

# Hobbes, the “Natural Seeds” of Religion and French Libertine Discourse

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## Abstract

Hobbes surely spent the ten years (1641–1651) of greatest significance for his philosophical career on the Continent, in France, above all, in Paris. It was during this period that he published *De cive*; wrote the *De motu, loco et tempore*; produced a draft of the entire *Leviathan* as well as most of *De corpore*. His complicated relationship with Descartes has been studied closely, and Mersenne’s role has become clearer. There remains however the task of more carefully delineating the contours of Hobbes’s relations with the circles of “learned libertinism.” The Libertinism which will be dealt with here was not only French, instead of English, but also “theoretical” and “intellectual” rather than practical, and nothing at all sexual, contrary to the common usage of that word in the current language. French Libertinism was a philosophical trend aimed at promoting a non-conformist approach to religion, history, morals, and even politics.

## Keywords

Thomas Hobbes – French libertinism – theory of religion

## 1 The Continental Hobbes and Libertine Circles in France

Hobbes surely spent the ten years (1641–1651) of greatest significance for his philosophical career on the Continent: in France and, above all, in Paris. It was during this period that he published *De cive*; wrote the *De motu, loco et tempore*; produced a draft of the entire *Leviathan* as well as most of *De corpore*,

in addition to polemicizing with Bishop Bramhall. Nonetheless, we habitually consider him first as a great political thinker situated mostly and essentially in the context of English debates. Yet, even if these debates had an undoubted impact on the evolution of his thought, one must never forget that, during this period, he viewed them from a Continental vantage point, owing to the fact that he was deeply immersed in the philosophical and scientific culture of the Continent.

Within this Continental context, some very imposing figures have already emerged from the shadows. First and foremost, Hobbes's relationship with Descartes has been studied closely, and Mersenne's role has become clearer with the publication of the *De motu, loco et tempore*, a work which benefitted from the careful revisions of the Minim friar, who inserted extracts of it into his own works.<sup>1</sup> Galileo's importance and, more recently, that of Gassendi are now fully recognized. The latter in particular has been the subject of several studies that have highlighted his intellectual interactions with Hobbes on a wide range of issues, including natural law theory and politics; psychology and morality; the doctrine of matter and space, and the hypothesis of world annihilation.<sup>2</sup> There remains however the task of more carefully delineating the contours of

1 On this subject, see my recent edition of this text in Italian, Thomas Hobbes, "Introduction," *MOTO, LUOGO E TEMPO*, ed. by Gianni Paganini, "Classici della filosofia" series, (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 2010), pp. 9–126.

2 On the Hobbes-Gassendi relationship, see the following studies of the present author: "Hobbes, Gassendi et la psicologia del meccanicismo," *Hobbes oggi*, ed. by G. Canziani and A. Napoli (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 1990), pp. 351–446; "Hobbes, Gassendi and *De cive*," in *Materia actiosa. Antiquité, Âge classique, Lumières. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Olivier Bloch*, ed. by Miguel Benitez, Antony McKenna, Gianni Paganini and Jean Salem (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), pp. 183–206; "Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism," *Der Garten und die Moderne. Epikureische Moral und Politik vom Humanismus bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. by G. Paganini and E. Tortarolo (Stuttgart: Frommann – Holzboog, 2004), pp. 113–137; "Le néant et le vide. Les parcours croisés de Gassendi et Hobbes," *Gassendi et la Modernité*, ed. by S. Taussig (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 177–214; "Hobbes, Gassendi und die Hypothese der Weltvernichtung," *Konstellationsforschung*, ed. by M. Mulsow and M. Stamm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 258–339; "Il piacere dell'amicizia. Hobbes, Gassendi e il circolo neo-epicureo dell'Accademia di Montmor," *Philosophie der Lust. Studien zum Hedonismus*, ed. by M. Erler and W. Rother (Basel: Schwabe, 2012), pp. 239–258; "Early Modern Epicureanism: Gassendi and Hobbes in dialogue on Psychology, Ethics, and Politics," in *Oxford Handbook on Ancient and Modern Epicureanism*, ed. by Phillip Mitsis, Oxford University Press (forthcoming).

3 We refer to the nowadays "classical" notion of *libertinage érudit* made canonical through the work of René Pintard (first publication 1943; new edition 1983). Over the last seventy years much research has been done on the French Libertines. See at least: the special issue

Hobbes's relations with the circles of *libertinage érudit* ("learned libertinism"),<sup>3</sup> in France. Hobbes has long been associated with the sexual Libertinism of the Restoration period,<sup>4</sup> but, as Noel Malcolm has recently demonstrated, it is possible to attribute to him a non-libertine theory of how sexual behavior is modified by laws of civil society. The Libertinism which will be dealt with here was French, instead of English, and also "philosophical" and "intellectual" rather than practical, and nothing at all sexual, contrary to the common usage of that word in the current language. French Libertinism was in the seventeenth century a philosophical trend aimed at promoting a non-conformist approach to religion, history, morals, and even politics. To this end, figures like Gabriel Naudé, François La Mothe Le Vayer and Samuel Sorbière among others promoted a fresh reading of ancient and modern sources (respectively Machiavelli and Aristotelianism, skepticism, and Epicureanism) to uncover an authoritative tradition of freethinking opposed to Scholasticism and the more common theological and philosophical theses.

At issue first and foremost is the question of personal contact. Hobbes "certainly counted among his friends four members of the *Académie Dupuy* or *Académie Putéane*, later known as the Cabinet Dupuy; these were Mersenne,

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of "Dix-septième siècle" on *Littérature, libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, 37 (1985); Tullio Gregory, Gianni Paganini, Guido Canziani *et al.*, *Ricerche su letteratura libertina e letteratura clandestina nel Seicento* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1981); Isabelle Moreau, *Guérir du sot: les stratégies d'écriture des libertins à l'âge classique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007). Considerable critical reflection on the category of French libertinism and its use has been done since Pintard's times, above all by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé; we refer here to his many contributions, including especially: *Dis/simulations. Jules-César Vanini, François La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Louis Machon et Torquato Accetto, Religion, morale et politique au xviiiè siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002); "Les libertins: L'envers du Grand siècle," *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, no. 28–29, April 2002, pp. 11–38 (reprinted in *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, 7 (2003), pp. 291–319; "Libertinage, Irréligion, Incroyance, Athéisme dans l'Europe de la première Modernité (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles) Une approche critique des tendances actuelles de la recherche (1998–2002)," available online 2/10/2017, at: <http://www.dossiersgrhl.revues.org/279>. For a recent summary of interpretations, see *Libertin! – Usage d'une invective aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. by Thomas Berns, Anne Staquet and Monique Weis, (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013) and the most recent collection: *Philosophy and Free Thought / Philosophy and Free-Thought, 17th-18th centuries*, ed. by L. Bianchi, N. Gengoux and G. Paganini (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017).

- 4 See Noel Malcolm, "Hobbes and Sexual Desire", *Hobbes Studies*, 28 (2015) 77–102. For a more emphasis on the theoretical side of Restoration freethinking, in which the author tries to frame also some aspects of Hobbes's thought and heritage, see Sarah Ellenzeig, *The Fringes of Belief. English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660–1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008), esp. pp. 1–28.

Gassendi, Sorbière and La Mothe Le Vayer.”<sup>5</sup> Naudé also belonged to this famous circle, which was the point of contact for those who went by the name of “Libertines,” according to the classic study of René Pintard. Moreover, all the distinguished foreigners who arrived in Paris in those years passed through it: Grotius, Campanella, the young Nicolas Heinsius in addition to Hobbes.<sup>6</sup> Meetings of this group of scholars, philosophers, savants and polymaths took place from 1617 to 1645, but in many cases the ties established here lasted well beyond that date.

Another significant Parisian scholarly society was the academy gathered around Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor, which included, among others, several friends and correspondents of Hobbes: first of all Gassendi, who returned to Paris in 1653 only to die there two years later; then François du Prat, Thomas de Martel, Samuel Sorbière and François de La Mothe Le Vayer.<sup>7</sup> At a certain point following Gassendi’s death, to Sorbière fell the task of formalizing the activity of this group by writing the rules for its meetings, which were to be dedicated above all to “questions concerning nature or experiments or fine inventions.”

Although “beyond the seas,” as Hobbes said – that is, back in England – after 1651, Hobbes would keep in touch with the group’s activities by way of letters sent by the same Sorbière; he thus remained intellectually attached to the group’s affairs, where the spirit of Mersenne and Gassendi dominated even after their deaths. We possess the memorable letter of February 1, 1658, written by Sorbière to communicate to Hobbes the rules of the academy. Its author refers to the ideal of a true republic of the learned, which should be non-dogmatic, open to various methods and to free discussion without any prejudice either of philosophy or of religion. To this enterprise, Sorbière summoned in his mind exemplary figures who in his eyes represented the best in the scientific research of the moderns; Gilbert, Bacon, Harvey, Sarpi, Galilei, Mersenne, Descartes and Gassendi are all mentioned with the declared hope that “this century of iron will not last forever” and that “the sciences will again resume their place,” together with the “rejuvenated arts.”<sup>8</sup>

5 See Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 397. La Mothe is mentioned to Hobbes by Charles du Bosc as one of his four or five “good friends” (Thomas Hobbes, *Correspondence*, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994: letter 137, 5/15 September 1659, vol. 1), p. 504.

6 See René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle*, new edition (Geneva: Slatine, 1983), pp. 94–97.

7 See Pintard, *op. cit.*, pp. 403–404.

8 See Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 491–493.

This eloquent letter is surely our best documentary witness to an intellectual atmosphere in which different traditions and cultures converged, including the "libertine" milieu to which several members of the new academy belonged, especially La Mothe and Sorbière. Galilean science was explicitly evoked, as was the empiricist and experimental tradition characteristic of the two deceased tutelary geniuses whom Sorbière recalls with regret, Gassendi and Mersenne. It should be noted that the former always maintained friendly relations with the "libertines" of his time, while the second, though he had fought with them in an early period of his life, kept in regular contact with certain of them. There was thus a constant and thorough dialogue on both sides (Hobbes and some "libertines"), as is otherwise attested to by the earlier exchange concerning atoms and the void, the Epicurean problem *par excellence*. The letters between Sorbière and Hobbes that relate the exchange provide explicit evidence that the debate involved not only those two persons but also the other members of the circle: Martel, du Bosc and La Mothe Le Vayer, whom both correspondents mentioned and of whom Hobbes says: "I very highly respect them" ("*quos omnes summe colo*").<sup>9</sup>

The numerous letters of Hobbes which passed after 1651 between him, the circle of Montmor and such figures close to the libertines as Abraham du Prat, François du Verdus and the aforementioned Sorbière suggest that these relations must have been as close also in the preceding decade, when Hobbes did not need to write letters to the members of this circle because he was on the Continent and in touch with them, most often in Paris. All of the external signs, such as friendships and correspondences, as well as internal signs, like textual analysis of his works, allow us then to explore the trail of the possible impact of the debates which typified intellectual French libertinism on the evolution of Hobbes's thought. This impact, if it took place (as we shall try to show), must have concerned first the work that was the direct result of Hobbes's Continental sojourn, namely, *Leviathan*.

One must acknowledge that the record of the very few studies already carried out on this "libertine" side of Hobbes's experience in France is so far rather meager. Quentin Skinner was a pioneer with his article on "the disciples of Hobbes in France and England." However, he focused mainly on Hobbes's influence downstream, so to speak, and did not deal in depth with a possible

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9 Sorbière to Hobbes, letter #114, 23 January/2 February 1657 (Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 433–435); Hobbes to Sorbière, letter #117, 6/16 February 1657 (Hobbes, *The Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 442–444).

upstream libertine impact on him.<sup>10</sup> The other important study for our subject, that of Noel Malcolm on “Hobbes and the European Republic of Letters,” directly addressed the intellectual relations between Hobbes and the French milieu. His conclusion, however, was rather restrictive. While acknowledging the existence of “some important general similarities” between certain aspects of Hobbesian thought and the Parisian ideology of the republic of letters, represented by a proto-libertine like Charron and libertines like Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer,<sup>11</sup> Malcolm emphasized much more the divergences than the affinities between Hobbes and the libertines. According to him, there would have been too deep a divide between “an ideology that was above all negative, an ideology of non-politics” as he defined the position of Libertines,<sup>12</sup> on the one hand, and, on the other, the Hobbesian project, which involved “a positive program of political education,” a veritable “cultural transformation,” closer to the Enlightenment than to the libertine critique.<sup>13</sup> The hypothesis of a positive contribution of libertine thought to the formation or evolution of the English philosopher is not really taken into account in his otherwise very remarkable study of the “Continental” environment where the thought of Hobbes matured. As we shall see, this “cleavage” exists and is to be noted (on this Malcolm’s study is absolutely right), though this fact would not, however, preclude Hobbes from having been able to benefit in other aspects from knowledge of libertine ideas, especially as regards the study of religion in general and above all its relations with politics.

At the opposite extreme, Gilbert Boss has described the teaching of Hobbes directly as “libertine.” His article (“The Libertine Doctrine of Hobbes”) is, however, more an overall interpretation of Hobbesian philosophy than a focused historical investigation of relations with the French “libertine” milieu in the proper sense of the word. Moreover, his definition of “libertinism” is too vague and general to be relevant in the case of Hobbes.<sup>14</sup> Whether favorable or

10 See Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes and His Disciples in France and England,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8 (1966), pp. 153–167 (in the same author’s collected essays, *Visions of Politics*, vol. III, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 308–323).

11 See Malcolm, *op. cit.*, pp. 457–545. On the context of Hobbes’s Parisian sojourn, see, above all, pp. 459ff. Most of the chapter concerns the reception of Hobbes’s work; see *op. cit.*, p. 541.

12 See Malcolm, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

13 See Malcolm, *op. cit.*, p. 545. See also Malcolm’s Introduction in his edition of *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012).

14 See Gilbert Boss, “La doctrine libertine de Hobbes,” *Hobbes Studies* 16 (2003), pp. 15–40. Hobbes is enlisted *ex officio* in this “libertinism” in a very broad sense, which has little

unfavorable to any rapprochement between Hobbes and the Libertines, these general frameworks run the risk of obscuring the effective historical research which must proceed in detail and by means of the analysis of the texts whenever that it is possible. This "fieldwork" remains largely undone. We are speaking here of the contextualization of Hobbes's work at the micro level, always keeping in mind the fact too often neglected that, for a whole series of his texts (*De cive*, first and second editions; *De motu, loco et tempore*, and *Leviathan*), the immediate context was more Continental than insular.

What we will present here is the result of a survey that, for want of explicit statements by Hobbes, can be based only on two categories of objective elements:

- (a) the circumstances of Hobbes's stay in Paris, that is, the links which he was able to establish with the libertine circles whose general characteristics we have given above, and
- (b) the analysis of certain parts of the Hobbesian works and such changes in them as can be related to the great libertine debates of the time he stayed in France.

Two things are evident: that the main subject of this possible, indeed, as we shall show, probable dialogue with the French "Libertines" of his time must have been religion and that the text to be investigated first is *Leviathan*. Indeed, this work in particular requires consideration not only in relation to the English context but also as a reaction to the exceptionally heterodox ideas developed by the "Libertines" on the Continent regarding religion and its relationship with politics. Obviously, the conclusion will not be that Hobbes became "libertine" during his Parisian stay, which is not true, but that he took into account certain ideas current in French Libertinism and to some extent was affected by them. The relationship must be understood here in a twofold sense, both positive and negative, receptive and reactive: Hobbes took on certain libertine ideas, which helped him to look at religion from a broader perspective, and at the same time he reacted to some others in order better to

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historical relevance in the light of research that has been done in these last decades. To quote: "We have assumed that Hobbes, like the philosophers of his time who were concerned with morality and politics, must be a Libertine in the sense that he must defend the freedom to think, notably by criticizing religious and scholastic authorities." In the whole article, there is no reference to the Libertines in the "historical" sense of this word; neither La Mothe nor Naudé nor Gassendi is mentioned. On the other hand, on p. 32, even Hobbes's Christ is described as "libertine," which is not correct (see here below, pp. 33–34).

distinguish their teaching from his own. In both cases, it was not a question of pure and simple reception but of stimulation, which demanded of him an original working through new material.

## 2 The Theory of Religion before *Leviathan*

In the analysis of religion, the *Elements of Law* and the *De cive* had played out on two parallel registers: the philosophical theory of religion on one hand and the biblical position on the other. As regards the first, the most clearly philosophical, the introduction of the religious theme in these works follows paths that are fairly simple and uniform. It is true that even in these writings the knowledge of God is not without problems, the main one being that there is no idea of its proper object; divinity remains inconceivable, like spirits and the other substances held to be incorporeal. The only proposition that can be affirmed of God – says Hobbes – is that He exists. Yet, even this inconceivability does not prevent one from being able, by means of philosophy alone, to assert His existence as first cause or prime mover of the universe. Yet, beyond this elementary rational core, there are only either the honorific uses of language or recourse to positive or biblical theology. Thus, Chapter XI of Part I of *The Elements* focuses on the problem of the knowledge of God and the question of the nature of spirits in the light of reason alone. Here, Hobbes offers ignorance of their true cause as the explanation of the error typical of the pagans, namely, belief in the incorporeality of spirits, specters, ghosts and other similar apparitions.<sup>15</sup> In Part II of the same work, Hobbes tries to show that obedience to the sovereign is no less conformable to reason than it is to faith, and to this end he cites biblical passages in the attempt to give a correct interpretation of them (Chapter VI). In the next chapter (Chapter VII), Hobbes develops his own ecclesiology, with specific regard to the relationship between religious and civil magistrates, and again the substance of his considerations derives mainly from biblical sources in that what is at issue is the study of the good functioning not of any state whatsoever but of the Christian state. All in all, in *The Elements*, Hobbes is quite far from developing, indeed, has no interest at all in, a general theory of religion that could include both natural religion as well as the religion of the Gentiles; his interpretation concentrates *either* on properly philosophical contents *or* on biblical features of religious experience. The existence of a source that is both natural and derived from the passions as well

15 See Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. by Ferdinand Tönnies (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Company, 1889), I, xi, pp. 53–60.



as prior both to reason and to revelation is not taken into account in *The Elements*, and this is why the author evinces no interest in constructing a theory of religion in general that might be capable of understanding the variety of religious phenomena in their widest extent.

The framework does not change decisively in the third part of *De cive*, which is entitled "*Religio*." This whole part is built entirely on biblical sources, taken from the Old and New Testaments, with the exception of the initial chapter, which deals with the "kingdom of God by nature," and is therefore based on His "rational word." In reality, the chapter is tightly structured by its use of purely legal, let us say abstract, concepts that are devoid of any historical, psychological or anthropological description of religious phenomena. Hobbes focuses on legal relations and mainly on the laws of worship, which are established between man and God in the regime of the "natural kingdom," without dwelling on the figures that a religion that is not revealed must take in this initial state of human history. No significant reference is made to the diverse universe of non-biblical religions.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically, a very brief sketch of what this "natural" religion might be is found out of place, just at the beginning of the next chapter, which is dedicated to the "kingdom of God through the old pact." In the first section, Hobbes describes the religious state of humanity before Abraham and notes that, after an initial phase of wonder at the events of nature, together with their knowledge of their own weakness, from which flows belief in the existence of a god, humanity rather oscillated between the two extremes of *atheism* and *superstition*, very soon degenerating into *idolatry*, true and proper. Superstition is characterized by "fear without right reason;" through the imperfect use of reason and the violence of the passions, it tends to divinize first "invisible things" and then directly "idols."<sup>17</sup> One finds here a very brief mention of what in *Leviathan* will be developed into a true and authentic natural history of religion", but the exposition is so elliptical as to be of little significance. Rational knowledge, ignorance of the true causes, psychological factors, principally fear, are just barely announced and in rapid succession, as the main pieces of what would later develop into a more complex reconstruction of the first stages of "natural religion."

16 See Thomas Hobbes, *De cive* The Latin Version ed. by Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), III, xv, pp. 219–233. In this chapter, Hobbes takes up above all the problem of "the purely rational worship of God" (§ 18) "the laws concerning divine worship" (§ 16). It is thus worship more than religion in general that is considered within the framework of that which reason requires.

17 See Hobbes, *De cive*, III, xvi, 1, pp. 234–235.

### 3 The Innovations of *Leviathan*: “Natural Religion” and the Passion of Curiosity

With respect to religion, one fact immediately jumps out from a reading of Chapter XII of *Leviathan*, “Of Religion.” *Leviathan* presents major innovations in relation to the works written before or at the very beginning of Hobbes’s Parisian stay. These include: 1) the reference to “natural religion”, a concept broader than the simple philosophical investigation of the first cause, on the one hand, and 2) the detailed analysis of the “Religion of the Gentiles,” on the other. As we shall see, these elements allow Hobbes to sketch a different portrait of religious experience and to study it both more concretely in relation to the analysis of human passions and more independently of the respective claims of truth put forward by the different positive religions.

Simply stated, the discourse on religion shifts in its relation to philosophy and revelation in order to situate itself at the level of the theory of human passions, that is, of moral psychology and anthropology. The introduction of this original perspective gives a new and unexpected twist to the structure of Chapter XII in comparison with previous works.

Let us note first that the religious theme is complicated and twofold in *Leviathan*, unlike the more uniform treatments in the preceding writings. Here, alongside the purely rational consideration that leads us to the demonstration of the first cause, Hobbes develops another genesis of religion, one that has its source in the passions rather than in rational factors. As he says toward the end of Chapter XI of *Leviathan*, the issue at stake is the consideration of how men have made their gods as “the creatures of their own fancy”, with scarce regard as to whether they consider them genuine or not. There is even a sort of symmetry which seems to put the distinction between “religion” and “superstition” into a single perspective, in accordance with the viewpoint of the observer and not according to the real nature of their respective contents.

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.<sup>18</sup>

This development about the “natural” origin, which does not exactly correspond to either philosophical reason or biblical revelation, makes it possible to consider an ensemble of matters belonging to secular and profane history.

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<sup>18</sup> See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XI, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), vol. II, p. 162.

Thus, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes room for a sort of 'neutral' description of the phenomenon of religion, which bears on neither its value as philosophical knowledge nor its claim to divine truth. This more distanced and, at the same time, broader view addresses the varied experience of cults and beliefs. In this way, a new landscape is given form, which Hobbes designates with an expression loaded with historical significance: "natural religion," an expression and concept never before at issue in *The Elements* and mentioned once in *De cive* only in passing.<sup>19</sup>

The motive force behind all these changes lies in a new anthropological factor,<sup>20</sup> whose nature we can specify. Hobbes locates the defining characteristic of man in the possession of a passion which is his own alone: curiosity.<sup>21</sup> The search for causes is not merely a rational process; it is also the effect of a passionate impulse, in which converge "Curiosity or love for the knowledge of causes" and "Anxiety for the future time". The marginal title accomplishes the full fusion of these two motifs: "Curiosity to know," says Hobbes, "from Care of future time", who adds in the following title: "Naturall Religion, from the same."<sup>22</sup> With this notion, natural religion, and especially together with the passionate motives that produce it, namely, curiosity and anxiety, Hobbes goes well beyond the pure rational knowledge of the existence of God. Thanks to the revolution in the doctrine of man in *Leviathan*, its author can now venture into relatively unknown territory, that of psychological, emotional and political, in short, simply human, factors, which preside over the origin and formation of religious beliefs.

19 Hobbes refers to the phrase "naturalis religio" in *De cive* III, xvi, 10, p. 239 to indicate that the second commandment of not worshipping any image "is a part of natural religion". The beginning of this section makes distinctions between the Jewish laws that oblige by nature and those by covenant, either with Abraham or Moses. The context and even the meaning of the phrase "natural religion" are quite different from those of *Leviathan*.

20 That is, in the sense of his philosophic teaching on man, in accordance with the spirit of the general theme "Of Man" in the first part of *Leviathan*.

21 For an explication of the sense in which *Leviathan* contains a significant innovation on this point over his other works, see G. Paganini, "Passionate Thought: Reason and the passion of curiosity in Thomas Hobbes, *Emotional Minds. The passions and the limits of pure inquiry in early modern philosophy*, ed. by S. Ebbersmeyer (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 227–256. See also "Hobbes, Montaigne et les animaux moraux," *L'axe Montaigne-Hobbes: Anthropologie et politique* ed. by E. Ferrari et T. Gonthier (Paris : Classiques Garnier), pp. 131–150.

22 See *Leviathan*, p. 160. On the importance of curiosity and its links to religion, see Yves Charles Zarka, "La curiosité chez Hobbes," *Curiosité et 'Libido Sciendi' de la Renaissance*

To be precise, we are far from the proto-Deist conception of Herbert of Cherbury, who had conceived of natural religion as a set of simple or primitive truths, underlying or antecedent to historical religions. For Hobbes, the phrase “natural religion” means rather a religion that is explained simply through the characteristics of human nature in its actual emotional constitution – hence also the importance accorded to the biological metaphor of the “seed of religion,” the “germ of religion” which, as will be seen later, consists more of non-cognitive and clearly passionate factors than of rational inference to the first cause.

#### 4      **The Emotive Complex of “Natural” Religion: Curiosity, Anxiety, Ignorance and Imagination**

Chapter XII of *Leviathan* presents a complex structure requiring detailed analysis. It is preceded in Chapter XI by a strictly philosophical definition of religion in line with the traditional considerations found in *The Elements of De cive* about the “first and only motor” or the “first and eternal cause of all things.” Man is driven “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.”<sup>23</sup> In this perspective, Hobbes makes the beginnings of religion depend on the search for causes through to the first of the series, a search that is driven by the characteristically human passion, “Curiosity.” In this sense, religion and philosophy overlap, at least partially, for both lead to a belief in the existence of the prime mover of the world, namely, says Hobbes, a primary and eternal cause of all things, which is what men mean by the name of God, a transparent paraphrase of the formula, with which the exposition of each of the five “paths” to the demonstration of the existence of God, ends in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. Strictly speaking, this is to be a completely disinterested knowledge; Hobbes adds that men accomplish it “without thought of their fortune”, even if – a few lines above – he has already

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*aux Lumières* ed. by Nicole Jacques-Chaquin (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure de Fontenay, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 157–166 ; Gianni Paganini, «Thomas Hobbes Philosopher of Curiosity», *Curiosity and the Passions of Knowledge from Montaigne to Hobbes*, ed. by G. Paganini (Rome : Accademia dei Lincei; Rome: Bardi Edizioni), pp. 7-36. 2018).

23 *Leviathan*, p. 160.

mentioned "anxiety" as the "care of future time" that dispose men to inquire into the causes of things.<sup>24</sup>

However, the discourse becomes complicated as soon as the "rational" considerations already present in the previous works intersect with the anthropological considerations that are typical of *Leviathan*. Together with the cognitive approach proper to rational inquiry, Hobbes reveals another kind of "anxious" inquiry that addresses the real or imaginary causes on which man considers his fate to depend. It is no longer simply a question of explaining the world but rather of initiating the search "for the causes of good and evil fortune."<sup>25</sup> The pure philosophical theory has given way to a quest which is now driven by the impulse of a passion like fear, for anxiety expresses the impossibility of mastering a future full of unknown dangers. Disinterested curiosity becomes fear and anxiety under the impulse of the interest which man nurtures for his own future.

This passionate faculty, initiated by curiosity but immediately dominated by anxiety and fear, requires two other elements to be complete: ignorance and imagination (*fancy*). Indeed, Hobbes continues, this "perpetual fear," which dominates expectations as to the future, is conjoined with the "ignorance" of real causes, that is, with the obsession with "intermediate" or "instrumental" causes that one can suppose but does not really know. When he is incapable of guessing and controlling the true causes, man imagines for himself fictitious causes and means of addressing them which can allay his anxiety, if only in an illusory way. Since, by definition, imaginary causes are not susceptible to being perceived, man identifies them easily with "powers" or "agents" invisible.

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24 See *Leviathan*, xii, p. 160. We find statements of this doctrine of the first mover or first cause in almost all of the philosophical works of Hobbes except *De motu, loco et tempore*, in which Hobbes raises doubts about it after having evoked it following White's text. In the *De corpore*, this traditional proof is set aside with the argument that any strictly theological consideration concerning the infinite should be excluded from philosophy, which can deal solely with what is conceivable. We have analyzed the evolution and impasses of the philosophical conception of the first mover in Hobbes, both in our edition of the *De motu* (see above, footnote 1) and in "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God? *De motu, loco et tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophic Career," *Companion to Hobbes* ed. by S. Lloyd (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 286–303; "Hobbes's Galilean Project. The Philosophical and Theological Implications," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 7 (2015), pp. 1–46, and "Art of Writing or Art of Rewriting? Reading Hobbes's *De motu* against the Background of Strauss' Interpretation," *Reading between the Lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Winfried Schröder (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 99–128.

25 *Leviathan*, p. 164.

Ultimately, ignorance of the real causes and the apprehension produced by a situation of uncertainty engender – says Hobbes – the belief in the existence of “some *Power*, or *Agent Invisible*,” from which men expect or fear some intervention that can affect their future.<sup>26</sup> We see, then, that the same “curiosity” may in one case produce the philosophical knowledge of the first cause, and, in another, the imaginary idea of many gods; deriving from ignorance and imagination, there are, says Hobbes, “innumerable sorts of God,” created by “the innumerable variety of Fancy.”<sup>27</sup>

## 5 The “Religion of the Gentiles”

As a result of this, the same name of “religion” in this chapter of *Leviathan* covers at least two very different realities. There is, on the one hand, the notion already encountered in *The Elements* or *De cive*, namely, a religion which is identified with the thesis of the existence of the first cause (even though the idea of God cannot be conceived) and, on the other hand, a religion which is explained better by the analysis of human passions, more or less perverted, than by the tools of pure theory or disinterested curiosity. Hobbes adds that, rather than in any way facilitating it, religion in this second sense represents a formidable obstacle to religion in the first. There is more: in the concrete reality of human history, setting to one side biblical revelation, the description of the “anxious” and “ignorant” religion ends up in the foreground at the expense of “cognitive” religion, that is, of the knowledge of the first cause. This new approach allows Hobbes to delve into the analysis of the “religion of the Gentiles,” giving him a good illustration of what “natural” religion really is, namely, the cultivation of the four “seeds” within which there need be no correct knowledge of the first and only cause.

Chapter XII of *Leviathan* thus accomplishes several highly important tasks:

- it describes in minute detail the genesis of human opinions about immaterial spirits;
- it studies in detail the origin of the worship of invisible powers;
- it analyzes belief in prognostics and shows how men have deified both the forces of nature as well as qualities and accidents, and
- it emphasizes the importance of awe at extraordinary events taken to be miracles.

<sup>26</sup> See *Leviathan*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>27</sup> See also *Leviathan*, the end of Chapter XI, p. 162.

Nor does Hobbes fail to denounce the anthropomorphism by which purely human capacities are projected onto the divinity, such as genius, ignorance, concupiscence, fury, including – he adds ironically – the genital organs and nightly pollutions. A large part of religious belief can easily be explained by the divinization of animals or of natural forces, the glorification of great inventors, the anthropomorphizing of the gods, feigned revelations, the exploitation of ignorance as to secondary causes, recourse to “second and ministerial” divinities, the superstitious practice of divination, the idea of possession by the divine spirit (“enthusiasm”) and the fascination of sorcery, which Hobbes calls “juggling and confederate knavery.” With great attention to all that which concerns the obsession with the future, Hobbes also draws up a small encyclopedia of the “superstitious ways of Divination” cultivated by the ancients, which includes no fewer than twelve different types of predictive techniques.<sup>28</sup>

From the strictly philosophical point of view, the demolition of this fantastic world can move along quickly. Men, Hobbes explains, have assimilated the “invisible agents” to the human soul, believing that they are of the same nature as the soul and therefore similar to the nature of images that appear in a dream. In reality, these apparitions in no way in fact differ from the images reflected in mirrors or, at most, depend on “thin aëral subtle bodies,” for they are always material effects or realities. In this area, Hobbes puts forward the argument according to which the expressions “incorporeal substance” and “immaterial spirit” are in principle contradictory and therefore unacceptable.<sup>29</sup>

Irrationality, however, does not amount to insignificance; these beliefs, says the author of *Leviathan*, are much more widespread than one might expect and dominate the religious psychology of most men. That it is not only a question of combating superstition by putting it up against principled arguments, like the rejection of any incorporeal spirit, is immediately understood later in the text of the chapter, when the author moves from the register of description to that of explanation. At stake is the interpretive recapitulation of the genesis of these beliefs and practices, and this work cannot be done on the basis of the simple philosophical theory of the first cause, or the equation between substance and body. This decisive development is also reflected in the structure of Chapter XII of *Leviathan*, which, after the theoretical root of religion is adduced – namely, curiosity in the search for causes and, above all, for the first cause – then shifts the discourse to the human roots of religious experience.

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28 See *Leviathan*, XII, pp. 172–176.

29 See *Leviathan*, pp. 166–168.

## 6 “The Natural Seeds of Religion” and the Double Structure of *Leviathan* XII

As always in Hobbes, the explanation of an effect, like “natural” religion, must take the path of the search for causes. This means, in other words, indicating “the natural seeds of religion” and not merely opposing to them a correct conception of what religion should be from the philosophical point of view. In fact, at the moment of detailing these “causes,” the structure of Chapter XII takes two routes. Paragraphs 1–4 present again, in agreement with Hobbes’s prior texts, the theoretical and purely philosophical understanding of religion, taken to be the pursuit of the first cause.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, starting with paragraph 5 and especially in the list of “Foure things, Natural Seeds of Religion” in paragraph 11, this theoretical and disinterested root (the philosophical search for causes) is simply omitted, so much so that the philosophical “curiosity” regarding the first cause does not have a place among the “four seeds.”

Is this an inconsistency or an oversight? Neither, since the general system of curiosity, that is, the search for causes (real or fictitious, it matters little here) makes possible the integration of the four “seeds” into the more general consideration of human nature. Nonetheless, the divergence between the beginning of the Chapter XII with its theory of the first cause and its subsequent development cannot be ignored or undervalued. It is as though the focus of Hobbes’s thinking has shifted from philosophical theory to anthropology, that is, the doctrine “Of Man.” Indeed, in the second and longer part of Chapter XII, the major theme is no longer curiosity in general in its philosophical manifestation but the concrete and historical form which it takes in the religions which most people practice. Thus, as he draws up his list of the “natural seeds,” this time in the anthropological and psychological sense, Hobbes omits the search for causes, which would rightly be the main motive of belief, and concentrates instead on four other “seeds.” These are less theoretical but all the more “natural” in the sense that they are dependent upon actual human nature, namely, belief in ghosts, ignorance of secondary causes, devotion in respect of the powers that men fear, and the interpretation of fortuitous coincidences as so many omens or signs. The search for the “first and only mover”

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30 This feature is particularly evident in the sequence of the first marginal titles: “Religion in Man only. First, from his desire of knowing Causes. From the consideration of the Beginning of things. From his observation of the Sequell of things,” even though in the text Hobbes underlines the fact that in the generality of men this impulse is stronger when they are “curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evill fortune” (*Leviathan*, p. 164).



has disappeared from centerstage because the "intermediate," "instrumental" or downright imaginary causes have taken the place of the true cause in the anxious and ignorant minds of men. The note in the margin says it clearly: "The natural seeds of religion are in the name of four":

And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for prognostics, consisteth the Natural seed of *Religion*; which by reason of the different Fancies, Judgments, and Passions of several men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.<sup>31</sup>

Then, an explicit and apparent contrast is drawn between what religion should be in theory and what it is in the reality of human beings. At this point, Hobbes introduces a new factor to be added to the "four seeds" which completes them, itself representing a fifth seed: the political or civil function of religion.<sup>32</sup> What differentiates between "philosophical" religion and "popular" religions is no longer only the abstract content of belief (the first cause vs. the multiplicity of "invisible powers") or its motivational basis (disinterested curiosity vs. interested anxiety), but the purpose and also the authority by which men are induced to "cultivate" these "seeds." This new distinction allows Hobbes to satisfy a twofold requirement: on one hand, safeguarding the special status of biblical religion, given that it depends on a special, divine authority, but, on the other, pushing even further the parallel with secular religions as they rely on political power, this time human and not divine, but still endowed with authority. There are, Hobbes says, two different categories of men who "cultivate" the "natural seeds" of beliefs and cults: some do so on their own initiative and according to their "invention," others by order and under the direction of God ("by God's commandement, and direction"). Beyond the different authorities, human or divine, on whom religions are founded, there are, however, common bases, which allow a close comparison. The starting point is common, that is, the same "seeds," but the goal is also common: to incite subjects to "obedience," to cultivate "peace" and "charity," in short, to obtain and maintain "peace in the state." Of course, says Hobbes, the second category of legislators acts by divine

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<sup>31</sup> See *Leviathan*, p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> One could object that this is not a "natural seed" like the other four inasmuch as political association is not natural, but only artificial, according to Hobbes. In any event, the political exploitation of religion becomes almost "natural" as soon as the Commonwealth is established and requires not only passive obedience, but also convinced adhesion.

impulse and includes Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ, while the first, purely human category includes all the “founders of Common-wealths, and the law-givers of the Gentiles.”<sup>33</sup> In both cases, however, they are political and religious legislators interested in the same ends: “both sorts have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society.”<sup>34</sup>

While the four “seeds” all pertain to the class of spontaneous affects, they can also be used, or “cultivated,” as Hobbes says, to achieve political ends that belong to the order either of sociability, in the best case, or of manipulation, in the worst. Thus, in the course of Chapter XII, the author of *Leviathan* dilates several times on the action of those “legislators” who have used religion to govern the people better. The four-element scheme (curiosity, anxiety and fear, imagination and ignorance) is complemented here by a fifth element: the political exploitation of all of these volatile emotional motives by leaders who know how to act wisely in order to stabilize or strengthen their power over the people.

So easie are men to be drawn to believe any thing, from such men as have gotten credit with them; and can with gentleness, and dexterity, take hold of their fear, and ignorance.<sup>35</sup>

Connecting the emotional and imaginative creation of “invisible powers,” induced by fear and ignorance, with the political use of religious myths, Hobbes shares in the narrative that goes under the classic title of the “libertine theory of the political use of religions.” The typical notion of imposture (“juggling and confederate knavery”) is found only once in this chapter, referring to sorcerers. The same notion, however, will be used a good deal in the chapter on miracles<sup>36</sup> and even more in Part Four, on “the kingdom of darkness,” to describe the “confederacy of deceivers” that is basically the Roman church.

However, Hobbes is not inclined to generalize a conclusion that the Libertines had presented with more audacity, allowing that it could be applied to all religions. Quite to the contrary, the English philosopher remains very concerned to separate revealed religion from pagan religion. It is above all the “religion of the Gentiles” which gives the historical exemplification of the way

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33 See *Leviathan*, p. 170.

34 *Ibid.*

35 See *Leviathan*, p. 176.

36 See *Leviathan*, XXXVII, vol. III, pp. 682–692.

in which the four "seeds" plus the fifth seed of political exploitation develop "naturally."

Nevertheless, the apparent decision to leave the "philosophical" definition of religion in the background allows Hobbes to focus on the psychological aspects of the phenomenon first and then its political aspects; furthermore, this new approach has theoretical consequences whose importance can be measured by comparison with the previous works. In this chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes does what he had done neither in *The Elements* nor in the *De cive*; he gives a general description of religions in the light of the psychological and anthropological, namely simply human, principles developed in the first part of *Leviathan*. The interpretative framework elaborated in *Leviathan* passes by controversial religious content in order to concentrate on a kind of objective phenomenology of the matter under study. Pertaining to the "Of Man" part of *Leviathan*, the point of view adopted in Chapter XII "Of Religion" seeks to be purely human; this is why Hobbes will disregard in this part so much of what is specifically Christian, the theme that will predominate in Part III "Of a Christian Commonwealth," as well as the internal controversies in Christianity, which will be the subject of Part IV. What counts here is rather to see how religion works in the concrete reality of human nature, which is the precise meaning of his new expression "natural religion."

This does not mean that his general approach is altogether neutral. Hobbes is quite cognizant of the distinction between religion and idolatry; everything in Part Four of *Leviathan*, dedicated to the "kingdom of darkness," digs a chasm between Protestantism and Catholicism. Certain passages of his work reflect the reasoning of the "Independents" against the theocratic temptation of the Presbyterians. His method of investigating the Scriptures is indebted to the legacy of philology and Humanist criticism, even as he develops it well beyond what Valla, Erasmus and the Socinians had done. Certain aspects of his anthropology go back to Epicurean and neo-Epicurean doctrines, a fact that has far-reaching implications for the development of the religious theme, and so on.<sup>37</sup> We cannot therefore say that Hobbes aims simply at neutralizing the political effects of religious consciousness from a purely Erastian perspective, though this also has its place in the work. In fact, he takes positions on several points of Christian doctrine with the ambition of proposing a new and more

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37 For a very nuanced and careful picture of this whole problem, see George Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), and the recent collection of essays *Jean Calvin and Thomas Hobbes*, ed. by O. Abel and P.-F. Moreau (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013), with articles by A.P. Martinich, E.M. Curley, P. Springborg, G. Wright, O. Abel and I. Boivignies, among others.

rational interpretation of essential elements of biblical religion. However, he is not concerned to fit himself into this or that theological current, be it orthodox or heterodox. His gaze is aimed much higher, at least in Chapter XII of *Leviathan*: to construct a theory of religion in which Christianity or biblical religion is no more than a particular instance, even if it is in principle privileged by the fact that it possesses a special revelation.

This is why it is always difficult to locate Hobbes's position within a defined religious denomination, as is shown by the fact that the discussion between commentators always remains inconclusive and is undoubtedly destined to remain so. At least in theology, Hobbes's perspective seems to be that of the "bricoleur," who takes here or there whatever best serves him, having in view a consistency that is no longer dictated by a desire to belong to a given confession (unless such adherence is demanded by a political exigency) but by the desire to safeguard and develop the critical sense of his own philosophy, even in that which concerns the religious theme.

Well aware that there are other levels of discourse which deal with "divine politics,"<sup>38</sup> to which he returns mainly in the third part, Hobbes focuses in Chapter XII on religion insofar as it is "human politics," practiced by most "lawgivers," who remain men even when they address religious questions. The long description of the "religion of the Gentiles" which occupies the central part of the chapter has exactly this function: to show the functioning of a "natural" religion as an outgrowth from its "natural seeds," without raising the question, at least in an explicit manner, of the special status of biblical religion. This detached point of view well reflects a fundamental precept which Hobbes derived from the sum of his reflection on history and also from his personal experience of religious controversy: apart from the intervention of political authority, which in fact more cuts the knot than unties it, religious conflict remains insoluble by means of theology alone in that the religion of the one is always the superstition of the other and vice versa, as he says at the end of Chapter XI.<sup>39</sup>

Said differently, the difference between "religion" and "superstition" is not one of differing contents, but, so to speak, of authority: the former is duly authorized by power, while the latter is not. The effect of the tendency here to

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38 In fact, for all questions concerning "divine politics" and thus the precepts that should apply to the subjects of the "kingdom of God," Hobbes refers to the third part "Of Christian Commonwealth" and specifically to Chapter XXXV, where revelation is taken up and with it the idea of a political contract that has taken place between God and men, first with Adam, then with Moses and finally in the messianic kingdom.

39 See above n. 18.

relativize religion is not less than in the other definition, even if Hobbes soon followed up there with a mandatory reference to "True Religion:"

Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; Not allowed, SUPERSTITION.<sup>40</sup>

The distanced gaze acquired in *Leviathan* thus allowed the emergence of three objects of philosophical consideration which were not so clearly visible either in *The Elements* or *De cive*:

- a) a philosophical description of religion in its own right, which also includes the passionate side of human nature (and it must be remembered that in *Leviathan* reason itself as a search for causes depends on a passion, namely, curiosity);
- b) a detailed philosophical explanation of paganism, its origins and characteristics, which had not really been taken into account in the previous works, and
- c) a general theory of theologico-politics, including the political instrumentalization of religion, which goes well beyond its use in Christianity in the "orthodox" form of the "kingdom of God," which had already been contemplated in the prior works.

## 7 Hobbes and French Libertine Discourse

How are we to explain these three innovations and, with that, the original discussion of the profane and pagan religions which appear in *Leviathan* and have no equivalent developments in the preceding works?<sup>41</sup> Is this a natural evolution of Hobbes's thought, or is it indeed necessary to think of external impulses that might have been able to orient or attract him in this direction? Of course, the fact that a treatise on "government" begins with a part "Of Man," that is, with a philosophical anthropology, has a direct impact even on the treatment of religion. Moreover, as we have shown elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> this new form of

<sup>40</sup> *Leviathan*, VI, vol. I, p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> After *Leviathan*, one will find a similar point made in the *Historia ecclesiastica*; see the edition of Patricia Springborg (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> See Gianni Paganini, "Hobbes and the French Skeptics," *Skepticism and Political Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* ed. by John Christian Laursen and Gianni Paganini (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 55–82.

political handbook that starts with a philosophical reflection on the main features of human nature, put its roots down in French skeptic and libertine culture, especially in Montaigne, Charron and La Mothe Le Vayer.

In the absence of substantial anticipations in *The Elements* or the *De cive*, the hypothesis of an entirely internal evolution in Hobbes's thought is difficult to accept, so much the more in that the similarities to certain doctrines of the Libertine circles frequented by Hobbes concern not only the structure of the political handbook but also its contents, especially as regards the theory of religion. In Paris, Hobbes was able to know close up the libertine doctrines which La Mothe Le Vayer had elaborated, which Gassendi had discussed (without being himself Libertine), which Sorbière had circulated and Mersenne attacked. As we have already seen, with all of these figures, Hobbes was in close contact during his stay in France, and he continued contact with those who were still alive, namely, La Mothe and Sorbière, even after he returned to England.

Indeed, his reading of the French Libertines has left an evident trace in his development signaled in the way he relates his 'psychological' doctrine concerning the origin of religion to the 'political' account that he gives. If one looks at one of the most audacious texts of libertine culture, the dialogue on the subject of divinity (*Dialogue sur le sujet de la divinité*, 1630) of La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672),<sup>43</sup> one sees that, in order to explain the origin and function of religions, La Mothe emphasizes a great variety of psychological, anthropological and moral factors that are not too far from the "seeds" identified by Hobbes in *Leviathan*.

The framework of the dialogue is more skeptical than dogmatic, which allowed La Mothe to present the theses of the "atheists" in a printed text, although without author's name, with a fictitious date and false place of publication. The character of Orasius, who represents the skeptic, promotes in

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43 In 1630, La Mothe Le Vayer, anonymously and with a false date and place of publication, published the *Quatre dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens, par Orasius Tubero*. The following year, he published a new series of five dialogues. It is in the first series that *De la divinité* appears; it is entitled *De la diversité des religions* in the other series. I have followed the recent edition edited by A. Pessel, entitled *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* (Paris: Fayard, 1988). For a study of the skepticism of La Mothe and of its impact on the thought of Descartes, see G. Paganini, *Skepsis. Le débat des modernes sur le scepticisme* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), pp. 61–100, 248–270; by the same author, "The Quarrel over Ancient and Modern Scepticism: Some Reflections on Descartes and His Context," *The Legacies of Richard Popkin* ed. by Jeremy Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 173–194.

atheism less demonstrative arguments than theories about the origin of religion. Thus, he aligns the main classical theories with their sources, namely, the impression made by natural phenomena and the fear that derives from them, as in the famous *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* of Petronius; "the prodigious visions during sleep" of Epicurus, the divinization of things and useful inventions in Prodicus and so forth. Many of these doctrines of "theogony" (as the Libertine calls them) are also found in Hobbes's description of the origins of paganism.<sup>44</sup> It may be objected that these were commonplaces among intellectuals nourished on classical and Humanist sources, like Hobbes, but what is characteristic of libertine culture is the ability to combine *classical theses* (for example, Euhemerism, Epicureanism, anthropomorphism, utilitarianism, etc.) with *psychological explanations* based on human passions, especially fear and hope, and the doctrine of the *political exploitation* of religion by "legislators."<sup>45</sup> These three different aspects merge in the dialogue *On Divinity*, where a large part is dedicated to describing the action of political leaders who have used religion "in behalf of the moral, economic and civil life, as in explaining the phenomena of the customs, actions and thoughts of poor mortals, with the purpose of giving them certain rules of living, exempt as much as possible from all absurdity."<sup>46</sup>

44 See *Leviathan*, XII, pp. 172–176: "The absurde opinion of Gentilism."

45 The French libertine explanation of religious phenomena is not reducible to the thesis of the imposture of religions, even if it plays a crucial role. To see the full extent of the treatment used to describe and demythologize religion by the libertines of the middle of the seventeenth century, see the anonymous text of *Theophrastus redivivus* (1659), ed. in two volumes by G. Canziani and G. Paganini (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1981–1982; now distributed by Franco Angeli, Milan), especially volume I, *Tractatus I*, 'Concerning the Gods,' pp. 27–174, and volume II, *Tractatus III*, 'Of religion,' pp. 341–558. For an analysis of this text within the framework of what we have called "radical libertinism," see my "'Legislatores' et 'impostores': Le *Theophrastus redivivus* et la thèse de l'imposture des religions au milieu du XVIIe siècle," *Sources antiques de l'irréligion moderne: le relais italien (XVe–XVIIe siècles)* ed. by D. Foucault and J. –P. Cavaillé (Toulouse: Collection de l'E.C.R.I.T., 2001), pp. 181–218; "Qu'est-ce qu'un 'libertin radical'? Le *Theophrastus redivivus*," *Libertin! Usage d'une invective aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. by T. Berns, A. Staquet et M. Weis (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 213–230; for an archeology of imposture in the modern era, "L'imposture des 'leges' dans le *Theophrastus redivivus* et son inscription dans l'histoire de l'humanité," *Figures de l'imposture. Entre philosophie, littérature et sciences*, ed. by J.-C. Darmon (Paris: Editions Desjonquères, pp. 29–53); "Wie aus Gesetzgebern Betrüger werden. Eine philosophische Archäologie des 'radikalen' Libertinismus," *Radikalaufklärung* ed. by J.I. Israel and M. Mulsow (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), pp. 49–91.

46 See La Mothe Le Vayer, *Dialogues*, pp. 330–331.

Another French libertine author, Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653), in his *Political Considerations on Coups d'état* (1639) and in the *Apology for Great Men Suspected of Magic* (1625), had further developed this theme, directly applying the “political” paradigm to Moses and in some aspects to Jesus Christ Himself. As we shall see, for Hobbes, this extension was not valid, for both religious and political reasons. Hobbes retained the distinction between the “human politics” of secular legislators and the “divine politics” of Abraham, Moses and Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, insofar as the two types of politics 1) rely on the same type of foundation, that is, the authority of the one who commands; 2) aim at the same goals, namely, peace in the state, respect for laws and the obedience of the citizens, and 3) resort to similar means, such as omens, miracles, prophecies, revelations, etc., it becomes possible to read them in parallel, such that the noun “politics” has more importance than the adjective, “human” or “divine,” that modifies it.

It is from this angle that Hobbes was able to profit from the reflections of the Libertines on the relations between religion and political authority. If we compare the key passages of the theory of legislators who have used religion according to Naudé and La Mothe Le vayer, on one hand, and the explication of Hobbes on “the first Founders, and Legislators of Commonwealths among the Gentiles,” on the other, we are struck by the similarity of analysis and, sometimes, of even the expressions used.

To this claim about the libertine origin of the thesis concerning the political use of religion, one might object that it was already available to Hobbes in the writings of Machiavelli, which he certainly had known since his early collaboration with Francis Bacon, a great admirer of the Florentine. It is also true that Machiavelli was one of the sources privileged by Naudé and the French Libertines. Machiavelli explained repeatedly that he saw religion as being

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47 *Leviathan*, XII, p. 170:

For these seeds have received culture from two sorts of men. One sort have been they that have nourished and ordered them, according to their own invention. The other have done it by God's commandment and direction. But both sorts have done it with a purpose to make those men that relied on them the more apt to obedience, laws, peace, charity, and civil society. So that the religion of the former sort is a part of human politics; and teacheth part of the duty which earthly kings require of their subjects. And the religion of the latter sort is divine politics; and containeth precepts to those that have yielded themselves subjects in the kingdom of God. Of the former sort were all the founders of Commonwealths, and the lawgivers of the Gentiles: of the latter sort were Abraham, Moses, and our blessed Saviour, by whom have been derived unto us the laws of the kingdom of God.



<p>Gabriel Naudé, <i>Apology for All the Great Men Who Have Been Falsely Suspected of Magic</i></p> <p>From this we may conjecture that all the finest and most cunning Legislators, not unaware that the best means of acquiring and of maintaining authority over their peoples was to persuade them that they were only the organ of some Supreme Deity who wished to favor them with His assistance and to receive them under His protection, made great use of these pretended Deities, these supposed dealings, these pretended apparitions, and, in a word, of this Magic of the ancients, better to disguise their ambition and found their empires more firmly.<sup>48</sup></p> <p>Naudé, <i>Political Considerations on the Coups d'état</i></p> <p>All the ancient legislators, desirous of authorizing, strengthening and laying down the laws which they fastened onto their peoples with nails, have had no better means at all of doing so than by publishing and making them believe with all possible industry that they had received them from some Divinity.<sup>49</sup></p>	<p>Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>, Chap. XII</p> <p>And therefore the first Founders, and Legislators of Commonwealths among the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace, have in all places taken care; First, to imprint in their minds a believe, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device, but from the dictates of some God, or other Spirit; or else that they themselves were of a higher nature than mere mortals, that their Lawes might the more easily be received [...] Secondly, they have had a care, to make it believed, that the same things were displeasing to the Gods, which were forbidden by the Lawes. Thirdly, to prescribe Ceremonies, Supplications, Sacrifices, and Festivalls, by which they were to believe, the anger of the Gods might be appeased...<sup>50</sup></p>
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48 We cite to the edition in Paris, François Targa, 1625, pp. 49–50.

49 See the edition of 1667, lacking editor and place of publication, p. 182. On Naudé, see two important studies: Lorenzo Bianchi, *Rinascimento e libertinismo* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1996) on the *Considérations*, pp. 109–142, and Anna Lisa Schino, *Battaglie libertine. La vita e le opere di Gabriel Naudé* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2014).

50 See La Mothe Le Vayer, “De la Divinité,” *Dialogues*, pp. 318–319.

<p>La Mothe Le Vayer, <i>On Divinity</i></p> <p>But all [atheists and Epicureans] agree amongst themselves that the greatest Legislators have availed themselves of vulgar opinion on this subject [namely, divinity ...] for no other reason than to tighten the bit to the foolish people and to guide it with this nonsense as they liked.<sup>51</sup></p>	<p>And by these, and such other Institutions, They obtained in order to their end (which was the peace of the Commonwealth) that the common people in their misfortunes, laying the fault on neglect, or error in their Ceremonies, or on their own disobedience to the laws, were the less apt to mutiny against their Governors<sup>52</sup></p>
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man-made, that the value of religion lies in its contribution to social order, and that the rules of morality must be dispensed with if security requires it. In *The Prince* and *Discourses*, he frequently described “armed prophets”, as he called them, such as Moses, Numa, Romulus, Cyrus the Great, and Theseus, as the greatest of the new princes, who were able to use religion as an instrument to engender political obedience.<sup>53</sup> In the chapter on “Roman Religion” in particular, when dealing with the foundation of new laws and governments, he stated the absolute necessity of having recourse to feigned religious authorization to ensure the obedience of the people: “And truly there was never any order of extraordinary laws for a people who did not have recourse to God, because otherwise they would not have been accepted. For a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others. Thus wise men who wish to take away this difficulty have recourse to God.” Numa is one of the preferred examples used by Machiavelli. According to Livy, Numa claimed that he held nightly consultations with Egeria on the proper manner of instituting rules and rites for the city. Machiavelli suggested that Numa played at religion to give himself an aura inspiring reverence and the appearance of the divine, in order to “establish new and uncommon orders in that city, doubting that his own authority would be enough to this end”.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Leviathan*, p. 176.

<sup>52</sup> *Leviathan*, p. 178.

<sup>53</sup> See *Il Principe*, VI (ed. Sergio Bertelli, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977, pp. 30–32); XXVI, p. 102. *Discorsi sopra la Prima Deca di Tito Livio*, *ibid.*, I, ii; I, xi; I, xix (pp. 134–35; pp. 160–63; pp. 183–85). On Hobbes and Machiavelli, see the ample study by Paul A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar. Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, esp. pp. 249–320).

<sup>54</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, *op. cit.*, I, xi, pp. 161–2.

It is possible that Hobbes had had direct access to Machiavelli's reflections on the relations between religion and political authority, and especially to the theory of legislators who used religion. However, two considerations would incline me to believe that there was a filtering of Machiavellian themes through the writings of Libertines like Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer. Firstly, chronological considerations: this particular topic does not appear in the early works such as *Elements* and *De cive*, but surfaces only in *Leviathan*, which was written during the Parisian sojourn in close connection with the circles we have described above, and in which the libertine component was both significant and provocative. Secondly, doctrinal considerations: both Hobbes and the French libertines read Machiavelli in a similar way.

Indeed, neither Hobbes nor the two French writers gave much importance to the "civic" and "republican" virtues for which religion had been a support as with the Romans, according to Machiavelli's interpretation in the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*. Unlike the Florentine writer, these authors of the seventeenth century did not reproach Christianity for having stifled warrior virtues and discouraged the political participation of citizens in favor of such false virtues as humility and poverty; instead, they accused it of having fed rebellion against authority under the pretext of religion. Consequently, neither Hobbes nor the French Libertines encouraged the active participation of citizens in public affairs in the spirit of republican liberty, as Machiavelli would have wished. On the contrary, they advocated submission to authority. What really interested them was respect for laws within the frame of an exchange of protection for obedience; this exchange takes place without political participation in the "republican" sense that drove Machiavelli to value the religion of the ancients more highly than that of the moderns.

All things considered, Hobbes, quite as much as Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer, prefers passive submission to authority, even to the point of political indifference, over the patriotism advocated by Machiavelli, if this patriotism is to become the seed of rebellion and civil war. A reading of a key passage from the dialogue on politics (*De la politique*) by La Mothe Le Vayer suffices to see this foundational exchange of obedience and protection, which is also the basis of the political theory of *Leviathan*, at work in the libertine theory of the state: "Even if kings are above the laws of Tribonian, they still have those of reason to stand above them. If their subjects owe them obedience, they are accountable to the subjects for protection."<sup>55</sup> And, we should also add that we find in

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55 See La Mothe Le Vayer "De la politique," *Dialogues*, p. 418. On libertine political thought, see our chapter: "Bonheur, passions et intérêts: l'héritage des libertins," *L'état*

the dialogue *On Divinity* by La Mothe both the phrase “natural religion,” which was not so common at the time, as well as praise for the tolerance of religions instituted by the Romans, that very tolerance which Hobbes himself valued in *Leviathan*, again within the framework of the political use of religious beliefs by the ancient legislators.<sup>56</sup>

We can thus assert that, in the successive transitions of *Leviathan's* discourse, from a “curious” religion to anxiety and ignorance, from the cultivation of “natural seeds,” to their political exploitation, Hobbes made his way to one of the most characteristic libertine doctrines, that of the politico-religious legislators who put into motion the basic affects, namely, hope and especially fear, and manipulated beliefs in order to establish and consolidate their power over human society. The phrase of Hobbes with which he illustrates “the designs of the authors of the religion of the pagans” could have been written by a La Mothe or a Naudé:

And this seed of Religion, having been observed by many; some of those that have observed it, have been inclined thereby to nourish, dresse, and forme it into Laws; and to adde to it of their own invention, any opinion of the causes of future events, by which they thought they should best be able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes, among the Libertines, the issue is the particular interests of the leaders, but, most of the time, the aim is, as Naudé says, “the consideration of the good and utility of the public, which often prevails over that of individuals.” Above all, the main aim is the control of the people, who are always described as a constant threat to the tranquility and security of the state. This aim licenses the use of lies and “impostures,” even of “coups d'état,” as in, according to Naudé, the famous example of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, provided they serve to maintain authority and therefore peace. These legislators do not create the passions on which they bring pressure to bear, but it is certain that they manipulate beliefs derived from the passions to serve to legitimize or strengthen their authority and to ensure peace of the state.

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*classique. Regards sur la pensée politique de la France dans le second XVIIe siècle* ed. by Henri Méchoulan and Joël Cornette (Paris: Vrin, 1996), pp. 71–92.

56 See La Mothe Le Vayer, “De la divinité,” *Dialogues*, pp. 334 and 332. For praise of the Romans for their tolerance, see *Leviathan*, p. 178.

57 See *Leviathan*, XI, p. 162.

Even if he knows and takes up the libertine discourse without mentioning his sources, Hobbes elaborates a more "moderate" version of this libertine art of government. *Leviathan* witnesses to a preference for emphasizing the strictly political functionality of the myths invented by legislators. The religious myth is more a necessity for the social cohesion which power seeks than the effect of exploitation dictated by the personal interests of those who govern. Even concerning the "religion of the Gentiles," Hobbes clearly states that it was "a part of their policy."<sup>58</sup> It is only in this perspective that the products which teem in human imagination find a kind of coherence when they are directed toward rational ends, namely, peace and obedience. Hobbes admires with the French Libertines the exceptional flourishing of human imagination and passions in the realm of "superstition." His own skepticism towards this mythopoiesis is not that different from that of a major skeptic, like La Mothe Le Vayer; however, Hobbes overall stresses the political function of these religious myths, following in the steps of a political thinker like Naudé.

## 8 Hobbes's Contractarianism and French Libertinism

It thus appears undeniable that the Libertines' discourse had some impact on Hobbes. He learned from the French Libertines to treat both religion in general and pagan religion in particular as phenomena closely tied on the one hand to human psychology and to the requirements of politics on the other. As we have seen, biblical religion remains out of the picture, or it re-enters only partially, namely, to the extent that even "divine politics" is a form of politics that shares with "human politics" some general requirements inherent to any type of government over people. Yet, for Hobbes, the distinction between the two remains quite firm. While "the Religion of the Gentiles was a part of their policy," in the "kingdom of God," it is He himself that, "by supernaturall Revelation, planted Religion," "made to himself a peculiar Kingdome; and gave Lawes." Thus, in this case, "the Policy, and Laws Civill, are a part of Religion,"<sup>59</sup> and not the other way round like in "human politics."

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58 See *Leviathan*, p. 178.

59 See *Leviathan* pp. 178–180:

And therefore the Romans, that had conquered the greatest part of the then known world, made no scruple of tolerating any religion whatsoever in the city of Rome itself, unless it had something in it, that could not consist with their civil government; nor do we read, that any religion was there forbidden, but that of the Jews; who (being the peculiar

The impact of learned libertinism on Hobbes may be calculated in terms not only of reception but also of reaction. Knowledge of the libertine theories of Naudé and of La Mothe Le Vayer served Hobbes in elaborating a fuller concept of religion, even to the point of understanding “natural religion” and paganism in this broader framework, but it also led him to take a clear position against the assimilation between Moses and the “ancient legislators,” on whom the Libertines had principally exercised themselves. The reasons for this demarcation are not only religious but also political.

### *Religious Reasons*

Albeit in ambiguous and veiled ways, the French Libertines had seen the possibility of extending the model of the politico-religious legislator to include Moses and, to some extent, even Christ. In the *Considérations politiques* of Naudé, Moses, as Schino says,<sup>60</sup> “is not a prophet but an astute politician, the first legislator of the Jewish people and the founder of a kingdom;” his name completes a long list of “ancient legislators,” who made use of religion to “confer authority, strengthen and firmly establish their laws.” It was for this reason that they “made the people believe that they had received these laws from a deity.” The list begins with Zoroaster, includes Mohammed and ends with Moses, even while Naudé tells us: “he was the wisest, and *Exodus* tells us how he received his law directly from God.”<sup>61</sup>

With respect to Moses, the Hobbesian position is very different: not only was he not a “magician,” or a “divine magician,” as claimed by Naudé; he was not even a “legislator” in the strict sense. Already in the first work written in

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kingdom of God) thought it unlawful to acknowledge subjection to any mortal king or state whatsoever. And thus you see how the religion of the Gentiles was a part of their policy.

But where God himself, by supernatural revelation, planted religion; there he also made to himself a peculiar kingdom; and gave laws, not only of behaviour towards himself, but also towards one another; and thereby in the kingdom of God, the policy, and laws civil, are a part of religion; and therefore the distinction of temporal, and spiritual domination, hath there no place.

60 See A.L. Schino, “La fine del mito del legislatore: la trasformazione delle figure di Mosé e di Cristo a metà del XVII secolo,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 32 (2015), pp. 509–524, see especially p. 509.

61 See Naudé, *Considérations politiques*, p. 182. In the *Apologie*, Naudé attributes to Christ the use of a “divine magic” with which some legislators have accomplished their miracles, while the other legislators have simply used a “natural magic,” which is the equivalent of an occult physics and has in it nothing of the supernatural. See Naudé, *Apologie*, pp. 21–45.

France, *De cive*, it is clear that Moses was only an "interpreter of the laws and of the word [of God],"<sup>62</sup> not the author himself of the laws, which were instead given to him by God. The same "kingdom" in the old covenant belonged to God, based on a contract between Him and the people. Like that of Moses, the office of Christ also was not "royal," but only "vice-regal" in that the kingdom belonged to the Father.<sup>63</sup> A parallel between Moses and Christ applies also with respect to the laws: the former in that he had them from the Father, whereas the latter did not bring a new law but "passed [on] and promulgated the Father's laws."<sup>64</sup> Christ will be king only until after the final resurrection, at the time of His second coming. With some slight variation, this pattern is maintained and strengthened in *Leviathan*: Moses is more a "sovereign prophet" than a real and true legislator; he is not the author of the commandments but has only the function "to declare God's commandments to the people."<sup>65</sup> God spoke directly with Moses, even if it is not quite clear how he did it; in addition, as is known, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes denies that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. Then, as for the figure of Christ, *Leviathan* again accentuates His spiritual character so as to avoid any interference with the existing exercise of politico-religious sovereignty. To the three parts of his "office" (redeemer; pastor, counselor or teacher; king, king forever) correspond distinguishable temporal moments such that His function as king is exercised only after the final resurrection; "the kingdom of God is not of this world," as Hobbes does not cease to remind his readers. Thus, similar to Moses, not even Christ was sovereign legislator but rather a "subordinate or Viceregent of God the Father."<sup>66</sup> The profile which emerges of Moses and Christ, from *De cive* and even more by the time of *Leviathan*, no longer corresponds to that of the libertine "legislator," as Schino has highlighted in her comparison between Naudé and Hobbes.<sup>67</sup> To the contrary, one may even think that Hobbes has expressed not only his own personal conviction but a reaction to Libertines like Naudé. We must exclude the thought that, for Hobbes, unlike for Naudé, it is possible to include Moses, much less Christ, in the same sequence as includes Zoroaster, Minos, Lycurgus or Mohammed.

62 See *De cive*, XVI, 10, p. 239.

63 See *De cive*, XVII, 4, p. 252.

64 See *De cive*, XVII, 6, p. 255.

65 See *Leviathan*, XXXII, vol. III, p. 582.

66 See *Leviathan*, XLI, p. 768.

67 On the differences between Hobbes and the Libertines, see Schino, *art. cit.*, pp. 518–524.

### *Political Reasons*

Yet, political reasons also explain the reaction of Hobbes. They pertain to a different conception of the role which the contract plays in the establishment of the state, including that particular state which was the Jewish theocracy, from Abraham up to the kings of Israel. The conception of Naudé, focused on the idea of the “coup d’état,” left no room for a contractual foundation of sovereign power, based on the voluntary and rational consent of citizens. Such a foundation would be incomprehensible for the French Libertines. Taking especially from Montaigne certain ironic and skeptical considerations as to the “mystical foundations” of political authority (those that are mysterious and unutterable), and deepening them, Naudé considered that he had revealed the “*arcana imperiorum*” upon which rests sovereign authority, which is not based on the consent of the subjects, but on imposture, above all, religious imposture, on violence, on bullying, most often on “barbarism and cruelty.” These are, for him, “the beginnings of all monarchies.”<sup>68</sup> Nothing is further from the contractarian approach of Hobbes, and in fact the idea of the social contract remains foreign to all of the political thought of the French Libertines. The “legislator” of Naudé, again, with Moses as no exception, has the traits of the crudest Machiavellianism, consisting in resort to fraud and violence, without a thought for the possibility of a political pact. Rights, equality, contract – that is, the foundations of Hobbes’s thought – could only have appeared to Naudé as “new opinions, daring and such as to tidy up put weak brains,” (“opinioni nove, ardite e da mettere i cervelli deboli a partito”) as he wrote to Cardinal Barberini in commenting on the *De cive*. Still referring to Hobbes’s book, he would warn: “if the book were widely known, there would be no lack to the great confusion it would wreak” (“se il libro fusse commune non mancherebbe di recare gran confusione”).<sup>69</sup> Even if Naudé appreciates the novelty of Hobbes’s theses, his judgment remains reserved and not favorable at all.

Therefore, even from the political point of view, the profile of the Hobbesian sovereign is different from the libertine “legislator.” According to the author

68 See Naudé, *Considérations politiques*, pp. 94 and 132–133. See also our “Hobbes and the French Skeptics,” cited above, footnote 41, pp. 72–76 (“Hobbes’s Response to the Challenge of Political Skepticism”).

69 This judgment (is found in a letter of June 27 of 1642, addressed to Cardinal Barberini, in which Naudé notifies the cardinal of the publication of *De cive*, which he has just received. The letter was found and first published by Anna Lisa Schino, “Tre lettere inedite di Gabriel Naudé,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 4 (1987), p. 707. Naudé refers in particular to Hobbes’s thesis according to which the *unum necessarium* of faith is to believe that Jesus is the Christ.



of *Leviathan*, contractarianism applies also to theocracy. After the phase of the natural realm, based on divine omnipotence, even God rules as a king over the Jews by means of a "pact," first, with Abraham and, then, through Moses, with the people at the foot of the Mount Sinai. One deals here with a real "civil sovereignty," for which the consent of the people is needed.<sup>70</sup> In this theocratic stage, Moses is only the interpreter of God's laws and His prophet. Even "God's kingdom," as it is described in the Ancient Testament and interpreted in *Leviathan*, conforms to the general pattern of political covenant on which Hobbes's theory of sovereignty rests.

## 9 Conclusion: Demystification and Constructive Politics

Can we then maintain that the philosophy of Hobbes signals the end of the "myth of the legislator"<sup>71</sup> and, in consequence, the end of the libertine analysis of politics? The answer is "yes" to the first part of the question and "no" to the second. It is certain that, within the sphere of constructive political proposals, Hobbes's contractarianism ushered in a new era which one may define as "political idealism" insofar as the contractual model is an abstract model based upon assumptions that are no less abstract: equality, rights, state of nature, etc. This position may be contrasted with "political realism," which was maintained by Libertines and skeptics regarding the origins and exercise of power.

On the other hand, with respect to the political analysis of existing regimes and their "ideological" underpinnings, as we would term them today, important aspects of libertine analysis are not only retained in the thought of Hobbes but continue their function, often in direct continuity with the legacy of humanistic criticism, especially that enunciated by Valla.<sup>72</sup> This is certainly true for the

70 See *Leviathan*, xxxv, p. 636.

71 On this point, see Schino, *art. cit.*

72 On the Humanist legacy in general and Lorenzo Valla in particular, see our "Thomas Hobbes e Lorenzo Valla. Critica umanistica e filosofia moderna," *Rinascimento*, 39 (1999), pp. 515–568; "Hobbes, Valla and the Trinity," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 11 (2003), pp. 183–218; "Hobbes's Critique of the Doctrine of Essences and Its Sources," *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. by P. Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 337–357; "Hobbes e Valla. Teologia, linguaggio e riforma della filosofia prima," *La diffusione europea del pensiero del Valla*, ed. by Mariangela Regoliosi and Clementina Marsico, Atti del Comitato Nazionale VI Centenario della nascita di Lorenzo Valla (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2013), book I, pp. 327–344; "Thomas Hobbes and the Aristotelian account of the Virtues and His Renaissance Source Lorenzo Valla,"

study of the past, as in Hobbes's analysis of the relationship between power and the "religion of the Gentiles," as we have seen, but also for the disenchantment of the present, as in his theory of religion in general, for which Hobbes was an imposing leading figure. One revealing indicator of this among others is his recourse to techniques of demystification of "imposture," as these had been developed by the Libertines and then taken up by Hobbes in at least three crucial areas: the analysis of signs and miracles, the description of human credulity and the dismantling of the "Confederacy of Deceivers," ("*Impostorum confoederatio*")<sup>73</sup> on which rests the "kingdom of darkness." The birth of a new political paradigm which would rebuild the state on new foundations did not preclude that another paradigm such as French Libertinism, might still be useful for the demystification both of the past and of the present.<sup>74</sup>

*Translated by George Wright*

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*Early Modern Philosophy and the Renaissance Legacy* ed. by C. Muratori and G. Paganini, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), pp. 220–237.

73 See *Leviathan*, XLIV, p. 956. Of course, in the fourth part of *Leviathan*, Hobbes draws abundantly from Protestant criticism of Scholasticism and of the Roman Catholic Church. The relationship is yet to be studied between this kind of criticism and libertine criticism, which instead was generally averse to Protestantism or considered it only from a political standpoint. In the light of the connections we have studied here, Hobbes is perhaps the most prominent link between these two kinds of criticism. On the Protestant contribution, see A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and then G. Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 15–32.

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