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Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct., 1994), pp. 553-571

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2709922>

Accessed: 19/02/2014 11:29

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Hobbes, Heresy, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*

Patricia Springborg

Certain assumptions underly the focus on Hobbes's major political works as the privileged source of his religious doctrines. One is that they constitute the polished views of a writer who was known to complain when his works reached the press in an unfinished state, as if he were thereby misrepresented.¹ There are good reasons for seeing Hobbes's religious views through a political lens but not the ones usually given—not because he is a secularist but because his most fundamental ontological and epistemological propositions are compatible with reason-of-state convictions. This central intuition has led commentators to deprecate or to ignore Hobbes's strictly religious pieces and the niceties of doctrine that they expound. These commentators are mistaken, I believe, given the delicacy with which Hobbes strives for his desired result, a religious tightrope act that he ultimately could not pull off as his contemporaries were quick to point out. It is worth noting that the third and fourth books of *Leviathan* on the Christian Commonwealth and the Kingdom of Darkness are longer even than the first two on the constitution of Man and the Commonwealth. It is the purpose of this essay to shift the focus on Hobbes's religious doctrines center stage, to consider the explicitly religious writings on heresy and ecclesiastical history in light of *Leviathan*, and to show that the religious motivations for *Leviathan* are in some senses inextricable from the political.

Hobbes's attachment to the ethic of primitive Christianity, expressed in his "Narration Concerning Heresy" and in *Leviathan*, comes perhaps closest to an expression of religious conviction on his part.² But far more important

¹ *Considerations upon the Reputation of T. Hobbes*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (11 vols.; London, 1839-45) (cited as *E.W.*), IV, 414-16. Thanks for support to the Folger Shakespeare Library and its staff; to Johann and Margaret Sommerville and Alan Cromartie; to the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.; to Francis Oakley and to the Editor and anonymous readers of this journal.

² "Narration Concerning Heresy," *E.W.*, IV, 388-89; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1991), bk. 4, ch. 46, 478-79.

than his private religious views, even in his own estimation, is the infinite difficulty that private opinion on these and other complex matters may pose for the stability of the fledgling nation state. The English nation has a civic religion, the established church: abide by its teachings, Hobbes tells his readers, whatever your private thoughts may be; forsake the anarchy of images and magic and subscribe to the printed word, oh ye followers of the Book, he exhorts Protestant Englishmen; and above all, refuse to listen to the metaphysics of the schoolmen, the Universities, and the poets and playwrights, who would give a footing to the Church of Rome and the anti-Christ in all his disguises. Here Hobbes follows in the tradition of the great Protestant reformers, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and those representing the new Biblical hermeneutic, for whom Christ, as opposed to the Neoplatonist Word, was the Text. Hobbes agreed with the Fathers of the Reformation in their condemnation of Platonist doctrines of the “incorporeal soul” and other supernatural notions that Catholicism shared with the old pagan religions. He shared their belief that religion was founded in fear and promoted by despair, and his interpretation of Christ the Logos or “Word of God” as a “promise” of the World to come was also purely Evangelical.³ Hobbes’s special genius was to provide a philosophical system to underpin Evangelical theology. This involved him in rewriting the history of philosophy as well as that of ecclesiology.

Hobbes had a way of looking at Catholicism that is quite foreign to modern eyes. Like many Protestants he considered the classical revival to have been the great triumph of paganism. Among his precursors there were some who found this fact the occasion of celebration; for example, Bruno, Dee, Marlowe, Chapman, Kyd, Sidney, and Spenser, reformers or skeptics who revelled in the rich world of metaphor and caprice that paganism offered.⁴ There were others who found it an occasion of fear and foreboding. The Catholic Church had failed in the task of renewal which some of its members had set for it and had increasingly succumbed to the long tradition of pagan popular religion which it was unwilling to extirpate and with which it had reached an uncomfortable accommodation. Hobbes could see the

³ The classic text for religion and fear is the eighteenth thesis of Luther’s *Heidelberg Catechism*, “it is certain that to obtain the grace of Christ a man must utterly despair of himself.” Luther’s co-worker Philip Melancthon wrote the book on the doctrine of “promise” in Article IV of his *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*. See George Wright, “Thomas Hobbes’ 1668 Appendix to Leviathan, translated with an Introduction and Notes,” *Interpretation*, 18 (1991), 323-413.

⁴ See, e.g., Vincenzo Centari, *Le Imagini dei Dei degli Antichi* (Venice, 1571), tr. Richard Linche as *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* (1599); Giordano Bruno, *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (1584), *De gli eroici furori* (1585), and *Cabal del cavallo pegaseo* (1585); Christopher Marlowe’s translation of Ovid’s *Amores* (1599); Marlowe and Chapman, *Hero and Leander* (1593); Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy of one Horatio and Bellimperia* (1592); Sir Philip Sidney, *Defense of Poesie* (1591); Edmund Spenser, *Micropotmos* (1591) and *The Faerie Queen* (1590).

Renaissance Church from both angles. To some extent he was haunted by this “ghost of the Roman Empire,” which was one of the most durable of the priest-ridden ancient theocracies that he undertook to study in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁵ At the same time he feared the perpetual threat posed by Catholicism to the small nation states which had broken with the Empire. He was dismayed to see that national religions of the Reformed Church still retained theological doctrines which could give Roman Catholicism a foothold in the realm. To the extent that Reformists had won, however, they opened up another alarming specter: the proliferation of small sects (reminiscent of the philosophical anarchy of late Hellenism) on which early Christianity and its promise of a new simplicity and doctrinal certitude had paradoxically founded its appeal. Presbyterians were still more aggressive than Papists in the claims to a doctrinal and ecclesiastical autonomy which they were prepared to lay against the state. The small Protestant nation states had slain Leviathan only to encounter Behemoth: Hobbes deliberately invoked the Biblical Beasts of the Old Testament world—incarnations of pharaonic Egypt and Assyria—because they were subjects both of fear and emulation.⁶

Hobbes shares with Machiavelli an admiration for the ancient Eastern empires and adopts the perspective of the late Hellenists, who, in the shifting world of moral and political change, undertook to analyze these empires. He shared the intuition of Augustine, perhaps, that these were the models against which early Christianity had protested but which the Church came perilously close to emulating. Hobbes’s “Narration Concerning Heresy”—written in English to make it more accessible to a local audience—works its ways systematically through the Nicene Creed, showing what a nominalist, an Erastian, and even a skeptic can make of it. His *Ecclesiastical History*—written in Latin, the privileged language of philosophic discourse which admitted Hobbes to the Mersenne circle and the company of Descartes—gives an interpretive prehistory of Anglicanism. It charts the doctrinal struggles of the second- and third-century Church Councils, which produced the Nicene Creed and doctrines concerning the Trinity that were central to the Anglican Church. These are subjects to which Hobbes returned in an Appendix (1668) to the Latin *Leviathan*, once more addressing very technical theological issues of *homoousion*, Christ as the Word, and the problem of the incorporeal soul.⁷ Hobbes’s answer to Bramhall, that “To obey is one thing,

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Historia ecclesiastica carmine elegiaco concinnata*, ed. and pref. Thomas Rymer (London, 1688). English paraphrase, *A True Ecclesiastical History From Moses to the time of Martin Luther, in Verse* (London, 1722).

⁶ See Patricia Springborg, “Hobbes’ Biblical Beasts: *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*,” *Political Theory* (forthcoming).

⁷ For Hobbes’s discussion of the debate over Christ’s nature as *homoousion*, or “consubstantial with the Father,” see “Narration Concerning Heresy,” *E.W.*, IV, 393; *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II, 670-80 (1688 ed., 31; 1722 ed., 52); and the 1668 Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, [127]B, tr. George Wright, *loc. cit.*, 370.

to believe is another," has been taken as the last word of an Erastian and a secularist.⁸ However, this is perhaps mistaken, since Hobbes, like the medieval nominalists, separated God's ordained power (*potentia ordinata*) from His absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), affirming the absolute sovereignty of God over the world as a model for the earthly sovereign.⁹ Hobbes's protestations that men could not know the nature of God and therefore ought not to speculate on it or on the nature of other numinous entities were consistent with evangelical Christianity. The cunning of Reason had set him to a secular and perhaps unintentional rewriting of the history of philosophy.

Heresy and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* was designed to turn a difficult trick, which was to recast the debate over heresy of which Hobbes had become a victim. In October 1666, for the first time since the Reformation, a bill was introduced into the English House of Commons to make Christian heresy a crime. The committee considering the bill was specifically empowered to investigate the views of *Leviathan*, reported to an earlier committee "as a most poisonous piece of atheism."¹⁰ Although this bill failed, similar ones were reintroduced in 1674, 1675, and 1680; and in 1683 at Oxford *Leviathan* and *De Cive* were burned, a fate Hobbes feared for himself.¹¹ Hobbes's reflections on heresy, set out in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the "Narration Concerning Heresy,"¹² may be read as a form of self-defense; but in this defense Hobbes was

⁸ *E.W.* IV, 387-408. See Margreta de Grazia, "The Secularization of Language in the Seventeenth Century," *JHI*, 41 (1980), 319-20; and G. A. Padley, "The Seventeenth Century: Words versus Things," in *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe 1500-1700: The Latin Tradition* (Cambridge, 1976), 141ff; Leopold Damrosch, Jr., "Hobbes as Reformation Theologian: Implications of the Free-will Controversy," *JHI*, 40 (1979), 339-52, arguing that Hobbes does not believe in a personal God; also John Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men 1600-1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson and 'Hobbism,'" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985), 407-27. For technical items in Hobbes's theology see the relevant sections in Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Context* (London, 1992), and Patricia Springborg, "Leviathan and the Problem of Ecclesiastical Authority," *Political Theory*, 3 (1975), 289-303, "Leviathan, the Christian Commonwealth Incorporated," *Political Studies*, 24 (1976), 171-83, and "Hobbes on Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorrell (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁹ Wright, *op. cit.*, 347, n. 78. On the use of the *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta* distinction by theologians from Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd (Muslim Platonists) to Ockham, Aquinas, Suarez, and Bellarmine (Catholic Aristotelians), and William Ames, Henry Stubbe, and Robert Boyle (Protestants, and in the latter case Newtonians), see Francis Oakley's important *Omnipotence, Covenants, and Order* (Ithaca, 1984), esp. 48-91.

¹⁰ Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford, 1989), 33; Sommerville, *op. cit.*, xiv.

¹¹ John Aubrey, in *Brief Lives*, ed. from the Author's Mss. by Andrew Clark (2 vols.; Oxford, 1898), I, 156, reports the real fear Hobbes felt at the inclination of bishops in the House of Lords to "have the good old gentleman burn't as a heretique."

¹² *E.W.*, IV, 387-408.

his own worst enemy. Heresy is the two-pronged dilemma on which he was caught.¹³ He sought to escape by defining for himself an impregnable position as defender of the Godly Prince. As his follower Daniel Scargill confessed to his accusers, however, it is difficult to believe one committed to affirming only what his masters would like to hear.¹⁴

Aubrey's first mention of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* characterizes it as an anticlerical tract. "In 1659," he says, Hobbes "wrot, among other things, a poeme in Latin Hexameter and Pentameter, of the encroachment of the clergie (both Roman and reformed) on the civil power. I remember I saw there 500 + verses for he numbred every tenth as he wrote." Aubrey adds, "His amanuensis remembers this poeme, for he wrote them out, but knows [not what became of it]."¹⁵ Aubrey's observation was repeated by Sir William Molesworth in his edition of Hobbes's Latin works;¹⁶ but Molesworth also records Hobbes referring in his *Vita* (p. xx) to the work, now containing some 2000 lines, as having been written around his eightieth year, that is, in 1670. Aubrey relates that a letter was received from James Wheldon, Hobbes's amanuensis, from Hardwick Hall, dated 16 January 1679 and addressed to Aubrey in response to a query regarding the whereabouts of the "Latine verses ... about Ecclesistical Power."¹⁷ Wheldon did not have them and wondered if Hobbes had burned them. Aubrey records his efforts, including a letter to Hobbes's printer, William Croke, eventually rewarded, to track the work down, entitled variously (and incorrectly) *Historia Ecclesiastica Romana* and *Ecclesiastica Historia carmine elegiaco conscripta*.¹⁸ The poem seems to reflect enduring religious interests of Hobbes, which the wealth of detail on ancient religion and primitive Christianity would confirm. This material, developed early, may have later been reshaped in the heat of the heresy charge.

Aubrey records other works in which Hobbes hoped to set the record on religion straight: "Mr. Hobbes told me he would write, in three columnes, his

¹³ No one realized better than his contemporary and perhaps most incisive critic, Bishop Bramhall, the degree to which Hobbes was caught with his own hook. See John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes his last animadversions, in the case concerning liberty and universal necessity; With an appendix concerning the catching of LEVIATHAN, or the great whale* (London, 1658, STC B4215), iv.

¹⁴ See "The Recantation of Daniel Scargill Publickly made before the University of Cambridge in Greas St. Maries, July 25. 1669" (London, 1669), 3-7; also Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford, 1989), 34; Alan Ryan, "Hobbes, Toleration and the Inner Life," in David Miller and Larry Siedentop (eds.), *The Nature of Political Theory* (Oxford, 1983), 197-218; and Tuck, "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration," in Mary Dietz (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory* (Lawrence, Kan., 1990).

¹⁵ Aubrey, *op. cit.*, I, 338.

¹⁶ *Opera Philosophica quae Latine scripsit omnia* (5 vols.; London, 1839-45), V, 342 (cited hereafter as *L. W.*).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 382.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 364.

doctrine, the objections and his answers, and deposit it in the earle of Devon's library at ... Derbyshire."¹⁹ This turns out to be the 63-page tract "Mr Hobbes considered in his loyalty, religion, reputation and manners, by way of letter to Dr. Wallis,"²⁰ one of the many occasional pieces in which Hobbes, throughout his life, sought to deflect charges of heresy. Such an explanation might answer Richard Tuck, who believes that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was written around 1666, though not published until 1688, and directed very specifically to the heresy charge.²¹ Tuck notes that according to the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* for 1667-68, Hobbes sent his "Narration Concerning Heresy" to Lord Arlington, a Cabal minister who defended him when he was summoned before the Lords, and to whom *Behemoth* was dedicated. The probable date of the *Dialogue of the Common Laws*, about half of which concerns the English law of heresy, at about 1666, strongly relates it to this group of works. The date and content of the 1668 Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* places it among them as well, divided as it is between a discussion of the Nicene Creed, Christian doctrines of the immortality of the soul, and the history of heresy in the Anglican church and its antecedents.²²

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is an important, although almost wholly neglected, source for Hobbes's religious views, as Aubrey clearly appreciated. Dressed in the garments of poetry, because the oracles of Apollo and the precepts of Pythagoras were so clothed, it represents Hobbes's *Enchiridion*. Ovid was florid, but this reads like plain Horace, Thomas Rymer tells us in his Preface.²³ It was cast in verse precisely to show that the author, neither a monk nor a clergyman but a philosopher and layman and swayed by neither schools nor sects, was not religiously cold. Hobbes's choice of an historical narrative that locates heresy squarely in the pagan era was also a strategy to diffuse contemporary debate and take the heat off himself. It is the same strategy that he pursued in the "Narration Concerning Heresy,"²⁴ where the point was again to show heresy to be an essentially historical problem and the creation of pagan philosophers. There he began by redefining heresy as the teachings of the sects, restoring to the word the Greek sense, as employed by Diogenes Laertius. "Heresy" (*hairesis*) in Greek means the taking of an opinion, he pointed out, and the chief opinionated philosophers were Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, and their disciples, who were "in love with great names, though by their impertinent discourse, sordid and ridiculous manners they were generally dispised."²⁵

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ (London, 1662), repr. in *E.W.* IV, 409-40.

²¹ Richard Tuck, *op. cit.*, 159.

²² Wright, *op. cit.*, 327ff.

²³ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Latin Preface (1688 ed., ii; 1722 paraphrase, i-ii).

²⁴ *E.W.* IV, 387-408.

²⁵ *E.W.* IV, 387. Richard Tuck in "The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes," in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern*

Hobbes suggested that heresy entered the Christian Church when unemployed Greek philosophers, no longer tolerated in Rome, plied their sophistries in the Christian cause, primitive Christianity proving no match for the allure of their casuistry. Hobbes here gave a prospective repost to doctrinal primitivism which eulogized the early church, whose simplicity was later taken for a sign of truth by William Whiston and Locke in a movement gathering momentum.²⁶ For Hobbes the reasonableness of Christianity was not transparent. It was reasonable only by being commanded by a sovereign ordained by reason.²⁷ His almost farcical rendition of the argument in the Latin *Ecclesiastical History*²⁸ is repeated more soberly in the more accessible English "Narration Concerning Heresy." The undoubted skill of philosophers as rhetoricians—and therefore, opportunists, Hobbes implies—encouraged them to jump on the Christian bandwagon early. They did so as "pastors of the primitive church." While "retaining still many doctrines which they had taken up on the authority of their former masters..., [they] endeavoured many of them to draw the Scriptures every one to his own heresy. And thus at first entered heresy into the church of Christ."²⁹

The heresies with which the Greek philosophers infected Christianity are spelled out in five hundred lines of Latin verse in the *Ecclesiastical History*. There Hobbes gives a genealogy of ancient wisdom which he renders up as a tale of chicanery and trickery perpetrated by the ancient oriental cities on the honest rural folk of the Christian *chora*.³⁰ Priest-ridden pharaonic Egypt, home of the *magi, comes, daemonii, spirituales genii*, and other fantastic and astrological characters, passed all these pagan arts, along with its genuine discoveries in the sciences, to the Greeks as well as to the Assyrians, whom they had conquered.³¹ By this line of transmission the Egyptian civilization, older also than the Hebrew, passed its pagan lore to the Chaldeans, famous for their auguries, who took their trade to the Romans and were in turn conquered by them. "Why were there no Chaldeans in Greece, given that the

Europe (Cambridge, 1993), 33-34, suggests Denis Petau ("Petavius"), *Theologicorum Deorum* (Paris, 1644), *Prolegomena*, ch. 3, as a source for this argument in *Leviathan*, Bk 4, ch. 44 (417-18). Petau was read and admired by Grotius, Gassendi, and Mersenne.

²⁶ See especially John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695); John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696); William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity reviv'd* (5 vols.; 1711-12); Samuel Johnson, *Julian the Apostate* (1682), which portrayed popery as a modern paganism. Charles Blount, author of *The Last Sayings and Dying Legacy of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (1680), published *The Oracles of Reason* in 1693.

²⁷ See Joshua Mitchell, "Hobbes and the Equality of All under the One," *Political Theory*, 21 (1993), 83.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, ll. 385-460 (1688 ed., 19-22; 1722 ed., 28-33).

²⁹ "Narration Concerning Heresy," *E.W.* IV, 388-89.

³⁰ Ll. 1-30 (1688 ed., 1-2; 1722 ed., 1-3).

³¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 80-280, 1688 ed., 5-14; 1722 ed., 6-19. See Patricia Springborg, *Royal Persons* (London, 1990), ch. 5, 6, 12.

Greeks were the masters of the Romans?" Because "the Greeks did not lack their own prophets and deceivers, with whom the Chaldeans could not compete, the seditious logicians, who had to leave under the Romans." Thus was "Egypt the source of Greek wisdom, imported by Pythagoras, Thales, Plato and others, who sought out the arts of measurement and left behind the mysteries of Memphis," passing their legacy to the Christians in turn.³²

Hobbes is never more scathing in this poem than about the philosophers. Regarding Socrates he is simply defamatory. Socrates is said to have invented dialectic, by Socratic irony gently leading the mob; and when public affairs went wrong, mocked the magistrates and flaunted the rules, to the point where the city would have killed him had not his insane wife (Xanthippe) hit him over the head first with her chamber pot. To Socrates, he says, we owe political precepts aimed at the vulgar, which, due to vain glory and under the specious name of liberty, cause them to ignore the law and believe kings to be wolves. Enter Aristotle, teacher of the mighty who allowed tyrants, master of Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus, and a thousand followers. According to the democratic teachings of these authors, liberty was not worthy of the name unless bought by the blood of kings. The hogs of Aristotle's sty were *Metaphysics*, *physics*, and *Logic*.³³

Making the observation that a new nation does not need a new voice lent by bloodshed, Hobbes reflects on perennial fascination for the Greek and Latin tongues, a dubious legacy, and why it is that the Assyrians and the Greeks got by without strange languages. This is clearly an attack on archaizing classical republicanism, which had been under attack in *Leviathan* as well, as a form of popular sedition and demagoguery.³⁴ Hobbes concludes with an unflattering portrayal of the early Christians (and, by implication, his English contemporaries) as succumbing to false philosophers, as Lucian paints them: "rhetors, a vile race, drawn by greed of money and fanning ears to people proud but poor, who take nothing seriously unless told them by bearded philosophers with austere faces, their whole lives an affront to their own teachings," while "anyone who decries the priests is hunted down as a blasphemer, atheist, heretic."³⁵ When the Gospel spread to Greece, all the false philosophers jumped on board as "soldiers of Christ," Hobbes notes sarcastically and, with a backhand swipe at the Puritans, adds that each was

³² *Ibid.*, ll. 320-50 (1688 ed. 16; 1722, 23-24).

³³ *Ibid.*, ll. 345-85 (1688 ed., 17-18; 1722 ed., 24-28).

³⁴ In *Leviathan*, bk. 2, ch. 21 (150), Hobbes comments, referring to the works of Aristotle and Cicero, especially: "And by reading these Greek, and Latine Authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a falseshew of Liberty,) of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their Sovereigns; and again of controlling those controllers; with the effusion of so much blood; as I think I may truly say, there was never any thing so dearly bought, as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues."

³⁵ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ll. 385-460 (1688 ed., 19-22; 1722 ed., 28-33).

an orator, a doctor in logic, pronouncing *ex cathedra* in Christ's church. Fathers of the synod took in the faithful and men of probity, confounding the simple folk with essences and entities. Masters of dogma, they split the church apart. To head up a new sect was the highest honor and so burst forth heresies of a thousand colors, born of hatred and love of fighting, each heresiarch believing his own tribe instead of Christ.³⁶

Hobbes's account is reminiscent of that of the Epicurean Lucretius's account of the origins of civil war in *De Rerum Natura* (II, 54-57). Hobbes quotes this passage to preface the "Narration Concerning Heresy," going on to relate how the names Catholic and heretic appeared among the warring parties and how militant Christianity spread among the Romans themselves and conquered Constantine, who washed the earth with the blood of non-believers. False gods were destroyed, the church flourished, and temples were raised to Christ. Peace returned, and there was no one to destroy it but the Romans themselves, which they did. After a few years of philosophic peace had reigned, discord broke out again between Alexandria and Arian, between the church and the bishop, over the Trinity, whether Christ was equal to or lesser than the Father.³⁷

In a thousand lines of textual exegesis Hobbes traces the doctrinal disputes of the first four councils of the early church in great detail, obliquely criticizing Constantine, who through indecision first gave entry to the priests to decide Christian doctrine.³⁸ He discusses in elegiac verse the technical problems of the Trinity and the troublesome concept of *homoousion* ("one substance"),³⁹ spelled out again in prose in the "Narration Concerning Heresy." Hobbes's conclusion is nowhere better expressed than in the English paraphrase of lines 1180 ff.:⁴⁰

Ten Thousand *Sphinxes* ne'er can reconcile
The Barb'rous Feuds, the *Babylonish* Toil;
The num'rous Cavils, Quirks and deadly Woes,
That from the First four gen'ral Synods rose.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, II. 470-510 (1688 ed., 22-24; 1722 ed., 34-39).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II. 520-40 (1688 ed., 25-26; 1722 ed., 40-42).

³⁸ *Ibid.* (1688 ed., 26-71; 1722 ed., 43-177).

³⁹ The term *homoousion* was used by the Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D., to define the doctrine of the Trinity, as opposed to the term *homoiousion*, "like substance," favored by the Arians. Overlooking Hobbes's contribution to the debate, the *OED* gives the first English users of the term as Ralph Cudworth, 1678, *The True Intellectual System*, I.iv. para 36, 597, "the Genuine Platonists would doubtless acknowledge also, all the Three Hypostases of their Trinity to be Homo-ousian, Co-Essential or Con-Substantial"; and Gibbon, 1781, *Decline and Fall*, II.xxi, 251, 252: "Their ['the Arians'] patron, Eusebius of Nicodemia,... confessed, that the admission of the *Homoousion*, or Consubstantial ... was incompatible with the principles of their theological system"; "The mysterious *Homoousion*, which either party was free to interpret according to their peculiar tenets."

⁴⁰ *Historica Ecclesiastica* (1722, ed., 95).

Why did the Church of *Nice* no more reveal?
 Why all her Doctrines in a Cloud conceal?
 But that her Tricks might in Dominion end:
 These first, from CONSTANTINE'S Indulgence sprang
 And, like warm'd Snakes, their Parent Bosom stung:
 Thence did the Populace their Kings despise,
 Hoisting the Church's Ensigns to the Skies.

The argument comes full circle as Hobbes extends the metaphor to a lengthy discussion of the primeval Serpent, the papal arts of the entrapment with lures and snares of many colors, and the Pope's triumph over all monsters.⁴¹ It closes back on that of Leviathan itself, which Molesworth rightly notes⁴² is clearly the source⁴³ for Hobbes's ecclesiastical history, except that the Pope is now Leviathan, hooking the little fish with lines and lures:⁴⁴

But now the Pope his end compleatly gains,
 And leads the People, and their Prince, in Chains:
 Now vast *Leviathan* the Hook receives,
 And *Behemoth* his wounded Nostrils grieves:
 All gently own the Pope's Imperial Sway
 Where'r the *Roman* eagles wing their Way....
 He mends his Nets, or strictly views his Wares,
 His Lines new models, or his Hooks surveys,
 And ev'ry Thing in decent Order lays;
 Gay gaudy Flies of ev'ry Sort are seen,
 The bright Carnation and the lovely Green....
 There skimming cross the Streams, with sov'reign Skill,
 The pointed Hooks th'unwary Fishes kill.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1230-70 (1688 ed., 57-59; 1722 ed., 98-102).

⁴² Molesworth's introduction to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (L.W. V, 342).

⁴³ Aubrey (*op. cit.*, 338-39) on the sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, stresses Cluverius, also mentioned by Molesworth. He tells us that Hobbes "did read Cluverius's *Historia Universalis*, and made up his poeme from thence." But Aubrey is probably wrong. The writer commonly known as Cluverius was one Philipp Clüver (1580-1622), a German historian and geographer, born in Danzig, who studied law in Leiden under Joseph Scaliger, became a member of the Leiden academy and visited England. He is the author, among other works, of an *Introductio in Universam Geographicam* (1629). The more likely Cluverius is the more obscure Johann Clüver (1593-1633), author of the voluminous *Historiam Totius Mundi Epitome A prima rerum Origine usque ad annum Christi MXDCXXX*, published in 1645. See Springborg, "Writing to Redundancy: Hobbes and Cluverius," *The Historical Journal*, 1996, forthcoming.

⁴⁴ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ll. 1225-35 (1688 ed., 57; quoted in the 1722 paraphrase, 97-100).

At this point it is worth considering what qualifications we must place on the assertion of A. P. Martinich that Hobbes subscribed to the doctrines of the first four councils as endorsed by Elizabeth's High Commission on Religion.⁴⁵ In the "Narration Concerning Heresy" Hobbes acknowledges his acceptance of these doctrines,⁴⁶ solemnly professing the Nicene Creed clause by clause; but we have to ask whether this is not the profession of one who, like his follower Daniel Scargill, is only officially bound to the creed of his sovereign. How does it sit with his lengthy criticisms of the first four Councils in the *Ecclesiastical History* and his dismay that powers of doctrinal definition should ever have been surrendered to the clergy? How do specific items, like the person of the Holy Ghost, sit with his refusal to accept incorporeal entities? And how does he, who believes the Kingdom of God to be of this World, define the World to Come?⁴⁷

Fayrieland and Gentilism

There are indications that Hobbes's attack on the doctrine of essences and demonology of the dark kingdom in the fourth part of *Leviathan* may have had other than "Romish" targets. He himself displays a surprising interest in what he terms the "absurd opinion of Gentilisme," or pagan beliefs.⁴⁸ Arguing fear as the main ground of religion as of the state, Hobbes painted a picture of primitive religions and their ability to exploit it. His principal sources are Herodotus, unacknowledged, and Diodorus Siculus, whom in the opening lines of *De Homine*⁴⁹ he eulogizes as the wisest and most deservedly celebrated ancient historian on the origins of the human race, praise that he repeats elsewhere, for instance in *Behemoth*,⁵⁰ *Decameron Physiologicum*,⁵¹ and the *Examinatio et Emendatio Mathematicae Hodiernae ... J. Wallisii*.⁵² Drawing most probably on Diodorus, Hobbes gives an account of the Egyptian Creation, beginning with the great God of chaos and replete with astral and solar gods, crocodile and bird gods, deified calves, dogs, snakes, onions and leeks.⁵³ Interspersing counterparts from Greek and Roman mythology—Greek "daemon," Roman "genius" and "lares"—this account, like others in various of his works, although characteristically mocking, displays a detailed knowledge of the sources. Bearing in mind Hobbes's definition of heresy as private opinion based on philosophizing typified by the Hellenistic sects, we note that he presents "gentilism" as a form of heresy:

⁴⁵ A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1992), 2.

⁴⁶ *E.W.* IV, 392-402.

⁴⁷ Questions addressed in Springborg, "Hobbes on Religion" (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ *Leviathan* (1991 ed., 79).

⁴⁹ *L.W.* II, 1.

⁵⁰ *E.W.* VI, 277-80.

⁵¹ *E.W.* VII, 73-74.

⁵² *L.W.* IV, 3-4.

⁵³ *Leviathan* (1991 ed., ch. 12, 79).

And for that part of Religion, which consisteth in opinions concerning the nature of Powers invisible, there is almost nothing that has a name, that has not been esteemed amongst the Gentiles, in one place or another, a God, or Divell; or by their Poets feigned to be inanimated, inhabited, or possessed by some Spirit or other.⁵⁴

Hobbes then proceeds to lay out the ancient theogony in the sonorous tones of the Book of Genesis and its predecessors:

The unformed matter of the World, was a God, by the name of *Chaos*. The Heaven, the Ocean, the Planets, the Fire, the Earth, the Winds, were so many Gods. Men, Women, a Bird, a Crocodile, a Calf, a Dogge, a Snake, an Onion, a Leeke, Deified. Besides, that they filled almost all places with spirits called *Daemons*: the plains, with *Pan*, and *Panises*, or Satyres; the Woods, with Fawnes, and Nymphs; the Sea, with Tritons, and other Nymphs; every River, and Fountayn, with a Ghost of his name, and with Nymphs; every house with its *Lares*, or Familiars; every man, with his *Genius*; Hell, with Ghosts, and spiritual Officers, as *Charon*, *Cerberus*, and the *Furies*, and in the night time, all places with *Larvae*, *Lemures*, Ghosts of men deceased, and a whole kingdome of Fayries, and Bugbears.⁵⁵

In the *Ecclesiastical History* Hobbes spells out the meaning of “gentilism,” which was also the topic of his discussion of the primitive religions of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia in the “Narration Concerning Heresy,” and in *Leviathan*.⁵⁶ He is not the first to address the question of gentilism, framed as the ancient legacy with which the Greek philosophers infected Christianity. Earlier sources for the term meaning “Heathenism, paganism, a heathen belief or practice,” and occasionally “in opposition to *Judaism*,” are to be found in H. Smith’s, *Arrow Against Atheists* (1592), where it is stated: “Mahomets Religion is a patched religion, mixt partly with Judaism, partly with Gentilism”;⁵⁷ and in the *Cases Conscience* (1602) of William Perkins, who declared: “The Masse ... hath more affinitie with grosse Gentilisme, then with the Institution of our Sauour Christ.”⁵⁸

Hobbes had yet more famous predecessors in Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649), whose massive *De theologia gentili, et physiologia christiana*, written in three books, was cited by the well known early English deist Edward Herbert (1583-1645) in his *De religione gentilis errorumque apud eos*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), V, 449, citing Smith (ed. 1593), I.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, citing Perkins (London, 1619), 214.

causis;⁵⁹ by his friend John Selden, author of *De diis syriis* (1617); and by Aubrey himself, author of the *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (1666).⁶⁰ Vossius, Hebraist and editor of Maimonides' *De idolatria*, marshalled an impressive array of classical sources, referenced in marginal notes, for his encyclopaedic account of the ancient religions of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Phoenicians. His vast 1200-page work is a compendium of information on the Noachite genealogy, Egypt (the land of Cham and the cult of Osiris), the Syrian gods, Phoenicia, and the myth of Cadmus and Semele.⁶¹ Herbert's more modest effort which focuses on the astral deities, produces interesting information, although undocumented, on the Cretan and Egyptian labyrinths, and the Egyptian goddess Neith, counterpart to Athena.⁶² Herbert, like John Selden, was a deist and minimalist, for whom "faith in Christ" was sufficient for salvation—and conformity to the Anglican Church a necessary condition. Did this doctrinal minimalism encourage an interest in the extraordinary array of "private beliefs" exhibited by the ancient religions, which constituted heresy in the technical sense? Such a quasi-anthropological interest was often coupled with a vehement anti-clericalism, corollary of the firm belief that essential Christian doctrines were simple, ruling out the doctrinal subtleties supplied by power-seeking priests.

It may be no accident that Hobbes's "kingdome of Fayries" invokes reminiscences of the "Faerieland" of Edmund Spenser, credited by the *OED* with being the first to use the term in this peculiar sense.⁶³ Spenser's preceded Hobbes in mapping a fantasy-land of "aerial bodies and spirits" which, in the form of the Church of Rome, had the power to bewitch subjects in Spain and Ireland, her stamping grounds. There are further indications of Hobbes's indebtedness to Spenser in the figure of the monster *Leviathan* himself, a double for the sword-wielding giant pushed over the cliff by Talus in the *Faerie Queen*, book five. In Hobbes's answer to Davenant's preface to *Gondibert*, addressed to Hobbes, he demonstrates acquaintance with Spenser's preface to the *Faerie Queen*, of which Davenant's preface was a critique.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Edward Herbert, *The Ancient Religion of the Gentiles and Causes of Errors Considered* (London, 1705; Folger Library: 153296), 141ff., English tr. of *De religione gentilis, errorumque apud eos causis* (Amsterdam, 1663; Folger Library: 150363.B1805).

⁶⁰ Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme* (1666); in *John Aubrey, Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell, Sussex, 1972), 130-304.

⁶¹ Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *De theologia gentili, et physiologia christiana; sive de origine ac progressu idolatrie, deque naturae mirandis, quibus homo adducitur ad Deum* (Amsterdam, 1668).

⁶² Herbert, *The Ancient Religion*, 4-5, 95.

⁶³ *OED*, V, 662: 1590, Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II. Introd. i. "None that breatheth living aire does know Where is that happy land of Faery"; *ibid.*, I. Introd. ii, "Lay forth ... the antique rolles.... Of Faerie knights."

⁶⁴ See "The Author's Preface to his much honour'd Friend Mr Hobs," by Sir William D'Avenant, and Hobbes's Answer, in *Gondibert: an Heroick Poem* (London, 1651) (STC D325). Cited in Paul H. Kocher, "Marlowe's Atheist Lecture," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 39, 1 (1940), 99.

Among Elizabethans, Spenser, Marlowe, and Kyd pioneered the idea of “Faerieland” as the realm of Aristotelian essences and Platonist *daemons* which shored up the Evil Empire of the Papacy and its imperial stooges. By such elaborate conceits they could bypass the censors and the secret service, increasingly powerful under Secretary of State Walsingham, taking jibes even at Shakespeare and his essentially medieval Aristotelian world, full of ghosts of the king and mystical-body language. Christopher Marlowe had accused Moses of being an Egyptian and a juggler and Christ of being “a bastard and his mother dishonest,” according to the Baines deposition convicting him of blasphemy laid before the Privy Council shortly before he was murdered in 1593. Buying into the scientific debate on the antiquity of the world, “he perswades men to Atheism willing them not be afeard of bugbeares and hobgoblins, and vtterly scorning both god and his ministers.”⁶⁵ But fairies still lived on in popular culture and in the stories told on sleeping and waking, even though, once politically contaminated, they could never quite regain their innocence. So, for instance, in the famous poem, “The Faeryes Farewell” (1648) Richard Corbett both laments the loss of the old fairies who kept children and wayward maids in line with sixpence in their shoes for good behavior, and he unmasks fairies as political agents:

By which wee note the *Faries*
 Were of the old Profession;
 Theyre songs were *Ave Maryes*,
 Their Daunces were *Procession*.
 But now, alas, they all are dead,
 Or gone beyond the Seas,
 Or Farther for Religion fled,
 Or elce they take theyre Ease.⁶⁶

Hobbes seems aware of the folk literature, invoking it for political purposes. He declares, “The *Fairies* in what Nation soever they converse, have but one Universall King, which some poets of ours call King *Oberon*; but the Scripture calls *Beelsebub*, Prince of *Daemons*.” He notes of the Roman Catholic Church that “their whole Hierarchy, or Kingdome of Darknesse, may be compared not unfitly to the *Kingdome of Fairies*; that is, to the old wives *fables* in England, concerning *Ghosts* and *Spirits*, and the feats they play in the night.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Paul H. Kocher, “Marlowe’s Atheist Lecture,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 39 (1940), 99.

⁶⁶ *The Poems of Richard Corbett*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and H. R. Trevor Roper (Oxford, 1955), 51, the editors noting that “the connexion between the old religion and the rule of the fairies” remarked upon by Corbett, is also to be found in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and Bishop Harsnett’s *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603).

⁶⁷ *Leviathan*, 481, 480.

We have reason to suppose from Hobbes's answer to Davenant's Preface to *Gondibert* that he shared that author's scorn for Spenser's Fayrieland. But he was not hostile to folklore or antiquarianism as such, rather defending them against the assaults of the Earl of Newcastle, for instance.⁶⁸ Hobbes's early anti-pastoral poem *De Mirabilibus Pecci, Being the Wonders of the Peak in Darbyshire Commonly called the Devil's Arse of Peak* (London, 1678⁴, STC H2224), which he acknowledged in his *Vita* (L.W.1, xxvii) as drawing on the chorographical study of Derbyshire in William Camden's *Britannia*, celebrated folklore about the land of his patron on which Chatsworth was situated, personifying and mythologizing its features in the tradition of Micheal Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1613, xxvi, 397-494) and Charles Cotton's *Wonders of the Peake* (1681). In an archaizing anthology of 1765, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Thomas Percy declared, "We have here a short display of the popular belief concerning FAIRIES." He went on to defend an indigenous "faerie" tradition: "it is well known that our Saxon ancestors long before they left their German forests, believed the existence of a kind of diminutive demons, or middle species between men and spirits, whom they called DUERGAR or DWARFS." He dealt swiftly with those who would maintain that fairies were an Eastern import, in the nature of djins or whatever: "Whoever considers, how early, how extensively, and how uniformly they have prevailed in these nations, will not readily assent to the hypothesis of those, who fetch them from the east so late as the time of the Croisades."⁶⁹ That these stock characters included Oberon, Merlin, Queen Mab, and Puck, we know from poems of the day.⁷⁰

"Fayrieland" and gentilism were sometimes inextricably connected, as we know from John Aubrey's preface to his peculiar compendium, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (c. 1688). It begins with "old customs and old wives-fables" and moves immediately to a history of "gentile" practices, treating everything from parallels between the pagan and Christian mysteries, fairies, marvels, mazes, and magic, to classical sources on the supernatural:

⁶⁸ See the Earl of Newcastle's letter to Charles II, dated 1658-59, reproduced by Thomas P. Slaughter, *Ideology and Politics on the Eve of the Restoration: Newcastle's Advice to Charles II* (Philadelphia, 1984), 20.

⁶⁹ Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs and other pieces of our earlier Poets* (3 vols.; London, 1765), III, 206-7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 201-8, see poems 24 and 25: "ROBIN GOOD-FELLOW—alias PUCKE, alias HOBGOBLIN," which begins, "From Oberon, in fairye land, the king of ghosts and shadowes there..."; and "THE FAIRY QUEEN," which begins "Come, follow, follow mee, Ye fairy elves that bee; Com follow Mab your queene...." Neither of these makes any special reference to Catholicism, but Percy (1765, III, 209-12) also includes "THE FAIRIES FAREWELL," noting both that it is a traditional "song which fell from the hand of the facetious bishop Corbet," and that "the departure of Fairies is here attributed to the abolition of monkery," just the reverse of the cause assigned by Chaucer in the "Wife of Bath's Tale."

The Britons imbibed their Gentilisme from the Romans; and as the British language is crept into corners: *sc.* Wales, and Cornwalle: so the Remaines of Gentilisme are still kept there, which customes (no doubt) were anciently all over Britaine and Gaule: but the Inundation of the Goths, drove it out together with the Language.⁷¹

It is significant that Aubrey, author of *Templa Druidum* and *Review of Stonehenge* (1665), dedicated to Charles II, should have shown the *Remaines of Gentilisme* to John Toland, who wrote a *History of the Druids* much indebted to Aubrey, as well as the famous *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696).

These were clearly matters of interest to Hobbes, who in *Behemoth* interpolates remarks on Diodorus Siculus on the Druids into his account of the religion of the ancient Egyptians, Persians, Assyrians, and Aethiopians.⁷² There he gives an instructive account of philosophy as the tool of priests usurping power in the ancient world, demonstrated in works on the ancient Egyptians, the Persian Magi, the Druids, and Indians by “Caesar, Strabo and others, and especially in Diodorus Siculus, the greatest antiquary perhaps that ever was.”⁷³ He quotes at length the passages from Diodorus about the Egyptian judiciary’s strange practices. Judges of Hieropolis, Thebes, and Memphis, chose from among themselves a chief justice who wore a jewel called truth on a chain when pleading and who, when they had agreed on a judgment, “put this jewel of truth to one of the pleas.” “You see now,” Hobbes concluded, “what power was acquired in civil matters by the conjuncture of philosophy and divinity.”⁷⁴ The Israelite priests, like the Egyptian drawn from one tribe, had a similar practice, “the high priest giv[ing] judgement by the breast-plate of Urim and Thummim.” Going on to discuss the Assyrians and Chaldeans, Hobbes gives Diodorus’s opinion of the latter as “a sect in politics like to that of the Egyptian priests,” professing philosophy, prophecy, and augury.

Diodorus is also Hobbes’s source in *Behemoth* for the discussion of Indian philosophers, who are of the highest caste, are free of taxes, have no slaves and no masters, and care for the dead and taking auguries—Hobbes seems to be emphasizing Egyptian and Platonist parallels.⁷⁵ His best example of the priest-ridden state of antiquity is Ethiopia, where, according to Diodorus, the priests of Meröe elect one of their number as king, controlling him to the point where they even decide when he is to die—by persuasion.⁷⁶ But the Greek educated Ethiopian king Ergamenes, in the time of Ptolemy II, brought soldiers to the golden temple of Abaton and killed all the priests. From this Hobbes draws a lesson for Charles II: better to have killed his

⁷¹ Aubrey, *Three Prose Works*, 132.

⁷² *E.W.* VI, 277-81.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁷⁵ *E.W.* VI, 280.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

ministers, not more than 1000, than to have suffered the loss in civil war of 100,000.⁷⁷ Hobbes is not caught convicting the priests, or at least not exactly, and ends this discursus by affirming the true religion of the Church of England but with an elaborate proviso. The divinity and philosophy of the heathens is idolatry, he states,

(excepting the knowledge which the Egyptian priests, and from them the Chaldeans, had gotten by long observation and study in astronomy, geometry and arithmetic whereas the divinity of the clergy of this nation considered apart from the mixture that has been introduced by the Church of Rome, and in part retained here, of the babbling philosophy of Aristotle and the Greeks, that has no affinity with religion, and serves only to breed disaffection, dissension, and finally sedition and civil war, as we have lately found by dear experience in the differences between the Presbyterians and Episcopals) is the true religion.⁷⁸

In chapter twelve of *Leviathan* Hobbes treats this hybrid genre of gentilism and demonology, giving a grotesque list of idols, gods in the shapes of monsters, beasts, “mongrill Gods” like Bacchus and Hercules, and the “Caverns, Groves, Woods, Mountains, and whole llands” consecrated to them and going on to chronicle their “Prognostiques of time to come” and pretenses to divination.⁷⁹ Whether in “the ambiguous or senslesse answers of the Priests at Delphi, Delos, Ammon, and other famous Oracles,” the prophecies “of the Sibills ... (like those perhaps of Nostradamus) ... the insignificant Speeches of Mad-men supposed to be possessed with a divine Spirit..., Theomancy..., Horoscopy..., Astrology..., Thumomancy, or Presage..., the Prediction of Witches..., Necromancy..., Conjuring and Witchcraft,” which “is but juggling and confederate knavery.” With clear reference to Herodotus’s account of the female oracles of Ammon at Delos and Pelasgus, black like ravens and speaking foreign tongues like birds,⁸⁰ Hobbes continues his catalogue:

Sometimes in the Casuall flight, or feeding of birds, called Augury, Sometimes in the Entrayles of a sacrificed beast; which was *Aruspicina*: Sometimes in Dreams: Sometimes in Croaking of Ravens, or chattering of Birds: Sometimes in the Lineaments of the face; which was called Metoposcopy; or by Palmistry in the lines of the hand; Sometimes in casuall words, called *Omina*: Sometimes in

⁷⁷ *Behemoth*, *E.W.* VI, 282.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Leviathan*, 1991 ed., 80-81.

⁸⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, tr. Aubrey de Sélincourt (Harmondsworth, 1972), 2.60, 152.

Monsters, or unusuall accidents; as Eccipses, Comets, rare Meteors, Earthquakes, Inundations, uncouth Births, and the like, which they called *Portenta*, and *Ostenta*, because they thought them to portend or foreshew some great Calamity to come: Sometimes in meer Lottery, as Crosse and Pile; counting holes in a sive; dipping of Verses in *Homer*, and *Virgil*; and innumerable other such vaine conceits. So easie are men to be drawn to believe any thing, from such men as have gotten credit with them; and can with gentlesse, and dexterity, take hold of their fear, and ignorance.⁸¹

Hobbes is given to recycling his material, and the deified onions and leeks of chapter twelve of *Leviathan* reappear later, this time in a comparison between “the Egyptian conjurers, that are said to have turned their Rods to Serpents and the Water into Bloud,” and the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation.⁸² But his tone was not always mocking; for in his discussion of the authenticity of Scripture Hobbes remarks that “the works of the *Egyptian* Socerers, though not so great as those of *Moses*, yet were great miracles.”⁸³ There are matters of great seriousness at issue here for a philosopher whose distinction between true and false religion turns on the distinction between “tales publiquely allowed” and tales “not allowed.”⁸⁴ The material out of which Gentilism is generated is the very well-spring of religion, as Hobbes reminds us in his early treatment of religious phenomena in *Leviathan*, chapter twelve: “And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques, consisteth the Natural seed of Religion.” He adds, “by reason of the different Fancies, Judgements, and Passions of severall men, [this seed] hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.”⁸⁵

Hobbes goes on to reassert a distinction between true and false religion—for all practical purposes unintelligible because it lacks an independent criterion. “For these seeds have received culture from two sorts of men,” he says. “One sort have been they, that have nourished, and ordered them, according to their own invention”—these presumably being the tellers of unsubstantiated tales. “The other, have done it by Gods commandment and direction,” these, it is suggested, having gotten true religion. But clearly the difference in intention between them is not great: “both sorts have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity and civill Society.”⁸⁶ In fact the way

⁸¹ *Leviathan*, ch. 12 (81-82).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 422-23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Hobbes designates the outcome of these lofty ideals suggests that he hardly valorizes one form of religion over the other: “so that the Religion of the former sort is a part of humane Politiques”—is this civic religion, or humanism, or both?—“and teacheth part of the duty which Earthly Kings require of their Subjects. And the Religion of the later sort is Divine Politiques; and containeth Precepts to those that have yeilded themselves subjects in the Kingdome of God”—not necessarily always correctly, as we know from other places. To show us just where gentilism fits in all of this, Hobbes concludes: “Of the former sort, were all the founders of the Common-wealths, and the Law-givers of the Gentiles: Of the latter sort, were *Abraham, Moses, and our Blessed Saviour*, by whom have been derived unto us the Lawes of the Kingdome of God.”⁸⁷

Why should Hobbes, fearful of the charge of heresy against himself, have risked his neck by cataloguing the heresies of others? It is my strong suspicion that there are two answers to this question. The first is that his antiquarian interests extended to a genuine curiosity in the ancient religions even if, as he suggests in chapter twelve of *Leviathan*, where he treats the religious impulse, these chiefly represent responses to fear of the unknown. The second and perhaps more important reason lies in the well developed tradition of hermeticism and cabalism, introduced to England by Giordano Bruno and favored by certain political factions. From the days of Elizabeth important court figures, including her astrologer, the alchemist John Dee, the enigmatic Gabriel Harvey, and others, had subscribed to Neoplatonist doctrines and magical practices reminiscent of the “gentilism” of the Church of Rome.⁸⁸ This tendency was to become much stronger when Isaac Newton, harbinger of “the new science,” Ralph Cudworth, and professed Neoplatonists subscribed to these doctrines and secret societies grew up to promote them. Their love of magic was balanced by sober academic interests in the rival claims of the Egyptians and the Hebrews to the ancient wisdom, over which much ink was spilt.⁸⁹ Hobbes was unwilling to dismiss entirely the old traditions of pre-Christian and local pagan myths and mysteries. Chronicled by the chorographers as part of the land, they were antiquaries that might yet have their political uses, after all.

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⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ See Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964); *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975); *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London, 1979); and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy,” *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), 30-78.

⁸⁹ See Paolo Rossi’s *The Dark Abyss of Time*, tr. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1984); John Gascoigne, “‘The Wisdom of the Egyptians’ and the Secularisation of History in the Age of Newton,” and Garry W. Trompf, “On Newtonian History,” in Stephen Gaukroger (ed.), *The Uses of Antiquity* (Dordrecht, 1992), 171-212, 213-49.