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Reading between the lines – Leo Strauss and the history of early modern philosophy

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Winfried Schröder

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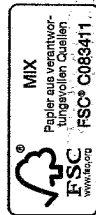
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Gianni Paganini

Art of Writing or Art of Rewriting?

Reading Hobbes's *De motu* against the Background of Strauss' Interpretation

1 Looking into Hobbes's files:

De motu, loco et tempore and its aftermath

As an opening work for Hobbes's "first philosophy", and the first in which he addressed the general questions of both his science and metaphysics, *De motu, loco et tempore* (hereafter DM) occupies a very special position in Hobbes's corpus. Being obliged to follow his interlocutor, Thomas White on his ground, Hobbes could not escape the big theoretical issues raised by White's scholastic theology.¹ He could not simplify or shorten the philosophical agenda, as he did later in *De Corpore*, excluding the field of theology from the competence of philosophy. However, the presence of this work in current Hobbes scholarship is very scant. Since it was written originally in Latin and barely addressed political issues, Anglo-Saxon scholars usually have avoided much engaging with it.² Most of the debate on Hob-

1 I quote this work in the main text, indicating chapters and sections, according to the Latin edn. made by Jean Jaquot and Harold Whitmore Jones (Hobbes 1973). I consulted also Harold Whitmore Jones' English transl. (1976) but I have often modified it to come closer to the Latin original. For the general characteristics of this work, left unpublished by Hobbes, features and history of the only extant manuscript, see Jaquot and Jones's Introd. (pp. 9–97), Paganini's Introd. to his Italian transl. (Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 9–126), and Paganini, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?: *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophical Career".

2 Curley is one of the most notable exceptions. See Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise", esp. pp. 580–7. Despite the theological import of DM, there are very scant references to it in Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, esp. pp. 347–9, and they concern: a) the difference between "proof" and "demonstration" in the case of God (on this, see also Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, pp. 124–5); b) the difference between the philosophical God and the Christian God, whose properties are impossible to demonstrate. As to a) Schuhmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes", p. 130 aptly remarked that "in Hobbes' theory of science there is no such a distinction". As to b), all the Christian tradition (including Luther and Calvin) meant that some sort of philosophical demonstration of God's existence should be counted among the "preambles" of the faith in the Christian God.

bes's theological positions has turned on *Leviathan* and the last writings, for instance, the famous debate on Calvin and Hobbes between Curley and Martinich and, more recently, the discussion reaching back to *Leviathan*, but not much earlier, between Springborg and Martinich.³ After the first edition by Jacquot and Jones, it can be said that mainly European scholars (Pacchi⁴ even before the edition, and after, Schuhmann, Leijenhorst, Lupoli,⁵ and myself) plus the American Curley, have addressed this work and paid it the attention that it deserves. Yet DM was a decisive *turning point*⁶ in Hobbes's intellectual history, both for the foundation of a new scientific ontology and for the bold attack it launched on the pretensions of philosophical theology. For, DM's uniqueness in Hobbes's corpus lies in the fact that it speaks against any possibility of rationally proving the existence of God. This is in sharp contrast to what is affirmed, for instance, in the *Elements* and *De Cive*; at the same time, Hobbes claims not to be irreligious, openly asserting that the only means to preserve religion from the attack of reason is to keep the two perfectly separate. For him, it is not the defeat of White's arguments that paves the way to atheism; the true adversary of religion is White himself, who promises in vain to give a demonstration *in forma* even though he cannot resist rational criticism (see esp. DM XXVI, 1–6).

Interpreters are divided about the historical meaning of this work and its consistency with Hobbes's other works. Pacchi termed this approach "fideistic skepticism";⁷ Curley spoke of a "fideistic experiment", bordering on a true "aberration" with regard to the remainder of Hobbes's work, so that in *Leviathan*

Hobbes abandoned this "strategy" that could have also "tactical disadvantages", such as to bring him "dangerously close to the doctrine of double truth".⁸ Schuhmann held that it was possible to resolve this conflict between reason and faith, and between DM and the other political works, by maintaining that the arguments about the existence of God which feature in the other works are not demonstrations *in forma* and that even the claim of God's existence (the sole attribute that can properly be ascribed to Him, according to DM)⁹ would be an honorific and not an assertive predicate. Therefore, all religious language should be considered as "pious" and not "dogmatic", expressing reverence and not affirming any philosophical truth.¹⁰ Cees Leijenhorst has followed more or less the same path,¹¹ but one should bear in mind the important caveat made by Patricia Springborg, according to whom this distinction between different kinds of language cannot be considered as the acknowledgment of "parallel truths".¹² From the theoretical standpoint, Hobbes did not put forth any doctrine of "doubtful truth", not even in DM. What is *above* reason cannot go *against* it, but it could represent a recommendation or a warning (a counsel or an order) aimed at guaranteeing the "legal order".¹³ Springborg convincingly argues that, besides the assertive and the honorific discourse, there is in the Hobbesian discourse a third register to be taken into account: the legal and the authoritative one, which does not stem from a demonstration, but from a command, the goal of which is peace and not truth.

However, the problem remains open of explaining how Hobbes could affirm, shortly before DM, (as Curley aptly remarked) that there is a God by the light of nature (DCi II, 21) or by natural reason (XIV, 19; XV, 14), and eight years later develop the famous argument from the first cause in *Leviathan* (XII, 6; cf. XI, 25)¹⁴ along the same lines which were sharply criticized and finally rejected in DM. So, if Leo Strauss had known this work, DM, which was totally unknown in his time, he would have raised the *vexata quaestio* of Hobbes's consistency: how could Hobbes have taken up again in 1651 the same causal argument that he

8 Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological/Political Treatise", pp. 581–2.

9 Several supporting passages in DM: XXVII, 8; XXXIV, 7; XXXV, 6 (God is "Ens"). See also DCi XV, 14; Lev. XXXI, 28.

10 See Schuhmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes"; Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Corporeal Deity".

11 Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Corporeal Deity".

12 Springborg, "Hobbes's Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle: A Corporeal God", pp. 926, 930–1, which I follow on this point.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 929–30.

14 For a presentation of these arguments see the article "God" in Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, pp. 120–8.

3 Recently the debate Springborg 2012a – Martinich 2012a,b has taken the place of the older one between Curley 1996a,b and the same Martinich 1996; however, both debates focus on the theological positions of the later Hobbes. Two recent articles discuss the late theology of Hobbes, especially the issue of the corporeal God, and provide an accurate overview of the different positions: see Springborg, "Hobbes's Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle: A Corporeal God"; Gorham, "The Theological Foundation of Hobbesian Physics: A Defence of Corporeal God". For an accurate examination of the *status quaestionis* on the whole of Hobbes's theological thought see now the important book of Schotte, *Die Enttarnung Gottes durch den Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes über Religion*, esp. pp. 4–46.

4 Pacchi, "Hobbes and the Problem of God"; *Id.*, *Scritti hobbesiani*, esp. pp. 55–8.

5 Schuhmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes"; Leijenhorst, *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism: the Late Aristotelian Setting of Thomas Hobbes' Natural Philosophy*; Lupoli, *Nei limiti della materia. Hobbes e Boyle: materialismo epistemologico, filosofia corpuscolare e 'dico corporeo'*; Paganini, "Hobbes alla ricerca del primo motore: il De motu, loco et tempore"; *Id.*, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*; *Id.*, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?"; *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophical Career".

6 So DM is defined in Paganini, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?"; *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophical Career".

7 Pacchi, *Scritti hobbesiani* (1978–1990), p. 59.

had already demolished in 1643? This is one of the incongruities, contradictions, or disjunctures that might legitimately hint at a double meaning, and accordingly need a double reading, of Hobbes's texts, as Strauss believed. Yet, before addressing the issue of a possible Straussian reading of Hobbes (which I shall examine, with important qualifications, at the end of this article), I shall stay, for now, close to the letter of Hobbes's text (DM) and after directly compare it to the other fully philosophical works, mainly *De corpore*. In so doing, I intend also to put forth the consequences that DM's approach had on Hobbes's later works.

2 *De motu's* theological minimalism¹⁵

Even though it remained unpublished, DM had a seminal influence on Hobbes's later works, indeed. Besides being an exercise in philosophical argumentation which provided nearly one fourth of the written text of *De Corpore*, DM acted as the "laboratory" where Hobbes tested the possible combination between his "first philosophy" and Galileo's science, using White's scholasticism as a agent. This latter was the bad example in question when Hobbes asked what the philosopher would have done if he had to choose between "dissimilar mares" (i. e. science and religion, reason and faith) that would have dragged him in "opposite directions" (DM XIV, 7). In opposition to White, who mingled both religion and philosophy, Hobbes's own approach would have been the good example of keeping the two domains rightly separate. However, in the field of theology, the final outcome of Hobbes's attitude was actually much more destructive than constructive. The main advantage of a polemical work is the fact that the author is not required to produce his own arguments, but simply to refute those proposed by his interlocutor, who represents a distillation of the entire metaphysical and theological tradition.

In reality, the final result of this sort of deconstruction is very scant, from the theological point of view. For Hobbes, in DM: A) There is no possible demonstration of the existence of God, even though His sole "true" attribute is supposed to be just existence. B) The only philosophical argument that Hobbes might have accepted (an argument based on the cause of motion in the universe) must end up by showing the irreconcilability of motion with the supposed immateri-

15 I adopt this nice formulation from Springborg, "Calvin and Hobbes: A Reply to Curley, Martinich and Wright", p. 3. Also Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 231 - 2, agrees on a certain anti-theological import of Hobbes's work, even while placing him in the history of the "theology of repristination" of the original Christian simplicity (p. 235). Neither author specifically refers, however, to DM.

ality of the first mover. C) Any analogy with the action of the human soul either is out of place or even risks extending materiality also to substances that should be immaterial (Hobbes's whole psychology is entirely materialistic, in DM as well as in the other works). D) Ultimately, any attempt to apply philosophical arguments to the problem of God's relationship to the universe cannot but lead to inextricable contradictions or to a concept of a corporeal first mover perpetually in motion. E) As an alternative, Hobbes leaves open the way to an infinite chain made up of causes and effects all brought about by means of motion, which implies once again their absolute materiality. This is a short summary of the main anti-theological theses developed in DM that exemplify the audacity of this work, despite all the efforts displayed to separate faith and philosophy, and to preserve the former from the corrosive action of the latter. Even though Hobbes does not explicitly state in DM a doctrine of a corporeal God (as he will do in the Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*), nor a flat rejection of incorporeal spirits (as in the English *Leviathan*), one could say that the author of DM laid the main foundations to achieve these results.¹⁶ This can be easily seen by a quick cross-referencing from DM to *Leviathan* and *De Corpore*. Indeed, it seems that DM established the range of possibilities and impossibilities Hobbes would later have either to develop or to eliminate. After a closer study of DM, we shall be able to draw up a *tabula absentiae* et *praesentiae* of these different arguments in the larger span of Hobbes's work.

3 Deconstructing the theological argument in *De motu*

However, before analysing the consequences of DM, I have to present the way in which Hobbes first deconstructs and then reconstructs the theological argument used by his interlocutor, Thomas White, an argument that is a combination of the first and the second "ways" developed in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.¹⁷ Hobbes's intention is to show that this argument is very far from achieving the result White wishes, and that by contrast it points in the opposite direction. Going back to the original source, Aristotle, Hobbes at first tries to rewrite the

16 For a deeper analysis of the extremely problematic situation of theology that comes out in DM see Paganini, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?: *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophical Career", esp. p. 300.

17 For a fuller analysis of this argument and Hobbes's treatment of it, see Paganini, *ibid.*, pp. 291 - 5.

argument, yet starting from his own new philosophical "nomenclature" (established at the beginning of this same chapter: DM XXVII, 1-7). This is the reason why his treatment of the subject takes the form of a rewriting: instead of writing a new demonstration, or even a counter-demonstration, Hobbes limits himself to rewriting Aristotle's and White's argument, but using his own method of demonstration and, what is more, imposing new meanings on the old metaphysical terms. This rewriting is preliminary to a close examination whose outcome is in reality a plain destruction. In this connection, Hobbes's intentions are rather deflationary than constructive.

Therefore, Hobbes does not need in DM any "art of writing", in the sense of Strauss: he never hides nor conceals between the lines the substance of his position, all the more so because he has no true demonstration to put in the place of the false one. Furthermore, he can consider himself safe from theological accusations, having shown that what harms religion is not his attitude of sharp separation, but instead White's philosophical ambitions, which turn out to be entirely deceiving.

I spoke about *rewriting*, but I might also use the metaphor of *translation*. In order to assess the real import of White's arguments, Hobbes must first translate the argument from the old language of metaphysics into the new language of his own "first philosophy". Of course, the novelty does not consist in using *new words*, but in using the same terms with *new meanings*.

Hobbes's reconstruction reads as follows. Aristotle and White would have reached their "truth" (the existence of an ultimate mover) starting from two basic principles ("axioms") which - he says - would be known by "induction". The first is plainly in conformity with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, indeed: *Quicquid movetur, movetur ab alio* (everything that is moved is moved by another), while the second principle: *Quicquid movet, movetur* (anything that moves is in turn moved) actually overlaps White's second, but it is reinterpreted by Hobbes in the light of Galileo's physics, even though he passes it off as Aristotelian (DM XXVII, 18). The importance of having completely changed the meanings of his philosophical "nomenclature", from an Aristotelian frame to a mechanistic one, cannot be overlooked. Just to take one significant example: since the first and main proof is a "way from motion" ("via motus"), the fact of transforming in depth the notion of movement (see DM XXVII, 7-12) cannot but change the nature, structure, and also the aim of this particular demonstration (the only one that Hobbes seems to be ready to take into consideration, indeed).

Moreover, Hobbes does not say that the second axiom should apply exclusively to secondary causes, and not to the first mover (this is what Aristotle meant). According to Aristotle, the mover can be "first" if and only if it moves

the heavens by operating not as an efficient, but as a final, cause - that is, without moving itself, whence the denomination of unmovable mover.

Obviously, this reserve was not due to an oversight on Hobbes's part,¹⁸ yet to a deliberately taken position. The ultimate result is turning the argument upside down; the least one can say is that "via motus" does not prove what Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and White meant it to prove, namely the existence of an unmoved and therefore spiritual first mover.

Let us first examine the argument as it features in DM XXVII, 18:

After seeing that the bodies constituting the finite world are finite in number, Aristotle derived from any one of them that was moved the motion of the second, and from the motion of this the motion of the third, until he reached the last. Now, because it was clear in accordance with the second axiom, that the body was in movement, since it had moved the next-to-last, and, in accordance with the first axiom, that it was moved by another one, he saw that he had to postulate the existence of an incorporeal mover.

Yet, in Hobbes's reconstruction, the combination of the two axioms produces something that is very opposite to this reassuring conclusion. In actual fact, the passage goes on thus:

However, Aristotle ought to have added that, from the second axiom, this incorporeal mover is also moved, and from the first axiom that it is also moved by something else.

In other words, even the 'first' mover needs moving by another one, so that it cannot be truly 'first'. Instead - it is just an implicit, but clear entailment - one could think of an infinite series of movers, which is to be explicated in the subsequent *De Corpore*. Or, the second alternative will be outlined in *De corpore* and is already clear in DM: the first mover must also be in movement, which implicitly implies that it cannot be but material, because from a strictly philosophical point of view only a body can move and be in movement.¹⁹ And

¹⁸ In at least one passage Hobbes was referring exactly to the correct Aristotelian doctrine: "quicquid enim movet aliquid, id ipsum et movetur (excepto primo motore Deo inconceptibili) (TOH IV: 15). In DM VII, 1 he acknowledges that the idea of God as a unmoved mover is "not natural": "Quod enim Deus movet immotus, id non est naturale sed supra naturam; atque etiam supra captum humanum, & concedendum fide in honorem Dei, cuius naturae aliquid à nobis conceptibile attribueret, nisi figuratè fas non est". This means that of a motionless mover one cannot have any philosophical notion, but only a dogma of faith: it can only be "believed in honour of God".

¹⁹ In DM Hobbes also insinuates other ideas very far from being 'orthodox': from the thesis of coeternity of God and world (which was admitted by some theologians *sub specie* of eternal creation) to the idea of eternal matter, until the insinuation that this eternal, possibly divine, matter

since every causality ultimately consists in motion, also the second way "ex ratione causarum efficientis" falls into the same difficulties, reaching a dead end too. It is true that in this very passage, following White's argument, Hobbes examines a third possibility, which is perfectly Aristotelian: "to postulate an incorporeal mover"; yet he adds immediately after that, given the new Galilean framework, this must imply that one be able to show "how incorporeal things, even though not moved, can yet move" (DM XXVII, 18; see also 20). In the Aristotelian and Scholastic view, this is not a big problem and in fact White simply refers to the example of "the soul in animals" (DM XXVII, 18) and shortly after to the human soul (DM XXVII, 20). Unfortunately, all this does not make sense in Hobbes's psychology that is entirely mechanistic and materialistic; for him, "there is no need to take refuge in an incorporeal mover", or in a "motionless mover" in order to explain the real functioning of the psychological operations. DM's mechanistic psychology is wholly made of material structures like heart, brain, nerves, sense organs, spirits (in the physiological meaning of this term: subtle, speedy and extremely active portions of matter), so that that there is no place for an immaterial mover like the traditional, spiritual soul. (DM XXVII, 19). The entire description of human life, including mental life, obeys the principles of the new physics, even though Hobbes is not able yet to develop the details of this functioning, except for some conjectural and very rough hypotheses. However, what he knows and says is already enough to reject White's metaphysics of the soul. This is also the reason why he cannot accept the analogy outlined by White between the human soul and God as the two types of spiritual movers supposed to move without any movement and without being themselves moved (DM XXVII, 19-20). White's spiritualistic psychology seems to Hobbes a perfect example of the plain absurdities into which metaphysics must fall, and he despises his adversary evoking the mockeries of Lucian addressing "the whole mob of metaphysicians: O Lucian, I wish you were alive" (DM XXVII, 20).

Besides this highly rhetorical *coup de theatre*, it is the very core of White's reasoning that is ridiculed by Hobbes and reduced to nonsense. All the complex argumentation put forth by White was meant to show that, "being unmoved, the soul moves itself"; yet, this affirmation amounts in DM to a plain contradiction. Ironically, Hobbes remarks that it seems that in metaphysics "we are allowed to pronounce contradictory statements about spiritual nature", whereas the same "is not allowed as regards corporeal nature." (DM XXVII, 19). Behind the mock-

plays the role of the first cause eternally in motion: exactly the second alternative outlined in DC XXVI, 1 (the first one is the infinite series of movers). See DM XXIX, 2; XXXIII, 7).

ery, for Hobbes the theological mover and the psychological one are on a par, yet with consequences that are contrary to White's. Even though it is not clearly stated, it is hinted clearly enough that Hobbes's materialist psychology necessarily implies, at least from a philosophical standpoint, a similar materialist theology, as will become clear in his later works. Since for White the human soul and God are supposed to share the same spiritual nature, at least in some measure (by "analogy", White says), overthrowing the former Hobbes ends up by turning upside down the Aristotelian theology as well: the infinite regress of movers cannot be stopped by a first spiritual mover, just as in psychology we do not need any incorporeal mover external to the body.²⁰

4 Anti-theological cross-references from *De motu to De corpore*

It is time now to see the consequences of DM in Hobbes's later works, evaluating the impact exerted by this unpublished manuscript on the books he brought out in the next dozen years. It is notable that this work had an important influence in three different directions, at least: first, in scientific matters, where Hobbes confirmed his adherence to Galileism; secondly, in the field of "first philosophy", where the author carried out his polemic against Aristotelian metaphysics, in favour of a new scientific philosophy; thirdly, in deepening the gulf between sound philosophy and the unsound pretensions of theology. I shall concentrate on the follow-up in this third domain, where the sharp separation between faith and reason took on the form, in the end, of the expulsion of theology from the very field of philosophy. Thus, theological minimalism became more and more an anti-theological strain.

a) Once dismantled in DM, the theory of an unmovable spiritual mover was not taken up again by Hobbes in the properly philosophical works (the case is a

²⁰ Given this connection, it is not an oddity that Hobbes introduces his own materialistic and mechanistic psychology in the same theological chapter that is devoted to the problem of the first mover. Hobbes's psychology is fully developed in DM XXX, 3-30 and almost entirely adopted in DC. An excerpt of this mechanistic psychology was published by Mersenne in his *Ballistica* (1644) and it will be largely reprised in the first part of the anthropological argument ("Of Man") of *Leviathan*. On Hobbes's psychology in connection with Gassendi's, see Paganini, "Hobbes, Gassendi e la psicologia del meccanicismo".

little different for the "popular" works that are aimed at political or religious topics where the immateriality of God is rescued at least as a sign of "honour")²¹.

b) By contrast, after being implicitly suggested in DM, the possibility of an infinite regress is also considered in *De Corpore*, where Hobbes affirms that a regress *ad infinitum* does not result in a logical impossibility, but just in psychological discomfort, which brings the philosopher, or simply man, a sense of weariness (*defatigatus*) in going back through the chain of causes. Hobbes hinted at this very idea of an uninterrupted chain of causes in another passage of *De Corpore*, where, referring to the cause of the universe, he speaks of it indifferently in the singular and the plural: "one eternal cause or more causes" of the universe. This section of DC takes up again the examination of the two possible proofs of the existence of God as a first mover or a first cause (which means for Hobbes the same, because any causation is made by motion) exactly at the same point where he had left them in DM; yet, the later work is much more explicit than the former, so that it is worth quoting in full. The first phrase of *De corpore* adds a new qualification that makes of the infinite regress just a *psychological* and not a *logical* impossibility:

"And though a man may from some effect proceed to the immediate cause thereof, and from that to a more remote cause, and so ascend continually by very correct ratiocination [ratiocinatione rectissima] from cause to cause; yet he will not be able to proceed eternally, but wearied [defatigatus] will at last give up, without knowing whether it were possible for him to proceed to an end or not".

21. It seems that the idea of a "corporeal God" was already at the heart of an early long letter (56 pages) of Hobbes to Descartes (5 November 1640), which is no longer extant, even though we can reconstruct its contents from the correspondence between Descartes and Mersenne. On this early episode and the later phases of Hobbes's philosophical career, especially referring to the problem posed by the corporeal God, see the excellent overview in Springborg 2012. She considers and discusses a lot of recent research by several scholars (especially Leijenhorst, "Hobbes's Corporeal Deity"; Schuhmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes"; Lupoli, *Nei limiti della materia. Hobbes e Boyle: materialismo epistemologico, filosofia corpuscolare e 'dio corporeo'*; Weber, *Hobbes et le corps de Dieu*; Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*; Id., "On Hobbes's English Calvinism: Necessity, Omnipotence, and Goodness"; Id., "Epicureism and Calvinism in Hobbes's Philosophy: Consequences of Interpretation"; Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise"; Id., "Calvin and Hobbes, or Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian"; Calvin, "Reply to Professor Martinićh") on the late attempts made by Hobbes to suggest that God could be a "fluid substance", with all the problems of consistency between theology and his philosophy that this hypothesis raises. This late Hobbes is beyond the scope of this article, which mainly addresses the early work of the philosopher, trying to show that some premises of these later developments were already laid at the time of DM.

Hobbes explains that no absurdity will follow in either hypothesis, which is enough to admit the possibility of an infinite regress. What comes after is even more important, because now in *De Corpore* Hobbes makes explicit what in the parallel passage of DM was still implicit: more an entailment than a clear affirmation. *De Corpore* reads thus:

"Besides, though from this, that nothing can move itself, it may rightly be inferred that there was some eternal first mover; yet never can be inferred what people are used to inferring, namely that that mover was eternally immovable, but rather eternal motion [aeternum motum]. For as it is true, that nothing is moved by itself; so it is true also that nothing is moved but by that which is already moved [ita etiam verum est nihil moveri nisi a moto]" (DC XXVI, 1).²²

One can easily recognize at work here both the axioms of which DM had already spoken (DM XXVII, 18) and that we analysed before. It is also absolutely astonishing that in this very section of *De corpore*, when referring to the final outcome of the causal argument, Hobbes speaks indifferently of "one or many eternal cause or causes" ("ad-causam aeternam unam vel plures"), singular and plural on a par.

c) In the last period, the "corporeal god" which is always in motion reappears in the *Appendix* of the Latin *Leviathan* and in the *Answer to The Catching of Leviathan*. This "corporeal god" seems legitimately derived from the second axiom of DM's "via motus", which is about a mover continually moving. By making Galileo's physics foundational for any ontology, Hobbes implies that nothing but body can act by motion. This is already clear in DM, even though he hesitated there between the thesis of a unique corporal mover (singular, as in the Latin *Leviathan*) and the possibility of a chain of several and potentially infinite causes (plural), which was not excluded either in DM or in *De Corpore*.²³

d) The affirmation, firmly established in DM (see esp. XXVI, 1-6), that the theological argument does not have the formal status of demonstration,²⁴ explains the reason why the so-called "proofs" (better: arguments) scattered throughout Hobbes's subsequent political works appear to be so loose and rough. In fact, they are not, and cannot be, demonstrations *in forma*, rather being some pieces of rhetorical discourse directed at a wider and non-professional audience; their aim is not an exercise in proper philosophical argumentation, but rather to recommend obedience towards authorities, which are at the

22 For the original Latin text see Schuhmann's critical edn., Schuhmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes", p. 282.

23 For this last phase of Hobbes's theology see the literature mentioned above, n. 21.

24 Cf. Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 67-74.

same time civil and religious. In that connection, affirmation of the existence of God constitutes a crucial piece of the theological-political complex, representing the basis of political obligation, yet it is not matter of properly philosophical investigation.

e) On the other hand, much emphasis has been put by some scholars on the causal argument that is presented in *Leviathan* (Lev. XII, 6). Referring to those passages, some interpreters have claimed that, besides an "informal belief in God", Hobbes maintained a real "proof for the existence of God. Hobbes believes that there is such a proof, and again his belief fits into a long and honourable tradition" that goes back to the "causal argument" laid by Aquinas.²⁵ As we have seen, in fact this causal argument had been already dismantled by Hobbes in his polemic against White almost ten years earlier. So, it is surprising to read that this argument can be considered at least as a "proof", whereas Hobbes claimed in DM that there cannot be any true philosophical demonstration of God's existence or any other theological topic.²⁶ Perhaps, one could reply (like Martinich) that the objections raised by Hobbes against White are just arguments *ad hominem*, which are addressed to scholastic metaphysics, and not to philosophy at all.²⁷

²⁵ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, p. 193. Most likely, this affirmation depends on the fact that Martinich neglects the crucial importance of DM's argument on this point (see his Chapter 7 "God"); this author refers to DM, mostly in the Appendix A (pp. 347-9) and in Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, pp. 124-5; both times, he distinguishes between "demonstration" and "proof". See *contra* this argument Schuttmann, "La question de Dieu chez Hobbes". Also according to Schotte, *Die Entmachtung Gottes durch den Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes über Religion* (see esp. his valuable section on "Die Erkenntnis Gottes: Der Schluss auf die erste Ursache", pp. 99-112), there is in Hobbes no real "proof" of God's existence, rather "an analysis of a psychological proceeding", which ends by postulating the existence of a first cause. For Hobbes, the existence of a "first mover" would be "plausible" and "free from contradictions", even though it would be more the premise than the justification of the causal description of the world (see esp. p. 111). In his analysis of this point, Schotte mainly focuses on Hobbes's major works, whereas a deeper examination of DM's peculiarities might question (as we have shown) all this supposed "plausibility" and "absence of contradictions" in God's notion.

²⁶ Martinich admitted this point in his subsequent work: Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, p. 125.

²⁷ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, p. 350 goes much further trying to show that Hobbes is a good Protestant (even though a "nonstandard" one), not only for separating theology from philosophy (p. 347), but also for criticizing philosophers from the standpoint of the Bible: "Any Reformer might have said something similar" (p. 350).

This possible objection does not take into account that Hobbes qualifies simply as proceeding *aphilosophos* (unphilosophically) any way of applying philosophy to religious issues, i.e. of doing philosophical theology (DM XXVI, 1), even if it is true that Hobbes primarily presents his thoughts on the causal argument and "via motus" as a critique of White's scholastic reasoning. Furthermore, it is also true that the so called "proof" of *Leviathan* is basically the same as Aquinas's second way (as it is acknowledged also by Martinich)²⁸, which in turn comes down to the first way ("via motus"), according to Hobbes's mechanistic conception of causality: so, what hits White in DM XXVII, 18 should by the same token hit the argument in Lev. XII, 6.

However, instead of reading between the lines or guessing secret intentions, I prefer remarking for now the "disjuncture".²⁹ This should not prevent us from acknowledging the different registers of the two kinds of text that tell the difference between the popular and political works (such as *Leviathan*), on the one hand, and the more sophisticated and philosophically professional works, such as DM and *De Corpore*, on the other. In these latter, Hobbes felt free to call in question what he apparently had allowed in the former. As Patricia Springborg has rightly remarked, "it is not necessary to adopt wholesale the Straussian doctrine about secret writing to concede this point";³⁰ it is just recommended to realize that different topics (pure philosophy, politics, and religion) needed different registers and addressed different audiences. Their respective aims and targets were not always the same.

f) None of the other theological arguments used by White ("necessary being", infinite, "being a se", first change) or by Descartes (ontological argument, ideological proof, "causa sui") was taken up again by Hobbes in the subsequent works, either to be discussed or to be refuted.³¹ It seems that after their deconstruction in DM and in the *Objections* against Descartes's *Meditations*, they fell once and for all into disrepute for Hobbes.

g) The most spectacular and also profound change from DM to *De Corpore* can be found, however, up-river of theology, and consists in no less than a radical shift in the definition of philosophy as such. This shift is a consequence of the decision in *De Corpore* to exclude theology from the very sphere of philosophy.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁹ I adopt this nice expression from Springborg, "Calvin and Hobbes: A Reply to Curley, Martinich and Wright".

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³¹ On these different arguments, esp. in DM, see Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 80-7; *Id.*, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?", pp. 286-7; *Id.*, "Significato ed errore in Hobbes".

Whereas in DM Hobbes showed appreciation for the function of the "categories", when they are meant as "appellations" ("names or denominations of things" DM V, 2), in *De corpore* he claims not to see "great usefulness" in the "predicaments" of philosophy (DC II, 16).

Therefore, philosophy excludes, for epistemological reasons, those things for which it is impossible to "search out the properties of bodies starting from their generation, or their generation from their properties." Thus philosophy will not talk about angels, nor about supposedly incorporeal entities,³⁵ and above all, not about God and theology, which is the field of the "ingenerable" ("the doctrine of God, eternal, ingenerable, incomprehensible, and in whom there is nothing neither to divide nor compound, nor any generation to be conceived" (DC I, 8). Thus, "first philosophy" is reduced not only *de facto* as in DM but also *de iure* to a general theory of the body, its position in time and space; its action, cause, quantity etc. (DC VII-XIV). Philosophy ought not to deal with "immaterial" and "immobile" substances, which had constituted an important and privileged part of Aristotelian and scholastic metaphysics³⁶. In *De corpore*, theology, including natural or "rational" theology and not only revealed or positive theology, does not belong to philosophy any more. Whereas God could be treated in DM under the general label of being, now in *De Corpore* He cannot be, given that philosophy is restricted to what can be divided or compounded, i. e. to the effects of which one can seek the causes.

This new dislocation of theology in relation to philosophy can be considered as a direct consequence of the anti-theological critique in DM. Once DM has shown the dangerous consequences of keeping faith and reason together, *De Corpore* develops a strategy of immunization, excising theology from philosophy. The embarrassing outcome of DM comes down to this: the only meaningful assertion one can make about God is that He exists, even though this existence cannot either be logically demonstrated or empirically established. In *De Corpore*, the straightforward exclusion of theology from philosophy seems to be the most viable alternative once the complete deconstruction of philosophical theology in DM has been made. *De Corpore* actually ends up by excluding theology from philosophy, yet only *after* DM had strongly put them in opposition.

³⁵ Philosophy does not treat of natural and political history either, because they are given by experience and not by demonstration in terms of causes of their generation. Nor will it talk about revelation and religious worship, even less of "false" doctrines such as astrology (ibid.).

³⁶ I have extensively dealt with the status of philosophy (comparing DM and DC) in the introduction to my edition of DM: Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 48-67.

play. In this work, philosophy, esp. "first philosophy", is no longer defined as a general science of being, according to the definition that Hobbes had taken from Aristotle, for once agreeing with his scholastic adversary. In DM, philosophy is defined as the "science of the general theorems" whose "truth can be demonstrated by natural reason", whereas "first philosophy" specifically demonstrates "theorems about the attributes of being in general" (DM I, 1; cf. IX, 16).³² In this work, Hobbes rehabilitates the original Aristotelian phrase "first philosophy" (which will be retained in DC, Part II), while rejecting the spurious name of "metaphysics", to which he imputes all the mistakes of the scholastic tradition. This latter claimed to provide metaphysicians with "a doctrine of the supernatural kind," as if they were "able to transcend the limits of their nature." (DM IX, 16). In *De corpore*, by contrast, philosophy is considered as knowledge enjoying a narrower scope: its domain covering only "effects or appearances" that can be "generated", i. e. caused³³ - in other words, not being in general, which would include being par excellence, God, but only accidents of the bodies. Bodies in themselves are impossible to create or destroy, except by an intervention of divine omnipotence, so that what is properly caused or generated cannot be but their accidents (already in DM: see DM XII, 5; XII, 8; XIII, 9; XXXV, 1; XXXVII, 1; XL 1 and 8).

It is also notable that in *De corpore* Hobbes does not provide the reader with a proper definition of "first philosophy", even though the second part bears this title. In the list of the "main parts of philosophy", with which the first chapter of *De corpore* ends, "first philosophy" is not even mentioned, whereas it is said that philosophy in general is divided into "*Naturalis et Civilis*" (DC I, 9). However, from the list of the subjects treated in the second part (place and time, body and accident, cause and effect, potency and act etc.), it becomes clear that, in comparison to the wider definition of DM, the proper object of "first philosophy" in *De Corpore* is tantamount to a general theory not of being, but of body.³⁴

³² For this characterization of philosophy, and esp. "first philosophy", which Hobbes opposes to "bad" metaphysics, considered as a Scholastic degeneration, see Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 50-5. In reality, Hobbes transforms the list of "categories" into a kind of philosophical and scientific "nomenclature" (see DM V, 2; XIV, 1; for a commentary Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 55-7).

³³ See *De Corpore*, Schuhmann edn. I, 2, p. 12: "Philosophia est effectuum sive phenomenon ex conceptis eorum causis sive generationibus, et versus generationum, quae esse possunt, ex cognitibus effectibus per rectam rationationem acquisita cognitio". The *Leviathan* definition is similar (Lev. XLVI, 1), yet adding a reference to technical utility of philosophy and science.

³⁴ For this shift from DM to DC see my introd. (Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 50-5); on the connection with the annihilatory hypothesis (which is just hinted at in DM) see Paganini, "Hobbes, Gassendi und die Hypothese der Weltvernichtung".

5 A new developmental picture of Hobbes's philosophical career

Might this shift from DM to *De Corpore* be explained in a Straussian way, as a strategic move to avoid the clash between philosophy and theology, or even as a trick aimed at avoiding dangerous topics in an age of oppression? As we already said, Leo Strauss did not know the existence of DM, which was discovered at the beginning of the 1970s and published only in 1973. However, it is important to ask what impact DM could have on the famous Straussian thesis and vice versa, or if and how the Straussian method is possibly applicable to a work such as DM. As Curley has aptly remarked, Strauss did not always think that Hobbes was a covert atheist, and sometimes he presented him as a philosopher sympathetic to natural religion.³⁷ However, Strauss always assumed Hobbes to have been under pressure of censorship and constrained to conceal his true opinions about religious matters. Can our present knowledge of DM shed new light on the whole question of Hobbes's writing in the age of persecution?

If one compares DM's more engaged approach on the one hand, and on the other *De Corpore*'s disengagement from burning theological questions, it would be tempting to think that the former is a hidden and esoteric work, and the latter

instead a public and exoteric one. Accordingly, one should read DM as the true bearer of Hobbes's convictions and *De Corpore*, by contrast, as a compromise between his intimate thoughts and the constraints of censorship. In fact, however, DM was not a clandestine manuscript, addressed to a hidden and heterodox audience. All the evidence is against this thesis, even though both the author's name and the title of the work are missing in the manuscript. First, the only extant manuscript, which probably came from Mersenne's convent and belonged to Le Tellier's library, is not the autograph copy, but a fair copy made in two different scribal hands. It seems that this was the final copy prepared for the press, and indeed it shows traces of Mersenne's careful editing made with a view to publication. Second, Mersenne himself is the main witness for the authorship and title of the work, since he mentioned it with the title *De motu, loco et tempore*, at the same time attributing it to Hobbes, and quoting some excerpts from the manuscript.³⁸ In fact, the copy of DM that still survives was just one step from being published. So, we can imagine that, at least for a while, Hobbes intended to get it out and not to keep it hidden. We do not know why the author finally gave up on publishing the manuscript, but it is unlikely that this happened for fear of censorship. Third, it seems that Mersenne was not particularly struck by the audaciousness of the contents. In his excerpts from the chapter on mechanistic psychology, he simply skipped over the passages that assimilated men and animals and challenged the traditional conception of human freedom by denying the most usual notion of free will.³⁹

Given the lack of any documentary evidence, we can only speculate about the abandoning of what appears to have been a text ready for the publication. Far from hinting at the risk of a possible persecution, Hobbes's change of mind could have been due to the fact that he was quickly engaged in writing a new work *in sua propria persona*, *De corpore*, and therefore lost interest in publishing a polemical work that had had to follow White's agenda, and not his

³⁸ See Jaquot and Jones's introd. to their edn.; Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, pp. 121–3.

³⁹ See Mersenne, "Praefatio utilis ad lectorem" (p. not numbered). Mersenne introduces thus the summary of Hobbes's psychology, stressing its mechanistic feature: "Cum 24 prop. Ball. plura iuxta subtilissimi Philosophi Thomae Hobbes attulerimus, et quasdam Philosophiae quam exornat partes legerim, quae omnia fere per motum localem explicant, velim etiam addere modum quo nostrarum facultatum operationes ex eodem motu concludit, ut lector perspiciat rum quaecumque fiunt in nobis ad vim Ballisticam referri possint, ut obiecta per sensus exteriores irruentia tot iaculis nobis nos impetere, hucque et illic impellere videantur, perpetuamque Ballisticam exerceant". At the end of this summary, Mersenne writes as follows: "Quod philosophiae genus si tibi arideat, precibus autorem urgeas ut corpus universum posteritati non invideat". This summary is a good synthesis of DM XXX, 3–26.

³⁷ See Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise", p. 498, for a careful analysis of these different presentations of Hobbes's ideas. The main texts of Strauss to be considered are: Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 74, 76 (Hobbes is not a believing Christian, but sympathetic to natural religion); Id., *Natural Right and History*, pp. 198–9 (Hobbes is presumably an atheist). The considerations of Strauss, *Die Religionskritik des Hobbes. Ein Beitrag zum Verstandnis der Aufklahrung* (written however in 1933–1934), esp. pp. 279–84, 334–9, contain a more in-depth study. According to Strauss, in Hobbes's opinion revelation cannot be recognized with certainty either by one who receives it directly (the impossibility of distinguishing between true and false prophets) or by one who receives it from intermediaries (raising all the problems concerning authenticity, canon, historicity, meaning etc. of Scripture). Besides, according to Strauss, Hobbes insinuates a 'discreet rejection of miracles', suggesting simply that 'it is very difficult to verify miracles' (pp. 339–40). Equally critical theses about revelation, prophecy, miracles, the authority of Scripture, etc., are attributed to Hobbes by Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise", pp. 520–72. In Strauss's work Hobbes is basically a representative of the Epicurean tradition for his materialism, his profound humanism, the reject of the fear of death as well as of gods etc. (see esp. pp. 315–9). In comparison with the original Epicureanism, Hobbes's critique of religion is presented as "a post-Christian modification of Epicureanism" (p. 317); on the whole, Hobbes would be the closest author both to Socinianism and Epicureanism (p. 322). For the general frame of Strauss' interpretation see Strauss 1952, where Hobbes is just touched on as one of the many authors who suffered from persecution of their ideas (p. 33).

own, as was the case with DM. In deciding to give up a work already finished in favour of one in progress, Hobbes probably underestimated the time that it would take to finish *De Corpore*. We know that at times during the production of his *magnum opus* Hobbes made a similar mistake in forecasting the timing of its completion.⁴⁰ In fact, *De Corpore* took twelve more years to finish.

Commenting on DM's text, Edwin Curley observed that this work would be enough to undermine the previously assumed developmental picture, according to which Hobbes passed from an earlier phase (*Elements, De Cive*), when he believed that natural reason could demonstrate the existence of God, to a later stage (*De Corpore*), when he became skeptical of the soundness of these arguments and shifted to a fideistic form of theism.⁴¹ In reality, reading DM, we can see that a complete deconstruction of philosophical theology was already achieved twelve years earlier, in DM, and, as we have shown, the disengagement from theology that one can see in *De corpore* is rather the consequence or the aftermath of that previous work; the same can be said about the shift from a broad to a narrower and more explicitly materialistic definition of philosophy itself. We can also add that the discovery and the study of DM does not make it necessary to "read Hobbes between the lines", according to Strauss' famous phrase. In DM everything is said, and clearly said, within the lines. On the other hand, the decline of the Straussian way of reading does not necessarily mean the rise of a more or less "orthodox" Protestant Hobbes, a good "English Calvinist" in Martinich's opinion, or a more Lutheran one in Wright's case.⁴² As a

⁴⁰ See the abundant documentation gathered by Noel Malcolm in his edn. of Hobbes's *Correspondence*.

⁴¹ Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise" 1, p. 579.

⁴² See Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, esp. pp. 1-16; Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, p. 15. In Martinich's view, *Leviathan* is, literally, to be taken as "a Bible for modern man" (Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, p. 45); he quantifies "at least 95 percent of Hobbes's remarks about religion" as "consonant with orthodox Christianity" (p. 14). However, it is extremely unlikely that one can find a sympathizer of Calvinism (Martinich) or Lutheranism (Wright), who affirms like Hobbes these three theses all together: a/ it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of God and any attempted proof is flawed; b/ God is corporeal and affirming the opposite (like Bramhall and any 'orthodox' theologian) comes down to atheism; c/ the human soul is also material and it is equal to the mechanical life of the body: it is nothing but matter and motion. Despite the attempt to explain Hobbes's "historic materialism" as an aim "at returning Christianity to its authentic, 'primitive' forms", or at separating "Jerusalem from Athens" (Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 235, 213), Hobbes's whole project is much more inspired by the new science than by "a theology of reprobation" (*ibid.*): the former is the leading impulse, the latter just a consequence or an adaptation. In fact, despite their tenden-

matter of fact, the nature and position of God and of the spirits in general, that emerge from DM, are extremely problematic, even from a protestant viewpoint. In fact, a developmental picture of Hobbes's philosophical career turns out again to be possible, even though it must be reshaped; however, the new perspective that results does not lead in the direction of "protestant" interpretations of the reason-faith conflict, because of the importance of the scientific context that Hobbes's thought takes on.

Hobbes's emphasis on semantic consistency increases after DM, because from then on he had at his disposal at least one strong model of meaningful discourse structured around a solid "nomenclature": Galileo's physics and cosmology. This was a "mathematical" discourse, in the broader meaning of this term indicated by Hobbes himself - a discourse in which unequivocal meanings are established, and this not simply *ex hypothesi*, but with all the evidence of demonstration and empirical knowledge. From the start of DM, Hobbes underlines the necessity that philosophy, which for him includes "every science", ought to be treated "logically", in order "to know the necessity of consequences and the truth of universal propositions" (DM I, 3). Arithmetic and geometry represent for Hobbes the perfect pattern of any science and they are usually combined under the name of "mathematics": as he says, "likewise from *mathanaitis*, that is [in Greek] 'to learn'", since "their pupils were said not only to have heard, but also for sure to have learnt something", whereas none of the other disciplines "has taught anything that was not open to question" (DM I, 1). Long before *Leviathan* and *De Corpore*, then, DM was the first systematic work to include science and "first philosophy" together, endowing philosophy with all the exactness of modern science; a project revealed not only in choosing meanings that could be precisely defined, but also in organizing these same meanings in a whole discourse free from internal contradictions and open to check by experience.

From DM on Hobbes progressively extended these strong "scientific" requirements for selecting or reshaping sound meanings coming from all kinds of discourse, both philosophical and religious, even while retaining the residual possibility of a "pious" discourse as a "gesture" of worship or honorific sign that does not imply any declarative statement, in the proper sense of this word.

cy to make of Hobbes a much more "orthodox" figure than is usual, both Martinich and Wright are obliged to seriously qualify their description of him as a good protestant: the former speaks about his "nonstandard religious views" (Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, pp. 2-5); the latter, in his Afterword, depicts Hobbes as "derived from and supportive of Christianity", but also adds that he was "no less radical" than "traditional" (Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, p. 311). It is a little difficult to adjust both the adjectives to the same author.

It is precisely thanks to DM's "linguistic turn" and its concern with a correct "nomenclature" fitting the needs of the Galilean science, that *Leviathan* could go a step further from the simple opposition of philosophy and theology.⁴³ In DM, Hobbes still thought he could find a safe refuge for the special status of religious discourse, declaring that, when the investigation about "the nature and cause of motion" reaches conclusions that seem to contradict faith, the philosopher can manage to reconcile faith with "free inquiry", or at least to avoid their clash, saying of the proposition "already held by the Christian faith": "I do not understand under what meaning of terms that proposition is true", since the terms involved in a religious proposition refer to objects that are not imaginable (DM XXVI, 7).

I have called this kind of solution, which is put forth exclusively in DM, a "linguistic (or semantic) compromise" between the requirements of the correct philosophical nomenclature, enounced in the same work, and the needs of religious discourse.⁴⁴ It is clear that it is an extremely fragile compromise, which rests on two premises present throughout Hobbes's work: the conventional stipulation of meanings and the emphasis on the relative autonomy of religious discourse, especially when it is considered rather as a sign of honour and worship than as declarative language. Nevertheless, due to its frailty, this "compromise" will be abandoned in *Leviathan* and Hobbes will never return to it, not even in the last phase of his materialistic theology.

What is more, in *Leviathan* Hobbes overthrows this approach to the status of religious statements. Instead of saying that "mystery" and "incomprehensibility" can be a safe harbor when it is a matter of faith", he admits now that even in this field "enjoining belief in impossibilities" or "enjoining belief in contradictions" would be a remedy much worse than the damage inflicted by incredulity. In fact, appealing to mystery and incomprehensibility, putting faith not only over, but also against, reason, would be at the origins of the very kind of disbelief that discredited the reputation of religion, undermining its credibility (Lev. XII, 25). Accepting incomprehensibilities eventually leads to the contestation and rejection of beliefs that are impossible to be believed (Lev. XII, 24), because a "revelation a man may indeed have of many things above, but nothing against natural reason" (Lev. XII, 25).⁴⁵ What was once called in DM "incomprehensible", is now qualified in *Leviathan* as a plain "absurdity".⁴⁶

⁴³ I have developed much further these aspects in Paganini, "Introduction", in: Hobbes, *Moto, luogo e tempo*, and Id., "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God?".

⁴⁴ See Paganini, "Significato ed errore in Hobbes".

⁴⁵ This is seen in the famous opening of Part III of *Leviathan*, where it is said that we cannot and must not renounce either our senses or experience or "our natural reason", even when the subject of discourse is the prophetic word of God. In the word of God there can be "many

This is the reason why Hobbes in *Leviathan* is no longer satisfied with religious meanings that he previously had considered as just apophatic or negative expressions, or purely performative utterances (like signs of honour: Lev. XII, 7), as it happened before in *Elements of Law* or DM. It is true that he still mentions the utility of signs of honour, especially referring to God, when he lists the "tributes of divine honour" (Lev. XXXI, 14-28), but - as Martinich aptly remarked - this is done concerning "what is honourable to say about God and not what is descriptively true".⁴⁷ Starting from the principle that "immaterial substance" is self-contradictory (Lev. XII, 7), in *Leviathan* Hobbes is looking now for positive meanings, which could be in line with the "nomenclature" outlined in DM and later confirmed in DC. And this search is now on display in the field of religious discourse, too. All that explains a great shift that passes between DM and *Leviathan*, and can be summarized roughly thus: many of the notions that in DM were isolated from the effects of philosophical criticism and then maintained as "incomprehensible" (such as the notion of spiritual substances) from *Leviathan* onwards will be denounced as "absurdities", and this move will lead to the attempt to understand spirits as corporeal substances, according to one only of the two kinds of entities classified in DM, the imaginable ones.

6 Might *De motu* be read in a Straussian way?

To conclude, the rediscovery and the analysis of DM posit in new terms the problem of applying Strauss' hermeneutics to Hobbes' thought. At first, it seems that this methodology is "legitimate", since many of the conditions established by Strauss himself⁴⁸ are found also in the discussion present in DM about the impossibility of demonstrating God's existence: first, the obvious existence of a state of persecution and censorship; secondly, a blatant contradiction between the central thesis of DM (i.e. the impossibility to philosophically demonstrate God's existence and theological arguments) on the one hand, and the appeal

things above reason (that is to say, which cannot by natural reason be either demonstrated or confuted), yet there is nothing contrary to it." Thus it seems that "the fault is either in our unskillful interpretation or erroneous ratiocination" (Lev. XXII, 2). This attitude is also present in Hobbes's doctrine of the Trinity and is deeply influenced by the humanistic critique of Lorenzo Valla in particular.

⁴⁶ Paganini, "How Did Hobbes Think of the Existence and Nature of God? : *De Motu, Loco et Tempore* as a Turning Point in Hobbes's Philosophical Career", pp. 299 - 303.

⁴⁷ Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, chap. 1, pp. 22-37.

to the causal argument on the other, under focus in the political work; thirdly, the full consciousness, on Hobbes's side, of the clash between the scientific approach he employs (which can be summarized in the 'nomenclature' of DM) and the professions of orthodoxy in the other works; fourth, the impossibility of reducing these professions to pure inaccuracy, precisely because of the prominent position accorded in DM to the accusation of being 'a-philosophical' addressed to theology. It is rather the causal arguments (like the one employed in Lev. XII, 6) that are to be considered conventional and philosophically hardly relevant.

However, the very nature of a work such as DM also requires notable modifications to Strauss' model, which seems too rough to take into account DM's complexity. The main modifications that are necessary to adopt are as follows:

a) Strauss' rigid distinction between esoteric and exoteric works appears to fit pre-modern times – the classical and medieval traditions – better than modernity.⁴⁹ In the case of authors like Hobbes, Bayle, Spinoza etc. it is more appropriate to differentiate between literary genres addressed to different types of readerships. This distinction sometimes does not depend on or overlap with the exoteric-exoteric dichotomy. As we have seen, DM is neither an "occult" nor a "clandestine" work (even if it remained unpublished), but its particular traits depend on the fact that it is intended for a readership of professional philosophers. Therefore, this work is strictly 'scientific' and 'rational' in scope, it does not address any practical purpose and is not meant to be persuasive, contrary to political or theological-political works. The great divide does not pass between secrecy and public sphere, but rather between 'professional' and 'popular' works: both share in the open debate, more or less wide, even though the audiences are totally different.

b) Roughly put, Strauss imagined that in the case of his authors "under persecution", text and sub-text would run parallel to each other, following paths that would never meet. He talked explicitly of "two doctrines": one popular and edifying, staying on the surface of the text, and the other secret and subversive; one for "the vulgar", another for "the wise" or "the initiated".⁵⁰ Moreover, in order to expound the contrasts between the "two doctrines" in the writings of

⁴⁹ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p. 33 identifies two types of esoteric writers. Both groups try to conceal doctrines, which might lead to their persecution. Strauss distinguishes them according to the fact that they consider or not that "the gulf separating 'the wise' and the 'vulgar' was a basic fact of human nature". For the moderns, it would be just a provisional situation to be overcome by means of education.

⁵⁰ For a parallel, but also a contrast, with similar considerations by Oakeshott, see the interesting article of Boyd, "The Lion and the Ox: Oakeshott's engagement with Leo Strauss on Hobbes", esp. pp. 704–7, which regards only issues concerning Hobbes's political philosophy.

an author, Strauss did not usually recur to considering the development of an author's thought; he rarely viewed the texts in a succession, which could explain the points of disjuncture in the arguments without necessarily implying the presence of hidden meanings. Put in simple terms, in Hobbes's case this approach led Strauss on the one hand to imagine an original nucleus, already almost perfectly shaped, and with a clear materialistic and atheistic tendency, and on the other hand, to assume a series of adaptations according to the circumstances, guessing dissimulation and simulation, irony and insinuation of concealed meanings, without imagining substantial changes in the sub-text or the true thought of the author.⁵¹

In fact, once DM has been integrated within the broader picture, one can see a real development of Hobbes's thought itself. On the superficial level, one can detect a certain permanence of 'orthodox' statements *lato sensu* (basically, the causal argument is put forward, on its own or combined with the "via motus"). But, on a deeper level, from a philosophical standpoint, there is a real and remarkable evolution that consists of different phases. DM marks, so to speak, the initial conditions of this evolution, which will remain almost unaltered: the equivalence of substance and body, the correct "nomenclature" and the scientific approach to first philosophy, the impossibility to demonstrate philosophically the theological argument, and the drastic conflict of reason with faith. Moreover, DM gives directions to the successive developments too, representing the first of four phases, which it is impossible to understand without reference to the initial clash of reason and faith, as it is displayed in DM. The other phases are: second, the realignment of theology with philosophy with regard to the spiritual substances or separate essences (mainly in the English *Leviathan*); third, the changes in the definition of philosophy and the exclusion of theological issues from philosophy (*De corpore*); fourth, the extension of this realignment to the corporeal God (from the Latin *Leviathan* onwards).⁵²

⁵¹ Starting from an opposite methodology (he does not share Strauss' concern with strategies of concealment), Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, reaches nearly the same conclusion about the stability of Hobbes's thought: "he did not greatly change the address of his studies", even if Wright acknowledges that Hobbes got more and more explicit about his materialism: "he likely long suppressed his true views regarding the materiality of God for fear of social opprobrium and religious persecution. He did not change his views, however, as it is evident in his avowal and defense of them late in life" (Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes*, p. 309).

⁵² Regarding this last phase, see the excellent study by Springborg, "Hobbes's Challenge to Descartes, Bramhall and Boyle: A Corporeal God", with a careful examination of the abundant and recent literature focused on Hobbes's later theology.

c) Against Strauss' tendency to emphasize the 'secret' as a technique to veil hidden meanings, and against the 'illegitimate usages' deriving from the attempt to penetrate the intentions of the authors (that are by definition private in nature), it is more sensible to follow two fundamental precautions.⁵³ First, the texts are to be read literally; second, the sincerity of Hobbes' statements must be assumed, if there are no proofs to the contrary. This is what I tried to do also with DM. These indications remain valid even if one takes seriously, as Strauss did, the "danger of free thought" in an age of persecution. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that Hobbes incurred greater dangers not through omissions, ambiguities and tacit implications, but rather because of the explicit and direct character of his statements. It is difficult to think that in the second half of the 17th century it should have been less perilous to state that God is corporeal (as Hobbes will do in his last phase), or to accuse of atheism the pious ecclesiastics who predicate spirituality (as Hobbes objected to Bramhall), rather than to make frank profession of atheism (as Hobbes denied to have done, rebutting this presumption over his enemies). In any case, for a potential censor it would have been a difficult dilemma to decide which of the two kinds of behavior would be more condemnable.⁵⁴

A different way of applying to DM a methodology similar to Strauss', yet not exactly the same, has been put forth by Edwin Curley, when he considered Hobbes's "fideism" in this work as a rhetorical strategy, even if an 'experimental' one (a kind of "thought experiment"). According to Curley, it is a question regarding presentation that can be detected at the basis of DM: how can a doubtless 'radical' position such as the one Hobbes puts forward in polemic with White, be presented without incurring dangers for the author himself and without encountering oppositions to the doctrine? All in all, this manuscript would arguably be "an attempt to work out what sort of position on natural religion it would be best for him to take when he decided to discuss those issues in public."⁵⁵ The reasons for not publishing the manuscript would thus depend on the fact that the exponent revealed itself not to be satisfying, as well as going into the dangerous territory of antirational theses similar to that of the 'double truth'.

⁵³ For a sharp criticism of Strauss' methodology, criticism which limits damages but does not eliminate the issue itself of interpreting texts written under persecution, see the already classical study: Skinner: "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", esp. pp. 41 - 3.

⁵⁴ On Hobbes's "intellectual courage" see Martinich's apt considerations: Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, pp. 30 - 2.

⁵⁵ Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly" or how to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise", p. 581.

From all these considerations, however, it should not be supposed that Hobbes had already reached a fully defined and complete philosophical position in 1642/43, and that therefore the problems would have arisen only from the strategic aspect of presenting the doctrine, and from envisaging the possible reactions of the readership. Nor should his position in DM be described as an implicit atheism, but as the perfect realization of the strong clash between the requirements of scientific discourse and faith's inadequacy in front of it.

As we have seen, DM shows that Hobbes already had at the time strong philosophical convictions (the chapters on "nomenclature" and on "first philosophy" are complete pieces, striking for their clarity). Moreover, he already mastered a method and a scientific praxis adopted from the school of Galileo; yet, he still seemed to define in positive and not only polemical terms, the relationship with theological conceptions, especially when they were presented in philosophical guise and belonged to a way of defining philosophy that at the time of DM was also Hobbes's own. From this point of view, DM was a true 'laboratory' in which Hobbes explained to himself, more than to others, the dramatic contrasts caused not by politics, but rather by the modern conception of science in connection with philosophy and theology. A situation that he perfectly knew, because he addressed nearly the same issue to White, asking him what he would do if he had to choose between science and religion, reason and faith that would drag him in "opposite directions" (DM XIV, 7).⁵⁶

Due to the enormous tension between these two contrasting demands, the approach employed by Hobbes in DM cannot be reduced either to a vague protestant orthodoxy, or to the art of deceitful writing. Acknowledging that Hobbes's view of God is "nonstandard", A. Martinich suggested, as an alternative interpretation to that of possible crypto-atheism, that Hobbes recognized the challenge issued by modern science, which tries to explain everything in terms of matter and movement. In fact, Hobbes - Martinich says - would have resolved to "meet that challenge", "reconceptualizing many Christian propositions."⁵⁷ The reconstruction I have been making of DM shows that in this early work Hobbes went deeper than that: he analyzed the philosophical foundations of the traditional doctrine, without bringing about any "double doctrine", in Strauss' meaning. Rather than using a special "art of writing", in DM Hobbes got involved in a

⁵⁶ Criticizing White, Hobbes alludes here to a Greek myth. To avoid leaving Penelope and going to war, Odysseus pretended to be insane. Yoked together with a horse and a bull he plowed the beach and sowed it with salt. However, Odysseus's trick was uncovered by Palamedes who placed Telemachus, in the way of the animals, so that the father could not push ahead and revealed himself to be sane.

⁵⁷ Martinich, *A Hobbes Dictionary*, p. 121.

complex attempt at “rewriting” the old metaphysics (which he brought back to the original denomination and meaning of “first philosophy”) – an explicit and deliberate attempt, devoid of “hidden meanings” and by contrast very clear about the new meanings involved in his own philosophical nomenclature. On the other hand, it is the destructive criticism displayed in DM, with the intention of building a new scientific philosophy on the ruins of the old metaphysics, that gives Hobbes’s thesis about God’s incomprehensibility the tones of strength and radicalism that go much further than any Christian fideism, including that of Calvinism; just as the flat affirmation of the last phrase– “God is a body” – cannot be reduced to the Cristian antecedents (e.g. Tertullian) to which Hobbes still appeals. Even the supporters of an interpretation of Hobbes pretending to be on the whole “religious” have to recognize that he was in any case a “transitional figure” and a “modernist”.⁵⁸ Yet, one cannot understand either phrase without thoroughly realizing how deep was the break with the orthodox tradition in DM.

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(I quoted Hobbes’s works by part, chapter, section, without indicating the page number, when it is possible.)

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- EW *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Now First Collected and Edited by Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols.* (London, 1839 – 1845; reprint Aalen, Scientia, 1962 – 1966).
- EL *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic.* Edited with a preface and critical notes by Ferdinand Tönnies (London, Smpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1889).
- Ob. III *Objectiones Tertiae cum responsionibus Authoris* in: René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols., ed. by C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris, Vrin, 1976), vol. VII, pp. 171 – 96.

TOII *Tractatus opticus*, Harley Ms. 6796, prima edizione integrale a cura di Franco Alessio, *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia*, 18 (1963): 147 – 228.

DCi *De cive. The Latin Version*, ed. by Howard Warrender, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983).

DM *De motu, loco et tempore = Critique du De mundo de Thomas White.* Introduction, texte critique et notes par Jean Jaquot et Harold Whitmore Jones (Paris, Vrin, 1973). See also the English transl.: *Thomas White's "De Mundo" Examined*, ed. by Harold Whitmore Jones (London, Bradford University Press and Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1976). I have often modified the English translation to come closer to the Latin original.

Lev. *Leviathan with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett, 1994). I have collated the new critical edition by Noel Malcolm (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2012).

DC *De corpore. Elementorum Philosophiae Sectio Prima.* Edition critique, notes, appendice et index par Karl Schuhmann (Paris, Vrin, 1999).

HE *Historia Ecclesiastica.* Critical edition, including text, translation, introduction, commentary and notes by Patricia Springborg, Patricia Stablein and Paul Wilson (Paris, Honoré Champion, 2008).

Correspondence *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Noel Malcolm, 2 vols. “The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes”, vol. VI-VII (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994).

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⁵⁸ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, pp. 2 – 3, 9 – 10.

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Edwin Curley

Resurrecting Leo Strauss¹

In his recent book on the *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP) Steven Nadler comments that "Spinoza never subjects the New Testament to the kind of rigorous and extended textual and historical critique that he gives to the Hebrew Bible."² I propose to speculate about his reasons for that omission, and ask if there isn't more in the TTP than meets the eye. To ask this question is to suggest that the answer might be "yes". And to do that is to raise the evidently terrifying spectre of Leo Strauss, who claimed that there's an esoteric philosophy in the TTP, which we need to ferret out by reading between the lines.

In the past I've often expressed sympathy with Strauss's approach.³ I'll do that again here. I've also expressed reservations about it.⁴ I'll do that again, too. But I do think Strauss was on to something important in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.⁵ And sometimes I feel that when I support Strauss, I'm swimming against the tide of a reaction against him which has gone too far. Recently Jacqueline Lagrée has written that the wiser course is to read the TTP *à la lettre*, to presuppose that Spinoza writes what he thinks and thinks what he writes.⁶ In *A Book Forged in Hell*, Nadler quotes this passage with qualified approval, saying cautiously that he thinks Lagrée is "closer to the truth" than Straussians like Steven Smith.⁷ Nadler concedes that

¹ This is the July 2014 version of a paper I've presented twice now: first at a conference on the TTP in Toronto in October 2012, and subsequently at conference on Leo Strauss's hermeneutics in Marburg in July 2013. The paper has evolved considerably over the course of these presentations, and I'm much indebted to those who gave me comments on them.

² Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 170. Susan James made a similar observation in *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics: The Theological-Political Treatise*, p. 179.

³ For example in Curley, "I Durst Not Write So Boldly", or How to Read Hobbes' 'Theological-Political Treatise'; Id., "*Homo Audaax*: Leibniz, Oldenburg and the 'Theological-Political Treatise'; Id., "Calvin and Hobbes, or Hobbes as an orthodox Christian".

⁴ For example, in Id., "The Problem of Professor Caton's Sincerity"; Id., "The Root of Contingency"; and Id., *Descartes Against the Skeptics*, Ch. 5. Some of these works criticize, not Strauss himself, but followers like Caton, or historians like Russell, who wrote quite independently of Strauss, but in a similar spirit.

⁵ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

⁶ See Lagrée, *Spinoza et le débat religieux*, p. 10.

⁷ Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 247, n. 6. He has in mind Smith's *Spinoza, Liberalism and the Question of Jewish Identity*. Sometimes Nadler puts his rejection of Strauss in much stronger terms. Cf. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 171–75 and the attached notes.