Spirits, Images, and Fear in Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

Thomas Hobbes has often been associated with Epicureanism.[1] In *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, Leo Strauss suggested "We understand by Epicureanism not primarily the doctrine of Epicurus and his school, but rather an interest natural to man, a uniform and elementary outlook [*Gesnnung*], which merely found its classic expression in the philosophy of Epicurus."[2] Although this stance rightly emphasizes Hobbes' interest in human psychology writ large as opposed to any particular "school of thought," it diminishes the potential of direct comparisons between Hobbes and Epicurean thinkers. Starting from the uncontroversial assumption that Hobbes did have particular figures and doctrines in mind when formulating his *Gesnnung*, this essay ventures a comparative analysis of the Malmesbury philosopher and the Epicurean poet Lucretius. Although Hobbes never mentions Lucretius by name, he must have been familiar with the poet, whose only extant work changed the course of modern history by renewing interest in atomism and stimulating a wave of fervent scientific inquiry in whose rise Hobbes was no small player.[3]

Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-55 BCE) is among the most prominent exponents of Epicureanism, not least because his *De Rerum Natura* is one of very few non-fragmentary accounts

[1] For a small sample of various readings of Hobbes in relation to Epicureanism, see Jan Maximilian Robitzsch, "The Epicureans on Human Nature and its Social and Political Consequences," in *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought 34*, no. 1 (2017): 1-19; Patricia Springborg, "Hobbes's Fool the Stultus, Grotius, and the Epicurean Tradition," *Hobbes Studies 23*, no. 1 (2010): 29-53; Patricia Springborg, "Hobbes on Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell, 346-380, (Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes e L'Epicureismo," in *Rivista Critica Di Storia Della Filosofia 33*, no. 1 (1978): 54-71. This characterization dates back to at least the early 18th century. *Cf.* Leo Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion* (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 65, footnote 143.

[2] Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique*, 65.

[3] On Lucretius' influence in the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), especially chapters 2, 6, and 7.

of Epicurean doctrines. Insofar as it can be encapsulated in a series of pithy formulas, Epicureanism revolves around four tenets, known as the *tetrapharmakon* (four-fold remedy):[4]

> (1) A happy and eternal being is untroubled and does not trouble any other being. Hence he is immune to anger and partiality, for each implies perturbation. (Do not fear the gods.)
> (2) Death is nothing to us; for that which has ceased to exist has no sensation, and that which has no sensation is nothing to us. (Do not fear death.)
> (3) The magnitude of pleasure reaches its climax in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain, either bodily or mental or both. (Pleasure is the absence of pain.)
> (4) Continuous bodily pain does not last. On the contrary, pain, if extreme, is always short-lived. (Do not fear acute pain.)

I am interested in Hobbes' iterations of (1) and (2), hence my focus on fear, which lies at the heart of Hobbes and Lucretius' critiques of religion, in turn central to their respective philosophical systems. More specifically, I compare the two philosophers' views on the role of spirits in fomenting superstitious fear. In a nutshell, I argue that both Hobbes and Lucretius understand the fear of spirits as resulting from conceptual misapprehensions of visual perceptions. Out of ignorance, people erroneously grant spirits independent existence as incorporeal entities. In Lucretius, this error is especially salient with respect to perceptions of images of dead bodies in the afterlife. Hobbes is less expressly concerned with dead bodies and the afterlife, thought he, too, unequivocally associates sight and spirits with fear and superstition. Part I outlines Hobbes and Lucretius' views on the purpose of natural philosophy in remedying ignorance. With this purpose in mind, part II examines the link between the fear of death and images of the afterlife in Lucretius. Similarly, part III surveys a series of remarks about sight, spirits, and fear in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Part IV briefly summarizes similarities between Hobbes and

[4] These correspond to Epicurus' first four Principal Doctrines. The Greek text is from Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II: Books 6-10*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library 185. Harvard University Press, 1925). Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own.

Lucretius, concluding with remarks on noteworthy differences. My aim is not to establish incontrovertibly that *Leviathan* borrows directly from Lucretius by tracing overt references to the poet in Hobbes' text. More simply, I wish to show considerable conceptual resemblances between them in order to elucidate Hobbes' understanding of the role of images and fear in the human psyche and, by implication, in the creation and maintenance of civil society.

I. The Study of Nature as a Remedy for Ignorance

For both Hobbes and Lucretius, the study of nature is meant to dispel ignorance. Appositely titled "On the Nature of Things," Lucretius' poem guides readers towards ethical flourishing through a scientific investigation of natural phenomena. Some commentators have wondered about the prevalence of "scientific" verses in a poem whose stated objective is ethical.[5] If his goal is to help people attain contentment, why does Lucretius spend so much time trying to identify the "nature of things" with oft-convoluted scientific hypotheses? Part of the answer lies in Lucretius' conception of the relationship between the study of nature (i.e., physics or natural philosophy) and ethics. In order to overcome the obstacles that hamper ethical flourishing, we must first understand the workings of nature, including the workings of the human psyche. This stance is evident in Lucretius' treatment of *religio*, commonly translated as "religion," though much closer to what today we call "superstition."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines superstition as "an excessively credulous belief in and reverence for supernatural entities." Incidentally, one of the references used to support this definition is Hobbes, a point to which I return in part III.[6] For Lucretius, it is superstition that

[5] John Godwin, *Aesthetic Ethics in the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius* (Open University, 1998), 3-4. Godwin noted that out of 7,415 verses, 823 (11%) are explicitly ethical, while the remaining 6,592 treat natural phenomena.

[6] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/superstition_n?tab=meaning_and_use#19693931. The reference is to chapter xxvii of the *Leviathan*. I am using the following edition: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B.

motivates heinous acts. Belief in supernatural entities with the power to intervene in human affairs impels people towards moral decadence. This point is illustrated at the very beginning of the poem with reference to a mythic episode from pre-Hellenic Greece, with which Hobbes was likely familiar: the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia. To gain the gods' support before setting sail for Troy, Agamemnon slaughters his chaste daughter as a sacrificial victim. Lucretius' conclusion is bitter: "So great an evil thing could religion justify."[7]

In the Lucretian universe, religion is predicated on the fear of supernatural entities, which is in turn partly fueled by the fear of death. Both fears can be alleviated, or even altogether cured, through the rational study of nature. According to the first Epicurean precept, the gods do not mingle in human affairs. There is no need to fear their interventions. According to the second Epicurean precept, death is the end of all sensation. If people understood this, "if people saw there was a certain end / To their travails, they would be invigorated by whatever reason / To resist religions and the threats of priests."[8] The rejection of this twofold fear can only follow the proper understanding of nature; that is, the nature of the gods, who are material entities like everything else, and the nature of the soul, which is material, perishes with the body, and is therefore neither immortal nor susceptible to any kind of suffering in an immaterial afterlife.[9] Once reason elucidates these axioms, people will have no pretext for worshipping and offering

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Macpherson (Penguin Books, 1985). Roman numerals refer to chapters, while Arabic numerals refer to page numbers.

[7] I, 101. The Latin text is from Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (Loeb Classical Library 181. Harvard University Press, 1924). Roman numerals refer to books, while Arabic numerals refer to lines.

[8] I, 106-108.

[9] III, 35-39: "the nature of mind and soul must be explained / Clearly by my verses, and that fear of Acheron / Driven away headlong, which troubles human life from its deepest depths, / Suffusing everything with the blackness of death, / And does not leave any pleasure clean and pure."

sacrifices to supernatural deities. They will be free of ignorance, fear, and the oppressive weight of superstition.[10]

We find a similar conception of the role of reason as a repellent of fear in Hobbes: "Want of Science, that is, Ignorance of causes, disposeth, or rather constraineth a man to rely on the advise, and authority of others."[11] For brevity's sake, I am defining Hobbes' "reason" and "science" interchangeably as "Knowledge of Consequences," or, in other words, cause and effect, "which is called also Philosophy."[12] Without reason, one is compelled to follow the "advise" or the authority of others, which bind one into dependence. This undesirable consequence stems from one's own ignorance: "Ignorance of naturall causes disposeth a man to Credulity, so as to believe many time impossibilities: for such know nothing to the contrary, but that they may be true; being unable to detect the Impossibility."[13] Reason enables one to entertain competing possibilities about the "naturall causes" of any given phenomenon, including the possibility that the phenomenon is "impossible" and should thus be discarded as false. Having no other option but the "Knowledge Of Fact," which "is nothing else, but Sense and Memory, and is Absolute Knowledge," one is deprived of tools to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses about the given natural phenomenon, hence one's inevitable dependence on the advice or authority of another mind.

The inability to investigate natural causes becomes especially consequential when the phenomenon in question concerns an individual directly, as in the case of superstitious beliefs that determine one's behavior. Hobbes outright blames ignorance of natural causes for enabling

[10] I, 61-67. See also III.982: "Rather, it is in this life that the empty fear of gods oppresses mortals."
[11] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xi, 164-165.
[12] Ibid., ix, 149.
[13] Ibid., xi, 166-167.

religion.[14] One of the four "seeds of religion," together with "Opinion of Ghosts," is indeed "Ignorance of second causes."[15] The link between ignorance and religion is fear. Those who "make little, or no enquiry into the naturall causes of things" are bound to suffer from the "feare that proceeds from the ignorance it selfe."[16] This fear takes form in apparitions. Duped by their own "imaginations," people are inclined to posit "severall kinds of Powers Invisible" and invoke them in times of distress (e.g., Agamemnon) or in times of expected success, "making the creatures of their own fancy, their Gods."[17] In other words, "this Feare of things invisible, is the naturall Seed of that, which every one in himself calleth Religion; and in them that worship, or feare that Power otherwise than they do, Superstition."[18] To dispel fear and superstition, one must exercise the power of reason and understand, at least partially, natural causes writ large, but especially vis à vis the inner workings of the mind and the sense organs that are directly implicated in the perception of "Ghosts," "imaginations," and the "creatures of their own fancy."

Parallels between Hobbes and Lucretius' understanding of the role of reason in the struggle against ignorance and fear should already be conspicuous. By offering us understanding of natural causes, reason remedies our ignorance and dispels the fear it provokes.[19] This is

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[14] Hobbes is careful to distinguish both the character and the consequences of ignorance and false convictions, the former being "in the middle" between "true Science, and erroneous Doctrines" (iv, 106). False conviction are worse than ignorance. In other words, "ignorance of causes, and of rules, does not set men so farre out of their way, as relying on false rules, and taking for causes of what they aspire to, those that are not so, but rather causes of the contrary" (v, 116). To be more faithful to Hobbes' own treatment of ignorance and true science, we should speak of ignorance and false opinions separately. In either case, however, true science provides the desirable resolution. For our present purpose, this un-Hobbesian conflation leaves the argument intact.

[15] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xii 12, 172.

[16] Ibid., xi, 167-168.

[17] Hobbes makes several analogous statements throughout *Leviathan*: For example, "From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, nymphs, and the like" (ii, 92).

[18] Ibid.

[19] This understanding is never certain, at least for Hobbes. One could object to the Hobbesian view on the grounds that without certainty, there always remains the possibility of ignorance. Therefore, fear is never quelled completely. A Hobbesian might reply that certainty is superfluous to remedying ignorance. All one

especially the case with superstitious beliefs and practices, which stem from ignorance of the true nature of sight and the visions it enables. We shall now examine this latter claim more closely in each thinker.

II. Fear of Death as Fear of Images in Lucretius

Lucretius thought the fear of death is responsible for religion and the evils it promotes. In turn, he attributed the genesis of this fear to visions of images of the afterlife. While alive, people often picture "a future where birds and beasts will mutilate [their] body."[20] They *see* their own body as simultaneously dead (i.e., dwelling in the afterlife) and alive (i.e., feeling pain).[21] This projection unfolds in the *imagination*,[22] which is overrun by wild bloodthirsty beasts, lacerated body parts, and other equally dreadful images.

The poet continues to develop the link between images of the afterlife and the fear of death as a catalyst of religion in book IV, which contains a thorough investigation of the five senses, with particular emphasis on sight:

> Now I address a matter of great import
> For our enquiries, and I show that there
> Exist what we call images of things;
> Which as it were peeled off from the surfaces
> Of objects, fly this way and that through the air;
> These same, encountering us in wakeful hours,
> Terrify our minds, and also in sleep, as when
> We see strange shapes and phantoms of the dead
> Which often as in slumber sunk we lay

requires is an approximate understanding of material mechanisms, which is still far superior to credulous obliviousness. For Hobbes, the primary aim is not to attain certainty about natural phenomena, but rather to avoid imprudent and uncritical subservience to illegitimate authority by extracting, through the independent use of reason, cogent explanations for those natural phenomena, however imperfect they may be.

[20] III, 870-883.

[21] At V, 62-63, Lucretius returns to this fatal error: *sed simulacra solere in somnis fallere mentem, / cernere cum videamur eum quem vita reliquit* (But in dreams images are prone to deceive the mind / As when we see a man whom life has left).

[22] *Cf.* IV, 722-740.

> Have roused us in horror; lest perchance we think
> That spirits escape from Acheron, or ghosts
> Flit among the living, or that after death
> Something of us remains when once the body
> And mind alike together have been destroyed,
> And each to its primal atoms has dissolved.[23]

This passage appears after a long excursus on the fear of death (book III), which Lucretius says stems from people's beliefs in an afterlife full of ferocious beasts, perpetual poverty, and disgrace.[24] At the heart of his mission is the wish to quell this fear and usher people into a life of genuine pleasure, peace, and equanimity. In line with his conception of reason, a study of sense-perception is indispensable. With his typical didactic register, Lucretius prefaces his comments by telling readers that this is "a matter of great import," for it bears on the possibility of ethical flourishing. There are "images of things" that "fly this way and that through the air." When these images "encounter us," during sleep or when awake, they "rous[e] us in horror." Lucretius has a specific set of images in mind: "phantoms of the dead," "spirits" from the underworld, "ghosts," and images of ourselves "after death." Elsewhere he also mentions centaurs, the ferocious multi-headed dog and guardian of the underworld Cerberus, and other mythic figures,[25] though his discussions of the fear of death revolve primarily around images of deceased human bodies.

The problem is that these images are just that: images. They do not correspond to reality. A materialist, Lucretius thought "reality" is material through and through.[26] That includes mental images, which are made of atoms just like everything else. For instance, Lucretius explains non-human figures like centaurs as "composite images." "Surely no image of a centaur comes from a living centaur," for such a creature has never been observed and thus cannot

[23] IV, 28-41.
[24] III, 65-67.
[25] III, 1011ff..
[26] For a summary of Lucretius' physics, see Sergei Vavilov, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 9*, no. 1 (1948): 21-40, especially sections II and III.

exist.[27] Rather, the separate images of a man and a horse meet in the mind by accident (*casu convenit*) and fuse into the image of a centaur. Since images of non-human entities are more blatantly fantastic because they do not correspond to any observable physical entities, it is easier to understand their nature and dismiss them as having no independent existence. They are physical products of a physical process that unfolds through a physical organ (i.e., the eyes) and concludes in another physical organ (i.e., the mind, or, in Hobbes' terms, the "braine"). This is good news for Lucretius, for people's fears about the afterlife are almost always associated with the terrible agony they think they will suffer at the mercy of dreadful beasts like centaurs. If people could only see composite images for what they manifestly are, they would make substantial progress towards dispelling fears of the afterlife and securing peace of mind.

Worth noting is Lucretius' careful distinction between the senses and the mind's response to the senses. There is no deception in the images we perceive. Every image our senses detect is "true": "You will find it is first from the senses that the notion of truth is created, and that the senses cannot be refuted."[28] The notion of truth originates in the senses, which cannot be refuted. Elsewhere, Lucretius suggests that "Unless [the senses] were true, all reasoning would be false";[29] or, in other words, "whatever at any time / Has seemed to the senses to be true, is true."[30] In this sense, Lucretius is a pure empiricist. If we doubted the veracity of the senses, all reasoning would be false. Without an indubitable starting point in sense-perception, any inquiry into the nature of things is doomed to fail, as is the liberating happiness that depends on it.

Speaking of "truth" here seems strange. Perceptions are not conventionally understood as truth-bearers. Truth is a property of linguistic items, but perceptions are not linguistic items. This

[27] IV, 739-740.
[28] IV.478-479.
[29] IV.485.
[30] IV.499.

apparent philosophical error dissolves, however, if we take "true" to mean "real." As Stephen Everson noted, understanding "true" as "real" allows us to "avoid convicting Epicurus [and Lucretius] of wrongly ascribing truth to perceptions and save him from the commitment to contradictory beliefs in cases of perceptual conflict."[31] Indeed, there is no error in raw perception. The senses could not perceive an image in any other way than how they perceive it. In this sense, the image must be "true."

The problem arises when mind meets sense. *Pace* Everson, it is misleading to suggest that conflict is perceptual. Lucretius "does not deny that the sense-experience itself is valid, but rather asserts that our interpretation of the sense-data is faulty."[32] For example, when "in the blind mist of night we think we see the sun and the light of day," we are wrong, not because our senses are perceiving light, but because our mind convinces us that things (i.e., light) are there "which are not seen by the senses."[33] Likewise, when we "see" our dead body being mauled by salivating beasts in a seemingly tangible space, it is our mind that convinces us that it is really our body, and that our body is really experiencing pain. The mind can trick the senses into "perceiving" something that is not really there—something not real, even though our perception of it is. To put it in un-Lucretian terms, the mind extrapolates conclusions about the ontological status of images. It prompts the perceiver to believe that "spirits escape from Acheron, or ghosts flit among the living"; that spirits are incorporeal but real, and that they can harm one while alive, but especially once one dies and enters their incorporeal domain.

The senses, in other words, are innocent. Once solidified into opinion, the mind's misinterpretations confound the perceiver, preventing him from understanding the true nature of

[31] Stephen Everson, "Epicurus on the Truth of the Senses," in *Companions to Ancient Thought 1* (1990): 165.
[32] Godwin, *Aesthetic Ethics*, 27.
[33] IV.453-467.

things. To avoid these misinterpretations, one needs reason. The senses alone cannot know the nature of things. We should therefore not "blame the eyes for the mind's faults."[34] But the mind alone does not guarantee understanding. After all, it is the source of errors, as when it makes us see light at night or convinces us that the beasts and spirits of the afterlife exist as incorporeal entities with the power to affect us. Only reason can remedy these fatal mistakes. It does so by reminding us that the soul is physical, that the "afterlife" is intangible and thus does not exist, and that images of it, though "real" insofar as they are perceived, have no independent ontological status beyond the confines of the physical mind. 1650 years later, Hobbes would reach very similar conclusions.

III. Hobbes' Demons

In the fourth and last section of *Leviathan* ("The Kingdome of Darknesse"), Hobbes resumes his critique of religion.[35] One of his main concerns in this concluding section is the role of spirits. The belief in spirits (or "demons") belongs to the third error he attributes to the religious dogma of his day: "the Misinterpretation of the Words Eternall Life, Everlasting Death, and the Second Death," or, in other words, the belief in the incorporeal soul and its immortality.[36] *Contra* this position, which maintains that spirits are real though incorporeal entities, Hobbes, like Lucretius, claims that they are instead products of the imagination, and thus not real: "Daemons […] are but Idols, or Phantasms of the braine, without any reall nature of their own, distinct from humane fancy."[37] Hobbes' quarrel is specifically with the "Heathen

[34] IV.385-386.
[35] He begins this critique early on. *Cf.*, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xii, 168-183.
[36] The other two being "the wresting of [Scripture], to prove that the Kingdome of God […] is the present Church" and "the turning of Consecration into Conjuration, or Enchantment." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xliv, 629 and 633; Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique*, 54.
[37] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xliv, 629.

Poets": "The Enemy has been here in the Night of our naturall Ignorance, and sown the tares of Spirituall Errors; […] Secondly, by introducing the Dæmonology of the Heathen Poets, that is to say, their fabulous Doctrine concerning Dæmons."[38] He singles out Hesiod as a main culprit.[39] The author of one of the earliest extant theogonies,[40] Hesiod offered the world a detailed account of "What kind of things they were, to whom they attributed the name of Dæmons."[41] Against the scores of heathen poets who disseminated pernicious superstitious doctrines, Lucretius stands almost alone as one who opted to expound atheistic scientific postulates in epic verse.[42] Hobbes, like many scientifically-minded figures of his time, may have found in Lucretius a heathen finally worth his salt.

In any event, Hobbes wants readers to know that when people assert the existence of incorporeal entities like spirits, they are committing a fatal error. The genesis of this error is not conceptual. Rather, it begins in sight.[43] Thus Hobbes describes the process by which images appear to us: "The impression made on the organs of Sight, by lucide Bodies […] produceth in living Creatures, in whom God hath placed such Organs, an Imagination of the Object, from whence the Impression proceedeth."[44] Like Lucretius, Hobbes does not deny the veracity of the apparitions. These "imaginations" are "real" insofar as they impress something on our sight. Although the error begins in sense-perception, then, the crucial misstep occurs in the conclusions people derive upon seeing these apparitions. "This nature of Sight having never been discovered

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[38] Ibid., xliv, 628-29; see also xlv, 658-59.
[39] Ibid., xliv, 659.
[40] Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Loeb Classical Library 57. Harvard University Press, 2018).
[41] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xlv, 659.
[42] Lucretius and the Epicureans did not deny the existence of the gods, and so were not "atheists" in the strict sense. However, they did maintain that the immortal gods dwelled in celestial spheres completely separate from the human world, and were thus utterly removed from and indifferent towards human affairs, so much so that virtually nothing would change if they did not exist at all.
[43] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xlv, 657.
[44] Ibid., xlv, 657.

by the ancient pretenders to Naturall Knowledge,"[45] people infer that images of spirits are either "absolutely Incorporeall, that is to say Immateriall, of Formes without Matter; Colour and Figure" (but nonetheless real) or "Bodies, and Living Creatures, but made of Air, or other more subtile and æthereall Matter."[46] Either way, they "agree on one generall appellation of them, Dæmons."[47]

Hobbes discusses visions of dead people as particularly conducive to this *faux pas*, though their role is much less prominent than in Lucretius. The individual who sees a dead person in a dream is inclined to believe that the dead person is an inhabitant "of the Air, or of Heaven, or Hell."[48] The perceiver does not realize that the dead person is dead, and that an image of his dead body, no matter how realistic, does not imply its existence in the afterlife.

To reiterate, ignorance about the nature of sight begets misleading conclusions about the nature of spirits, which are thought to exist as much as any physical, tangible body.[49] It is not the postulate of incorporeality that enables spirits to be accepted as real entities. Rather, visions of spirits offer (ignorant, unreasoning) individuals no other option than positing their existence. In this sense, the conception of a dualist metaphysics that posits corporeal and incorporeal substances and grants them the same basic ontological status finds its origin in perception. Only in seeking to legitimize their visions do people begin to speak of the world as constituted by corporeal and incorporeal entities.[50] Perception precedes conception, but the crucial misstep is, again, conceptual. This conclusion is Lucretian through and through.

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[45] Ibid., xlv, 658.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] *Cf.*, Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique*, 56.
[50] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xii, 170: "men not knowing that such apparitions are nothing else but creatures of the Fancy, think [them] to be reall, and externall Substances; and therefore call them Ghosts."

If these images of spirits had been trivial, Hobbes would have dismissed them as mere figments of a childish imagination. He does that, to be sure, but only after discussing the serious consequences they and their corollary metaphysics enable. The immediate affective response elicited by these "Ghosts; as the Latines called them *Imagines*" is fear: "And by that means have feared [the demons], as things of an unknown, that is, of an unlimited power to doe them good, or harme."[51] "That means" refers to sight unaided by reason. One finds no part of the image that can be physically grasped in the place where it seems to appear. Therefore, one concludes that this image exists in a realm of its own; i.e., an incorporeal realm. Yet, its existence in an incorporeal realm does not preclude its ability to intervene in the physical realm.[52] In fact, it heightens that ability: people deemed these images "Spirits, that is, thin aëreall bodies; and those Invisible Agents, which they feared, to bee like them; save that they appear, and vanish when they please."[53] Since one cannot grasp and thus exert some degree of control on the spirit, one concludes that that spirit has a power greater than one's own. That is, one convinces oneself that one is susceptible to the spirit's power, which could, at any point and without the possibility of resistance, either do good or inflict harm. One hopes for good, but the menace of harm is ever-present. Fear thus ensues.

Note Hobbes' distinction between good and evil demons. Pagan poets, he suggests, made "some [demons] Good *Dæmons*, and others Evill; the one as a Spurre to the Observance, the other, as Reines to withhold them from Violation of the Laws."[54] Spirits, in other words, have political valence. Hobbes does not expound the poets' reasons for inventing good and evil spirits, though presumably he thought they were composing their verses with this political purpose in

[51] Ibid., xii, 171 and xlv, 659.
[52] *Cf.*, Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique*, 56.
[53] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xii, 171.
[54] Ibid., xlv, 659.

mind, whether they knew it or not. That is, they invented evil spirits to prevent people from transgressing the law. Likewise, they invented good spirits to encourage obedience to legal customs. In demonology we thus find a primitive form of social regulation based on a theology of reward and punishment, with fear at its heart. An evil spirit will punish whomever violates the law. One fears punishment. One will therefore refrain from violating the law. Fear, however, underlies "Observance" as well. Good spirits bestow blessings upon whomever observes the law. But one wishes to receive blessings because one wants to avoid the spirits' punishment. Pleasure is the absence of pain, to put it as Lucretius might. The fear of punishment, not the promise of blessings, motivates people's obedience to the law.[55]

Hobbes appreciates the useful regulative functions of spirits: "For these seeds [of religion, among which is the belief in incorporeal spirits,] have received culture from two sorts of men. […] 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."[56] Yet, he can never quite endorse a worldview that relies on a fallacious and pernicious substance dualism. He upsets this dualism partly by pointing out that it stems from an incorrect understanding of sight and the erroneous inferences that follow. This move does not deprive the distinction between good and evil spirits of its social significance. It does, however, negate its truth-aptness, thus nullifying it and everything else that depends on misguided doctrines born of ignorant extrapolations from visual perceptions.

To sum up: Hobbes thought images of spirits fuel the "perpetuall feare" on which religion thrives.[57] This fear is experientially prior to the assertion of the substance dualism that sustains religion once it is articulated. Individuals posit the existence of incorporeal entities as an attempt

[55] These claims demand a more thorough analysis than I can provide here.
[56] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xii, 173.
[57] Ibid., xii, 169.

to rationalize their sense-perceptions. Their postulates about the independent existence of incorporeal spirits stem from a misunderstanding of sight and a corollary misinterpretation of visual data, which perpetuates fear instead of quelling it.

IV. Lucretian Hobbes and Hobbesian Lucretius

Lucretius and Hobbes spilled considerable ink to discuss the role of images in fomenting fear. Both thinkers see the perception of a fanciful image as the genesis of fear. The Lucretian-Hobbesian person traps himself into fear when he concludes that the spirit he perceives exists independently as an incorporeal entity. This fear fuels his superstition, making him subject to priests and other religious authorities. In Lucretius, the most consequential images are images of dead people in the afterlife, which are always explicitly dreadful. Hobbes speaks of ghosts, spirits, and demons, though he rarely characterizes them, leaving readers wanting for descriptions. What suffices for Hobbes is to describe certain spirits as perpetrators of harm. These "evil" demons are dreadful because of their power, regardless of their literal appearance. In a sense, Hobbes' emphasis is more on the potential for interaction between people and spirits, whereas Lucretius focuses his analysis on the visual perception itself. Nevertheless, both place sight at the core of the conceptual blunder that results in a pernicious substance dualism responsible for religion's dominance over its ignorant victims.

Unsurprisingly, both Hobbes and Lucretius thought debunking demonology, an effort that fuels their critiques of religion, had political implications. Hobbes describes the kingdom of darkness as "nothing else but a "Confederacy of Deceivers, that to obtain dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark, and erroneous Doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospell; and so to dis-prepare them for the Kingdome of God to

come."[58] These "Deceivers" (i.e., the Pope and the Roman clergy) exploit people's credulity. They are only able to obtain dominion over the masses because the masses fear spirits. Likewise, for Lucretius reason empowers one "To resist religions and the threats of priests."[59] Priests intentionally prey on people's fears of the afterlife. They "contrive so many dreams / To subvert the principles of reason in your life, and perturb / All your fortunes with dread and fear."[60] To reaffirm the principles of reason is to rebel against a social and political class whose status and influence necessitate an ignorant public.

A significant difference lies between Hobbes and Lucretius lies in the character of the response to the social (dis)order that allows priests and deceivers to prey on fears. Epicureans like Lucretius disavowed active involvement in politics. The priests' deceit is best avoided by a retreat into privacy, where ease and equanimity can be cultivated in the Epicurean "garden," which lies beyond the troubling bedlam of politics. This hermitic outlook explains why for Hobbes the anti-idealistic tradition, of which Epicurus was a central exponent, was not a "tradition of political philosophy. For it was ignorant of the very idea of political philosophy […]. It was concerned with the question of the right life of the individual and therefore with the question of whether or how the individual could use civil society for his private, non-political purposes," but that was the extent of its "political" character.[61] For Lucretius, concern for the right order of society is peripheral. Reason is practiced behind closed doors, fear extinguished in the privacy of the skull, and politics avoided in the name of peace of mind. In Hobbes, the extent of this hermitic response is limited to one's private efforts to unshackle oneself from the grip of ignorance and

[58] Ibid., xliv, 627.
[59] I, 109.
[60] I, 104-106.
[61] Leo Strauss, "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* (1950): 406.

fear by the exercise of reason. But this is not really a hermitic outlook, for it always maintains active participation in civil society as its end goal.

Another related difference between Hobbes and Lucretius concerns the positive role of fear. Lucretius wants to dispel fear for good and forever, whereas Hobbes considers fear an essential motivation for forming a covenant and establishing civil society.[62] In a sense, Hobbes also wants to rid people of fear. But this riddance only becomes possible (and desirable) once civil society is established and "public reason" incarnated in the State. Before this can happen, we must abandon the brutish state of nature. Fear (of violent death in particular) ignites reason, which guides people to seek a way out of the state of nature. Fear is thus self-defeating, but also necessary.

Yet, upon closer scrutiny, Lucretius may be suggesting something much more similar to Hobbes than typically assumed. The poet never articulates the positive role of fear, but he does depict so many dreadful images throughout his scientific expositions that we must conclude his intention is to inspire fear. As Henri Bergson noted, "Lucretius tried to show the powerlessness of men and gods in the face of natural laws. He tried to paint an awesome picture, to fill our minds with dread, and to make this our last impression," such that we may awaken the need for exercising reason and evade superstition.[63] The same may be said of Hobbes' portrayals of the State of Nature and Leviathan, including its famous depiction in the book's frontispiece, which in a sense inspire the fear Hobbes thought necessary to catalyze the formation of civil society. Fear also plays a role in Lucretius' account of the state of nature.[64] I must leave these claims largely undeveloped, though there seems to be room for positing conceptual proximity between Hobbes

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[62] *Cf.*, Gianni Paganini, "Hobbes, Gassendi and the Tradition of Political Epicureanism," in *Hobbes Studies 14*, no. 1 (2001): 3.
[63] *The Philosophy of Poetry: The Genius of Lucretius* (The Wisdom Library, 1959), 83.
[64] V, 973-1027.

and Lucretius even as regards the conscious instrumentalization of fear in the service of reason and civil society.

I have also been unable to flesh out the implications of Hobbes' distinction between incorporeal and "aetheral" bodies, the first having no tangible form whatsoever and the second having ephemeral but nonetheless tangible form, be it made of air or "more subtile" matter.[65] People's conclusions about a spirit's power to affect them seem to differ for the two types of spirits, one of which retains some physicality and is in principle "graspable" and resistible. In either case, Hobbes might respond that a presumed total lack of bodily form in incorporeal and exceptionally minimal perceptibility in "aethereal" bodies produce the same reactions in the perceivers, who is still baffled at his inability to exert control over the image. That claim warrants closer study, for it would further elucidate Hobbes' views on the alleged interactions between people and spirits.

The role of dreams has also eluded my scrutiny.[66] Hobbes distinguishes dreams from visions one experiences while awake. Lucretius, too, suggests that images seen in dreams stem from residues of images seeing while awake, as is the case with centaurs and other composite images in the afterlife. A closer treatment of Hobbes' views of dreams would further elucidate pertinent similarities and insights.

Despite these flagrant limitations, I hope to have at least sketched the fundamental role of vision in Hobbes and Lucretius' understanding of fear and its implications vis à vis religion. My aim has been to clarify Hobbes' understanding of the role of images and fear in the human psyche and, by implication, in the creation and maintenance of civil society. Indeed, without

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[65] *Cf.*, Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law* (Routledge, 2020), part I, xi, section 4: "By the name of spirit we understand a body natural, but of such subtilty that it worketh not on the senses."
[66] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ii, 90-93.

attending to the role of sight and spirits in the arousal of fear, our understanding of Hobbes' critique of religion is bound to be partial. If his critique of religion really is "the presupposition of [Hobbes'] science" and, therefore, undergirds Hobbes' political philosophy, that would be an unfortunate shortcoming.[67]

[67] Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique*, 90.

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