



## Hobbes, Descartes and the *Deus deceptor*

**Mauro Farnesi Camellone**

Research Fellow, Università di Padova  
Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali  
via del Santo 28, 35123 Padova, Italy  
email: farnesi.mauro@libero.it

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### Abstract

This article is a contribution to the question of the impact of Descartes on Hobbes's philosophy. The focus is put on the radicalization that Hobbes had made of the Cartesian argument of the *Deus deceptor*. To introduce the question we analyze the critique of miracles led by Hobbes. The aim of the article is to underline the close connection subsisting between foundation of science, critique of religion and political science in the thought of the English philosopher.

### Keywords

Miracles; Critique of Religion; Consciousness; Corporeality

“Descartes begins the groundwork of philosophy with distrust of his own prejudices, with distrust above all of the potential *deus deceptor*, just as Hobbes begins interpreting the State and therewith all morality by starting from men's natural distrust”.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

From early writings to later, the overall hypothesis that dominates the thinking of Thomas Hobbes is the idea of the unity of the real interpreted in terms of matter and local motion. This ontological, radically reductionist perspective places him in a position that clearly breaks with both Medieval tradition and the dominant philosophical trends of the Renaissance. The same assumption led Hobbes to consider Cartesian dualism as the most

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<sup>1</sup> L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Its Basis and Its Genesis* (1936), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1963, 56–57.

dangerous theory to his philosophy, because of the common elements that deeply bind his thought to that of Descartes.<sup>2</sup>

There seems to be little doubt that much of Hobbes's works on optics was written with Descartes as a target in mind. But how much he drew on Descartes for his own ideas in physics more generally and in optics in particular is much less clear. It is sometimes argued that any final assessment on the matter depends on whether Hobbes is the author of the so-called *Short Tract on First Principles*. There is no general agreement on this amongst Hobbes commentators;<sup>3</sup> we, however, agree with the thesis of J. Bernhardt, and thus we lean towards attributing the paper to Hobbes.<sup>4</sup> The *Short Tract*, if by Hobbes, shows that Hobbes in 1630, the most probable date for the paper, had by then accepted an account of light and sensation that confirms he developed a subjective view of secondary qualities of objects before Descartes and shows that he did not borrow his account from the author of the *Discours de la methode*, who had not then published any such claims. However, this does not resolve the question of the role played by Descartes in the definition of the philosophy of Hobbes. The complexity of the relationship between their thought should be explored further.

### I. A profound disagreement on the maximum proximity

As we have seen, it was probably in 1630 that Thomas Hobbes reached his great insight into the nature and cause of sense that was to dominate his account of human beings, an insight that lies at the heart of his whole philosophy. He believed that the cause of all things was to be sought *in the difference between their motions*. That is to say that all change is the product

<sup>2</sup> See R. Tuck, *Hobbes and Descartes*, in G.A.J. Rogers and A. Ryan (editors), *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, 11–42; P. Guenancia, “Hobbes-Descartes: le nom et la chose” in Y.-Ch. Zarka, J. Bernhardt (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes. Philosophie première, théorie de la science et politique*, PUF, Paris 1990, 67–80; G. Mori, “Hobbes, Descartes, and Ideas: a Secret Debate”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 50:2(2012), 197–212.

<sup>3</sup> See F. Brandt, *Thomas Hobbes's mechanical conception of nature*, Levin & Munksgaard, Copenhagen 1927, 9–85; R. Tuck, “Hobbes and Descartes”; P. Zagorin, *Hobbes's Early Philosophical Development*, “Journal of The History of Ideas”, LIV, 34 (1993), 505–518; K. Schuhmann, “Le Short Tract, première oeuvre philosophique de Hobbes”, *Hobbes Studies*, 8 (1995), 3–36; N. Malcolm, “Robert Payne, the Hobbes Manuscripts, and the “Short Tract”, in his *Aspects of Hobbes*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, 80–145.

<sup>4</sup> See T. Hobbes, *Court traité des premiers principes. Le Short Tract on First Principles de 1630-1631. La naissance de Thomas Hobbes à la pensée moderne*, edited by J. Bernhardt, PUF, Paris 1988.

of the motion of physical objects, themselves composed of tiny particles impacting on one another.<sup>5</sup> In Hobbes's view, sensation was a kind of motion, generated by an external object, which led to a motion in the brain that we experience as an awareness of, say, the colour of an object. From this it followed that the cause of sensations, such as colour, taste and smell, the so-called secondary qualities of objects, are not anything other than powers to cause those experiences in us. Some years later, René Descartes was to claim that Hobbes had plagiarised this account of sensation from his own work. This was part of a cantankerous dispute between the two men that lasted until Descartes's death in 1650 and that marred relations between the two leading philosophers of their generation, if not of the century. However, it is worth attempting to underline Hobbes's position for he puts forward the claim about the nature of sensation, a dimension that had either been rejected or not fully considered by others and for which he deserves the special credit that he, indeed, claimed for himself. For Hobbes, it is not just the case that motion is the *cause* of sensation, a position accepted by Galileo and Descartes, but *the sensation is itself a motion*, a physical change in the brain. That is to say that "experiences and thought are numerically identical with physical states of the brain. For Descartes and other dualists, whilst they accepted that sensations are *caused* by motions in the brain, the seat of consciousness is another substance, mind, which is not material, whose essence is thought, in contrast with matter, whose essence is extension".<sup>6</sup>

In 1637, Hobbes was sent a copy of Descartes's *Discours de la methode* by Kenelm Digby. The *Discourse* consists in four parts: method, optics, meteors and geometry. The last three, according to Descartes, were examples of application of the method described in the first part. In 1640, Hobbes sent Marin Mersenne a manuscript in which he criticised Descartes's work,<sup>7</sup> especially his account of various optical claims in

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<sup>5</sup> Hobbes had hardly been the first to reach such a conclusion, for it was central to the classical atomists of ancient Greece and revived in a somewhat different form in Italy by Galileo in the 1620s. But it is likely that Hobbes reached it by reflection on the nature of change rather than straightforwardly borrowing from others. See R.H. Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1966.

<sup>6</sup> G.A.J. Rogers, "Hobbes and His Contemporaries", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's "Leviathan"*, edited by P. Springborg, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, 416.

<sup>7</sup> This text has never been recorded but N. Malcolm describes it in some detail, see *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. I, edited by N. Malcolm, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007, lii–liv.

*La Dioptrique*;<sup>8</sup> he also criticized Descartes's account of matter and spirit. Descartes responded strongly to Hobbes's criticisms and in particular he rejected Hobbes's corporeal soul and corporeal God<sup>9</sup> claims that at the level of first ontology divided Hobbes and Descartes so completely that there would never be any chance of reconciliation. In 1641, Mersenne invited Hobbes, along with several other thinkers, to reply to the argument of Descartes's *Meditations*. According to Descartes, Hobbes's objections were entirely dismissive. His view on Hobbes was evident in a letter he wrote to an unnamed Jesuit priest, probably in 1643, who had asked Descartes for his view on the recently published *De Cive*. Descartes believed its author to be the person who wrote the Third Objections against his *Meditations*, and he found Hobbes much more astute in moral philosophy than in metaphysics or physics.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, what is certain is that Hobbes was always to claim that it was he, rather than Descartes, who had first put forward the view that

light is a fancy in the minde, caused by motion in the braine, which motion againe is caused by the motion of the parts of such bodies as we call *lucid*: such as are the sunne and the fixed stars, and such as here on earth is fire. By putting you in mind hereof, I doe indeed call you to witness of it: because the same doctrine having since been published by another, I might be challenged for building on another man's [Descartes] ground.<sup>11</sup>

However, if Hobbes's impact on Descartes was little or nothing, as it appears, it is far from clear whether the reverse was also true. It is a matter of considerable contention precisely what the impact might have been. Hobbes had always been very strongly dominated by the problem of the conditions and

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<sup>8</sup> See Y.-Ch. Zarka, "La matière et la représentation: Hobbes lecteur de *La Dioptrique* de Descartes", in *Problématique et réception du Discours de la méthode et des Essais*, edited by H. Méchoulan, Vrin, Paris 1988, 81-98. On the role *La Dioptrique* plays in the definition of Hobbes's philosophical system see also È. Marquer, "Ce que sa polémique avec Descartes a modifié dans la pensée de Hobbes: histoire d'une controverse", in *Hobbes, Descartes et la métaphysique*, edited by D. Weber, Vrin, Paris 2005, 15-23.

<sup>9</sup> See Hobbes *Correspondence*, Letter 29, [11/] 21 January 1641, René Descartes to Marin Mersenne for Hobbes, from Leiden, 57. See D. Weber, *Hobbes et le corps de Dieu*, Vrin, Paris 2009. See E. Curley, "Hobbes versus Descartes", in *Descartes and his Contemporaries: Meditations, Objection and Replies*, edited by R. A. Ariew, M. Grene, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995, 97-109.

<sup>10</sup> See *Œuvres de Descartes*, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, revisited edition, Vrin, Paris 1996, vol. IV, 66-67.

<sup>11</sup> *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 11 vols., edited by Sir William Molesworth, John Bohn, London 1839-1845 (reprint Scientia Verlag, Aalen 1966), VII, 468.

character of science. Between his ontology and his conception of science there is a complicated interplay of mutual influences and deep fractures. Moreover, the question is complicated by the dominance of the relationship with Descartes. Certainly, for Hobbes the substantialization of *cogito* and Cartesian dualism generally represent a target for controversy. However, with all the obvious differences (these also continually emphasized by Hobbes), Hobbes believed the new Cartesian epistemology was also a positive presence whose weight was difficult to deny. The same constancy of reference suggests that behind the considerable differences exist very deep connections. Regarding these issues, sometimes it becomes difficult to determine what in Hobbes's thought is completely original and independent and what is the result of a Cartesian dependency.<sup>12</sup>

By taking the background to these difficulties, we will try to contribute to the question of the impact that Descartes had on Hobbes's philosophy, also by analyzing the radicalization that he had made of the Cartesian argument of the *Deus deceptor*. The aim is to understand in the thought of the English philosopher the close connection subsisting between foundation of science, critique of religion<sup>13</sup> and political science.<sup>14</sup> To unravel this plot,

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<sup>12</sup> See A. Minerbi Belgrado, *Linguaggio e mondo in Hobbes*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1993, in which the author interprets the relationship between Hobbes and Descartes not as a simple opposition but as a complex interconnection. For an opposite view, which tends to underestimate the importance of Descartes in the definition of the status of science for Hobbes, see T. Sorell, "Hobbes's Objections and Hobbes's System", in *Descartes and his Contemporaries*, 83-96.

<sup>13</sup> See L. Strauss, "Die Religionskritik des Hobbes. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Aufklärung (1933-1934)", in *Gesammelte Schriften. Band 3: Hobbes' politische Wissenschaft und zugehörige Schriften - Briefe*, edited by H. Meier, J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart/Weimar 2001, 263-373. In this book, which long remained unpublished, Strauss has shown the link between critique of religion and modern political thought. Specifically, Strauss argues that critique of religion is the founding moment of Hobbes's political theory. According to this interpretation, Hobbes's political science refers to a conception of man and world, a particular theology characteristic of what Strauss calls the radical Enlightenment. Hobbes fights tradition, the Church and theology, which are considered responsible for the wars of religion, deducting from the Bible the subordination of religion to politics. However, according to Strauss, Hobbes goes further away from any reference to a compassionate God and by radicalizing the Cartesian argument of the *Deus deceptor*, salvation and hell thus assume an earthly dimension and only political science enables man to survive in an incomprehensible world.

<sup>14</sup> See Y.-Ch. Zarka, *La décision métaphysique de Hobbes. Conditions de la politique*, Vrin, Paris 1999<sup>2</sup>. Zarka has shown that the significance of the political theory of Hobbes is evaluated correctly if this theory is conceived in its relationship with the *logica* and the *philosophia prima* of the English philosopher. Following this reading, only a methodical elucidation of Hobbes's project on the rational re-foundation of knowledge can open a doorway to his

we should first correctly understand the meaning of the critique of miracles led by Hobbes.

## II. The critique of miracles and the possibility of science

In his critique of miracles,<sup>15</sup> Hobbes leaves faith in Scripture apparently unquestioned. As a first step, he merely warns against the belief in false miracles. To this he adds, however, the allocation of the decision to secular power about the natural or supernatural being of a given event. The result seems to be the *partial* denial of the miracles: Hobbes explicitly denies the reality of miracles in the present but also that of the miracles attributed to the Church Fathers. Towards the biblical miracles, however, he had to proceed more cautiously.

There be some texts of Scripture that seem to attribute the power of working wonders, equal to some of those immediate miracles wrought by God Himself, to certain arts of magic and incantation [...] Enchantment [is] not, as many think it, a working of strange effects by spells and words, but imposture and delusion wrought by ordinary means [...]. For it is evident enough that Words have no effect but on those that understand them, and then they have no other but to signify the intentions or passions of them that speak; and thereby produce hope, fear, or other passions, or conceptions in the hearer.<sup>16</sup>

The distinction between a miracle and sham is so hard that it is necessarily arbitrary and thus given to secular power. In fact, “a private man has always the liberty, because thought is free, to believe or not believe in his heart those acts that have been given out for miracles, according as he shall see what benefit can accrue, by men’s belief, to those that pretend or countenance them, and thereby conjecture whether they be miracles or lies. But when it comes to confession of that faith, the private reason must submit to the public”.<sup>17</sup> Referring to Scripture, Hobbes says that miracles are recognizable as such by *the elect only*,<sup>18</sup> but he adds that in any case miracles cannot

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political science. Inevitably, to understand Hobbes’s *philosophia prima* means first understanding his confrontation with Descartes. For the meaning of Hobbes’s *philosophia prima* see also Y.-Ch. Zarka, *Philosophie et politique à l’âge classique*, PUF, Paris 1998, Première Partie (*L’État et la représentation. Hobbes, Descartes*), 5–60.

<sup>15</sup> See M. A. Bertman, “Hobbes on Miracles (and God)”, *Hobbes Studies*, 20 (2007), 40–62.

<sup>16</sup> See T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. by N. Malcolm, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2012, Chap. 37, 688–690.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>18</sup> “Wee may further observe in Scripture that the end of Miracles, was to beget belief, not universally in all men, elect, and reprobate; but in the elect only; that is to say, in such as God had determined should become his Subjects”, *ibid.*, 686.

be recognized by natural reason, namely it is impossible *to imagine* the natural causes of a miracle:

To understand therefore what is a Miracle, we must first understand what works they are, which men wonder at, and call Admirable. And there be but two things which make men wonder at any event: The one is, if it be strange, that is to say, such, as the like of it hath never, or very rarely been produced: The other, is if when it is produced, we cannot imagine it to have been done by natural means, but only by the immediate hand of God. But when wee see some possible natural cause of it, how rarely soever the like has been done; or if the like have been often done, how impossible soever it be to imagine a natural means thereof, we no more wonder, nor esteem it for a Miracle. Therefore, if a Horse, or Cow should speak, it were a Miracle; because both the thing is strange & the natural cause difficult to imagin: So also were it to see a strange deviation of nature in the production of some new shape of a living creature. But when a man, or other Animal, engenders his like, though we know no more how this is done than the other; yet because it is usual, it is no Miracle. In like manner, if a man be metamorphosed into a stone, or into a pillar, it is a miracle, because strange: but if a piece of wood be so changed; because we see it often it is no Miracle: and yet we know no more, by what operation of God the one is brought to passe, than the other.<sup>19</sup>

That is to say that it is impossible to obtain *truthful knowledge* of what a miracle is in the present. But Hobbes did not stop there. To regulate fully the faith in the Revelation, he not only had to demonstrate the non-recognition of the miracle, but also *that it was impossible in itself*. To prove the impossibility of a miracle means showing that *God* cannot, or does not, want to do miracles. This demonstration therefore assumes that scientific statements about God are possible. Natural reason is undoubtedly capable of knowing that there is an eternal cause of things: in other words, that God is eternal and all powerful.<sup>20</sup> Can these attributes help us to conclude something about the possibility or impossibility of miracles? Hobbes seems to answer yes to that question, because if God is omnipotent then the possibility of miracles must be accepted. However this assertion says nothing about the *will* of God to do miracles, and nothing about the possibility of man to recognize with certainty the miraculous nature of an event. At this point, for Hobbes the problem becomes that of the possibility of knowledge of the natural world.

To address the issue Hobbes makes a regression to consciousness, to a dimension that somehow seems to escape divine intervention. God can make use of nature at will, but in the hypothetical case that he would

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 68z.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, Chap. 12, 77.

destroy the natural world outside *myself*, my ideas about the nature remain and with them the basic possibility of science. These ideas take the form of science based on principles that we *ourselves* create, principles are thus completely in our power: even if God were to destroy the outside world, science would still be possible because both the field of science (the ideas that we have made) and its form (the principles of knowledge that we have created) are in our power. However, the causes of the natural world seem to *stay out* of the understanding of a science conceived in this way.<sup>21</sup>

Based on this definition of natural science, it can be argued Hobbes was suggesting that natural reason is unable to recognize miracles. Miracles are not recognizable as miracles because God has produced them in an incomprehensible way, in the same way all natural events are produced. However, natural events can be *explained* by science, despite their *essential incomprehensibility*, because they can be traced to their *possible* causes. As for the explanation of all natural events, to explain miracles it is enough to indicate the possible causes, though it is not possible or necessary to verify empirically the causes that have been mentioned as possible. Thus, the science that enables man to explain nature also enables him to explain miracles.

According to Hobbes, experience shows that men are likely to consider events as miraculous if they are not familiar with natural science. In this sense, it is therefore true that miracles are directed to the elect only: the elect are the poor in spirit without any scientific knowledge. Hobbes may therefore expect that, with a progressive development of natural science, faith in miracles gradually loses importance until it disappears. Or he may hope that the ignorant crowd is educated in this direction.<sup>22</sup>

### III. The foundation of science and the Deus deceptor

Hobbes's critique of miracles shows how the critique of religion precedes the foundation of science, that is to say that the former is the condition of the latter. To meet this condition, we need to compare the fundamental

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<sup>21</sup> See J.-L. Marion, Hobbes et Descartes. L'étant comme corps, in *Hobbes, Descartes et la métaphysique*, 59-77.

<sup>22</sup> "The Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted with dependance on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of the Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Publique Authority shall be imprinted in them", T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chap. 30, 524.

ideas of Hobbes with those of Descartes. The difference in attitude between the two philosophers about the religion of Revelation is based on the difference of their philosophical principles. However, the comparison between these principles, which are still close, shows how Hobbes's critique of religion precedes the foundation of modern science, but at the same time it is specifically modern.

Compared to the context that interests us here, the fundamental reflection that Descartes developed above all in his *Meditations*<sup>23</sup> may be summarized as follows:

- 1) The illusions of the senses justify the doubt about everything I say on the basis of the senses;
- 2) The absence of a reliable criterion for the distinction between waking and dreaming justifies the doubt against all knowledge that is not entirely indifferent to this distinction, that is to say the doubt on any non-mathematical knowledge, particularly the belief that corporeal things exist;
- 3) The possibility that I was created by a powerful and evil demon that wants to cheat me in any way, justifies the suspicion against *all* knowledge (including mathematical knowledge);
- 4) Under the hypothesis of radical doubt, however, it is absolutely certain that as a being who doubts, I am; I am a thinking being and therefore conscious. The absolutely certain knowledge of my existence as a doubting being contains no knowledge and no opinion about the world of bodies: it is indifferent to both the idealist denial of the existence of the corporeal world as the materialist assertion that I am a corporeal being;
- 5) I can legitimately leave the circle of absolute knowledge that I am conscious of being myself and only reject the possibility, limited to this circle, that I depend on a *Deus deceptor*. This rejection is possible because in my ideas, in my conscience, I find the idea of God as being absolutely perfect: God cannot fail to have the attribute of existence. Since God exists as an absolutely perfect being, and since this being as such can only be truthful, I am not at the mercy of an absolutely wicked being that wants me to make mistakes, but I am in the hands of an absolutely good being.
- 6) It is therefore not necessary that I am wrong, but I can avoid the error by making good use of the forces that I have acquired.

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<sup>23</sup> See *Œuvres de Descartes*, VII, 1–90.

Consequently, everything that I understand in a clear and distinct way is *necessarily* true. Everything I know in this way, especially all mathematical knowledge, is absolutely certain.

- 7) In clear and distinct knowledge of my mind there is not the slightest reference to something corporeal, so it is absolutely certain I am, in my essence, different from my body and I can exist without it.
- 8) Because God is truthful, it is absolutely certain that my natural inclination to believe in the existence of corporeal things is not madness, so it is absolutely certain that corporeal things exist.

Looking at his *Objectiones*<sup>24</sup> to *Meditations*, we see that Hobbes accepts the necessity that philosophy begins with doubt in the sense that Descartes has shown. He accepts the regression to consciousness, to the world's consciousness as the foundation of philosophy. This is confirmed by the fact that in *Elements* and *De Corpore*, Hobbes begins his research from the fictional annihilation of the world. However, this does not mean that Hobbes agrees with the argument of Descartes. While not considering all Descartes's arguments to be relevant, he does consider the regression to consciousness to be necessary. For Hobbes, Descartes shows the real need for this regression, that is to say the argument of the *Deus deceptor*. The real reason of radical doubt is the possibility of the *Deus deceptor* itself: Hobbes fully agrees with Descartes that this possibility, and *it alone*, requires a regression to consciousness.

The opposition between the two philosophers is evident just from this landmark agreement. This opposition is based on the fact that Hobbes denies the possibility of a rational theology, but this possibility was put forward by Descartes. Hobbes denies that man has an idea of God. Certainly, Hobbes admits that starting from our ideas we can reach a primary cause of the ideas themselves, to assume an eternal cause called God. However, he denies that the existence of God would suggest the creation of the world, namely that we can demonstrate the nature of the created world. If the creation of the world is not absolutely certain, then the full deduction of Descartes has no solid basis. Even if we could prove the created nature of the world, Hobbes denies that the absolute truthfulness of God can be proven, as Descartes understands it. Therefore, the hypothesis at the basis

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<sup>24</sup> See *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis Opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia in unum corpus nunc primum collecta*, 5 vols., edited by Sir William Molesworth, John Bohn, London 1839-1845 (reprint Scientia Verlag, Aalen 1966), V, 249-274 (also in *Œuvres de Descartes*, VII, 171-196).

of Hobbes's entire critique is that God is completely *incomprehensible*. Hobbes criticizes Descartes using the same weapons that Descartes had used against traditional theology.

If Hobbes disagrees with Descartes's rejection of the argument for the *Deus deceptor*, though he acknowledges that this argument is justified, then it would seem that for him it is not possible to confirm the existence of corporeal things. He must be satisfied that we know with certainty only the objects of our representations, not things in themselves: he must act as a radical "phenomenalist". However, the fact that Hobbes continues to maintain that the substance and the body are identical, that only bodies are real, and that mind is nothing but a movement within the brain,<sup>25</sup> seems to speak against this result. We must understand whether this materialism is a metaphysical presupposition, or whether it is a methodical prerequisite. Certainly, Hobbes identifies "substance" and "body". However, the body is only something introduced by conscience, by thought. Hobbes maintains both the phenomenal being of sensitive qualities and the phenomenal nature of time and space.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, he distinguishes between imaginary space and real space, which is identical to the size or extension of the body. The body is understood by Hobbes as "quicquid non dependes a cogitatione nostra", something characterized by the extension and that, acting on the perceiving subject, is represented as occupying a place in phenomenal space. Consequently, only extended bodies seem to exist in themselves. The extension of a body is nothing but a way of understanding the body itself. However, according to Hobbes, a body marked by extension is not real, but "merum nomen".<sup>27</sup> This result is fully confirmed by the fact that Hobbes describes the concept of "body" as a "thing in itself" speaking of the phenomena as "species rerum externarum, id est, tanquam non existentes, sed existere sive extra stare apparentes".<sup>28</sup>

According to Hobbes, "fundamental sciences" deal with the world as a phenomenon that appears *in us*. If these sciences are based on the fictional annihilation of the world, they assume that objects are not the result of sensory perception, but only objects of memory and imagination, simple "accidentia animi interna".<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the *true* science of nature

<sup>25</sup> See *Leviathan*, Chap. 34, 610–612.

<sup>26</sup> See *De corpore* (1655, 1668), in *Hobbes, Opera philosophica*, I, Chap. VIII, 91–93.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 93–94.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. VII, 81–82. See *ibid.*, Chap. XXIV–XXV, 305–334.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. VII, 81.

undoes this fiction, it re-establishes in their own right both sensory perception and the relationship it establishes with *the present real world*. The science of nature is concerned, therefore, with objects of sensory perception, with phenomena understood as nature shows them to us.<sup>30</sup> The true science of nature returns to the *causes* of sensory perception which are absolutely independent of us.

Since the true science of nature transcends the world of phenomena, which is dependent on us, *it is necessarily hypothetical*.<sup>31</sup> As *things in themselves* – the causes of the representations we have of them – are not in our power, they are therefore inaccessible to absolutely certain knowledge. We can develop them only *a posteriori*, and even then we can do it only in accordance with the principles of mechanics that we ourselves have created.<sup>32</sup> Our knowledge of things in themselves is merely a result of their effects in the completely hypothetical mechanical system established *a priori*: therefore it is a kind of “phenomenalism”. Everything leads us to the conclusion that if Hobbes is fundamentally sceptical about the knowledge of things in themselves, he is, however, absolutely certain of the obvious and indisputable existence of things in themselves.

According to Hobbes, not only is the existence of things in themselves evident but their *corporeality* is as well. In his philosophy, body and substance are synonymous. To understand the significance of this statement, we should return to Hobbes's *pre-scientific* definition of the concept of the body. Unlike the scientific one, the vulgar concept of body does not match everything, but only with what you can see and touch. Indeed, of the two senses that are inherent to the body, touch is dominant. A body is visible because it is opaque, and therefore prevents us from having another perspective. But that *impediment* could be better perceived through touch, when an object *resists* our strength. According to the pre-scientific point of view, corporeality is the same thing as *resistance* and *palpability*. The scientific perspective differs from the pre-scientific one in this alone: for the former, only bodies exist, while for the latter, *spirits* exist alongside corporeal beings.<sup>33</sup> Science is based on the observation of effects not observed by

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, Chap. XXV.

<sup>31</sup> See A. Pacchi, *Convenzione e ipotesi nella formazione della filosofia naturale di Thomas Hobbes*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1965.

<sup>32</sup> See *De corpore*, Chap. VII.

<sup>33</sup> “To men that understand the signification of these words, *Substance*, and *Incorporeal*; as *Incorporeal* is taken not for subtle body, but for *not Body*, they imply a contradiction: insomuch as to say, an Angel or Spirit is (in that sense) an Incorporeal Substance, is to say in effect, there is no Angel nor Spirit at all”, *Leviathan*, Chap. 34, 630.

common opinion; these effects are the same type as those that we experience when something resists us, or weighs on us.<sup>34</sup> The scientific point of view seems to universalize the pre-scientific one, including *everything* under the phenomenon of resistance that we experience through touch. This means that, according to Hobbes, the existence of a world that resists us is therefore taken for granted and always clear.

Returning to Descartes, we see that he considers all *cogitationes* (thought, will, representation, perception) as they do not presuppose the existence of a corporeal world. His regression to consciousness is therefore a total regression. On the contrary, Hobbes disregards the existence of the corporeal world *only* as far as the faculty of *knowing* is concerned. He believes that the faculty of willing, or to be able to move, are conceivable only if a corporeal world exists. Moreover, Hobbes recognizes that a relative independence of consciousness is possessed only by derived representations (imagination, memories), and not by the original representations of the perception. He does not doubt that man is a part of the corporeal world, linked in his existence entirely to this very world. Likewise in the fictional annihilation of the world, Hobbes does not refer to a *res cogitans* but to a *man*. Consciousness is possible only *in* the world and *through* the world, as an accident of a living body, and Hobbes never makes this an object of “methodical doubt”.

Hobbes's *man* is at the mercy of a corporeal world independent of him, one that resists his power. This conviction finds a theological expression in the idea that man is in the hands of a corporeal God whose strength he can not resist. All knowledge of being, namely of corporeality, builds on the experience of resistance, of touch: it is knowledge of the corporeal origin of everything.

### **Conclusion: Making our way through a completely incomprehensible world**

Criticizing the thought of Descartes, Hobbes seems to move *from an original materialism to a kind of phenomenism*. This displacement can be noted in the argument for the proof of the existence of God. In all other writings,<sup>35</sup> Hobbes demonstrates the existence of God, basing his deduction on the observed effects on bodies sent back to their ultimate cause.

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<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, Chap. 1 and 4.

<sup>35</sup> See for example *ibid.*, Chap. 12.

On the contrary, in his *Objections to Meditations* – clearly driven by the theological proof of God given by Descartes – Hobbes starts from ideas to lead back to their ultimate cause, namely God. Materialism, and not the phenomenalism, is the original belief of Hobbes, and this distinguishes him radically from Descartes. Thus the power of what Descartes claims as possible, that a *Deus deceptor* can delude us about the existence of the world, does not move only against the possibility of an absolutely certain domain of consciousness, but also against the absolutely sure prejudice that we humans entirely depend on a world the reality of which we discover through its resistance to us.

We must be aware of this fact to correctly understand Hobbes' criticism of the Cartesian rejection of the possibility of a *Deus deceptor*. Hobbes argues against Descartes that the possibility of a deception by God cannot be ruled out in principle; he disputes the argument *a priori*, based on a supposed knowledge of the essence of God, which would show that God cannot wish to deceive; Descartes's argument obviously leaves open the possibility of a critique *a posteriori*. However, even Descartes provides a kind of critique *a posteriori*: the fact that I can doubt, and that I can protect myself against any deception by the all-powerful demon, denies the supposed possibility that I could be in the hands of an all-powerful trickster. A *Deus deceptor* would have been able to prevent the onset of the doubt. However, Hobbes does not present his criticism of the hypothesis of *Deus deceptor* in this manner because he does not consider this argument as a danger to philosophy. What meaning can we thus attribute to the ambiguous sympathy Hobbes expresses for the idea of a *Deus deceptor*?

We have seen that Hobbes differs from Descartes in that he denies the possibility of a rational theology; he justifies this rejection arguing that God is simply incomprehensible, in fact taking a position similar to the one Descartes held against traditional theology. According to Hobbes, the possibility of the *Deus deceptor* is simply derived from the subject of a totally incomprehensible God. As it does not want to be anything but the symbolization of this subject, Hobbes defends and submits the possibility of a trickster God. However, if this possibility is seen as a reversal of faith in Providence, then Hobbes must fight it, indeed it contradicts the certainty of the existence of the world based on the resistance that the world opposes to my strength. For Hobbes, the existence of the world is not problematic, but to be problematic is the *understanding* of the world that naturally exists. If a completely incomprehensible God created the world, then the world itself must be regarded as incomprehensible. Behind the symbol of the *Deus deceptor* Hobbes finds the much more credible and ominous

possibility that the world is the incomprehensible work of an absolutely incomprehensible God. For this reason Hobbes does not consider the regression to consciousness the foundation of philosophy because this regression may be a sufficient protection against the *Deus deceptor*, but it cannot help us to make our way through a completely incomprehensible world.

The Hobbesian theory of sovereignty attempts to build a tool for guidance in this terrible and incomprehensible area that is the world. If this is true, Hobbes is finally trapped in a circle in which the theory of sovereignty is both the product of political science and the presupposition of science in general. At the heart of this game of references, we find Hobbes's critique of the religion of Revelation, which thus appears to be the true condition of the foundation of modern science in general and of modern political science in particular. Hobbes's critique of religion can be considered a necessary by-product of his philosophy of nature only if we match it with a materialistic metaphysics. If we believe that Hobbes's philosophy of nature laid the foundation for modern natural science, then we must consider why that science is in need of a critique of religion. Furthermore, if we interpret one third of *De cive* and half of *Leviathan* for what they are, i.e. genuine political-theological treatises, it is plausible to argue that understanding Hobbes's critique of religion means grasping the link that unites it with new political science.

The *anthropology* of Hobbes (his *philosophia moralis et civilis*) works toward an aim other than that of physics. Physics sets out to serve man's dominion over things, but anthropology serves *peace*.<sup>36</sup> Now, without peace, science is impossible, *culture* is impossible. The purpose of anthropology is more urgent than the purpose of physics. Furthermore, the aim of physics cannot be clearly established except by starting from the aim of anthropology, as effort directed towards mastery over things, toward *commoda hujus vitae*, does not contain within itself its own measure and restraint. By its very nature it leads to mastery over men; it leads to hate and strife, to the war of all against all, which it cannot bring to an end by itself, and thus it brings about its own undoing. It becomes limited, and justified within limits, only through the most radical consideration, through regard for the fragility of the human body, through fear of death by violence and through our desire for security. Only thus is the *unambiguous* distinction

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<sup>36</sup> See L. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, translated by E.M. Sinclair, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1997, 94.

between good and evil to be ascertained. With this is also given the peculiar character of Hobbes' criticism of religion. Religion is rejected as a creation of vanity, desire for status and reputation, overestimation of one's own powers. When Hobbes enunciates this view, he is not merely continuing the traditional, hostile arguments against priests who are set on gaining wealth and advancement for themselves. It would be more natural to assume that the antithesis *gloriatio-modestia* as the ultimate antithesis, which is the basis of morality, represents the *secularized* form of the antithesis *superbia-humilitas*.<sup>37</sup> If the root of all evil is *gloriatio*, then the religious illusion is not contested as illusion in the sense corresponding to the spirit of physics, as an attempt made with insufficient means; it is contested for the reason of its origin in *gloriatio*. Judged from the standpoint of physics, physics and religion surely spring from the same root: they differ only in that one has method and the other has not. Not until we come to anthropology, which is animated by the spirit of peace and civil society, do we find reason and religion in conflict.

Hobbes distinguishes between the natural seed of religion and the "culture" which religion took on between paganism and the Revelation. The culture of religion takes as its aim the education of mankind to obedience, peace, love and ordered society. For the pagans, religion was a part of politics. The pagan legislators and founders of political societies brought it about by establishment of suitable institutions that the populace should never even contemplate rebellion, but remain content with bread and circuses. The powerful Romans tolerated every type of religion within their city with the exception of Judaism, in which obedience to a mortal king was forbidden.<sup>38</sup> Obedience to the established power is never sin. Rather, rebellion against established authority is sin. Revelation, the second path opened to the culture of natural religion with its basis in fear and dream, makes politics *a part* of religion. With his formulation Hobbes indicates the way in which he seeks to counter the threat, contained in revealed religion, to public peace. Politics *is to be* a part of religion; religion can never and must never contradict politics: the distinction between spiritual and temporal power is absurd. This distinction, which in paganism was in principle avoided, and was introduced by the Jews, originates in the belief in spirits and in the fear of spirits, which are part and parcel of natural religion. Only when fear of spirits is well and truly expelled from men's mind is peace assured, as is the loyalty of the citizen to his country.

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<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> See *Leviathan*, Chap. 29 and 42.

When men find themselves in darkness and confusion on account of their untutored questing after causes, and have become alarmed and anxious, not only do they take as true and proven causes suggested to them by their own imaginations, but they lay themselves open to the suggestion as to causes put forward by those whom *they take to be superior*, and because of their *natural credulity* accept the causes suggested as true. In this regard Hobbes speaks of two kinds of *madness*: one, fuelled by baseless anxiety because it stems from impaired vitality, consists of over-great modesty and self-depreciation; the other, which arises from an all compelling craving, manifests excessive self-confidence. What conduces to the madness of the second type is any form of marked self-confidence, in particular the belief that one is *directly inspired*. This belief abuses the belief in spirits held by simple people.<sup>39</sup> The “spirit” to which the inspired make claim, is nothing other than their *gloriatio*. One who says that he speaks on the basis of inspiration says in effect that he feels a burning desire to speak, or has a high opinion of himself, for which he can adduce no natural or sufficient reason. According to Hobbes, *gloriatio* is the root of all evil and the basis of prophecy at the same time. Hobbes and Descartes<sup>40</sup> both speak of this issue: reason is common to all men, and is one and the same in all men. The difference among men consists only in the difference regarding the methodical training and the development of this natural disposition which they have in common. *Method*, by in fact doing away with this natural *equality*, recognizes it, whereas prophecy as *gloriatio* denies it.

Now, Hobbes's political doctrine is based on the axiom that violent death is the greatest evil; on the contrary, Christian religion says that there is a greater evil: the eternal torments of hell that await the damned soul after death. At this point religion and the foundation of Hobbesian doctrine collide in the highest degree. Hobbes's entire political science depends upon the failure of the religious doctrine of eternal damnation; clearly, the entire political structure of Hobbes depends on maintaining a critique of religion that can refute this doctrine. Hobbes simply cannot imagine a political science that is *independent* of theology, but must build a space for politics in which any political theology is impossible. This new science cannot be considered as prior to the Revelation, but is faced with the ambition of the latter. The new science must be determined *a priori* as superior to that ambition, and thus head in an opposite direction to the theological-political indications contained in Revelation. My thesis is that the critique

<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.*, Chap. 2, 8, 12, 29 and 32.

<sup>40</sup> See *Œuvres de Descartes*, VI, 1–11.

of Revelation is not only a complement *a posteriori* to Hobbes's political science, but its condition, if not the condition of his philosophy in general.<sup>41</sup>

If we limit our consideration to the structure of *Leviathan* only, this thesis may appear hardly sustainable. In *Leviathan*, the critique of political theology is built on a critique of Revelation, and developed as a critique of a State based on Christian revelation, following the purely rational doctrine of man and State; as a result Hobbes seems to base his critique of Revelation on a previously developed philosophical doctrine. Yet this reading could be confirmed if we maintain that Hobbes considers the philosophical discussion of politics as self-evident. If on the contrary this very evidence is at issue, we have to question whether the structure of *Leviathan* hides the real terms of the relationship between political science, science in general and the critique of Revelation. The space allocated in *Leviathan* to theological questions shows how the belief in Revelation is the main obstacle to the scientific *construction* of the *true* State. Therefore, it can be argued that the critique of Revelation is as important to Hobbes's political science as the critique of sophistry is to Plato's political philosophy.

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<sup>41</sup> See L. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik des Hobbes*, 272.