifying, that reasoning itself is language removes a step in the account.

Indeed, while Descartes and Hobbes here both seem to be slipping towards the problem that Huw Price notes, as discussed in the previous chapter, that not only is “all there *is* is the world studied by science” and that “all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge,”²⁶⁹ Descartes seems to move closer to Price's description of those who hold representationalist assumptions about the relationship between words and the world. This view, as Price explains, begins with a turn to the world and seeks to describe it correctly, or get the right metaphysical picture about that world. The task on this approach is to use language to get to substantive claims about the world. Although natural, the task ends up being an awkward one, as Price finds. In seeking to pinpoint just what is in the natural world, this view harnesses the “representationalist assumption” that linguistic items “stand for” or “represent” something that is non-linguistic.²⁷⁰ By viewing rationality as the relation between the very objects, Descartes then begins from a position in which the task of language is to represent an object properly so that we can engage in reason. We will need to match our words to the world in order to reason this way in the first place.

²⁶⁸ Descartes, 126.

²⁶⁹ Price, “Naturalism Without Representationalism,” 73.

²⁷⁰ Price, 78.

This difference again highlights their disagreement about the human being and the nature of rationality. If for Hobbes, rationality happens through language, then rationality itself will be this activity of dealing in names. But, for Descartes, the things themselves are at issue. This is an important distinction for them, too, because it speaks to their perspectives on truth, or the kind of truth claim that might be achieved by the human being. While Descartes is here interested in the thing itself, Hobbes's concerns are focused at the level of language. Indeed, Hobbes is not left with a very strong conception of truth.

Signification

For Hobbes, *signification* is the goal of speaking,²⁷¹ and a definition determines the signification to be used in speech.

True and False are attributes of Speech, not of things. And where Speech is not, there is neither Truth nor Falsehood. Error there may be, as when wee expect that which shall not be; or suspect what has not been; but in neither case can a man be charged with Untruth.²⁷²

To link words correctly, in a way that abides by the process of addition and subtraction of names, is what proper signification entails. Without getting clear on signification, confusions abounds:

Seeing then that truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations, a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed.²⁷³

Truth is a matter of this right ordering of names, it is not a matter of getting a name right.

As Ball explains, Hobbes here “virtually abandons the crude label-and-object theory of meaning in favor of a richer, more variegated view about the ways in which language

²⁷¹ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 225.

²⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 105.

²⁷³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 105.

actually functions.”²⁷⁴ Truth concerns the relationship between significations themselves, the relationship between several moving parts. Although we do remain constrained by the material world, his concern is not about getting a fixed notion of truth about any given part, nor that truth might be only about the object itself. We can be better or worse at labeling, in some sense, but this is not where an analysis of language begins nor is it the primary task of language.

But, the way to get out of the twigs is through “settling of Significations,” the meaning or Definitions, which are placed “in the beginning of their reckoning.”²⁷⁵ Hobbes writes, “The first cause of Absurd conclusions I ascribe to the want of Method; in that they begin not their Ratiocination from Definitions; that is, from settled significations of their words...”²⁷⁶ Mistaken reasoning most often stems from mistaken use of language, especially the significance of words and definitions. To do reasoning right, you need to begin with right definitions.²⁷⁷ These “settled significations” are especially important in the language of philosophy and religion.

Significations are settled by society itself and fixed in their authority, although not absolute or infallible. They are changeable in some way, as human beings first fix the signification. For Hobbes, definitions still express the agreed-upon use of names, “from the decision of those who first imposed names on things, or accepted from others those imposed.”²⁷⁸ To define a word is to institute a convention. But again, as Pettit points out, “Hobbes is hostile to any suggestion that it might be reasonable for people to use words

²⁷⁴ Ball, 758.

²⁷⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 105.

²⁷⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 114.

²⁷⁷ In maintaining the view that there is a general equality of all human beings, Hobbes thinks that all men will reason similarly if they possess the same general principles.

²⁷⁸ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 235.

according to their own idiosyncratic and so idiolectical definition.”²⁷⁹ Meanings are common and the fixing of words takes place by agreement of a kind, but one with its own levels of complexity. Getting to an understanding of names is a complicated affair, with great risk of equivocation, and requiring consideration “not only in the language of other men, wherein we are to consider the drift, and occasion, and contexture of the speech, as well as the words themselves; but also in our own discourse, which being derived from the custom and common use of speech, representeth not unto us our own conceptions.”²⁸⁰ We are already part of the linguistic system itself, formed in that system and through language. And in this context, in the various uses and abuses of language, we seek to gain understanding. As Hobbes continues, “It is therefore a great ability in man, out of the words, contexture, and other circumstances of language, to deliver himself from equivocation, and to find out the true meaning of what is said.”²⁸¹

The terms that are the most fixed for Hobbes, so central to getting to the bottom of misunderstandings, are definitions. The making of reference to those definitions is of the utmost importance because, as settled significations of words, they are the goal or foundation of speech.²⁸² They are, as he explains in *De Corpore*, primary propositions made by human beings, or “truths established by the decisions of speakers and hearers,” so both the consequence of direct sense experience and the formation of names in light of the marks and signs generated between individuals, and “indemonstrable”²⁸³ in that they are the most foundational kind of proposition, or first in reasoning, so need to be established and agreed upon in order for reasoning to take place. Although established by

²⁷⁹ Pettit, 40.

²⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 21.

²⁸¹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 21.

²⁸² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 105.

²⁸³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 237.

the decision of human beings, based in sense experience, they serve as principles for demonstration. If we look to the kinds of definitions used by authors of the past, Hobbes thinks, we can often come to see where their own reasoning went wrong and led to mistaken claims.²⁸⁴

While sensory perception is the primary form of our engagement with the world, and marks and signs are generated from this sensory experience, speech in the form of signs, definitions, and signification remains a practice, the terms and concepts used very much determined by human beings.

In their introductory article on Hobbes's *De Corpore*, Hungerland and Vick focus primarily on his notions of signification and signifying, arguing that the act of signifying is logically basic in Hobbes's conception of language, so supporting a view that sees his as based in practice in this important sense. On their view, Hobbes sees language, like reasoning, as a practice, and they argue that some of the standard misconceptions about Hobbes's theory of language stem from a failure to recognize the difference, in Hobbes's own work, between what he means by signifying and what he means by naming, or the concept of an "utterer signifying something" versus the "concept of an arbitrary or conventional correlation between words and things."²⁸⁵ They see the root of the problem of misinterpretation as residing with the view that the only way a linguistic expression can have meaning is if it "stands for something," or represents or denotes something – so

²⁸⁴ "From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they cast up many little summs into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not; and at last finding the error visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds, know not which way to cleere themselves; but spend time in fluttering over their bookes; as birds that entring by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in." *Leviathan*, 105-106.

²⁸⁵ Hungerland and Vick, 15.

that, “what an expression means is what it stands for”²⁸⁶ – for the individual. According to Hungerland and Vick, scholars most commonly read Hobbes as holding in a simple sense that mental images are the very thing that linguistic expressions stand for or mean, but those mental images are private to each individual. Hungerland and Vick argue that the relationship between signifying and meaning is not so straightforward for Hobbes, so that relationship needs to be clear.

Instead, Hobbes argues that signifying, the act by community members of using words, not the signification or fixed meaning itself, is “logically the basic concept”²⁸⁷ in his theory of language. So, the activity of signifying is logically basic, which means that at the root of his linguistic account is the interaction between interlocutors, the act of signifying for the community and by the community; basic to his account is neither the fixed meaning of a term nor a simple account of the individual alone and his or her interaction with world. The root of meaning begins with the social or communal piece of language exchange – so, this “notion of membership in a community of signifiers is basic”²⁸⁸ for Hobbes, say Hungerland and Vick. The act itself is primary, an act that takes place in the context of membership in a linguistic community, rather than the mental image or concept itself. Their interpretation supports the view that Hobbes indeed accounts for the socially formative aspect of language.

Ball agrees, seeing in Hobbes the view that, “When words lose their meaning, communication – and therefore community – is impossible.”²⁸⁹ Community, or society, is both a product of language and a means for its maintenance. Ball interprets Hobbes as

²⁸⁶ Hungerland and Vick, 15.

²⁸⁷ Hungerland and Vick, 18.

²⁸⁸ Hungerland and Vick, 19.

²⁸⁹ Ball, 746.

viewing politics as something created by members of the polity, collectively, and most fundamentally through linguistic practice.²⁹⁰ The same will hold for religion.

The limits of language

Language in general, as Hobbes sees it, is the source of great misunderstandings.²⁹¹ It is the means for enabling fears and anxieties about the future, which is also one of the central seeds of religion. But, as with some of the limits to his epistemological view, as outlined in the previous chapter, language can only get us so far in trying to answer, in a final way, some metaphysical or ontological questions. And, indeed, this might not be our primary concern, on Hobbes's reading.

Apart from sensory experience, Hobbes sees language or discourse as the primary source of knowledge, that is, the "hunting out of the causes, of some effect, present or past; or of the effects, of some present or past cause."²⁹² But this common method for seeking knowledge – science itself – cannot lead to anything absolute. "No Discourse whatsoever, can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, past, or to come. For, as for the knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and ever after, Memory."²⁹³ The knowledge of consequence is merely conditional, and the individual can never get to some matter of fact through discourse, only through his or her own sense.

Religious language and religious claims are then subject to an even greater level of uncertainty and quite distinct limitations. Not only are these limits to language and to absolute knowledge especially at play – for example, events rarely experienced by individuals often provide some of the justification for particular religious claims – but

²⁹⁰ Ball, 747.

²⁹¹ As Homer Simpson has said of beer: it is "the source of and the solution to all our problems."

²⁹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

²⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

religion also most often requires that we believe the word of others. Indeed, as Hobbes sees it, religion is a paradigmatic example of a social practice for which we must trust the word of others. Rather than being a belief in the word of God, religion is primarily a matter of faith and belief in the word of another human being. Most of our communication engages belief in the word of others, but for religion this is especially the case. So, for Hobbes, questions pertaining to language and discourse and those pertaining to belief and faith, and so religion, are closely connected.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes's discussion of discourse leads straight into his discussion of belief and faith. And belief can only rest on what is said by others. The discourse of man often begins with opinion, or the judgment of the one discoursing, or from the saying of someone else. So belief has much to do with the person speaking – "*Faith, in the man; Beleeffe, both of the man, and of the truth of what he says.*"²⁹⁴ Faith, for Hobbes, is then faith in the source first and foremost rather than faith in the content. Faith can only be faith in other human beings – it is again a social affair. Hobbes continues, "whatsoever we believe, upon no other reason, then what is drawn from authority of men onely, and their writings; whether they be sent from God or not, is Faith in men only."²⁹⁵ The individual can never know by natural reason if another has a kind of "supernatural" revelation from God.²⁹⁶ And beliefs can never be commanded, as they are involuntary,²⁹⁷ so belief in God can neither be commanded or obligatory nor can obedience to authority be assessed on anything but action, as this is the only evidence available.

²⁹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 132.

²⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 134.

²⁹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 332.

²⁹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 527.

Matters of belief and faith are then tied to matters of authority. Hobbes distinguishes between believing in something, like a doctrine of faith, and believing in the word of another man, or what he says, and in the man's virtue. To believe the word of another is to both believe based on arguments or on our natural reason and based on the authority of the speaker.²⁹⁸ Belief is not based on the thing itself if we have not had experience with that thing. Scriptures themselves are written documents in which, like any other text, we need to believe – “consequently, when we believe that the Scriptures are the word of God, having no immediate revelation from God himselfe, our Beleeefe, Faith, and Trust is in the Church; whose word we take, and acquiesce therein.”²⁹⁹ Just as is the case in our believing the word of an individual, we trust in the Church as the voice of these texts. And the same holds, Hobbes says, for all of history.³⁰⁰ The access we have to historical facts is through the word of the historian, so we believe in or distrust the historian himself, not the facts. Everything we discuss, everything we know that is acquired from language and from other people, and not from our own sensory experience, is “Faith in men onely.”³⁰¹ As linguistic creatures, one of our main resources for knowledge claims is language and the word of others. But, Hobbes reminds us, this is itself a matter of faith in the word of others and not of fact.

Even more, Hobbes warns that the speakers' particular circumstances influence the use of names and the kinds of meanings they employ. The speakers' own natural disposition is implicated in the process of reasoning. Or, as he says, the “tincture of our different passions” plays a role in shaping the very process of reasoning:

²⁹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 133.

²⁹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 133.

³⁰⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 133.

³⁰¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 134.

For seeing all names are imposed to signifie our conceptions; and all our affections are but conceptions; when we conceive the same things differently, we can hardly avoyd different naming of them. For though the nature of that we conceive, be the same; yet the diversity of our reception of it, in respect of different constitutions of body, and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions.³⁰²

From this, Hobbes advises that to reason well we must not only account for the words used and their possible significations, but also the speaker himself, his natural constitution, his “disposition,” and any particular interests he might have. Names themselves never provide an entirely solid ground for the truth in reasoning, rather, much depends on the speaker, the speaker’s own constitution, cast, and set. Like metaphors, which we already understand to be vague and less true, we should also have some suspicion about names, especially names that give the appearance of truth. But, they too must be considered in light of the speaker and the speaker’s own propensity to bias and passion.

Aware of the rootedness of the human being in his or her own circumstances, Hobbes notes that this bias needs to be accounted for. Although we might all reason similarly if in possession of the same general principles,³⁰³ we are still all coming from different backgrounds and are moved by different passions. This difference makes the practice and fixing of names and words especially crucial. The less sure we are about our words and use of names, the shakier the ground on which reasoning rests. The fixedness of names has strong authority, but it is neither absolute nor unshakeable authority.

Language and religion

Language also provides a source for misunderstanding and deception, which leads to many of the conflicts pertaining to authority and obedience, especially in the Church.

³⁰² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 109.

³⁰³ Hobbes writes, “For all men by nature reason alike, and well, when they have good principles.” *Leviathan*, 115.

In Chapter 46 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes expatiates on the destructive repercussions of the abuses and misuses of language. He sees the effects of abuses of speech as far-reaching, including self-deception, deception of others – especially through the use of metaphor – the expression of lies about what one really wills, and language used to “grieve” others, or as a kind of abuse.³⁰⁴ The Church, in cahoots with the “Vain Philosophy of Aristotle,” uses speech and mistaken signification, or toying cleverly with the meaning of words for their own ends, to keep power over the citizens and, Hobbes notes, to “lessen the dependence of Subjects on the Sovereign Power of their Countrey.”³⁰⁵ For example, if a person is convinced they have been possessed, their own ability to act freely taken from them by a spirit, the Church then claims to have the solution to this problem. And with this solution, they have a means to authority over the individual. These sorts of errors in understanding – errors rooted in linguistic affairs – lead to the worst kind of misuse and abuse of power and take away the authority of the sovereign himself.

With a naturalized account of the human being, her language as born from experience in the world and with others, her passions the seeds of religion itself,³⁰⁶ religious claims, for Hobbes, can be treated in exactly the same way as any other knowledge claim. The signification of terms used in theological discourse, the claims made by the church, and the consequences of those claims, are all prime for critique by Hobbes. In providing a naturalistic explanation of language and in making language central to understanding religion, his account adds to his broad explanation of religion as itself a human social practice like any other, so subject to the same critique as any other practice.

³⁰⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 102.

³⁰⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 692.

³⁰⁶ The focus of the next chapter of this project.

The linguistic beings Hobbes is working with are then inescapably part of the social practices constituted by language, with no realm of the human world being immune to this, as to be a rational, sapient creature is to be a language-user. As he reminds us, “The use of Words, is to register our selves, and make manifest to others the Thoughts and Conception of our Minds.”³⁰⁷ Through language use, we are rendered human in a significant way. We reveal ourselves to others as the kind of being who engages with particular sorts of thoughts and conceptions. To be human, in this sense, is to use words.

Where Hobbes sees philosophy as often attempting to make for itself some exceptions to this picture, offering metaphysical claims that fall outside the sets of terms agreed upon by the community, he here objects to their tendency to overreach, tendencies that could be potentially dangerous. And where he does see these tendencies as especially dangerous is with metaphysicians of another stripe: Christian theologians.

The matter in this sense seems especially tricky. While Hobbes appears to speak authentically of God and God’s law, he is also explicit in his application of the very same criteria for critique applied to all other facets of social exchange to the term God. Names themselves are given by way of human agreement, every term in every language is signified through this agreement, and God is a term like any other. The community puts a specific signification on this term but much of the project of the second half of *Leviathan* is to go through, with something of a fine toothcomb, many of the mistaken significations that have emerged in theological language.

In looking to questions surrounding religion in terms of linguistic practices, religion is not a special case for Hobbes, it is just a more complicated case. The terms

³⁰⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 690.

used in particular religions, and even the term religion, are just that: terms. While in everyday social practice, interlocutors deal in propositional content, with the intentionality of selves and others, there is a robust sense in which individuals believe in others, as this is the crux of agreement. Language itself, as a practice, is based on this matter of agreement. Just as the political realm in some sense parallels the kind of agreement that takes place between people at the linguistic level, the realm of religion also parallels this structure of agreement, albeit with a different set of pieces.

So, one of the places where Hobbes's theory of language gets its most explicit payback, second only to his critique of the metaphysicians and schoolmen, is in what he does with religious language in particular. His theory of language is also central for interpreting his view on religion more broadly, apart from his specific complaints about theological language. But the Church in particular, a human construction like the commonwealth, can itself be subject to the same kind of critique of language and its use. With Hobbes's linguistic theory in hand, his skepticism about religion and his naturalist perspective on religion takes clearer shape.

A good part of the second half of *Leviathan* is devoted to breaking down and getting clear on the "signification" of theological terms. Talk emanating from the sphere of religion is a classic case of a realm in which there is necessity for focusing on those words. Names like immaterial substances, free will, and transubstantiation have mistaken significations for Hobbes, and he seeks to get to the source of error. And the consequences of these errors and abuses are no minor matters. Misinterpretations, stemming from bad definitions and signification, lead straight to the kingdom of

darkness. Natural ignorance extends in many direction for Hobbes, but its cause is mostly from the kinds of misunderstandings that emerge from mistakes pertaining to language.

As discussed, the term God is itself a name agreed upon by society to account for, in light of our own curiosity, an original cause. Unlike Descartes, for whom the idea of God is found with the individual, Hobbes offers a more naturalistic explanation for God, and his theory of language reinforces that the use of the name God is merely one chosen and agreed upon by mankind to account for a particular unknown.

Hobbes tells the story illustrative of his point:

For as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to warm himself by the same, may easily conceive, and assure himselfe, there is somewhat there which men call Fire, and is the cause of the heat 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.³⁰⁸

We have the experience that everything has a cause, and even if we do not experience all causes, we hear from others and from empirical evidence that everything has a cause, so we give a name to that first cause for which we have no image or idea. That name is God. While Descartes' idea of God must already be in the mind, Hobbes accounts for it in the same way in which any other idea is accounted for, so the idea of fire is accounted and explained in exactly the same way as the idea of God.

Like any other name, 'God' is the name agreed upon by a linguistic community and bearing the signification it does because of that agreement. In this case, it refers to the unknown first cause of the world itself, the term human beings in a linguistic community have given to that unknown cause, and that signifies that unknown cause. All men, whether Christian or not, may "believe in" God. But, for Hobbes, this is "all the

³⁰⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

Faith and trust [that] can possibly be had in any person whatsoever.”³⁰⁹ To believe in God looks very much like how we believe in the authority of any given man, but a more extreme and fraught case.

In Part III of *Leviathan*, Hobbes takes on, in an extensive and detailed manner, a slew of terms used by the Church and by those who put authority or power in something outside the natural world. The terms he discusses include spirit, angels, ghost, miracles, the kingdom of God, holy, sacred, sacrament, the eternal life, hell, salvation, and the Church. In each case, Hobbes approaches the term’s “signification,” or its meaning as understood by human beings and the ways names have been connected in various ways by individuals and what the terms have come to mean in public communication. Here, he inquires into the meaning or signification of the word as it stands in Scripture.

The point of doing this is based in his theory of language. As he explains:

Seeing the foundation of all true Ratiocination, is the constant Signification of words; which in the Doctrine following, dependeth not (as in naturall science) on the Will of the Writer, nor (as in common conversation) on vulgar use, but on the sense they carry in Scripture; It is necessary, before I proceed any further, to determine, out of the Bible, the meaning of such words, as by their ambiguity, may render what I am to inferre upon them, obscure, or disputable.³¹⁰

Hobbes wants to return to the source of terminology used by the Church, Scripture, to get to the problems with some of the mistaken, obscure, or disputable kinds of signification of terms. From mistaken terms emerges mistaken understanding.

Beginning with body, he presents his own materialist view, one familiar from the first half of the text, and points out that the combination of terms, “substance incorporeall” or “Incorporeall Body,” “destroy one another” and so are the product of a misunderstanding in signification.³¹¹ He also discusses the common understanding of

³⁰⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 133.

³¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 428.

³¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 429.

body and the mistaken tendency to distinguish between what is and is not body. Again, for Hobbes, the universe is all body, but common people, he explains, fall into the common mistake of seeing things like air and wind as other than body. This common mistake leads to “Idols of the brain,”³¹² or the view that they are not actually body.

He explains that the “proper signification of *Spirit* in common speech, is either a subtile, fluid, and invisible Body, or a Ghost, or other Idol or Phantasme of the Imagination.”³¹³ The signification is proper in that there is public agreement on the sense of the term and on its common use. Hobbes also specifies that metaphorical significations may be much broader. But through the chapter, Hobbes makes the case that to consider the spirit immaterial is a mistake in understanding, and one that has been made quite often. At the very worst, an incorporeal substance has to be a very thin substance which is imperceptible to our senses, but a substance nevertheless.³¹⁴ When he comes to ghosts, a signification often matched with spirit, Hobbes explains that this “signifieth nothing, neither in heaven, nor earth, but the Imaginary inhabitants of mans brain.”³¹⁵ To conceive of spirit as ghost is a mistake of the mind; spirit, as Hobbes concludes, only signifies an actual substance of some kind, when considered literally, or a special ability of the mind or body, but this is when considered metaphorically.

For Hobbes, the term “inspiration” only has “metaphorical significance,”³¹⁶ and does not refer to some incorporeal power and the “kingdom of God” is signified correctly

³¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 429.

³¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 429-430.

³¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 434.

³¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 433.

³¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 440.

in the Scriptures, but not by others, as a covenant made in this world, instituted by the people.³¹⁷

Hobbes spends a chapter of *Leviathan* discussing miracles and their use, beginning with the common understanding, or signification of miracles. Miracles are, Hobbes says, works that are “strange” or that have “very rarely been produced,” and are those works we cannot imagine having happened by natural means.³¹⁸ They seem instead to be, to the common people, “by the immediate hand of God.”³¹⁹ The merely usual is no miracle, only that for which we cannot find a natural cause. Hobbes also specifies that what might be a miracle to one person may not be so to another – it may simply be the first exposure to a work of nature for one person (for example, the first witnessed rainbow seemed like a miracle, but now has a natural explanation, or, for example, the witnessing of an eclipse³²⁰).

Indeed, miracles are meant to “procure credit” for God’s messengers, prophets, and ministers, and in Scripture, miracles were done in order to “beget beleef...in the elect only,”³²¹ not in all men universally. In Scripture, the role of miracles was to secure the belief of God’s elect.

After laying out the definition of miracles, Hobbes transitions to a discussion of the tendency to be deceived by miracles that are false. In many cases, something close to a magic trick might seem like a miracle because we are easily enchanted. And in light of this tendency to easily believe, Hobbes warns that we need to consult the Church and both see the miracle ourselves and decide whether it truly is a miracle.

³¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 442.

³¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 470.

³¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 470.

³²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 470-471.

³²¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 471-472.

But some of Hobbes's skepticism comes through here. When discussing the sacraments, Hobbes finds that there is no reason to think a miracle has been performed if the object looks the same – for example, that a piece of bread has become God. If the individual does not see it with her own eyes, she is perfectly justified in her skepticism.³²² In cases like this, Hobbes says, we must appeal to the Church itself and decide whether we are willing to take the word of those relaying this information, in this case Christian sovereign. Hobbes himself admits that he's never run across anyone who has witnessed a miracle. The matter for the moment, he explains, is then not whether someone has seen some miracle performed, rather "whether the Miracle we hear, or read of, were a reall work, and not the act of a tongue, or pen; but in plain terms, whether the report be true, or a lye."³²³ The question at issue is then, again, a matter of putting faith in a man, or in the trustworthiness of a man, here, the Church. Private reason is one thing – the individual is free to believe, in his or her heart, anything she would like.³²⁴ Whether you believe the report of a miracle is up to you. But, public reason, that is, the reason of the head of the Church, so the sovereign, is something we must all submit to for the purposes of the faith. Ultimately, men put their trust in the Church to judge whether something is a miracle or not, but they are free to believe what they will.

Even though Hobbes takes the definition of miracles seriously – that they are something without a natural explanation and are connected to God, by the end of his discussion we are left with very little to hang our hats on. Whether to believe a work of the miraculous is, in the end, up to the individual and, in essence, about whether the

³²² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 477.

³²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 477.

³²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 478.

individual believes those reporting on that miracle. Even claims to miracles come down to matters of language and belief in the claims of another person.

An examination of the language in Scripture, compared to that of common use, also leads Hobbes to similar skeptical conclusions about immortality, the Kingdom of God, and Church. Of immortality, Hobbes says, “That the Soul of man is in its own nature Eternall, and a living Creature independent on the body; or that any meer man is immortall, otherwise than by the Resurrection in the last day...is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture.”³²⁵ Nowhere in Scripture, says Hobbes, is there indication that the soul in some way continues without the body in immortality. Reflecting Hobbes’s own objection to Descartes’ view that there is something like a dualism between the mind and the body, Hobbes finds that even in Scripture this position is not supported and the mistaken view is one that maintains this kind of dualism. Reserving a place for immortality with resurrection, as the Bible describes it, Hobbes preserves a place for a view to something after death, but it must be consistent with his own materialist view – the individual could only exist in an embodied way or it would not be a person.

On the Kingdom of God Hobbes similarly interprets the discussion in Scripture as referring to something in this world, and grounded in a materialist view. The Kingdom of God, Hobbes says, is a “Civil Commonwealth” in all of Scripture, and God is the sovereign of that commonwealth. Hobbes finds that the common understanding of the kingdom of God is quite the contrary – most people on the street think that it refers to something otherworldly, and not of this earth – but presses the importance of getting this view right. By seeing the signification of the Kingdom of God as something on this earth, Hobbes thinks that views about the earth, and about the kingdom of men on the earth, are

³²⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 483.

also affected. Again, proper signification is important for how authority operates and the sorts of things human beings do in this life.

Even further, “As the Kingdome of God, and Eternall Life, so also Gods Enemies, and their Torments after Judgment, appear by the Scripture, to have their place on Earth.”³²⁶ Hobbes, in essence, seeks to secure an understanding of all discussion in Scripture as supporting a materialist, earth-bound view, that Scripture itself, if you look closely and carefully at the text, never makes a claim that any aspects of religion are found in or explained with resources from a realm outside the material, natural world.

³²⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 485.

Chapter 3

Hobbes on the Passions

A thoroughgoing materialist, with a theory of language that works to call into question a host of theological claims, Hobbes's human psychology is another aspect of his broader philosophy that serves to support the claim that Hobbes is offering a naturalized account of religion. Religion is a social practice much like politics and connected to politics, and it is one based very much in his story of the human being and society, explained by looking to human language and rationality and to his view of the mind and the world, in the context of his broader social vision. His account is a naturalized one in the sense considered in the first chapter, that our account of beliefs and human social practices only appeal to sources in the natural, causal world. A central part of this story for Hobbes is the passions. A consideration of this aspect of Hobbes's thought is a critical key for interpreting his views on religion. The first two chapters of this project made the case that Hobbes's materialism and his theory of language provide evidence of his view of religion as being a human social practice, subject to the same

criteria of analysis and means to explanation as any other social practice. His broader picture is a holistic one, seeing human beings as part of and constituted by that social system. In this chapter, I turn more specifically to his human psychology or Hobbes's account of the passions.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes: "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary for commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them. And Reason suggesteth convenient Articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement."³²⁷ The passions, or specific features of our human psychology – especially our anxieties about the future, our fear of death, our curiosity, and a desire for power – ground Hobbes's argument for a political sovereign, in conjunction with reason.

The move out of the state of nature is a matter "consisting partly in the Passions, partly in his Reason."³²⁸ While reason and language are the means by which we recognize and construct agreement between and among human beings, the passions are what drive us to seek out some kind of agreement in the first place and serve as significant factors determining the nature of the agreement. A natural fear of death, and in turn a deep desire for power and security, as well as the desire for the innumerable features of a contented existence, both now and in the future, are the psychological characteristics of the individual that both lead to the recognition of a need for agreement and help to shape that agreement.

When it comes to his political project, the more often studied area of Hobbes's work, the passions clearly play a central role, providing an important component to his

³²⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

³²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

complete account of human behavior and an important premise for several of his arguments. The condition of the state of nature, a war of all against all, where every individual is perpetually poised to attack, is so because of our particular psychological features. And in this state of nature, we are free to preserve ourselves in any way we deem necessary – it is up to us to decide what is required for self-preservation. Our desire for self-preservation, prior to any agreement with others, then leaves us constantly on guard, as any other person may interpret the requirements for self-preservation in any way they see fit. In the move to a contract, the need for a Leviathan or sovereign to keep us in awe is attributed to a fear of death and desire to secure our own future. For Hobbes, this should be apparent to all of us, as experience gives us clear evidence of our own nature:

Let him therefore consider with himselfe, when taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep he locks his doores; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there bee Lawes, and publike Officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall bee done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow Citizens, when he locks his doores; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not here as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words?³²⁹

Our very actions, even those we do without consideration, point to our natural tendency to act from certain fears, from worries and anxieties about death and harm, and in service of our desire to preserve ourselves. Recognizing this rationally, in light of our psychology, we then seek out a power to protect us. And that power is based on this psychological foundation on which Hobbes's complete political vision takes shape.

While the role of the passions is clear in the case of Hobbes's political claims, when it comes to religion, the passions are rarely given the same kind of consideration by scholars. Religion is often treated primarily as it relates to purely theological concerns,

³²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 187.

with interpretations of Hobbes's views of religion often beginning with a particular theological debate and appealing to his materialism or the historical context as evidence for what he might be saying. Interpreters alternatively appeal to what they read as his conception of obligation, basing his views of religion on the consequences of this alone. Or they pay passing attention to the explanation of religion that Hobbes has woven into his discussion of human psychology, but then leave it aside when considering his broader views on religion. Rarely do scholars look seriously to his psychological portrait to fill out what he has to say about religion at a more foundational level, as they so often do with politics.

As with the case of politics, religion is similarly grounded, in large part, in human psychology. Religion is also founded in our fears for the future, anxieties about death, and desire for power, and in our natural desire for knowledge or our need for explanation. With an accurate explanation of the world, or with increasing knowledge, one's future can be better secured. Religion is another important means for acquiring that kind of security.

This chapter makes the case that for Hobbes, religion, as with the political, is based centrally in his story of the passions, alongside the central role given to reason and language, and that this aspect of Hobbes's human psychology is a critical key for interpreting his views on religion and one often overlooked by interpreters. Just as Hobbes explains politics as being based in particular passions, in conjunction with language and reason, so too is religion. Interpreters of Hobbes on religion who fail to account for the role of the passions overlook an important resource for making sense of his view. To read his religion as grounded in the passions in this way provides crucial

clues to his project of offering a naturalized account of religion, evidence that helps to make sense of other aspects of his work. Like politics, religion ends up serving an important role in the state, so in their formation and operations, there is a parallelism between religion and politics. But, ultimately, some of the consequences of these practices and the impact of Hobbes's own explanation of those practices will differ.

In this chapter, I will first briefly describe the connection between the passions and politics, a connection often made by scholars. I will then turn to some of the ways in which interpreters of Hobbes on religion account – or fail to account – for the passions in their conception of Hobbes's view of religion. The greater part of the chapter will then make the case for just how central human psychology is to his view of religion and the importance of accounting for this centrality. Specifically, in contending with the question of the source of authority for the law of nature, the key issue in debates on Hobbes on religion, a consideration of the passions helps to resolve some of the debate, reading Hobbes as clearly making moves to redefine the law of nature and not merely align himself with a traditional theological approach.

For Hobbes, religion and politics are rooted in particular and overlapping psychological antecedents. Although how the story of religion unfolds might be quite different from that of politics and might deal in some slightly different aspects of psychology, both begin from a base in some shared and similar passions, and in the operations of reason and language. At the root of both religion and politics are desires for self-preservation, fears of the future and of death, and desires for power and so knowledge. Religion, like politics, is a specifically human endeavor because it is tied to our specifically human passion or curiosity, in conjunction with our reason, which leads

to the pursuit of knowledge. Politics in general and, for Hobbes, a sovereign government in particular, is similarly deemed necessary for the human being in light of this very uniquely human quest for knowledge. And while religion might be, in some sense, like politics, inevitable for the human being based on rational and psychological propensities, and both serving to secure peace, in the case of religion it remains a question as to whether it can survive Hobbes's own account of religion. There is some evidence pointing to Hobbes's own recognition that religion might not be able to withstand its naturalistic, scientific account.

Talk of God and talk of religion are clearly connected, but they are somewhat different matters for Hobbes. God, as noted in the previous chapters, is the name given to the first unknown cause of the world. Religion is only partially born from this idea of God. As Hobbes sees it, religion is a social practical activity, like the political in that both are practices rooted in our language, rationality, and psychology. Religion is crucially built out of some psychological features of the human being, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, including our fears and anxieties, our desire for an overarching power, and our mistaken opinions of things like ghosts. But, one of those psychological features is our curiosity, and so, religion is in part a result of this very inquiry into the first cause. This inquiry is itself based in psychology. But this inquiry can often be marred by very human errors, by laziness and ignorance, and by the workings of the imagination:

By which means it hath come to passe, that from the innumerable variety of Fancy, men have created in the world innumerable sorts of Gods. And this Feare of things invisible, is the natural Seed of that, which every one in himself calleth Religion.³³⁰

³³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

Religion then will be the expression of the variety of psychological propensities of the human being. But God is only part of that story. God, the result of a particular psychological and linguistic engagement, is a central claim and component of religious practice.

Hobbes, politics, and the passion

When it comes to Hobbes on politics, scholars are for the most part clear about the central place he gives to the passions. His political argument relies on his view of human psychology, and although interpreters may object to aspects of his portrayal of the human being, or to whether he can make some of the claims he does based on his portrayal, it remains that his political argument leans on this depiction. Many find that the psychological portrait he offers is robust enough, and, as Watkins says, “allowed him to go beyond his knowledge of himself and his observations of others to a general theory of man sufficiently powerful to do what was required of it within his civil philosophy.”³³¹ His view is seen by some scholars to be entirely consistent with his materialism, as Hobbes “ruthlessly extended Galileo’s assumptions into the innermost sanctuaries of human thought and decision.”³³² Others claim his psychological views are based in both his materialism and his empiricism.³³³ Indeed, the insights of the new science proved to be the richest of resources for Hobbes’s psychological vision. But seemingly rooted in aspects of his mechanistic theory, Hobbes describes much about the inner workings of the

³³¹ J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes’s System of Ideas* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1965) 69.

³³² Richard Peters and Henri Tajfel, “Hobbes and Hull—Metaphysicians of Behavior,” pgs. 165-183, in *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. by Cranston and Peters (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972) 165.

³³³ Watkins argues that, “a set of metaphysical ideas about human nature and a set of empirical generalizations about human behaviour both play indispensable roles in his psychological theory.” Watkins, 77.

human being, most notably a focused and very personal desire for self-preservation, a general equality amongst human beings, a fear of death, curiosity, and desire for power.

David Gauthier and Gregory Kavka are two examples of theorists who focus primarily on Hobbes's political and ethical vision, both seeking to get from Hobbes's work a new political and moral theory, one that is Hobbesian in spirit, but departing from him in important ways. But, for both, human psychology is central to the story. Gauthier says of Hobbes's "psychological doctrine that self-preservation is man's basic end,"³³⁴ that it is the source of some of his troubles, especially in leaping from the factual to the normative, but that his argument indeed rests on this claim. Gauthier holds that Hobbes's psychology, although at times problematic and the area that gets him into the most argumentative confusion, is still essential to Hobbes's moral and political claims.³³⁵

As Kavka holds, the central psychological features of egoism, aversion to death, worries about reputation, tendencies to look toward the future, conflicting desires, and basic equality amongst human beings,³³⁶ "all play a substantial role in his arguments against anarchy, and several play a further role in his other arguments."³³⁷ Kavka differentiates between what he sees as a descriptive theory of human nature or behavior in Hobbes and a normative theory, one prescribing kinds of actions that are permissible.³³⁸ He also, like other scholars, tempers what many see as Hobbes's psychological egoist position to one of "Predominant Egoism." He rejects the claim that

³³⁴ David Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan: Moral and Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 22.

³³⁵ Gauthier, 25. Gauthier finds that Hobbes ends up blurring the line between factual and normative issues, appealing to human psychology as justification for normative conclusions.

³³⁶ That is, that our passions are similar although the objects of our passions differ.

³³⁷ Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986) 33.

³³⁸ Kavka, 19. Some aspects of this distinction will be contended with in the final section of this chapter and in Chapter 5.

Hobbes finds individuals to be purely and only self-interested, claiming instead: “self-interested motives tend to take precedence over non-self-interested motives in determining human action.”³³⁹ Kavka points to some other concerns of human beings and their social lives to which Hobbes turns, and it is this milder form of egoism that Kavka sees in Hobbes. Kavka thinks this must be “assumed as a premise”³⁴⁰ for his political arguments.

Certainly not all scholars concerned with Hobbes’s political program focus centrally on his human psychology, alongside reason, as many turn primarily to aspects of his claims on liberty, rationality, or rhetoric, for example. But, they do recognize the role of this aspect of human nature for helping to ground his views on morality and politics. It would be difficult to speak of Hobbes on either politics or morality without spending a substantial amount of time coming to terms with and accounting for the role of the passions.

Interpreters on Hobbes, the passions, and religion

While most interpreters of Hobbes on politics recognize the centrality of the passions, those taking Hobbes seriously on religion often push this aspect of his work aside. While secular interpreters are generally uninterested in what he has to say about religion, as noted above, they do take the passions seriously for their role in grounding claims for politics, Gauthier being an example of someone offering this kind of reading. So-called theological interpreters, meanwhile, sometimes recognize this centrality, but then lose this component in their readings, for various reasons, turning instead to the primacy of obligation, for example. A.P. Martinich, a theological interpreter, even admits

³³⁹ Kavka, 64.

³⁴⁰ Kavka, 23.

that the secularists “account for human psychology better than religionists when it comes to moral theory.”³⁴¹ But it remains that both sets of readers end up overlooking important aspects of Hobbes’s view, critical to interpreting what he is saying about religion.

Again, briefly, as discussed in the introduction of this project, although there are a number of subtleties to their differences, the primary distinction between the “religious” and “secular” interpreters turns centrally on readings of the law of nature.³⁴² While the so-called religious interpreters read Hobbes as basing his views on a divine command theory of some sort – that is, the law of nature is God’s law and is in place prior to the state of nature – the secular interpreters see Hobbes as doing no such thing, rather, they see him as redefining the law of nature as a product of reason and human social exchange, placing the source of obligation in the hands of the human being in the first instance, not with God.³⁴³ As discussed earlier in this thesis, and to be dealt with more fully later in this chapter, there are a number of approaches taken by scholars from either side, this being the roughest characterization of the distinction. Many of the “secular” readers, instead of seeing Hobbes as an especially secular or even atheistic thinker, more often pay no attention to what he has to say about religion, with the assumption that it plays no significant role in his theory. As I argue throughout this project, both sets of readers are missing an important aspect of Hobbes’s view, and this is again apparent in their engagement with Hobbes on the passions.

³⁴¹ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 73.

³⁴² A more thorough analysis of the question of the law of nature in Hobbes’s work is taken on later in this chapter.

³⁴³ Again, some of the loudest voices for versions of the “theological” view are Taylor, Warrender, Hood, and Martinich, and for the “secular” view, Curley, Gauthier, Skinner, Strauss, and Cooke.

It was A. E. Taylor who originally got the ball rolling on what came to be seen as the religious interpretation of Hobbes.³⁴⁴ Taylor famously reads Hobbes as a deontologist or one who sees obeying of the law or a command as a good in itself, not as a good for any particular end or outcome. Taylor reads Hobbes as holding that, “the ‘natural law’ is the command of God, and to be obeyed because it is God’s command.”³⁴⁵ He also explicitly states, when arguing for the imperative character of the law and its antecedent status in the state of nature, that human psychology is of minimal importance for Hobbes. Human beings are obligated to obey the moral law, both eternally and prior to the formation of society. We are, according to Taylor’s reading of Hobbes, bound to the law whether we agree with the substance of that law or not. Our human passions have nothing to do with the nature of that obligation. For Taylor, Hobbes is offering something like a proto-Kantian view, in the direction of, but without the move to, a categorical imperative. As Warrender says of Taylor’s interpretation, “Hobbes agrees with Kant on the imperative character of the moral law, as he also agrees with him in the assertion that it is the law of ‘right reason.’”³⁴⁶ For Taylor, the moral obligation, the obligation to obey the law of nature, exists prior to agreement among individuals and prior to the conditions of the state of nature. While Taylor reads Hobbes as, unlike Kant, holding that the natural law needs to be obeyed because it is a command from God, he claims it obliges in ways similar to Kant’s. Warrender disagrees with this approach and especially with Taylor’s drawing of a likeness between Hobbes and Kant: “the obligatory character of natural law in his doctrine, does not follow from its rational form; the laws of nature are theorems

³⁴⁴ A.E. Taylor, “The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes,” *Philosophy* 13 (1938) 406-24.

³⁴⁵ Taylor, 418.

³⁴⁶ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957) 336.

and do not oblige except in their capacity as commands of God.”³⁴⁷ Warrender does not see the role of God as minimized in Hobbes’s view, instead it proves central, setting him apart from Kant.

Warrender’s case also rests on the role of the law of nature as commanded by God and prior to human agreement. He, too, focuses almost exclusively on an analysis of Hobbes’s theory of obligation, a topic that will be turned to at the end of this chapter. Warrender does spend a short chapter³⁴⁸ coming to terms with the role of self-interest and desires for self-preservation, but the task of the chapter is primarily to make the case that Hobbes gives no critical place in his view to self-interest, indeed that what matters are the kinds of rational decisions made in the face of duty, with no accounting for the psychological. He maintains that Hobbes is not trying to convince readers that they go into agreement for reasons of self-interest, based in some of the needs and passions of the individual, rather that Hobbes’s entire case rests on the rational argument based on obligation to the law. He calls “improbable” the view that Hobbes is attempting to convince readers that obedience to the law is, in some way, based on their own interest.³⁴⁹ Warrender instead aligns himself with a view that, like Taylor’s, gives primacy to the covenant, in a sense separate from the consequences of human passions.

Warrender admits that Hobbes’s discussion of felicity has to do with the goal of self-preservation and security in this life, not in some eternal afterlife, but he differentiates between what he sees in Hobbes as the motivations for his claims and the actual grounds for his argument. For Warrender, Hobbes is saying that, “Physical preservation, therefore, becomes for each man the supreme motive of action in so far as

³⁴⁷ Warrender, 337.

³⁴⁸ Warrender, Chapter 9.

³⁴⁹ Warrender, 207.

he is not affected by thoughts of God and eternal salvation.”³⁵⁰ Apart from the fact that one would be hard pressed to find explicit claims in Hobbes that individuals are, primarily, driven by a desire for pleasing God and for salvation, Warrender here places the root or base of all obligation with God. For Warrender, the notion of fear “does not, as such, supply a key to Hobbes’s theory of obligation” – to conceive of the reason for obligation as the “rational maxims for self-preservation” is to be mistaken about Hobbes’s view, Warrender says.³⁵¹ To use self-preservation as the answer to the question of why we should obey laws is to mistake matters of motive for those of obligation. Although Hobbes sees the laws of nature as rational principles that are meant to ensure self-preservation, “this consideration does not ensure their obligatory character; it is only in their aspect of being commands of God that they are laws and hence oblige.”³⁵² As Warrender specifies of his reading, one *can* do her duty because she sees it as a means to her preservation and is able to perform her duty, but one *ought* to do her duty because it is God’s command. Self-preservation is a “validating condition” not a “ground” of obligation.³⁵³ So, again, as with Taylor, the passions take a back seat to notions of duty and rationality in Warrender’s version.

On Warrender’s reading, obligation to God serves the foundational role in Hobbes’s entire project.³⁵⁴ Because of this placement, human psychology or the passions become, in some sense, dispensable, or merely secondary. While other interpreters ground Hobbes’s arguments in some of his psychological claims, here, the rational act of obeying the law of nature because it is God’s law both grounds Hobbes’s entire argument

³⁵⁰ Warrender, 210.

³⁵¹ Warrender, 212-213.

³⁵² Warrender, 213.

³⁵³ Warrender, 213.

³⁵⁴ Again, this will be dealt with further at the end of this chapter.

and ends up being the only aspect of his argument that matters for his political and moral visions.

Martinich, meanwhile, the scholar whose recent work on Hobbes on religion has emerged as the main voice to be contended with from the theological approach, also gives somewhat short shrift to the passions but still provides a more subtle engagement with the role of human psychology in Hobbes. Martinich's interpretation of the source of obligation and the law of nature is of a stripe with that of Taylor and Warrender, but he also appeals more forcefully to historical and theological claims to make the theological case for Hobbes on religion.³⁵⁵ The human psychological features tending the individual toward religion again follow the divine command, on this telling.

The common approach of those who offer a theological reading is to render the passions secondary. In this sense, aspects of the perspectives of both the "religious" and "secular" interpreters of Hobbes on religion can be critiqued. On the side of the "secular" interpreters, while they do take Hobbes's psychology seriously, as it is central for making sense of his politics, they fail to take seriously the ultimate role of religion in the political sphere. While aware that religion is, in some unexplored ways, based in psychological antecedents, they then drop the topic altogether, often considering religion as, in some sense, a secondary part of his larger view. But if the explanations for the emergence of both politics and religion are parallel, and if both play a crucial role in the securing of one's future, then religion has an important role alongside and intertwined with politics. Religion is then a central factor in the overall project of securing our future peace. But for the theological readers, while religion is indeed central, they neglect this central

³⁵⁵ Martinich's interpretation of Hobbes's conception of religion from the first part of *Leviathan* will be discussed below.

component to Hobbes's account of religion. And by overlooking human psychology, they overlook an aspect of his religion and of the commonwealth itself.

A note on Hobbes's discussion of religion and the passions

In making the case for his view of religion as, like politics, based in our particular human psychology, the placement, in the text of *Leviathan* itself, of Hobbes's discussion of religion is worth considering. Religion is part of the main narrative thread for Hobbes, not a side note. His account of religion is importantly woven into his account of the human being's psychology – an account that is also important to his explanation of politics. If Hobbes is indeed doing something on purpose, or means to explain religion in the way he does, the order is not accidental – it is actually important for understanding how he is framing religion. He is not simply relaying his explanation of the passions then taking a detour into a discussion on religion, and then returning to the main thread. Nor is religion merely relegated to the second half of the book, as some readers seem to think. Religion is very much central to his narrative.

While the second half of the book is devoted to a more particular and thorough analysis of Christianity, woven carefully into the first part, "Of Man," is Hobbes's more complete work on religion itself. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes's most thorough discussion of the passions takes place just before he makes his case for the social contract. This portrait of the rational and passionate nature of the human being is the foundation of his argument for the sovereign and religion, a human being driven by self-preservation, rational in and through her language use, and running into all sorts of trouble because of any number of unwieldy appetites and desires. His chapter devoted fully to religion is placed amid his

work on the passions. His account of the emergence of religion is explained by particular passionate and rational tendencies in the human being.

After chapters on sense, language, speech, reason, and intellect, among other things, Chapter 11, “Of the difference of Manners,” turns finally to a more thorough indication of Hobbes’s conception of religion. The chapter does not concern “decency of behaviour” – as Hobbes says, or “how a man should wash his mouth, or pick his teeth before company”³⁵⁶ – rather, manners refer to the more pressing issue of “those qualities of man-kind, that concern their living together in Peace, and Unity.”³⁵⁷ Here Hobbes takes steps toward his conception of civil society. The important features of human psychology that lead to prospects of peace among human beings – from both religion and the political – all fall under the rubric of manners. It is the desires of man, desires for power upon power, desires for ease and delight of the senses, desires of knowledge and praise, wealth and competition, and fears of death, oppression, and the future, that all conspire in the human being to lead us to both seek help from one another and to jump to mistaken conclusions about sources of authority, like custom, invisible powers, and example. The general portrait of the human being is presented by Hobbes as the groundwork for his explanation of both religion and the political, or the contract.

Although religion comes up in several places in the first half of *Leviathan*, his fullest discussion, the chapter devoted explicitly to religion, follows “Of the difference of Manners” and precedes the chapter entitled “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery.” Religion, or what constitutes the “seeds of religion,” is nestled deeply in his discussion of human psychology, a set of chapters

³⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

³⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

which itself precedes the most often read and cited chapters of the book, beginning with chapter 14, “Of the first and second Natural Lawes, and of Contracts.” The chapters leading up to his discussion of natural law focus on the human being, language, reason, and the passions, and features that need to be in place and understood in order for Hobbes to make his argument about the contract and the political sphere. Passions, felicity, anxieties, manners, and the “seeds” of religion, all come before his discussion of the natural law.

So, not only is his discussion of the passions woven carefully through his discussion of speech and discourse, religion is one of the main consequences of the passions at this very fundamental level. Indeed, the placement of his discussion of religion appears to be no accident, seemingly very much entwined with his complete picture of human psychology.

The passions

Hobbes holds that religion is peculiar to the human being, and that there are “no signes, nor fruit of *Religion*, but in Man onley.”³⁵⁸ What leads to religion comes from the unique nature of man alone. And it is not simply language and rationality that provide the full story of human behavior for Hobbes. Appetite and desire, the goals of “endeavor,” and felicity are the ways in which he characterizes the passions, which in turn provide the other major piece of the explanation for how and why we get to a place like the contract, an explanation that remains consistent with his materialist vision.

All is matter in motion for Hobbes, but he distinguishes between two kinds of motion in animals, vital and voluntary. Vital motion is the sort that happens without thought from the organism – the movement of blood through the veins, breathing,

³⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

digestion, and all the sorts of activity that require no imaginative or thoughtful engagement.³⁵⁹ Voluntary motion, meanwhile, is that found in animals requiring some engagement by the mind. This is the kind of movement that enlists the imagination in the first instance. To go somewhere, to speak, or to engage in a kind of directed activity requires the mind. It depends on what Hobbes describes as “a precedent thought of *whither, which way, and what.*”³⁶⁰ These are the most microscopic of primary motions in the human being, a kind of original intentionality. They are given the name “endeavor.” When this endeavor is directed toward something, or considered in terms of the cause of the movement, it is called appetite or desire more generally.³⁶¹ Aversion is then endeavor away from something, or a repulsion of some kind.

The will, for Hobbes, is a primarily voluntary act, with aspects of the involuntary, and is defined as the “*last Appetite in Deliberating.*”³⁶² He claims it is voluntary because it engages appetite and involuntary because it also engages warring aversions.³⁶³ It is not something like a willing nature rather the willing itself, or the act actually partaken at the end of deliberation. Hobbes’s version of the will maintains continuity with his materialist ontology and view of what human minds are like. The will is also naturalized, not a faculty separate from the operations of the body. The will is the last act or the last desire in deliberation, not the faculty itself and not the “Rationall Appetite,”³⁶⁴ as he claims many have it. When the human being acts, or makes the move to do something with the

³⁵⁹ Hobbes’s friend, William Harvey, had recently discovered that blood flows through the system. David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986) 31.

³⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118.

³⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 119.

³⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 128.

³⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 128.

³⁶⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 127.

operation of the will, the explanation for this activity is of a piece with that of all other operations of the human being.³⁶⁵

The will is also one of the realms in which his distinction between animals and human beings becomes especially clear. Animals also deliberate – “This alternate Succession of Appetites, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, is no lesse in other living Creatures then in Man; and therefore Beasts also deliberate”³⁶⁶ – rendering the will a feature of our most basic natural passions, as with those of animals. Where humans differ from animals is then in the level of sophistication of our rationality, or our linguistic capacity, and with the psychological tendency to curiosity. As Hobbes explains, “Desire, to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but *Man*; so that Man is distinguished, not onely by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other *Animals*.”³⁶⁷ While animals can engage in deliberation and so the activity of willing, they lack a more future sighted form of rationality, which is tied to language, and care overwhelmingly for satisfying these primary appetites of things like food and other sensory pleasures. The perpetual quest to satisfy these particular sense desires is tempered in the case of the human being. Instead, the human being seeks to know causes as well, and this “perseverance of delight in the continuall and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnall Pleasure.”³⁶⁸ This particular passion of the human being, a desire for knowledge of causes, ends up being one of the very central passions that distinguishes man from beast.

³⁶⁵ As Kavka sees it, Hobbes’s is an “incomplete theory of premeditated action,” which ignores many of the complexities and multiplicities of options and consequences that come with deliberation, but that “within its own limited domain, it both makes sense and preserves the fundamental relationships among the main concepts of Hobbes’s account,” 14.

³⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 127.

³⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

³⁶⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

And this hope and expectation of future knowledge from anything that happeneth new and strange, is that passion which we commonly call ADMIRATION; and the same considered as appetite, is called CURIOSITY, which is appetite of knowledge. As in the discerning faculties, man leaveth all community with beasts at the faculty of imposing names; so also doth he surmount their nature at this passion of curiosity. For when a beast seeth anything new or strange to him, he considereth it so far only as to discern whether it be likely to serve his turn, or hurt him, and accordingly approacheth nearer it, or flieth from it; whereas man, who in most events remembereth in what manner they were caused and begun, looketh for the cause and beginning of everything that ariseth new unto him.³⁶⁹

With the desire to know causes, the human being can then call a halt to the perpetual pursuit of base passions and engage in the quest for knowledge. Passions in this basic sense, including deliberation and the will, are then something prior to language, as language itself emerges as a consequence of these passions. With language comes rationality and the desire for knowledge.³⁷⁰

Indeed, in light of Hobbes's views on the passions and reason, we share important features with animals. Hobbes distinguishes between animals and human beings in that animals operate by the senses, without a more fully formed linguistic rationality. For Hobbes, deliberation has to do with the passions, desires and aversions, immediate hopes and fears. Rationality is much more than deliberation because it is linguistic, while deliberation is pre-linguistic. Human rationality is able to deal in some complexities associated with specifically human passions like curiosity and the quest for knowledge. But, these functions are merely more complex extensions of the purely animal functions. The will is not a special faculty, non-natural in some sense, neither is rationality a special faculty. These faculties make us human, but they are still natural capacities.

For Hobbes, human beings experience diverse and ever-changing appetites and aversions. Because our bodies constantly transform, as they are themselves matter in

³⁶⁹ Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, 45-46. Here, Hobbes continues, "And from this passion of admiration an curiosity, have arisen not only the invention of names, but also the supposition of such causes of all things as they thought might produce them."

³⁷⁰ Hobbes specifies two forms of knowledge, absolute and conditional, or that of experience of fact and that of evidence of truth, the latter being sapience, which is particular to human beings. *Leviathan*, 147; *Elements of Law*, 26.

motion, the same things may cause different kinds of desires in different moments and every individual will not desire the same thing.³⁷¹ An individual's desires are in constant flux and will always be unique to specific individual constitutions and given situations.

When it comes to rationality alone, if all men were provided with the same information, we could reason equally well, holds Hobbes. But differences lie not only in access to knowledge, human beings also differ in their passions. All men have similar basic desires, rooted in the desire for self-preservation, but these very basic passions manifest themselves in innumerable ways thanks to differences between the constitutions of human beings and because of varied life experiences. These differences in passions lead to some of the extremes in human behaviors and help to explain some of the diversity of claims of individuals, especially some religious claims. Not only is language subject to the particulars of a human being's perspective and the variations of the social fabric, so too are the passions. Hobbes writes of the differences of men's wit, "It proceeds therefore from the Passions; which are different, not only from the difference of mens complexions; but also from their difference of customes, and education."³⁷² We are shaped socially in a fundamental way, constituted and formed by language – traditions and education also form the kind of passionate beings we will be. Just as language shapes the individual through its use, so too do the passions, which beyond their basic, fundamental manifestation as shared by all human beings, are then shaped more variously through engagement with the world and others and through the differing and particular constitutions of each individual.

³⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 120.

³⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 139.

Wit is one example, as “this difference of quicknesse, is caused by the difference of mens passions” – different men like and dislike different things, and the imagination operates in different ways, and those that can catch similarities have good wit, those that can observe difference quickly have good judgment.³⁷³ The differences are attributed to a combination of these factors:

The causes of this difference of Witts, are in the Passions: and the difference of Passions, proceedeth partly from the different constitution of the body, and partly from different Education. For if the difference proceeded from this temper of the brain, and the organs of Sense, either exterior or interior, there would be no lesse difference of men in their Sight, Hearing, or other Senses, than in their Fancies, and discretions. It proceeds therefore from the Passions; which are different not onely from the difference of mens complexions; but also from their difference of customes, and education.³⁷⁴

Basic desires, that of self-preservation, fears of death, and some desires for power, and the basic senses that we share with animals, are quite the same amongst all human beings. Differences can be accounted for through our actually different bodies and the make-up of those bodies, and through the difference in men’s particular “complexion,” customs, and education, as William James might say, the difference in “the circumpressure of our caste and set.”³⁷⁵

Both the differences in aspects of our passionate natures and our shared anchoring in the basic desire for self preservation, power, fear of death, curiosity, and basic workings of the senses, provide the ground work for Hobbes’s case for politics: these desires are what need to be accounted for in the pursuit of the general goal of peace. Because of these specific features of our human nature, we are all not only driven to go into agreement with others, in order to secure our futures, we also require a Leviathan to keep us in awe. As a feature of our beings, our passions, in conjunction with reason, are

³⁷³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 135.

³⁷⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 138-139.

³⁷⁵ William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *The Will To Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 1-31. (NY: Dover, 1956) 9.

not always to be trusted. These human psychological traits provide some justification for the need for the sovereign. These are indeed the “Passions that encline men to Peace,”³⁷⁶ and the way to peace, the way out of the state of nature, “consisting partly in the Passions, partly in his Reason.”³⁷⁷

These passions of the human being also provide part of the explanation for the emergence and existence of religion. Religion, like politics, is the manifestation of social engagement of human beings with one another, in light of very specific passions. In the case of religion, as with politics, it is a curiosity leading to a desire for knowledge, a desire for peace, and especially a desire for a secure future, in light of anxieties about that future. The emergence or existence of both of these social practices, politics and religion, can be explained in large part by these central aspects of our passionate natures.

Endeavor and felicity, power and self-preservation

For Hobbes, the human being is driven first and foremost, but not solely, by the desire for self-preservation. The individual is, very basically, out to keep him or herself alive and attain the object of his or her desires, though certain things (for example slander) can seem to be a worse fate than death, Hobbes thinks. And for Hobbes, self-preservation is achieved through the ongoing acquisition of power, or the means for the achievement of all the sorts of desires that lead to self-preservation – such as riches, honor, knowledge, and especially the means for securing one’s future desires.³⁷⁸ Hobbes explains, “in the first place,” lies a “generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death.”³⁷⁹ By their very nature,

³⁷⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

³⁷⁷ Hobbes. *Leviathan*, 188.

³⁷⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

³⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

human beings are on a continual quest to obtain the means to satisfy one desire after another, or power after power.

His explanation for this desire, and for how the human being operates, begins at the most minute level: “These small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called ENDEAVOR.”³⁸⁰ The invisible motions in the individual provide the root explanation for human activity and desire. These small motions, directed either towards or away from something, are appetites or aversions, the former what Hobbes often calls desire, at a more general level.³⁸¹ Endeavor is the infinitesimal motion within the body, indicating a direction toward or away from objects.³⁸²

Felicity, then, is what Hobbes calls the “continuell successe”³⁸³ in satisfying these desires, as they appear to the individual. It is the “continuell progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter.”³⁸⁴ All the human being seeks is the attainment of the objects of these desires, and felicity is success at that attainment and a continual success, as the constant emergence of various desires will be continual. This process is also consistent with his view that all is matter in motion. To exist as a human being is to be in a kind of state of motion, or perpetual quest for desire upon desire. To be a human being just is to be in this state of motion as death is characterized as a state lacking this motion.

³⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 119.

³⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 119.

³⁸² Peters and Taifel note that Hobbes makes a subtle move here, taking a concept meant to operate at the purely physical, mechanical level, applied to movements of external bodies, and using it to account for the bodily, the internal, and the psychological. See pages 168-169 of “Hobbes and Hull—Metaphysicians of Behavior,” pgs. 165-183, in *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. by Cranston and Peters (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972).

³⁸³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 129.

³⁸⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

While Hobbes is content with the “comparison of the life of man to a race,”³⁸⁵ Descartes again departs from this view. Descartes thought that the goal of life was a kind of cessation of pursuit, or a contentedness. As Curley describes Descartes’ position, “he understood the goal of happiness in a very Stoic way: it consists in a life of perfect contentment or mind and interior satisfaction. He thought that the wise man, using his reason, could attain this peace of mind.”³⁸⁶ Descartes will have us try to control our desires and passions while Hobbes sees them as importantly constitutive of our humanity and to be managed in a very different way.

Again, for Hobbes, with a view inspired by Epicurean thought, life is matter in motion. The human being is part of his vision, with sensations and, in turn, knowledge, coming from the pressing of external objects on the senses, which produce motion themselves. As he writes, “Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else, but divers motions; (for motion, produceth nothing but motion.)”³⁸⁷ His metaphysics is one of matter in motion, and all is body in an Epicurean sense. And, because this is the case, for something to be still, for something to not be in this state of perpetual motion, would mean it does not exist. Hobbes even rejects the notion of a *summum bonum*³⁸⁸ – for there to be a highest good, a version of which even Epicurus maintains, would mean there is some fixed end state to be attained. So, a mind settled and satisfied, resting in something like a final state, is actually not something to seek. If this were the case, the individual would cease to exist because what constitutes his or her existence is the very seeking.

³⁸⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 47. He continues, “though it holdeth not in every point, yet it holdeth so well for this our purpose.”

³⁸⁶ Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 88-89.

³⁸⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 86.

³⁸⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

Future-thinking

Felicity is not just about attaining the object of desire of the moment. The view to the future is a critical part of the construction and maintenance of social life, including the political, moral, and religious realms of sociality. The human being seeks an object of desire at any given time, and also seeks to “assure for ever, the way of his future desire,”³⁸⁹ or seeks power. The quest for attaining desire after desire or for the power after power to attain those desires is not merely momentary, rather, pertains to both the “procuring” of those objects of desire and to “the assuring of a contented life.”³⁹⁰ Desires are then not simply singular and of the moment, although these are central; the human being also has the desire to secure his or her means of satisfying future desires. Felicity then tends toward a view of a future ease. Human beings have the desire of ease and the desire of “sensuall Delight,”³⁹¹ also disposing them to think of the future, in this case, leading them to a common power who might be able to assure for them a future of ease and sensual delight.

For Hobbes, this feature of human nature is entirely this-worldly, and entirely about the perpetual, continual securing of immediate objects of desire and the future possibility for satisfying immediate desires in this life. Felicity is then something that occurs in this life, a “continuall prospering.”³⁹² Because the fundamental desire of the human being is self-preservation, felicity can only be something that satisfies this desire, or the preservation of this human life.

³⁸⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

³⁹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

³⁹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

³⁹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 129.

In light of this conception of felicity, he says, “For there is no such thing as perpetuall Tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense.”³⁹³ As he further describes it in *Leviathan*:

...the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such Finis ultimus, (utmost ayme,) nor Summum Bonum, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the books of the old Morall Philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose Desires are at an end, than he, whose Senses and Imagination are at a stand.³⁹⁴

Because felicity is a continual success in satisfying desires, for all desires to be satisfied in some final and complete way, the human being would no longer live or exist. If this seeking were to cease, the human being so understood would cease, as she would no longer possess the very foundational inclinations and activity that make her human. Again, this notion of felicity is central to Hobbes’s political vision, as the Leviathan is meant to provide a way to secure the means to satisfying future desires and the perpetual pursuit of power, along with the “Desire of Ease, and sensuall Delight,” are some of the several natural human attributes which “disposeth men to obey a common Power.”³⁹⁵ But, in scholarship on Hobbes on religion, felicity is rarely connected to Hobbes’s fullest conception of religion even though it is also based in this feature of the human being.

The passions and religion

Hobbes defines religion, in his section on the passions, as rooted in human curiosity, and so in our quest for knowledge, anxieties about the future and the unknown, fears of death and invisible powers, and our desire for a secure and contented future, that is, that we can be sure that our power will be secure in the future. Religion is defined as:

³⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 130.

³⁹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 160.

³⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

“Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publically allowed,”³⁹⁶ as emerging from an “Anxiety for the future time,” which, he says,

“disposeth men to enquire into the causes of things,”³⁹⁷ and more fully, in one of

Hobbes’s descriptions of religion:

And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques, consisteth the Naturall seed of *Religion*; which by reason of the different Fancies, Judgments, and Passions of severall men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.³⁹⁸

While curiosity is one of the passions that make us human, the consequences of this curiosity, and the consequences of our fears, leads directly to religion. Religion results from several features of our psychology, including our curiosity about causes, both our desire to know of causes and to seek first causes and our ignorance in trying to track causes. With this desire to know of causes, or a desire for knowledge, comes a tendency to trust the opinion of others and invisible powers.³⁹⁹ Without being clear about causes, men are also inclined to consider something just or unjust based solely on custom or example,⁴⁰⁰ not on one’s own pursuit of the question. But, with our anxiety about the future, we want the future to be secured, and it is made secure through the acquisition of knowledge.

Formation of religion in its particular form, and some of the seeds for the political, can also be explained further by some of these features of the human being. The desires of both “ease” and “sensuall Delight,” Hobbes explains, “disposeth men to obey a common Power.”⁴⁰¹ In the act of desiring, Hobbes says, the individual will be abandoning

³⁹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

³⁹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

³⁹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 172-173.

³⁹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168-169.

⁴⁰⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 165.

⁴⁰¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 161.

any protection he or she gets by her “own Industry, and labor.”⁴⁰² In the activity of desiring, the individual lets her guard down, turning attention to particular objects and to the possibility of ease in the future instead of watching her back in the present moment. So, one of the reasons human beings seek this common power is to put them in a position in which they can pursue their desires, seek to secure power after power, and try and plot for a life of future delight. A common power allows one to focus on these aims and hand over the project of self-protection to the common power. A common power helps to secure one’s future by putting the individual in a position in which she can actually focus on securing her future and not keep all eyes on the present.

While this is clear for the political, the story looks somewhat similar when it comes to religion. The same kinds of anxieties about the future and desires to secure that future lead to a focus on an invisible power. As Hobbes writes, “where there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or evill fortune, but some *Power*, or Agent *Invisible*: In which sense perhaps it was, that some of the old Poets said, that the Gods were at first created by humane Feare.”⁴⁰³ Like the case with a common power in the political sphere, fear, and a desire to focus on the future instead of being trapped in the present moment, leads to an invisible power in the religious sphere. An invisible power helps man to avoid being “in a perpetuall solicitude of the time to come.”⁴⁰⁴ An invisible power might have jurisdiction over realms not accessible to the visible, for example, the future.

Because knowledge of science might be of great benefit to humankind, but because human beings tend not to pursue it despite their curiosity about causes, the

⁴⁰² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 162.

⁴⁰³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 170.

⁴⁰⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 169.

“ignorance of causes”⁴⁰⁵ leads to several troublesome tendencies in man. They are pushed to “rely on the advise, and authority of others.”⁴⁰⁶ Not knowing the truth themselves, individuals tend to look to others, to the seemingly wiser, for their opinions, and tend to believe them without question. Even worse, when individuals are ignorant of a word’s signification, they trust others even more, and even trust them if they are wrong. Without understanding, human beings tend to put too much faith in the word and opinion of others. Men also tend to mistake the actions of one for the actions of many or the actions of many for the actions of one,⁴⁰⁷ leaving even less clarity about just who holds what kind of opinion and who believes what.

But it is human curiosity that leads the way, and this “love of the knowledge of causes” provides the basis for what many consider Hobbes’s proof of God’s existence. As noted in previous chapters, our natural desire for an explanation leads to our desire to know causes. It is this curiosity, he says, that “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 at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall; which is it men call God.”⁴⁰⁸ This inquiry amounts to the very form of inquiry that happens in science,⁴⁰⁹ albeit with a less secure conclusion. But, the natural curiousness and inclination to continually seek after knowledge of cause upon cause must end somewhere and it finally “inclines” man to believe in one eternal God. Indeed Hobbes specifies that this is not an idea that already exists in the mind, as with Descartes’

⁴⁰⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 164.

⁴⁰⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 165.

⁴⁰⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 165.

⁴⁰⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

⁴⁰⁹ Again, for Hobbes, science, which seeks a knowledge that is conditional, is “*Knowledge of the Consequence of one Affirmation to another.*” *Leviathan*, 147.

proof⁴¹⁰ – “though they cannot have any Idea of him in their mind, answerable to his nature”⁴¹¹ – instead, this is an idea arrived upon through a very human line of inquiry. God is not primary in this sense, or proved by proving some kind of prior existence on his part. The idea of God is only arrived at thanks to human psychological tendencies, from fear and curiosity, from the human desire for knowledge. This is important too because having an accurate explanation is also a means to better securing one’s future. Human curiosity is itself an exercise of this desire to know, a desire rooted in a fundamental desire to secure an unknown future, or achieve a kind of peace.

As Hobbes explains, ignorance of remote causes lends itself to a tendency in men to attribute an immediate or “instrumental”⁴¹² cause to any given event and to be especially gullible. Blame or punishment tends to happen in the immediate scene, with the cause perceived as a present, identifiable one. Without knowledge of natural causes, man tends to be more likely to believe others, as they have no evidence to the contrary. In fact, this all leads to a tendency in men to both believe the lies of others and to tell lies themselves.⁴¹³

Notoriously anxious about the future, human beings want nothing more than to secure their own future peace. This anxiety itself disposes them “to enquire into the causes of things; because the knowledge of them, maketh men better able to order the present to their best advantage.”⁴¹⁴ This curiosity, often exercised in an un-scientific way, leads to the inquiry of cause upon cause until, coming upon a last cause in the inquiry, itself unknowable but eternal, it is given the name God by mankind. This tendency isn’t

⁴¹⁰ Descartes. See *Meditations* 3 and 5.

⁴¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

⁴¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 166.

⁴¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

⁴¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 167.

neat; it leads to all sorts of gods, to the supposing of invisible powers, and to the granting of these invisible powers some kind of authority and force in the natural world, which is itself the source of “fear of things invisible.”⁴¹⁵ But, these tendencies are then the seeds of religion.

Because of the human being’s tendency to seek out causes, and because of the natural passions of the human being that tend mostly to felicity, Hobbes also argues that the supposed claims of the religious, of prophecy and inspiration by possession, are mistaken. They are indeed not the work of some power from without, rather, the consequence of some of the natural tendencies of the human being and, in their most extreme form, as something of an imbalanced desire, lead to madness, or “Passions that produce strange and unusual behaviour.”⁴¹⁶

Hobbes even points to some scholars of philosophy as engaging in a kind of linguistic madness. In the case of certain philosophers, Hobbes sees “abuse of words” as a form of madness brought on by the human tendency to seek causes and to get entangled in discourse that quickly moves away from anything that has comprehensible signification, piling term upon term to create new terms that soon lose any meaning. Hobbes points to Suarez as an example of an especially erudite thinker who has, somehow, produced texts that Hobbes worries are impossible to translate into plain language as there is nothing comprehensible about them. “When men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not Mad, or intend to make others so?”⁴¹⁷ Suarez in particular, in this instance, turns the body to spirit. And this example highlights the

⁴¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

⁴¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 146.

⁴¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 147.

consequences of the combination of very human, extreme passions and language when it is used in the process of endeavor.

The tendency in human beings to worry about the future is played out in both the realm of the passions and that of language. Curious, anxious about the future, and fearing death, we seek felicity, or the assurance of the means of attaining desire after desire, including the assurance of our future desires. Through the faculty of language, we have instituted ways to overcome some of these fears and anxieties, here in the form of religion. So, it is this combination of the passions and rationality that leads to peace, together working to ensure the individual's future ease.

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As noted, when engaging Hobbes's political views, scholars are quick to point to, even begin their analysis with, human psychology. The centrality of his human psychology is seen as one of his more important contributions to western thought,⁴¹⁸ and this psychology translates well to discussion of his politics. Again, many argue over how strong his theory is and whether his case is a good one, but his case is made, in part, on a very specific portrait of the human being and human passions. When looking to his religion, scholars take note of the centrality of the passions, but they less frequently work through the real consequences of his views on psychology for his perspective on religion. If they had, what becomes apparent is a very different kind of consistency to Hobbes's work. Not only is his view grounded in a materialist view, and not only are human beings rational and linguistic creatures in an importantly constitutive way, human beings share

⁴¹⁸ Peters and Taifel see Hobbes as one of the stronger candidates for consideration of the title "the father of modern psychology." 165.

very basic psychological features which lead both to what Hobbes sees as a need for a particular political program, and to the very human activity of religion.

Taylor, Warrender, and others place the command of God prior to the state of nature, in some sense prior to human activity itself. But, the main argument of this chapter is that in light of his psychological account, and in light of the claim that God for Hobbes is really the name given to the first, unknown cause,⁴¹⁹ Hobbes seems instead to see a less foundational role for God. To put God first, to give priority to something like a command of God prior to the state of nature, is to overlook the central role Hobbes gives to the passions. It is the case that the first cause of the universe itself existed before the practices that sought to understand it, but the naming of that cause can only come later. And in that naming, and through the subsequent attribution of various powers and authority to that name, God takes on a role for Hobbes that is, in some sense, unearned and too laden with authority.

On this reading of Hobbes on the passions, God is grounded in a certain way, folded into the naturalized account of the human being, and accounted for through an account of very human passions and rationality. Hobbes might disagree with his religious interpreters for the very reason that he criticizes the philosophers and theologians of his own time – they pull God from a naturalized and holistic account of human social practice, raising God up in a way in which he loses any kind of tether to the practices from which he emerged. The idea of God is indeed important, but important in ways more closely connected to the quest for peace and security in this world. To put God first

⁴¹⁹ See Chapter 2 of this project for an analysis of Hobbes's conception of God and its relationship to religion.

in the thoroughgoing way they do, wrenches God from his consistent story of human social practice.

From Hobbes's reading it also becomes clear that religion and God are far from the secure ideas and practices that men might deem them to be. If we are perfectly rational and take Hobbes seriously about his explanation for the emergence of religion, for the psychological factors at work, and for God as the unknown first cause, the question emerges as to whether this is enough to sustain religion. Hobbes is clear that God is a useful and powerful concept, especially for the sovereign and especially when theological terms and concepts have the kind of force they do, in his own time. He takes these concepts seriously, seeming to recognize both their force and their fallibility.

As Hobbes tellingly writes, deep in *Leviathan*: "For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect."⁴²⁰ Hobbes here seems to recognize that religion works as a powerful social force, a curative for chaos and a means to peace, in conjunction with politics. But, he also seems to clearly recognize that by looking closely at his own account of religion, the very curative powers of aspects of religion might be threatened. While politics is not subject to the same consequences – indeed, insight into an account might lend itself to political stability – for religion this does not seem to be the case. But, it remains for Hobbes that he recognizes and takes seriously the influence and force of religion in his own time, as, for his social system in his own time, it indeed has that kind of force.

⁴²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 410.

So, in the way Hobbes describes religion and its emergence from human psychological features and tendencies, religion is a consequence of our very desires and needs, emerging in human activity as another means to secure peace and a contented future. The seeds of religion are first contained in the individual's psychology and are then played out in interactions with others, so in the context of exchange with other human beings. But as with language, Hobbes cannot be offering a literal account of the emergence of religion – the “seeds” might exist in the human being, that is, particular psychological propensities, but religion is made and sustained through social activity. As with politics, language is required for religion because religion is a matter for the human being only – and language is what makes a human being human. The state of nature helps to illustrate the components of this practice, but Hobbes's vision remains a social and holistic one.

Religion, he says, is formed from the seeds which human beings then, as Hobbes writes, “norish, dresse, and form it into Lawes,” adding “their own invention” to maintain power and authority.⁴²¹ So the seeds are a very human anxiety for the future, fear of death, a tendency to trust the opinion and word of others, and the hope for a future of peace, ease, and security. And through social exchange, they are dressed up to become more robust versions of religion. God, the name given to the first unknown cause, is a central component to religion. But, it remains a consequence of our passionate natures and linguistic practices and one that needs to be accounted for accordingly. As a practice sustained by society, religion serves as a certain force for peace and security. But, as mentioned, its future, in light of Hobbes's own account of religion, remains an open question.

⁴²¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

Interpreters like Martinich do end up, when turning to religion, leaving aside the very central psychological picture offered by Hobbes. Religion, specifically what he identifies as “true religion,” takes on a kind of force for Martinich that Hobbes does not give to other objects of science, knowledge, and opinion. Indeed, without accounting for the connection between the passions and religion, and the role of language, Martinich ends up claiming: “the definition of religion reveals a confusion of Hobbes’s thought.”⁴²² While Martinich employs a number of strategies to make the case that Hobbes is very much a standard, straightforward, seventeenth century Calvinist, concerned with Protestant Reform, and arguing for Christianity as the “true religion,” by omitting the passions from his account, Martinich, like other theological interpreters, overlooks a possible reading in which there is no confusion to Hobbes’s thought. Martinich focuses on what he sees as a crucial distinction being made by Hobbes between “superstition” and what he calls “true religion.” For Martinich, although he finds inconsistencies in Hobbes’s account, making sense of this difference is central to his project of establishing him as a theological thinker.

Hobbes does indeed differentiate between superstition and what he calls true religion. When first defining them, again, he says, “*Feare* of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publically allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined is truly as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION.”⁴²³ At the close of his chapter on manners, leading into his chapter on religion, Hobbes writes: “By which means it hath come to passe, that from the

⁴²² Martinich, 54.

⁴²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124.

innumerable variety of Fancy, 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.”⁴²⁴ Religion, born from natural seeds in the human being, then takes the form of a power human beings fear and worship. Superstition is the same, entailing a similar creation of gods and power through fear, but superstition is a power that is forbidden from being publicly worshiped or feared. True religion is then, as he says, when the imagined power really is that power.

Martinich appeals to several instances like these in which Hobbes differentiates between true religion and superstition and points to two different definitions of superstition in *Leviathan*, definitions that seem to contradict one another. Religion is something “feigned by the mind” – with feigned in a stronger sense seeming to be a fine definition of superstition, for Martinich.⁴²⁵ This is as all well and good, holds Martinich, except that Hobbes also presents a more explicit definition of superstition as religion that is “not allowed,”⁴²⁶ true religion being, “tales publicly allowed,” and superstition as those not allowed. A worry here is that “allowed” is somewhat vague. Martinich’s worry in this case is, “This is a relativistic definition of ‘superstition’ that has the consequence that whether a religion is a superstition or not depends on time and place.”⁴²⁷ On this reading, true religion would be that found acceptable by authorities, most likely political, and superstition would be that found unacceptable.

⁴²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

⁴²⁵ Martinich, 52.

⁴²⁶ Martinich, 52. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

⁴²⁷ Martinich, 52.

This point is critical for Martinich because “true” can then refer, for Hobbes, to something like a religion that is, in some sense, right or correct even outside of the context of human social practice. In light of his position, in line with Taylor and Martinich, this is indeed what Martinich wants to appeal to in his interpretation. And here he claims that for Hobbes that religion is Christianity. But, because on the second definition “true” amounts to acceptable, when Hobbes then speaks of the “true religion,” namely, a particular form of Protestant Christianity in his own time, he is speaking of the religion found acceptable, or allowed, which is relative. This is the very interpretation Martinich wants to avoid. While again, when Martinich reads Hobbes’s true religion, or “the power imagined, is truly as we imagine,” he sees Hobbes to be holding that this is the true religion in a sense that stands outside place and time, and in a sense that is true outside the activities of human beings. Martinich then sees a contradiction in Hobbes: true cannot be both merely what is allowed by those in power and a power truly as we imagine. In fact, the very acceptance of the power would make it a power that is indeed truly as we imagine it, or true religion.

But, if Hobbes’s discussion of “true” religion is to be consistent with his own explicit explanation for the formation of religion, true religion cannot be something that exists prior to social engagement. Religion itself is only born in and sustained by human engagement, so must emerge from and survive in that engagement. True religion needs to be read in the way Martinich rejects, that is, as the religion allowed for by public authorities. Indeed, its acceptance would also make it a power that is truly as we imagine it being. It is as we imagine because it is the power in force, albeit in the relative place and time in which Hobbes finds himself. The truth of the Christian God and the truth of

Jesus truly are as “we imagine,” for Hobbes, because the authority, or those in power, publicly allow for these stories. It is the public authority, then, that institutes and allows for their acceptance, and so their very truth. There is no “truth” to them in any other sense. Indeed, again, religion is only something “feigned by the mind,” or a consequence of very particular features of our human psychology.

This reading then supports what Martinich sees as a “relativistic definition of superstition,” and this seems to be closer to as Hobbes would have it: religion is born from imagined powers, mistakes in attributing causes, and fears for the future and of invisible powers. Whatever emerges from these tendencies can be found either unacceptable by the authority, rendering it superstition, or acceptable, making it “true religion.”

For Hobbes, one of the central goals of social life, if not the goal of social life, is to better secure one’s future, or to achieve the fulfillment of the desire for future security, or peace. On the political front, Hobbes offers an explanation for the necessity of the social contract and the sovereign as a need rooted in our passions and reason. The sovereign is the consequence, based on these features of the human being, of this desire for future security. Religion then provides a kind of parallel story, but one that ends up heavily intertwined with politics. Both are part of Hobbes’s larger holistic vision.

This interpretation of Hobbes on the passions as connected to his view on religion is critical for making sense of some of the shortcomings of the so-called theological readings of Hobbes. It will also be important for pointing to the necessity of taking into account his perspective on religion, an account usually overlooked by the secular

interpreters. While diverging interpretations of his views on religion often come down to reading Hobbes on the source of the law of nature, the role he gives to the passions helps to clarify some of the contours of this debate. Psychology is central to Hobbes's stories of both politics and religion, and his explanation for the existence and persistence of religion parallels or is consistent with his argument for the social contract, and so the political, again making religion, for Hobbes, something generated in human social practice and sustained through that practice. Against those who read him as conceiving of religion as originally founded in God's law (and so all human social agreement as founded in God's law) or those who see "true religion" as something subject to a different set of criteria from other forms of social practice, or justified in some way different from how we account for other forms of social practice, Hobbes's argument for religion is quite parallel to and consistent with that of the political, both of which are of a piece with his larger system.

Both religion and politics are about securing one's future, calming worries so that we are no longer poised in a posture of war against others, fearing death, or fearing the great unknowns of our future. While the role of the passions is clear when it comes to the political, without religion, without a full conception of the role religion plays in the social scene, we do not have the complete picture of the political, social, and moral realms as Hobbes conceives of them.

Revisiting the Law of Nature

The argument being made throughout this dissertation – through an analysis of Hobbes on the body, or his materialism, on language, rationality, and human psychology, and on his religion in light of his political scheme – is that Hobbes provides a naturalized description and explanation of religion, one that sees religion as a human social practice like any other, based in the needs, desires, and rationality of the human being, and that Hobbes's picture is more socially based than some interpreters hold. As a relatively consistent naturalist throughout his work, Hobbes offers a quite modern view of religion, and the support for this argument comes most centrally from an analysis of the content of his broad philosophy of the human being and society. His materialism, his linguistic theory, and his theory of the passions and reason and, in conjunction with this, the role he gives to religion in the political setting, I argue, provide a significant amount of support for the view that Hobbes conceives of religion in this way.

The question of law, including various aspects of law and just what Hobbes means by the law of nature in particular, is one of the central hinges upon which interpretations of his view of religion rest, and a topic that finds its way into a number of debates on the broader question of Hobbes's views on religion.⁴²⁸ Interpreters of Hobbes here diverge on the general question of just how embedded Hobbes is in the raging debates on natural law theory and on more specific aspects of that topic. Many scholars see Hobbes as either engaging with debates in natural law very traditionally, and that this engagement is of some consequence, that natural law is a less important area of concern for Hobbes, or he is seen as making some innovative moves within the conversation on

⁴²⁸ As has been made clear throughout this project.

natural law.⁴²⁹ Debates range from questions like whether Hobbes was a traditional natural law theorist or an early legal positivist,⁴³⁰ how Hobbes's work on natural rights is or is not an innovation in the history of political philosophy,⁴³¹ and the important distinction between civil laws and laws of nature for Hobbes. Although these are major questions, many of which are beyond the scope of this thesis, aspects of this debate should be considered for making sense of his work on religion, especially, as has become clear throughout this project, interpretations of Hobbes's conception of the law of nature itself and what this means for the location or source of obligation.

While the consequences for religion being suggested throughout this project are, in many ways, in line with a traditional reading of Hobbes which sees his view as leading to atheism, more recently⁴³² commentators appeal to debates surrounding his conception of the law of nature as a way to read Hobbes differently, a reading that "implies that there is in Hobbes's philosophy a theory of an obligation of the same type, that runs through the whole of his account of man, both apart from and within civil society."⁴³³ This reading, one that sees moral obligation in all realms of Hobbes's picture of human social exchange, including his thought experiment of the state of nature, then crucially impacts

⁴²⁹ Two examples among many are Bobbio's *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, which argues that Hobbes's theory of natural law maintains features of both traditional natural law theory and legal positivism, Bobbio's reading leaning towards that of the legal positivist but complicated in its own way; and, Perez Zagorin's recent, posthumous *Hobbes and the Law of Nature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009) in which he clearly situates Hobbes in the natural law tradition, but argues for some of Hobbes's subtle but important innovations in the realm of natural law. But, Stuart Duncan, for example, in critiquing Zagorin's book, wonders of his focus on natural law, "One might question how much that emphasis really achieves, once we get past the initial important point of seeing how Hobbes presents his work in those terms." In *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 5/21/10, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=19687>.

⁴³⁰ This is Bobbio's driving question in *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*.

⁴³¹ For example, Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) argues that Hobbes offers an original theory on natural rights, one in which is the "greatest and most absolute in the prepolitical condition he called the state of nature" (Zagorin, 28-29).

⁴³² Beginning with A.E. Taylor's "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," *Philosophy*, vol. xiii 406-24 (1938).

⁴³³ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957) 7.

a reading of Hobbes on religion and of the role of God in that vision. If the human being is obliged in the state of nature, as some interpreters hold, then they further hold that that obligation can only be to God. Of the so-called “religious” and “secular” readers of Hobbes on religion, interpreters look to his conception of the law of nature and the source of obligation to that law as a primary place to begin assessing just where he seems to stand on religion itself.

The interpretation offered by most secular readers, and even some theological readers, and, on my view, the stronger reading, holds that Hobbes is not a natural law theorist in the sense in which many see him – for example, following squarely in the footsteps of someone like Francisco Suarez. Instead Hobbes’s approach more closely resembles that of the legal theorist Hugo Grotius, a thinker who clearly disassociates the law of nature from any theological concerns, rendering concerns about obligation to God distinct from those pertaining to obligation to the law of nature, understood as principles by which the natural human being operates. Jerome Schneewind makes the clear case for this reading – arguing that Grotius “removed natural law from the jurisdiction of the moral theologian, to whom Suarez assigned it, and made its theory the responsibility of lawyers and philosophers,”⁴³⁴ and, more, in the case of Hobbes, he “goes beyond the limits of Grotianism.”⁴³⁵ Although Schneewind ends up ultimately diverging from the secular reading of Hobbes on religion, he does establish Hobbes as influenced by Grotius rather than Suarez on the matter of natural law, leading to important implications for his moral theory.

⁴³⁴ Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 82.

⁴³⁵ Schneewind, 86.

As a way to articulate some of the differences, Warrender delineates between three approaches or “classes” to Hobbes on the law of nature. The first (and the furthest from Warrender’s own view) sees no theory of obligation in his work, reading Hobbes as providing a descriptive theory of “how men do act” but no “*theory* concerning how men ought to act.”⁴³⁶ In this class, says Warrender, interpreters see Hobbes as engaging in description and comparison, and, some of the shortcomings of man might be noted, but “he is able to offer no further theory concerning whether they ought to pursue them or to be efficient in doing so.”⁴³⁷ On this reading, Hobbes does not provide any kind of general theory of obligation – his work is entirely scientifically descriptive – and so any mention of the term obligation is a mistaken one on Hobbes’s part. For this set of interpreters, there is “a denial of a theory of obligation in Hobbes’s philosophy.”⁴³⁸

The second class of interpreters, according to Warrender, sees Hobbes as providing a new “type” of obligation, one in which: “Hobbes’s State of Nature is a moral vacuum; moral obligations begin only in civil society and moral distinctions become valid only through the alchemy of a sovereign will.”⁴³⁹ On this reading, what are conceived of as laws of nature or divine laws only oblige as commands from the civil sovereign himself. There is no obligation prior to the institution of laws by human beings in society. Warrender will object to this class of interpretation, because its reliance on “a generically new kind of obligation” that only comes into being with the commonwealth, “has the effect of reducing considerably the value of Hobbes’s argument, as all these interpretations can be shown to reduce either to a dogmatic assertion that the citizen is

⁴³⁶ Warrender, 4.

⁴³⁷ Warrender, 4.

⁴³⁸ Warrender, 5.

⁴³⁹ Warrender, 5-6. Michael Oakeshott and Strauss being two voices for this view in Warrender’s time.

obliged, or to a merely circular argument in the same end.”⁴⁴⁰ On Warrender’s reading, a moral theory cannot be generated from a description of a moral-free system. The civil sovereign can never be enough to uphold a moral system and, by beginning with a “moral vacuum,” there are not enough resources for the generation of a moral theory in Hobbes account. As Warrender sees it, there needs to be original obligation of some kind to generate any other kind of obligation.

Third and finally, Warrender’s own view “is based upon the postulate that the obligation of the citizen to obey the civil law is a type of obligation that is essentially independent of the *fiat* of the civil sovereign.”⁴⁴¹ It is this final view – the one leading to the “religious” interpretations of Hobbes – that maintains there is moral obligation running all the way through Hobbes’s conception of the human being and human social interaction. Again, moral obligation always already exists in the state of nature, and it continues in the civil sphere. Moral obligation is not generated in the civil sphere and there is no distinction between kinds or types of obligation.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, scholars generally interpreted Hobbes along the lines of the secular readings, most akin to the Warrender’s first or second class – that embedded in his philosophy was a subtle but scathing critique of some traditional theological and philosophical conceptions, that religion was indeed being undermined in certain ways, in part through his reinterpretation of the law of nature and obligation, and that Hobbes certainly made somewhat radical moves in philosophy with implications for religion. Even Martinich recognizes that his own reading of Hobbes goes against the mainstream: “According to the dominant interpretations, Hobbes did not mean that the

⁴⁴⁰ Warrender, 6. Warrender also sees less explicit evidence in the text, leading to his own construction of a coherent picture.

⁴⁴¹ Warrender, 7.

laws of nature are literally laws; did not mean that they literally impose an obligation on humans; did not mean that God literally commands them; did not mean that the kingdom of God is literally a kingdom; and did not literally mean that God rules.”⁴⁴² Martinich’s claim is that Hobbes should instead be interpreted literally, but he is aware that, for the most part, scholars do not read him this way. For the most part, interpreters see in Hobbes an undermining of tradition and traditional theological claims.

Again, this dissertation stands in agreement with this dominant interpretation – one also upheld by Warrender’s second “class” of interpreters – but looks more closely at what Hobbes has to say on religion and the central, formative role of the social, to make sense of both his more robust views on religion itself and to assess the important role Hobbes gives to religion in society and in his political scheme. The task of this short section is to further briefly clarify some of the contours of this debate, making a case for the reading most embraced by the secular interpreters of Hobbes, but also to reconsider approaches to this question based on the more holistic reading of Hobbes being offered throughout this dissertation.

If Hobbes conceives of language as a formative social practice, to analyze aspects of language is to look closely at the parts of a larger system, the analysis of each part serving as a tool for gaining clarity on the broader practice. In this way, the state of nature itself must also be considered a heuristic device of the same kind. Hobbes has us consider men as “emerged from the earth like mushrooms,” but he also does not think this was actually the case. To look to parts of the system, to pluck the individual from her context for examination, is merely helpful for making sense of the human being and society and for focusing on our passions and forms of rationality. We are inducted into

⁴⁴² Martinich, 16.

language and we are also then inducted into a society with shared meanings and laws there already. But, if something like the state of nature is taken too literally, it fails: we need society for language and to become human in some sense, but we also need to be human and speak to form society. So, the state of nature can only truly be something like a thought experiment, helpful to a degree for explaining many of our practices, but hard to take literally. Indeed, Hobbes is not interested in getting to the origins of practices in any way.

In light of this reading of Hobbes, some of the debates on the law of nature take on a different hue. While scholars argue over whether the individual is obliged in the state of nature, in some senses, readers like Warrender might be right. Hobbes's individual is indeed embedded in the normative from his very formation. Language itself, which shapes the individual, brings with it a set of social practices, or oughts already in place, needed for taking part in those practices. But, again, Hobbes uses the state of nature as a heuristic device and, as such, strips from the human being many of these features and formative forces. As a tool for analysis, just like he does with the parts of language, Hobbes pulls the individual out of a more complete system to better analyze rational and psychological factors.

This project again maintains that there is depth and complexity to Hobbes's views, with a subtle but ultimately scathing critique of religion woven through. Only by looking to Hobbes's more complete system does this become especially clear. As David Berman describes, "Whereas Hobbes's contemporaries employed depth interpretation, there has been a growing tendency to accept the surface meaning of Hobbes's statements

and, hence, the sincerity of his Christian professions.”⁴⁴³ Looking to Hobbes’s explicit claims has lent itself to a reading of Hobbes as sincere in his claims: when he mentions God he can only mean God in this traditional sense. But, as was recognized by interpreters in his time, there is much more to Hobbes’s claims than it might at first seem.

A return to some approaches to the law of nature

At the close of chapter xiii of *Leviathan*, Hobbes explains:

The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodius living; and a Hope by their industry to obtain them. And Reason suggesth convenient articles of Peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These Articles, are they, which otherwise are called Lawes of Nature.⁴⁴⁴

The laws of nature are here another name for articles of peace suggested by one’s own reason. According to Hobbes here, laws of nature arise from passions and from reason, which again is “nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts,” or the noting them to ourselves and demonstrating it to others.⁴⁴⁵ Reason suggests these articles in the face of certain natural passions. Further, Hobbes defines the law of nature as: “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.”⁴⁴⁶ The rules or laws when they are so conceived work for the project of self-preservation, as what reason deems necessary for that project. Just what those rules are, and when they can be considered laws of nature, end up being some of the major points of debate among scholars.

⁴⁴³ David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988) 64.

⁴⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

⁴⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111.

⁴⁴⁶ Hobbes *Leviathan*, 189.

And the debates on the law of nature often center on the difference between the individual in the state of nature and the individual in society, and just how different they really are. Again, Warrender emerges as one of the louder voices for the claim that, “if the laws of nature in the State of Nature are considered as the commands of God, they may properly be regarded as laws, and it is this factor which is responsible for constituting their obligatory character.”⁴⁴⁷ The laws of nature oblige because they are God’s commands, says Warrender, and so a consistent theory of obligation runs through his entire view. If the laws of nature are not considered commands of God, he continues, they are only “rational principles of prudence,”⁴⁴⁸ useful to the atheist as a guide for preservation, but not obligatory.

In Warrender’s analysis of Hobbes on the law of nature, his argument rests on the claim that there are indeed binding laws in the state of nature, but what is lacking is “sufficient security.”⁴⁴⁹ So there are still acts that are permissible or impermissible in the state of nature, according to Warrender – for example, drunkenness and cruelty are impermissible acts to which there are no ends or which are not in the service of self-preservation.⁴⁵⁰ In this way, there are obligations that can be broken, even in the state of nature. The issue, he thinks, is the level of security of the situation. The state of nature is less secure and so, although obligation exists, it is not enforced. The enforcer, in these cases, is “the individual conscience,” as there is no human authority.⁴⁵¹ Warrender’s case then rests on differentiating between laws of conscience and laws with an external enforcer. The dictates of reason give us reason to act in certain ways – these are oughts –

⁴⁴⁷ Warrender, 98.

⁴⁴⁸ Warrender, 99.

⁴⁴⁹ Warrender, 63.

⁴⁵⁰ Warrender, 62.

⁴⁵¹ Warrender, 71.

but with an external form of authority, or security, we are obligated to act in certain ways, or it becomes law. But those oughts are still God's oughts for Warrender.

A return to Hobbes's conception of the state of nature and the task of the thought experiment does provide some evidence for objection to Warrender's view. When he talks of analyzing men as "just emerged from the earth like mushrooms," Hobbes continues this description with, "grown up without any obligation to each other."⁴⁵² This state is indeed meant to be one characterized as free of obligation – here, as obligation to other men, but also to God. Warrender focuses on the "ought" implied by the demands of reason, but this is a necessity of self-preservation, not a demand with socially normative implications. It is a principle of prudence, not an obligation.

Martinich's *The Two Gods of Leviathan* is influenced by but significantly departs from this sort of reading of Hobbes. Although very much standing in the tradition of Taylor and Warrender,⁴⁵³ Martinich sees problems with both interpretations of Hobbes's moral view as based on self-interest and the view that sees Hobbes as a divine command theorist. For Martinich, the former view requires an explanation for just how it counts as a moral theory if it merely codifies self-interest, and the latter must explain the role of self-interest if obligation is merely commanded from God.⁴⁵⁴

Martinich holds that *Leviathan* indeed "espouses a divine command theory,"⁴⁵⁵ but appeals instead to Hobbes's claim that the human being requires an omnipotent force, interpreting this as evidence for making sense of law as divine command theory. For Martinich, unlike some of the other religious interpreters, Hobbes sees the root of all

⁴⁵² Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 102.

⁴⁵³ Although distancing himself from Hood – see Martinich, 13-14.

⁴⁵⁴ Martinich, 71-73.

⁴⁵⁵ Martinich, 133.

obligation as God's omnipotence: "Because humans are roughly equal to each other, they are not naturally obliged to anyone other than God. They can create obligations, however, by using the laws of nature, which are God's commands, to create a human sovereign who acquires irresistible power."⁴⁵⁶ They create obligation through the binding power of God's omnipotence. Because of fear of others, Martinich argues, "it is a practical necessity for humans to create a civil government, which can enact laws and impose obligation, but only because God stands behind and commands the laws of nature."⁴⁵⁷ So, Martinich argues that the ground of obligation is God's irresistible power. For Martinich, as with Taylor and Warrender, "according to Hobbes, the existence of God is essential to morality."⁴⁵⁸ In this case, Martinich rightly appeals to a psychological factor as some of the explanation for the move to institute law, but again turns it into a theological one. Instead for Hobbes, his "omnipotent force" is secular, not religious. Instead of a God, there is a sovereign to keep people in awe and serve as an omnipotent force of a kind.

In contrast, the other – and, as Martinich notes, "dominant" – set of interpreters most generally see the law of nature as something born from human reason and arising from the human desire for self-preservation and not interpreting this as God's law. This second "class" of interpreters, as described by Warrender, sees a somewhat new theory of obligation in Hobbes, one in which the human being becomes obligated only through the institution of laws and commands, an institution by and for human beings. But the human being begins from a morality-free space, in the state of nature. This more common, standard reading, then has important implications for consequent interpretations of religion: these interpreters may have something to say about Hobbes's theism, but more

⁴⁵⁶ Martinich, 100.

⁴⁵⁷ Martinich, 99.

⁴⁵⁸ Martinich, 136.

centrally, “argue[] that his moral and political theory is independent of any theistic suppositions.”⁴⁵⁹

Edwin Curley and Richard Tuck both see Hobbes as far from a traditionally religious thinker but admit to complexities involved with the religious implications of his work. Curley sees Spinoza’s as a more developed version of Hobbes’s own project – Curley notes that Hobbes wrote, after reading Spinoza, that he “durst not write so boldly.”⁴⁶⁰ Hobbes may have been impressed with Spinoza’s argument from his *Theological-Political Treatise* against miracles and his proof that God cannot be a lawgiver (a challenge to the crux of the argument offered by Taylor and Warrender). A law from God cannot be a command in the sense of a command from God’s will because we would have to obey it. Rather, Curley explains, “When we speak of law in connection with God, the only thing we can coherently mean is a necessary truth about how things actually behave, and must behave; we cannot mean a command that they are capable of disobeying.”⁴⁶¹ Spinoza’s argument renders a command-giving God incoherent and, if Hobbes agrees with Spinoza on this point, it is difficult to see Hobbes as a divine command theorist. Curley finds that, contrary to Taylor and Warrender, Hobbes thinks of laws as closer to “a (very special) kind of hypothetical imperative,”⁴⁶² but that he leaves room for “his theistic readers to interpret his laws of nature as laws in the strict sense.”⁴⁶³ *Leviathan* then contains a level of cleverness, allowing for both a secular and a religious reading, although Curley finds the former to be his sincere view. In a Hobbesian world,

⁴⁵⁹ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” in Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris (eds.) *Rational Commitment and Social Justice*, 90-121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998) 91.

⁴⁶⁰ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” 100.

⁴⁶¹ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” 102.

⁴⁶² Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” 104.

⁴⁶³ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” 104.

Curley holds, “There is no God, and no hope of reward or fear of punishment in an afterlife. So if we have prudential reasons to be moral, those reasons must rely only on the benefits and costs of this life.”⁴⁶⁴ Moral obligation is borne from a kind of self-interest and prudence, not from God’s command.

Tuck also writes of Hobbes, “he never advanced the view (which some modern scholars have attributed to him) that the *reason* for doing what the laws prescribe is that they are the commands of God: our reason for following them is that they are general principles which tell us how to preserve others effectively.”⁴⁶⁵ Knowing we must follow the laws of nature does not require knowing God or conceiving of those laws as God’s laws.

For these interpreters, the normative force of Hobbes’s scheme emerges most fully in the context of agreement, and through social exchange. Prior to that agreement, as illustrated through the state of nature, the “dictates of reason” of the individual may prescribe an “ought” of some kind, useful for the project of self-preservation, but these oughts are neither socially nor theologically normative. Individuals act according to their passions and reason, but, at this level, there is little to be considered either good or bad; actions either tend to self-preservation or they don’t. The only “ought” prior to agreement is that of self-preservation, and this is merely, as Hobbes says, a “necessity of Nature.”⁴⁶⁶

Hobbes vs. Suarez

At the close of chapter 15 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

These dictates of Reason, men use to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves; whereas Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider

⁴⁶⁴ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes,” 112.

⁴⁶⁵ Tuck, Richard, *Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 91.

⁴⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 210.

these same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then they are properly called Lawes.⁴⁶⁷

In this passage, Hobbes appeals to a distinction maintained by Suarez between counsel and law. But again, although he may be appealing to Suarez, his use of this distinction does not imply some of the theological consequences that follow.

Hobbes explicitly differentiates himself from Suarez in a crucial way, providing support for a reading of Hobbes as relegating all matters pertaining to law to the realm of human exchange. One of the most basic differences between Hobbes and Suarez is the primacy given to God and the role of God's command pertaining to the law of nature. While for Suarez, natural law will always be "subordinated to supernatural" – political power, although rendered by human beings, has its basic origins with the divine⁴⁶⁸ – Hobbes is less clear about the divine origins of natural law, the point of contention among scholars. Martinich continuously declares that the only view held at the time is the only view Hobbes could have, namely, that "the only possible lawgiver for the laws of nature is God."⁴⁶⁹ But, Hobbes seems to have carefully and purposefully shifted the place in which God emerges and, too, where obligation occurs, especially through his specification of God as itself an explanatory concept generated by human passions, language, and reason.

The portraits of the natural law as articulated by both Suarez and Hobbes have much in common. Because of this, and especially through his use of some similar language, Hobbes is again often read as echoing the major thrust of Suarez's view of

⁴⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 217.

⁴⁶⁸ The work of Suarez cited in this project is from the edition, *Selections From Three Works of Francisco Suarez, S.J., Volume Two*, prepared by Gwladys Williams, Ammi Brown, and John Waldron (Oxford: The Clarendon Press and London: Humphrey Milford, 1944).

⁴⁶⁹ Martinich, 112.

natural law.⁴⁷⁰ The theological readers of Hobbes on religion, especially Martinich, see clear signs of Suarez's impact in Hobbes's work, although they, too, note where he differs.⁴⁷¹ But Martinich, for example, sees in Suarez, and Aquinas, a kind of influence that provides support for a reading of Hobbes as a theological thinker. Indeed, like Hobbes, Suarez, for example, also objects to the notion of the divine right of kings, one that had some sway during this period. For both, the source of the authority of the state originates with human beings, not with any kind of divine power.

But, even Martinich admits, although drawing an odd conclusion:

In addition to reversing or inverting medieval priorities, Hobbes also transformed religious concepts into secular concepts. For example, the biblical and medieval model of God's method of creating the world becomes the model for creating the commonwealth. The biblical and medieval idea that salvation comes after death is changed into the view that the commonwealth provides salvation in this life....None of these reversals or transformations is evidence that Hobbes was nonreligious or antireligious. To the contrary, they indicate how important he thought these religious concepts were, not merely for some remote or invisible spiritual life but here and now.⁴⁷²

As most interpreters realize, Hobbes uses some traditional theological ideas to his own secular purposes. While Hobbes seems to pick up much of the language and meaning of legal terms, as presented by Suarez for example, in some ways he has little patience for the hairsplitting and inconsistent use of many terms. Hobbes is explicit in his critique of the use of the terms command and counsel, and the use of these terms in defining the law of nature. He writes: "How fallacious it is to judge of the nature of things, by the ordinary

⁴⁷⁰ Although Hobbes uses many of the same terms as Suarez, and indeed seems, in the use of this language, to be engaging in some of the theological debates of his time, there is a specific, quite different tenor to Hobbes's discussions of matters like divine authority, the law of nature, and the role of Scripture. Although not serving as substantive evidence for a reading of Hobbes as naturalizing religion, *Leviathan* is very distinctively missing some of the more theological-sounding claims so present in the work of thinkers like Suarez. Although Martinich is adamant that Hobbes conceives of the state of nature as a place inclusive of an obvious and grounding obligation to God, and holds that Hobbes could think no other way in his time, Hobbes only provides hints for this reading, evidence that Martinich must take great pains to put together. Hobbes never states so explicitly, as someone like Suarez does, that the human being in the state of nature is obligated only to God. He more often discusses only the human being's obligation to his or her own desire for self-preservation.

⁴⁷¹ Martinich sees Hobbes as "contradicting" the "deontic use" of *ius*, or right. (102)

⁴⁷² Martinich, 10.

and inconstant use of words, appeareth in nothing more, than in the confusion of Counsels, and Commands, arising from the Imperative manner of speaking in them both, and in many other occasions besides.”⁴⁷³ The distinction between counsel and command is one example of the use of language serving the purpose of the theologian, Hobbes holds. And, indeed, in the case of command and counsel, Hobbes importantly shifts the understanding of these terms in order to support his own naturalized view.

Even if an interpretation of this passage cited above, found at the close of chapter 15 in *Leviathan*, is in line with Suarez’s own view, it still provides support for a “secular” reading of Hobbes on religion. Suarez holds that counsel is excluded from the law of nature because it is more a matter of wisdom, taking place between equals rather than “derived from a superior in so far as he possesses power over and charge of his subjects.”⁴⁷⁴ While law comes from a relation of inequality – from a superior in charge of an inferior, a subject or a community – counsel, for Suarez, “passes between equals,”⁴⁷⁵ it being a matter of exchange of wisdom, not an exercise of power.

Counsel is then produced by reason, or is something like a principle of prudence, while law requires a lawgiver. As Suarez explains, “For counsel, as such, is not of its very nature derived from a superior in so far as he possesses power over and charge of his subjects; whereas law should be an ordinance of the reason such that it emanates thus

⁴⁷³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 302. He continues: “For the words Does this, are the words not onely of him that Commandeth; but also of him that giveth Counsell; and of him that Exhorteth; and yet there are but few, that see not, that these are very different things; or that cannot distinguish between them, when they perceive who it is that speaketh, and to whom the Speech is directed, and upon what occasion. But finding these phrases in mens writings, and being not able, or not willing to enter into a consideration of the circumstances, they mistake sometimes the Precepts of Counsellours, for the Precepts of them that Command; and sometimes the contrary; according as it best agreeth with the conclusions they would inferre, or the actions they approve. To avoid which mistakes, and ender to those termes of Commanding, Counselling, and Exhorting, their proper and distinct significations, I define them thus.”

⁴⁷⁴ Suarez, 127.

⁴⁷⁵ Suarez, 127.

from one having charge of the community.”⁴⁷⁶ Counsel and law differ, Suarez says, in that counsel “passes essentially between equals” and is a matter of wisdom, not power.⁴⁷⁷ Law, meanwhile, “essentially proceeds from a superior with respect to an inferior,” so is about power.⁴⁷⁸ While Hobbes might very well agree with this distinction – there is indeed a difference between what Suarez calls counsel and what Hobbes calls principles, these being generated from something like the necessity of the individual, and law being something instituted by a superior – Hobbes denies that that superior needs to be God. For Hobbes, unlike Suarez, the superior to inferior relationship, as pertains to the law, is first and foremost one of sovereign to subject. The sovereign commands over all aspects of the law; God has no place in this part of the equation, as again, there can be no covenantal exchange between the individual and God, only between the sovereign and God, whether the individual truly believes it or not.

While those interpreting his law of nature as a divine command appeal to the sincerity associated with his claims about God, Hobbes later explains that the laws of God are only a different way of describing natural laws: “The Laws of God therefore are none but the Laws of Nature, whereof the principall is, that we should not violate our Faith, that is, a commandment to obey our Civill Sovereigns, which we constituted over us, by mutuall pact one with another.”⁴⁷⁹ The laws of God also forbid the individual to do what is destructive to his or her own life, but they are formulated in faith in another, in this case the Church. Only with the sovereign’s help are Christian laws obligatory, and “the Scripture of the New Testament is there only Law, where the Civill Power hath

⁴⁷⁶ Suarez, Chapter XII: 4, 127.

⁴⁷⁷ Suarez, Chapter XII: 4, 127.

⁴⁷⁸ Suarez, Chapter XII: 4, 127.

⁴⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 612.

made it so.”⁴⁸⁰ The religion of the commonwealth, in this case Christianity, has force and is subject to public belief only because it is born from the same human impulses which resulted in the commonwealth itself. The sovereign has the right as lawgiver “derived originally from the consent of every one of those that are to be governed,”⁴⁸¹ but the same holds for religion. The sovereign acts as the representative for all men, based on an agreement among all, and religion comes from the same form of agreement, the laws of God being another way of expressing the laws of nature, or principles of prudence.

If individuals are already obligated to obey God, there is no real reason to come together to obey an overarching power in order to preserve oneself. Although Hobbes may speak of God in seemingly matter of fact ways, throughout the texts, Hobbes offers a view of God as borne from reason, anxiety, and ignorance, his own materialism better supporting this interpretation. Talk of God is then talk of a conception emerging from human psychology and its particular manifestation in society. What Hobbes has to say about the law of nature in *Leviathan* seems to provide the best evidence of a reading that places the human being and the natural world at the center or as primary and sees God and religion as emerging from the reason and practice of that human being.

Laws understood in the theological sense, that is, as eternal and divinely ordained, do not exist as such for Hobbes. Laws so understood only exist in the context of the commonwealth, that is, through and upheld by the social practice of agreement that takes place. Not only are language and reason required to render principles of self-preservation into laws to be obeyed, but the “word of God” is itself subject to the commands of the sovereign, which only exists in the context of the commonwealth.

⁴⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 552.

⁴⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 599.

Finally, the state of nature is itself a heuristic device used for making sense of aspects of human beings and society. To take claims about the state of nature too literally, to rely too much on the claim that Hobbes's view is heavily theological because God originally commands in the state of nature, seems also to overlook some of the value of this kind of analysis. With the science of his time and his sharpened method, Hobbes seeks a best explanation for human beings and society. With his own definition of God and his own explanation of religion in hand, to explain mankind as obligated to God does not seem to be what he would consider a best possible account of human social life.

Chapter Four

Religion, Society, and the Citizen

One of the primary goals of Hobbes's political work is to offer a model for a commonwealth that is most conducive to peace and security among the people of a given society. Hobbes's *Leviathan* makes a case for the consolidation of all authority, including the authority of the Church, under the sovereign.⁴⁸² His is a unifying vision, one seeking to eliminate any kind of conflict among various forms of power and authority. The "End of the Institution of Sovereignty" is, Hobbes says, "namely, the Peace of the Subjects within themselves, and their Defence against a common Enemy."⁴⁸³ To that end, Hobbes makes the case for the Leviathan, an all-powerful sovereign who stands in for every individual in a society thanks to a decision by every individual who, out of his or her own rational interest, deems it necessary to institute a sovereign. The sovereign, who is not party to the contract, has been handed the rights of every citizen, given the authority to

⁴⁸² Norberto Bobbio argues that this main aim drives all of Hobbes's work: "This leading idea is that human beings have only one way out of the natural anarchy that is a consequence of their nature; and they have only one way to establish peace, which is prescribed by the first law of nature. This way is the institution by artifice of a shared power, that is, the state." *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) xii.

⁴⁸³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985 [1651]) 268.

act for and over every citizen, by every citizen. Singular, consolidated, and unified, all authority is granted to the sovereign, moving human beings out of a state of war between one another and into a state of peace, as all have become one and there is no one, apart from external enemies, with whom to wage war. With a single power, with the needs of the human being unified into one vision, there is no longer room for disagreement because each individual has agreed to give his or her rights over to that sovereign, who now stands as the single voice for all.

This view is meant to be neither dark nor frightening – or at least no darker nor more frightening than human nature itself. The sovereign is seen as a quite natural extension of our own human propensities and tendencies, including both our passions and reason. Human beings render the “artificial man” from features of the natural man. The desires of the sovereign, and the rationality of the sovereign, are meant to be an expression or extension of human nature, writ large. The portrait of the human being that Hobbes offers in the first part of *Leviathan* is extended, at times metaphorically, but quite powerfully and consistently, into his portrait of the sovereign. Even the well-known image on the cover of the original edition of *Leviathan*, that of a crowned man, larger than life, torch in one hand, sword in the other, with symbols of the state and the Church below, is completely composed of the bodies of other men, or the citizens. The image of the human body extends to all areas of Hobbes’s politics, illustrating the whole that makes up his social system. In its ideal form, the sovereign will act in the way a rational human being would act, that is, for the preservation and felicity of the human being.

The role of religion and of God in this naturalized political picture remains a topic of disagreement among scholars. As with competing interpretations of his general

explanation of religion and his conception of God, scholars provide quite divergent accounts of the role religion takes within this political scheme, whether it plays any part in politics and, if so, what part. Again, the so-called “secular” readers, those who most fully focus on his politics and pay less attention to his work on religion, often do so because they see very little place for religion in his political vision or religion is briefly considered, priority given to political matters.⁴⁸⁴ For these readers, the more important puzzle of Hobbes’s political proposal exists irrespective of his apparent skepticism or critique of certain religious claims. Theological readers, alternatively, recognize that religion is not to be ignored and so give it a central, sometimes foundational role in his political vision. A.P. Martinich defends, for example, “Hobbes’s theologically based political theory.”⁴⁸⁵ And A.E. Taylor, Howard Warrender, and E.C. Hood all read Hobbes’s quite innovative political theory as supported by and thoroughly infused with a very traditional theological view.⁴⁸⁶ On my reading, as argued throughout this project, although both approaches correctly account for certain aspects of Hobbes’s view on religion, neither sufficiently accounts for the role Hobbes gives to religion in the commonwealth because neither considers the consequences of his full account of religion and its connection, as with politics, to language, reason, and the passions.⁴⁸⁷

This chapter takes on the realm of the political, and in particular, forms of social activity and agreement between people, and seeks to make sense of how Hobbes conceives of religion as a social practice or exchange of this kind, operating in

⁴⁸⁴ As discussed in previous chapters, for example, David Gauthier, Edwin Curley, and Leo Strauss offer versions of this approach.

⁴⁸⁵ A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 161.

⁴⁸⁶ See A.E. Taylor, “The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes,” *Philosophy* 13 (1938) 406-24, Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), and E.C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

⁴⁸⁷ The focus of chapters two and three of this dissertation.

conjunction with politics, in service of the strength and security of the commonwealth. The previous chapter on the passions established a parallelism between politics and religion in that both are grounded in human psychology, their existence and need each explained by features of that psychology. Politics itself, and religion, as I argue, are both bound up in rationality and language as well as the passions and, if extended in the way Hobbes proposes, both serve the primary goal of social life, that is, peace. So, the roots of both of these social practices are similar and this chapter makes the case that each serves a similar function, namely, to secure peace.

The main argument of this chapter is that, in rendering religion, like politics, based in very human passions, rationality, and language, in grounding his conception of religion entirely in human features, faculties, and social practices, and in making all claims to religious authority subject to the sovereign, he gives to religion the quite functional role of helping to secure peace among human beings, and, in doing so, takes away any of the force it once had as either a source of otherworldly authority for the Church, a source of spiritual comfort for the individual, or a medium for acquiring knowledge about anything outside the natural world. His account reduces religion to a social practice that both resembles and serves a similar purpose to politics, but crucially falls under the domain of the sovereign. Both of these connected realms are rendered natural by Hobbes, made the consequences of human activity alone, and are seen as an expression or manifestation of entirely human qualities. Hobbes argues that religion is then best seen as a practice consolidated into the role of the sovereign, a human standing in for all humans in the commonwealth. As such, religion, like politics, is entirely naturalized. As seen in the previous chapter, the fate of religion might not be the same as

that of politics, but they share important features pertaining to how they are explained and how they operate and are sustained.

With the more specific view of religion and God in hand, as established in the previous chapters, it is possible to see clearly some of the subtle moves Hobbes makes, using traditional conceptions and terminology but proposing much more groundbreaking claims about just how religion functions in the public sphere. Here again, this reading is opposed to that offered by so-called theological readers. On their interpretation, religion looks very much like it has before Hobbes's time, God maintaining a kind of priority in a political scheme, providing the foundational point from which to make a case for a particular political vision. But, considering Hobbes's more complete views on God and religion, and in light of many of the specific definitions he gives to concepts like the law of nature, authorship, and covenant, a very different picture emerges. Far from the traditional and theologically mainstream thinker many scholars make him out to be, and far from a political theorist without a care for matters religious, Hobbes is indeed making some quite careful and innovative claims through his work on religion in the political sphere, and in so doing, shaping and clarifying his conception of religion itself, in particular, that religion is a natural human social practice like any other and part of his broader social practical account, and, as such, needs to be accounted for and managed accordingly.

This chapter will first briefly discuss the role of the natural body, or the extension of all things human and bodily to the realm of the sovereign, and how central and primary this is to Hobbes's political project. Then turning to some of the particular features of how the sovereign is instituted, I argue that the narrative for the political story is crucial

for making sense of the religious story, as matters considered essential to establishing the sovereign are also important for religion, including authorship, authority, agreement, covenant, and the law. The chapter will then turn more explicitly to the role of religion in the commonwealth, making the case, in line with the thrust of the interpretation of religion offered throughout this project, that religion, a human social practice, born from particular psychological and rational features of the human being, is most clearly seen as a practice sharing features with and encompassed by the political, so conceived of as a central element of the broader conception of the artificial man, similarly serving the purpose of human peace and security. But, in the case of religion, it is not only a source of security, or a means to calm anxieties about the future, but, as such, it is also an additional means of promoting or encouraging obedience toward the sovereign power.

Religion is not, first and foremost, either an expression of divine authority distinct from the sovereign or an independent, final court of appeals for moral and ethical questions or questions lying beyond the scope of reason. Rather, religion is a social practice contained squarely under the purview of political practice, for the purposes of peace. Religion helps calm particular fears that are natural to the human being, both those related to the future and of things like ghosts, and also reinforces obedience to the sovereign. Within this conception, God emerges as an important, explanatory feature of religion. God becomes central to this scheme but does not have a kind of ontological or explanatory priority in Hobbes's account of human social practices. Human society is understood by first making sense of human beings and society, and, with that, making sense of our propensity to religiosity. The content of religious practice itself, for example religious claims and claims about God, is then born from those psychological

propensities and from social exchange, but does not ground religious or political practices.

In explaining religion as a natural human social practice, Hobbes neither calls for its end nor makes claims about its truth, especially its truth in some metaphysical sense. He is not explicitly declaring that religion needs to or will eventually disappear, nor that it is a burden to society, blocking the path to peace, when re-interpreted in the way he suggests. As Richard Peters notes, Hobbes “did not make the mistake of thinking that, because we can assign a psychological cause to religion, religious belief is necessarily undermined.”⁴⁸⁸ Although, as we find, his account might tend to an undermining of religion, and Hobbes seemed to be at least somewhat aware of this. Indeed, Hobbes maintains a certain respect for religion and recognition that it is a powerful psychological and social force to be reckoned with, a practice with claims that hold great sway in society. He is claiming that, if religion is going to be a feature of the commonwealth – and he thinks it will be, considering the human propensity to religiosity both psychologically, in our curiosity and anxieties about the future, and rationally, in our move to act to assuage those fears – then, as with politics, the sovereign needs to rule absolutely over the realm of religion in the commonwealth. All authority is with the sovereign, and this includes all authority over public religion.⁴⁸⁹

But, in making his case for the consolidation of religion under the power of the sovereign, Hobbes is also making quite substantial claims about the very nature of religion itself. And it is these consequences that are perhaps what led to some cries of

⁴⁸⁸ Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (England: Penguin Books, 1967) 228.

⁴⁸⁹ Private religion, to be discussed later, is a separate matter.

atheism on the part of his contemporaries,⁴⁹⁰ and scholars today. For Hobbes, everything that establishes the sovereign is an extension of the human being, and no more. Because religion falls under the purview of the sovereign as well – to practice religion is to worship the sovereign – religion, too, is an extension of the faculties, passions, and practices of the human being. If all political social practice falls under the sovereign’s power, and if religion is, in essence, a matter of worshipping the sovereign, Hobbes is then offering something like a naturalized, even secularized account of religion. Religion takes on aspects of a functional definition, serving a particular purpose in the commonwealth. But, it can only be functional when particular religious explanations and concepts hold certain meaning for the citizens. But, its roots are psychological and, as such, have a force and stability recognized by Hobbes. The human being will retain the psychological features that lead to religion, but, as Hobbes indicates, knowledge that this is the case – the pill chewed up instead of swallowed whole – could threaten religion.

In response to the debate between secular and theological readers of Hobbes on religion, this interpretation embraces aspects of both: Religion does matter for Hobbes, but, to put it plainly, it is nothing special or especially divine in a manner that has consequences for life in this world. He ends up emptying religion of much of its substantive theological content – cleverly using some of the same terms but ridding them of their real force – but he does not do away with its supportive role in society. Hobbes does not explicitly call for the end of religion nor does he seem to see himself as heralding in the destruction of God, but in light of his philosophy of human nature and

⁴⁹⁰ For example, in Curley’s edition of *Leviathan*, he cites Clarendon’s remark on Hobbes’s subtle atheism: “it was ‘enough to destroy many of the prerogatives he hath given to his sovereign and to cancel many of the obligations he hath imposed on his subjects. But if the reader will suspend his judgment till he hath read a few leaves more, he will find that Mr. Hobbes hath been wary enough to do himself no harm by his specious divinity, but hath a salvo to set all straight again.’” (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) 234.

the thoroughgoing case he proposes for both politics and religion, played out to its natural conclusion, he is indeed proposing a vision that might very well lead to the end of religion as practiced and understood at the time.⁴⁹¹ Just as he changes the force and implication of some key political terms, he does similar things with theological terms.⁴⁹² So, while he uses some terms and concepts torn from traditional sources, encased in familiar phrasing and voice, Hobbes uses that language for a view of religion both functional and bereft of its substantive content, both familiar and entirely new.

The natural body

The metaphor of the body pervades Hobbes's discussion of politics. An extension of both his materialism and his appeal to natural features of the human being as the groundwork for a social system, the body takes on a central, quite pervasive place in his view.⁴⁹³ This means, too, that understanding the functioning of the human body and of the human being's psychology and rationality is necessary to understanding the workings of the social system. Hobbes's is a naturalized account of politics in this sense; the source of all obligation, on his account, is the workings of the natural world and human beings in that world, or the very natural needs, desires, and functioning of mankind, rendered law by mankind.

The opening lines of *Leviathan* clearly illustrate this aspect of his view of politics:

Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that is can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principall part within; why may we not say, that all Automata (Engines that move themselves by springs and wheelles as doth a watch) have an artificall life? For what is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves*, but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheelles*, giving

⁴⁹¹ Even Martinich, who reads Hobbes as thoroughly theological, ultimately places him in a tradition of secularizers. Martinich ends his book: "Despite their best efforts to save the intellectual respectability of Christian doctrine, they contributed to its downfall," 337.

⁴⁹² Martinich will maintain throughout that Hobbes's use of these terms is itself evidence for his theological reading.

⁴⁹³ The subject of the first chapter of this project.

motion to the whole Body, such as was intended by the Artificer? *Art* goes yet further, imitating that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, *Man*.⁴⁹⁴

The creation of an “Artificial Animal” is seen as an extension of the natural human animal, as the mechanistic functioning of the human animal offers a model for imitation. But, more substantive than mere mimicking, it serves as a model actually extended from and composed of the very bodies it imitates. In setting up a society, or being the artisan of a society, man imitates his own natural function, looking to nature and the natural world, along with the human being in that natural world. The created body is material – it is made up of the bodies of the people – and it functions in a similar way to the natural body. The “Art whereby God hath made and governe the World” again can be seen as an appeal to the name given to the first, unknown cause of nature.

Hobbes goes on in the same passage to render such things as magistrates and officers the joints of the body, reward and punishment the nerves, wealth as strength, “counsellors” as the memory, and laws as reason and will. Pacts and covenants are original acts of creation, as in the original creation of the world by God.⁴⁹⁵ All parts of the commonwealth, the specific offices and aspects of the civil sphere, can be seen in a way both analogous to and a substantive extension of the human body itself. In making a political system, man makes an artificial animal, or a model of himself, able to account for the natural features of that self.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 81.

⁴⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 81-82.

⁴⁹⁶ In his explicit use of the term God here, some scholars argue that Hobbes is relying on a theological picture and that God underlies his project in this very traditional sense. But again, in Hobbes’s more robust definition of religion in the first part of *Leviathan*, God is defined as the name given to the unknown first cause of the world. In both of these examples, both of the art that “God hath made” and the original act of creation, Hobbes here provides no more substance to the notion of God than he gives in his more complete definition. It remains a concept serving merely as a name standing in for whatever is that unknown something which originally caused the workings of the natural world.

Throughout the text, Hobbes takes the concept of the human body in several directions, using it quite consistently as a way to describe how the workings of the political system should be organized. Of assemblies or systems of people, he says, “which may be compared (as I said,) to the Similar parts of mans Body; such as be Lawfull, to the Muscles; such as are Unlawfull, to Wens, Biles, and Apostemes, engendered by the unnaturall conflux of evill humours.”⁴⁹⁷ As for the body politic, Hobbes says, “this kind of Publique Ministers resembleth the Nerves, and Tendons that move the severall limbs of a body naturall.”⁴⁹⁸ When Hobbes gets into some of the particular operations of the commonwealth, he specifies roles for public ministers that are, for example, the eyes and ears of the natural body.⁴⁹⁹ A body needs nourishment, says Hobbes, and the movement of goods is the “nutrition and procreation of a commonwealth,”⁵⁰⁰ these being compared to the specific nutrients a body needs to keep itself alive. Money is the blood of the commonwealth, circulating and nourishing the system, just as blood does in every human being, through all of its veins, hearts, and arteries.⁵⁰¹

To begin with the human body and principles of the body, and extend this to the level of the commonwealth, is central to Hobbes’s approach. One of his critiques of Aristotle and others is that they begin in the wrong place: they ground their civil doctrine in whims and trends of the moment, looking to the world that they inhabit and taking that world as evidence for what should be done.⁵⁰² Their fault is that they do not appeal to

⁴⁹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 288.

⁴⁹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 290.

⁴⁹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 294.

⁵⁰⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 294.

⁵⁰¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 300-1.

⁵⁰² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 267.

“Principles of Nature” as the resource for rights of individuals. Hobbes’s is instead a true “science of man,” he says, with the method of that science extending from the passions of the individual all the way through to the sweeping power of the commonwealth. The only way a proper political program can be constructed, Hobbes thinks, is by beginning with the human being and the human being in the natural world. From there, we find everything we need for the most potentially stable and peaceful social model possible.

Any social practice in the public sphere – including, I argue, religion – is then a crucial part of this artificial body, based on the functioning of the natural body. While the commonwealth itself is, in some sense, equivalent to the natural body, although an artificial but substantive extension, religion is then part of that body as a whole, a social practice included in the broader picture of the artificial animal. As another source for assuring the security of the individual, and as another realm through which authority can be wielded over individuals, like the blood and nerves, religion takes on a specific role within the artificial body.⁵⁰³ And no human social practice has its origin or source anywhere outside the body, as all will be seen as a natural extension of the human being. This is again consistent with a socially astute, holistic view provided by Hobbes. Again, to look to aspects of that whole, to things like agreement, is to look analytically at parts of a broader system.

Authors and agreements

To leave the state of nature, to escape the kinds of conditions where life, so famously and explicitly, is described as, “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short,”⁵⁰⁴ requires coming together with others and going into agreement. So, it requires language

⁵⁰³ Again, even the cover image for *Leviathan* illustrates this point, the items standing in for aspects of both the state and the Church situated underneath the sovereign himself.

⁵⁰⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186.

and rationality, and tied to this, acceptance and recognition of our particular human passions. Aware of what nature has bestowed upon the individual, the human being comes to recognize that the state of nature, or the perpetual posture of war, is perhaps not the most enjoyable, reasonable, or even safest state in which to reside. The individual then uses his or her reason, and so language, to work with others to come to some kind of agreement about what might make the situation better.

Hobbes builds his case for how this agreement comes about by first defining some central concepts including, rights and laws, authors and authorship, covenant, counsel, and command.⁵⁰⁵ These features of human social activity and the components to the broader kind of agreement they describe are critical aspects of his political theory, but they are also essential to understanding his conception of the role of religion and how religion fits into his political scheme. If religion, like politics, emerges from certain human psychological features, reason, and language, and functions, in many respects, in service of the security of human beings just as politics does, there is considerable overlap and interconnection to how the two realms operate. But just as scholars reading Hobbes on religion tend to overlook the central roles of rationality, language, and human psychology, interpreters also often pay too little attention to how these aspects central to his account of social agreement, so key to interpreting his politics, can be seen as shaping and influencing his view of religion as well. Because this kind of exchange between individuals and other social practices are so central to his account of religion, as they are with politics, it is worth making sense of some of the major features of his view of

⁵⁰⁵ Debate rages among scholars about just how aggressively he redefines some of these terms and what work the redefinition does. Several aspects of this are taken up throughout this project.

agreement, so grounded in this very human practice, in order to make sense of how religion fits into this picture.

Again, as argued throughout this project, and especially in the second chapter, Hobbes is analyzing specific elements of social practice, and religion is central to that analysis. Religion is a practice that is part of the substantive content of the process of agreement and exchange, which is itself part of a holistic system described by Hobbes. Language requires a level of agreement and the agreement he describes requires language, so the state of nature is not a literal account but is again instructive for elucidating aspects of ourselves and of society. But, religion, or aspects of religion, does not serve as either the means or justification for agreement.⁵⁰⁶

Following his most famous chapter in *Leviathan* on the state of nature, Hobbes turns to some of the necessary definitions for clarifying his political program, so essential to the story of how the commonwealth comes to be. Hobbes begins the first chapter following his description of the state of nature with the right of nature, or “the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his

⁵⁰⁶ Again, Martinich’s argument rests on the claim that Hobbes’s very integration of some of these central concepts into his view is entirely theologically-driven. Rather than using some of the language he does, but putting it to new purpose or re-interpreting some of its use, Martinich sees the wholehearted and authentic use of these terms as evidence placing Hobbes squarely in the theological tradition. For example, on the matter of theological distinctions made about merit, Martinich writes: “I believe that Hobbes raises this issue of *meritum congrui* versus *meritum condigni* in the context of laying the theoretical foundations of civil government because he is resting his case upon theological concepts and because he cares about the correct theological doctrine of salvation. There is no explanation for his attempt to understand these terms other than a deep intellectual commitment to theology. I would be willing to rest my entire thesis about Hobbes’s religious thought on the fact that he weaves these theological concepts into his initial discussion of a covenant, if there were not so much other evidence for his commitment to the Christian religion,” 142.

own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.”⁵⁰⁷ A right is then the liberty all individuals have to keep themselves alive in whatever way they deem necessary. Every individual, even prior to any agreement with other individuals, has this right. This would include a whole range of activities – any action performed in the natural world that the individual sees as appropriate for his or her own preservation. Indeed this would encompass activities that include religious practices, whatever they may be. Religious activities, for example the worshiping of idols or prayer of any kind, is seen as an activity that might lead to preservation – as worship of idols might be conceived of as serving to assist in the supplying of resources for survival, for example. The individual then has the right to perform all of these practices.

Liberty is then defined as the “absence of externall Impediments,”⁵⁰⁸ or anything that might keep him from using his power, judgment, and reason. Nothing can get in the way of the individual’s right to preserve him or herself. Again, this liberty can include anything in the state of nature, including any kind of limitations that might be set on particular religious practices. All are free to act in ways that they deem central to their own individual self-preservation and liberty is the lack of impediment to that pursuit.

Meanwhile, the law of nature, which Hobbes clarifies more specifically throughout his discussion, is again, “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.”⁵⁰⁹ A law is different from a right in that a law carries some kind of obligation

⁵⁰⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 189.

⁵⁰⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 189.

⁵⁰⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 189.

because of a commander and is binding in some sense while a right is a liberty or lack of impediment to do or to not do something.

So, while rights then “consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear,” and may be transferred, laws are binding or obligatory.⁵¹⁰ But, certain rights may be transferred to another, thus rendering the person transferring those rights obligated:

Right is layd aside, either by simply Renouncing it; or by Transferring it to another. By Simply RENOUNCING; when he cares not to whom the benefit thereof redoundeth. By TRANSFERRING; when he intendeth the benefit thereof to some certain person, or persons. And when a man hath in either manner abandoned, or granted away his Right; then he is said to be OBLIGED, or BOUND, not to hinder those, to whom such Right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it...⁵¹¹

The transferring of a right is voluntary and for one’s own good; the only reason the individual would transfer his rights is for the preservation of his or her own life.⁵¹² No individual can transfer the right to save himself from death or harm, as this would undermine the purpose of the transfer of right in the first place.⁵¹³ In light of this, Hobbes calls a contract: “the mutuall transferring of Right.”⁵¹⁴ A contract is between people and both parties agree to transfer their rights to another. So, with a contract, the transfer is between equals and mutual.

For this kind of transfer or exchange to take place – and for it to eventually happen on a large scale – natural persons, individuals, must either represent themselves in the practice of agreement or have a representative who stands in their place for this exchange. Hobbes here employs the notions of personation and authorship to make this

⁵¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 189.

⁵¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 191.

⁵¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 192.

⁵¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 199.

⁵¹⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 192. A “pact” or “covenant” is a contract, but one that puts off the transfer for a future time, requiring trust for the future. A “gift” is what the transferring of a right is not mutual but one-sided. (193)

kind of exchange possible.⁵¹⁵ A person, for Hobbes, is, “he *whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction.*”⁵¹⁶ A natural person is one for whom the words or actions are his own and an artificial or feigned person is one who represents the words or actions of someone else.⁵¹⁷ So a person is an actor, says Hobbes, or anyone who represents, as if they are on the stage, the words or actions of themselves or another.

Hobbes then differentiates between an actor and an author – an actor being either a natural person or an artificial person for whom “some have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represent,” and an author being one who “owneth his words and actions.”⁵¹⁸ In this way, Hobbes offers a picture in which someone acts for another person, and the words or actions of the person acting are taken as his own for the purposes of social exchange.

Authority is then “the right of doing any action,” and the author then has the right to act for the actor. In this way, authority can either be owned by another or the actor may be the author of his own words and actions. But, whichever it might be, the actor is in the position of authority for whomever he or she represents. Hobbes continues, “when the Actor maketh a Covenant by Authority, he bindeth thereby the Author, no lesse than if he had made it himselfe.”⁵¹⁹ So, in this way, from the basic notion of rights, possessed by

⁵¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Philip Pettit’s *Made With Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) provides a good, extensive argument for the centrality of language in the process of authorship and personating and impersonating, for Hobbes.

⁵¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 217.

⁵¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 217.

⁵¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 218.

⁵¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 218.

each individual, the person may grant someone the authority to act on his or her behalf. The sovereign will then acquire authority through the transfer of these rights.⁵²⁰

So it is very much from the natural person, or from the passionate and rational individual situated in the state of nature, that Hobbes presents the means through which he or she hands over his or her own authority, that is, the authority we all have over ourselves as authors, to another, or to an actor. The social contract that goes into the formation of the commonwealth will then be one that contains every individual agreeing, with every other individual, to transfer his or her rights, or to give authority to another, in this case, the sovereign. The commonwealth is then defined in *Leviathan*⁵²¹ as: “*One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence.*”⁵²² Each individual goes into agreement with every other individual, not with the sovereign himself. But, each agrees with all others to hand over his or her rights to the sovereign for the purposes of peace, rendering the sovereign the author, or giving him absolute authority over all.

Hobbes is not the first to use the covenant or contract model in his analysis of society. And it is in this appeal to covenants that Martinich again sees evidence for his

⁵²⁰ Martinich sees in Hobbes an equivocation in his use of the term authority. He claims that “Hobbes will illicitly slide from holding that *the sovereign is authorized to act by his subjects to the sovereign has authority to the sovereign has authority over his subjects*,” 166. He works through this and then concludes, “My own guess is that Hobbes confusedly did not intend to specify any propositional content for ‘I authorize.’ He intended to give the sovereign carte blanche to do with his subjects what he will, as indicated by Hobbes’s variation on the sovereign-making covenant: ‘I authorize, or take upon me, all his [the sovereign’s] actions’ (EW, 3:204),” 173.

⁵²¹ Where, in comparison to his definitions in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*, he works out his most robust and complex definition. Bobbio, 49.

⁵²² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 228.

theological reading. A covenant, in its traditional use, deals in matters having to do with God and a relationship to God. Because covenants are binding, holds Martinich, they can be binding only as laws and they can only be such if “God’s power underwrites them” in the state of nature.⁵²³ Martinich also claims that many of the particular features of the covenant, for example authors and authorization and personation, are taken directly from covenant theology, the Calvinist notion that particular agreements between mankind and God, and so certain obligations, are central to interpreting of social practices.

Martinich holds, “Hobbes’s idea that a person can represent the words and actions of another person is, I believe, derived from the covenant theologians, for whom the idea of a representative or public person was a key concept.”⁵²⁴ For Martinich, Hobbes is taking up these basic concepts, with most of their traditional use and meaning preserved, and employing them for his own very theologically-inspired covenant model. In this case, Martinich reads Hobbes as appealing to the notion that all human beings have sinned through Adam and can be redeemed through Jesus. Just as Jesus takes on the sins of mankind, as representative, so too does the sovereign take on the “immediate evil of death lurking in the state of nature.”⁵²⁵ This very notion of authorization and representation, Martinich holds, is key to the covenant model and similarly central to Hobbes’s own model.

But, Martinich does admit, “Hobbes transmutes a theological idea into a secular one”⁵²⁶ – the worries at issue between covenanters being those of this life rather than those of an eternal life. Indeed, Hobbes changes the function of the covenant in a

⁵²³ Martinich, 161. He repeats this claim throughout the book. For example, a few pages later he writes, “...civil sovereignty depends upon the law of nature, which depends upon the natural power of God,” 164.

⁵²⁴ Martinich, 165.

⁵²⁵ Martinich, 165-166.

⁵²⁶ Martinich, 166.

substantial way, using the notions of agreement and representation, concepts also utilized in covenant theology, but putting them to use in an entirely secular context. It is only through agreement with one's fellow man, and agreement *about* rather than *with* a sovereign, that steps are taken to try and avoid so-called evils, in this case, death.

Martinich also admits to some of the revisions Hobbes makes in his use of these concepts. Martinich sees novelty in Hobbes's view, namely in his employing of the covenant as an agreement between two individuals rather than one between an individual and his sovereign or his God. Each individual sees it as in his or her own best interest to institute the sovereign – for the covenant to be rational at all requires the sovereign – but the sovereign cannot be party to the contract or else “the authority would be effectively undermined.”⁵²⁷ On this matter, instead of reading Hobbes as cleverly working with theological concepts in new ways for his own more secular purposes, Martinich again appeals to tradition to explain Hobbes's move: “I believe that Hobbes was inspired to introduce this novelty by the conception of God he formulated from his Calvinistic reading of the Bible.”⁵²⁸ He finds that none of God's authority is undermined on this picture of covenant between individuals because of God's total power. To remove the sovereign or God from the terms of the covenant keeps his power total, as God or the sovereign has no obligations to the citizen. Again, Martinich claims that there are unique aspects to Hobbes's engagement with the tradition, but what novelty he brings to the story takes nothing away from its theological force.

In contrast to this interpretation, scholars like Peters point to the covenant tradition as very much in the air during this period in Hobbes's life, as this was a period

⁵²⁷ Martinich, 167.

⁵²⁸ Martinich, 167. He later says, “I have further suggested that the paradigm of Hobbes's idea of sovereignty is biblical,” 181.

in which individuals “were not simply trying to reconcile claims of liberty and security. They were also trying to make explicit how they, as individuals, stood in relation to this new system of centralized social control that had gradually emerged from the more secure and understandable social structure of the Middle Ages.”⁵²⁹ In trying to argue for a new political conception, “that civil society was based upon some kind of a contract or covenant, was a commonplace at this period.”⁵³⁰ As Peters reads it, the contract was used to work through tensions between individualism and absolutism and, in some ways, was used as a means to deny certain claims of divine authority. If individuals are “born free and equal in the sight of God or under natural law,” Peters maintains, civil society, and the covenant that upholds it, is merely a device for maintaining that equality.⁵³¹

The covenant is also, as Peters argues, “a pictorial way of saying that their [the King’s] authority was conditional, not absolute,”⁵³² and “the social contract theory was embedded in Greek thought...after the Renaissance, it was popularized together with many other muddles initiated by Greek thinkers.”⁵³³ The contract model was also “a way of exhibiting the artificiality of human institutions,”⁵³⁴ and “a device which gave expression to a shift in attitude towards *authority* whose significance was not then properly appreciated.”⁵³⁵ Peters sees general talk of covenant at the time, even that between the King and his subjects, as a means for “*rationalizing* the concept of

⁵²⁹ Peters, 181.

⁵³⁰ Peters, 182. Peters cites the Pilgrim Fathers use of the covenant in 1620 in the formation of a civil society and the Magna Carta. He also notes varied uses of the covenant model, specifically for the institution of a civil society itself (*pactum unionis*) or agreement pertaining to the particular form of government to be instituted within that society (*pactum subjectionis*) and sees Hobbes as uniquely combining aspects of these two uses, 182.

⁵³¹ Peters, 182-183.

⁵³² Peters, 183.

⁵³³ Peters, 184.

⁵³⁴ Peters, 185. Peters says it is actually much more than this.

⁵³⁵ Peters, 185.

authority.”⁵³⁶ In sum, Peters argues that the period was one in which conceptions of authority were being reconsidered and re-negotiated in light of new views of the individual as free and equal. As such, new forms of government were required to account for and best preserve that equality and liberty. So, while Martinich sees direct engagement in the covenant tradition as the only explanation for its use, Peters more convincingly points to the tenor of the times, one that used notions like covenant but put it to secular purpose.

Hobbes’s account of how authority is transferred – an account central to his political vision, as authority is ultimately given over by every individual to the sovereign – requires no otherworldly component like God and is explained by and through the rationality and psychology of the human being. So this account is entirely naturalized and, in this crucial sense, secularized, so made into a narrative independent of any religious components or forces. Although theological terms and concepts are used, they are put to the task of human social relations alone. It is a fully human exchange that takes place between and among individuals, for the purposes of the best means of self-preservation of those individuals. Getting to the place of the sovereign, or to the point where a sovereign retains all of the rights of members of the commonwealth, happens only because of the rational and linguistic activity of the human being. No divine source, no godly authority, plays any explicit role in the emergence and case for the sovereign. The formation of the sovereign is a fully human activity, with no role at all for the divine, so justifying the focus, by secular interpreters, on these entirely human features of Hobbes’s narrative.

⁵³⁶ Peters, 187.

Covenant and contract also, crucially, do not take place between human beings and gods, this being one of the features scholars point to as a unique move on Hobbes's part.⁵³⁷ Gods and the specific substance of religious practice are what emerge from contracts and covenants, they do not ground or found those covenants. Idols, or what might have been considered false gods, cannot be personated and cannot be authors, as, again, all authorship on this matter will reside with the sovereign: "But idols cannot be Authors: for an Idol is nothing. The Authority proceeded from the State: and therefore before introduction of Civill Government, the Gods of the Heathen could not be Personated."⁵³⁸ Without an authority or author, the gods of the heathens cannot be introduced into the commonwealth. Again, a god, too, is personated after authority is handed to the state, or to the commonwealth itself, so, from a situation in which individuals have already gone into covenant, assumed the transfer of rights, and granted authority to the sovereign. For an idol to serve as an author, so to be the spokesperson or authority for another, is impossible because there is no person there, behind the idol, for whom it can represent.

A covenant has to be born from the deliberation of the individual and by the will of the individual. It also has to be accepted mutually and this could never be assured in the case of God. Indeed, Hobbes specifies the nature of the limits to going into covenant with God, rendering the exchange unattainable:

To make Covenant with God, is impossible, but by Mediation of such as God speaketh to, wither by Revelation, supernaturall, or by his Lieutenants that govern under him, and in his Name: For otherwise we know not whether our covenants be accepted, or not. And therefore they that Vow any thing contrary to any law of Nature, Vow in vain; as being a thing unjust to pay such a Vow. And if it be a thing commanded by the Law of Nature, it is not the Vow, but the Law that binds them.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Even Martinich maintains this point. See p. 167.

⁵³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 220.

⁵³⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 197.

A covenant with God is impossible because it is one-sided and the only evidence one might have of this covenant is through revelation or God's representatives. The law itself is the piece of the covenant that is binding, and only another person who can speak in God's name is in a position to act as the other party to the covenant.

But, Hobbes also points out that there are problems with both of these sources of knowledge. In Chapter 32, he specifies that God may speak to a man "either immediately; or by meditation of another man, to whom he had formerly spoken by himself immediately."⁵⁴⁰ And we might easily grasp what we hear from another man, and any given individual might understand what God says to them, but we can never be sure about the nature of their claim:

How God speaketh to a man immediately, may be understood by those well enough, to whom he hath so spoken; but how the same should be understood by another, is hard, if not impossible to know. For if a man pretend to me, that God hath spoken to him supernaturally, and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what argument he can produce, to oblige me to believe it.⁵⁴¹

So in the case of revelation, or a purported revelation, Hobbes points out that there is no way to test the veracity of the individual's claim and so no reason to accept the authority of that claim. All there is to trust is the word of the individual who claims to have had the exchange or revelatory encounter with God.

Hobbes is quick to note the solution: only the sovereign and the claims of the sovereign can command, even and especially when it comes to claims about the word of God. Hobbes continues here: "It is true, that if he be my Sovereign, he may oblige me to obedience, so, as not by act or word to declare I believe him not; but not to think any otherwise then my reason perswades me. But, if one that hath no such authority over me,

⁵⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 410.

⁵⁴¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 410-411.

shall pretend the same, there is nothing that exacteth either beleefe, or obedience.”⁵⁴² To obey the sovereign has nothing to do with whether the individual believes the sovereign or not. The subject might very well think what she will – her reason will persuade her one way or another, and this cannot be helped. But, the individual does need to obey the authority of the sovereign on these matters as well, whether he believes him or not, thanks to the contract.

But the covenant is not between man and his sovereign but between man and man, so again, the individual is not going into contract with the sovereign himself, only with other individuals. The covenant being between people, each just agrees to hand over certain rights to the sovereign. But, what is handed over includes the right to make claims to the word of God or interpretation of the word of God, as claims like these are part of the kinds of practices used to calm particular fears.

Religion is then neither a means to this exchange of authority – although the covenant model provides a useful model or kind of inspiration for Hobbes – nor does it provide any source of justification for the establishment of that authority. Religion, the seeds of which are found in the state of nature and in the very psychology of human beings, is then, in an important sense, part of the content of what is being transferred or exchanged in the establishment of the sovereign. In the “mutuall transferring of Rights,” the right to practice one’s own religion as one sees fit is one of the rights abandoned through the contract. In the case of religion, the contract is meant to control the right to act in any way one deems necessary to assuage fears, especially fears of the future. In the state of nature, individuals have the right to express this passion in any way they would

⁵⁴² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 411.

like, by, for example, appealing to their personal gods for security of any kind. But, as with other rights handed to the sovereign, this too is given up.

As Hobbes further describes:

The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear; whereof there be two very generall Objects: One, the Power of Spirits Invisible; the other, the Power of those men they shall therein Offend. Of these two, though the former be the greater Power, yet the feare of the later is commonly the greater Feare. The Feare of the former is in every man, his own Religion: which hath place in the nature of man before Civill Society. The later hath not so; at least not place enough, to keep men to their promises; because in the condition of meer Nature, the inequality of Power is not discerned but by the event of Battell. So that before the time of Civill Society, or in the interruption thereof by Warre, there is nothing can strengthen a Covenant of Peace agreed on, against the temptations of Avarice, Ambition, Lust, or other strong desire, but the feare of that Invisible Power, which they every one Worship as God; and Feare as a Revenger of their perfidy.⁵⁴³

In the state of nature, religion is the consequence of a natural psychological feature of the human being – fear. As a response to this fear or as a means to manage it, religion is used to control invisible spirits (which Hobbes has already established as mistakes in understanding, as there cannot be invisible powers like this⁵⁴⁴). In the state of nature, the human being has the right to express this fear in any way he or she would like. But, as with any other means to self-preservation, through the contract, or through the act of handing over particular rights to the sovereign, obligations will emerge in the commonwealth limiting some of those rights.

When Martinich takes on the above passage, he sees an inconsistency in Hobbes's view, again because of his focus on the claim that God obliges in the state of nature. Martinich notes that Hobbes here downplays the fear of other men in the state of nature because all are relatively equal, this equality only being put to the test in battle.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 200.

⁵⁴⁴ See chapter one of this dissertation. "How we came to translate *Spirits*, by the word *Ghosts*, which signifieth nothing, neither in heaven, nor earth, but the Imaginary inhabitants of mans brain, I examine not: but this I say, the word *Spirit* in the text signifieth no such thing; but either properly a reall *substance*, or Metaphorically, some extraordinary *ability* or *affection* of the Mind, or of the Body." *Leviathan*, 433.

⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, Hobbes thinks that individuals are more equal in intellectual and rational capacity than they are in physical strength. As to the "faculties of the mind" Hobbes finds a "yet a greater equality amongst men, than that of strength." *Leviathan*, 183.

Martinich writes, “This does not seem consonant with Hobbes’s usual view about the state of nature. I think he adopts it because he believes that he needs the fear of God to ground all obligation...God puts the obligation into covenants in the state of nature...he is saying that the power of God is already underwriting any covenant made in the state of nature.”⁵⁴⁶ Again, Martinich interprets this as a direct claim, by Hobbes, that obligation to God exists prior to any kind of covenant made between men. But, this again fails to account for Hobbes’s conception of God as the name put to a consequence of a particular tendency in the human being to attribute agency to unknown causes, and specifically the unknown first cause.

In the state of nature, each man’s religion is his personal way of contending with fears of the future and fears of unknown powers that might get in the way of a peaceable future. This fear is powerful and, although not consolidated in any way in the state of nature, and so expressed according to the specificities of any given individual, it is a psychological feature, a passion that needs to be limited through the contract. But, again, it is purely psychological and, as Hobbes points out, often a kind of psychological mistake. This passion of fear, especially fear of an invisible power, leads people to “Worship as God,” in any way they deem necessary, that power. This worshipping is a way for individuals, in any way they can, to at least come to some kind of agreement with others, seeing that agreement enforced by something that keeps them both in awe, as will the sovereign. As such, this tendency also needs to be managed by the sovereign in the commonwealth.

As becomes clear, the sovereign will maintain all authority over religious matters, but the sovereign himself has been created and instituted in a fully human way. In

⁵⁴⁶ Martinich, 160.

handing over certain rights to the sovereign, the individual is also handing over the right to determine what constitutes public religious practice. The sovereign is instituted in order to protect men from each other, and to keep in check some of the consequences, religious and otherwise, of the natural desire for self-preservation, desires that might benefit the individual but may harm the other or the collective.

Religion is again neither the means by which a sovereign is established nor is it a separate domain, lying outside the terms of agreement used in establishing the sovereign. Religion is not a distinct problem, subject to different rules and maintaining some kind of unique power over the human being. Religion is again born from human psychological and rational features, but, as a public social practice that might get in the way of the peace and security of the commonwealth, it too falls under the authority of the sovereign. Authority over matters religious is part of the substantive content of the exchange process. The content of religion is encompassed in the process of personation, transfer of rights, and the giving over of authority – what constitutes religion as it is found acceptable by the authorized sovereign and what is accepted as the true God. Some of the important content of religious practice is included in the terms of authorship used in generating the sovereignty – a naturalized account of the emergence of the commonwealth.

Coercive power

While individuals might all seem quite agreeable and happy to engage in these forms of social exchange, giving up their natural rights for a peaceful, more secure future, Hobbes's perspective is not as sunny as all that. Central to this entire scheme is the requirement of a coercive power. Covenants can only hold "if there be a common Power

set over them Both, with right and force sufficient to compel performance.”⁵⁴⁷ Individuals will quite instinctively look out for themselves and need a reason to think that others will do the same. Without some power to keep them in awe, some of those individuals might try and get away with breaking a covenant, especially if it seems in their own best interest and that they might not get caught.

As Hobbes describes most clearly at the beginning of the second part of

Leviathan:

For the Lawes of Nature (as Justice, Equity, Modesty, Mercy, and (in summe) doing to others, as wee would be done to,) of themselves, without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our naturall Passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like. And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore notwithstanding the Lawes of Nature, (which every one hath then kept, when he has the will to keep them, when he can do it safely,) 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 all other men.⁵⁴⁸

So, a coercive power must be instituted in the context of agreements. Indeed, one central feature of the state of nature, of every man against every man, is that there is no such sweeping coercive power. In the “condition of meer nature,” Hobbes says, there is no coercive power like this. Hobbes’s story requires an account of the problem of attempting to agree with another, prior to the existence of some kind of coercive power, based only on one’s trust in the other person, in the state of nature. An overarching power is required for the commonwealth to hold together. But, importantly, the task at hand for Hobbes is to institute this kind of coercive power where none existed before. In this sense, contrary to Martinich’s view, God as a power of this kind, as an authority commanding or compelling a law-like obligation, has no role for Hobbes in the original state of nature.

The coercive power is there, in part, to keep any individual from breaking away from the covenant or the terms of agreement. And indeed, the worry and reason for a

⁵⁴⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 196.

⁵⁴⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223-224.

coercive power applies in religious matters, too. The individual might worship idols publicly, use religious claims as a form of authority in service of a god other than that of the commonwealth, or practice in a way that takes away from the security of the commonwealth, all potentially undermining some of the authority of the sovereign. The coercive power has an authority over all matters of obligation, including religious matters on this picture. This is crucial to an interpretation of Hobbes on religion. Again, there is no obligation in the state of nature, to someone like God, rather obligation arrives with the arrival of the coercive power.

Part of the strength of a coercive power is that the human being both has good reason to obey the power and has the psychological propensity to obey this kind of power if it serves to ensure self-preservation. What commands each individual is the “*irresistible power*” of his God and this is the right of nature tending to God’s sovereignty.⁵⁴⁹ We do have a natural tendency or psychological tendency to appeal to a power greater than anything we know if we think it will help to better secure our future. Martinich also interprets this claim theologically, again noting that Hobbes’s appeal to this power is because “God’s irresistible power underwrites the force of covenants.”⁵⁵⁰ But, in line with the reading offered here, the notion of irresistible power is important because it is connected to a particular psychological tendency in the human being – the tendency to appeal to a force that might have the power to assist in self-preservation –

⁵⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 397.

⁵⁵⁰ Martinich, 137. He earlier states: “Hobbes grounds the obligation imposed by the state and enforced through its irresistible power in the obligation humans have to God in virtue of his irresistible power” (47). Martinich also objects to claims by Brian Barry (from “Warrender and His Critics,” In *Hobbes and Rousseau*, pp. 37-65. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), that Barry equates, for Hobbes, “God’s natural right” and “each person’s right in the state of nature” (Martinich, 93). Critics like Barry object to the connection made between power and obligation – Barry and others hold that there is no such connection in Hobbes, while Martinich maintains that there is and that, indeed, “irresistible power is the fundamental ground for obligation.” (93) Martinich’s claim seems especially flawed as Hobbes’s entire use of the social contract itself is a means to create an obligation that did not exist in the first place.

and it can then be used by the sovereign himself. But, God's irresistible power is not important *because* it offers a ground for obligation. If this were the case, Hobbes would have little need for the contract itself, as the human being would already be under obligation to God thanks to that irresistible power. The tendency of the human being to be drawn to a power is another psychological propensity that falls under the purview of the contract itself, as the sovereign is there to keep the individual in awe, so as not to break the contract.

Again, the individual in the state of nature is inclined to appeal to his or her own God as a means to securing his future – a future that is by nature unknown and unknowable. God's purported power or power over the laws of nature is seen as a source for security of some kind, especially against invisible powers. But, this tendency on the part of the individual to be compelled by God's irresistible power is another important feature of the commonwealth. To be naturally drawn to the power of an omnipotent being is a useful characteristic of human psychology for keeping people obedient to the sovereign himself.

If God's power, God so conceived, is irresistible in this way, and the sovereign has a hold on all aspects of God and is seen as the only link on earth to the word of God,⁵⁵¹ then the sovereign in some ways holds on to this irresistible power as well. So, worship of God feeds the power of the sovereign: "The End of Worship amongst men, is Power. For where a man seeth another worshipped, he supposeth him powerfull, and is

⁵⁵¹ In the context of this picture, only the sovereign can have full authority from God to instruct the citizens: "The Monarch, or the Sovereign Assembly only hath immediate Authority from God, to teach and instruct the people; and no man but the Sovereign, receiveth his power *Dei gratia* simply; that is to say, from the favor of none but God: All other, receive theirs from the favor and providence of God, and their Sovereigns." (*Leviathan*, 291) The Sovereign is the only one who is able to speak for God – that is, the sovereign is the only one who can express, as commands, the natural dictates of right reason. We all have these dictates, but in going into agreement with one another, we hand over the power to render these dictates commands to ourselves, giving that power to the sovereign.

the readier to obey him; which makes his Power greater.”⁵⁵² Indeed, Hobbes does specify what sets worship of God apart from other kinds of worship. He continues: “But God has no ends: the worship we do him, proceeds from our duty, and is directed according to our capacity, by those rules of Honour, that Reason dictateth to be done by the weak to the more potent men, in hope of benefit, for fear of damage, or in thankfulness for good already received from them.”⁵⁵³ While in the case of men, worship will lead to increased power – the sovereign will only be stronger through worship by his subjects – God will gain nothing from worship of him. God has no ends, that is, no motive or purpose or reason for which he might require worship, as worship to God will change nothing of God. Another way of interpreting this is that, if God is the name for the first cause, and what describes the cause of the laws of nature, indeed, these laws have no ends but their perpetual expression.

In the state of nature, the human being is obligated to no one but to him or herself, living primarily according to his or her passions and reason, to some degree, and can be religious or express any kind of means to assuaging fears about invisible powers and anxieties about the future, in any way she would like. In the state of nature, God as a personal explanation or name for unknown causes and as a supposed source of security, exists only in a personal, not a civic way, and is based purely on one’s psychological propensities. As a source for security, the human being has a tendency to appeal to an invisible power that can help. God as the source of the dictates of reason or the cause of the laws of nature, when systemized in a more robust way for the purposes of the state, only comes in after the establishment of the commonwealth, as an explanatory tool. God

⁵⁵² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 401.

⁵⁵³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 401.

and religion serve a functional role, alongside politics, helping to assuage fears and anxieties about the future, fears that so often get in the way of the greater goal of self-preservation over the long term.

Religion in the Commonwealth

In the commonwealth, to practice religion properly is, in essence, simply to worship and obey the sovereign power. Although couched in terms of worship to God, when Hobbes discusses the laws of God, the kingdom of God, and the kind of worship due to God, it is all by way of obedience and worship to the sovereign. All divine matters are filtered through the sovereign and the sovereign himself is merely an extension of the entirely human, that is, human psychological, rational, and linguistic features. While he utilizes the language of God and God's law, with Hobbes's more complete philosophy in mind, he can only be referring to matters of God in the sense that God is the name given to the cause of these natural features of the human being. In Hobbes's picture, talk of God and worship of God adds nothing to the nature of the contract and the functioning of the commonwealth except enhancement and strengthening of obedience to the sovereign himself and to the sovereign's aim of securing the peace of society.

Religion is one of the aids to strengthen the "force of Words," as words themselves, as in the social contract, are "too weak to hold men to the performance of their Covenants."⁵⁵⁴ Something else is required – a power of some kind that keeps people honest – and, when religious ideas and meanings have the kind of hold they do on a society, as in Hobbes's own time, religion can be one of the resources for ensuring that power.

⁵⁵⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 200.

In chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, “Of the Kingdome of God by Nature,” Hobbes moves to the practical matter of worshipping God. It is this chapter that Martinich thinks most strongly supports his own theological reading of Hobbes.⁵⁵⁵ But, for Hobbes, the matter of worshipping God is really merely a matter of obeying the sovereign and recognizing the role religion plays here provides more confirmation for a reading of Hobbes’s view as an entirely naturalized account.

Although he describes the laws of God, embedded in his discussion is the recognition that “Lawes of God” is the name given to natural laws, or the precepts, apparent in the state of nature, that tend to self-preservation. Hobbes claims to have proven that the civil laws, or what entails obedience to the sovereign, are in line with the laws of God, and he here turns to the question of just how to know what those laws of God are. The subject or citizen must be made aware of the laws of God, Hobbes holds, “For without that, a man knows not, when he is commanded any thing by the Civill Power, whether it be contrary to the Law of God, or not; and so, either by too much civill obedience, offends the Divine Majesty, or through feare of offending God, transgresses the commandments of the Common-wealth.”⁵⁵⁶ Awareness of the laws of God, or principles that lend themselves to self-preservation or peace, is necessary so that the citizen neither offends nor contradicts, but instead obeys properly.

But in appealing to the language of God, Hobbes is adding nothing to his basic claim that the subject must obey the sovereign. There is no more here, in its phrasing as a law of God, to Hobbes’s political program. To call the laws of nature, or the rules of reason, laws of God, is only to name them differently. Indeed, to conceive of these laws

⁵⁵⁵ Martinich claims that secular readers find chapters 30 and 31 to be “either mysterious or an embarrassment,” 162.

⁵⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 395.

as laws of God is a matter of perception: “They therefore that believe there is a God that governeth the world, and hath given Praecepts, and propounded Rewards, and Punishments to Mankind, are Gods Subjects.”⁵⁵⁷ If the laws of nature so-called, the rules that tend to self-preservation, are conceived of as God’s laws, then the individual who sees them as such is God’s subject. Otherwise, or in a situation in which there is no sovereign power through which to dictate God’s laws, these are then merely dictates of right reason or natural precepts, useful for self-preservation.

Earlier in *Leviathan*, and as cited throughout this thesis, Hobbes specifies what many call laws in the state nature:

These dictates of Reason, men used to call by the name of Lawes; but improperly: for they are but Conclusions, or Theoremes concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of the themselves; whereas Law, properly is the word of him, that by right hath command over others.⁵⁵⁸

To call the precepts found in the state of nature laws, of the source of what seems like a kind of obligatory force, is actually a mistake, says Hobbes. These precepts do not command in the way that laws command.

But, in seeming support for the theological reading, in the same passage, Hobbes continues: “But yet if we consider the same Theoremes, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes.”⁵⁵⁹ Again, they are only laws if considered commands from an external power of some kind. In this case, what are dictates of reason, seen as the best way to ensure self-preservation by a rational human being, are seen as laws when God is conceived of as commanding them. But, Hobbes is clear that, in the state of nature, there is no law because there is no force or

⁵⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 396.

⁵⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 216-217.

⁵⁵⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 216-217.

being commanding all. This could be seen as the case in the state of nature only if that state is interpreted as one ruled by God.

For civil laws, too, those laws particular to the commonwealth, only the sovereign can regulate, interpret, and enforce them. The law of nature and the civil law, as Hobbes says, “contain each other,” in that they are for the same end and have, generally, the same content, but one pertains to the Sovereign itself while the other is closer to a mere principle:

The Law of Nature, and the Civill Law, contain each other, and are of equall extent. For the Lawes of Nature, which consist in Equity, Justice, Gratitude, and other morall Vertues on these depending, in the condition of meer Nature (as I have said before in the end of the 15th Chapter,) are not properly Lawes, but qualities that dispose men to peace, and to obedience. When a Common-wealth is once settled, then are they actually Lawes, and not before; as being then the commands of the Common-wealth; and therefore also Civill Lawes: For it is the Sovereign Power that obliges men to obey them.⁵⁶⁰

Hobbes specifies here that what is found in the state of nature, and what are often called laws in the state of nature, are actually merely qualities of the human being, disposing him to peace. These are natural human propensities, and dictates of reason, but not laws obligating the individual in the way they do thanks to agreement. Only in the commonwealth, so only when agreement has been reached between individuals, are these principles really considered to be laws.

Hobbes continues: “The Law of Nature therefore is a part of the Civill Lawe in all Common-wealths of the world. Reciprocally also, the Civill Lawe is a part of the Dictates of Nature. For Justice, that is to say, Performance of Covenant, and giving to every man his own, is a Dictate of the Law of Nature. But every subject in a Common-wealth, hath covenanted to obey the Civill Law...”⁵⁶¹ To obey the civil law is then part of obeying the law of nature itself. But the law of nature is rendered civil law when agreement takes

⁵⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 314.

⁵⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 314.

place. “And Law was brought into the world for nothing else, but to limit the naturall liberty of particular men, in such manner, as they might not hurt, but assist one another, and joyn together against a common Enemy.”⁵⁶² Prior to being “brought into the world,” the individual has every right and every liberty to do as he pleases. But the dictates of reason are rendered law or given a commander by the sovereign power in order to better ensure a peaceful future.

Further, in the civil context, all of these laws, those of God included, are known only through the sovereign: “the knowledge of all Law, dependeth on the knowledge of the Sovereign Power”⁵⁶³ So, although generated from dictates of right reason, as found in every human being prior to the contract,⁵⁶⁴ in the commonwealth itself, the only means by which the citizen can become aware of the content of any of these laws is by way of the sovereign power. The sovereign is also the interpreter of all law: “All Laws, written, and unwritten, have need of Interpretation. The unwritten Law of Nature, though it be easy to such, as without partiality, and passion, make use of their naturall reason, and therefore leaves the violaters thereof without excuse; yet considering there be very few, perhaps none, that in some cases are not blinded by self-love, or some other passion, it is now become of all Laws the most obscure; and has consequently the greatest need of able interpreters.”⁵⁶⁵ But, only the sovereign or sovereign’s authority can serve as interpreter

⁵⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 315.

⁵⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 395.

⁵⁶⁴ Hobbes here specifies three different forms of the word of God, supernatural, natural, and prophetic. In chapter 31, Hobbes only contends with the form of law that is natural – that is, “wherein he governeth as many of Mankind as acknowledge his Providence, by the naturall Dictates of Right Reason.” (397) So, again, his discussion is framed in terms of God’s laws but he is still making clear matters pertaining to dictates of right reason, which is the very matter he has been speaking about up to this point. The dictates of right reason are the natural human propensities that can be conceived of as God’s laws. He describes the declaration of laws by supernatural means to be not universal in any way, as they are only declared to one person; and, he will deal with prophetic laws in the next part.

⁵⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 322.

of the law.⁵⁶⁶ In handing over one's rights to the sovereign, law is generated in the generation of a command or obligation. Through the contract, the sovereign is also given the power to interpret that law.

Hobbes presents a kind of circle: Subjects or citizens require knowledge of God's laws in order to be able to obey those laws properly. And, knowledge of all laws must come from the sovereign. But, as Hobbes has established, the sovereign is merely an expression of natural human propensities and rules for self-preservation, rendered law in the process of agreement and through the institution of a commanding authority. What is deemed law by way of the sovereign is meant to be what any individual would deem necessary to best preserve him or herself. So, to have knowledge of God's laws is to have knowledge of the natural laws of human self-preservation. And to obey God's laws is then to adhere most closely to what best preserves the self, as adjudicated by the sovereign.

Again, Hobbes uses terms like God, terms that have a certain force, but their use changes little of the substance of his view of the contract itself and the role of the sovereign. Engagement with God or any kind of religious practice is in service of the strength of the commonwealth, through the encouragement of obedience. He writes that the individual should will that God exists, but only as the cause of the world, not as the stuff of the world itself. All that can be attributed to God is will, not as "rationall Appetite," as you would find in the human being, "but as the Power, by which he effecteth every thing."⁵⁶⁷ When saying anything of God, it shouldn't be claims to knowledge of certain features of God, or *what* he is, only *that* he is – so, all engagement

⁵⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, "The Interpretation of the Law of Nature, is the sentence of the Judge constituted by the Sovereign Authority...", 323.

⁵⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 402.

should be that of admiration or “how much wee admire him, and how ready we would be to obey him.”⁵⁶⁸ Any actions of divine worship are then simply “signes of the Intention to Honour God,”⁵⁶⁹ and these include prayer, thanksgiving, the giving of gifts, the swearing to no other God, the honoring of God’s name in recognition of his power, and the public worship of God.⁵⁷⁰ But, most importantly, the honoring of God happens through civic duty and proper social practice: the “Obedience to his Lawes (that is, in this case to the Lawes of Nature,) is the greatest worship of all.”⁵⁷¹ To obey God’s laws or live according to the laws of nature as deemed such by the sovereign is the best expression of worship to God.

But even more, Hobbes never forgets his own view that the signification of terms is itself a human social practice based in agreement. The claim of any attribute to God is so only because the community agrees that it is so. In chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, following his discussion of the role of God, Hobbes writes:

And because words (and consequently the Attributes of God) have their signification by agreement, and constitution of men; those Attributes are to be held significative of Honour, that men intend shall so be; and whatsoever may be done by the wills of particular men, where there is no Law but Reason, may be done by the will of the Common-wealth, by Lawes Civill. And because a Common-wealth hath no Will, nor makes no Lawes, but those that are made by the Will of him, or them that have the Sovereign Power; it followeth, that those Attributes which the Sovereign ordaineth, in the Worship of God, for signes of Honour, ought to be taken and used for such, by private men in their publique Worship.⁵⁷²

Where no law on the matter is in place, men are free to practice religion as they will, or honor their God in any way they know how, according to their own reason. But, as an extension of the rational human being, the sovereign’s view, or the attributes the

⁵⁶⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 403.

⁵⁶⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 403.

⁵⁷⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 403-405.

⁵⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 405.

⁵⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 406.

sovereign conceives of as honoring God, should be accepted by every citizen as the way to express honor or worship God.

Hobbes knows that the private individual cannot be made to believe what he doesn't believe and that all we have to work with is the authority or word of other men.⁵⁷³ In the ideal commonwealth, the laws of nature, so framed as the laws of God, are what "naturall Reason dictateth to private men"⁵⁷⁴ anyway, so the command to obey and honor the sovereign would be something the individual would reason to on his own. But all things not necessarily being ideal, the sovereign can only hope that the private individual will seek to worship God beyond the public expression. But in the commonwealth, the individual is forbidden, or has given up the right, to publicly worship God in any way he sees fit for self-preservation. That right has been handed over to the sovereign. As Hobbes writes, "where many sorts of Worship be allowed, proceeding from the different Religions of Private men, it cannot be said there is any Publique Worship, nor that the Commonwealth is of any Religion at all."⁵⁷⁵ Religion in the commonwealth can only be expressed through the religion as determined by the sovereign, and this will be what is considered "true religion."⁵⁷⁶

Again, obedience to these laws comes through obedience to the sovereign power, and the sovereign power must be streamlined and unified. Hobbes specifies:

But seeing a Common-wealth is but one Person, it ought also to exhibite to God but one worship; which then it doth, when it commandeth it to be exhibited by Private men, Publiquely. And this is Publique Worship; the property whereof, is to be Uniform: For those actions that are done differently, by different men, cannot be said to be a Publique Worship. And therefore, where many sorts of Worship be allowed, proceeding from the different Religions of Private man, it cannot be said there is any Publique Worship, nor that the Common-wealth is of any Religion at all.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 134.

⁵⁷⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 405.

⁵⁷⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 405.

⁵⁷⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 124. See chapter 3 of this dissertation for an extensive discussion of "true religion."

⁵⁷⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 405.

So religion, once a personal expression in the state of nature, or a means to preservation of the self by way of calming fears about the future, is now also subject to the terms of the contract. Just as, for example, the right to kill one's neighbor existed in the state of nature, because every individual has the liberty to act in any way they deem necessary for their own self-preservation, so, too, can the individual worship his or her notion of an invisible spirit or name for a first cause, in any way they see as necessary for their own self-preservation. But, with the contract, as with acts like killing one's neighbor, all public religious practice falls under the thumb of the single sovereign. Religion is then in service of obedience to the sovereign who is in service of the security of the citizens.

Conclusion

As established in the previous chapters, religion and a conception of God that emerges from the natural seeds of religion, are products of human psychological and rational faculties and propensities and explained in and through Hobbes's holistic social account. While scholars dwell on the debate about how Hobbes conceives of God in relationship to the law of nature, and from this, make claims about the kind of obligation found in the state of nature, even more evidence for his outlook on religion as a naturalized social practice, intimately connected to politics, is found by looking directly to the specific role assigned to religion and God in the commonwealth, the sovereign's relationship to religion, and the task it assumes, especially in light of his more fully considered conception of religion. Within the broader project of the consolidation of power, religion is clearly folded into Hobbes's naturalized political picture. Religion, at the end of Hobbes's story, is a social practice akin to and in service of politics, engaged in by citizens because of both how it accounts for very particular human psychological

propensities, namely fears about the future and tendencies to be compelled to obedience from irresistible power, and the additional role it can play in assuring a secure and peaceful existence and future. Its role is much like that of politics – but religion is a social practice that accounts for some slightly different human tendencies. Enveloped in the larger political picture, in service of promoting obedience and honor to the laws of nature and the sovereign and in calming very particular sorts of fears about the future and the unknown, the account of its emergence and maintenance is quite the same as that of the political. In some sense, in relation to the artificial animal, religion is a piece of the body, but a critical piece and one that fills out the complete picture of the artificial animal. Hobbes also sees the psychological tendencies as a permanent piece but calls into question the future of religion itself, especially in light of his own descriptive account.

Religion as a public social practice does not lie outside of the political picture, or outside of the natural, bodily political vision. Instead, his discussion of social exchange and agreement between individuals, of authorship, command, covenant, and counsel, all need to be taken into account when considering what Hobbes is doing with religion. The fact that Hobbes gives authority on matters religious over to the sovereign, especially so that religious practice can be in service of the peace of the commonwealth, is no small point.

To practice religion is to worship God, or what human beings have identified as the first unknown cause, and this is just to obey the sovereign, which is to adhere to the laws of nature and to the agreements made among human beings, based on language, passions, and reason, about how to best mutually adhere to those laws of nature. In this sense, again, God remains the word we use to signify the first cause of which we do not

know. But it is also part of the stuff of religion, based in fears and fancies, first emerging as ideas to counter these psychological tendencies, until they “norish, dresse, and form it into Lawes,” adding “their own invention” to maintain power and authority.⁵⁷⁸ To obey God or be obedient to God then becomes a matter of being obedient to our own natures that are then recognized, given specific limits, and translated into or authorized as obedience to the sovereign.

Putting the pieces of Hobbes’s story together, it becomes clear that religion is a social practice critical to the overall functioning of the larger political body, and so the kind of religion Hobbes calls for, or the role he gives to religion, is not distinct from the political workings of the commonwealth. The narrative for religion is parallel to that of politics in the way it is formed and born from our human psychological tendencies, but, at the social practical level, religion takes on a somewhat different role from politics, working to assuage very particular fears and in service of worship and obedience. As a central element of the political body, religion has very particular functions in that body.

The sovereign himself is instituted through the steps Hobbes sets forth, including authorship, consent, the transferring of rights, and agreement between human beings, and all of this is grounded in natural features of our psychology and the faculty of reason. All of the steps taken to institute the sovereign take place between human beings, with no force or authority at work outside that of the human desire for self-preservation and the use of rationality. Put in place by the human being for the good of the human being, to obey the sovereign is to obey the laws of nature, or what everyone in the society recognizes best tends to future peace and security. This includes practicing public religion, a practice that in part serves to reinforce obedience to the sovereign.

⁵⁷⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 168.

Chapter 5

Contemporary Insights: Hobbes and Robert Brandom

As a relatively unrecognized voice in the narrative of “disenchantment,”⁵⁷⁹ Hobbes provides some early and important routes for making better sense of religious practice. He also offers some potentially useful resources for thinking about the possibilities and limits to ways in which religion is reconciled with political and moral claims. The central argument of this project is that Hobbes conceives of religion as a human social practice like any other, born from particular linguistic, psychological, and rational features of the human being – religion is part of the mechanistic world, explained in the same terms as any other practice, and human beings are central to that story. Hobbes also offers a holistic picture of social life that well accounts for the socially formative forces like language and other practices. In reading Hobbes as naturalizing and humanizing religion in this way, a reading that goes up against those contemporary scholars who read Hobbes as a theologically grounded thinker, his views on religion are

⁵⁷⁹ As coined by Max Weber and recently described in Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2007).

then consistent with his moral and political theories and accounted for accordingly. In some sense, religion falls under his rubric of “science,” to be explained in the same way as any other human social practice. While commonly considered one of the more innovative thinkers when it comes to political and moral thought, it is also worth looking to his work on religion for a more complete picture of human sociality and for insights into aspects of the narrative of secularization in the modern west.

Reading Hobbes on religion in this way also serves as a telling counterpoint to some of the strategies used today in trying to account for religious practice and in trying to account for religion in the context of the moral and the political. As clarified throughout the dissertation, there are three central tasks to this project: 1) to interpret Hobbes on religion on his own terms, offering a more thorough reading of his view than that presented in current scholarship, and one that accounts for some of the weaknesses of current interpretations, especially those that read Hobbes as theological; 2) to return to Hobbes’s political and moral vision with this reading of religion in hand, in order to account for ways in which his conception of religion enhances or complements his moral and political views; and, 3) to turn to some questions in the contemporary study of religion, using Hobbes as a way to elucidate or expose outstanding questions with some current debates, while appealing to these debates as a way to get clear on some limitations or objections to Hobbes’s own account. The first four chapters of this dissertation focused on the first two items, looking closely at Hobbes’s account of religion, through an analysis of his materialist ontology and his theories on language and the passions, and, in the previous chapter, turning to religion in the context of his political and moral vision.

The aim of this chapter, the third and final task above, is to look to some debates in the current study of religion in order to both get clearer on some of the limits to or weaknesses of Hobbes's view and to use Hobbes and some of his strategies as a way to point out possible objections to or insights into approaches taken by some contemporary philosophers. As a first step in this analysis, this chapter will focus on the philosopher Robert Brandom. Scholars of religion have recently appealed to Brandom as a promising resource for taking on questions pertaining to the role of normativity and authority in the study of religion. With Brandom's theory, commentators hold, we might get better accounts of norms and normativity, of the role of authority, freedom and constraints on freedom, and of objectivity, and with it, the role of belief and truth. Scholars see in him an analytically astute pragmatist whose inferentialist theory could provide the tools needed to resolve some long-standing debates in the study of religion, especially debates centered on accounting for the kinds of normative claims so often encountered when seeking to describe religious practice. As Jeffery Stout explains, Brandom's is a theory that provides the tools necessary to examine "the inferences being made by the people we are studying, the transitions they make into discourse when they perceive something, and the discursive exits they execute by acting intentionally in the world."⁵⁸⁰ Brandom's theory breaks down the linguistic elements and features of basic intersubjective, I-thou exchanges, the sorts of practices that he thinks serve as the basic structure of all forms of social exchange, providing a resource for looking at religious practice in particular and making sense of the kinds of commitments and claims made by religious individuals in the context of communities.

⁵⁸⁰ Jeffrey Stout, "Davidson, Rorty, and Brandom on Truth," in *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, 25-52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 45-46.

While his theory seems especially promising in this regard, as a potential tool for examining and better describing an aspect of religious practices in particular, even more recently, scholars are also looking to Brandom as a resource for generating more robust ethical and political claims. Brandom himself has ventured into this realm, tentatively exploring possible consequences of his view for political and moral thought.⁵⁸¹ But in less tentative fashion, some of Stout's work stands out as an example of this move, as he explicitly employs Brandom's theory when analyzing a "self-consciously democratic ethical community."⁵⁸² As Tanya Pritzlaff writes in the introduction to her interview with Brandom, "Although Brandom's complex work doesn't contain an explicit political theory, assumptions and expectations regarding the political consequences of Brandom's work have grown, especially since his debate with Jürgen Habermas."⁵⁸³ Indeed, Brandom himself, when asked by Pritzlaff about the possibilities for this kind of use of his theory, expresses hesitation but acknowledges some of the potential.

The argument of this chapter is that this move – the move to use Brandom's linguistic theory as a resource for a more robust political or ethical theory – is problematic. Those using Brandom's theory for political and moral work, and even Brandom's own recent exploration into the consequences of his theory, take it too far, engaging in a kind of category mistake, and insights from Hobbes serve to provide a check to the current impulse to use Brandom's theory in this way. While Brandom describes the structure of discursive intersubjectivity, and describes the normative commitments and statuses composing the structure of intersubjectivity, there is no

⁵⁸¹ See, for example, part two of his *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Belknap Press at Harvard University, 2009).

⁵⁸² Stout, *Democracy & Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) 282.

⁵⁸³ Tanja Pritzlaff, "Freedom is a Matter of Responsibility and Authority: An Interview with Robert B. Brandom," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7:365 (2008): 365-381.

normative force to Brandom's theory itself. He describes human beings as thoroughly normative creatures – we inhabit the space of reasons, are intentional, “concept mongering” beings – but this is not to say that there is any normative direction or greater normative insight to be had from his theory. Some contemporary scholars, especially scholars of religion, mistake a project that seeks to describe our activity, including our normative activity, for a project with normative implications.

In light of this analysis of Hobbes on religion and his work on religion in the political sphere, Hobbes emerges as an intriguing counterpoint and source of insight on this question. Indeed, looking at Hobbes alongside Brandom clarifies some objections to this strategy. Hobbes and Brandom share much in common, especially regarding their accounts of the human being and of language and their recognition of a very holistic social picture, but Hobbes derives very different political conclusions from his story. While Brandom provides an account of the human being as an intentional, discursive actor, Hobbes helps make the case that this does not mean that there is a normative ethical or political program implicit in Brandom – there is not, as Stout holds, implicit in his view, a strong defense of a “self-consciously democratic ethical community.” And in his focus on the role of human psychology, Hobbes also helps to make clear that Brandom's linguistic strategy can only be part of the story in seeking the fullest account of religious or political activity. Insights from the work of this project, especially Hobbes's focus on the centrality of human psychology, point to some of the pertinent resources in Hobbes for looking to questions about Brandom's view. Hobbes helps to

point out some of what we might be missing from Brandom, including engagement in the subject naturalist⁵⁸⁴ turn in a more thoroughgoing way.

By establishing some important similarities between Hobbes and Brandom, and accounting for the senses in which they differ, Hobbes's view provides some support for the worry that Brandom's theory is indeed too "thin"⁵⁸⁵ to work as a political theory and that it is not equipped to uphold a specifically democratic political or ethical theory, as some might have it. So, when scholars appeal to Brandom for this reason, they are, in some sense, engaging in an unjustified leap, employing a descriptive philosophy of language – one useful for making sense of a very particular aspect of human social practice – for their own prescriptive task of ethical democracy. Looking at Hobbes and Brandom together also serves as a reminder of the task of the study of religion, a task strengthened with Brandom's theory but often overlooked in the move to use him for more robust political claims. Hobbes reminds us to look to the human being and to look to our analyses of language, of why we say the things we say, and to the passions, and not to ontological questions. In some sense, a comparison of Hobbes and Brandom reminds us to return to the original pragmatist task of seeking the best possible naturalistic explanation of religion by looking first to human beings themselves.

This chapter will first set out some of the pertinent similarities and central differences between Hobbes and Brandom, providing some of the justification for considering these two thinkers side by side. I will then turn to a more thorough consideration of some of the ways in which scholars appeal to Brandom as a resource for a political or ethical theory and for various political claims. The chapter will then focus

⁵⁸⁴ Huw Price's term, as discussed in chapter one.

⁵⁸⁵ Brandom in Pritzlaff, 377.

on ways in which Hobbes's view is useful for raising some concerns about this current trend, looking back to insights from his linguistic account and his view of the passions. Finally, returning to the matter of religion in particular, I will, with insights from Hobbes, look to some of the potential for – and possible limits to – applying Brandom's theory to the study of religion and to the ongoing task of providing a naturalistic account of religious practice.

Hobbes and Brandom

Brandom places himself in a very particular historical narrative, one marching straight through the history of western philosophy, with important stops at Kant, Hegel, Frege, and Wittgenstein.⁵⁸⁶ Making a brief appearance in the course of this story is Samuel Pufendorf and, along with him, Hobbes. Brandom recognizes in Hobbes a thinker who sensed, early on, some of the ways in which human beings, through language use and other forms of social engagement, bring values to the world. He also sees in Hobbes and others an early voice of objection to aspects of Descartes' characterization of knowledge and a thinker struggling to make sense of questions about authority and normativity. Looking to some features of each of their systems, comparisons can be drawn between their respective views, specifically to do with the sources of normativity, aspects of knowledge, and some of the central features of the practice of human agreement. From these common points of contact, Hobbes offers an important critique of some current uses of Brandom.

⁵⁸⁶ This is the narrative he presents, for example, in *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1994) especially throughout Part I, and in the first half of *Reason in Philosophy*.

Although it might be something of a mainstream view in philosophy today, in Pufendorf and Hobbes, Brandom sees an important shift to the view that we human beings, as social and linguistic creatures, bring values to the world. The world itself does not arrive with values built in. This early insight runs counter to a long tradition in which, for example, an idea of the moral good lies outside the world in some way, waiting for our recognition of that good. For Hobbes and others, instead, the world is valued – norms exists, authority exists – only because of the activity of human beings not because of the establishment or existence of those norms prior to that human engagement. As Brandom puts it, Pufendorf was one of the first to recognize that “the worth of things and the fitness of actions is a product of our activity—that unlike natural properties, normative proprieties are in the eye of the human beholder.”⁵⁸⁷ Nothing is good and nothing is bad unless human beings deem it so.

As Brandom sees it, this insight, and the various ways in which it is reconciled with a materialist ontology, is key to the story of secularization, “heir to a line of thought central to and characteristic of the Enlightenment project of disenchanting the natural world and humanizing values.”⁵⁸⁸ In an enchanted world, the good and the true are already, in some sense, on the scene, fixed in a way beyond the efforts of mere human beings. In a way there is an important gap in place: human beings sit in the world, trying as they can to access the true, the good, and the real, which exist independently of their efforts. But, this move in the 17th century, one made by Hobbes and others, ushers in a naturalizing and humanizing perspective in which, “Meaningless objects and meaning-

⁵⁸⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 47.

⁵⁸⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 47. Charles Taylor offers a subtler account of the story of secularization in *A Secular Age*. He describes a shift from a landscape in which belief in God was a given, to one of options, an emergence of what he calls “exclusive humanism” and a recognition of a distinction between the transcendent and the immanent.

generating subjects are two aspects of one picture...valuing is the source of values”⁵⁸⁹

Meaning does not inhabit objects outside the activity of granting meaning to those objects.

Brandom sees contractarian theories, “those that invoke positive law to explain various rights and obligations,” as central to this story as they explain “deontic statuses in terms of what agents are doing in instituting or constitutively recognizing such entitlements and commitments.”⁵⁹⁰ What Pufendorf and contract theorists have in common is an attention first to the activity of the human being and the kinds of normative statuses human beings impose on objects, and then to the kinds of norms and entitlements themselves that are generated from that activity. Rather than beginning with norms, for example, norms as somehow existent in objects themselves, apart from engagement with those objects, they each begin with the activity of the human being.

As the story pertains to Hobbes, Schneewind also points to the legal theorist Grotius as an important voice in this shift, Hobbes being the thinker who “goes beyond the limits of Grotianism.”⁵⁹¹ While Grotius “removed natural law from the jurisdiction of theology,” rendering it a matter between men, not one between the human being and God, it is Hobbes who, Schneewind claims, “explicitly refuses to say that our nature is sinful (*Leviathan* XIII.10). He is simply giving a scientific account of the factors that cause the problem we must learn to solve.”⁵⁹² There is no good or evil by nature for Hobbes, rather, the good and the bad are determined in and through social exchange itself, based primarily on what lends itself most to self-preservation.

⁵⁸⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 49.

⁵⁹⁰ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 49.

⁵⁹¹ Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 86.

⁵⁹² Schneewind, 87.

Hobbes's embrace of this view is especially clear in *Leviathan*. For Hobbes, valuing, and morality itself, begins with the very human need for self-preservation, not with some alternative concerns, either the good or the god-like. So, morality is a matter for human beings, not, for example, for God, and this placement of moral concerns further establishes Hobbes as, in some sense, de-divinizing the foundations of his entire social picture.

For Hobbes, good and evil, right and wrong, do not exist outside or apart from the practices of human beings. Indeed, the good or the evil are only determined in the context of human social practices. He writes in *Leviathan*:

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*; And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; And of his Contempt, *Vile*, and *Inconsiderable*. For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them; There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-wealth;) or, (in a Common-wealth,) from the Person that representeth it; or from an Arbitrator or Judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the Rule thereof.⁵⁹³

So, in the first instance, good and evil do not exist on their own as some feature of the world disconnected from human beings themselves. Good and evil are socially generated, determined in the context of their use – “ever used with relation to the person that useth them” – and not fixed across communities and across time.

What is then considered good and evil or right and wrong, so what constitutes the kinds of norms human beings in any given community are required to obey, are generated in and through those communities. There is no alternative source of authority but that of human needs and human social agreement. As Schneewind continues, “There is thus, as Hobbes says, ‘no obligation on any man which ariseth not from some act of his own’ (*Leviathan* XXI.10). Being obliged or duty-bound arises from the belief that I will benefit

⁵⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 120-121.

from the self-limitation that puts me under obligations to others (either definite others, or indefinite),”⁵⁹⁴ the threat of death being the only exception. Normative attitudes and assessments are based on the attitudes and activities of human beings, shaped by the individual’s belief about what the best action might be for one’s own purposes.

Brandom also reads Pufendorf as maintaining that we are set apart from animals “by the fact that our actions are subject to assessment according to their propriety, a special kind of attribute over and above the natural motions of things, an attribute that has somehow been *given* to them.”⁵⁹⁵ For Pufendorf, certain norms that make life civilized are “not part of the intrinsic nature of things, which is entirely indifferent to them. They are imposed by the will of intelligent beings and can affect things only through their effect on the will of such beings—beings who can act according to a conception of them.”⁵⁹⁶ Brandom sees this as a crucial move, as human activity itself “*institutes*” or “*imposes* normative significance on a natural world that is intrinsically without significance for the guidance or assessment of action.”⁵⁹⁷ This is a basic claim or approach taken by the tradition with which Brandom aligns himself, although, as he sees it, philosophers of this time only took the first steps in this direction, not yet playing out real the implications of this view. And the march toward secularism was certainly not straight.

Brandom distinguishes between two lines of thinking in the secularization story, one in which, “settling all the facts specifiable in *non*normative vocabulary settles all the facts specifiable in *normative* vocabulary” – this being the story taken up by “atoms-in-

⁵⁹⁴ Schneewind, 90.

⁵⁹⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 47-48.

⁵⁹⁶ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 48.

⁵⁹⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 48.

the-void physicalism” and leading to a particular way of naturalizing the world and seeking to attain a “*complete* description of everything that deserves to be called real.”⁵⁹⁸ The second strand leads to the likes of Pufendorf and, to some degree, Hobbes and is one in which “settling all the facts concerning normative *attitudes* settles all the facts concerning normative *statuses*” – that “the worth of things and the fitness of actions is a product of our activity.”⁵⁹⁹ For the first kind of naturalist enterprise, the normative can be reduced to the non-normative, beliefs, moral claims, and the like described in purely non-normative terms. With the second comes a recognition that no complete description of the real could ever become available because the normative is tied to human activity in a way that allows for that kind of assessment only in the moment, in a given context, and in relation to other beliefs and normative claims.

Although both make this second turn, Brandom points to the major difference between Hobbes and Pufendorf: Hobbes’s materialist ontology about the will.⁶⁰⁰ As a materialist through and through, even normative statuses and attributions can be accounted for in this picture, one that might seem scientifically reductive. Meanwhile, according to Brandom, Pufendorf’s insight does not take him to the view that how we describe natural objects is sufficient to describe our practice of instituting norms. Normative statuses might be the consequence of normative attitudes, but, “He does not conjoin this thesis with any sort of physicalism about the mechanism by which these

⁵⁹⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 47.

⁵⁹⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 47.

⁶⁰⁰ As discussed in chapter 1 of this project, the will, for Hobbes, is “*the last Appetite in Deliberating*” (*Leviathan*, 128). For Hobbes it is not the “*Rationall Appetite*,” rather the end of the succession of appetites and aversions, or the final appetite or aversion “immediately adhaering to the action, or to the omission thereof” (*Leviathan*, 127). For Hobbes, an external body or object is itself the cause of particular sensations, and is itself what presses on the organs of sense (*Leviathan*, 85).

moral secondary qualities arise from our practical activity.”⁶⁰¹ For Pufendorf at least, we can think this about normative attitudes and statuses without thinking in purely reductionist terms; a description of normative attitudes and statuses needn’t be reduced to non-normative vocabulary.

While Hobbes agrees that the activity of valuing is what gives something value, and that no complete description of the real is available, he also appeals to a materialist ontology in accounting for practice. As Brandom notes, “One who does conjoin these commitments [cited above] is Hobbes. He explains, not good and evil, but *calling* things good and evil. He understands the use of the words ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as expressing appetites, desires, or aversions. He expresses his commitment to fundamental normative statuses being instituted by our attitudes this way.”⁶⁰² The normative can still be explained by very natural, materialist functionings of the human being, especially the human being’s relationship to the world and desires or aversions to objects in the world.

An important difference between Hobbes and Brandom, Hobbes’s materialism leads him to the view that the activity of the mind, thoughts and desires, are ultimately describable in non-normative terms – the institution of authority explained, for example, by a psychological fear of the future. Brandom is not a materialist in this sense. Brandom will side with Pufendorf over Hobbes, holding that values only exist in our recognition of them and attitude towards them, but that we needn’t be “obliged in addition to understand those attitudes in terms of desires or preferences that can be characterized independently in value-free terms.”⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 49.

⁶⁰² Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 49.

⁶⁰³ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 50.

This first point of contact between Brandom and Hobbes – that human beings, through social,⁶⁰⁴ practical activity, bring values to an otherwise value-free world – puts them both in a position in which they give central consideration to the human being and the activity of the human being as a norm-generating and norm-responsive creature. For both, we are reason-exchanging beings who both produce and obey forms of authority. For both Hobbes and Brandom, this is just what it is to be a human being. Their respective descriptive accounts focus, in large part, on our sapience, and on the inescapably normative nature of our rationality.

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A second important point of contact between Brandom and Hobbes is their shared objection to an aspect of Descartes' epistemology. Brandom points to "the unfortunate emphases that Descartes imposed on the representationalist tradition...the privileging of *knowledge*, and therefore *successful* representation, as a topic of inquiry, over *understanding*, and therefore *purported* representation."⁶⁰⁵ For Descartes, the mind seeks to grasp or get right an aspect of the world – the worry for a linguistic account being its success, that what a representation is, the mental property that it is "“as if of,”⁶⁰⁶ as Brandom puts it, is both justified and objectively real. He sees Descartes as concerned primarily with entitlement to a commitment. What Descartes is not concerned with is the story of what it is for the mind to grasp the content and what the activity of taking an idea to be about something might look like.⁶⁰⁷ So, for Descartes, Brandom says, “Representational purport, ‘the objective reality of things in thoughts,’ and its

⁶⁰⁴ This feature will be dealt with more thoroughly in a moment.

⁶⁰⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73. Italics are Brandom's.

⁶⁰⁶ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73.

⁶⁰⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73.

corresponding uptake by the mind whose thoughts they serve are Descartes' unexplained explainers."⁶⁰⁸ What Brandom seeks, and what Descartes never provides, is an "account of what it is for the mind to grasp such purport, for it to take or treat an idea as being of or about something."⁶⁰⁹ Not only do representations serve as something of an unexplained rock-bottom for Descartes, but the activity of acquiring and engaging with that representational purport is never explained but central to making sense of linguistic practice.

Huw Price explains the distinction well when pointing out a contemporary manifestation of the "*representationalist* assumption," which he describes as "the assumption that the linguistic items in question 'stand for' or 'represent' something *nonlinguistic*."⁶¹⁰ Price finds that, although one might be a good naturalist, holding the view that "natural science constrains philosophy,"⁶¹¹ some naturalists might still encounter problems trying to connect words and objects in the material world,⁶¹² especially when operating with and giving priority to this representationalist assumption. For Price – and for Brandom – what becomes central is how concepts are used in our practices, not whether those concepts match up to objects or ideas lying somewhere outside those practices. While Descartes is concerned with this kind of entitlement to a commitment, whether it well represents reality, Brandom finds that "the content of the representational commitments to which the mind's entitlement is at issue is never clarified. A representational model of contentfulness cannot rest with an account of

⁶⁰⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73.

⁶⁰⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73.

⁶¹⁰ Price, "Naturalism Without Representationalism," in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario de Caro and David MacArthur, 71-88 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2004) 77.

⁶¹¹ Price, 71.

⁶¹² Price, 73.

successful representation.”⁶¹³ Instead it requires an account of just what it is to grasp, take, treat, or use something as a representation, that is, as understanding as opposed to merely knowledge.⁶¹⁴

As Brandom sees it, a better strategy is: “Instead of asking what object is being referred to by the term, what property is being ascribed by the predicate, and what fact would make the sentence true, one ought first to look at the use of the expressions, to see if the putative referrings, characterizings, and claimings in fact play a practical role that is best understood in terms of such contents.”⁶¹⁵ Beginning with the intentional activity of the human being, with the practical attitudes they take and the use to which expressions are put in specific contexts, a better picture of the activity of understanding can be attained. Instead of getting stuck on the impossible task of trying to get a reference right,⁶¹⁶ better would be to look with a pragmatic holism at the relations between claims and the roles being played by the expressions, references, and facts at hand.

Brandom points to what he calls “a minority semantic tradition that takes *inference* rather than representation as its master concept.”⁶¹⁷ Exemplary of this tradition are rationalists like Spinoza and Leibniz who, Brandom says, “accept the central role of the concept of representation in explaining human cognitive activity, but they are not prepared to accept Descartes’s strategy of treating the possession of representational

⁶¹³ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 73-74.

⁶¹⁴ Price recommends what he calls a “subject naturalist” position from which analysis begins with the human being within the realm of the linguistic, avoiding some of the problems encountered by “object naturalists” who maintain the “representationalist assumption.” What is central is then how concepts are used in our practices, not whether those concepts match up to objects or ideas lying somewhere outside those practices. 73.

⁶¹⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 75.

⁶¹⁶ Price offers a helpful and clear discussion of these “placement problems” on 74-76.

⁶¹⁷ Brandom, 93.

content as an unexplained explainer.”⁶¹⁸ Representation still plays a part in the workings of the minds, but it is not foundational or primary on this view. Brandom points to a major fork at this point in Enlightenment epistemology as pertaining to the “explanatory priority” given to the concepts of inference and representation. For the likes of Spinoza and Leibniz, an account of language begins with the inferential relations among representations and inferential significances of these representings. While Descartes gives explanatory priority to representation, these thinkers seek “to explain what it is for something to be understood, treated, or employed in practice *as* a representing *by* the subject—what it is for it to be a representing to or for that subject.”⁶¹⁹ What those representations refer to is not some fixed feature of the external world or an idea, apart from the activity of individuals, instead these representings are understood in terms of their inferential relations to other representings and have content, as Brandom explains, in their role as premises and conclusions.⁶²⁰

On this view, to look to a representation as something corresponding directly to an object or idea makes little sense. The representation gets its content from the use to which it is put and the inferential relations in which it stands. As Brandom explains, representation itself is not the problem, the problem is when this approach acts as if “an account in these terms gives one an independent grip on what is expressed by the declarative use of sentences—as though one could understand the notions of states of affairs or truth conditions in *advance* of understanding claiming or judging.”⁶²¹ His task

⁶¹⁸ Brandom, 93.

⁶¹⁹ Brandom, 93.

⁶²⁰ Brandom, 93.

⁶²¹ Brandom, 496.

is not to object to the use of representation and representational language altogether, rather he objects to the view that puts it first in an order of explanation.

While Hobbes's own view doesn't contain as explicit a rejection of Descartes' form of representationalism, there are important ways in which he falls more fully into the "minority semantic tradition" that Brandom indicates. As argued in the second chapter of this project, language is for Hobbes constitutive of human thought and of reasoning,⁶²² and, as such, is a faculty for navigating within the world. The elements of language are part of a system, one that both constitutes and shapes a given community. For Hobbes, to speak, to be linguistic, is just to deal in reasons. Language is the very activity of the exchange of reasons among interlocutors. And to use language is a pragmatic affair, engaging the passions and directed at objects of desire and aversion, a tool for the purposes of felicity, or "Continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continuall prospering."⁶²³ Hobbes's theory of language contains features of an instrumentalist view, as, individuals share their thoughts in order to, "declare them to one another for mutuall utility and conversation."⁶²⁴ But, linguistic practice is also fundamentally inferential in that claims stand in need of reasons, and serve as the premises or conclusions in inferences.

Discourse itself, beginning with the "discourse of the mind," is just "*Seeking*, or the faculty of Invention...a hunting out of the causes, of some effect, present or past; or of the effects, of some present or past cause."⁶²⁵ And he gives primacy to the faculty or process of understanding that, although common to both human beings and animals, is

⁶²² As discussed in Chapter 2, this is the main argument of Philip Petit's *Made With Words*.

⁶²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 129.

⁶²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 100.

⁶²⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

based in agreement: “For a dogge by custome will understand the call, or the rating of his Master; and so will many other beasts.”⁶²⁶ And in the case of human beings, what is at stake in understanding is both the will and “his conceptions and thoughts,” part of the process of understanding “by the sequell and contexture of the names of things into Affirmations, Negations, and other formes of Speech.”⁶²⁷ In seeking to make sense of the linguistic activity of human beings, Hobbes focuses on the working of this faculty itself, on the relations between premises and conclusions of claims and how claims serve as reasons, not in the first instance on the content of claims and questions of entitlement to those claims.

Knowledge – the kind of knowledge Hobbes sees as central to human social practices, from politics to moral behavior – is also not knowledge of the sort Descartes recommends, that is, some final, justified grasp of an idea. For Hobbes, there is a social, practical sense to knowledge. And this form is, for him, science – “*Knowledge of the Consequence of one Affirmation to another.*”⁶²⁸ While “Knowledge of Fact,” is, for Hobbes, nothing but “Sense and Memory,” knowledge of consequence is conditional. Any claims are dependent on their relationship to other claims. Again, for Hobbes, “*True* and *False* are attributes of Speech, not of Things. And where Speech is not there is neither *Truth* nor *Falsehood.*”⁶²⁹ Language is then a holistic, social-practical affair and claims and commitments are generated from that practice. Priority is given to the inferential consequences to this exchange, not to representational content. For Hobbes, it might be said, a good starting point for making sense of language use would be to look to

⁶²⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 93.

⁶²⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 94.

⁶²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 147.

⁶²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 105.

the subjects who engage in practices which are themselves inferential, practices that get their conceptual content by serving as premises and conclusions in those inferential practices.

For Brandom, as sapient, believing, intentional, desiring creatures, instead of being “representers” as Descartes has it – “producers and consumers of representings”⁶³⁰ – we deal in reasons, at the level of propositional content. Rather than looking first to representations and then to us as creatures engaged in the practice of dealing in these representations, we are in the first instance reason exchanging, concept using, judging, assessing, attributing, committing agents. Hobbes, too, would agree with this point. As sapient, we operate in the space of reasons, and this is a normative space, implicitly – there is no escaping this normativity. For Brandom, we are normative creatures and normativity comes in social practice.

Representation needn’t be given the kind of priority it takes in other accounts. Turning first to inference and the practical activity of reason exchange, Brandom maintains: “Talk about the *representational* dimension of the conceptual content of intentional states should be understood in terms of the *social* dimensions of their inferential articulation.”⁶³¹ Pragmatics precedes semantics for Brandom so getting the best explanation of the social practice of linguistic exchange requires beginning with that activity in its social context.

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Aspects of the importantly social dimension of Brandom’s theory are a third key point of interest for scholars and a point of some contact with Hobbes. In a fundamentally

⁶³⁰ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 6.

⁶³¹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 586.

social context, and embedded in a particular community, Brandom offers a multi-layered linguistic theory which is, as he says, inspired by Hegel's insight that "normative statuses are in the end social statuses, more particularly, that normative statuses – again authority, responsibility, commitment, entitlement, etc. – are instituted by social practices," and, from this, the importance of "reciprocal recognition."⁶³² But Brandom is concerned more specifically with the details of this kind of recognition and in getting to a "more complicated recognitive structure"⁶³³ than Hegel's.⁶³⁴ As claimed in chapter two, Hobbes's own linguistic theory also characterizes the human being as not simply performing linguistic acts, like naming and marking, in a methodologically individualist way. For Hobbes, language is a single system, importantly part of the social context and fabric, and something into which human beings must be "inducted." As such, although Hobbes analytically breaks down the elements of linguistic activity, language can only be seen as a social practical system. At this fundamental level, Hobbes also recognizes and accounts for the social.

Deontic scorekeeping is what Brandom calls his particular form of discursive practice or model of language.⁶³⁵ In the fundamental practice of giving and asking for reasons, the main "move" is to make claims or offer reasons – and something is considered a reason because of its propositional content. These claims can also be assertions, or doxastic, which entails the acknowledgement of or the undertaking of some kind of commitment.

⁶³² Brandom in Pritzlaff, 367.

⁶³³ Brandom in Pritzlaff, 368.

⁶³⁴ Here, too, Brandom sees some promise for a "general framework for thinking about social institutions and political institutions," although he does not expand upon this suggestion in this interview. (368) He does explore this further in *Reason in Philosophy*.

⁶³⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 141.

Where the uniqueness of Brandom's theory lies is in the specifics of the very particular I-Thou structure of discursive intersubjectivity and its means of accounting for the particular attitudes and commitments of the individual and for objective representational content. Although inspired by the Hegelian tradition, Brandom goes in the direction of more foundational, more specific, and more fundamental forms of social exchange instead of contending with some of the broader political consequences.⁶³⁶ Those in the study of religion who look to Brandom also appeal to these more precise features, including his deontic scorekeeping model – again, an I-Thou model of exchange – and expressive freedom as it manifests itself in the context of the I-Thou relation. This I-Thou model is, for Brandom, the very basic form of linguistic exchange between two interlocutors. One makes a claim and the other, in this exchange, hears and interprets the claim. From aspects of this interaction he builds his theory.

In this interaction Brandom also seeks to account for the difference between “concepts” and “the objects they apply to,”⁶³⁷ or the “*objective* notion of correctness or appropriateness of claims” and the very subjective application of concepts.⁶³⁸ Brandom is aware that all concepts and claims are applied or made from some perspective or specific point of view. From where we stand, we can never get to some birds-eye-view of the world. We instead remain rooted in our subjective viewpoint. But, objective truth or falsity must be nonperspectival or not subjective in this sense. So, the puzzle for Brandom is to account for objectivity with the perspectival, or to account for objective notions when individuals can only make subjective, perspectival claims on the world. He holds

⁶³⁶ Especially in *Making it Explicit*.

⁶³⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 594.

⁶³⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 594.

that this can be accounted for in his analysis of the structure of discursive intersubjectivity.

One of the basic insights behind his I-Thou model is its “incorporation” of a distinction between “two types of attitudes one can adopt toward a commitment: acknowledging it (oneself) and attributing it (to another).”⁶³⁹ Brandom takes this traditional philosophical distinction and puts it to work in his social practical theory. Traditionally, to use a definition from Ernest Sosa, “Belief *de dicto* is belief that a certain *dictum* (or proposition) is true, whereas belief *de re* is belief about a particular *res* (or thing) that it has a certain property.”⁶⁴⁰ The distinction is one of belief being *about* something (de re) versus having the belief *that* something (de dicto).⁶⁴¹

Brandom uses these concepts for a pragmatic theory, meant to account for the social features of the attitudes and commitments of interlocutors and provide a way to account for objectivity in the context of intersubjective discursive exchange. Brandom’s focus in the use of this distinction is in service of a precise account of linguistic exchange itself and an account of the activity of understanding between two interlocutors, in the I-Thou account.

With the specification of these different types⁶⁴² of attitudes – de re and de dicto, the undertaking and the attributing – Brandom claims that he is accounting for the centrally social nature of this practice. The de re type of attitude is the acknowledgement of a commitment by the claimant herself. And the de dicto is then the attribution of that

⁶³⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 55.

⁶⁴⁰ Ernest Sosa, “Propositional Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Re*,” *Journal of Philosophy* 67, 883-896 (1979) 883.

⁶⁴¹ Sosa, 884.

⁶⁴² Brandom calls the distinction between these descriptions “two different *styles* in which the *content* of the commitment ascribed can be specified,” 503. He also call it “two socially distinct flavors of undertaking or acknowledging a commitment (oneself) and attributing a commitment (to another),” 140.

commitment to the claimant, by the interlocutor. Any given individual takes on a different attitude towards a claim and individuals come from necessarily different perspectives, so “a single commitment typically has a different significance for the one undertaking it, a speaker or believer, from that which it would have for those attributing it, an audience or intentional interpreter.”⁶⁴³ This difference, the sense in which “the implicitly normative inferential significance of a commitment may be different from the point of view of one undertaking the commitment and one attributing it,” is what Brandom holds, “introduces a relativity to social perspective into the specification of such contents.”⁶⁴⁴ The *de re* stance might specify the objective representational content of the claimant’s claim, but this remains one aspect of the discursive structure. Indeed, “Our cognitive attitudes must ultimately answer to these attitude-transcendent facts,”⁶⁴⁵ but significances of any given claim will differ for the claimant and the interpreter of the claim, or the “I” and the “Thou.”

So it is in the context of this dual-perspective model that Brandom gives a role to objective representational content. While the conceptual content of this structure is relative and perspectival in this important sense, the objective correctness of a claim cannot be. Because claims are taken up and attributed from a particular perspective, a stance that is subjective, a puzzle emerges in accounting for the objective or in accounting for the truth or falsity of a claim.⁶⁴⁶ Indeed, Brandom wants to avoid losing the world in his account – Brandom still wants to maintain that “objects and the world of

⁶⁴³ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 139.

⁶⁴⁴ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 139. Further, “grasping the semantic content expressed by the assertional utterance of a sentence requires being able to determine both what follows from the claim, given the further commitments the scorekeeper attributes to the assertor, and what follows from the claim, given further commitments the scorekeeper undertakes,” 591.

⁶⁴⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 137.

⁶⁴⁶ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 594.

facts that comprises them are what they are regardless of what anyone takes them to be,” but this means that there needs to be a “notion of objective correctness of claiming and concept application that is *not* perspective-relative in the way that what is *taken* to follow from what is.”⁶⁴⁷

Brandom wants to account for objectivity or objective representational content, but he wants to do this neither with “nonperspectival facts” nor with something being deemed objective because a community has deemed it so.⁶⁴⁸ He rejects both a bird’s-eye-view of objectivity, that we could ever get some real grasp on the objective content of a claim, and a view that slips towards relativism or idealism, losing objectivity altogether.

Brandom appeals instead to the *structure* of discursive intersubjectivity itself. He looks not to the content of claims for objectivity rather to the entire intersubjective process that he describes. Objective representational content is accounted for in the *de re* ascription of the individual undertaking a commitment. But this is only part of the structural story. As Brandom explains,

...the distinction between claims or applications of concepts that are objectively correct and those that are merely taken to be correct is a structural feature of each scorekeeping perspective. Indeed, the required notion of objective correctness is just what is expressed by *de re* specifications of the conceptual contents of ascribed commitments. For ascriptions in the *de re* style specify the objects that determine the truth or falsity—that is, the objective correctness—of the ascribed claim.⁶⁴⁹

In the undertaking of a commitment, the individual takes that commitment as having objective representational content. Because the commitment specifies something objective or an object, something that determines whether the ascription is correct or not, this is where the objective representational content can be identified in the structure itself.

⁶⁴⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 594-595.

⁶⁴⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 595.

⁶⁴⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 595

But, there is a crucial difference between what is objectively correct and what the individual merely takes to be correct and this needs to be included in the full account. What the individual takes as objective representational content is only part of the structure, one stance in a more complex model. So, while no one perspective can ever describe the total structure of exchange, it is in the de re ascription of the structure of intersubjective exchange that objective representational content can be accounted for.

De dicto ascriptions, meanwhile, specify a commitment's content "*subjectively*," as Brandom explains, "from the point of view of the one who acknowledges that commitment."⁶⁵⁰ While someone undertaking a commitment (the "I" in the I-Thou relation) takes that commitment as objective representational content,⁶⁵¹ so sees it as authoritative, the interlocutor (the "Thou"), attributes to her a de re ascription – what he takes as her attitude or commitment – and this is his de dicto attribution, or what he takes the undertaking to be about. He can also assess the claim of the "I" either using "facts, true claims, as auxiliary hypotheses" or by appealing only to the claims acknowledged by the one endorsing the claim.⁶⁵² The "Thou" attributes to the "I" a certain commitment, one that she takes as objective representational content. The "Thou" also takes a stance on that commitment, either appealing to other facts (presumably from some authoritative alternate source in the community) or, in some sense, taking the "I" at her word or as the authority.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵⁰ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 595.

⁶⁵¹ Or engages a de re stance. She can also take a de dicto stance on her own commitment.

⁶⁵² Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 596. Indeed, the scorekeeper needs to keep "multiple sets of books," says Brandom (592).

⁶⁵³ "In this way, every scorekeeping perspective maintains a distinction in practice between normative status and (immediate) normative attitude—between what is objectively correct and what is merely taken to be correct, between what an interlocutor is actually committed to and what the interlocutor is merely taken to be committed to," *Making it Explicit*, 597.

With this difference in stance in place, the “permanent possibility of a distinction between how things are and how they are taken to be by some interlocutor is built into the social-inferential articulation of concepts.”⁶⁵⁴ The scorekeeper can always take an interlocutor to be wrong, while being aware of her commitment and attributing to her that commitment. Objectivity is then accounted for in the *de re* stance of the claimant, but this objectivity is also always up for assessment as to its correctness. In this structure, there can never be finality to claims of objectivity; there is a fallibility built in, with the truth being always up for grabs.

So, for Brandom, “objectivity is a structural aspect of the social-perspectival form of conceptual contents.”⁶⁵⁵ And, again, conceptual concepts are the “systematic relations among various pragmatic significances.”⁶⁵⁶ The objective is a structural aspect of the relations between pragmatic significances. In this sense, there is no content to Brandom’s account of objectivity. No one objective claim is true or false – Brandom’s theory itself offers no insight into the contents of claims. What his theory does offer is a way to account for objective representational content in the structure of exchange itself, so in the form that discursive intersubjectivity takes. Objectivity, found in the *de re* attitude taken by the claimant, acts like one of the beams in the structure of a very flexible house, keeping it all from collapsing in on itself. For Brandom, objectivity keeps this house from collapsing into the notion that the true or real is just what the community decides it is.

Brandom foresees that one might think that this account just “put[s] off the question of what is really correct.”⁶⁵⁷ Objectivity, for what it’s worth, does its work only

⁶⁵⁴ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 597.

⁶⁵⁵ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 597.

⁶⁵⁶ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 591.

⁶⁵⁷ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 600.

in the undertaking of a commitment by an interlocutor, and this is where objective representational content remains. That content is never grasped in some complete fashion and it remains in the structure of intersubjectivity itself. Objective content never rises to a more global level, except as a possible claim or commitment taken by any given individual, because Brandom's own approach would be undermined – objective content would have a kind of authority and priority he refuses to grant it. Objectivity can still only be accounted for in the I-Thou exchange.

This approach also seems egalitarian, according to Brandom. There is no pre-determined authority to the I-Thou exchange, instead authority “precipitates out of this process” and “derives from what various interlocutors say rather than from who says it.”⁶⁵⁸ Not that there is no privileged perspective at all, but as Brandom explains, “each perspective is at most *locally* privileged in that it incorporates a structured distinction between objectively correct applications of concepts and applications that are merely subjectively taken to be correct.”⁶⁵⁹ From the I-Thou exchange, the facts should be doing most of the work – conditions should be met so that the truth can be determined – and Brandom sees this as fundamentally egalitarian.

But each interlocutor takes on a role in this exchange and is empowered to assess the attitude and stance of the one making a particular commitment. While, as Brandom says, “every scorekeeping perspective incorporates a distinction between what is (objectively) true and what is merely (subjectively) held true,”⁶⁶⁰ the scorekeeper is in the position of assessing the claim of the claimant. The claimant can do the same for another claim, but at some point, a kind of authority emerges from this structure. It is egalitarian

⁶⁵⁸ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 601.

⁶⁵⁹ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 600.

⁶⁶⁰ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 598.

in that we see each other as committed creatures – not only do we see ourselves as creatures in the normative space of giving and asking for reasons, but we see others as the same, and we see others as givers and takers of reasons, as committing and asserting, and as taking normative stances. We are all equally equipped players in this game. We have to be in order for the game to sustain itself. Authority and objectivity itself are tentative affairs. In taking on any given commitment, thanks to the scorekeeping and claim-assessment structure, any other commitment can fall away.⁶⁶¹ So a claim's status as objectively correct is always open for debate.

In these features of Brandom, although far from the seventeenth century in spirit, there are some echoes of Hobbes's work, along with some fundamental differences. Brandom obviously draws the relationship between two interlocutors, and the nature of their attitudes and assessments of the attitudes and assessments of the other, in a way Hobbes never does. Stout highlights one of the central differences from Brandom's Hegelian approach: Hobbes's individualism. Taking a cue from the social contract tradition, Stout points out that Hegel "criticized Kant for explaining the process of norm-institution as a matter of self-legislation and for modeling society in a contract among independent rational agents."⁶⁶² As Hegel sees it, according to Stout, Kant's contract-inspired view leans on a conception of too inwardly rational, too autonomous individuals, at the expense of the importantly historical and sociological components, so central to an account of ethical norms, and components missing from the social contract story.⁶⁶³ As Stout puts it, "Norms do not arise because solitary individuals, already in full possession

⁶⁶¹ "...acquiring a commitment may have as a consequence the loss of entitlement to concomitant commitments one was heretofore entitled to." *Making it Explicit*, 169.

⁶⁶² Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 272.

⁶⁶³ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 272.

of practical rationality, commit themselves to a social contract. They emerge out of the mutually recognitive activities through which a people comes to share a culture.”⁶⁶⁴ Individuals do not independently and mutually come to recognize, with their own pre-formed rational powers, what a norm should be and then, with that recognition in hand, take steps to institute that norm. Instead, norms come from a “form of ethical life (which shapes the subjectivity and rationality of the individuals who participate in it)”⁶⁶⁵ – life itself, the social mess from and through which an individual is formed and shaped, generates both the individuals who institute those norms and the norms themselves. The Hegelian tradition, unlike the contract tradition, Stout claims, is seen better to account for the world, for the individual as of a piece with his social setting, and the constitutive force of all of these various factors of social life.

Certainly squarely in the contract tradition, and focused on rationality and primarily on the needs of the individual, Hobbes’s view might seem worlds away. But, as argued in chapter two, and a claim being made throughout this project, Hobbes’s theory of language is a specific area of his thought in which he explicitly engages some of the claims of the Hegelian tradition and the model of exchange offered by Hobbes appeals to some features similar to Brandom’s account. Again, far from the stark methodological individualist he is sometimes made out to be, the human being is constituted by language in a crucial way for Hobbes and language and rationality, the activity of understanding, are tightly connected. At the most fundamental level, Hobbes sees human beings as equal,⁶⁶⁶ and language is a tool that works to shape that humanity.

⁶⁶⁴ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 272-273.

⁶⁶⁵ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 273.

⁶⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 83.

Linguistic practice is a complicated process in and through which the individual is constituted. A social dimension is already built into language use, for Hobbes. At the very ground of his account of the human being, we are socially constituted by that language. In this way, Hobbes might see the human being as a rational and individualistic actor, concerned first and foremost with her own well-being, and, as Stout describes, individually choosing the social contract. But that individual is first shaped by the social, for Hobbes, unable to be any kind of linguistic rational actor without first being formed in the social. As had been argued here, Hobbes's vision contains a kind of holism, conceives of the social as one system, and accounts for practices like language, politics, and religion as a part of that system. Stout's own assessment then misses this component to Hobbes's view. Hobbes could then also point to "the social mess from and through which an individual is formed and shaped," although out of this mess the human being might emerge as especially rational and concerned primarily with his wellbeing.

Related to this, Hobbes also accounts for the kind of recognition of the other required in Brandom's linguistic story. The very form the social contract takes is that each individual agrees with every other individual about the institution of the sovereign. With Hobbes, the individual recognizes that it is in his or her own best interest to act rationally, so in a particular way, to agree to hand over rights to the sovereign but, at the same time, she recognizes that any other rational individual would and will make the same decision. In some basic sense, the individual must take on the perspective of the other when going into agreement with the other. The individual will see that others will agree to the same thing, as that is the only way this could get off the ground. One's own consent will be based on the fact that others will choose to do the same thing – the

individual would never agree otherwise. So, on this point, Hobbes and Brandom share the view that the individual both acknowledges his own normative commitments and attributes these commitments to the other, and in Hobbes's case, to all others, as this is what it is to be human and rational.

So clearly Hobbes does not go into as much detail as Brandom on this point, and doesn't unpack the two types of attitudes one can adopt, but the broad thrust of Hobbes's view notes the same kind of required recognition of the other. Brandom is talking about the actual act of social exchange, about the practical activity of giving and asking for reasons and what takes place when that activity is happening. Hobbes's conception of this activity of social exchange, first through language and then through the agreement of the contract, is similarly socially grounded in a mutual recognition of the stance of the other.

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Finally, one of the main points to which scholars of religion turn when seeking in Brandom the resources for a political or moral theory, is what he calls "expressive freedom."⁶⁶⁷ This contains the basic idea that, with constraints put on our practices, we are able to act freely. Central to this is the kind of constraint that comes with our institution of norms. As Brandom explains, "a rational justification for subjecting oneself to such constraints is supplied by the possibility of making all sorts of novel utterances that constraining oneself by discursive norms makes possible, the creative realm that is opened up by coming to speak a natural language."⁶⁶⁸ Brandom points to Kant and Hegel as resources for recognizing that there is a "payoff in positive expressive freedom that one gets and can only get by constraining oneself by discursive norms," and, too, that this

⁶⁶⁷ Interestingly, expressive freedom is a concept given significantly less air time in *Making it Explicit* than it is given in some of his earlier and later works.

⁶⁶⁸ Brandom in Pritzlaff, 370.

might be extended to “the standard by which we assess and evaluate any social or political institution that proposes to constrain us.”⁶⁶⁹

This “linguistic model of positive freedom” maintains that language itself contains the kinds of constraints on practice that are necessary for the very expression of freedom. So, constraints, or norms instituted by language-users themselves, are the source of a positive, expressive freedom. Constraints make possible a new kind of freedom. Only in having these kinds of limitation can the individual act creatively.

Brandom’s account of the structure of discursive intersubjectivity clearly integrates this notion of expressive freedom, at the very local level. Interlocutors are constrained by the norms and claims of a community, and constrained through the assessments of the other. A very basic feature of intersubjectivity is this kind of constraint, but a constraint seen as the source of creative expression. Hobbes’s view also contains a basic embrace of this point, as, most broadly, the institution of limits through the social contract is meant to lead to a greater peace and stability. Constraints lead to a realm in which one might act more freely as opposed to being enslaved by natural necessity.

Brandom, Hobbes, and political prospects

Scholars of religion have recently turned to Brandom’s linguistic theory because they see it as a promising resource for political and ethical insights. His account of the I-Thou structure, expressive freedom, and deontic scorekeeping are a few of the elements most appealed to as resources. Even Brandom, in some of his more recent work, attempts

⁶⁶⁹ Brandom in Pritzlaff, 370.

to identify the possible political consequences to his view.⁶⁷⁰ Even though he has taken on the task himself, just what might be available from his theory remains a subject for debate. While some scholars of religion have set forth, holding high the banner of Brandom, without really looking back, not only does the question about what his theory can accomplish for political or ethical work remain unresolved, but there are ways in which, especially in looking at his approach alongside that of Hobbes, there is not enough to Brandom's linguistic theory to get a full-blown defense of ethical democracy nor does it seem to be the most fruitful application of his theory.

As will be argued in the remainder of this chapter, scholars of religion misuse Brandom because they mistake a theory descriptive of our normative attitudes and statuses for a theory with normative implications. But, there is no pre-determined normative direction to these "reflective practices" or to the expressive freedom appealed to in his account. Linguistic practices themselves have no direction. These are practices that emerge out of the very activity of linguistic exchange, which is a feature of all human communities – evidence of our sapience – no matter what the political structure in which we find ourselves. Brandom's task is only to describe that this is the case. He may find that making explicit the norms that are implicit in practice "enriches" our language in a way.⁶⁷¹ But, his account remains descriptive of linguistic practice itself, and further, descriptive of a primarily implicit, mostly unconscious or unreflective aspect of our

⁶⁷⁰ Especially in *Reason in Philosophy*, which, in a quite different spirit from *Making it Explicit*, includes a "defense of a life of philosophical activity," 130.

⁶⁷¹ Brandom specifies: "an understanding of discursive practice as a normative practice, with how creatures who already lived and moved and had their being in a normative space, could – by engaging in practices with the right sort of recognitive structure, that is, that involved the right sort of keeping score on each other's commitments and entitlements, and in particular showing sensitivity to those commitments and entitlements – lift themselves into a discursive space, become discursive creatures, able to make claims and perform intentional actions in a richer and stronger sense than any non-discursive creature can do." Brandom in Pritzlaff, 374.

practice. In the same spirit, Hobbes says, “Nature itselfe cannot erre: and as men abound in copiousnesse of language; so they become more wise, or more mad than ordinary.”⁶⁷² Their lives might be enriched in one direction or another, but there is no directionality to the practice itself. Indeed, both might agree with the Orwellian observation, illustrated best through the concept of newspeak, that limiting language limits the expression of thought itself. But, this is a feature of linguistic practice, on this description of the human being, not yet a prescriptive insight.

In a 2008 interview with Tanja Pritzlaff, Brandom is asked several times whether and how the theory he defends in *Making it Explicit* contains the resources for the defense of broader political or ethical projects.⁶⁷³ With Pritzlaff’s prodding, Brandom notes a number of “points of contact”⁶⁷⁴ with work in political theory, or realms of his work for which political theorists are especially intrigued, but he tellingly concludes with the sentiment that, whether or not the seeds are there, the political implications pertain to a project yet to come.⁶⁷⁵ So, while Brandom himself does not see his own work as a resource for a political theory, scholars still try to get from him something quite robust, and quite democratic.

Brandom is clear that his own is quite different from a political project, that his is, at a more fundamental level, getting to what he sees as “discursive rock-bottom”: “I abstracted away from everything about us human beings that did not seem to be

⁶⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 106.

⁶⁷³ Tanja Pritzlaff, “Freedom is a Matter of Responsibility and Authority: An Interview with Robert B. Brandom,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 7:365 (2008): 365-381.

⁶⁷⁴ Pritzlaff, 365.

⁶⁷⁵ Pritzlaff, 381. The essay ends with his remark, “My ambition is to see what political consequences one might draw from the sort of understanding of discursive practice that I have been pursuing over the last 20 years. But that is a project that is still in its infancy.”

absolutely essential to the one enterprise of making claims about how things are.”⁶⁷⁶ His is descriptive of a very particular (and partial) element of human social practices.

Importantly, any linguistic community can be described in the way he does, as Brandom himself has written, “For the community need not be democratically organized with respect to its social practices.”⁶⁷⁷ A community can come to any decision it would like with respect to social practices. Further, Brandom finds, “Social practices evolve the way case law does – an issue may be resolved very differently depending upon where in a chain of precedents it comes up for adjudication. Thus a community may accept an act as in accord with a particular practice, and later refuse to accept acts objectively as similar as you like.”⁶⁷⁸ There is a crucial, built-in fallibility to the claims of a community. And for Brandom, this is true of any community – even Hobbes’s vision of a sovereign stands as a fallible one. The community may decide that this is the best form of government, but even if the community has bound itself to this decision, it is always open to renegotiation.

As Brandom clarifies, “...the past decisions of a community as to what accords with a practice of theirs admits of codification in objective rules only with large areas of indetermination as to future possible performances.”⁶⁷⁹ Objectivity may constrain the activities of a community, but Brandom thinks that it is still possible for a community to get things wrong. Any given objective claim must still be assessed and accepted or rejected. And in any case, an individual – even every individual – may not be correct. In this important sense, “the community has total authority over their own practices.”⁶⁸⁰ And

⁶⁷⁶ Brandom in Pritzlaff, 378.

⁶⁷⁷ Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger, 173-191 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 177.

⁶⁷⁸ Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” 177.

⁶⁷⁹ Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” 177.

⁶⁸⁰ Brandom, “Freedom and Constraint by Norms,” 177.

any given interlocutor, in the process of intersubjective exchange, can only appeal to the norms and claims generated by that community. Objectivity and the norms generated by a community will constrain members of the community in their practices, but this still does not say *what* should be constraining us, only *that* members will be constrained in this way and that this is a way to understand the structure of discursive practice.

Although Brandom's theory seems like one aimed at the descriptive enterprise suitable for analyzing the structure of a particular I-Thou exchange, scholars of religion, and Brandom himself, have proceeded to try and squeeze from his "rock-bottom" theory some ethical and political insights. Jason Springs appeals to Brandom to give some "normative trajectory" to his analysis of Foucault, seeing in his "social-practical account of 'expressive freedom'"... "a normative trajectory for his diagnoses of power and domination, thereby resolving the alleged ethical aimlessness of his [Foucault's] account."⁶⁸¹ Although dissatisfied with the final product, Springs appeals to Brandom because he thinks he "opens up a potential vista to a normative orientation for distinguishing between better and worse, acceptable and unacceptable sets of social practices and social and political norms."⁶⁸²

In *Democracy and Tradition*, Stout offers a series of interrelated essays on democracy and pragmatism, arguing most generally for a middle ground between the new traditionalists, a group of contemporary Christian theologians making moves to reject forms of liberalism and critique, and more relativist views, often associated with a form

⁶⁸¹ Jason Springs, "'Dismantling the Master's House': Freedom as Ethical Practice in Brandom and Foucault," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37.3, 419-448 (2009) 421.

⁶⁸² Springs, 429. Springs continues, "he leaves the political implications of his account woefully underdeveloped in his work," and, one sentence later, appealing to Rorty, he claims, "Brandom errs in the direction of neglecting the ways that the social practices of which he writes are inscribed with systemic inequalities that often give rise to states of domination." (429) So, Springs finds Brandom's theory useful for infusing normative direction into Foucault's account but sees the payout as not only underdeveloped but possibly problematic.

of Rortyan pragmatism. In seeking a compromise, Stout argues that “democracy...*is* a tradition,”⁶⁸³ or a culture and ethical life that “inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of actions, events, or persons with admiration, pity, or horror.”⁶⁸⁴ Not only is democracy a tradition but “*pragmatism is democratic traditionalism.*”⁶⁸⁵ According to Stout, the philosophical tradition with which he aligns himself, and which is often so maligned, is itself part and parcel to democracy. As Stout argues, to see democracy this way is to see our community as one prepared for, even requiring, an ongoing practice of internal critique and public exchange of reasons, including religious reasons. His view of democracy as a pragmatist tradition then leaves the necessary room for competing beliefs and opinions, a space that is not sufficiently allowed for by the new traditionalists.

In several sections of the book, Stout turns to and relies on Brandom’s linguistic theory as implicitly making a case for democracy. Stout seeks to “explain the sense in which democratic norms are creatures of the practices of accountability in which we exchange reasons with one another.”⁶⁸⁶ In an upfront way, with “terms borrowed” from his “pragmatic analysis of practical reasoning,”⁶⁸⁷ Stout uses Brandom’s language and his linguistic project for making a case at the level of political practice. From sandlot baseball to the process of scientific inquiry, Stout sees in these practices a central objective dimension, maintained through scorekeeping practices. Rules, that is, the rules of the game or the rules of scientific research, are not explicit rather they are implicit in

⁶⁸³ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 3.

⁶⁸⁴ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 3.

⁶⁸⁵ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 13.

⁶⁸⁶ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 185.

⁶⁸⁷ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 187.

those constraints, as practitioners hold each other accountable based on shared norms, which are then objective.

On scientific inquiry, Stout writes:

Its objectivity is a matter of the constraints the practice imposes on its practitioners when they make commitments and when they keep track of normative statuses involving other practitioners and the propositions to which they commit themselves. The constraints are object-directed in the sense that they involve attentiveness to something being investigated as well as disciplined avoidance of wishful thinking, rationalization, and related intrusions of ‘merely subjective’ factors. ... Ethical discourse has an objective dimensions insofar as it involves constraints of this kind.⁶⁸⁸

Again Stout appeals most thoroughly to the feature of constraint, the place in which he sees objective content accounted for in a suitable way. The objective is again the object of focus of the *de re* stance, the claimant constrained by the object or the claim that is held to be objectively true by the claimant. Stout here utilizes Brandom’s *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions, as a scientific claim is considered objective by the researcher in her *de re* stance.

But here Stout has added some extra features to this structure of discursive intersubjectivity. The interlocutor is now “attentive” and “disciplined” and successfully avoiding “wishful thinking,” she is especially rational and not enslaved by subjective concerns. While appealing to the notion of constraint, one central to Brandom’s account (and to Kant’s and Hegel’s accounts), Stout already adds more features to the story than what is found in Brandom’s “rock-bottom” theory.

Stout also sees Brandom’s theory as an antidote to the worrisome claim for some kind of required third-person scorekeeper often coming in the form of an un-democratic government in the political scheme or as divine command theory. But, Stout maintains, “Brandom’s theory shows that a discursive practice can be objective in the sense at issue

⁶⁸⁸ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 271.

here without being construed on an authoritarian model of scorekeeping.”⁶⁸⁹ Again, Stout appeals to the discursive structure itself, that occurring between two interlocutors, as evidence or support for a political scheme. He sees a means, with Brandom’s help, for an ethical democratic society “where no monolithic authority is recognized by all those engaging in ethical discourse” but with a means for accounting for the correctness of the content of commitments.⁶⁹⁰ The interactions among individuals, and very fundamental features of exchange, are enough to generate and maintain authority. “In ethics, as in most other forms of objective discourse, we are all keeping track of our interlocutors’ attitudes, as well as our own.”⁶⁹¹ Again, Stout sees in Brandom a model for what an entire ethical community might look like.

Also in keeping with Brandom, Stout thinks there is a revisability to norms and there is the “possibility that we might all be wrong to attribute this particular right or to embrace the underlying norm.”⁶⁹² Objectivity is a structural feature of intersubjectivity, but individuals might nevertheless take the wrong stance on the objective.

While Stout appeals to these features of Brandom’s account as promising resources for his own project, he ends up making some leaps, akin to a category mistake, in applying Brandom’s description of the basic, stripped down, I-Thou relation of intersubjectivity to a more robust conception of a political model. Stout sees in this I-Thou exchange the resources for his dialogical model of rational exchange, one well-suited to his ideal vision of ethical democracy, where rational actors treat each other as equals and authority emerges from that exchange.

⁶⁸⁹ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 271.

⁶⁹⁰ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 271-272.

⁶⁹¹ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 272.

⁶⁹² Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 275.

But, Brandom's is descriptive of a "rock-bottom," even unconscious form of exchange, features that are mostly implicit in our practices. It is also, at the very core, a description of an I-Thou exchange, which means that, what is required for the structure is two rational, sapient individuals. What is required is then two individuals who both have the capacity to simultaneously make claims and keep scorebooks on the claims of others, engaging the *de re* and *de dicto* stances. The structure of discursive intersubjectivity complexly requires practical knowledge of the rules of exchange and the know-how to negotiate the activity. This engagement is then engagement in linguistic practice. But again, the details of this linguistic exchange are descriptive of two interlocutors, or two individuals interacting.

Stout's is decidedly not an I-we model of the sort that might be found in a political setting. It is not descriptive of the relationship between an individual and his or her community; the individual retains the features of sapience described by Brandom and the community necessarily has a quite different set of features. The "we" or the community, in this sense, would be a group of individuals or representative body, together lacking the specific characteristics or faculties of any given individual in the space of reasons. For example, the "we" is not a single body with a single voice and interpretive position that can itself take a *de dicto* stance on the commitment of an interlocutor. Even if there were a single representative, this is not a model suited to Brandom's view because a lack of equality to this relationship would already exist. The description of intersubjective discursive exchange is much more local than any description of the individual in relation to the communal or the "we" could be. Indeed, Brandom's account would require a further explanation if even a third interlocutor were

added to the narrative. In this case, the dynamics of the exchange would already change significantly.

So, Stout's is not an I-we model in the sense that he explicitly worries about: that the "we" might be appealed to as some kind of privileged authority, "we" having more power than any particular "I." This much is also clear from Brandom's account. But, even more so, Brandom's account is merely descriptive of this fundamental I-Thou exchange and central to his model are the very specific features of the human being as an individual engaging with another individual. From this, again, work would still need to be done to describe how an account at this level of exchange has the resources available for an account of the practices of exchange of the entire community.

Brandom is clear that the I-Thou account underlies it all: "Thus wherever propositional or other conceptual contents are attributed, there is some implicit appeal to an *I-Thou* social practice in which one scorekeeper interprets the performances of another."⁶⁹³ In describing the features of language – to the very details of sentence structure – he is, at root, describing the very particular features of this form of exchange, and nothing more. His is most fundamentally an I-Thou exchange, not an I-we model, and, in this light of this, "The notion of a discursive *community*—a *we*—is to be built up out of these *communicating* components."⁶⁹⁴ A broad account of community would need to be built up from accounts of pairs of interlocutors.

But, Brandom's account does not yet provide the kinds of resources necessary for a more complete and robust account of community built up out of this conception. The I-Thou model cannot be easily translated into an I-we model – no one interlocutor can

⁶⁹³ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 590.

⁶⁹⁴ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 508.

engage in discursive intersubjectivity with a community. No community can, in the stead of an individual, play the role of claimant or scorekeeper in the same way a rational human being can play either of those roles. This facility is just what it is to be a human being, but it does not describe a community and the facility of a community as a whole. The “we,” or the community, would have features and characteristics very different from those of any given individual.

The question remains as to how Brandom’s structure of discursive intersubjectivity could translate to the level of the individual and the community. With *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions, along with the other semantic content to his account, he is still only describing linguistic practice – granted, a practice that is possible by virtue of being a social creature and being part of a community – but the specific elements he describes of that practice pertain to the individual in relation to another individual. The core structure, this basic practice, might be basic to other forms of linguistic exchange, but his theory is a semantic one. It describes our inferential discursive practice but does not prescribe how that practice should unfold. It offers no insight into the kinds of norms any given community should call into question or make explicit in order to critique. That is up to the community.

So, a move to the level of the political can only happen by a building up, from the level of the I-Thou, to a more global picture. But, there has to be worry about the feasibility for how Brandom’s could ever be translated to an I-we conception. Just because this structure of social exchange is part of the linguistic structure does not mean it is or can easily be made to be part of the political structure. Just because, as he claims,

objectivity can be accounted for in the structure of the practice does not mean this structure can account for objectivity in a similar way, at a more global level.

Stout is pleased with his theory because now he has an account of how religious reasons can count as reasons, just like any other reasons, where he can engage democratically with a believer and each can be respected and taken seriously as a rational interlocutor, where he can “persuade sincere believers that legalizing same-sex marriage would not be the end of the world...encourage them to have their say on what Leviticus 18:22 means and then challenge them on their own ground.”⁶⁹⁵ But, this remains one instance of exchange. And to build up from the moment of rational negotiation to a political democracy that retains these features, would require a few steps along the way. Except in some kind of idealized sense, where well-informed rational actors have this kind of level-headed exchange with other well informed actors, there is little more here than a description of just what an aspect of linguistic exchange looks like. There are different kinds of concerns at the political level – contending with different and entangled power structures and forms of authority, with claims that compete at a level of complexity that no lone scorekeeper’s multiple sets of books could possibly manage.

While Stout finds that Brandom’s theory “sheds light on the objective dimension of ethics as a social practice,”⁶⁹⁶ in some ways Brandom’s theory sheds light on the objective dimension of all forms of linguistic practice. Not only do questions remain about just how robust this “objective dimension” is – it is an objectivity found in the structure of discursive intersubjectivity, a source of constraint on claims. But this objectivity is then not only in the structure of all linguistic practice, it is something we

⁶⁹⁵ From Stout, *Rorty and Religion on Politics*, page 14 of manuscript.

⁶⁹⁶ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 270.

can, ultimately, be wrong about. Brandom's account of objectivity is then not especially robust, nor does objective representational content play the kind of empowered role Stout seems to want it to play, in some ways getting to moral truths of a kind. Stout continues: "ethical discourse can retain an objective dimension without there being a single authority on questions of truth and falsity."⁶⁹⁷ So, this form of discourse needn't lead to a sovereign. But, all forms of discourse, on Brandom's account, have this objective dimension. The objective dimension is just what constrains action but the individual can still be wrong about that objective dimension.

Stout continues, "What does an ethical community share that makes it an ethical community? My answer thus far has been: a way of thinking and talking about ethical topics, or more precisely, a discursive social practice."⁶⁹⁸ For Stout, this discursivity is central, one worry being that this could easily be a communitarian, conventionalist, or contractarian view, that is, that something in the community has been given authority over that community. But, Stout also thinks that "what makes a discursive practice social...is rather the need for each participant in the practice to keep track of other participants' commitments and to assess those commitments from his or her own point of view."⁶⁹⁹ Stout thinks that the over-arching authority is not what makes discursive social practice social, rather what makes it social is this particular form of participation by each individual.

But, in the case of Hobbes's contractarian theory, and his theory of language and society, individuals in society are indeed engaging in the kind of discursive social practice Brandom describes. At the level of discourse, individuals are assessing their

⁶⁹⁷ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 272.

⁶⁹⁸ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 279.

⁶⁹⁹ Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 280.

commitments and weighing the commitments of others in order to, rationally, choose to go into agreement with others for the sake of peace. The kind of discursive intersubjective story Brandom tells exists in Hobbes's story. Hobbes also identifies this kind of practice as foundational to his system, language, politics, and religion all existing and thriving in and through these social practical exchanges. This particular discursive social practice is just what it is to be a human being, to be sapient, and to be a reason-exchanging creature. Hobbes's human being is just that.

Stout is then maintaining that this aspect of the human being – how she is a discursive creature – is a model for what the political setting should look like. We are exchanging reasons in this way, we make commitments and assess the commitments of others, and because this is what the practical faculty of the human being looks like, this is what the political scene *should* look like. The political democratic setting should be modeled on the very structure of rationality Brandom attributes to sapient beings.

But, Hobbes sees us as both rational and passionate creatures, driven by a desire for self-preservation and secondary passions. And it is with Hobbes's account of the passions that some of the shortcomings of Brandom's account become especially clear. Hobbes, too, conceives of the best political scheme as an extension of the combination of these very rational and passionate features of the human being. The sovereign will look very much like any human being would look, and will stand in for the human being but act in the best interests of the human being. And it is the rationality of each individual that leads to the conclusions that, in light of our particular passionate propensities, we need to hand our power to the sovereign.

How Hobbes accounts for human psychology points to an important limit to Brandom's view. Both Hobbes and Brandom see the human being as rational and see that rationality as tied to language. As such, both focus on language as the means to agreement and the medium for this kind of rational exchange. But Hobbes brings to equal attention another component: the passions. As described in this project, the formative and central role of the passions are key to his account of the human being. Because Hobbes sees agreement itself as a matter partially for the passions and partially for reason, his full account must include the central role of human psychology. For Hobbes, it is this piece that leads to the sovereign. Hobbes describes the individual as psychologically requiring an overarching power of some kind. And this power can then be accounted for in the political scheme that emerges.

Through Hobbes's holistic interpretation of religion as a social practice, and by analyzing aspects of this contained picture, Hobbes then makes the claim, just as contemporary scholars do with Brandom's work, that a certain political program might follow. But, in some ways, Hobbes provides a more complete picture of the human being, one accounting for both the rational and passionate features of the individual, while still, like Brandom, aware of the formative force of the social. Hobbes may not get the human being exactly right and the politics that emerge from his vision may not work either, but from him we get insight into what is required for the best account of the human being in society.

In the cases of both Stout, via Brandom, and Hobbes, a description of the human being, and of the fundamentally normative nature of human social practices, leads to a political model that looks very much like the human being so described. In the case of

Stout, it is a rational, dialogical citizen, modeled after the rational (and dialogical) nature of our linguistic practices. In the case of Hobbes, it is a rational and passionate citizen, put under the control of a sovereign authority because human reason, in contemplating her passionate nature, recognizes that this would be best. Not that Hobbes's model is more satisfactory, and both make a similar leap to the political, but Hobbes's certainly leans on a more robust, complete picture of the human being.

An example of the kind of slippage or overstepping evident in some uses of Brandom comes, for example, in his claim, in response to whether his own deontic scorekeeping model could be "referred to as a democratic political practice," that he finds a "content democracy" inherent in speaking at all.⁷⁰⁰ Brandom claims that this could perhaps be translated to a democratic political theory.⁷⁰¹ But, he too is overstepping matters. When discussing "speaking" and linguistic activity, of the ilk analyzed in *Making it Explicit*, Brandom is talking about the structure of linguistic exchange at its most fundamental level, and mostly implicitly. There is a content democracy only in the sense that, for communication to exist, this structure, a structure with so-called "democratic" features, must persist. For communication to happen, as explicated in his I-Thou model, each interlocutor must recognize the commitments and attitudes of the other. Each interlocutor must assess the claims and commitments of the other, whether this is happening implicitly or explicitly.

But, this isn't to say that there is the same kind of democracy found in these forms of linguistic exchange as that found in a robust political democracy, expect perhaps at a

⁷⁰⁰ Brandom, "Freedom is a Matter of Responsibility and Authority," 370. He states that this "content democracy...may perhaps provide a guide for thinking about democratic norms."

⁷⁰¹ Pritzlaff, 370.

very superficial level. Indeed, there is no fixed, external authority, except that of the linguistic norms agreed upon and appealed to by a society prior to the particular I-Thou exchange. So, language is “democratic” in the sense that claims to objectivity and authority are constantly renegotiated in moments of intersubjective exchange. Each party to this exchange, both the one making a claim and the one assessing that claim, take on two kinds of perspective – de re and de dicto, the undertaking and the attributing. As such, there is no authoritative position prior to the context of this exchange. So, in some very subtle sense, it is democratic. But, this is still very much at the most basic level, mostly implicit, often unspoken, in our linguistic practices, and at the very basic I-Thou level. There is still, again, local privilege – indeed, Brandom is only explaining practice at this very local level.⁷⁰²

Community remains central – it is the source of norms, traditions, and other remnants of past exchanges, which serve as some of the propositional contents or sources of disagreement or agreement to any given commitment. To even engage in language of course requires being formed within a language-wielding community. And Hobbes agrees with this claim. At the root of Brandom’s account is this insight: “Being a member of a community is rather being one who ought to conform to the norms implicit in the practices of the community. Community membership has this normative significance; it is a normative status.”⁷⁰³ Brandom’s account only makes sense for the individual who is always, already rooted in a community. This will be the background from which claims are generated and to which new claims are proposed, the world of norms any interlocutor inhabits.

⁷⁰² It is perhaps an important question, for another investigation, of just how egalitarian this model really is. Privilege is local but so is his account.

⁷⁰³ Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 39.

Although community is central in this way, as part of the account of the I-Thou model, it is part of the holistic context, a force helping to shape this exchange. The role of the community here doesn't help get to an I-we account. Brandom's still rests on the I-Thou structure, with community playing a formative role in that structure. To attempt to translate it into an I-we model, into a description of a discursive structure that includes an individual in a relation of linguistic exchange with a community, would require an additional story. If the Thou, for example, were instead a We, or a community considered more globally, it would sap the We of the kind of rational capacities required to engage in this exchange. No "community," as a unit, will ascribe to an individual certain beliefs and commitments while at the same time assessing the truth of those commitments. This is a practice that can only be performed by being a human being. A community does not itself have sapience – the more global body does not have the same features as the individual.

Understood this way, Hobbes also has to hold that there is a kind of "content democracy" to linguistic practice. Because it is the very basis of rationality and the source for the practice of human agreement, linguistic practice itself must have these "democratic" features. But this is not to say that what comes out of this practice will result in a democratic political scheme. Nor is there a resource here for the claim that, because there is a "content democracy" to linguistic practice there should be full-fledged democracy in political practice. Hobbes makes a different kind of case, employing other resources – including his more complete psychological account of the human being – for a sovereign.

As a central aspect of his project, Hobbes is also, in some ways engaging in what Brandom sees as the basic task of making explicit what he sees as the implicit practice of

agreement that operates in a political realm. Hobbes doesn't hold that there was some original state of nature and from which we, in all awareness, pulled ourselves out. In some ways, he is describing the implicit rational and passionate operations of human practice and practical reasoning, giving a kind of post-game analysis of how we got to where we are.

Despite some of their differences, Hobbes appeals to some of the same features as Brandom and the pragmatist tradition in his conception of human linguistic practice. At this level of explanation, Hobbes, like Brandom, sees us as fundamentally social and normative creatures, rendered human in and through our language use. But Hobbes provides an additional account of the psychological features of the human being, and the role of psychology in a description and explanation of social practices.

On Religion

Scholars of religion have turned to Brandom as a philosophical and theoretical resource for good reason. His account of language, a paradigmatic and, as he sees it, centrally foundational social practice which begins in a specific social context, sees normativity as constitutive of that practice, accounts for the role of authority, both its fallibility and its objectivity, and crucially renders the social as the foundational or fundamental feature of accounts of the human being. The social practical level is where we need to begin when trying to make the best sense of what it is that makes us human in order to better understand how we might improve our human condition. With the kind of clarity he brings to our practices and to an aspect of ourselves, we gain the kind of knowledge that allows us to be reflective on our own practices and norms. As his theory describes it, human beings are doing just that in their linguistic practice. For the task of

the scholar of religion, Brandom's theory is helpful for attaining that clarity of explanation.

When it comes to religion, a social practice like any other, Brandom's approach then seems especially promising. Religion comes with a particular set of puzzles – a practice embedded in specific contexts and histories, complete with metaphysical claims that are not easy to reconcile with scientific knowledge and methods, and often a source of authority that leads to various forms of oppression and cruelty, both explicit and subtle. Religion, in some sense, is itself a kind of paradigmatic social practice that needs to be dealt with carefully and attentively.

While Hobbes comes from a very different time to our own, and his claims are by no means without their flaws, his strategy for accounting for social practices – linguistic, political, religious, and otherwise – is also compelling both in its scientific spirit and its recognition of the role of human psychology and rationality, of foundational and formative sociality, of desires, mostly unarticulated, and the kinds of rational conclusions we might come to thanks to engagement in language. And, in some ways, Hobbes's recognition of the role of psychology, of the role of unarticulated and perhaps impossible to articulate aspects of our being, points to some of the limitations to Brandom's account. For Hobbes, desires and volitions play a central role in the shaping of normative claims. What we value is not only valued thanks to our rational reflection and intersubjective negotiation about those claims, and to the community from which we emerge, but values are shaped and driven by very human and sentient needs and desires.

So, while Brandom's theory is promising for explaining an especially rational aspect of human social practice, Hobbes brings to the table the insight that the study of

religion as a human social practice might best be done in conjunction with work being done in other realms, for example the social sciences and other disciplines, using every resource possible in our attempts to get the best kind of account of linguistic and social practice. Hobbes gives us some of the resources for thinking about these realms together and for attaining a more complete naturalistic account of religion.

Hobbes's account is important both in light of his psychological and epistemological view, as he sees religion itself as part of the complete picture of what it is to be a citizen and live in a peaceful society. Like Stout, Hobbes may well be taking a leap, appealing to his description of the human being in defense of a normative task. But, even and especially if this is the case, in the very different ways their political schemes unfold, it becomes clear that more than a description of one aspect of the human being is needed to make the case for a robust political structure.

Indeed, the task Brandom inspires is not the quest to attain truth but the ongoing quest to make clear the ways in which truth plays a part in our practices, enriches practice, and helps to express some of the norms implicit in our attitudes. In light of this, a direction we might more fruitfully head in, and a direction recognized by Hobbes in his own engagement with religion, is to engage insights from the social sciences, from empirical inquiries, and to findings from realms like cognitive science. The task of ours would be to get clear on how best to use these insights to get the best possible account of religious practice as a human social practice like any other. Insights from this kind of study of religion could then be used as resources for making sense of other forms of social practice; and other kinds of practice might offer insight on the religious.

It is up to any given community to deal in the norms and authority with which they find themselves. If Stout and others declare the objectivity and benefits of particular claims, they do so as citizens of their community. But, there is still a central task for the scholar of the religion: with better explanations of our practices, and resources for this kind of clarity, the clearer any given community can be on these accounts of ourselves, the better chance that *they* might recognize what is required for themselves for their human flourishing.

From Hobbes and Brandom we get a reminder of the important work to be done in the study of religion. We also get a reminder to return to the pragmatist task of “rethinking inherited ideas of rationality, understanding, agency, and self in light of the very best contemporary scientific understanding of the natural world.”⁷⁰⁴ Despite his flaws, Hobbes attempts to do this well in his time, especially in his work on religion. In our own time, Brandom offers us a new kind of resource for getting even closer to our best explanation of religious practices one that, in conjunction with some insights from Hobbes, proves especially fruitful for getting the best explanation. And this is a task that, in pragmatist spirit, is useful in itself.

⁷⁰⁴ Brandom, “When Philosophy Paints Its Blue on Gray: Irony and the Pragmatist Enlightenment,” *boundary 2* 29:2 (2002) 8.

Conclusion

In the opening of *Leviathan* Hobbes writes:

He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind; which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself.⁷⁰⁵

Hobbes sees his own task as that of examining the human being and society, in all its detail. And this happens by looking at all human beings, that is, by looking to mankind itself. The human being, as has become clear throughout this project, is socially constituted through language and rationality and formed in the social practices in which he finds himself, and so the person must be considered as one of a more holistic picture. By looking at humanity this way, Hobbes thinks, one might even get clearer on oneself.

His social contract and his portrait of the exceedingly rational individual are two of the more common areas to which contemporary scholars look when turning to Hobbes as a resource for our own time. In this regard, his appeal extends from philosophy to the social sciences, from insights into political and ethical questions to models for the self-

⁷⁰⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 83.

interested, hyper-rational individual. But, as has been made clear throughout this project, Hobbes's value goes well beyond these realms.

This dissertation argues that Hobbes offers a quite modern, naturalistic account of religion, one that sheds light on his broader philosophical project, calling into questions some accepted truisms about Hobbes and providing resources for our own task in the study of religion. With an eye to Hobbes on religion, it becomes clear that he accounts for the social in a way that often goes unrecognized. He is also, as many hold, neither squarely theological nor uninterested in matters to do with religion.

His materialism, considered a serious threat to religion by his contemporaries, is indeed threatening to a more robust view of religion and subject to the same epistemological constraints as science, so limited in the kinds of ontological claims that can be made. On language and rationality, he sees these features of human social practice as constitutive of the human being and of society itself, as we are formed in and through our sociality. His theory also leads to a deep critique of some uses of theological language. His account of the passions provides significant grounding for his account of religion, stressing human psychology as key to making sense of practices like politics and religion. And his view of the political is one that incorporates religion as a part of the larger system, born from similar human features and, with the political, an alternative source of peace and security, but one that is significantly less stable than politics.

This project also provides resources for taking a first step in exploring the ways in which Hobbes might be helpful for tackling some questions in our own time, here pointing to ways in which Hobbes calls into question the viability of some current uses of the work of Robert Brandom as a resource for political or ethical projects.

For the purposes of political peace, Hobbes sought total unity. This dissertation makes the further claim that there is an even deeper unity to Hobbes's philosophy itself. Language, religion, politics, and similar social practices, are parts of a single, holistic system, one made by and in those interconnected practices. To read Hobbes this way opens doors to a new, promising reading that finds in Hobbes some insights more suited to and in conversation with our own current theories and strategies. Looking at his views on religion in the context of this reading of Hobbes also reminds us to look to other resources, to both philosophy and the social sciences, to both religion and to history, as any scientific inquiry benefits from as much good and varied evidence as possible. Hobbes saw the important task of understanding ourselves and our world as the first step toward bettering that world. With insights from Hobbes, we are better armed for the ongoing task of getting the best possible account of ourselves and of the role of religion as part of our practices.

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