

**Politics of Immortality: Hobbes on “Humane and Divine Politiques”**

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## Politics of Immortality: Hobbes on ‘Humane and Divine Politiques’

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Hobbes anticipates many important features of liberalism, including rights, the sovereign state, social contract and constitutionalism. Yet in his insistence that the sovereign will have final authority in matters of faith he appears to repudiate what we have come to consider the core liberal assumptions regarding separation of church and state. In this article I argue that Hobbes takes this approach because of the political challenge posed by immortality (the promise of eternal rewards and the threat of eternal torment and damnation after death). Hobbes regards immortality as one of the most important factors that transform a religion from a means to strengthen the sovereign’s authority, a ‘humane politiques’, to a ‘Divine politiques’, where others come to exercise countervailing claims on subjects’ loyalty. Because immortality presents such a profound challenge to Hobbes’s political remedy founded on the judicious use of fear, he adopts a twofold strategy to moderate its political influence. The first is a redefinition of who shall speak and what shall be said about immortality. The second strategy is to elevate the demands of this-world, by promising an eternal peace that will ensure a commodious life.

**Keywords** Hobbes, immortality, church, state, religion, toleration.

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Separation of church and state is one of the defining features of modern liberalism. The origins of the concept have been traced to Biblical, apostolic and patristic sources, which in turn have been influential in subsequent Catholic and Protestant thought.<sup>1</sup> Yet the most influential modern articulation of the idea is generally

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Two communities, two cities, two powers and two swords’, each duality drawn from different Biblical texts, justified separationism according to John Witte, ‘Facts and Fictions About the History of Separation of Church and State,’ *Journal of Church and State* 48, no. 1 (2006): 15–45. See also Richard Bowser and Robin Muse, ‘Historical Perspectives on Church and State,’ in *Church-state Issues in America Today*, eds. Ann W. Duncan and Steven L. Jones (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), pp. 41–62.

considered to be by John Locke, especially his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [1689] where he defends absolute separation and thereby limits on political authority on the grounds that ‘The care of Souls cannot belong to the Civil Magistrate, because his Power consists only in outward force; but true and saving Religion consists in the inward persuasion of the Mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God’.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that Locke’s formulation was adopted by the framers of the American constitution, especially Thomas Jefferson, it became a decisive aspect of American constitutionalism, and through its influence, modern constitutionalism more generally.<sup>3</sup>

This ready acceptance and general promotion of the principle of separation of church and state has obscured an earlier critique of concept. Thomas Hobbes, with his seminal conceptions of rights of

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<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James H. Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, [1689]1983), p. 27. For a discussion of Locke’s conception of toleration see Christopher Nadon, “The Secular Basis of the Separation of Church and State: Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 43, no.1 (2014): 21–30; Christopher Nadon, “Absolutism and the Separation of Church and State in Locke’s Letter Concerning Toleration,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 35, no. 2 (2006): 94–102. The success of this conception is such that toleration has now been extended beyond religion to encompass liberty of thought generally, respect of diversity and autonomy, even recognition. For an overview of the scholarship see Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, *Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Catriona McKinnon, *Toleration: A Critical Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); Catriona McKinnon and Dario Castiglione (eds), *The Culture of Toleration in Diverse Societies: Reasonable Toleration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> On the idea of separation of church and state in American constitutionalism see Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Robert Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Daniel Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Stephen M. Feldman, *Please Don’t Wish Me a Merry Christmas: A Critical History of the Separation of Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). On the international influence of American constitutionalism see Albert J. Rosenthal and Louis Henkin, *Constitutionalism and Rights: The Influence of the United States Constitution Abroad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); George Athan Billias, *American Constitutionalism Heard Round the World, 1776–1989: A Global Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Heinz Klug, “Model and Anti-Model: The United States Constitution and the Rise of World Constitutionalism,” *Wisconsin Law Review* (2000): 597–616.

nature, social contract, and the sovereign state is certainly an especially influential thinker for the modern liberal state. Yet in his insistence that the sovereign should have final authority in matters of faith he appears to fundamentally oppose and repudiate what we have seen as liberal conception of freedom of religion. Why does Hobbes insist on subordinating the church to the state, or ‘uniting the two heads of the eagle’ as Rousseau put it?<sup>4</sup> This is not merely an important question for a better appreciation of Hobbes’s political philosophy. To the extent that it articulates a powerful case that implicitly challenges the liberal conception of separation of church and state and religious toleration, it allows us to confront and therefore better understand the theoretical merits of the liberal position, and thereby appreciate why such alternative views continue to hold a powerful attraction to many illiberal countries around the world.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of religion for Hobbes is well known.<sup>6</sup> On the specific question of the role of the church in politics, the scholarship

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<sup>4</sup> The subtitle of the *Leviathan* shows his ambition: ‘*The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civill*’. ‘Of all Christian authors’, according to Rousseau, ‘the philosopher Hobbes is the only one who correctly saw the evil and the remedy, who dared to propose the reunification of the two heads of the eagle, and the complete return to political unity, without which no State or government will ever be well constituted’. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St Martin’s Press, [1756] 1978), p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> See generally Alfred C. Stepan, “Religion, Democracy and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (2000): 37–57; Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> The major recent debate regarding Hobbes and religion has been the question of whether he is an orthodox Christian or a skeptic. For an overview and assessment of this debate see Patricia Springborg, “Calvin and Hobbes: A Reply to Curley, Martinich and Wright,” *Philosophical Readings* Special Issue: Hobbes on Religion, 4, no. 1 (spring 2012): 3–17. For other works that examine different aspects of his religious thought favouring the sceptical position see Devin Stauffer, “‘Of Religion’ in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,” *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3 (July 2010): 868–879; Gianni Paganini, “Hobbes, Valla and the Trinity,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2003): 183–218; Greg Forster, “Divine Law and Human Law

has tended to concentrate on Hobbes' historical and institutional reasons for advocating the subordination of church to state.<sup>7</sup> In this article I will argue that his decision to subordinate the church to the state is due principally to the twofold challenge he saw in immortality, or the promise of eternal rewards, and the threat of eternal torment and damnation after death.<sup>8</sup> Hobbes considered immortality one of the principal causes of political instability and civil war because it transformed a religion from a means to strengthen the sovereign's authority, a 'humane' politics, to a 'Divine' politics, where others come to exercise countervailing claims on subjects' loyalty, instituting a contending source of power. At the same time, the promise of post-mortem eternal life and death presented the greatest challenge to his proposed political remedy of the *Leviathan*, or Commonwealth, the 'Artificiall Man' that was intended to secure the *salus populi* or peoples' safety by enforcing the foundational social contract through the use of rewards and punishments.<sup>9</sup> For, as he says, 'it were

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in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 2 (summer 2003): 189–217; Douglas M. Jesseph, "Hobbes' Atheism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2002): 140–166.

<sup>7</sup> For the scholarship that focuses on church and state in Hobbes see, for example, Christopher Nadon, "The Secular Basis of the Separation of Church and State: Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville"; Hilmar M. Pabel, "'Give to Caesar That Which Is Caesars': Hobbes's Strategy in the Second Half of *Leviathan*," *Journal of Church & State* 35, no. 2 (1993): 335–349; Jianhong Chen, "On the Definition of Religion in Hobbes' *Leviathan*," *Bijdragen: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 67, no. 2 (2006): 180–194; Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 46–72.

<sup>8</sup> The work that comes closest to directly addressing the question of immortality is Peter J. Ahrens Dorf, "The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy," *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 3 (September 2000): 579–593. Ahrens Dorf notes the limited scholarship on the subject and the importance of immortality for both Thucydides and Hobbes, though his intention is to show the extent to which Thucydides, unlike Hobbes, thinks that the longing for immortality is an intractable political problem.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin Books, [1651] 1968), Introduction, pp. 81–83.

madness not rather to chose to die a natural death, than by obeying to die eternally'.<sup>10</sup> Immortality is therefore both the source of the political problem and an obstacle to Hobbes' solution that promises an 'everlasting commonwealth'.

Hobbes, I contend, attempts to undermine the political challenge of immortality by adopting a twofold strategy that is fundamentally determined by his understanding of the political importance of fear and how its judicious use can lead to stability. The first is a redefinition of who shall speak and what shall be said about immortality. His view is that the sovereign will decide the meaning of scripture and his suggestion is that immortality should be reinterpreted to moderate the claims of eternal life while depreciating the torments of eternal death. The second strategy is to elevate the demands of this-world, by promising an eternal peace that will ensure a commodious life. This twofold approach does not solve the problem of immortality but it does suggest a means of moderating its political influence by shifting the balance from the otherworldly to the demands of the present.

In the discussion that follows I examine Hobbes' understanding of immortality in his early work, *De Cive*. I then turn to his most famous work, *Leviathan*, to see how his more elaborate political exposition conceived the problem of immortality. Here I explore his conception of religion, the difference between 'humane' and 'Divine' politics, and his attempt to moderate the political influence of

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, in *Man and Citizen*, ed. and trans. Bernard Gert (Gloucester: Peter Smith, [1658] 1978), Ch. XVIII, pp. 1, 370.

immortality with his novel attempts to reinterpret the meaning of eternal life and death. I conclude by noting the implications of our discussion for liberalism and its endorsement of religious toleration and the separation of church and state. These include the question of the nature of psychology implicit in liberal thought as well as the necessity to distinguish between religions based on their views regarding immortality.

## I.

### Hobbes and the Problem of Fear

Hobbes is famous for denying the ancients' premise that human beings are 'Political creatures' or lovers of some 'greatest Good'.<sup>11</sup> He rejects the classical understanding of types of human beings (and therefore regimes) defined by what they love or seek — for example, their love of honour, or wealth, or freedom — on the grounds that 'there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers'.<sup>12</sup> Human motion, for Hobbes, is 'Vitall' and 'Voluntary'. Voluntary motion is created by imagination, and results in 'endeavour', which is felt as either desire or aversion.<sup>13</sup> Because there is no 'greatest Good', 'Felicity' lies in 'a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another'.<sup>14</sup> But the feeling of unlimited power does not last because new desires and aversions are always

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 17, p. 225; Ch. 11, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 160.

created by the ‘Senses and Imaginations’.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Hobbes famously declares that ‘in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death’.<sup>16</sup> Where there is no common power to keep all in awe, the natural condition of man, according to Hobbes, is that of ‘warre, as is of every man, against every man’.<sup>17</sup> There are ‘three principall causes of quarrell’ for Hobbes — Competition, Diffidence and Glory. Thus the diffident, the competitive and the glory-seeker, though they have different judgments about how much power they need and about what confers the necessary power, are compelled to destroy or subdue one another because in pursuing their ‘Ends’ they confront the reality of limited or scarce goods.<sup>18</sup>

Hobbes’ solution to this problem is well known: the institution of a *Leviathan* state with a sovereign to keep peace, ensuring security and prosperity. Men with foresight who want to leave the ‘miserable condition of Warre’, to preserve themselves and to secure a more ‘contented life’, will establish a common power or sovereign to whom they will submit their will and judgment.<sup>19</sup> This new ‘*Mortal God*’, will use fear of punishment to keep all in awe, making men observe their covenants and especially the Laws of Nature. Fear is needed,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 124; Ch. 11, p. 161.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 161. Indeed, every good we seek — ‘Riches ... Knowledge ... Honour’ — and every passion we feel ‘may be reduced to ... Desire of Power’, since all things are to us ‘but severall sorts of Power’, see *ibid.*, Ch. 8, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, pp. 185–186.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, p. 184. See Hobbes’ discussion of ‘Manners’ (*ibid.*, Ch. 11, pp. 160–168) and the ‘NATURALL CONDITION of mankind’ (*ibid.*, Ch. 13, pp. 183–188).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 17, p. 227.



according to Hobbes, because ‘without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed’, the Laws of Nature ‘are contrary to our naturall Passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like’.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of fear for the political efficacy of the Commonwealth indicates why immortality is especially problematic for Hobbes. Fear creates the discord in the state of nature. It is also the means for escaping from its debilitating effects to a state of security and comfort. But a sovereign cannot contend with another source of power — this would simply reintroduce the discordant wills that characterised the state of nature into the commonwealth. The promise of eternal reward after life, and the threat of eternal torment, as judged by a representative or vicar of God, introduce into politics such a new authority, profoundly challenging Hobbes’ sovereign who is to hold and exercise complete power. Thus immortality is not only a theological question for Hobbes, it goes to the heart of his new political science.

## II.

### **Immortality in *De Cive***

The political importance of immortality is made clear from the beginning in Hobbes’ *De Cive*. In the context of discussing those doctrines that lead citizens to disobey the laws of the city or the commands of those in supreme authority, Hobbes observes:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 17, p. 223.

For if one command somewhat to be done under penalty of natural death, another forbid it under pain of eternal death, and both by their own right, it will follow that the citizens, although innocent, are not only by right punishable, but that the city itself is altogether dissolved. For no man can serve two masters; nor is he less, but rather more a master, whom we are to obey for fear of temporal death. It follows therefore that this one, whether man or court, to whom the city hath committed the supreme power, have also this right; that he both judge what opinions and doctrines are enemies unto peace, and also that forbid them to be taught.<sup>21</sup>

In the subsequent Chapter XVIII, ‘Concerning Those Things Which Are Necessary for Our Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven’, he outlines the nature of the difficulty confronting a citizen who wants to obey the sovereign in secular matters.

For if the command of the prince or city be such, that he can obey it without hazard of this eternal salvation, it is unjust not to obey them. ... On the contrary, if they command us to do those things which are punished with eternal death, it were madness not rather to chose to die a natural death, than by obeying to die eternally: and then comes in that which Christ says (Matth. x. 28): *Fear not them who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*. We must see, therefore, what all those things are, which are necessary for salvation’.<sup>22</sup>

The practical political effect of immortality, according to Hobbes, is political instability due to the existence of two masters who command obedience from citizens who are placed in a difficult situation, so that ‘with a wavering obedience between the punishments of temporal and spiritual death, as it were sailing between Scylla and Charybdis, they often run themselves upon both’.<sup>23</sup> For Hobbes deferring to the power

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, Ch. VI, Section 11, pp. 179–180; footnote omitted.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, Section 1, p. 370.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, Section 1, p. 370.

of this alternative authority is perfectly reasonable: given a choice between a natural and eternal death it would be ‘madness’ not to choose the latter. Or, as he says subsequently, ‘For every man, if he be in his wits, will in all things yield that man an absolute obedience, by virtue of whose sentence he believes himself to be either saved or damned’.<sup>24</sup> As these statements in *De Cive* indicate, Hobbes mentions both eternal life and death, hence it would seem that for him the political efficacy of immortality lies not in the hope of eternal life, but in the fear of eternal death. Avoidance of eternal death, rather than search for eternal life, is the political reality of immortality.

In *De Cive* Hobbes does not attempt to do away with the longing of immortality. Rather he uses it to buttress sovereign authority. He teaches that only two virtues, faith and obedience, are needed for salvation. As a matter of inward faith, ‘there is no other article of faith requisite as *necessary* to salvation, but only this, *that Jesus is the Christ*’.<sup>25</sup> For obedience what is necessary for salvation is ‘nothing else but the will or endeavour to obey’. This includes the ‘moral laws, which are the same to all men, and the civil laws; that is to say, the commands of sovereigns in temporal matters, and the ecclesiastical laws in spiritual’.<sup>26</sup> In this way he attempts to moderate doctrinal differences, while reposing their authoritative determination in the sovereign. But what if the sovereign orders something we cannot obey? To the question ‘Must we resist princes, when we cannot obey them?’ Hobbes’ answer is, ‘Truly, no’. Martyrdom avoids obedience

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, Section 1, p. 385.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, Section 6, pp. 376–377.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, Section 3, p. 372.

to the city by relying on ‘a feigned Christian faith’ that does not believe ‘with his whole heart, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*’.<sup>27</sup>

### III Of Religion

When we turn to Hobbes’ comprehensive and best known work, *Leviathan*, we see him approaching the question of immortality differently. In the first two parts of the *Leviathan*, ‘Of Man’ and ‘Of Commonwealth’, Hobbes focuses on religion, and how Christianity presents a challenge to the sovereign. But the reason for this influence, which was revealed in *De Cive* to be the problem of immortality, is now taken up and discussed at the end of *Leviathan*, in the Third Part, ‘Of A Christian Common-Wealth’ and the Fourth, ‘Of The Kingdome of Darknesse’. What was confronted directly in *De Cive* is in comparison relegated to the latter parts of *Leviathan*. The reason for this apparently more cautious approach lies, as we will see, in Hobbes’ new and more ambitious attempt in the *Leviathan* to undermine the political influence of immortality.

Hobbes’ definition of religion and superstition in Chapter 6 on ‘Voluntary motions; commonly called the PASSIONS’<sup>28</sup> is revealing:

Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; not allowed,

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. XVIII, p. 384.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 6, pp. 118–134.

SUPERSTITION. And when power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION.<sup>29</sup>

The emphasis on fear corresponds with depreciation of eternal life — in Hobbes' definition of 'Felicity' a form of 'continual prospering', he states: 'What kind of Felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour him, a man shall no sooner know, than enjoy; being joyes, that now are as incomprehensible, as the word of School-men *Beatificall Vision* is unintelligible'.<sup>30</sup> This definition of religion, as 'feare of power invisible' explains in part Hobbes' starting point in his extensive discussion 'Of Religion'.<sup>31</sup> The nature of this discussion is anticipated by his comments at the end of Chapter 11, where he outlines his famous account of power and the political implications of different forms of 'Manners' or 'qualities of man-kind, that concern their living together in Peace, and Unity'.<sup>32</sup> There he states that men are anxious for the future because they want to 'order the present to their best advantage'. This 'Feare of things invisible' is, according to Hobbes, the 'naturall Seed' of religion, which some 'nourish, dresse, and forme it into Laws' to govern others and increase their power.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the overarching theme of the subsequent discussion of religion in Chapter 12 concerns the best means for tending to this 'seed'.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 124. Note that the difference between religion and superstition is, according to Hobbes, to be 'publiquely allowed', that is, decided by the sovereign.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 130.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, pp. 168–183.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 160.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, pp. 167–168.

‘Of Religion’ appears as a damning account of the religions of the Gentiles. Human curiosity, the desire to look for causes, and foresight of things to come, produces, especially in certain human beings, an anxiety: ‘So that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long gnawed on by the feare of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep’.<sup>34</sup> This perpetual fear results in a belief in ‘some *Power*, or Agent *Invisible*’ which is supposed to be incorporeal. Hobbes thus endorses the view of the ‘old Poets’, at least with respect to the ‘many Gods of the Gentiles’, that ‘Gods were first created by humane Feare’.<sup>35</sup> Not knowing ‘*causing*’ — the difference between the ‘antecedent and subsequent Event’ — almost all men superstitiously attribute their fortune to things that have no such influence. They thereby seek to secure the favours of such Powers Invisible by honouring them, and especially by believing in the ‘Prognostiques’ of men ‘of whom they have once conceived a good opinion’. Hobbes summarises his views as follows:

And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques, consisteth the Naturall seed of *Religion*; which by reason of the different Fancies, Judgments, and Passions of severall men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 169.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, pp. 172–173.

Hobbes, in his subsequent discussion, takes great delight in showing how ridiculous the Gods of the Gentiles were — ‘there is almost nothing that has a name, that has not been esteemed amongst the Gentiles, in one place or another, a God or Divell; or by their Poets feigned to be inanimated, inhabited, or possessed by some Spirit or other’.<sup>37</sup> Hobbes’ account of the inventive diversity (and absurdity) of the Gentiles is in effect a testimony to the power of fear.

In his amusing critique of the heathen gods Hobbes occasionally raises uneasy questions concerning the Christian God. For example, it is not clear if the Christian God is also created by human fear. The claim that the ‘one God Eternall, Infinite and Omnipotent, may more easily be derived, from the desire men have to know the causes of naturall bodies, and their severall vertues, and operations; than from the feare of what was to befall them in time to come’ is sufficiently far-fetched to betray his true opinion.<sup>38</sup> Hobbes’ ridicule of the claimed power of some to ‘turn a stone into bread, a bread into man, or any thing into any thing’, to distinguish between God and ‘Divell’, as well as his references to how certain men attributed to Gods the ability to propagate, ‘by mixing with men, and women, to beget mongrill Gods’ show how his ostensible attack of the Gentiles is also

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 170, as is subsequently contradicted by him. Note that previously he had attributed to this desire the number of gods, and not the source: curiosity, ‘or love of the knowledge of causes’. This results in two opinions: where people examine natural causes of things, they are ‘enclined thereby to believe there is one God Eternall’; others who do not enquire but proceed from ignorance will propose ‘severall kinds of Powers Invisible’, *ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 167.

implicitly and indirectly an assault on Christian beliefs and practices.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, consider his view that the success of Christian Religion in the Roman Empire was due not simply to the preaching of the Apostles and Evangelists, that ‘a great part of that success, may reasonably attributed to the contempt, into which the Priests of the Gentiles of that time, had brought themselves, by their uncleanness, avarice, and juggling between princes’.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, he blames ‘unpleasing Priests’ as the cause of ‘all the changes of Religion in the world’ — ‘not onely amongst Catholiques, but even in that Church that hath presumed most of the reformation’.<sup>41</sup> These observations make us wonder what the real difference is between True Religion and Religion, between the one Infinite God and the many heathen Gods. Hobbes’ response appears to raise even more fundamental questions regarding Christianity. Hobbes says that the seeds of religion have

received culture from two sorts of men. One sort have been they, that have nourished, and ordered them, according to their own invention. The other, have done it, by Gods commandment, and direction: but both sorts have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society. So that the Religion of the former sort, is a part of humane Politiques; and teacheth part of the duty which Earthly Kings require of their Subjects. And the Religion of the later sort is Divine Politiques; and containeth Precepts to those that have yeilded themselves subjects in the Kingdom of God. Of the former sort, were all the founders of Commonwealths, and the Law-givers of the Gentiles: Of the later sort, were *Abraham, Moses*, and

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 172; Ch. 12, p. 173; Ch. 12, p. 175 respectively.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 183.



our *Blessed Saviour*; by whom have been derived unto us the Lawes of the Kingdome of God.<sup>42</sup>

The seeds of religion can never be abolished — they can only be cultivated for better or worse.<sup>43</sup> The ‘Authors of the Religion of the Heathen’ cultivated the seeds of religion for their political benefits. However absurd or ridiculous, the religion of the gentiles had a salutary political purpose — a ‘humane Politiques’ that aimed at peace and obedience. They did this by making it seem that religious precepts were ‘dictates of some God, or other Spirit’; by making the people believe that ‘the same things were displeasing to the Gods, which were forbidden by Lawes’; and finally, by prescribing ‘Ceremonies, Supplications, Sacrifices, and Festivalls, by which they were to believe, the anger of the Gods might be appeased’.<sup>44</sup> These institutions, according to Hobbes, were designed to secure the peace of the Commonwealth.<sup>45</sup> Hobbes seems to endorse this ‘humane politiques’, where the ‘Religion of the Gentiles was a part of their Policy’, by noting that in Rome it led to religious toleration.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 173.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 177.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 178.

<sup>46</sup> Except for the Jews, ‘who (being the peculiar Kingdome of God) thought it unlawfull to acknowledge subjection to any morall King or State whatsoever’ (*ibid.*). That the Torah does not refer to immortality raises the question of whether it is monotheism rather than immortality that posed the political problem in this case. That immortality was accepted by the Pharisees would seem to suggest that at its core the problem continued to be immortality: see Noah H. Rosenbloom, “Rationales for the Omission of Eschatology in the Bible,” *Judaism* 43, no. 2 (spring 1994): 149–158; David Castelli, “The Future Life in Rabbinical Literature,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1, no. 4 (July 1889): 314–352; Ernest F. Scott, “The New Testament Idea of the Future Life: I. The Formative Influences,” *The Biblical World* 38, no. 1 (July 1911): 18–27; C.J. De Vogel, “Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 39, no. 1 (March 1985): 1–62.

But what is the nature of ‘Divine Politiques’? Hobbes confines his discussion of the Kingdome of God, both by Nature and Covenant, to one brief paragraph, before directing our attention to ‘another place’, namely Chapter 35 of the *Leviathan*. His point is that in the specific Kingdom where God by supernatural revelation plants religion, there is no distinction between temporal and spiritual dominion. The subsequent discussion of what causes changes in religion — use of contradictory arguments; acting contrary to religious precepts; want of miracles — seems to apply equally to humane and Divine politics, as the discussion of Moses, Samuel, Christian evangelism in Rome and English abolition of Catholicism shows.<sup>47</sup> Thus ‘Of Religion’ implicitly raises impious questions regarding the motives of Abraham, Moses and Christ. The political effect of ‘Divine Politiques’ is not clearly stated, but passing statements allow us to gain an idea of how they differ from ‘humane Politiques’. As the example of the toleration of the Roman empire for religion shows, the only religion forbidden by the Romans was the Jewish, because it did not defer to a ‘morall King or State’. The discussion of the power of the Church of Rome at the end of the chapter shows how the Pope, using the idea of Salvation, imposes his authority over ‘Christian Princes’.<sup>48</sup> It would seem, then, that the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 12, pp. 180–181.

<sup>48</sup> On the means used by ‘Priests’ to exert political control Hobbes lists the religious power to crown; the inability of Priests to marry (thereby denying priesthood to princes); the determination of lawfulness of marriages; the power to decree heresy, thereby limiting a subject’s allegiance; exclusion from criminal jurisdiction; and the source of independent income from religious services. Hobbes attacks not only the ‘Catholiques’ but also ‘that Church that hath presumed most of Reformation’, *ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 182; Ch. 47.

political difference between the religion of the gentiles and the true religion is that true religion, in relying on salvation, institutes a competing source of authority — the Kingdom of God — in secular politics. Salvation, with its attendant notions of immortality, undermines the ability of rulers to use religion for political purposes. Therefore immortality is one of the major challenges for Hobbesian sovereignty. Before we accept Hobbes' invitation to examine these questions by going to Chapter 35, where Hobbes discusses in detail his understanding of the Kingdom of God, we should recall that the discussion of religion was preceded by Chapter 11, 'Of the difference of MANNERS', where Hobbes notes that there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme), nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good), as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers'.<sup>49</sup> His silence in this context and in the subsequent discussion of the human desire for power of the promise of eternal felicity in the Kingdome of God suggests that he does not think that paradise (as opposed to hell) has political significance.

#### IV

#### Kingdom of God

The introductory sentence to Chapter 35, 'Of the Signification in Scripture of KINGDOME OF GOD, of HOLY, SACRED, and SACRAMENT', states the common meaning of 'Kingdome of God', as evident in the 'Writings of Divines', is the 'Eternall Felicity after

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 160. We should note that Hobbes does, in passing, touch on immortality in the chapter 'On Religion'. In his discussion of 'Invisible Agents' he challenges the idea of incorporeality. Those who refer to God as '*Spirit Incorporeall*' mean it piously and not dogmatically, according to Hobbes, since it is impossible to imagine something that has such attributes, *ibid.*, Ch. 12, p. 171.

this life, in the Highest Heaven'. It is this meaning that Hobbes seeks to subvert in this chapter, which he does by arguing that the Kingdom of God was in fact the earthly or 'Civill Kingdome', which required the people of Israel to obey the laws of Moses, and afterwards those of the High Priest. The Kingdom ended, according to Hobbes, with the election of Saul, to be restored by Christ.<sup>50</sup> Hobbes' reinterpretation of the Kingdom of God reveals its theological and political importance. Theologically, the Kingdom of God is premised on the possibility of 'Eternall Felicity after this life', that is, immortality. But what is the political import of this understanding of the Kingdom? If the Kingdom of God

were not a Kingdome which God by his Lieutenants, or Vicars, who deliver his Commandments to the people, did exercise on Earth; there would not have been so much contention, and warre, about who it is, by whom God speaketh to us, neither would many Priests have troubled themselves with Spirituall Jurisdiction, nor any King have denied it them.<sup>51</sup>

Immortality and the promise of eternal happiness allow Priests to be vicars of the Kingdom of God on earth, translating their spiritual jurisdiction into an independent authority that challenges kings. Or, as Hobbes states in a previous chapter discussing the authority of Scriptures, a consideration of the Kingdom of God is important for resolving an important question:

*Whether Christian Kings, and the Sovereigne Assemblies in Christian Common-wealths, be absolute in their own Territories, immediately under God; or subject to one Vicar of Christ, constituted over the Universall Church; to bee judged, condemned,*

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 35, p. 448.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 35, p. 448.

*deposed, and put to death, as hee shall think expedient, or necessary for the common good.*<sup>52</sup>

The political problem of the Kingdom of God, premised on immortality, is not only a question of who is sovereign in each state — king or priest — but presents a larger international problem of a universal sovereignty by the ‘Vicar of Christ’.

We now have a better appreciation of the Hobbesian distinction between humane and Divine politics. The idea of immortality and therefore eternal felicity in the Kingdome of God, as revealed in certain interpretations of Scripture, allows priests, as vicars of God, to claim a separate and countervailing authority against sovereigns, thereby instituting a Divine politics. Immortality, especially articulated in sacred books, makes a humane politics, where sovereigns use religion for the public good, impossible. Hobbes’ challenge is to reassert control over immortality, ameliorating its pathologies, so that sovereigns can return to humane politics. In his reinterpretation of the meaning of the Kingdome of God in Chapter 35, we see the principal means he will employ to pursue this objective. Hobbes will undermine Divine politics by questioning the authority of Scripture, as well as the Divine’s interpretation of its terms, denying them independent authority as Vicar of God. The most important part of this endeavour will be a reinterpretation of the meaning of the Kingdome of God, immortality and martyrdom. He will then recover the sovereign’s authority to interpret scripture, thereby re-establishing the possibility of a humane politics. It may be sufficient for our

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 33, p. 427; italics in original.

purposes to indicate in greater detail his teaching on immortality to show how it attempts to accomplish Hobbes' overall objective.

## V

### Hobbes on Immortality

Chapter 38, 'Of the Signification in Scripture of ETERNALL LIFE, HELL, SALVATION, THE WORLD TO COME, and REDEMPTION' starts with a succinct statement of the political importance of immortality:

It is impossible a Commonwealth should stand, where any other than the Sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death. Now seeing *Eternall life* is greater reward than the *life present*; and *Eternall torment* a greater punishment than the *death of Nature*; It is a thing worthy to be well considered, of all men that desire (by obeying Authority) to avoid the calamities of Confusion, and Civill war, what is meant in holy Scripture, by *Life Eternall*, and *Torment Eternall*; and for what offences, and against whom committed, men are to be *Eternally tormented*; and for what actions, they are to obtain *Eternall life*.<sup>53</sup>

In the remainder of the chapter Hobbes undertakes a detailed scriptural exegesis of the meaning of these terms, intended as a possible teaching to be adopted by a future sovereign who must decide its substance because, as Hobbes notes, 'For the points of doctrine concerning the Kingdome [of] God, have so great influence on the Kingdome of Man, as not be determined, but by them, that under God have the Sovereign Power'.<sup>54</sup>

The meaning of eternal life is the first important matter explored in the chapter. Hobbes denies immortality of the soul: 'That the Soul

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, pp. 478–479.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, p. 485.

of man is in its own nature Eternall, and a living Creature independent on the body; or that any meer man is Immortall, otherwise than by the Resurrection in the last day, (except *Enos* and *Elias*,) is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture'.<sup>55</sup> After we die, according to Hobbes, we shall be resurrected and face judgment, with believers promised immortality not in heaven, but here on earth.<sup>56</sup> Eternal life is on earth, specifically in Jerusalem, because the eternal life promised to Adam was on earth, which was restored by the eternal life promised by Christ's victory over death.<sup>57</sup> As for the joys of life eternal, they are 'comprehended all under the name of SALVATION, or *being saved*' — Hobbes presents paradise in negative terms, as a place where one is 'secured' from 'Want, Sicknesse, and Death it self'.<sup>58</sup> If eternal life is on earth, so is Hell (and death). Hobbes rejects the accounts of Hell as a bottomless pit, a lake of fire, or a place of eternal darkness, which he regards as no more than metaphorical depictions of the torments of the reprobate who grieve over the eternal felicity of others. Similarly, he denies that 'Satan' and 'Devill' are proper names for specific individuals; they are 'Appellatives' meaning 'any Earthly Enemy of the Church'.<sup>59</sup> Consequently the fate of those condemned on the day

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, p. 483.

<sup>56</sup> He confirms this with his subsequent discussion in Part 4 of the *Leviathan*: the human soul is not immortal 'naturally' but only by the Grace of God, *ibid.*, Ch. 44, pp. 644–647. It is on this basis that he denies the possibility of purgatory, *ibid.*, Ch. 44, pp. 649–653.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, pp. 491–493.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, p. 490. As he subsequently notes, as there is no eating, drinking or 'engendering' in the eternal Kingdome of God, it is not clear what pleasures are left for the average person, *ibid.*, Ch. 44, pp. 646–647. This may explain why Hobbes does not regard paradise as a *summum bonum*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, pp. 488–489.

of judgment will not be ‘Everlasting Fire and Torments’ but a ‘second Death’, which is an ‘Everlasting Death’.<sup>60</sup>

This brief account of Hobbes’ detailed review is sufficient to reveal his intention in reinterpreting scripture in a way that he admits ‘will appear to most men a novelty’.<sup>61</sup> Hobbes’ intention is to reduce the scope and meaning of immortality of the soul while denying any possibility of malignant spirits such as Satan. He literally brings us back to earth — both Paradise and Hell are shifted from the otherworldly ‘Higher Heaven’ to God’s ‘Footstoole’, the earth. They are also reduced in their force and promise: Paradise is salvation, a sort of security but with none of the pleasures of eating, drinking or ‘engendering’; Hell is at worst a brief torment and then a second death.<sup>62</sup> Altogether Hobbes wants to readjust the balance between ‘life present’ and ‘*Eternall life*’ and ‘*Eternall torment*’, with the hope of giving his new peaceful commonwealth, with its promise of earthly pleasures, an advantage over the fantastical power of the eternal.

He adopts a similar strategy with his discussion of what is needed to be saved. In Chapter 43, ‘Of What is NECESSARY for a Mans Reception into the Kingdome of Heaven’ he restates at the very start the political problem of immortality: ‘The most frequent praetext of Sedition, and Civill Warre, in Christian Commonwealths’, according to Hobbes, ‘hath a long time proceeded from a difficulty, not yet

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, pp. 489–490.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 38, p. 484.

<sup>62</sup> His definitive view regarding the possibility of spirits and therefore immortality, that ‘every part of the Universe is Body, and that which is not Body, is not part of the Universe’ he reserves for his subsequent discussion of Aristotelian metaphysics towards the end of the *Leviathan*, *ibid.*, Ch. 46, p. 689.



sufficiently resolved, of obeying at once both God, and Man, then when their Commandments are one contrary to the other'.<sup>63</sup> Hobbes then elaborates on this problem in terms that are nearly identical to his discussion in *De Cive*, that it is 'madness to obey' a Civil sovereign's command that damns one to Eternall Death. Hobbes' answer is: 'All that is NECESSARY to *Salvation*, is contained in two Vertues, *Faith in Christ*, and *Obediance to Laws*'.<sup>64</sup> One should obey, according to Hobbes, the Laws of God, which are 'the Laws of Nature, whereof the principall is, that we should not violate our Faith, that is, a commandement to obey our Civill Sovereigns, which wee constituted over us, by mutuall pact one with another'.<sup>65</sup> As for 'Faith', the only article necessary for salvation is that 'Jesus is Christ'.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Hobbes argues, it is not hard to reconcile our obedience to God with that of the civil sovereign. But what if the sovereign should force us to deny even this article of faith? This raises the problem of martyrdom, a theme he discusses in detail in chapter 42, '*Of Power Ecclesiasticall*'. There he refers to Prophet Elisha's dispensation to Naaman that allowed him to bow before the idol Rimmon, even though in his heart he believed in the true God. These actions are to be attributed to the sovereign and not those of the believer, according to Hobbes. Does this mean that martyrs 'have needlessly cast away their lives'? Hobbes resolves that problem by interpreting 'Martyr' to mean

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 43, p. 609.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 43, p. 610.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 43, p. 612.

<sup>66</sup> Hobbes demonstrates this with reference to the words of the Evangelists, the sermons of the Apostles, the ease of the doctrine and clear Scriptural references, *ibid.*, Ch. 43, pp. 615–618.

‘a Witnesse of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah’.<sup>67</sup> There are therefore the original martyrs, or ‘Martyrs of Christ’, who conversed with him and saw him after he had risen, and second martyrs, who can only witness what others have previously seen and therefore are ‘Martyrs of Christs Witnesses’ or ‘Martyr of Martyrs’. Of these second martyrs, who is everyone alive, Hobbes severely restricts the possibility of martyrdom — one can only die for one article, that ‘Jesus is the Christ’; but testimony and not death is sufficient. Indeed, one cannot be a Martyr of the first or second kind, according to Hobbes, unless one is ‘sent to the conversion of Infidels’. Consequently no-one can be a martyr in a Christian commonwealth; such actions only benefit the ‘ambition, or profit of the Clergy’ or reveal someone who pretends to believe, ‘to set some colour upon his own contumacy’.<sup>68</sup> But even in witnessing where the civil sovereign is an infidel, a martyr need not put oneself in danger; faith is internal and invisible and it is possible to rely on the example of Naaman. ‘But if they do’, Hobbes warns with seeming frustration, ‘they ought to expect their reward in Heaven, and not complain of their Lawfull Sovereign; much lesse make warre upon him’.<sup>69</sup> Thus whatever reservations we may entertain about Hobbes’ scriptural exegesis regarding martyrdom, his intention is clear. He endeavours, with all the hermeneutical, rhetorical and forensic skills at his disposal, to comfort those who may think that it is madness not to be a martyr. You can have both, Hobbes seems to say, a comfortable life here, and

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 42, p. 529.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 42, p. 530; Ch. 43, p. 625 respectively.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 43, p. 625.

if you still believe, an eternal life hereafter. Those who claim otherwise only seek to exploit you.

## VI

### Everlasting Commonwealth

The discussion of immortality and martyrdom reveals an important aspect to Hobbes' treatment of religion in *Leviathan*. Hobbes' interpretation of Scripture, however novel and therefore contentious, is designed to moderate as well as politically exploit the power of immortality. He does this by depreciating the joys of eternal life, by denying or ameliorating the terrors of eternal punishment, and by making civil obedience a guarantee of salvation. This account, to be adopted by the sovereign, the only proper authority to interpret the Bible, should be seen in the context of his larger attempt to undermine the authority of revealed religion in 'Of a Christian Commonwealth', the third part of the *Leviathan*,<sup>70</sup> and the accusation and condemnation in 'Of the Kingdome of Darknesse', the fourth part of the *Leviathan*, of the Church of Rome as author and beneficiary of spiritual darkness.<sup>71</sup> Hobbes' attempts to reinstate the sovereign as the interpreter of Scripture, displacing the Universities and the Pope, and to undermine Scripture's authority, reinterpreting the meaning of all

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, the challenge to the character of the Bible in *ibid.*, chapter 33; the questions raised regarding Spirits and Angels in chapter 34; the undermining of the meaning of the Kingdom of God in chapter 35; the challenge to the nature of prophets (chapter 36) and miracles (chapter 37); the depreciation of paradise and hell (chapter 38), and of the Church (chapter 39); and the undermining of rights of the Kingdom of God (chapter 40); of the role of the Saviour (chapter 41), of the Pope (chapter 42) and the significant diminution of what is needful to be saved (chapter 43).

<sup>71</sup> Note that the attack on the Papacy in *ibid.*, Chapter 42, is the longest of all these chapters.

its terms, especially salvation, have one overall objective: to readjust the balance between ‘life present’ and ‘*Eternall life*’ and ‘*Eternall torment*’, with the hope of giving his new peaceful commonwealth, with its promise of earthly pleasures, an advantage over the fantastical power of the eternal. Thus we see that Hobbes has a twofold strategy in transforming Divine politics into humane politics. The first, as we have noted, is the reinterpretation and depreciation of immortality and the undermining of all those who exploit its considerable political influence. The second is a comprehensive attempt to rehabilitate the importance of the ‘life present’, which he pursues in the first two books of the *Leviathan*. It is instructive to note the way in which Hobbes, while accepting present deficiencies, promises a better future in the *Leviathan*.

Hobbes concedes the misery of our present life. He reminds us that even in our most confident moments we are only a step away from our natural state of war, which destroys all industry and therefore commodious living, resulting, in his well known formulation, in a pervasive fear of violent death, and a life that is ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’. Hobbes denies this state is due to a moral lapse or sin — ‘The Desires, and other Passions of man, are in themselves no Sin’.<sup>72</sup> It is the inevitable consequence of power seeking humanity untrammelled by laws. Hobbes notes that all previous attempts to improve this situation, the ‘Vain Philosophy’ of the ‘old Morall Philosophers’ and more recently the ‘Schoole-Divines’, have been

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, p. 186.

useless or pernicious, exacerbating the situation by leading to even greater violence and destruction.<sup>73</sup> It should not surprise us, then, that those Hobbes wants to address, the men and women who are compelled by fear to be reasonable, are also the anxious human beings who look hopefully to eternal life and happiness. It is these individuals Hobbes has in mind when he promises a new and better life.

Hobbes promises peace, and thereby all those advantages of peace that war takes away: industry, including cultivation of the earth, international trade, commodious buildings, geography, the ‘Arts’, ‘Letters’ and ‘Society’.<sup>74</sup> Peace will dispel the fear of violent death and replace it with the comfort of commodious living. Hobbes concedes that his proposals are novel: as he notes at the end of the *Leviathan*, having completed his ‘Discourse of Civill and Ecclesiasticall Government, occassioned by the disorders of the present time’, he will ‘return to my interrupted Speculation of Bodies Naturall; (if God give me health to finish it,) I hope the Novelty will as much please, as in the Doctrine of this Artificial Body it useth to offend’.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, Hobbes boasts that he is the first to have founded politics on solid ground, the first political scientist. With reference to his ‘Science of Naturall Justice’, he notes that, ‘neither *Plato*, nor any other Philosopher hitherto, hath put into order, and sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theorems of Morall doctrine, that men may

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 46, pp. 682–703.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, p. 186.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, A Review and Conclusion, pp. 728–729.

learn thereby, both how to govern, and how to obey'.<sup>76</sup> He observes that just as 'Time and Industry' produce new knowledge regarding the art of architecture, his newfound 'Principles of Reason' set forth in 'this discourse' will make the constitution of Commonwealths '(except by externall violence) everlasting'.<sup>77</sup>

Hobbes thus counters immortality or the promise of eternal life (and death) in the hereafter with an everlasting peace and therefore commodious living here on earth. Moreover, and importantly, we can be assured of the prospects of such a commodious life because it is our own handiwork: the *Leviathan* that will secure our social contract is of our own making. We are in a sense god-like, creating an 'Artificiall Man', or '*Mortall God*', that 'great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE', which is of 'greater stature and strength than the Naturall'.<sup>78</sup> As creators of a new artificial yet divine creature superior to those created by God, we will not only ensure an unending commodious life here on earth, but we will share in its immortality, especially in the contemplation of our 'laudable actions', where we will delight in imagining now the fame we will anticipate in the future.<sup>79</sup> Though these pleasures do not amount to personal immortality, Hobbes' promise that in obeying the sovereign we will assure ourselves salvation and eternal life satisfies any remaining anxieties we may have in the enjoyment of our present existence.

## VII

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 31, pp. 407–408.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 30, p. 378.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 81; Ch. 17, p. 227.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 11, p. 162.

## **Politics of Immortality**

Our recovery of Hobbes's understanding of immortality reveals how seriously he considered the challenge it posed to politics and the extensive means he employed to counter its threat. Hobbes accepts that the seeds of religion, and especially the idea of immortality, cannot be extirpated. Humane politics allows the natural human anxiety or fear that is the origin of gods and religion to be marshalled and channelled to sustain and bolster the sovereign's authority. Immortality transforms humane politics into a Divine politics, with countervailing sovereignty of the Kingdom of God. Where the two are in conflict, Hobbes accepts that it would be madness not to choose eternal over temporal rewards and punishments. Hobbes' ambition, then, is to return Divine politics to humane politics. He attempts to show the illogicality of believing in incorporeal spirits, but knows that these arguments will not be sufficient to dissuade all the fearful who are too willing to hold on to these hopes. His strategy is therefore to undermine the force of immortality, by controlling who shall speak about it, and what they will say. The sovereign will now be the sole interpreter of scripture, and he will, assuming he adopts Hobbes' suggestions, bring heaven and hell to earth, and in doing so undermine their appeal. Heaven is just like life on earth but with less cares. Hell is only a brief moment of regret, before a second death. Thus the afterlife comes to resemble life on earth. This reinterpretation of immortality allows it to be compared favourably with the new transformed politics that Hobbes seeks to inaugurate with the

*Leviathan*, that artificial creation that will ensure everlasting peace and prosperity. The twofold Hobbesian strategy is especially addressed to the fearfully rational who are most disposed to accept Hobbes' arguments for a new politics founded on the rights of nature, a social contract and an authorised sovereign state.

Our recovery of Hobbes' understanding of immortality also provides important insights into contemporary liberal responses to immortality and religion. As we have seen, Hobbes' diagnosis of the political problem of immortality, and his proposed solutions, are founded on his conception of human nature and his understanding of the human passions. The sovereign's authority over religion is the direct and inevitable consequence of his conception of power. This argument suggests that liberalism's toleration of religion, to the extent that it rejects Hobbes's solution to the problem of immortality, does not take it to be such a serious concern in part because it does not accept significant aspects of Hobbesian psychology. This is an important insight to the extent that early moderns are often characterised as endorsing a coherent and consistent conception of atomistic individualism.<sup>80</sup> If true, this poses an important question: what is the nature of liberal psychology that warrants an endorsement of separation of church and state and religious toleration (and therefore implicitly, a disregard of the threat posed by immortality)?

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<sup>80</sup> We can see this, for example, in Macpherson's arguments regarding 'possessive individualism', see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). We can also see it in the communitarian critiques of liberalism, see, for example, Amy Gutmann, "Communitarian Critics of Liberalism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1985): 308–322; Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (1990): 6–23.



This question is beyond the scope of this discussion, but as a preliminary reflection, I suggest that the crucial difference lies in the liberal emphasis on ‘unease’ as a decisive difference in psychology and the theoretical foundation for the political remedy of separation of church and state and religious toleration.<sup>81</sup>

Leaving to one side such theoretical differences, Hobbes’ insights may present an important challenge to the contemporary treatment of religion by liberalism. His distinction between ‘humane’ and ‘Divine’ politics, and the different challenge they pose to political stability, questions whether liberalism should treat all religions in the same way. Hobbes appears to argue that only those who provide a strong version of immortality, which includes personal salvation in a Kingdom of God, need special attention. He thus seems to indicate that all other religions are already humane or as Rousseau subsequently put it, ‘civic’ religions.<sup>82</sup> This seems to suggest that the Hobbesian solution may only be necessary or warranted, for example, in those countries where religions of the book, or those founded on the God of Abraham predominate. Religions where immortality is not asserted or is not personal immortality, do not pose a threat to sovereignty according to Hobbes.

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<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of Locke’s conception of desire see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, “Locke’s Desire,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (1999): 189–208; Vere C. Chappell, “Locke on the Intellectual Basis of Sin,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (1994): 197–207; Tito Magri, “Locke, Suspension of Desire and the Remote Good,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2000): 55–70.

<sup>82</sup> Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, distinguishes between three forms of religion, one true, the other state and the third Christian, which he calls priestly. Rousseau agrees with Hobbes’ proposed solution to this priestly religion but, as noted above, thinks it is not viable (see Rousseau, *On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*).

In one important respect, however, Hobbes and liberalism seem to concur in their treatment of religion. The liberal response to religion — an emphasis on education, the ‘liberal’ or moderate interpretation of sacred texts, and an insistent claim that material wellbeing will always counter religious extremism — is reminiscent of Hobbes’ twofold strategy to counter immortality. If true, this may point to the continuing salience of Hobbesian thought for significant aspects of contemporary liberalism.<sup>83</sup>

Yet such a solution to the problem of immortality seems to succeed by distorting, misdirecting and forgetting rather than refuting religious teachings, a matter that Hobbes’ contemporaries regarded as the most serious consequence of ‘Hobbism’.<sup>84</sup> Hobbes’ refutation of immortality, founded upon a political Epicureanism, is arguably as dogmatic as the piety he ridicules and dismisses as fables for the fearful.<sup>85</sup> Importantly in his refutation and therefore attempted occlusion of a certain manifestation of the problem of immortality — of ‘Divine Politics’ — he also makes us neglect and therefore forget other political manifestations of the ineradicable power and influence of our longing for immortality. For example, as we saw, one of the pleasures (and therefore rewards) of laudable actions is the pleasure of contemplating in the present our future fame, which is in effect our

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<sup>83</sup> See John W. Seaman, “Hobbes and the Liberalization of Christianity,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, 32, no. 2 (June 1999): 227–246.

<sup>84</sup> On contemporary reception of his thought see Graham Alan John Rogers (ed.), *Leviathan: Contemporary Responses to the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Thoemmes Press, 1995).

<sup>85</sup> On the differences between ancient atomism and modern empiricism see Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

present experience of a form of immortality. It seems that one cannot understand nobility without understanding the desire for immortality.<sup>86</sup> One significant price of forgetting immortality is therefore the inability to understand ‘laudable actions’, as displayed by Sidney Godolphin whose virtue was ‘inhaerent, and shining in a generous constitution of his nature’<sup>87</sup> or even Hobbes himself, who risked so much for the public good.

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<sup>86</sup> See in this regard Diotima’s account of the ‘Ladder of Love’ in Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 211c.

<sup>87</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Epistle Dedicatory, p. 75.

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