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Hell and Anxiety in Hobbes's *Leviathan*

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Abstract: Despite his statements that the fear of damnation is greater than the fear of violent death, scholars have generally overlooked Hobbes's vision of hell. Hobbes's reinterpretation of hell is meant to redirect peoples' anxiety about whether they will get into heaven or hell into anxiety about whether there is a hell and if so, what it will be like. He did not expect that citizens of his state would accept his theology or that they would become secularists or atheists. He hoped that they would be left with an indeterminate belief they would be averse to examining. This becomes clear when Hobbes's theology is seen in light of his epistemology and his complex rhetorical strategy. Hobbes's theology has been rejected, but there is an affinity between his hopes for indeterminate belief and the religious attitudes of many in the West.

Hobbes's interpretation of hell sparked some of the most incendiary responses from the first readers of *Leviathan*. Modern scholars, though, generally overlook Hobbes's vision of hell, and this choice is at once surprising and understandable.[1] It is understandable because the belief in hell among Westerners has declined at a faster pace than has belief in God or heaven.[2]

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[1]Although some scholars who focus on Hobbes's religious thought mention his unusual interpretation of hell without much comment (for example, A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]; J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time* [New York: Atheneum, 1971], 148–201), the whole issue is conspicuously absent from other works, such as F. C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) and Howard Warrender, *The Political Theory of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

[2]A 2008 poll of 35,000 respondents by the Pew Forum found that belief in hell has continued to decline (based on comparisons with a 2001 Gallup poll). According to a theologian interviewed for the report, "Skepticism about hell is growing even in evangelical churches and seminaries" (Charles Honey, "Belief in hell dips, but some say they've already been there," Pew Forum, http://pewforum.org/news/display.

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This oversight is surprising, however, because the fear of violent death is the foundation of Hobbes's political thought and Hobbes clearly states that the fear of hell is greater than the fear of violent death and that citizens are often more afraid to sin than they are of breaking civil laws.[3]

This does not appear to be a serious problem in Hobbes's thought, since he says that salvation depends on obedience to civil law, which is the same as divine law, and an inner faith that is beyond the sovereign's reach. Since capital punishment in this world leads to damnation in the next, avoiding violent death appears to be the only pertinent consideration. This, though, only makes Hobbes's discussion of hell more puzzling. On the basis of his political theory, there would seem to be no reason for him to stake out a position on what hell will be like. Indeed, he never raises this topic in *De Cive* or *The Elements of Law*.[4] Still less clear is why Hobbes's description is so bizarre, and it is bizarre even by the standards of seventeenth-century England. Hobbes must have known that the image of the damned fornicating after the Second Coming would have rubbed Puritan sensibilities the wrong

php?NewsID=16260). D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discourses of Eternal Torment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), notes that the gradual lessening of the fear of hell, and attacks on the orthodox view of hell, began in the mid-seventeenth century. More recently, Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 573, 576–77, notes that "sociological studies show that belief in an afterlife is declining at a much faster rate than faith in God among people of Christian cultures," and in particular that belief in the traditional concept of hell has all but disappeared.

[3]"But if the command be such, as cannot be obeyed, without being damned to Eternall Death, then it were madnesse to obey it, and the Counsell of our Saviour takes place, (*Mat*. 10.28.) *Fear not those that kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*" (*Leviathan*, chap. 43, in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 403). See also *Leviathan*, chap. 29 (223, 227), chap. 30 (236), chap. 38 (306–7); *De Cive*, chap. 6 (in Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 80), chap. 12 (135), chap. 18 (234–36); *The Elements of Law*, chap. 26 (in Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic: Part I, Human Nature and Part II, De Corpore Politico, with Three Lives*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 162); Hobbes, *Behemoth; or, The Long Parliament*, ed. Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8, 50. See also David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[4]It is possible that Hobbes had not worked out his theory of hell before writing *Leviathan*. The frontispiece of *De Cive* is dominated by a traditional Last Judgment, including what appears to be a standard set of demons and devils torturing the damned and casting them into hellfire. On Hobbes's use of imagery, see Horst Bredekamp, "Thomas Hobbes's Visual Strategies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's "Leviathan,"* ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29–60.

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way. In fact, the strangeness of this image is likely part of the reason so few scholars discuss it.

Those who study Hobbes and religion can be divided roughly into those who think that he is a believer of some sort, one whose theology is either a more or less orthodox type of Calvinism[5] or, despite his sincerity, highly idiosyncratic,[6] and those who believe that the theological sections of his works are a sop to his contemporaries or an impish subversion of Christianity.[7] A general theme in most of these authors is that Hobbes's treatment of religion is an attempted synthesis of biblical Christianity and materialism or a natural religion that flows from modern science, and that whatever he is doing to religion, his goal is promoting political stability and peace.[8]

That Hobbes is trying to alter Christianity somehow for the sake of peace is a quite familiar position in Hobbes scholarship, and I accept this position and agree in general with those who claim that Hobbes is attempting to undermine Christianity. The process or mechanism by which he does this, however, and what it means to undermine Christianity, can be specified to a greater degree than has been done so far. This article is an attempt to provide at least some of that specificity through an examination of Hobbes's description of hell. The assumption, which is still quite common, that Hobbes wants to usher in a secular political system or create a nation of atheists is proleptic and, in light of the work done by Mitchell, Tuck, and others, is untenable. However, it is equally untenable to maintain that Hobbes hopes individuals will continue to believe in the same way they had previously.

I argue that Hobbes's interpretation of hell is meant to redirect individuals' anxiety about whether they are destined for heaven or hell into anxiety about whether there is a heaven or hell, and if so, how they could know anything certain about either. Hobbes did not expect that citizens of his state would accept all the specific points of his theology or that they would become

[5]For example, Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*; Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*.

[6]See Joshua Mitchell, *Not by Reason Alone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[7]Edwin Curley, "Calvin and Hobbes, or, Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (1996): 256–71; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Leo Strauss, "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy," in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chap. 7.

[8]Curley, "Calvin and Hobbes"; Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*; Benjamin Milner, "Hobbes: On Religion," *Political Theory* 16, no. 3 (1988): 400–25; Patricia Springborg, "Leviathan and the Problem of Ecclesiastical Authority," *Political Theory* 3, no. 3 (1975): 289–303; Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*.

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secularists or atheists; he hoped, rather, that they would be left with an indeterminate belief they would be averse to examining. There is an affinity between this view and the religious attitudes of many in the West. The impossibility of certain knowledge about the correct path to salvation is also the precondition to thinking about religion as a personal choice. Rather than a sharp break with the past, then, Hobbes's treatment of hell is best seen as an attempt to refract an older form of anxiety in a new direction that retains something of its Christian character. This becomes clear when one examines Hobbes's description of hell in light of his epistemology and his selective use of modern rationalism in his interpretation of both hell and the concept of faith.

I begin with a discussion of Hobbes's account of hell and a comparison with other views that were current in seventeenth-century England. I next discuss Hobbes's epistemology and materialism and their importance to the political and religious sections of *Leviathan*. I conclude with an explanation of how the previous sections contribute to Hobbes's rhetorical strategy.

Hobbes's Reinterpretation of Hell: A Farrago of Heresies

The soul, Hobbes claims, is nothing but the "breath of Life" or anima of the "Body alive" and not the incorporeal substance many believe it to be.[9] When a person dies, the soul, or breath of life, leaves the body, and only a "dead carkasse" remains.[10] At the Second Coming, each person will be restored to life, or reanimated, and after the Final Judgment the elect will be given immortal and spiritual, albeit corporeal, bodies while the damned are given mortal, "grosse and corruptible" ones.[11]

The kingdom of God will be on earth, according to Hobbes, and not in the sky or anywhere close to God.[12] There will be no marriage or procreation among the blessed, since this would lead to rapid overpopulation, especially if they will inhabit the New Jerusalem which will descend from heaven and which, according to the verses Hobbes draws our attention to and accepts without comment, will be 2,250,000 square miles in area, or somewhat smaller than Australia, and made entirely of gold and gems.[13]

Hobbes claims initially to be uncertain about the location of hell, suggesting from certain passages in Job and Isaiah that it might be underground or underwater among the ancient race of giants, or from Revelation that it will be a lake of fire, or from Exodus that it is simply a place of complete darkness

[9]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (425).
[10]Ibid.
[11]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (431–33).
[12]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (318).
[13]Ibid.

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away from the elect.[14] He goes on to note that the word "hell" derives from the Hebrew word *Gehenna*, the name of a garbage dump outside Jerusalem that was periodically set on fire in order to clear the stench. Hobbes, though, later rejects all of these interpretations because "now there is none that so interprets Scripture."[15]

Hell, Hobbes eventually claims, will be on earth and the damned will live after the Resurrection in a state of "grief, and discontent of mind, from the sight of that Eternall felicity in others" until they are cast into the everlasting fire and die a second death.[16] Since, Hobbes reasons, Paul cannot have had the damned in mind when he says that the body will be "*raised in incorruption* … *in glory* … [and] *in power*," he cannot have meant that they would have eternal life or be subject to eternal torment. The second death is painful, but at least it is quick.[17] Since the damned will not burn and suffer eternally, though, the everlasting fire mentioned several times in the Bible would seem to be superfluous. Hobbes alludes to his solution to this problem in chapter 38 when he says, "men may be cast successively [into the fires of hell] one after another for ever."[18]

It is not until chapter 44, however, that Hobbes spells out the full and gruesome implications of his interpretation, as if he had to prepare the reader gradually to hear them. Unlike the elect, the damned will marry, procreate, and raise children before they are killed at some unspecified time.[19] There is no hope of salvation for the children of the damned, who will also be annihilated, but not before having children of their own. This procession of corruptible bodies will provide an endless supply of fuel for the fire, and there will thus be no contradiction between the biblical passages about a second everlasting death and the everlasting fires and torments of hell.

The specific tortures of hell described in the Bible, such as "the worm of conscience," "gnashing of teeth," and "Brimstone," are metaphors for the mental pain and anxiety the reprobate will suffer from the sight of the endless happiness of the elect.[20] Similarly, the notion that Satan along with other devils and demons will torture the damned is a mistake that stems from the importation of pagan demonology and untranslated words.[21] The word "Satan" signifies any "Earthly Enemy of the Church."[22] These enemies, whom Hobbes likens to "evill and cruell Governours," will

[14]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (312–13).
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid. Hobbes makes the same claim in the appendix to the Latin edition, having his character "B" say, "So the reprobate will rise again, so it seems, to a second death" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994], 507).
[17]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (312–15).
[18]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (315).
[19]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (432–33).
[20]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (312, 314).
[21]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314) and chap. 45.
[22]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314).

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torment the damned after the Resurrection.[23] Before being annihilated, then, the damned will live much as those do in the present world who live under bad and, perhaps Hobbes wants to suggest, non-Hobbesian government.

What exactly Hobbes means by hellfire, though, is complicated by the fact that he explicitly claims that it is meant metaphorically, but then speaks about it as if it were real. This is an intentional ambiguity, and as I will argue below, part of Hobbes's rhetorical strategy. In chapter 38 he states that "it is manifest, that Hell Fire which is [in Revelation 21:8] expressed by Metaphor, from the reall Fire, of Sodome, signifieth not any certain kind or place of Torment; but is to be taken indefinitely, for Destruction."[24] He says further that "it follows, me thinks, very necessarily, that that which is thus said concerning Hell Fire, is spoken metaphorically" and that biblical passages referring to fire, such as "the fire is not quenched," are meant "metaphorically."[25] Being cast into hellfire, then, simply means being destroyed rather than burning eternally. The argument here seems to be that the wicked will be resurrected, live horrible lives, and then die once and for all, their punishment being their horrible lives rather than the second death. As Hobbes claims in chapter 44, "To the Reprobate there remaineth after the Resurrection, a *Second*, and *Eternall* Death: between which Resurrection, and their Second, and Eternall death, is but a time of Punishment and Torment."[26]

But despite repeatedly asserting that hellfire is meant metaphorically, Hobbes also claims in the same context that "of all Metaphors there is some reall ground" and that this applies both to the "*Place of Hell*, and the nature of *Hellish Torments*, and *Tormentors*."[27] Indeed, in arguing that there is no corporeal soul and that the reprobate will be resurrected with corporeal bodies, he claims that "where it is said that any man shall be cast Body and Soul into Hell fire, it is no more than Body and Life; that is to say, they shall be cast alive into the perpetuall fire of Gehenna."[28] Hobbes implies here that hell will consist of real fire and be in a real place, as he does when he says that "the Fire, or Torments prepared for the wicked in *Gehenna*, *Tophet*, or in what place soever, may continue for ever."[29] Though these passages could be interpreted in light of Hobbes's earlier statements about the metaphorical nature of hell, the suggestion that the damned will die a second death in some specific place certainly clouds the issue.[30]

[23]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314–15).
[24]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (312–13).
[25]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314).
[26]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (433).
[27]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314).
[28]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (426).
[29]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (432).
[30]In the appendix to the more conciliatory Latin edition of *Leviathan*, Hobbes complicates this issue further by having B claim first that "heaven and earth will be renewed, and though the world will burn, still it would not be annihilated, but real

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Hobbes blurs the line between the metaphoric and literal interpretation of hell most effectively in the following passage:

> And although in Metaphoricall Speech, a Calamitous life Everlasting, may bee called an Everlasting Death; yet it cannot wel be understood of a *Second Death*. The fire prepared for the wicked, is an Everlasting Fire: that is to say, the estate wherein no man can be without torture, both of body and mind, after the Resurrection, shall endure for ever, and in that sense the Fire shall be unquenchable, and the torments Everlasting: but it cannot thence be inferred, that hee who shall be cast into that fire, or be tormented with those torments, shall endure, and resist them so, as to be eternally burnt, and tortured; and yet never be destroyed, nor die.[31]

Though this passage can be interpreted to mean that hellfire is metaphorical, it has often been interpreted to mean that there will be a real fire into which the damned will be thrown.[32] Indeed, if hellfire is meant metaphorically, Hobbes leaves open the question as to how the damned actually will die a second death. Old age? Illness? Or perhaps execution by the bad governors of hell? Whether metaphorical or literal, though, the overall effect of this ambiguous and confusing presentation is to make hell appear less terrifying, and perhaps less believable or knowable.

The prospect of dying quickly is less frightening and more humane than that of suffering for the rest of eternity.[33] This was part of what Hobbes wanted to achieve; those who believed that this was an accurate description would have less to fear from following civil law against the teachings of their priests. Similarly, heaven appears less appealing, and much more like a sanitized version of life here on earth than a theocentric view in which the resurrected are in the presence of God.

On the other hand, although this kind of hell does appear somewhat less frightening, there is no lack of gruesome and apparently unnecessary details. Why, for example, does Hobbes dwell on the lack of marriage among the blessed and the endless generation of hopelessly damned children among the reprobate? Why does he present us with the vision of an endless stream of human beings being burned to death? Why does he raise several unorthodox possibilities about hell's location before rejecting them? And

beings will remain," and later, in response to A's claim that many of the descriptions of hell appear to be metaphorical, that "however that may be, so far the church assembled has defined nothing regarding the place of the damned—or at least our church hasn't" (*Leviathan*, ed. Curley, 500, 504).

[31]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (315).

[32]See, for example, Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 259–60.

[33]As early as 1643 Hobbes denied Thomas White's assertion that annihilation would be worse that eternal torment. See David Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism," *History of Political Thought* 10, no. 4 (1989): 652.

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why would Hobbes, who is so concerned with civil obedience, conflate sin with transgressing civil law, and then proceed to deny eternal torment to sinners? In short, why does Hobbes take such liberties with his interpretation of the afterlife, liberties he knew would be controversial, when this interpretation did not in any obvious way further his political goals?

Hobbes admits that his interpretation is unusual, and given the great variety of views espoused in seventeenth-century England, this was no mean feat. Before answering the question of why Hobbes presents hell the way he does, some understanding of the historical context is necessary, particularly since so many scholars point to the similarities between Hobbes's views and those of his contemporaries to demonstrate that his theology was not as strange as it appears today and that he may have been something of an orthodox thinker.

I will, then, briefly discuss other views of hell that share similarities with Hobbes's in order to highlight what is unique in Hobbes's reinterpretation. One recent strategy has been to compare Hobbes's mortalism to that of Milton, and I will discuss this comparison. Hobbes has also been likened to a Calvinist, yet his views on hell and the soul have little in common with those of Calvin. One early critic characterized the theological teaching of *Leviathan* as "a farrago of Christian Atheism," and this is an accurate description of Hobbes's approach.[34] The second half of *Leviathan* has always been difficult to interpret because it is made up of a tangled mix of ideas, many of which, when taken in isolation, resonated with one group or another. Most sects and theologians could find something to agree with among these ideas, but these were always partial agreements. Hobbes's theology, then, had something for everyone, but as a whole was shared by no one. This is particularly the case with Hobbes's portrayal of hell and the soul.

Indeed, one of the most discussed aspects of Hobbes's eschatology is his denial of the immortality of the soul. Some scholars note that this view, though unorthodox, was not entirely unheard of and that Milton and others shared it.[35] If, however, Milton and Hobbes agreed that the soul was mortal, they agreed on little else, as even the most cursory glance at their respective views of hell reveals. Milton wavered between presenting hell as a state of mind and as another realm, while Hobbes is adamant that hell will be on earth. Further, no one could confuse Hobbes's Satan, the bad governor, with Milton's description in *Paradise Lost*. Other points of disagreement include their respective views on predestination and free will. Mintz notes

[34]Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102.

[35]Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 266; Tracy Strong, "How to Write Scripture: Words, Authority, and Politics in Thomas Hobbes," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 138, 152.

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that Milton in fact has much more in common with Bishop Bramhall's views than those of Hobbes.[36]

Hobbes only raises the issue of the soul's mortality in the context of his discussion of hell, since it is an essential point of his interpretation that individuals can be completely annihilated by the second death and that neither the bodies nor the souls of the reprobate are immortal, something Milton did not believe. It is indeed surprising that scholars who study Hobbes's mortalist views have not noticed this connection with his vision of hell.[37]

That Strong and Martinich emphasize the small point of agreement between Hobbes and Milton (and others) and do not mention the massive and obvious differences in their views of hell is due to their efforts to demonstrate that Hobbes was more orthodox than many think. The source of the view that Hobbes and Milton had a similar conception of the soul is Norman Burns's *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*, in which the author points out that Milton openly stated his mortalist position only in his *Christian Doctrine*, which was not published during Milton's lifetime (he died in 1674, long after *Leviathan*'s publication) and which lay undiscovered for nearly two hundred years.[38] The most likely reason Milton, who was by no means an orthodox thinker, did not openly state this view is the fact that nearly all Reformation Christians considered it blatantly heretical.[39] That Hobbes had the audacity to state this view openly is one of the chief reasons he was so reviled during his lifetime.

Martinich also claims that Hobbes is a type of orthodox Calvinist. Yet Hobbes's view that the soul was only the breath of life was the focus of Calvin's earliest polemical writings. Indeed, Calvin says that those with views such as Hobbes's "ought to be severely repressed."[40] As Burns points out, "In Calvin's view, at death the souls of the reprobate go directly to their punishment while the souls of the elect go directly to their reward, each state being but a foretaste of what will follow the Last Day."[41] Also, although both Calvin and Hobbes describe hell as a tortured state of mind,

[36]Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 118–19.

[37]Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Vere Chapell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15–42. Hobbes also defends his view of the soul and its connection with hell at length in his *An Answer to Arch-bishop Bramhall's Book Called the Catching of the Leviathan* (hereafter *An Answer*), in *Tracts of Mr. Thomas Hobbs of Malmesbury* (London, 1682), 97–100.

[38]Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 148.

[39]Ibid., 10–11.

[40]Ibid., 23.

[41]Ibid., 22–24.

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Hobbes claims that this state will end in a second death, perhaps in a nonmetaphorical fire, while Calvin believes in the immortality of all souls.

Luther similarly believes that the soul is incorporeal and that heaven and hell are in another realm than the earth. As he says in his commentary on Ecclesiastes:

> thou mayst understand hell to be that place where the soules be kept, being a certayne graue (as it were) of ye soule, without this corporall worlde, as the earth is the sepulcher of ye body. ... The dead therefore are out of all place. Euen as after the resurrection, we shall be cleare from place and tyme.[42]

Most orthodox Christians, in fact, both Catholic and Protestant, held that hell, as a parallel to heaven, was eternal. There was strong scriptural support for this view, and various councils, including that of Constantinople in 543 and the Lutheran Diet of Augsburg of 1530, stated that denying the eternity of hell's torments was anathema.[43] Thus Hobbes is far from orthodox in this respect, as these councils clearly refer to the eternal torture of each damned individual rather than the eternal torture of the species, as Hobbes would have it. Hobbes's claim that the immortality of hell's punishment "is an Immortality of the Kind, but not of the Persons of men" is entirely novel.[44]

This is a complex innovation that allows Hobbes to both agree with orthodox thinkers that there will be a Resurrection and Day of Judgment (a crucial point, as denying this was punishable by death),[45] while at the same time claiming immortality for the elect and annihilation for the damned. This stance amounts to a partial agreement with orthodoxy, and partial agreement with one of the most serious heresies of the age, that of the Socinians. This sect held that the wicked were never resurrected, but were simply annihilated when they died (whereas the elect were resurrected with celestial bodies).[46] Hobbes's unusual combination of claims, that the elect would be immortal and the damned mortal, also brought him into proximity with another unorthodox view: that all would eventually be saved. Adherents of the theory of universal salvation held that sinners would suffer torment for a certain period of time, generally several thousand years depending on the individual's sins, before their eventual salvation.

Hobbes was also unusual in denying what for most in the seventeenth century was the gravest of hell's torments: the mental agony of being deprived of God's presence. A typical statement comes from bishop of London Robert Bolton's 1639 essay, "Of the Foure Last Things": "a sensible and serious contemplation of that inestimable and unrecoverable losse,

[42]Quoted in ibid., 31.
[43]Walker, *Decline of Hell*, 19–22.
[44]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (433).
[45]Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*, 15.
[46]Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 73–92.

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doth incomparably more afflict an understanding soule, indeed, than all those punishments, tortures, and extremest sufferings of sense."[47] The damned do suffer mental anguish in Hobbes's hell, as we have seen, but Hobbes does not place great emphasis on this type of suffering, describing it as "griefe, and discontent of mind," a predicament not entirely alien to the living, whose lives are a perpetual and restless desire for power.[48] The mental pain of the reprobate, for Hobbes, stems from jealousy of the lives of the blessed.

Hobbes could not emphasize the distance from God as a source of pain for the damned as his contemporaries did since he would understand this distance in a literal sense, and both the damned and the blessed, inhabiting this planet, will be equally distant from him. Indeed, it is hubris, Hobbes claims, for man to want to ascend any higher than God's footstool, which is the earth.[49] In the eyes of Hobbes's contemporaries, this interpretation made hell less of a deterrent, and, as we shall see, was simply perplexing.

While many of Hobbes's claims about hell and the soul were unorthodox, they were not necessarily unheard of. But it was the unusual combination of so many unusual ideas, and especially his unprecedented claim that there would be an endless stream of children being born who would be doomed to oblivion from birth, that so confounded Hobbes's readers.

There were, then, a great variety of theories about what happens to one after death in the seventeenth century, and although Hobbes's view has something in common with many of them, he manages, with great ingenuity, to stake out an original position. Through his partial agreement with so many sects, Hobbes draws his readers in and forces them to take his ideas more seriously than they otherwise might have. Hobbes's theology, then, could not simply be dismissed, nor could the connection between his theology and his scientific thought.

Epistemology, Theology, and Materialism

Many of those who discuss Hobbes's theology and his epistemology in *Leviathan* hive these off from the work's overarching political goals. Nor do most scholars read Hobbes's epistemology in light of his theology or vice versa. This has made it more difficult to see clearly some of the most important implications of Hobbes's strategy regarding the relationship of religion and freedom of conscience to politics. All of the details in this work, including its theological and epistemological sections, must be seen in light of its political goals and its

[47]John Bolton, *Of the Foure Last Things* (London, 1639), quoted in C. A. Patrides, "Renaissance and Modern Views of Hell," *The Harvard Theological Review* 57, no. 3 (1964): 220.

[48]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (314), chap. 11 (70).

[49]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (318).

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rhetorical character.[50] As Hobbes says, "they that insist upon single Texts, without considering the main Designe, can derive no thing from them cleerly."[51] Hobbes was free to write separate works of science and theology, and he did so.[52]

We should be wary, then, of Hobbes's claim that the first chapters on sense perception are unnecessary to the work as a whole.[53] In a similar vein, the theological section of the book cannot be seen simply as a long, tedious joke designed to ridicule Christianity. Nor, however, is it simply a list of scriptural passages that support the overtly political part of the work (the strategy Hobbes pursues in *De Cive*). Indeed, the labyrinthine theology of Hobbes's *Leviathan* is an integral part of the work's political project, and it is reasonable to suppose that there is nothing extraneous in it.

All knowledge, according to Hobbes, derives from sense perception, on which both natural prudence and reasoning depend.[54] There are no innate ideas. Hobbes does not think that man naturally has an idea of God in his mind, or any innate knowledge of a transcendent standard of good or evil. Nor can contemplation alone provide any such knowledge. The mechanistic nature of our sense perception not only makes it impossible for the human mind to grasp metaphysical truths, it also places serious limits on what we can know for certain about the external, physical world, since "the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another."[55] We can reason well enough when it comes to mental concepts like lines and figures, and we can make our way in the world by way of memory and experience, but our senses are not reliable as a source of scientific knowledge.[56] Hobbes devoted a great deal of time to works on optics and mechanics, but the account of perception in *Leviathan* is truncated and omits several details that are elaborated in *De Corpore* and elsewhere. In *Leviathan* we learn just enough about our

[50]An exhaustive study of the unity of Hobbes's thought would have to incorporate his historical thought in addition to his theology as well as his natural and political science. For a discussion of the unity of Hobbes's historical and scientific thought, see Robert Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Hobbes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[51]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (415).

[52]Scholars as diverse as Strauss ("On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy"), Quentin Skinner (*Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997]), and Johnston (*The Rhetoric of Leviathan*), among others, have noted the rhetorical character of *Leviathan*.

[53]*Leviathan*, chap. 1 (13).

[54]*Leviathan*, chap. 5; chap. 1 (13).

[55]*Leviathan*, chap. 1 (14).

[56]Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), show that this was one of the sources of Hobbes's disagreement with empiricists and the experimental scientists of the Royal Society such as Robert Boyle.

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perception to realize that we do not necessarily have an adequate grasp of the external world.

This view of the mind echoes Paul's statement that we see "through a glass, darkly."[57] But unlike Paul, Hobbes does not think that we can have the sort of inner knowledge or experience that many Christians equate with faith. Again, since all concepts derive from the motion of external bodies pressing against our sense organs, any notion of accepting God into one's heart, or having any sort of direct communion or communication with God, what Hobbes calls enthusiasm or private spirit, is ruled out.[58] As Mitchell notes, "True, the Leviathan is Christ-like, but through him there is no possibility of possessing the interiority of faith."[59] Those who claim to be prophets who have heard God speak are likely deluded by their vivid imaginations or extravagant dreams, and should be regarded with extreme suspicion if they teach civil disobedience or anything other than that Jesus is the Christ.[60]

The ear, and not the heart, Hobbes says, is the primary organ by which we can acquire faith. In particular, although faith is a gift of God, it is nothing other than believing pastors and parents who teach that scripture is the word of God.[61] Because we have not heard God speak to us directly, and did not see Jesus resurrected as did the apostles (the only true martyrs according to *Leviathan*), Christians "doe not know, but onely beleeve the Scripture to be the Word of God."[62] And this belief depends on accurate transmission of the events described in the Bible across several centuries, or, as he puts it, "a beliefe grounded upon other mens saying, that they know it supernaturally, or that they know those, that knew them, that knew others, that knew it supernaturally."[63] There is no way of knowing whether this transmission has been accurate and we can never have knowledge, but only belief, about what any author says.[64] The primary account of the events in which Christians must have faith is the Bible, and Hobbes demonstrates through

[57]1 Cor. 13:12 (AV).

[58]*Leviathan*, chap. 32 (259), chap. 43 (406).

[59]Mitchell, *Not by Reason Alone*, 71.

[60]*Leviathan*, chap. 2 (18–19), chap. 32 (257), chap. 36 (297), chap. 43 (405).

[61]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (406); *De Cive*, chap. 18 (238). Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," 163, then, is wrong when he claims that for Hobbes, faith is a "faculty of the mind," "distinct from either reason or experience," which we can use to understand revealed history. Cf. also Hobbes, *On Man*, chap. 14, in *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 72.

[62]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (405–6). Hobbes's definition of martyrs changes from *De Cive*, in which one can die a martyr rather than obey laws that one believes to be impious, to *Leviathan*, where Hobbes defines martyrdom by its Greek root—witness—and says that dying for one's beliefs is not necessary and is no testimony to the truth of one's beliefs (*De Cive*, chap. 18 [245]; *Leviathan*, chap. 42 [344–45, 363]).

[63]*Leviathan*, chap. 15 (103).

[64]*Leviathan*, chap. 5 (33).

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philology and logical reasoning that both the Old and New Testaments are corrupt and unreliable.[65]

In sum, the human mind cannot derive certain knowledge about metaphysics or religion in general, or the nature and path to heaven or hell in particular, from contemplating innate ideas, having an inner experience of faith, or reading the Bible. Reasoning is simply addition and subtraction, and reasoning about one's fate after death on the basis of any of the above is inherently erroneous.

This conjunction of epistemology and theology is significant because it sets out new criteria for acquiring knowledge not only about the natural world but also about religious matters. One effect of this new set of conditions is the separation of outward worship, which can be policed by the civil authorities, and internal belief, which can neither be policed nor, being invisible, compelled by religious authorities.[66] This was clearly an important step toward abolishing the cruelty of religious inquisitions and persecution of those with heterodox beliefs.[67] Also of great importance for Hobbes is the fact that this division would defuse one of the chief sources of turmoil in seventeenth-century England, namely, the widely preached doctrine that subjects must not obey the king when his commands conflict with the commands of God.[68] These conflicting sources of authority were a cause of serious

[65]Hobbes's assessment is that the Pentateuch was written long after the events it describes, and this should immediately force readers to wonder how accurate these descriptions could be after reading in the second chapter that "after great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak" (*Leviathan*, chap. 2 [16]). Ezra, it turns out, wrote the Pentateuch after Cyrus released the Jews from Babylon. Moreover, the original had been burnt and lost, and Ezra could not have transcribed it perfectly without omitting the evidence Hobbes uses to make this determination, which evidence consists entirely of logical inconsistencies related to historical details. On Hobbes and Ezra see Alistair Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalpse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). The New Testament was likely collated no earlier than AD 364 by Clement I, and although there was a tremendous temptation for the ambitious church doctors to alter the texts, since they sought through pious fraud to divert obedience from the civil authorities to themselves, Hobbes states unpersuasively, and I believe ironically, that he is "perswaded they did not therefore falsifie the Scriptures, though the copies of the Books of the New Testament, were in the hands only of the Ecclesiasticks" (*Leviathan*, chap. 33 [266]). From the poverty of human memory and man's deceitful nature, in addition to the difficulty of transmitting reliable information from one generation to the next, Hobbes sows seeds of uncertainty in his readers about how far they can trust the Bible, which is henceforth regarded more as a text subject to modern hermeneutics than as sacred scripture.

[66]See, for example, *Leviathan*, chap. 31 (249), chap. 34 (268), chap. 42 (342–44, 348).

[67]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (414), Review and Conclusion (488).

[68]*Behemoth*, 49–50.

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distress for many ordinary citizens, and Hobbes's teaching is in part an attempt to reduce this type of anxiety.

While Hobbes seeks to loosen the tension between the civil and religious authorities through the application of his epistemology to theology, this strategy involves heightening another sort of anxiety, namely, anxiety about the status of one's beliefs and one's ability to have any certain knowledge about the most important questions, such as the afterlife. The separation of outward action from private belief is certainly in line with much Protestant thought. Take, for example, Luther's statement that "no matter how much they fret and fume, they cannot do more than make people obey them by word and deed; the heart they cannot constrain. … For the proverb is true, 'Thoughts are free.'"[69] The difference between Hobbes and Luther (and others) on this point is that the separation of thoughts and external actions for Hobbes is grounded in a mechanistic account of the mind, rather than the implicit understanding of the heart and soul we find in Luther, and it is this distinction that gives rise to a new type of anxiety.[70]

The political goals of Hobbes's treatment of the Bible and separation of private belief from outward profession (along with his suspicions about the validity of private belief) are clear, but his description of heaven and hell do not appear to serve these goals in any obvious way. The requirements for salvation in Hobbes's system are quite simple: obedience to the country's laws and a will to obey them, as well as faith that Jesus is the Christ.[71] Conversely, disobeying the law is conflated with sin and a breach of faith, and consequently the penalties for serious crimes will be meted out in both this world and the next. The sovereign requires obedience to "all the Civill Laws; in which also are contained all the Laws and Nature, that is, all the Laws of God: for besides the Laws of Nature, and the Laws of the Church, which are part of the Civill Law … there bee no other Laws Divine. … There can therefore be no contradiction between the Laws of God, and the Laws of a Christian Common-wealth" or those of a heathen commonwealth.[72]

We would expect, then, that Hobbes would either remain silent about what the next life will be like, as he does in *De Cive* and *The Elements of Law*, since no such description is necessary to his argument, or that he would emphasize the worst aspects of hell and the best features of heaven, since this strategy would

[69]Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 385.

[70]For good discussions of the materialist basis of Hobbes's account of consciousness in contrast with Descartes's immaterial interpretation, see Samantha Frost, "Hobbes and the Matter of Self-Consciousness," *Political Theory* 33, no. 4 (2005): 495–517, and Philip Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[71]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (403).

[72]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (413–14). See also *De Cive*, chap. 18 (245); *On Man*, chap. 9 (72).

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only reinforce the subject's incentives for civil obedience, which, to repeat, is necessary for salvation. Hobbes's argument in chapter 43 of *Leviathan* that since the most common cause of civil war is the conflict between the commands of God and those of the sovereign, it is necessary to demonstrate that there is no conflict between the two, appears to be sufficient and is made with no mention of heaven or hell (and this is also true of the parallel chapter of *De Cive*).

A common explanation for the unusual character of Hobbes's theology is that it results in large part from his attempt to reconcile his religious views with his materialism.[73] For example, Martinich, one of the few scholars to pay much attention to the issue of hell in Hobbes, notes correctly that the depiction of hell is "quite horrible," and sets this down to Hobbes's desire to "explain how belief in hell is consistent with the scientific view of the world."[74] The only concrete example of a scientific explanation for this vision of hell Martinich offers, though, is that "only a real fire burns real bodies," and that Hobbes was therefore obliged to say that the damned are consumed in the fire and do not suffer eternally.[75] And because the fires are eternal, it is simply a necessary corollary that the damned will procreate and raise children who will be fuel for the fire, since the fire would have no other reason to burn forever.[76]

In the case of Hobbes's description of hell, though, the explanation that its oddness results from an attempt to interpret scripture in a way that is compatible with modern science is simply untenable. To begin with, Martinich falls prey to Hobbes's ambiguity about the metaphorical nature of hellfire. He also outlines the only possible feature of Hobbes's interpretation of hell which admits of some sort of scientific explanation, and although it is plausible that Hobbes thought the damned would not burn eternally because they had gross and corruptible bodies that would be consumed, he never explicitly makes this connection. The closest he comes to this is his assertion, quoted above, that although the "fire prepared for the wicked" will last forever, "it cannot thence be inferred, that hee who shall be cast into the fire, or be tormented with those torments, shall endure, and resist them so, as to be eternally burnt, and tortured; and yet never be destroyed, nor die."[77] But Hobbes supports this contention not by saying that corporeal bodies cannot

[73]See, for example, James Farr, "Atomes of Scripture: Hobbes and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation," in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990); Tom Sorell, *Hobbes* (London: Routledge, 1986); Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*; Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*; Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 115; Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 77. Against this view see Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*.

[74]Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 260, 258.

[75]Ibid., 259.

[76]Ibid., 259–60.

[77]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (315).

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withstand fire forever, but by pointing to a supposed lacuna in scripture: "though there be many places [in the Bible] that affirm Everlasting Fire, and Torments … yet I find none that affirm there shall bee an Eternal Life therein of any individual person; but to the contrary, an Everlasting Death."[78]

In fact, in neither chapter 38 nor chapter 44 does Hobbes ever refer to a physical law or any characteristic of the material world as an explanation for his interpretation. Nor does he offer any such justification when defending this interpretation in his response to Bramhall: in both places Hobbes relies entirely on scripture.[79] Given the topic under discussion, this is understandable. Hobbes does not raise any questions about the physical possibility of a resurrection of all of the dead, or of a city more than ten times the size of France made of gold and jewels descending from heaven, or spiritual human bodies that can live forever. In accepting these phenomena as unproblematic, Hobbes implicitly accepts the notion of God's omnipotence. Thus, although Hobbes's theology is materialistic, in the sense that it does not rely on incorporeal bodies, it cannot be reduced to, or explained by, its materialism. Rather than attempting to reconcile his theology with the emerging scientific understanding of the world, Hobbes is exploiting the latitude with which the Bible can be interpreted.

In effect, Hobbes leaves citizens free to believe what they want about topics such as hell, but only after insinuating that these beliefs are groundless; an unsettling fact that citizens will not likely want to face directly.[80] Hobbes's theory of the mind cuts individuals off from what they had once regarded as certain knowledge about the world around them and what they could expect after death. Since this knowledge cannot be recovered through study or contemplation, citizens are increasingly likely to avoid thinking about this problem at all.[81]

Hobbes's Rhetorical Strategy

Part of Hobbes's goal is making hell less frightening, and therefore less of a deterrent. He accomplishes this not by offering an interpretation he thinks

[78]Ibid.

[79]Hobbes, *An Answer*, 97–100.

[80]For a discussion of the theme of homelessness and fear in Hobbes see Jan H. Blits, "Hobbesian Fear," *Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (1989): 417–31, and for a discussion of the affinity between Hobbes and existentialism see Fred Dallmayr, "Hobbes and Existentialism: Some Affinities," *Journal of Politics* 31, no. 3 (1969): 615–40.

[81]In some sense, Hobbes is picking up on the Protestant notion of a hidden God, or *Deus Absconditus*, and combining it with his account of the mind to prove just how incapable man is of acquiring such knowledge. The difference is that the Protestant soul could still have some sort of contact with the hidden God, while for Hobbes God was entirely hidden in every respect.

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will be accepted, but by offering one he knows will be highly controversial in an effort to change the way individuals think about the afterlife. In his verse autobiography Hobbes says that he was pleased by the controversy his *Leviathan* caused, claiming that the attacks by innumerable divines "made it read by many a man,/And did confirm't the more; 'tis hop'd by me,/That it will last to all Eternity."[82] This is not simply Hobbes's attempt to make the best of his infamy after the fact, for he announces in the work's opening paragraph that his readers are likely to be offended by his interpretation of scripture.[83] The notoriety of the work in fact only increased the demand for it and allowed Hobbes to claim that it had "framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen."[84]

The main argument against the view that Hobbes wanted his work to be controversial is that Hobbes's religious statements were, as Strauss says, an attempt at "circumspection" and "accommodation" designed to allow him "to survive or to die in peace."[85] In a similar vein, Cooke argues that Hobbes was trying to cover over the bleakness of his vision, claiming that

> Hobbes hid this "nakedness," the exposure of autonomous and also unprotected man to an impersonal, masterless universe, by means of his appropriation of religion. This is how Hobbes deals with the question of what life is for—he hides his conviction of the fundamental absence of an answer to this question behind his appropriation of a transformed Christianity.[86]

In this supposed appropriation, though, Hobbes was singularly unsuccessful. He immediately gained various sobriquets in England, including the "Monster of Malmesbury," the "Devil's Secretary," and, perhaps appropriately for the topic under discussion, the "Agent of Hell."[87]

Thus, far from trying to conceal his harsh view of human nature and life's lack of meaning, it was in fact this brutal picture which more than anything has established *Leviathan* as the classic work of philosophy in the English language. None of this escaped Hobbes's contemporaries, and the second half of the work did nothing to assuage them, to say the least. As Mintz, in surveying the hostile reaction to Hobbes during the seventeenth century, points out,

[82]Hobbes, *The Verse Life*, in *The Elements of Law*, ed. Gaskin, 261. Gaskin includes a note at this point in the autobiography stating that *Leviathan* was in great demand by 1668, in part because of its notoriety.

[83]*Leviathan*, Epistle Dedicatory (3).

[84]Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 95.

[85]Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 199n.

[86]Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in "Leviathan"* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 236.

[87]Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 1.

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> Hobbes must have known that the line between his brand of theism and seventeenth-century atheism was a thin one and that for many of his contemporaries this line did not exist at all. If safety and a peaceful life were his object he would have had to express his opinions far more circumspectly than Professor Strauss would have us believe.[88]

In fact, the response that Hobbes received was the one he hoped for, and we should therefore see him as a rhetorical success, rather than the rhetorical failure many claim him to be.[89] While so many of his readers and detractors purport to be lifting the veil he places over his true thoughts, they are in fact reading Hobbes the way he wants to be read. If he were in fact trying to avoid controversy, it is hard to see why he devoted increasing space to his increasingly bizarre theology from one work to the next. This is especially the case given that even the single theological chapter of *The Elements of Law* attracted negative attention, not to mention the many hostile responses *De Cive* received for the same reasons.[90]

Hobbes, in fact, wants most of his readers to think themselves capable of seeing through to his real meaning. Indeed, what better way for an analyst of pride such as Hobbes to pull his readers in than allowing them to proclaim that they had not been fooled by his subterfuge? Although one did not have to be especially perceptive to notice that Hobbes was somehow unorthodox, his subversion of Christianity is not so obvious or clear that his readers can simply dismiss him as an atheist without attending carefully to his arguments, and this is Hobbes's goal.[91]

As noted above, Hobbes was not obliged to raise the topic of hell at all, and the fact that he did so in the way that he did is further evidence that he was attempting to provoke his readers. Walker notes that there were some figures in the seventeenth century who doubted hell's eternity, but who did not dare to state this opinion openly, and the earliest "surprising example" he finds of someone suggesting obliquely that God was not bound to punish sinners

[88]Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 44.

[89]It is a necessary corollary of Skinner's arguments about Hobbes's use of rhetoric that he failed completely either in trying to hide his true views or in trying to persuade his readers of his orthodoxy.

[90]Jeffrey R. Collins, "Silencing Thomas Hobbes: The Presbyterians," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's "Leviathan,"* 480; Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 25–26, 35.

[91]Strauss is the best-known exponent of the theory that Hobbes is esoteric in the sense of being circumspect, but he too seems to imply that the complete picture is more complex. In one of his later writings on Hobbes, Strauss claims almost in the same breath that Hobbes "expressed himself with great caution" and that his work was full of "shocking over-simplifications" and "absurdities" ("On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 189). A full examination of Strauss's complex treatment of Hobbes's esotericism, though, is beyond the scope of this article.

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forever is a sermon by Tillotson in 1690.[92] The danger of openly stating such opinions, Walker claims, led to "a theory of double truth: there is a private, esoteric doctrine, which must be confined to a few intellectuals, because its effects on the mass of people will be morally and socially disastrous, and a public, exoteric doctrine, which these same intellectuals must preach, although they do not believe it."[93] He is thinking here of later thinkers, the most famous of whom are Locke and Newton, who were very guarded with respect to their opinions about the nature of hell. Hobbes was also an adherent of the theory that there were certain truths one should not teach openly, as he indicates when he asks Bramhall to keep his thoughts on free will private because of the "ill use" that might be made of them, but he clearly did not think that the annihilation of the damned was a topic he had to keep to himself.[94] The frank statements Hobbes makes about such a sensitive topic preclude the possibility that his teaching about the afterlife was esoteric in the usual sense of the word.

Everybody knows that Hobbes's *Leviathan* was attacked in the seventeenth century because of its supposed atheism, but less well noted today is how significant a role his description of hell was in making this such a frequently attacked book. Malcolm states that "this feature of his theory had become a favorite target for his critics."[95] And as Parkin notes in his work on the reception of Hobbes's work in England, Hobbes's "portrait of Hell as a finite return to earthly existence leaves Tenison, like many of his contemporaries, simply puzzled."[96] Also, "booksellers . . . found Hobbes's highly unusual reinterpretation of Hell objectionable" and tried to have *Leviathan* banned or burned, because it had put "millions of Souls" on the "High-way to eternal Perdition."[97]

The worst part of being damned, according to Hobbes, is the second death one suffers, which his contemporaries saw as lessening hell's punishment. As Tenison notes in his 1670 work, *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined*, "That which you [Hobbes] make the top of their calamitie, is to be reckoned as a priviledg, because it puts an end to their torment together with their being; the continuance of which cannot make recompence for that misery with which in the real Hell, it will be oppressed."[98] Bramhall makes a similar charge, stating that, there being no "fear of any Torments after death for their ill-doing, they

[92]Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, 6.
[93]Ibid., 5.
[94]Hobbes, *An Answer*, 24.
[95]Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 365.
[96]Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 269.
[97]Ibid., 114–15; Collins, "Silencing Thomas Hobbes," 483; cf. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 60.
[98]Thomas Tenison, *The Creed of Mr. Thomas Hobbes Examined* (London: F. Tyton, 1671), 217.

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will pass their times here as pleasantly as they can. This is all the Damnation which T. H. fancieth."[99]

Perhaps Hobbes's most dangerous opponent, though, was Edward Hyde, later the Earl of Clarendon. In his book-length attack on *Leviathan*, he singled out Hobbes's interpretation of hell for some of his harshest criticism, claiming that "after sixteen hundred years Mr. *Hobbes* should arise a new Evangelist, to make the joies of Heaven more indifferent, and the pains of Hell less formidable, then ever any Christian hath before attemted to do."[100] He goes on to argue

> that the rewards which he hath propounded are of much less value then they are esteemed to be, and the punishment which he threatens, to be less terrible, and of shorter duration then they are understood; and take upon them to suspend the inflicting of any punishment at all upon the greatest sinner until the end of the World, by the mortality of the Soul, equal to that of the Body, and so to undergo no farther trouble till they are again united in the Resurrection; and even then not to be in so ill a condition, as most men apprehend, which is a consolation wicked men stand not in need of, and which no Christian Casuist, before Mr. *Hobbes*, ever presum'd to administer.[101]

Although this critique was not published until Hobbes was eighty-eight years old, Clarendon's opinions predate *Leviathan*'s publication. This is in fact what made Hyde so dangerous. While Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, both he and Hyde were living among Charles's exiled court in Paris. When Hobbes showed Hyde sections of the work while it was being prepared for printing, he told Hyde that he would not like it. Indeed Hyde did not, claiming in fact that any European government would be within its rights in punishing Hobbes for writing such a work.[102] Since Hyde was one of Charles's closest ministers, it is no surprise that Hobbes was stripped of royal protection soon after presenting the king with a manuscript copy of *Leviathan*.[103] In short, as Collins

[99]Bramhall, in *An Answer*, 99.

[100]Edward, Earl of Clarendon, *A Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr. Hobbes's Book, Entitled Leviathan* (Oxford: The Theatre, 1676), 219.

[101]Ibid., 222.

[102]Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 95; Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 144; Perez Zagorin, "Clarendon against *Leviathan*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's "Leviathan,"* 463.

[103]Hyde admitted to having had some hand in excluding Hobbes from court: Zagorin, "Clarendon against *Leviathan*," 464; Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, 146. I follow Collins's argument addressing the question of why Hobbes would have presented such a manuscript to Charles knowing it would displease him. As Collins notes, this presentation "bears all of the hallmarks of an ad hoc effort by Hobbes to cover his tracks once Charles had unexpectedly returned to France" (ibid., 144). He goes on to note that "the manuscript lacks a dedication to

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notes, "there is ample evidence that Hobbes anticipated the controversy that *Leviathan* would spawn."[104] But why would Hobbes want to stir such controversy?

The first question to revisit is why Hobbes would want to make hell less frightening and heaven more mundane if the divine law is the natural law and the natural law obliges man to obey his sovereign, and therefore obedience to the civil law merits entry into heaven as well as commodious life on earth, while breaking the law brings punishment in both this world and the next. Chapter 38 of *Leviathan*, which describes eternal life and hell, begins in much the same way as chapter 43, which outlines what is necessary for entry into heaven. Both chapters open with the claim that a state cannot stand when someone other than the sovereign can offer rewards and punishments greater than life and death. Each chapter, though, approaches this political problem in a different way, chapter 43 stating that there is no contradiction between civil and divine law and chapter 38 stating that the torments of hell will not be eternal.

If subjects were convinced that they would suffer eternal agony if they disobeyed the sovereign, this would incline them all the more to obedience and there would then be no one who could offer greater rewards or punishments than the sovereign. If hell were less of a deterrent, but nonetheless in the sovereign's hands alone, complete submission to civil law would still be the only reasonable choice. Hobbes makes his highly controversial claims about the nature of hell in the context of his discussion of the political problem of obedience, and the question of why he describes it as he does becomes more acute in light of the fact that this interpretation does not further his political goal in any obvious way.

In fact, this interpretation of hell is evidence that Hobbes did not think that he would be entirely successful in convincing individuals that there is "no

Charles," and contained several passages critical of Independency which are not present in the printed version. Hobbes in fact had wanted to return to England before Charles's return (if Charles returned at all), but was waylaid by serious illness (ibid., 145; see also Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, but *pace* Ted H. Miller, "The Uniqueness of *Leviathan*: Authorizing Poets, Philosopher, and Sovereigns," in *"Leviathan" After 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004]).

[104]Collins, "Silencing Thomas Hobbes," 481. Although Collins argues that *Leviathan* was primarily written to signal Hobbes's change of allegiance from the royal cause to that of the revolutionaries, I would argue that Hobbes was concerned mostly with his ability to continue his philosophic activity rather than with any factional allegiance. Clarendon was probably right, if we remove the adjectives, when he claimed that "he considers not, nor will be subject to any other Soveraignty, then that of his own capricious brain, and haughty understanding" (Clarendon, *A Brief View and Survey of . . . Leviathan*, 230).

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contradiction between the Laws of God, and the Laws of a Christian Common-wealth," or that there could be a complete separation between inner belief and one's actions.[105] By claiming that a state will only stand where the sovereign has a monopoly on the most severe punishments and then stating that hell will not be eternal, Hobbes indicates that a certain number of individuals will continue to believe that there is a conflict between civil and religious law—that they can acquire knowledge of God's will independently of the sovereign's interpretation of scripture—and who will therefore continue to be more concerned with punishments after death than with death itself.

This is a corollary of the fact that, according to Hobbes, individuals, who are "in a perpetuall solicitude of the time to come," will always be subject to natural superstitions that are not subject to rational argument.[106] Man in the state of nature initially appears to have no notion of gods or religion, since neither of these are mentioned in chapter 13 of *Leviathan*, and he escapes from the state of nature through rational observation of natural law. In the two chapters surrounding chapter 13, though, Hobbes claims both that the seeds of religion will always be present in the human heart, and 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.[107]

There is, then, a natural fear of invisible powers and an accompanying sense of justice and fear of reprisal from those powers. These fears predate civil society and organized religion, and among a large segment of the population, they have persisted until the present in spite of official religious teachings. Hobbes states in *On Man* that "all men are of the opinion that there is an invisible something or invisible things, from which … all goods are to be hoped and all evils are to be feared," and that almost all human beings have a propensity to believe in one type of divination or another.[108] For this segment of the population neither rational argument nor rigorous biblical scholarship will be able to loosen the grip of these fears and beliefs. Hobbes's strategy, then, is not to convince his readers entirely on the grounds of reason or scriptural hermeneutics, but to persuade them through a subtle manipulation of their fears.

Rather than simply trying to shock his readers, Hobbes attempts to manipulate their anxieties about the afterlife in such a way that they will suspect

[105]*Leviathan*, chap. 43 (413–14).
[106]*Leviathan*, chap. 12 (76).
[107]*Leviathan*, chap. 12 (83), chap. 14 (99).
[108]*On Man*, chap. 12 (58), chap. 14 (79–80).

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that it could not be as harsh as their priests claim, but also so that they will be afraid to even face the question directly. This is an essential part of Hobbes's attempt to make the fear of violent death, which man can always be sure is a real possibility, the most reliable passion on which to found political society.

Both Mintz and Parkin note that Hobbes forced his opponents to unwittingly change the way they thought about religion; as Mintz argues, he was able to "penetrate their defences by obliging them to adopt the rationalist approach. For the Cambridge Platonists this meant that in refuting Hobbes they … concentrated on logical arguments for the existence of God and spirit."[109] Similarly, Parkin notes that Hobbes's critics "were obliged to employ his own method of rational argument, thus absorbing his method while they resisted his ideas," and that one of the elegies written after Hobbes's death claimed that those "who his writings still accused in vain / were taught by him of whom they complain."[110] Something similar occurs with Hobbes's discussion of hell, but here his goal is not to turn his readers into materialists but to force them to realize that they cannot know for certain what awaits them after death. Hobbes undermines his readers' confidence that they can have any actual knowledge about the afterlife while at the same time fostering the suspicion that God would not punish them eternally for their sins.

Hobbes plants the suggestion in the minds of his readers that hell is unlikely to be as terrible as many claim it will be. He cannot hope to convince them beyond a shadow of doubt. The suggestion Hobbes makes is that the God who wants to make his yoke light and who puts salvation within such easy grasp is unlikely to be so unmerciful as to torture sinners forever.[111] Hobbes's denial of free will has similar consequences, as Bramhall notes: "if there be no liberty, there shall be no day of doom, no last judgment, no rewards nor punishments after death. … To take away liberty hazards heaven, but undoubtedly it leaves no hell."[112] One does not have to accept all the specifics of Hobbes's theology in order to believe that this is a reasonable possibility, and suggesting this possibility, rather than convincing readers of the literal truth of his account, is in fact Hobbes's goal.

This becomes clear in light of Hobbes's suggestion, in one of his responses to Bramhall, that he was not serious about his account of hell in *Leviathan* and that he really believes that "after the Resurrection there shall be at all no wicked men; but the Elect (all that are, have been, and hereafter shall be) shall live on earth."[113] This account implies the annihilation of the damned

[109]Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, 151.

[110]Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 5, 451.

[111]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (431–32).

[112]John Bramhall, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, 4.

[113]Hobbes, *An Answer*, 100. Hobbes comes close to saying something similar in the Latin edition of *Leviathan* when he says, "From this it follows that the reprobate will

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at death or universal salvation, which is consistent with *Leviathan's* denial of eternal torture, but not its description of hell. Also, in *On Man* Hobbes suggests that "there is no reason why God cannot forgive sinners, at least the repentant, without any punishment having been received by them or by others in their place."[114] Hell, then, becomes less of a deterrent not because anyone accepts Hobbes's account of it, but because no one can be absolutely certain of what it will be like, or whether it really exists. In this way, Hobbes is able to sidestep many of the thorniest religious controversies of his day, such as the debates surrounding predestination and Pelagianism.[115]

The possibility that hell might not be eternal may reduce one's distress about the afterlife, but this possibility in fact conceals and is premised on a source of anxiety that is in some sense even more acute than that which permeates the traditional view. While the non-Hobbesian could believe he or she knew what lay ahead and could make constant progress towards greater knowledge of and closeness to God, no such knowledge or progress is possible for Hobbes. Even the Calvinist who could not know for certain whether he or she was among the elect knew what being among the elect or among the damned meant and could see signs of this fate reflected in life on earth. A student of Hobbes's epistemology could not know anything for certain about the afterlife, especially since, unlike knowledge of salvation which for most Protestant Christians depends on inner faith alone, knowledge of heaven and hell involves concrete details and factual answers to difficult questions, such as whether one will be in God's presence or not and whether heaven and hell are on earth or not. One can assume or hope that hell will not be eternal, but the Hobbesian must admit that, strictly speaking, what awaits us after death is unknowable. Indeed, although Hobbes offers an unorthodox and controversial interpretation of hell, there is no other aspect of his theology about which he is so equivocal.

As noted above, Hobbes begins his discussion of hell by raising the possibility that it could be in various different locations, but then dismisses these possibilities on the grounds that no one else believes this is where hell could be. That no one else interprets the location of hell in this way is an unusual reason for Hobbes to reject these possibilities; he raises no such objection when setting forth the most controversial aspects of his own interpretation of the life of the damned, and indeed he proclaims at various points

not be resurrected at all, except to a second death; for only the children of God are children of the resurrection" (*Leviathan*, ed. Curley, chap. 44 [427]). He maintains, though, that the reprobate will in fact be resurrected and that they will die again.

[114]*On Man*, chap. 14 (74). There is a similar ambiguity in *De Cive*, chap. 4 (61–62).

[115]See Michael Gillespie, "Where Did All the Evils Go?" in *Naming Evil, Judging Evil*, ed. Ruth Grant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

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that his own interpretation is a novelty.[116] These "new Doctrines" are permissible, he claims, in part because he is writing in the midst of civil war and there is no sovereign to offer an official doctrine. But this does not explain why Hobbes lays out his thought process regarding hell's location only to reject it on the basis of what others think, or why he chooses to interpret hell in this particular way.

Conclusion

Hobbes's method of exegesis is a demonstration of just how wide a range of interpretations are possible, and in light of this the traditional pictures of hell as well as Hobbes's interpretation appear quite arbitrary, and by offering plausible historical explanations as to the genesis of the various ideas about hell, he fosters a sense of uncertainty in his readers about the reliability of any scriptural interpretation of the afterlife.[117]

Hobbes's theory that the damned will procreate after the Resurrection could only have exacerbated this sense of uncertainty. These passages are among the most controversial statements in the work, and in fact the only major excision Hobbes made between the "Head" and "Bear" editions of *Leviathan* was the sentence stating that "the wicked … may at the Resurrection live as they did, marry, and give in marriage, and have grosse and corruptible bodies, as all mankind now have; and consequently may engender perpetually, after the Resurrection, as they did before."[118] Although Tuck claims that Hobbes "eliminated" these passages, Malcolm is more accurate when he says that Hobbes's excision was a "toning down" of this "idiosyncratic eschatological theory," since Hobbes retains the subsequent paragraph which discusses the eternal "propagation" of the reprobate.[119] It would be difficult, though, to think that Hobbes took this theory very seriously; he tries to deny he was serious about it when responding to Bramhall, and makes quite different statements in *On Man*, as noted above. Also, Hobbes's keen sense of humor shines through when, in the midst of describing this horrible scene, he says that the passage supporting the marriage of the damned is "a fertile text."[120]

[116]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (311); cf. the Epistle Dedicatory (3), Review and Conclusion (489–90).

[117]For a discussion of contemporary views of the relationship between Gehenna and hell see Lloyd R. Bailey, "Enigmatic Bible Passages: Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 49, no. 3 (1986): 187–91.

[118]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (433). On the alterations relating to this issue between the first and second editions of *Leviathan* see Tuck's introduction to his edition of *Leviathan*, xlvi, and Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 349–50, 364–65.

[119]Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 349; *Leviathan*, chap. 44 (433); and Tuck's introduction, xlvii.

[120]*Leviathan*, chap. 44 (433).

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His goal, though, is not simply to make a joke, but to point to a problem with no solution. Hobbes claims that his is a legitimate interpretation because "there is no place of Scripture to the contrary."[121] This is not so much scriptural proof, though, as proof that there is great latitude in how scripture can be interpreted. The Bible, it turns out, cannot offer firm answers about what awaits us after death, and no amount of study can improve this situation. Hobbes claims that he is waiting for the outcome of the civil war to find out what doctrines his new sovereign will approve, and he makes this claim immediately before describing hell in chapter 38 of *Leviathan*.[122] This means that if the new sovereign teaches that hell will be on another plane of existence and that the damned will be tortured there forever, Hobbes will have to proclaim that he believes this to be the case. If the sovereign is wise he will see the political advantages of adopting Hobbes's theory, but he may not. Whatever he chooses to do, the official church doctrine will appear quite arbitrary with respect to the unknowable truth. Hell either exists or it does not, and if it does, it is either on earth or it is not, but the official teaching of the church, as determined by the sovereign for reasons of his own rather than by superior learning or the strength of tradition, cannot be a guide to which of these is actually the case.

Hobbes allows that everyone can have his or her own private beliefs about the afterlife as well as other aspects of religion, but this freedom is premised on the fact that the human mind alone cannot know anything for certain about the afterlife, and scripture is similarly unable to offer any reliable answers. The afterlife, and indeed religion as a whole, becomes a matter of opinion rather than knowledge, and as such it becomes a matter of personal choice. Since no amount of independent reasoning or biblical scholarship can lead to any progress in these questions, Hobbes in effect leaves individuals free to make up their minds about that which they cannot possibly know. If one's fate after death is an impenetrable mystery, dwelling on that fact is likely to be a source of great distress. In the face of this irresolvable problem, questions about the afterlife are likely to recede into the background in a more or less unconscious effort to avoid asking them altogether.

[121]Ibid.
[122]*Leviathan*, chap. 38 (311).

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