

Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law**Kody W. Cooper****Publication Date**

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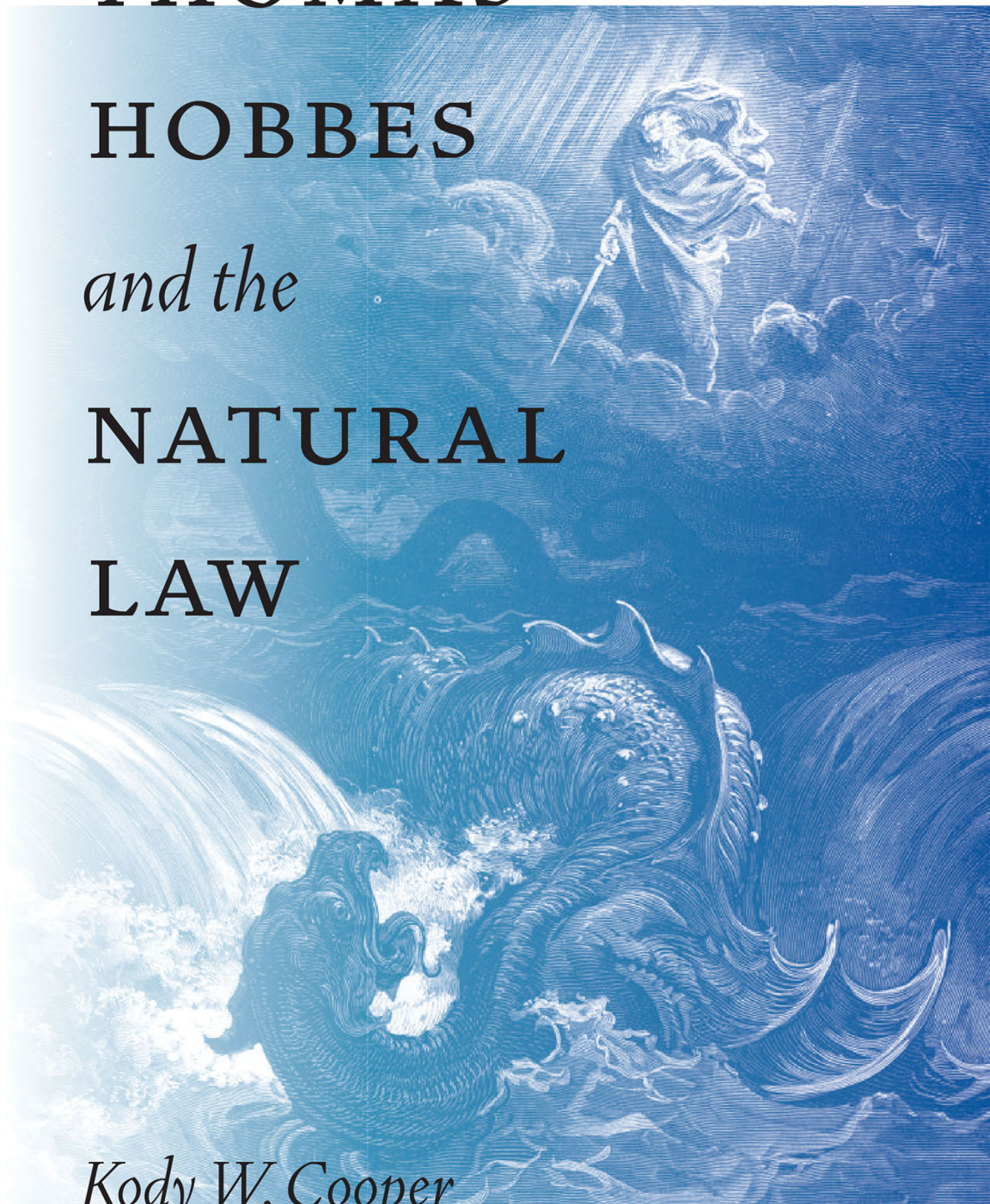
HOBBS

and the

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Kody W. Cooper



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THOMAS HOBBS
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THE NATURAL LAW

KODY W. COOPER

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For My Children

Hitherto I have set forth the nature of Man, whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government; together with the great power of his Governour, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of *Job*; where God having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud. *There is nothing, saith he, on earth to be compared with him. He is made so as not to be afraid. Hee seeth every high thing below him; and is King of all the children of pride.* But because he is mortall, and subject to decay, as all other Earthly creatures are; and because there is that in heaven, (though not on earth) that he should stand in fear of, and whose Lawes he ought to obey; I shall in the next following Chapters speak of his Diseases and the causes of his Mortality, and of what Lawes of Nature he is bound to obey.

—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

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Introduction

“Doceo,” Thomas Hobbes famously wrote, “sed frustra” (I teach, but in vain). It has been nearly 350 years since Hobbes died, and if there is one thing that political philosophers and historians of political thought agree on, it is this: that Hobbes failed to persuade his contemporaries to adopt his moral and political doctrines. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 set England on the path toward a stable constitutional monarchy that was animated by a notion of limited sovereignty. Over the next couple of centuries, the path of Anglophonic political theory would bear the marks of such liberal and progressive thinkers as John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill more than those of Hobbes, whose “radicalism” was considered to have been put in the service of reaction. Hobbes’s teachings were arguably in vain from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, which, as Edwin Curley recounts, saw a drought in Hobbes scholarship.¹ Yet the latter half of the twentieth century saw a renaissance in Hobbes scholarship. Gregory Kavka captured the general feeling: “Though he has been more than three hundred years in the grave, Thomas Hobbes still has much to teach us.”² This judgment was apparent when the preeminent Anglo-American political theorist of the twentieth century paid homage to Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* as “surely the greatest work of political philosophy in English.”³ John Rawls thus solidified a judgment that

many have arrived at in the era of the Hobbes renaissance. Indeed, the Hobbes literature has become so mountainous that one wonders what, if anything, can be contributed to our understanding of the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Indeed, it would not be an intellectual foul to be initially skeptical that another book on Hobbes is necessary or fitting.

Yet what if the most celebrated and influential scholarly interpretations of Hobbes's natural law theory have often been misleading and even fundamentally incorrect? If so, not only might it be the case that Hobbes's teaching is still in vain over three hundred years after his death, but also a new scholarly contribution might be in order.

Thomas Hobbes famously referred to his doctrine of the laws of nature as "the true and only moral philosophy."⁴ Most readers of Hobbes agree that he intended these laws to be understood as the firmest basis on which to secure peace. Moreover, they agree that they are at the heart of Hobbes's moral and political theory. And yet, beyond these points of agreement, Hobbes's natural law doctrine has been the most controversial and debated feature of his thought. It is well known that Hobbes's writings generated considerable controversy when they were published.⁵ Shortly after the publication of *Leviathan* in 1651, one of Thomas Hobbes's most intelligent critics, Bishop John Bramhall, published a scathing critique. Bramhall contended that Hobbes's natural law theory, including his list of twenty laws of nature in *Leviathan*, was incoherent and just one of many instances in which Hobbes was "inconsistent and irreconcilable" with himself. In Bramhall's view, Hobbes had scorched the whole scholastic tradition. In particular, Hobbes was taken to jettison the characteristic doctrines of classical natural law that had reached their highest expression in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. For the nearly four centuries since the publication of *Leviathan*, most readers of Hobbes have followed Bramhall in their assessment of Hobbes's moral and political doctrines vis-à-vis the classical natural law tradition. Yet few of the standard accounts of Hobbes's political philosophy give much, if any, detailed attention to Hobbes's doctrine in light of classical natural law. While Hobbes does break from the older tradition in several ways, I contend that scholars have largely misunderstood how Hobbes breaks from the tradition, and I argue that he maintains key features of classical natural law. Against

orthodox interpretations, I contend that Hobbes's novelty flows not from supposedly secular foundations, nor from a rejection of the legal character of natural law, nor from a rejection of the objectivity of the human good rooted in a notion of human nature as fixed, nor from the ability of practical reason to tame the passions in line with its own goals. Rather, Hobbes's novelty flows chiefly from his thin theory of the human good. According to my interpretation, Hobbes retains an understanding of the role of God and practical reason in morality that has more in common with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition than has been recognized. This book develops and defends a reading of Hobbes as a natural law theorist in his account of morality, commonwealth, church-state relations, and positive law.

Hobbes's theory counts as a natural law theory because he retains two key notions that classical natural law theory considered requirements for a properly *natural law theory*. First, the human good, which is grounded in a notion of human nature as fixed, provides basic reason(s) for action. Second, the norms or precepts that correspond to the human good have a legal character. I argue that Hobbes's various breaks from the apex of the classical natural law tradition—including his natural law account of morality, his common good account of commonwealth, and his natural law account of civil law—flow chiefly from his thin theory of the good. We can get an initial grasp of the outlines of the argument if we first consider classical natural law theory's thick theory of the good and the legal character of natural law precepts.⁶

The core notion of classical natural law theory lies in those standards—principles, rules, or norms that give or purport to give direction in deliberation about what to do—of right judgment in matters of practice (conduct or action). We can speak of these standards as *natural* inasmuch as they are not the products of individual or collective choice and not subject to repeal—“however much they may be violated, defied, or ignored”—because mere individual or collective choice cannot change the kind of thing man is.⁷ And we can speak of these standards as *lawful* inasmuch as they bind or ought to bind in one's deliberations about what to do. These rules, norms, or laws are rooted in the first principles of practical reason, which are fittingly described as those most basic reasons for action that direct us to the range of human goods. I shall discuss the classical natural law tradition in more detail in chapter 1.

For the moment, let us briefly consider Thomas Aquinas's thick theory of the good in his presentation of classical natural law theory.

As John Finnis correctly points out, Aquinas's presentation of the thick theory of the human good proceeds according to a "metaphysical stratification" of human nature: (1) what we have in common with all substances, (2) what, more specifically, we have in common with other animals, and (3) what is peculiar to us as human beings.⁸ Hence, in Aquinas's formulation, the human goods include preservation of one's substantial being, marriage and childrearing, friendship with others in society, and knowledge of the truth, including the truth about God.

Notably, Finnis himself has been at the forefront of the twentieth-century revival of a classical natural law approach to ethics, law, and political philosophy. In collaboration with the theologian Germain Grisez and the philosopher Joseph Boyle, Finnis has formulated a thick theory of the good that is presented as broadly within the spirit of Aquinas. According to their "new natural law" theory, the basic goods include bodily life and health, friendship, marriage, knowledge, skillful performance in work and play, harmony between one's inner and outer life, and harmony with the ultimate source of reality. There is a dispute between the new natural lawyers and their critics about how true to Aquinas this theory is.⁹ I would emphasize with Christopher Wolfe that new natural law theory and traditional natural law have this essential element in common: acting according to reason means acting according to certain human goods that are naturally known.¹⁰ Thinkers in both of these camps can agree about this core claim of natural law theory. Moreover, I believe that the terminology of "basic goods" and "reasons for action" is helpful to elucidate natural law theory. But it must be pointed out that, in using this terminology, I do not commit myself to new natural law theory's particular theses, such as its action theory (its theory of intention) and its axiology (its version of the incommensurability thesis).¹¹ As will become apparent, I incline to the more traditional views of these matters *qua* interpreter of Aquinas. But, as far as the argument of this book is concerned, it is conceivable that a genuine natural law theory could come down on different sides of these questions. I note this simply to point out that my account of natural law, and my argument that Hobbes has a (peculiar) place in that tradition, can be affirmed by natural law theorists in both of these camps.¹²

Returning to Aquinas, the range of goods corresponding to the metaphysical stratification makes up the objective content of happiness because they are required by human nature and are objectively knowable by all rightly reasoning persons. Corresponding to these goods is the order of precepts of the natural law, that is, the norms regarding preservation of human life, sex and the education of children, shunning ignorance, and living peaceably with one's fellows. This is, in very short outline, classical natural law's thick theory of the good, which makes up the objective content of authentic human well-being, fulfillment, or happiness, and is how Thomistic teaching meets the first requirement for something to count as a natural law theory.

It is also a sketch of classical natural law theory's grounds for judging the moral validity of human positive law, since the flourishing of individuals and communities in their pursuits of basic forms of the human good is the standard guiding those who are charged with care of the whole community when they deliberate about what to enact, decide, require, promote, and so on. Since that which authorities have care over is a *communitas communitatum*, a community of communities, the authority's charge will be twofold. First, it must foster and protect the unity and well-being of the range of communities that enjoy noninstrumental common goods, including the *communiones* of friendships, families, and religious believers. Second, it must foster and protect the unity and well-being of the community at large. In other words, classical natural law theory held that legislators are, or ought to be, guided by the common good.

Regarding the second requirement of something qualifying as a natural law theory, Finnis is correct that, for Aquinas, the ultimate source of reality enhances "both the content and the normativity" of the first principles.¹³ Another way to put the point is to say that, for Aquinas, the norms of natural law have a legal character. How is that?

For Aquinas, the basic norms of natural law have the character of law because they meet the four necessary conditions for something to be law: each is (a) an ordinance of reason (b) for the common good (c) made by a proper authority and (d) promulgated.¹⁴ Aquinas believes natural law is law because he holds a vision of the universe—all of "nature," including human nature—as created and ordered by a providential and loving God (doctrines that Aquinas believed were demonstrable by

unaided reason in the science that we would today call philosophical theology). Human beings in particular are ordered toward a form of flourishing available only to rational creatures. The flourishing available to man by his unaided powers is an end that specifies good and bad action. Good acts are those ordered to happiness and bad acts are those not ordered to happiness or flourishing. As we have seen, those goods that are basic or the basic reasons for action specify precepts that, while not sufficient to secure one's full-fledged flourishing, keep one from falling off the cliff in one's moral life. For Aquinas, the precepts take on the character of law prior to human positive law, inasmuch as God—the being who has care of the common good of the whole universe—promulgates them or makes them known in the very act of creating and ordering man with reason and will. Moreover, since Aquinas holds that law is properly the imperium or command of an authority, the natural law is commanded in God's act of creating nature.¹⁵

Suppose we take Aquinas's theory to be the apex of classical natural law theory. On this understanding, modern moral theory breaks from classical natural law theory in at least two ways: in its treatment of practical reasoning as essentially in the service of subrational passions and in its secular foundations. Hume stated the modern view most sharply when he claimed that reason is and only can be a slave of the passions and in his skepticism of natural theology.¹⁶ But on Finnis's reading—which is one of the most influential narratives of the history of ethical, legal, and political thought written from a perspective sympathetic to classical natural law—the modern understanding of practical reason as enslaved to the passions is traceable to Thomas Hobbes.¹⁷ I call this understanding of practical reason the impotent thesis, because it claims that practical reason does not have the power to set its own goals or to tame the passions in accord with objects determined by reason. In other words, practical reason is incapable of apprehending noninstrumental reasons for action. Indeed, the impotent thesis is the orthodox interpretation of Hobbes's theory of practical reason among Hobbes scholars. Hence, standard interpretations of Hobbes's natural law theory tend to posit a universal desire to which reason is instrumental. The universal desire typically posited is the desire for self-preservation, given its strong textual basis in Hobbes's corpus. This desire is supposed to secure the normativity of the laws of nature.

Moreover, the standard interpretation of Hobbes's natural law theory includes what we can broadly call the secularist thesis, the claim that God plays no substantive role in Hobbes's moral and political thought. This claim is defended on the basis of three subtheses: the historical thesis, the concealment thesis, and the practical severability thesis. God plays no substantive role either because Hobbes is an atheist, as attested to by the reactions of his contemporaries (the historical thesis)¹⁸ and by the ironic hints hidden in his texts suggesting that his religious and theistic statements are so many genuflections to the religious authorities of his day (the concealment thesis),¹⁹ or because, even supposing Hobbes is a theist, he renders God irrelevant to his political philosophy (the practical severability thesis).²⁰ On the secularist view, Hobbes's laws of nature are mere "qualities" or "theorems" and do not attain the status of law until the erection of an absolute sovereign. While these features of the standard interpretation—the pure instrumentality of practical reason and secularism—have not gone unchallenged, they probably remain the conventional wisdom.

But these two features of the standard interpretation of Hobbes's natural law theory—the impotent thesis and the secularist thesis—do not fit well with two principles Hobbes holds: first, on the diverse psychology of persons, and second, on the eternal, immutable, and universal bindingness of the laws of nature, *in foro interno*.²¹ Call these the psychological diversity principle and the bindingness principle. Regarding the first, Hobbes observes a number of cases in which persons fail to desire self-preservation. He believed that people may be and often are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of personal honor, or what Sharon Lloyd has called "transcendent interests." Recognizing the force of this point, one might water down the putatively necessary desire for self-preservation to a predominant desire in order to make it more psychologically fitting. But this option is ruled out if we take seriously Hobbes's second principle regarding the eternal, immutable, and universal bindingness of the laws of nature, because then the laws of nature would bind only usually or for the most part. They would not bind universally, since not everyone actually has the putatively universal desire. In short, as Lloyd has insightfully put it, "If [the laws of nature] are always to bind everyone *in foro interno*, their claim on us must either depend on no desires, or on a desire that no human can fail at any time to have."²²

Now this may be another example of instances in which Hobbes is simply irreconcilable with himself, as Bramhall alleged was evident in a whole range of Hobbes's doctrines. Or they may be instances in which Hobbes is, in his own words, "a forgetful blockhead." But Hobbes's texts actually suggest another possibility, namely, that practical reason grasps bodily life and health as a—indeed, the—basic reason for action. Hobbes indicates as much when he lays down two postulates of human nature in the dedicatory epistle to *De Cive*: first, the postulate *cupiditatis naturalis*, whereby man demands private use of common things, and second, the postulate *rationis naturalis*, which teaches man to avoid violent death or to "fly contra-natural dissolution" as the greatest natural evil.²³

While cupidity is the principle of covetousness in man—which, unchecked, leads to widespread destruction and misery in the state of nature—the rational principle "teaches every man to fly a contre-naturall Dissolution, as the greatest mischief that can arrive to Nature." It has appeared to some that Hobbes here identifies reason with the passion of fear.²⁴ Yet I contend that the tenor of the passage is to distinguish between reason and desire sufficiently to indicate that they are at cross purposes in man—and this suggests that reason is not, or need not be, a slave to the passions. On this reading, the goal of practical reason, to avoid violent death and pursue preservation, is independent of the contingent desires of natural cupidity.²⁵ In other words, reason grasps life, which Hobbes refers to as the *bonum maximum*, as the basic reason for action.²⁶ I suggest that Hobbes's contrast with the classical natural law tradition lies not in the sheer instrumentality of practical reason but in his thin theory of the good. Nor does the thinness of Hobbes's notion of the good disqualify his theory from being a natural law theory—but it does mark it off as novel in relation to the older tradition.²⁷ If correct, the impotent thesis may be what Adrian Blau has called a "Humean anachronism."²⁸

Such a reading saves both the psychological diversity principle and the bindingness principle because, while all persons may not actually take the good of life as basic in their practical reasoning, they rationally ought to. The laws of nature can then be understood as so many practical necessities that conduce to the basic good of life. Moreover, Hobbes's texts indicate how he understands his claim that these practical necessities are eternally, immutably, and universally binding *in foro interno* with the force of law to be warranted on his own terms—because God commands

them. Hence, I argue that God does play an essential role in Hobbes's natural law theory because God's command secures the legal character of the laws of nature.²⁹ In other words, Hobbes is a member of what Elizabeth Anscombe called the "law tradition of ethics" since his ethical and political theory rests on a conception of God as a lawgiver.³⁰ Upon these grounds I offer a rereading of Hobbes's theory of commonwealth and positive law. At the outset, it is necessary to set forth the reasons I think I am warranted in taking Hobbes's theology as sincerely proffered and relevant to his moral and political theory.

Fifty years ago, Hobbes scholars were reconsidering the traditional secular interpretations following the work of A. E. Taylor, Howard Warrender, and F. C. Hood, all of whom had built cases for the view that Hobbes was a theist and that God played an essential role in his political theory.³¹ The "Taylor-Warrender" thesis, as it came to be called, engendered a lot of discussion. While, as late as 1968, Brian Barry was able to write that a decade of criticism engendered by Warrender's thesis "has found critics united in rejecting many of Warrender's conclusions, but it has not produced a generally accepted alternative,"³² by 1990 Edwin Curley was recounting that the attack on the Taylor-Warrender thesis had been "vigorous":

It came from many sides; and while there may not have been any consensus among the critics about the best way to account for Hobbes' talk of obligation, a consensus does seem to have emerged that the Taylor-Warrender account is hopeless.³³

But, since Curley's judgment, the work of A. P. Martinich has mounted a serious challenge to whatever consensus had developed and built an impressive case for the proposition that not only was Hobbes a theist and not only did his theism matter for his moral and political thought, but also he was an English Calvinist, orthodox by the criterion of the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds.³⁴ Accordingly, his work has challenged each of the secular theses.³⁵ First, the historical thesis does not seem to be decisive when one considers that the epithet "atheist" was a term of opprobrium used to label any generally objectionable religious views.³⁶ Hence, Hobbes's contemporaries' use of that term would be not paradoxical but expected if he espoused teachings that purported

to be orthodox in terms of the language of the creeds but were novel as theories or explanations of them: for example, Hobbes's application of his theory of personation to the Trinity. Moreover, there is simply no consensus among Hobbes's contemporaries about his belief or unbelief in God. Some of Hobbes's most intelligent readers took him to be a theist. I join the company of Leibniz in interpreting Hobbes as sincerely believing that God exists as "ruler of the world" and as the "common monarch of all men."³⁷

As for the concealment thesis—which, in my judgment, is a more challenging and interesting interpretation—Martinich has raised a number of potential difficulties for reading Hobbes's religious statements as ironic.³⁸ In making the case that Hobbes was a theist and a Christian, Martinich does not facilely assume Hobbes's complete sincerity in his theological and religious statements. Rather, as he explains, his project begins by taking the concealment thesis seriously and going on to show that, "given the cultural context of early and mid-seventeenth-century England, Hobbes's own upbringing, his actual religious practice, and his writings, the more plausible interpretation is that he was sincere."³⁹ While his case may not ultimately persuade those convinced by the concealment and/or the historical theses, it seems that one must admit at least that Martinich has made no mean argument.

The point here is not to rehash Martinich's argument, the secularist responses, the counterarguments, and so on. However, I mention a couple pieces of historical evidence that seem to me important for raising doubts about the secularist thesis in general and the concealment thesis in particular. The concealment thesis builds on the claim that Hobbes feared being completely sincere about his religious views for fear of persecution. Hobbes's cowardice also seems to be self-attested when Hobbes writes in his autobiography that the impending invasion of the Spanish Armada hastened his mother's pregnancy such that he was born the twin of fear. Moreover, he quickly fled to France at the outbreak of the civil war. Yet it has been pointed out that Hobbes's cowardice seems to be diminished by his tenacity and intellectual courage in his disputes with the likes of Bramhall and Wallis.⁴⁰ Another important biographical point seems to weaken the concealment thesis. When Hobbes returned from exile in 1652, he could not find satisfactory worship services because, following the church reforms of the Long Parliament and the

Rump Parliament, episcopacy had been outlawed. The legally permitted churches had Reformed liturgy along Independent or Presbyterian lines, which Hobbes indicates he thought were riddled with sedition and blasphemy. Hobbes preferred episcopacy to these other religious forms: "For my own part, all that know me, know also my opinion, that the best government in religion is episcopacy."⁴¹ There is strong evidence based on his own testimony in his "Prose Life" that Hobbes attended St. Clement of East Cheap, where services were conducted by John Pearson, a high churchman who, in spite of the law, conducted the liturgy according to the more traditional Anglican rite and liturgy.⁴² But if true, it seems inconsonant with the portrait of a priest-fearing, insincere Hobbes, considering that episcopacy had been outlawed and that compulsory church attendance had been abolished. In short, if Hobbes had been a scared secret atheist feigning faith, it seems that it would have been a better strategy to attend a Reformed church or no church at all.⁴³

At a minimum, it seems that Martinich has opened the door to Hobbes scholarship that builds on the assumption that "for the most part, Hobbes meant what he said," including his theological and religious doctrines.⁴⁴ To readers of Hobbes more inclined to see him as a religious skeptic, I would say that, at the very least, it seems that a suspension of judgment on this question is warranted. For such readers my argument can be seen as showing the ways in which Hobbes's natural law theory can and cannot be seen as rhetorically continuous with the older theistic natural law doctrines. My argument proceeds by taking as sincere, *ex hypothesi*, Hobbes's natural and revealed theology. A theme of this book is that the theistic interpretation of Hobbes's moral and political theory makes better sense of Hobbes's texts as an integral whole than do rival interpretations.⁴⁵

Throughout this book I suggest that key features of Hobbes's moral and political thought are illuminated by the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. In this my approach has been anticipated in some ways by the work of such scholars as Francis Oakley, Mark Murphy, Michael Gillespie, and Timothy Fuller, although, as will become apparent, my own interpretation differs from that of each of the latter in many important respects. It is fitting to address at the outset an immediate objection to this approach: that Hobbes's whole demeanor is deeply antischolastic. This objection deserves elaboration.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes equated Christian Aristotelianism with the “Kingdom of Darkness.” He thought the “tenets of vain philosophy,” derived “partly from Aristotle, partly from blindness of understanding,” had infected Christian doctrine.⁴⁶ As Hobbes narrates it, the early Christian doctors had endeavored to defend Christian faith by means of arguments from natural reason and had begun to make use of pagan philosophy, “and with the decrees of Holy Scripture to mingle sentences of heathen philosophers.”⁴⁷ First they intermingled “some harmless ones of Plato,” but later “also many foolish and false ones out of the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle.”⁴⁸ It was thus that they let their enemies through the gate and “betrayed unto them the citadel of Christianity.”⁴⁹ Hence, what was held by the followers of Thomas Aquinas to be *sacra doctrina*—a science that made use of “extrinsic and probable authorities” like Aristotle to elucidate the truths of Christian faith grounded in the “canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof”⁵⁰—looked to Hobbes like a hideous Empusa: “walking on one foot firmly, which is Holy Scripture, but halted on the other rotten foot, which the Apostle Paul called *vain*, and might have called *pernicious philosophy*.”⁵¹ It was pernicious because it led to endless doctrinal controversies, “and from those controversies, war.”⁵² In *Leviathan*, a work Hobbes professes is about “nothing but what is necessary to the doctrine of government and obedience,” he takes pains to emphasize that Aristotelian teachings tended to rupture civil peace.⁵³ The Aristotelian “jargon” of substantial forms and essences was used to “fright [men] from obeying the laws of their country, with empty names; as men fright birds from the corn with an empty doublet, a hat, and a crooked stick.”⁵⁴

If these reflections weren’t enough to raise doubts about finding any continuity in Hobbes’s thought with the Aristotelian tradition and its wedding to Christian doctrine in general, Hobbes gives us reason to doubly doubt that he has anything in common with specifically Thomistic thought. In his controversy with Bishop Bramhall, Hobbes mentions Aquinas by name, and his words are less than praiseworthy:

I know St. Thomas Aquinas calls eternity, nunc stans, an ever-abiding now; which is easy enough to say, but though I fain would, yet I could never conceive it. They that can, are more happy than I. But in the mean time his Lordship alloweth all men to be of my

opinion, save only those that can conceive in their minds a nunc stans, which I think are none. I understand as little how it can be true his Lordship says, that God is not just, but justice itself; not wise, but wisdom itself; not eternal, but eternity itself; nor how he concludes thence that eternity is a point indivisible, and not a succession, nor in what sense it can be said, that an infinite point, and wherein is no succession, can comprehend all time, though time be successive. These phrases I find not in the Scripture; I wonder therefore what was the design of the School-men to bring them up, unless they thought a man could not be a true Christian unless his understanding be first strangled with such hard sayings.⁵⁵

In reply to Bishop Bramhall's complaint against Hobbes that "it is strange to see with what confidence now-a-days particular men slight all School-men, and classic authors, and philosophers, and classic authors of former ages," Hobbes says:

It troubles him much that I style School-learning jargon. I do not call all School-learning so, but such as is so. . . . But because he takes it so heinously, that a private man should hardly censure School-divinity, I would be glad to know with what patience he can hear Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon speaking of the same? . . . Luther in another place of his work saith thus: "School-theology is nothing else but ignorance of the truth, and a block to stumble at laid before the Scriptures." And of Thomas Aquinas in particular he saith, that "it was he that did set up the kingdom of Aristotle, the destroyer of godly doctrine."⁵⁶

Hobbes's reference to Aquinas by name in *Leviathan* comes in the same breath as a reference to Aristotle and is no less derisive. The reference appears when Hobbes is explaining how, by words, men can become "excellently wise" or "excellently foolish." Those in the former category see words as "counters" because they do but "reckon" by them—that is, they perform the mathematicized reasoning process of adding and subtracting words or composing and dividing names generally agreed upon. But the "excellently foolish" are those that value counters "by the authority of an *Aristotle*, a *Cicero*, or a *Thomas*, or any other doctor

whatsoever, if but a man.”⁵⁷ In short, it seems clear that Hobbes references Aquinas as at best a stranger from a bygone era and at worst a mortal enemy who set up the very kingdom of darkness Hobbes’s project is meant to bring down. Therefore, the objection goes, there ought to be a presumption that the thesis of this book is stillborn.

Yet such a conclusion is too strong for the following reasons. First, nothing in my argument stands on the claim that Hobbes consciously sought to mimic his scholastic forebearers, and nothing turns on whether Hobbes’s knowledge of Aquinas was derivative or not.⁵⁸ My analysis seeks to draw out the essential continuities and discontinuities of ideas in the natural law tradition, with particular attention to those of Aquinas and Hobbes. Second, Hobbes’s references to Aquinas don’t necessarily entail a stance of wholesale intellectual hostility. In his controversy with Bramhall, Hobbes expresses puzzlement over Aquinas’s view of eternity. But, given Hobbes’s materialist metaphysics, this is one of the points at which we should most expect Hobbes to disagree with Aquinas. For Hobbes, since corporeity is the touchstone of all being and instantaneous motion of the body is impossible—and since eternity is a state of activity—eternity must be an everlasting succession of moments. The same can be said for Hobbes’s rejection of Aristotelian “essence,” which he protests throughout his works is not a word used in the Bible. Hobbes is rejecting immaterialistic dualism and hylomorphism—but, as I shall argue, he does want to retain the Aristotelian four causes, including a doctrine of substantial form, to formulate a sort of materialistic hylomorphism. Nor is Hobbes’s reference to Aristotle and Aquinas as doctors of the “excellently foolish” evidence that he rejects them wholesale. There Hobbes is critiquing Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s *followers* downstream, who merely repeat their doctrines without critically reflecting on the meaning of the words they are repeating. If their followers reflected critically in light of the new physics, Hobbes thinks, they would do away with any words or phrases incompatible with the truth of materialism, like “immaterial substance,” which is absurd speech. Furthermore, inasmuch as the proliferation of arcane and stale words in later scholasticism sparked its rejection by Hobbes and his contemporaries in favor of getting back to reality, Hobbes is deeply in the spirit of Aquinas, because for Aquinas it is not the words of authorities but the object that is sovereign.⁵⁹

Finally, Hobbes explicitly points out that he does not reject all school learning as jargon, which suggests that he does retain some of the doctrines of the older natural law tradition. While I shall seek to draw these continuities out, in this book I do not intend to suggest that Hobbes did not break with the classical natural law tradition in important ways. My aim is to elucidate how Hobbes broke with that tradition, which I believe most scholars have misunderstood. My argument is that Hobbes's breaks with the classical natural law tradition proceeded amid a number of fundamental agreements with it.

Let me now set forth in brief the outline of the argument I want to develop, in which I broadly seek to follow the order of Hobbes's own presentation. In chapters 1 and 2 I seek to lay the groundwork for my interpretation of Hobbes's natural law theory. On my reading, Hobbes's metaphilosophy should be understood in essential continuity with the realistic tradition of political philosophy. Chapter 1 sets the stage for this argument by limning the realistic foundations of Hobbes's natural law philosophy. Realistic political philosophy has a particular understanding of theoretical science and knowledge in relation to practical science or knowledge in that it takes moral and political truth to essentially rest on truth claims about the structure of reality. The chapter outlines Hobbes's metaphysics, epistemology, theism, and teleological philosophical anthropology. Chapter 2 shows how Hobbesian civil philosophy, while enjoying a certain autonomy, essentially rests on a particular conception of human nature as existing and knowable and on a particular conception of God's causal relation to the world. Chapters 3 and 4 constitute the heart of my positive account of Hobbes's natural law theory. Chapter 3 defends an interpretation of Hobbes's natural law theory as meeting the first requirement of natural law theory in expressing an account of life as the basic good, since self-preservation is desirable for all rational persons. Chapter 4 articulates how Hobbesian natural law meets the second criterion and shows how the pursuit of the good of life and the necessary means thereto attain the force of law by their divine pedigree. In this chapter I seek to shed new light on the divine pedigree of natural law and moral obligation in Hobbesian natural law and contend that Hobbes's solution should be understood in light of the scholastic dialectic between God's absolute and ordained power. The directive of Hobbes's fundamental law of nature to seek peace binds practically

reasonable persons as the means to secure the good of life. To secure the good of life, it is necessary to make that good common through incorporation into commonwealth. Chapter 5 argues that Hobbes's theory of commonwealth is properly a common good account. It shows how the distinctiveness and novelty of Hobbes's theory of the common good as the peace of security is illuminated in comparison to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. It also argues that the common good account helps clarify confusion in Hobbes scholarship over the nature of the person of the commonwealth. In chapter 6, which considers Hobbes's theory of civil law, I show that Hobbes's account of the common good provides sovereignty with its end or purpose and, as such, imports a content-based limitation on what the sovereign can effectively command into civil law. The chapter criticizes positivist interpretations of Hobbes and contends that Hobbes has a properly natural law account of civil law inasmuch as the moral validity of civil law turns on its order to the common good. I conclude the book by reflecting on how Hobbes should be thought of in the natural law tradition. I argue that Hobbes should be considered a member of the tradition of natural law liberalism, and I illumine the argument with reference to that tradition in American political thought.

The structure of the book is not only inspired by the order of Hobbes's own *Leviathan*, which, with some exceptions, it broadly follows by beginning with the foundations of his natural law philosophy in his metaphysics and philosophy of the sciences, then proceeding to his account of the natural law, commonwealth, and civil law. The structure is also inspired by common approaches to disputed questions in medieval universities. As Josef Pieper recounts, first a question is posed for discussion, with a proposed answer. Then the poser becomes silent and listens to the positions and objections of his opponents. Their positions are stated as concisely and charitably as possible before reasons for disagreement are offered; a full statement of one's own position is then proffered before turning to answer further objections.⁶⁰ This approach is deeply inspired by Socrates in the belief that, through dialectical conversation about a disputed question, one can come to knowledge of the truth of the matter—in this case, a disputed question about the true character of Hobbes's political philosophy.

The method deployed in this book is conversational not only with respect to other Hobbes commentators, but also in that it deploys

the political theorist's methodology of studying past political ideas. J. G. A. Pocock identifies three kinds of approaches to the study of past political ideas: those of the historian, the political scientist, and the political philosopher.⁶¹ The political theorist takes his or her inspiration from political philosophy. Whereas the historian focuses on how language is used in specific historical contexts to discuss political problems and the political scientist studies the rise and role of language in organized political activity, the political philosopher has a different approach. As Leo Strauss helpfully articulated, political philosophy is deeply normative in that it sprouts from questions of fundamental human concern: What is the good or best life for man? Can this good be common? In taking as his aim the knowledge of the human good or well-being, the goal of political action (the "complete political good"), the political philosopher is concerned with knowledge of the political things. Political philosophy is then a branch of philosophy that can be provisionally defined as a quest for wisdom or knowledge of all things. Philosophy seeks to know the truth about God, the world, and man—and therefore political philosophy, as a branch of philosophy, cannot avoid making claims (whether implicit or explicit) about knowledge of all these things, what Strauss calls "the whole."⁶² The approach of this book is that of the political theorist: to study past political ideas through the lenses of our subject, one of the greatest political philosophers.⁶³ The political theorist is inspired by classical political philosophy in his or her attempt to understand and elucidate past political philosophers' ideas about political things and to compare those ideas with those of the other great Western political philosophers, with whom the subject of study (and oneself) is engaged in a conversation about these things.⁶⁴

This book is therefore not a rational reconstruction of Hobbes. In it I do not seek to "update" Hobbes to align him with some favored school of philosophy or to enlist some or all of his principles in service of my own views of the moral and political truth. This book is held forth as chiefly an interpretive endeavor. Hence, the point of this book is to defend a theistic natural law interpretation as the most accurate and plausible, that is, the interpretation that is warranted by a close reading of Hobbes's texts. So, while I argue that Hobbes's moral and political philosophy is best understood as a (peculiar) natural law theory, my goal is not to provide an independent defense of that theory.

But, as already indicated, a proper understanding of Hobbes's moral and political theory is of enduring interest because he offers an undeniably rich and challenging account of God, the world, man, morality, and politics. Moreover, inasmuch as his thought played a foundational role in modernity, understanding what Hobbes has to say can help us to better understand ourselves, because we cannot understand ourselves unless we understand where we have come from. Finally, an accurate interpretation of Hobbes's natural law theory is a prerequisite to assessing whether it is the "true moral philosophy."

CHAPTER 1

The Foundations of Hobbes's Natural Law Philosophy

Wisdom, says Hobbes, is *the perfect knowledge of the truth in all matters whatsoever*. But what is it to have perfect knowledge of the truth? In the passage following this definition of wisdom, Hobbes explains that wisdom is the knowledge of *things* through the medium of words:

Which being derived from the registers and records of things; and that as it were through the conduit of certain definite appellations; cannot possibly be the work of a sudden acuteness, but of a well-balanced reason; which by the compendium of a word, we call philosophy.¹

What, then, is political wisdom or political philosophy? If we say that political wisdom is perfect knowledge of political things or political truth, what does political truth have to do with truth *in all matters whatsoever*? The question can be recast in terms of the relationship between the sciences. If knowledge of political truth comes through *civil science*, what relationship obtains between civil science and the other sciences or branches of knowledge?

Hobbes makes different statements about his view of the relationship between the sciences in *De Cive*, *De Corpore*, and *Leviathan*.

This has generated a range of perspectives in the Hobbes literature about how it all may or may not fit together. One can discern a spectrum of emphasis in the scholarship between two polar views. On the one hand, there are those who emphasize the unity of Hobbes's moral and civil science with his materialistic, mechanistic, and determinist metaphysics and/or his philosophy of human nature and/or his theology.² On the other hand, there are those who contend that Hobbes's moral and civil teachings are essentially severable from his natural philosophy, his theology, and even his philosophical anthropology. Call this latter contention the *autonomy thesis*. The heart of this thesis is that Hobbes holds forth his political doctrines in such a way that they *need not* rest on any other science or knowledge.

The tradition of realistic philosophy understood the practical (moral and political) sciences to have an ultimate grounding in the speculative or theoretical truth about the world. Yet, within that tradition, it was thought that this could be compatible with a certain kind of autonomy for political philosophy. In this and the following chapter I argue that Hobbes's conception of moral and civil science should be understood in essential structural continuity with the tradition of realistic philosophy. With John Wild, I define realistic philosophy to line up with three basic beliefs of human "common sense":

- (1) There is a world of real existence that men have not made or constructed.
- (2) This real existence can be known by the human mind.
- (3) Such knowledge is the only reliable guide to human conduct, individual and social.³

In realistic philosophy, each of these basic beliefs corresponds to one of three sciences: first, an account of the world *qua* being or inasmuch as it *is* (metaphysics and theology), second, an account of how we know the world (epistemology), and third, an account of the human good and its pursuit individually and in common (ethics and political philosophy). These are the metaphilosophical principles of natural law philosophy, which as a tradition is united by the golden thread articulated by Paul Sigmund: "the belief that there exists in nature and/or human nature a rational order which can provide intelligible value-statements

independently of human will, that are universal in application, unchangeable in their ultimate content, and morally obligatory on mankind.”⁴

I argue that Hobbes should be considered a member of the tradition of natural law philosophy in that Hobbesian civil science essentially rests on wisdom about man, God, and the world. And yet Hobbesian civil philosophy does have a certain autonomy in that it is severable from some of his theoretical doctrines, such as his mechanistic physics. In this chapter I lay out the twofold realistic foundation of Hobbes's natural law philosophy: (1) a particular moral conception of human nature as existing and knowable and (2) a conception of God as existing and as causally related to the world in a specific way. Hobbes offers a proximate epistemological ground for (1) and (2) in unaided reason. Yet he intends reason to work in partnership with faith to secure his doctrines on the ultimate foundation of revelation, which we shall consider in the next chapter.

Several scholars who have contributed to the twentieth-century revival of natural law philosophy—Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, John Wild, Henry Veatch, Anthony Lisska, Ralph McInerny, Russell Hittinger, J. Budziszewski, Elizabeth Anscombe, Paul Sigmund, Mark Murphy, Jean Porter, and (the later) Alasdair MacIntyre—have insisted that a properly natural law theory of morality and politics must rest on a philosophical anthropology and even a natural theology. Meanwhile, Robert P. George, who is one of the foremost defenders of the “new natural law theory” of Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle—which aspires to reformulate natural law philosophy in a way that accepts a version of Hume's fact/value dichotomy—has conceded that the ontological foundation of natural law is in human nature. As George puts it, the new natural law theorists are *not* asserting that “basic human good or moral norms have no connection to, or grounding in, human nature.”⁵ On the contrary, as George points out, for the new natural lawyers the basic human goods and moral norms “are what they are because human nature is what it is.”⁶

My argument is that Hobbes's metaphilosophy and natural law theory of morality and politics stand in stark contrast with the post-Humean and post-Kantian approaches. Hume had vigorously argued that an “ought” cannot be derived from an “is,” and Kant's moral theory can be understood as an attempt to generate obligation without appeal

to the *is* of human nature. The belief that Hume and Kant were basically right has animated a dominant strain of moral and political philosophy. Essentially, it has generated the notion of normative ethical and political philosophy as *autonomous* disciplines in that the doctrines of these sciences do not rest upon factual claims about the world. John Rawls's "political, not metaphysical" conception is the most sophisticated and articulate descendant of this tradition. My contention is that Hobbes's natural law philosophy should be set in contrast with the Rawlsian view, which is probably the most influential conception of political philosophy promulgated in the twentieth century.

I shall postpone more detailed consideration of Hobbes's theory of commonwealth, social ontology, and regime typology until chapter 5. Like the Aristotelian tradition, Hobbes is concerned with identifying regime types and which regime is best to secure the unity of peace. Yet Hobbes's transformative vision of the good entails a distinctive understanding of regime types. The postponement of a detailed consideration of this aspect of Hobbes's civil science is due not only to our deference to the logical order of *Leviathan*, which we are broadly striving to follow, but also to the fact that Hobbes's thoughts on these matters rest on his account of personhood, which merits extended treatment. This entails that my realistic interpretation of Hobbesian civil science will be deepened in chapter 5, where I consider how Hobbes continues the realistic tradition's mimetic principle in making commonwealth, along with the function of identifying regime types, including the best regime.⁷

HOBBS'S REALISTIC PHILOSOPHY: THE WORLD AND OUR KNOWLEDGE OF IT

Hobbes begins the introduction to *Leviathan* in a memorable way:

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated.

Politics is a mimetic science because it seeks to establish a social order in imitation of the order God has established in the world. Hobbes refers

to this order by the general term “nature.” More precisely, politics imitates the order evident *in man*:

Art goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, man. For by art is created that great Leviathan called a commonwealth, or state, (in Latin *civitas*) which is but an artificial man.

Hobbes has already introduced the “three foci” of classical natural law theory identified by Yves Simon: order in the divine mind, order in nature, and order in man.⁸ To conceive of God as maker and governor necessarily implies order in the divine mind. The product of the divine art has an excellence that is counterposed to disorder and chaos, and man is Exhibit A.

Hobbesian civil science takes commonwealth as its formal object. In order to understand what the commonwealth is, Hobbes considers it in its various parts to see how it comes into being. In *Leviathan* Hobbes follows the same resolute-compositive or analytic-synthetic method he laid out in the preface to *De Cive*: first to be considered is the “very matter” of government, namely, man. A philosophy of man is necessary, then, in order to understand the causes that generate government. But man is a part of the world, and therefore an account of what man is depends on an understanding of the world man finds himself in. Thus civil science rests at least in part or in some respect upon natural philosophy.

Natural philosophy, and therefore political philosophy, has suffered, Hobbes thinks, from want of a proper scientific method. Application of the proper method yields scientific knowledge. The way of analysis begins with effects and moves back to possible causes. The way of synthesis starts from causes and moves to possible effects. Hobbes applies this method to the investigation of the natural world to arrive at a materialistic and mechanistic picture of the real. He remarks in the first chapter of *Leviathan* that an elaboration of the materialistic foundations of the thoughts of man “is not very necessary to the business now in hand.” However, Hobbes deems it fitting to “briefly deliver” the details of the account, and in this section I follow his lead. I draw upon his elaboration in other works of his materialistic and mechanist picture

of nature to illustrate how Hobbes supposes this picture informs the workings of human psychology.

Our knowledge of the world begins in our senses, and from our sensory knowledge we arrive at knowledge of causes in external reality by analysis. A cause is the total aggregate of accidents in the agent and the patient that concur in the production of an effect. To arrive at knowledge of the cause, the natural philosopher examines “singly every accident that accompanies or precedes the effect.”⁹ Then Hobbes proceeds to consider various combinations of accidents in agent and patient, subtracting these out until he arrives at a combination of accidents the combination of which he cannot but conceive conduces to the propounded effect. At the most fundamental level, Hobbes believes it is inconceivable that the standard sensory experiences of the sense powers can be conceived apart from the accidents of *extension* and *motion*.

The world is made up of bodies in motion. A body for Hobbes is something that occupies *space*. His ideas of body and space are closely interconnected. In order to understand what space is, he offers a thought experiment in which he subtracts away all of the accidents that concur in the effect of sensory experience, save those in the patient. Imagine that all of a sudden everything was annihilated except you. Hobbes claims that you would still retain all of your memories of your sense perceptions. Suppose you remembered your cat, and you bring your sense image of your cat before your mind’s eye. Hobbes says that you can imagine that cat having existence outside of your head. You can further imagine that cat existing outside of your head without considering any of its particular qualities or the image of the body insofar as it exists. Now you have the notion of space, according to Hobbes, but it is still only a phantasm, an image in your head—in a word, imaginary. Now take the thought experiment another step and imagine that your cat is created *ex nihilo* and placed in the world anew. Once created in the world anew, your cat is an existent, which is to say that it *subsists of itself*, without any dependence on your subjective thought. Thus Hobbes arrives at a definition of a body as “that, which having no dependence upon our thought, is coincident or coextended with some part of space.”¹⁰ Hobbes’s conception of real space, then, is evident. Real space is the property of true extension or magnitude in external reality.¹¹ In short, a body is something subsisting in external reality that occupies space and is thereby

measurable in length, depth, and width. Corporeity is the touchstone of reality—this is *materialism*.

Bodies are in motion, which Hobbes defines as the “continual relinquishing of one place and acquiring of another.”¹² The universe, considered as the aggregate of all finite bodies, is a massive process of relinquishment and acquisition. How does all of this shifting happen? Hobbes accepts Galileo’s principle of inertia.¹³ A body at rest will remain at rest unless or until some other body gets into its space and suffers it to remain at rest no more, thus displacing it.¹⁴ In other words, bodies act upon one another through contact—this is *mechanism*.

The beginning of sensation in human beings therefore comes from the operation of external bodies on human bodies or, it might be said, from the action of existents on persons. This happens either mediately or immediately. The former is the operation of bodies upon persons through various media such air or water, and it corresponds to the sense powers of sight, hearing, and smelling. The latter takes place by direct impressions of bodies on persons, as in the case of tasting and touching. Through such contact, pressure is exerted upon the relevant sense organ and the impulse travels by way of motions through the nerves and is “continued inwards” to the brain or the heart.¹⁵ There it generates “a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart”—in Latin, *conatus*—which in turn generates a phantasm or fancy of something without. *Conatus* is an imperceptibly small and invisible motion that cannot be measured and is the internal principle of our experiences of qualia and, as we shall discuss later, the passions.¹⁶

If Hobbes were apprised of contemporary science, he might fill out his account this way: You perceive your cat lying on the deck. Light waves arriving from the sun traveled at a velocity of 186,000 miles per second to bounce off of the feline body and toward your retinas; upon contact, the light waves impress motion there that in conjunction with the operation of the heart generates an impulse in your optic nerve.¹⁷ This generates, in turn, a specific kind of neural activity in your brain. That neural activity considered in relation to the various sense organs is named accordingly:

to the eye, in a *light*, or *colour figured*; to the ear, in a *sound*; to the nostril, in an *odour*; to the tongue and palate, in a *savour*; and to

the rest of the body, in *heat, cold, hardness, softness*, and such other qualities as we discern by *feeling*.¹⁸

One of Hobbes's themes from his earliest writings forward is that the neural activity generated in the brain by existents is a *representation* of external objects.¹⁹ Hobbes uses various terms to denote representations of external objects: *phantasms*, *seemings*, or *fancies*. He is not entirely clear about the relationship between the object in external reality and its representation in the brain. How much of a gap between mind and reality does Hobbes open by claiming that "the object is one thing, the image or fancy another"? We might first ask, why is there any gap introduced at all?

Hobbes wants to formulate a theory that does not fall prey to the possibility of deception by optical illusions. He relates one particularly strange phenomenon of what might have been an optical illusion, namely, an experiment in which fir tree resin in a convex piece of glass gave the appearance of many fir trees "better designed than they could be done by any painter."²⁰ He gives various other examples of optical illusions, including seeing a candle double, or seeing the reflection of the sun in a glass. Take a case of the latter. A man, call him Luke, is working on a chain gang to pave a road on a hot and sunny afternoon. An overseer wearing mirrored sunglasses, call him Boss, accosts Luke. When he looks at Boss's face, Luke does not see Boss's eyes, but sees two suns shining off of his sunglasses. If Luke were to say to Boss, "There are two suns on your face, shining out from where your eyes ought to be," then, this would be, on Hobbes's terms, insignificant speech—a failure to communicate anything significant. Why? Because, Hobbes would say, "*colour* and *image* may be there where the *thing seen* is not."²¹ Upon this basis, Hobbes will go on to formulate his distinctively modern theory that colors are merely motions in the mind and do not inhere in the thing.

But notice how Hobbes himself indicates the restricted application of the mind-reality gap. In order to even formulate the problem of the optical illusion of the sun reflected in glasses—the problem of seeing an object in a space where it is not—he must suppose that he knows that the object *really* isn't there, but somewhere else. And, apparently, properly functioning human faculties are reliable. As Hobbes puts it,

"Natural sense and imagination are not subject to absurdity," and "all men by nature reason alike, and well, when they have good principles."²² Human beings perceive objects correctly with sufficient frequency to be able to develop useful arts and pursue their interests. However, fabulous traditions of speech and snares of words perpetuated by bad books can and have obscured the real from people.

As commentators have noted, Hobbes seems to waffle between conventionalist and correspondence theories of truth.²³ A conventionalist theory of truth holds that "true" is nothing more than the proper composition and division of names. The conventionalist theory seems to fit with the notion that all we really know are the motions buzzing around in our heads. The correspondence theory of truth holds that the truth value of propositions consists in their adequation of the intellect to the real: *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*. The correspondence theory holds that we really know things in the world. While acknowledging that Hobbes at times uses conventionalist-sounding language, his deepest commitment seems to be to the correspondence view. How else can we make sense of Hobbes's entire protest against the absurd and insignificant speech of the schools if not because their propositions have no correspondence to reality? If Hobbes were a *deep* conventionalist—believing that truth is just convention all the way down—his protest against insignificant speech could ultimately be only the bluster of one who prefers his own arbitrary definitions of words to the arbitrary definitions of others. This strikes me not only as an uncharitable interpretation of Hobbes but as a misreading of all the relevant texts. Hence, the conventionalist-sounding language in *Leviathan* should be read with the caveat of the *De Cive* definition of philosophy already quoted: words are a conduit to knowledge of things.²⁴ Hence, on the realistic reading, the Hobbesian universal proposition "man is a rational animal" is true in virtue of its correspondence with the character of all particular substances that constitute the resemblance class "man."²⁵ It is *not* true just in virtue of an arbitrary definition of the universal word "man."

Hobbes is a shallow conventionalist in his theory of language. The actions of bodies on our senses leave impressions that linger in "the internal parts of man" and "decay" over time.²⁶ The store of decaying sense impressions in the brain constitutes one's memory.²⁷ And the assortment of phantasms constitute imagination, such that imagination

and memory are not really distinct things. Language presents itself as a solution to the problem that decaying sense presents for philosophy. Philosophy needs some device to recall prior thoughts and to signify those thoughts to others since, Hobbes recognizes, science is normally a social practice. Thus *naming* is the imposing of a word to serve as a mark “which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before, and which being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had, or had not before in his mind.”²⁸ Hobbes is “conventionalist” in that he believes the original imposition on this or that utterance to signify that something is always arbitrary. Supposing the truth of the Genesis account, Hobbes concedes that “some names of living creatures and other things, which our first parents used, were taught by God himself.”²⁹ However, even the forms of these utterances were arbitrarily imposed by God because they no more specially signified the thing named than another language might have. And Hobbes points out that those original names used by Adam and Eve were lost after the confusion of languages at Babel.

So far, it might sound odd to call Hobbes a “realistic” philosopher—after all, doesn’t he unabashedly aver nominalism, and isn’t that the opposite of “realism”? As explained in the next section, Hobbes does not believe in the external existence of universals. He is “realistic” in his belief that the human mind has knowledge of reality. And he rejects the doctrine of universals and in its place posits a form of resemblance nominalism.

HOBBS’S RESEMBLANCE NOMINALISM

As we have seen, for Hobbes the matter and form of utterances have no essential relationship to the thing named. Hence, he calls “childish” the view that “names have been imposed on single things according to the nature of those things.”³⁰ But it should be noted the reason for his denial of an essential relationship between words and things is crucial for understanding his point. It is because languages everywhere are different, “*while the nature of things everywhere is the same.*”³¹ Hobbes is not denying that names track the natures of particular things but simply asserting that the “first names” to be used as “marks or notes of

remembrance” were arbitrary from place to place. For example, it was arbitrary in the first instance if one imposed the name “shoe” instead of “zapato” to signify a foot covering. But it does not follow from this that when we talk about a shoe we are merely manipulating vibrations in our heads—the word marks off a real object in the world. As Hobbes puts it, “Names cannot be considered without supposing there is some real thing to which they are attributed.”³² And, as Philip Pettit points out, for Hobbes the common name enables us to “address ourselves to an object, not in its particularity, but under its general aspect.”³³

But still, how can these remarks be squared with Hobbes’s raw assertion of nominalism? Doesn’t nominalism render impossible any such thing as “natures”? Here is Hobbes in his own words:

Of names, some are *proper*, and singular to one only thing, as *Peter*, *John*, *This man*, *this tree*; and some are *common* to many things, as *man*, *horse*, *tree*, every of which, though but one name, is nevertheless the name of divers particular things, in respect of all which together, it is called an *universal*, there being nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them individual and singular.³⁴

Hobbes’s claim that there is “nothing in the world universal but names” has been taken as an unsentimental statement of nominalism. In the first instance, Hobbes seems concerned with rejecting a Platonic conception of universals. According to the Platonic conception, a thing is called beautiful or just or large by partaking in supremely self-same Forms such as Beauty, Justice, Largeness, and so on. These Forms are postulated as separate from the particular things and enjoying their own unity. Hobbes would seem to want to reject this, not least because the Platonic conception considers Ideas to be immaterial realities, which is ruled out by Hobbes’s materialist metaphysic.³⁵ But to reject Platonism, what might be called an extreme realism about universals, is not yet to reject a conception of “natures” as existing and knowable. We need to get a better understanding of what divides nominalists and realists about universals.

According to Michael Loux, the divide between realists and nominalists about universals arises in trying to explain “the phenomena of similarity or attribute agreement”:

Realists claim that where objects are similar or agree in attribute, there is one thing that they share or have in common; nominalists deny this.³⁶

Another way to put this is that the realist wants to explain the basic phenomena of similarity between objects by grounding *character*.³⁷ Universal properties or qualities are held out as determinants and therefore grounds of character. So consider, for example, three objects: a hammer, a nail, and a frying pan. Call the hammer, nail, and frying pan *H*, *N*, and *F*, respectively. *H*, *N*, and *F* resemble each other in that they are resistant to pressure or solid. The realist claim is that *H*, *N*, and *F* are similar in virtue of their characters—and the property or quality of *hardness* is so closely connected with these objects' characters as to shape them. The quality of hardness grounds the characters of these objects such that *H*, *N*, and *F* *exemplify* the universal "hardness." In other words, it is *because* *H*, *N*, and *F* are *hard* that they are said to resemble each other in solidity.³⁸ The explanatory principle of resemblance is the universal, which each thing exemplifies. This, in very few words, is the story that metaphysical realists give to account for similarity in terms of universals.

Hobbes's theory of naming rejects this understanding of universals. Immediately following the already quoted passage, Hobbes writes:

One universal name is imposed on many things for their similitude in some quality, or other accident; and whereas a proper name bringeth to mind one thing only, universals recall any one of those many.³⁹

For Hobbes, particular bodies are metaphysically fundamental. The really real things in our world are individual substances, and materiality is the touchstone of being. *To be* is to be a particular body. The qualities that distinguish this body from that body are also fundamental, and therefore, the resemblance between particulars is fundamental. I suggest that Hobbes should therefore be understood as a resemblance nominalist in contemporary metaphysical parlance. For resemblance nominalists, particular objects are what are really real, and among them there are resemblance relations that are metaphysically fundamental. Some things fundamentally resemble some other

things more than things that are not in the same class. The fundamental resemblance relation between things is what grounds similarity.

To explain this, consider two objects, coin C_1 and a second coin, C_2 . C_1 and C_2 fundamentally resemble each other and, in virtue of that fundamental resemblance relation, they are said to be members of a resemblance class of coins. The coin-y character of C_1 and C_2 is explained by the fundamental resemblance they bear to one another. Resemblance nominalism can be illuminated by contrasting it with class nominalism. For class nominalists, it is membership in a class that grounds character. C_1 and C_2 are coins *because* they are members of the class of coin-y things. Class nominalists say that attributes or properties are just classes. When we say that C_1 and C_2 have the property of *being coins*, what we mean by *being a coin* is just that they belong to the class of coins.

Class nominalists face a number of objections. Suppose that class nominalism is correct that the property of *being a coin* is one that belongs just to the set of all coins that exist. Let us call the set of all coins that exist CoinVault. If we say that N coins exist, CoinVault is constituted by its members ($C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots C_N$). Now suppose that C_1 —a shiny 1-ounce gold American Eagle—gets melted down and made into jewelry. What has happened to CoinVault? With one member of CoinVault destroyed as a coin, CoinVault no longer exists. CoinVault is *just* the set constituted by ($C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots C_N$). If even one member is destroyed, the set no longer is CoinVault. But remember that the property of being a coin is identical with CoinVault. Hence, when C_1 got melted down, its property of *being a coin* was destroyed. Resemblance nominalism can avoid this extensionality problem by denying that coins are coins because they are members of CoinVault. Rather, for the resemblance nominalist, the members of the set of things ($C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots C_N$) are coins because they resemble each other more closely and in a certain way than they resemble other things. Shareable properties are grounded on the resemblance relation such that the destruction of one member of the resemblance relation does not destroy the property. Hobbes might have wanted to avoid the extensionality problem just sketched by seemingly rejecting class nominalism.⁴⁰

We shall have occasion to return to Hobbes's resemblance nominalism and consider how it fits with his natural law theory and the nominalist tradition of natural law. For the moment, suffice it to say

that, if the best contemporary analytic metaphysics is any guide, the debate between realists and nominalists is far from over, and each side has developed quite sophisticated replies and counterarguments for their interlocutors.⁴¹ For his part, Hobbes seems to be wielding Ockham's razor to do away with metaphysical entities that he believes are unnecessary to explain attribute agreement.

Moreover, it must be repeated that Hobbes's philosophy is "realistic" in that names are always conduits to particular things. The proper name "John" is a conduit to the individual thing John. The common name *man* is a conduit to the group of particular things that fundamentally resemble each other in their respective qualities, such as "quantity, motion, sense, reason, and the like," which compounded together "constitute the whole nature of man."⁴² To restate the claim in slightly different terms, the fundamental resemblance of particular things picked out by the universal "man" consists in their having a basically similar (or exactly similar) sum of "natural faculties and powers," such as "the faculties of nutrition, motion, generation, sense, reason, etc."⁴³ When giving an example of how reason's computative function operates, Hobbes indicates that to be a member of this class is to be a *body*, an *animal*, and *rational*. The faculty of reason or the power of rationality is then the most specific quality that particular things picked out by the word *man* are said to possess in similitude (or exact similitude).⁴⁴ Thus, as we discuss Hobbes's philosophical anthropology, we must remember that whenever Hobbes uses words such as "man," "human nature," "mankind," etc., each should be understood to designate a class of particulars standing in a fundamental resemblance relation.

In his classic reflections on natural law, Yves Simon remarks on the importance of the question of the existence of universals in discussions of natural law theory. Simon points out that nominalism diverges from natural law in the Aristotelian-Thomistic realist mold and argues that a strict and consistent nominalism would "probably" render natural law theory impossible.⁴⁵ The worry is that nominalism would conflict with the supposition of natural law theory that there is some shared human nature that grounds the rules of conduct. Or, to put it in the form of a rhetorical question Hobbes himself asks, "Have not all men one kind of soul, and the same faculties of mind?"⁴⁶ Simon's argument against nominalism goes like this:

If by the word “man” . . . we mean the set of all existent men, or the set of all men that have existed or are existent or will exist—then clearly, man no longer can be predicated of Socrates. One can say that Mr. Douglas is a member of the Senate, but one cannot say that he is the Senate, or that he is senate.⁴⁷

However, notice that Simon's argument is directed against *class* nominalism. As we have seen, Hobbes rejects this form of nominalism. To be decisive, Simon would have to lay out Aquinas's subtle and difficult doctrine of essence considered absolutely and show how it is not a positive, subsisting unity outside of the mind and why only such a conception can ground a theory of natural law. While Hobbes errs on this point from the Thomistic perspective, he does not think it is logically necessary to affirm a Thomistic doctrine of essence in order to affirm the reality of natural law.

There are at least two more reasons that Hobbes rejects the existence of universals in the world to explain attribute agreement. First, it is apparent that he wants to reject any form of metaphysical dualism, which the theory of universals was tied to in the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. Second, Hobbes is convicted for theological reasons that fundamental ontology cannot restrain God's power. William of Ockham had given this as a reason for rejecting universals: they would constrain God's power. Ockham contended that God is radically free in his omnipotence to annihilate particular substances.⁴⁸ But, Ockham contended, if universals existed, God would not be able to annihilate an instantiation of the universal without destroying all other individuals that instantiate that universal. Hobbes seems to be concerned in a similar spirit when he writes:

The doctrine of natural causes hath not infallible and evident principles. For there is no effect which the power of God cannot produce by many several ways.⁴⁹

This statement provides a theological foundation for Hobbes's analytical method, which, as we have seen, moves from effects to *possible* causes. It also provides a reason for the rejection of universals. For the realist says that for any object *O*, it is red if, and only if, it exemplifies

the universal, red. But if that is true, it follows that the quality of *being red* could be brought about in a thing only in virtue of this exemplification relation. By hypothesis, God is not constrained to bring about the effect of redness in any particular way, since God “can make and change all species and kinds of body as he dareth.”⁵⁰ It is apparent, then, that we shall need to consider Hobbes’s conception of God in more detail in order to fill out his understanding of the real. What we shall discover is that Hobbes offers a particular answer to the question *an sit deus* (whether God exists) and formulates a conception of God’s causal relation to the world that plays an essential role in his natural law theory.

THE IMMORTAL GOD

Hobbes’s civil science is aimed at formulating a correct doctrine of “government and obedience,” which he argues requires authorization of a very powerful sovereign, the Leviathan, or, in Hobbes’s words, “that *Mortal God*, to which we owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense.”⁵¹ What are the grounds for theistic belief in Hobbes’s philosophy?

We have seen that philosophy is reasoning about causes and effects—and, accordingly, the drawing out of consequences of affirmations and negations. The subject or province of philosophy is “every body of which we can conceive any generation, and which we may, by any consideration thereof, compare with other bodies, or which is capable of composition and resolution; that is to say, every body of whose generation or properties we can have any knowledge.”⁵² Hobbes’s division of the sciences springs from this definition. So where there is no generation or property, there cannot be *philosophy*. Hence *theology* is excluded: “The doctrine of God, eternal, ingenerable, incomprehensible, nothing to divide or compound, nor any generation to be conceived.”⁵³ Taken in conjunction with what Hobbes says in his critique of Thomas White, isn’t Hobbes denying that there can be a science of theology?⁵⁴

Hobbes is not saying that we cannot know by natural reason that God exists. While Hobbes’s method works from empirical data to move back to *possible* causes, Hobbes thinks that natural reason can judge with a very high probability or accuracy about the existence of a first cause.

And indeed, Hobbes offers a natural theology packed with arguments that were standard in the older tradition of Christian philosophy.

After claiming that theology is excluded from philosophy proper, Hobbes continues to affirm the argument from motion—a version of Aquinas's "first way"—for God's existence: "From this, that nothing can move itself, it may be rightly inferred that there was some first eternal movement."⁵⁵ So the statement is not a denial of the possibility of a natural theology. For Hobbes, it is God's *incomprehensibility* that cordons off the *divine nature* from philosophical investigation. In other words, "we understand nothing of *what he is*, but only *that he is*."⁵⁶ So stated, the teaching is identical to that held throughout the Christian tradition and in Aquinas.⁵⁷ Because we have finite minds, we can have only finite conceptions or ideas: "When we say any thing is infinite, we signify only that we are not able to conceive the ends and bounds of the thing named, having no conception of the thing, but of our own inability."⁵⁸ Moreover, there is more of an echo in Hobbes of Calvin's indictment of the effects of man's vain curiosity when he rashly speculates about God, effectively picturing God in man's image. Hobbes sounds Calvin's essentially Pauline theme in his relentless attack on the absurdities of Gentile religion, which conceptualized God by deifying particular things found in nature.⁵⁹ The name "God" does not imply a conception of God in our mind but is a name of honor. So, Hobbes says, "We ought not dispute about God's nature; he is no fit subject of our philosophy." He goes on to suggest that true religion "consisteth in obedience to Christ's lieutenants, and in giving God such honour, both in attributes and actions, as they in their several lieutenancies shall ordain."⁶⁰ It is notable that this claim is Augustinian and Thomistic *in structure*. Hobbes's difference is in his Erastian-Anglican conception of lieutenancy as lodged in the civil sovereign of England, whereas Aquinas and Augustine believe lieutenancy is lodged in the Roman church.

Robert Arp has developed a generally persuasive case that Hobbes actually has throughout his texts arguments embedded with elements of each of Aquinas's five arguments or ways that reason judges that God exists.⁶¹ While I think the thrust of Arp's argument is correct, I emphasize the interdependence of Hobbes's arguments on one another and his natural philosophy for his judgment that God exists and is omnipotent. Moreover, Arp does not properly connect Hobbes's arguments with

the divine pedigree of natural law, which I shall elaborate in chapter 4. We have just seen a glimpse of Hobbes's first-way style argument from motion in *De Corpore*. Aquinas believed this way was the "most evident" way to prove God's existence, and Hobbes tended to favor this way throughout his writings.

Early in Hobbes's career, he rejected the ontological argument for God's existence that had been formulated by Anselm and revived by Descartes. In response to Descartes's Third Meditation, Hobbes argued for an alternative proof of God's existence, in the spirit of the Thomistic tradition, of *a posteriori* reasoning from effect to cause:

Just as a person is born blind, who has often come close to the fire and felt himself grow hot, recognizes that there is something by which he is heated, and hearing it called 'fire,' concludes that fire exists, yet does not know what shape or colour it is, nor has any idea or image of fire arising in his mind; so man realizing that there must be some cause of his images or ideas, and that this cause too must have another cause prior to it, and so on, I finally led to an end-point, or to the supposition of some eternal cause that, since it never began to be, can have no cause prior to itself. He necessarily concludes that something eternal exists. Yet he has no idea what he could call the idea of this eternal being, but gives this thing he believes in or acknowledges the name or label "God."⁶²

Hobbes's statement of the first-cause argument in *Leviathan* is similar in flavor but actually seems to combine the first way with the second way, the argument from efficient causation:

But the acknowledging of one God, eternal, infinite, and omnipotent, may more easily be derived from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several virtues and operations, than from the fear of what was to befall them in time to come. For he that from any effect he seeth come to pass should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himself profoundly in the pursuit of causes, shall at last come to this: that there must be (as even the heathen philosophers confessed) one first mover, that is, a first

and an eternal cause of all things, which is that which men mean by the name of God.⁶³

As we saw earlier, Hobbes understands causation in terms of agents acting on patients. No body can bring itself into being, for such would be to say that it is self-created, that is, that it is the efficient cause of itself. But, says Hobbes, this is impossible.⁶⁴ All finite substances have existence *in* themselves but not *from* themselves. Therefore, one cannot proceed to infinity in the order of efficient causation—of bringing things into being. There must be something that has existence in itself *and from itself*, and Hobbes tells us that this is God.⁶⁵ Hobbes synthesizes the first and second ways because he conceives of all finite being as matter in motion. So an efficient cause is just a motive cause.

How is God the cause of a body in motion, if mechanism is true?⁶⁶ To answer this question, we will need to take a detour before coming to consider the third, fourth, and fifth ways in Hobbes's writings. If a body remains at rest or in motion unless acted on by another body, how does God act upon the world? Hobbes cannot conceive of God as incorporeal, not only because incorporeality is inconceivable but also because that would render God powerless to cause any effect in the world. Hence Hobbes conceives of God as material, albeit no ordinary matter. God is "an infinitely fine Spirit," and by "spirit" Hobbes means "thin, fluid, transparent, invisible body," which is the equivalent of a "perfect, pure, simple, infinite substance."⁶⁷

Does Hobbes sincerely believe in a corporeal God? Or is this an example of Hobbesian irony that reveals his deep skepticism? Edwin Curley and A. P. Martinich debated Hobbes's theological sincerity in a famous exchange in 1996.⁶⁸ In 2002, George Wright reassessed the debate, coming down on the side of Martinich.⁶⁹ More recently, Patricia Springborg has entered the fray and argued that the skeptical reading of Hobbes can be rescued if it is considered in light of such works as Hobbes's *Answer* to Bramhall (just quoted) and his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁷⁰ While conceding that Hobbes can be understood as carrying forward the general goal of Protestantism to de-Hellenize and simplify Christianity, Springborg believes that Hobbes's deepest commitment is to skepticism of both Christianity and theism. Says Springborg, "Hobbes's ontology and epistemology do not permit a personal God

... and the banality of his concept of 'fluid matter' was designed to mock even Deists."⁷¹ In support of this claim, Springborg rehearses Bramhall's arguments that Hobbes had effectively eliminated God from the real. Bramhall quotes from Hobbes's *Leviathan*, chapters 34 and 41, and argues that atheism is the consequence:

The universe being the aggregate of all bodies, there is no real part thereof that is not also body. And elsewhere, Every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body, is no part of the universe. And because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere. How? By this doctrine he maketh not only the angels, but God himself to be nothing.⁷²

Springborg then quotes from another argument of Bramhall's, that if God is corporeal, he is made of parts and divisible, since parthood and divisibility are features of matter.

My next charge is, that [Hobbes] destroys the very being of God, and leaves nothing in his place, but an empty name. For by taking away all incorporeal substance, he taketh away God himself. The very name, saith he, of incorporeal substance is a contradiction. And to say that an angel or spirit, is an incorporeal substance, is to say in effect, that there is no angel or spirit at all. By the same reason to say, that God is an incorporeal substance, is to say there is no God at all. Either God is incorporeal; or he is finite, and consists of parts, and consequently is no God. This, that there is no incorporeal spirit, is that main root of atheism, from which so many lesser branches are daily sprouting up.⁷³

Springborg maintains that Bramhall got it right. But did he? Unfortunately, Springborg does not develop Bramhall's argument but simply restates his claim that the denial of immaterial substances necessarily entails atheism before moving on to consider Hobbes's doctrine of the Trinity. Since we are concerned here with Hobbes's natural theology—and the concomitant "Kingdom of God by Nature," accessible by unaided reason—we can set Hobbes's Trinitarian doctrine to one side. I take it, then, that the thrust of Springborg's claim is that

Bramhall's argument, that a materialist conception of God entails atheism, is sound. We can discern two arguments that Bramhall makes for the conclusion that Hobbes's principles entail atheism:

- (1) The universe, an aggregate of all bodies, is all that exists. [Implicit premise.] But God is not a part of the universe. Therefore, God is nothing.
- (2) Matter has the features of parthood and divisibility. But God is without parts and indivisible. Therefore, the "material God" is no God.

Springborg ignores most of Hobbes's replies to these arguments. After quoting one line of his reply, she immediately jumps into the thicket of Trinitarian doctrine, as if Bramhall's arguments had already demonstrated that Hobbes's doctrine entails atheism. Let us take the second argument first, as that is the order in which Bramhall and Hobbes debate it and the first argument. Of the divisibility-parthood argument, Hobbes writes:

God is indeed a perfect, pure, simple, infinite substance; and his name incommunicable, that is to say, not divisible into this and that individual God, in such manner as the name of man is divisible into Peter and John.⁷⁴

We have seen that for Hobbes, names are always conduits toward individual things. The proper names Peter and John pick out *this* or *that* man. Meanwhile, the name "man" picks out the class of particular things that fundamentally resemble each other in possessing a certain set of faculties. But the name "man" is not divisible into *parts*. That would be more akin to class nominalism, where *being a man* is just belonging to the entire set of existing human beings. Hobbes draws an analogy from the name "man" to God's name. It also picks out an *individual*: "And therefore God is individual; which word among the Greeks is expressed by the word indivisible."⁷⁵ Hobbes wants to affirm the Nicene doctrine that *God hath no parts*. But he continues to point out that this proposition does not forbid the faithful to speak of God according to the common practices of piety. For example, it is common for the faithful to say that "God is in every part of the church." But,

Hobbes points out, surely speaking this way is acceptable and does not *divide* God, as if by speaking in this way someone were to deny that God is also in the churchyard. In short, one can affirm both that God in his essence is indivisible and that one can consider God by parts.

Hobbes continues to develop arguments from scripture and church tradition. Regarding the former, he returns to his principal argumentative strategy throughout his controversy with Bramhall: to out-Protestant Bramhall. Hobbes claims that Aristotelian philosophy—or at least a version of it that he deems “Aristotelity”—was brought, like a Trojan horse, into the citadel of Christianity by Christian doctors under false pretenses. Christian doctors like Aquinas thought it would be helpful in expounding Christian doctrine. However, “Aristotelity” turned out to pervert the learning of “school divinity” rather than enhance it. The perversion largely consisted in introducing Aristotelian metaphysical distinctions to philosophize about God’s nature and interpret scripture. And Hobbes relishes pointing out that such terms as “indivisible” and “incorporeal” are not found in scripture. Bramhall has set up a false dichotomy based on his unbiblical metaphysical dualism: *either* incorporeal substances exist *or* there is no God. Having fended off the charge of atheism, Hobbes then considers Bramhall’s charges regarding his Trinitarian doctrine, and there he enlists patristic church authorities Tertullian and Athanasius to his cause, which, to repeat, is beyond the scope of our considerations here.⁷⁶

Continuing to argument 1, that God is excluded from existence by the definition of the universe as the aggregate of all bodies, Hobbes makes the point that Bramhall continually urges dualism, which Hobbes believes he has already provided good reasons for rejecting. Hobbes draws a comparison between Bramhall’s argumentative strategy and a story in Greek mythology:

I wonder he so often rolls the same stone. He is like Sisyphus in the poet’s hell, that there rolls a heavy stone up a hill, which no sooner he brings to day-light, than it slips down again to the bottom, and serves him so perpetually. For so his Lordship rolls this and other questions with much ado, till they come to the light of Scripture, and then they vanish; and he vexing, sweating, and railing, goes to it again, to as little purpose as before.⁷⁷

Again Hobbes leans on scriptural authority to oppose metaphysical dualism. Such, he thinks, is to introduce alien pagan ideas into the Hebrew texts. Hobbes then replies by denying the minor premise of argument 1:

From that I say of the universe, [Bramhall] infers, that I make God to be nothing; but infers it absurdly. He might indeed have inferred that I make him a corporeal, but yet a pure spirit. I mean by the universe, the aggregate of all things that have being in themselves; and so do all men else. And because God has a being, it follows that he is either the whole universe, or part of it. Nor does his Lordship go about to disprove it, but only seems to wonder at it.⁷⁸

Isn't this passage another example of Hobbes's subversiveness and impiety? How can God be part of the universe, or how could the universe be predicated of God? And doesn't this directly contradict Hobbes's notion of God as the first efficient "eternal cause of all things"? The language just quoted suggests that God is *outside* of the universe, as it were, upholding it. Indeed, in the course of the reply to the second argument sketched earlier, Hobbes argues that "God is properly the hypostasis, base, and substance that upholdeth all the world."⁷⁹ Moreover, Hobbes explicitly affirms in *Leviathan* and again in his controversy with Bramhall that God is not confined to some place, because that would entail that God is finite. What are we to make of this puzzle?

It may be the case that, at the end of the day, a corporealist conception of God is simply ridden with irresolvable contradictions and *aporia*. Yet this does not mean that Hobbes did not sincerely believe it or himself think it aporetic. How could he hold these apparently contradictory propositions consistently? Hobbes often points out that trying to harmonize certain propositions requires the kind of investigation into the divine nature that the human mind is incapable of. However, he does venture a hypothesis that presents at least an initial attempt to solve the puzzle of the corporeal God's causal relation to the universe. Hobbes recalls his empirical experience, which he believes is readily imaginable by his readers, of mixing river water and mineral water in a clear container. When they were put together, the entire substance appeared milky. But it could not be that the murkier water so imbued

the clearer water as to completely occupy the whole container, since two bodies cannot be in the same place. Somehow, the murkier water was able to significantly change the clearer substance without displacing or annihilating it. (Notice how Hobbes's empirical example supposes that the mind can breach the mind-reality gap.) We might more readily imagine what Hobbes is getting at if we imagine putting a few drops of dye into a glass of water and consider how the water then appears to be wholly colored. Hobbes then says:

If then such gross bodies have so great activity, what shall we think of spirits, whose kinds be as many as there be kinds of liquor; and activity greater? Can it then be doubted, but that God, who is an infinitely fine Spirit, and withal intelligent, can make and change all species and kinds of body as he pleaseth?⁸⁰

We should read Hobbes's doctrine of God's causal relation to the universe in light of this passage. As an infinitely fine spirit, a fluid, invisible, subtle body, God encompasses all finite substances and operates upon them through a subtle contact that does not displace or annihilate them. As Cees Leijenhorst has shown, such a conception of God's causal interaction with the world is compatible with Hobbes's conception of *primum fluidum* as a sort of subtle ether that permeates and fills the whole universe.⁸¹ As another substance created by God, *primum fluidum* is not prior to God as unformed matter is prior to Plato's Demiurgos, nor as prime matter is it prior to substantial form, nor is it pantheistically identified with God, as in Spinoza's philosophy.⁸² As with other bodies, God can causally interact with it without annihilating it.

According to Hobbes, God is "part" of the universe when that term is defined as the aggregate of all particular material things, because God is a material being who is "particular" in that he is an individual distinct from individuals who do not have existence from themselves (i.e., all created things). It can also be said that, if we consider the aggregate of all created things together, God is *present* to them all as a "part" (as God is present "in part" in the church), but God is not confined to them (as God is not confined to the church), because God is infinite. *Pace* Edwin Curley, Hobbes is no more "uncomfortable" in understanding God as one material object among others than Bramhall

is uncomfortable in positing God as one immaterial object among others (i.e., individual souls and angels). Neither need the notion of an infinite entity's being a part of a whole present a special problem for Hobbes vis-à-vis mereological principles stated in earlier works.⁸³ On this solution, the "universe," defined as the set of things including God, is of infinite magnitude, because God's being is infinite. That Hobbes thought this way, but tentatively, is suggested by his denial that philosophers can resolve the question of the finitude of the universe, at least when supposing the technical definition of the universe that he does.⁸⁴

If this interpretation is correct, why does Hobbes allow for the possibility that God *is* the whole universe? This option, Hobbes himself says in *De Cive*, entails atheism.⁸⁵ However, in this passage Hobbes is simply recognizing that these are two logical possibilities that his definition of universe and corporealist conception of God would entail, neither of which Bramhall addressed but just "wondered at." He is not saying that both possibilities are equally valid.

Springborg does not even attempt to make sense of Hobbes's replies to the arguments she rehearses. My point is that it is insufficient to prove the proposition that Hobbes was really a subversive atheist who ironically mocked deism (and, by implication, theism) in his corporeal deity hypothesis *just because* Bramhall thought so. Of course Bramhall thought the corporeal God hypothesis was silly. In his critique he echoed Aquinas, who conceived of God as simple and immaterial, and mocked David of Dinant as *stultissime* for conceiving of God as prime matter.⁸⁶ We shall resist the temptation to speculate as to whether Springborg is ironically indicating her own muted belief that Thomistic metaphysics is the objectively correct standard of judgment for philosophical and theological truth.

As I read Bramhall and Hobbes's debate, it was doomed to be an exercise in talking past one another, because for Hobbes metaphysical dualism is a nonstarter as is metaphysical materialism for Bramhall. But readers of Hobbes should not be so dazzled by Hobbes's antischolastic polemics that they miss his own renegade scholasticism.⁸⁷ Hobbes is engaged in a scholastic overthrow of scholasticism if we understand the heart of scholasticism to be the Boethian project of synthesizing natural reason and Christian faith. Hobbesian thought is an iteration of that

project. He wants to wed the new materialist science with a minimalist reading of the Bible in the *sola scriptura* tradition of Protestant hermeneutics. In this project he is willing to take over and/or modify scholastic principles and arguments in their “lucid” moments, especially when they serve his purpose, which is ultimately a civil science that can secure a sound doctrine of government and obedience.

PROOFS OF GOD’S EXISTENCE

We have seen how Hobbes combines the first and second ways to prove that God exists as an argument from natural reason for God’s existence, and we have seen how Hobbes posits an understanding of God as corporeal in order to explain how God could be the first mover in a mechanistic world. The third way moves from possible being to necessary being. Possible or contingent beings come to be and pass away. An infinite regress of possible beings cannot be affirmed, because contingent things cannot get being from contingent things for the same reason that one cannot proceed to infinity in efficient causes. There must needs be some noncontingent or necessary being:

A man cannot imagine anything to begin *without a cause* . . . but if he try, he shall find as much reason, if there be no cause of the thing, to conceive it should begin at one time as another, that he hath equal reason to think it should begin at all times, which is impossible, and therefore he must think there was some special cause why it began then, rather than sooner or later; or else that it began never, but was eternal.⁸⁸

This eternal cause is conceived as *necessary*.⁸⁹ Hobbes should be understood to posit the cause as “necessary” with the analytical caveat hinted at in the passage just quoted, that is, that no other cause is conceivable. As we have seen, its necessity consists in having existence from itself rather than another. In other words, God is *the* metaphysically independent being. Thus Hobbes declares that metaphysical dependence is a sign of imperfection in a thing.⁹⁰ This leads us to the fourth way, which is the argument from the gradation of perfection in things.

Hobbes has judged by natural reason that a necessary first efficient cause of motion exists, and this is what all men call God. Like Aquinas, Hobbes sees in the world that some things are more honored and some less. And, again like Aquinas, Hobbes is willing to draw an analogy between how persons of different grades relate to the civil sovereign and how the whole realm relates to God as, for example, when the civil sovereign is said to be a “*Mortal God* to which we owe obedience, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense.”⁹¹ And Hobbes points out that “we ought to attribute nothing to God but what we conceive to be honourable, and we judge nothing honourable but what we count so amongst ourselves.”⁹² In his discussion of the eminence of the civil sovereign, Hobbes points out that there are greater and lesser dignities in the social order, such as “lord, earl, duke, and prince,” and he observes that some shine more and some shine less.⁹³ But, in the presence of the civil sovereign, who is the fountain of civil sovereignty and honor, “they shine no more than the stars in [the] presence of the sun.”⁹⁴ In other words, it is apparent in our experience that greater and lesser dignities and titles attach to persons and things. From the fact of various grades of dignity, it is a valid inference that there is a “fountain of [civic] honor,” namely the sovereign. One can reason analogically about all finite things that have existence from another in relation to the infinite first cause that surpasses those things in perfection, dignity, and honor inasmuch as it has existence in itself, that is, is the fountain of all existence and therefore all perfections. While Hobbes does not explicitly infer God’s existence in this way, he does affirm the necessary premises. At the very least, supposing the unity between his different ways of arguing to God’s existence, his fourth-way language works in tandem with his other arguments to judge that the first cause must be denied all imperfections and terms that imply any lack of honor. Thus reason demands that God be referred to by titles in the superlative—“most good, most great, most powerful, etc.”—or indefinite—“good, just, strong, creator, king, and the like.”⁹⁵ As Hobbes puts it in *De Homine*, “They sincerely honour God who believe not only that He exists, but also that He is the omnipotent and omniscient creator and ruler of all things.”⁹⁶

Hobbes again asserts that such judgments constitute not quidditative knowledge of God’s essence but signs of a will to honor God. This should not be taken to imply that such titles are mere mental

fictions that have no correspondence to the reality of God's being, for Hobbes's whole harangue against "Aristotelity" aims to show that some of the scholastic claims (such as, e.g., "God is eternity") are insignificant speech, *even when* coupled with an honest desire in the speaker of the insignificant speech to honor God.⁹⁷ In short, I take Hobbes's fourth-way language to constitute a distinct argument for his claim that God is the omnipotent creator, because titles of God signify that which makes God honorable, namely, God's dignity or perfection.

Thus Hobbes's affirmation that the world is created—a claim he repeatedly makes in the philosophical parts of *De Cive* and *Leviathan*—is warranted by his natural theology.⁹⁸ By the "light of nature" we can know that the first attribute of God is *existence*.⁹⁹ This is a view similar to Aquinas's view that existence is the first of the divine perfections.¹⁰⁰ This is so because something cannot *be* a subject of an attribute except insofar as it exists. But, by the "commands" of reason to honor God in the superlative fashion, if God exists, there is no perfection that can be denied of him—indeed, all perfections are *maximally* so in God.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the judgment that God exists entails that God is maximally, or, as Hobbes prefers to put it, *irresistibly* powerful because power is a perfection.¹⁰² God is omnipotent. And if God is omnipotent, he has complete power over all of nature. But God could not have maximal power over nature unless he *created* it, because if he didn't create it, its existence would not depend on God's power, and then he would not have complete power over nature. Hence, if a first efficient cause exists, it created the world and is sovereign over it.

These considerations bring us to the fifth way to prove God's existence, which for Aquinas is "taken from the governance of the world."¹⁰³ We saw at the beginning of the chapter that Hobbes begins *Leviathan* taking for granted that God is governor of the world. Those who claim that God does not govern the world by imputing idleness to Him have a "wretched apprehension."¹⁰⁴ What evidence is there in nature for inferring the governing God? Recalling that nature is the "art of God," Hobbes points us to that "most excellent work of nature, *man*." There is an order in man that is evidence of a purposiveness or directedness implanted by a mind: "For what is the heart, but a *spring*; and the *nerves*, but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?"¹⁰⁵

Aquinas's fifth way emphasizes the apparent purposiveness in things that *lack* intelligence as evidence of their workmanship by God. For Hobbes, too, the order we observe in the human organs, which are not subject to imagination and reason for their operation, is evidence that they were fashioned by an artificer's mind: "It is very hard to believe that to produce male and female, and all that belongs thereto, as also the several and curious organs of sense and memory, could be the work of anything that had not understanding."¹⁰⁶ The human organism is a focal instance of "the order of [God's] work, the world, wherein one thing follows another so aptly as no man could order it by design."¹⁰⁷ Indeed, when Hobbes writes about the mechanics of human generation and embryology, which are processes not subject to human intelligence, he goes so far as to say that the person who says the process is undirected by a mind is himself mindless.¹⁰⁸

Pace Strauss, Hobbes's teleological statements are not merely vestigial.¹⁰⁹ If it's true that Hobbes's teleological language is sparse, it might imply only that he does not feel the need to argue at length for a proposition widely shared by his contemporaries. Moreover, it may be, assuming that the earlier passages are sincerely stated, that many of Hobbes's other passages are *implicitly* teleological. For example, the passages suggest that Hobbes implicitly considers purposive animal motion—"begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life; such as are the course of the blood, the pulse, the breathing, the concoction, nutrition, excretion . . ."—as evidence of divine workmanship.¹¹⁰

In sum, Hobbes seeks to retain traditional arguments for God's existence within the power of natural reason while reconceptualizing how God must be (or not be) in a corporeal universe. I have argued that Hobbes retains elements of each of the five ways to prove that God exists. Hobbes thus maintains the classical realistic idea that God makes the things of this world and imbues them with purpose. Perhaps most controversial for readers of Hobbes is my suggestion that Hobbes retains a notion of teleology. How can Hobbes maintain teleology alongside materialism, mechanism, and the principle of inertia? I discuss this issue further in the next section, where I fill out in more detail Hobbes's philosophy of man or philosophical anthropology, including the two postulates of human nature.

THAT MOST EXCELLENT WORK OF NATURE: MAN

The standard interpretation of Hobbes holds that he jettisons final and formal causality from his picture of the world. This view is shared even by interpreters who take his theology to be sincere. As Robert Arp puts it, Hobbes “subverts the formal and the final into the efficient and the material.”¹¹¹ Some of the closest readers of Hobbes in relation to the Aristotelian tradition do not deny that he retains teleology in the sense that acts of human will are purposive.¹¹² But does Hobbes really *restrict* teleology to the sense of willed purposes? Or is the world, and therefore man, imbued with purpose prior to human willing?

Certainly Hobbes wants to jettison immaterial forms from nature and from the human mind. The Hobbesian universe admits neither of Platonic forms in a metaphysical heaven nor of Aristotelian immaterial substantial forms that animate matter. Yet Hobbes does not take himself to be rejecting formal causes *tout court*. He takes the paradigm example of a chair to explain his view: “The matter of a *chair* is *wood*; the form is the figure it hath, apt for the intended use.”¹¹³ The formal cause is radically immanent in the matter and thus is not severable from it. Moreover, the form renders the matter “apt” for its purpose, which is another way of saying that the formal cause organizes matter in such a way as to orient it toward its proper function or end.

What Hobbes opposes is Bramhall’s view that substances are *compounded* of matter and form, as if of two different substances: “Does his Lordship think the chair compounded of the wood and the figure?”¹¹⁴ What then is the principle that organizes the wood to be a *chair* rather than a block? Hobbes wants to retain the notion of form as an explanatory principle. In the case of material, inanimate objects, the matter is informed by a particular assortment of accidental forms of figure, magnitude, and the like.

In the case of human beings, Hobbes also wants to deny that *man* is compounded of two substances, of a material body and a rational, immaterial soul. He opposes all forms of anthropological dualism, Platonic, Aristotelian, Cartesian, and otherwise. Yet Hobbes believes that some sort of notion of formal causation is absolutely essential to include in his philosophical anthropology. He is famous for saying that life is but motion. Less discussed is his belief that the motion of the individual

organisms picked out by the word “man” begins in generation. But one might object that even if Hobbes recognized that one’s life begins when one’s motion begins, that is not sufficient to prove that Hobbes thought that (say) the adult man called Socrates was the self-same thing that he was from the moment of his generation until Hobbes’s time. Indeed, Socrates’ matter as a grown man was evidently completely different from his matter as an embryo. And, given Hobbes’s materialism, on what grounds could he maintain Socrates’ identity over time? Hobbes points out that the claim that Socrates was not the self-same being over time because of the complete change of his matter would be open to a devastating objection. According to this view, the Socrates who committed the crime of corrupting the youth of Athens several years before would not have been the same man who was later executed for the crime.¹¹⁵ So, Hobbes’s answer is that, while Socrates’ matter changed because his bodily dimensions changed, he was the same man because that name was given for the form. And “if the name be given for such as is the beginning of motion, then, as long as that motion remains, it will be the same individual thing; as that man will always be the same, whose actions and thoughts proceed all from the same beginning of motion, namely, that which was in his generation.”¹¹⁶

In short, Hobbes’s view is that the proper name Socrates picks out the self-same being by the form or principle of its vital motion, from the infinitesimal beginnings of that motion until the time that vital motion ceases.¹¹⁷ It is somewhat surprising to find this crucial point overlooked in treatments of the contrast between Descartes’s and Hobbes’s philosophical anthropologies.¹¹⁸

Hobbes’s doctrine has some similarities with the distinctive materialist, essentialist, and teleological account of living substances in the work of Peter van Inwagen. In van Inwagen’s formulation, the root question driving our ontology of material objects is the special composition question which, stated simply, is this: What is it for some objects designated *x* to constitute (form a proper part of) some object *y*. Van Inwagen’s answer is that some *xs* constitute some *y* if and only if the activity of the *xs* constitutes *a life*. Van Inwagen’s doctrine is obviously a very sophisticated account that is indebted to hundreds of years of advances in science and philosophy since Hobbes’s time. But I believe that van Inwagen is driving at essentially the same idea Hobbes is when

he speaks of biological life as the kind of event that is distinct in kind from other events (such as waves and flames) in that it is well individuated and self-directing, even if its material parts completely change over time. In his words:

If a life is at present constituted by the activities of the *xs* and was ten years ago constituted by the activities of the *ys*, then it seems natural to identify the two events if there is a continuous path in space-time from the earlier to the present space-time location, along which the life of ten years ago has propagated itself.¹¹⁹

The idea is that Socrates was the self-same being through space-time due to having a unique principle of vital motion. It is, of course, an open question from the perspective of the older tradition of hylomorphism whether Hobbes or any kind of materialism has paid the metaphysical price necessary to get personal identity over time.¹²⁰ The point here is that the evidence in Hobbes's texts indicates that he is retaining a thinned-out teleology: the *telos* of each particular substance picked out by the word "man" is its own well-individuated and self-directing life, and therefore acts of will must accord with continued vital and voluntary motion for them to be reasonable. The basic end or good drawing the appetite is life. Thus Hobbes is willing to retain the language of teleology, and he does not restrict it to human willing:

As *appetite* is the beginning of *animal* motion toward something which pleaseth us; so is the *attaining* thereof, the *end* of that motion, which we also call the scope, and aim, and final cause of the same . . . so that *bonum* and *finis* are different games, but for different considerations of the same thing.¹²¹

Meanwhile, Socrates is said to have been a *man* in that he stands in a fundamental resemblance relation to other things with a particular assortment of faculties, including sense and reason. These are the key faculties for Hobbes's civil science. Accordingly, Hobbes lays down two most certain postulates of human nature: first, the postulate *cupiditatis naturalis*, and second, *rationis naturalis*. In the next chapter, the two postulates are taken up in greater detail. Here they are briefly introduced.

Hobbes identifies “wrong definitions” as the “first abuse” of speech.¹²² Hence, he distinguishes two broad categories into which statements can fall: *abuses of speech* or *not abuses of speech*. Therefore, the two postulates of human nature are either abuses of speech or not abuses of speech. For felicity of expression, this can be restated thus: the two postulates are either abusive or nonabusive. I have already argued that the criterion for nonabusive speech is whether it is warranted by the real. Abusive speech is *absurd* or *insignificant*, because it does not signify anything that actually exists. For example, according to Hobbes, there is no rational warrant for speaking of “immaterial substance.” The locution “immaterial substance” is an abuse of speech, because to *be* a substance is to be material or a body.¹²³ Hobbes understands his two postulates of human nature to be *nonabusive* speech because they have a rational warrant in the powers of reason and desire in actually existing individual human beings. The word “man” picks out the set of individual things that resemble one another in being endowed with a particular assortment of powers that distinguishes them from other things in the world, including beasts, plants, and inanimate objects. Moreover, the distinguishing feature of man, the power of reason, is that which makes man “apt” for a particular end.

On my interpretation, the conjunction of the powers of reason and desire in man constitutes the nature or “form” that is *radically immanent* in man, making him “apt” for his purpose or function.¹²⁴ This function or purpose is *life*. When someone rightly reasons—when the faculty of reason functions properly—the person judges the good of life to be basic in his or her plan of life.

Having sketched the lineaments of Hobbes’s realistic foundations of metaphysical materialism, resemblance nominalism, theism, and teleological philosophical anthropology, we can reconsider the role of these foundations in Hobbesian moral and civil science. As we shall see in the next chapter, Hobbes will build his civil philosophy on his particular conception of this resemblance class of things called “men” or “rational animals,” who are fashioned and ordered in this way in virtue of their creation by God.

