HOBBES’S DECEIVING GOD: THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THOMAS HOBBS AND RENE DESCARTES

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In presenting their correspondence, I highlight the means in which Hobbes is able to divorce nature and politics in his philosophy. This is done by bringing to light Hobbes’s agreement with Descartes’s deceiving God argument. First, I demonstrate Hobbes’s hidden agreement with it by analyzing his objection to Descartes’s first Meditation. Second, I show that Hobbes and Descartes both retreat into consciousness in order to deal with the possibility of deception on the behalf of God. Third, I trace Hobbes’s rational justification for entertaining that very possibility. Fourth, I bring forward Hobbes’s certain principle, that God is incomprehensible. Fifth, I demonstrate Hobbes’s rationalization for rendering nature incomprehensible in turn. From this key insight, the differences between the two philosophers stand out more. Whereas Descartes rids himself of the possibility of a deceiving God, Hobbes does not. Sixth, I show that Descartes needs to rid himself of that possibility in order to have a basis for science, Hobbes’s science is such that he does not need to rid himself of that possibility. My investigation ends by considering both Hobbes’s and Descartes’s stance on nature, in relation to politics. I find that Hobbes’s principle is much more practical that Descartes’s principle. Hobbes’s principle is shown to be much more instructive and sustainable for human life. In conclusion, this analysis of the origins, principles, and orientation of the two philosopher’s thought brings forward the overarching question, whether the recovery of value and meaning is to be brought about in nature, or in civilization.
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INTRODUCTION

I will investigate the correspondence between Rene Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, which is published in the objections and replies section of the Meditations. In the objection and replies section, Hobbes demonstrates his agreement with Descartes’s deceiving God argument. The deceiving God argument refers to the possible existence of one or more intelligent being powerful enough to deceive us about everything we believe to be certain, even mathematics. Having previously secured all knowledge in the certainty of the principles of mathematics, it gives Descartes a powerful reason for reflecting on knowledge purely from the intellect, in order to secure knowledge. Hobbes seems to silently agree with the deceiving God argument. While Hobbes does not directly express his agreement with the argument overall, his acceptance of the argument is evident in his subsequent critiques of Descartes’s philosophy. Specifically, Hobbes relies on the deceiving God argument as he contests Descartes’s own refutation of the deceiving God argument. Throughout Hobbes’s critique, he maintains that we cannot rid ourselves of the possibility of a deceiving God. To Hobbes, insofar as the deceiving God scenario stands for the possibility of an incomprehensible God, he openly accepts it. Unlike Descartes, Hobbes does not need to rid himself of the possibility of a deceiving God in order for his philosophical project to function. The possibility allows him to establish the incomprehensibility of nature, as a result. Hobbes separates civilization from nature in order to orient his philosophy towards the political. Hobbes begins with a skeptical basis, and his foundation is ultimately much firmer than Descartes’s. Hobbes’s philosophy has the capacity to produce practical, and moral solutions with more expediency and prudence than Descartes’s.
DESCARTES’S THREE ARGUMENTS

Hobbes begins his objection by establishing a point of agreement between him and Descartes. Hobbes “acknowledges the correctness” of the first Meditation.\(^\text{1}\) It is important to review Descartes’s argument in the first meditation in order to evaluate the implication of Hobbes’s acknowledgement. Descartes’s philosophy is a philosophy of presentation. We must bring his presentations of things to the forefront, before we can analyze Hobbes’s objection. In Meditation I, Descartes calls attention to methodological skepticism, which he will employ in order to establish a basis for science. Before he outlines the process that he will undertake for the project, he offers an explanation for adopting a skeptical point of view. Descartes begins by showing how skepticism can serve as a useful guide in attaining certainty. Specifically, skepticism is what leads the mind to doubt the very notions that we once accepted to be true. When we have a sense that those notions are uncertain, we are compelled to reflect on those notions more closely. We can use this response as a basis to arrive at a certain principle. Whatever is demonstrated to be the most certain principle will become the basis of knowledge. Descartes points to an example from his personal experience. When he reflects on the knowledge he acquired throughout his childhood, he realizes that there are many falsehoods which he accepted as true.\(^\text{2}\) Descartes only realized their “highly doubtful nature” after he had brought them to reflection later on in life, and had to build a “whole new edifice” that Descartes had based on those falsehoods.\(^\text{3}\) Now, Descartes must “demolish everything and start again from the right foundations”.\(^\text{4}\) Descartes will use his methodology to discover a foundation to ground

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\(^\text{1}\) Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch. 1984. *Philosophical Writings of Descartes.* II, 171, pg. 121. Henceforth referred to as PWD.

\(^\text{2}\) PWD, II, 18; pg. 17

\(^\text{3}\) PWD, II, 18; pg. 17

\(^\text{4}\) PWD, II, 18; pg. 17
science. Descartes intends to discover a true basis to ground science that is as reliable as the principles of mathematics themselves. A firm and long-lasting foundation must draw its knowledge from the right sources. There are two sources for knowledge: the mind, and the senses. Descartes wishes to demonstrate that the most trustworthy source of scientific knowledge is the mind, whereas knowledge from the senses are uncertain and prone to error. Thus, Descartes hopes to lay out the groundwork for his foundation using knowledge derived from the mind, rather than knowledge derived from the senses. Descartes will demonstrate the unreliability of the senses by bringing them to doubt. By doing so, he will show that knowledge from the senses is open to doubt. He will introduce three main arguments. First, he will give reasons to prove the uncertainty of the senses. Although the senses are proven to produce erroneous conclusions, Descartes is able to rationalize his way out of the errors by appealing to common sense. Thus, Descartes will introduce two scenarios where he cannot rely on common sense to rid himself of sense deception. He will point to the difficulty involved in discerning the waking state from the dreaming state. Then, he will introduce a much more powerful argument than the previous one, known as the deceiving God argument.

Uncertainty of the Senses

First, Descartes will demonstrate the uncertainty of the senses. He will do this by describing a scenario where he is guided by the senses. In this extreme scenario, he will use his senses to correct sense deception. Descartes starts out his experiment by describing what kind of knowledge he can derive through the senses. The senses provides evidence of the existence of material objects. He describes a scenario where he is sitting next to the fireplace with a piece of paper in his hands. The senses demonstrate to him that he is sitting by the fireplace with a piece of paper in his hands. The senses also provide some information about the said objects. Through
the senses, he can feel the warmth of the fire and the texture of the paper in his hand. Through the senses, Descartes is able to conclude that he is wearing a winter night gown. However, the senses are proven to provide little information on the existence of corporeal things. He cannot perceive his body without the aid of a mirror or any other object that reflects. In this case, Descartes is not directly perceiving his body. Thus, he is given reason to wonder whether his hands, or his whole body, are actually his.

He is skeptical of the possibility that his body belongs to anyone else at first. He turns to the little evidence that he was able to derive so far. Relying on this evidence alone, Descartes is able to orient himself in the world to some extent. At the very least, we can say that Descartes is comfortably dressed, and enjoying the warmth of the fireplace while he undergoes his philosophical experiment. It seems irrational for Descartes to doubt his body from this evidence alone. For Descartes to entertain these possibilities, Descartes would have to reject the information that he derived from his senses. It seems unlikely unless he were a “madman” that maintains, “…that they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked”.\footnote{PWD II, 20; pg. 13} Since this is irrational, the correct inference is that his body is in fact his own. However, Descartes remains skeptical that the senses can be reliable. Notice that in the example above, he only relies on the senses to infer the existence of his body. Most importantly, he is only able to do this because he is able to distinguish between reality and imagination. In the case that he is not able to distinguish between reality and imagination, the senses are proven to be uncertain.
Dreaming Argument

Dreams can feel so real that it can be difficult to discern imagination from reality. When
Descartes is dreaming, he makes similar mistakes to the madman. He points to “how often” he
believes that he is sitting by the fireplace wearing his nightgown, when in reality he is neither
wearing his nightgown, nor sitting by the fireplace.\(^6\) Once he wakes up, he realizes that he was
only dreaming of those things. Thus, we can distinguish being awake from being asleep by
bringing our doubts to reason, just like in the previous scenario. Yet, there are times when
Descartes has similar thoughts in his dreams as he does when he is awake. It follows that he may
raise the same doubts in his sleep than he does in his waking state. Therefore, reflection cannot
serve as a guide alone. He must also be awake. Descartes tries to find a sign to distinguish
dreaming from being awake, but is not able to find any certain sign to serve as a guide.\(^7\) With
these difficulties in mind, Descartes will reflect on the nature of things in order to find something
certain that will remain true, whether or not he is dreaming or sleeping.

First, he considers the visions in his dreams. He compares visions in dreams to painting.
As Descartes explains, “…for even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs… they cannot
give them natures which are new in all respects, they simply jumble up the limbs of different
animals, or… think of something new… something fictitious”.\(^8\) Clearly, when a painter creates
art, they are awake. Thus, they can chose the sources that they will use to compose the painting.
However, this is from the point of view of the painter. When we are asleep, the visions appear to
us like a painting, which is merely just a material thing. Thus, we cannot discern imagination
from reality from the visions we see in our dreams. For instance, Descartes can imagine his own

\(^6\) PWD, 19; pg. 13
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) PWD II, 20; pg. 13
body in his dream, and believe to be awake. While he dreams, he may doubt the existence of his body. This doubt is justified because in this scenario, Descartes’s body is merely an object of his imagination. Yet if Descartes is actually awake, his body is an actual, existing thing.

Descartes inquires on other aspects of his dream. Descartes wonders if “at least the colors used in the composition must be real”.9 The colors may perhaps exist, but all the information he received through the senses regarding his body could be imaginary. Colors form the images of things, and whether true or false, occur in thought. While particulars like the hands could be imaginary, other universal things are real. Included in the class of universal things are corporeal nature, extension, shape, quantity, size and number, and the place and time of an object’s endurance. Descartes concludes that physics, astronomy, medicine, and “all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things are doubtful”.10 Disciplines that deal with the most simple and universal things, like arithmetic and geometry, are more certain and indubitable. For example, two plus three equals five. This remains true whether or not we are awake, or sleeping. Therefore, mathematics is demonstrated to be the most certain thing, whether we are awake or sleeping. Returning to the question of whether or not Descartes’s body is his own, mathematics can serve as a guide. Although Descartes cannot know whether he is dreaming or sleeping, mathematics can at least provide Descartes with the ability to measure his body, and therefore demonstrate its existence. That is, unless Descartes was given a reason to doubt mathematics. The final thought experiment will provide Descartes with a reason to doubt the certainty of mathematics.

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9 PWD II, 20; pg. 13
10 PWD II, 20: pg. 14
Deceiving God

Descartes’s final argument for the uncertainty of knowledge derived from the senses is the deceiving God argument. He proposes the notion that there could be a “malicious” deity that is “of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies to deceive me”.\(^{11}\) Since God is powerful enough to distort our understanding of almost anything, he can even deceive us in mathematics. Thus, it is possible that even our beliefs concerning the most indubitable things are incorrect. This deceiver could make us believe that all things we perceive in the waking state are merely “delusions of dreams”.\(^{12}\) Now, Descartes is also forced to doubt the existence of objects, for he cannot know for certain whether or not the “…colors, shapes, sounds, and all external objects” are real.\(^{13}\) He must also doubt his body, since the deceiver could make him “falsely believe” that his body looks the way that Descartes perceives.\(^{14}\) If this is true, then we cannot know anything for certain, and thus, there can be no foundation for science.

In the first Meditation, Descartes does not provide a solution to his arguments for sense deception. While the deceiving God argument is so crucial for Descartes’s project, he will later abandon skepticism in favor of a more certain principle. He will later appeal to the truthfulness of God to demonstrate that God is not a deceiver. Before he can do this, he will show that clear and distinct ideas are certain. Then, he will appeal to the certainty of a truthful God, i.e. a God that does not deceive. Eventually, Descartes will make God’s truthfulness the basis of all science. The purpose of the first meditation is strictly to introduce the problems that need to be addressed before we can implement a stable foundation for the sciences.

\(^{11}\) PWD, II, 23; pg. 15  
\(^{12}\) PWD, II, 23; pg. 15  
\(^{13}\) Ibid.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
HOBBES’S HIDDEN AGREEMENT

Hobbes holds that Descartes was justifiably correct in undertaking this project. Hobbes acknowledges the correctness of the notion that “if we follow our senses, without exercising our reason in any way, we shall be justified in doubting whether anything exists”. In other words, if we rely on the senses without applying any reason, then we are given a reason to doubt the existence of things. This is exactly what Descartes does in the first meditation. Descartes examines the evidence he may derive through the senses, and then brings them to reason. From his rationalization, he is able to establish grounds to doubt the evidence that the senses granted him. Except in the case of the deceiving God, he is able to utilize reason to correct sense deception.

The last half of Hobbes’s objection is directed toward Descartes’s rationalizations for doubting the senses. While Hobbes establishes that Descartes’s project was justified in the beginning of his objection, he raises concern about the originality of Descartes’s arguments for sense deception in the last half of his objection. Hobbes says, “Since Plato and other ancient philosophers discussed the uncertainty in the objects of the senses, and since the difficulty of distinguishing the waking state from dreams is commonly pointed out, I am sorry that the author, who is so outstanding in the field of original speculations, should be publishing this ancient material”. There is one main issue raised by Hobbes in this critique. Hobbes accuses Descartes of merely recycling ancient philosophy when he gives his arguments for the uncertainty of the senses. He also argues that Descartes’s dreaming argument is frequently discussed. In sum, Hobbes argues that Descartes’s demonstrations for sense deception are unoriginal. He even notes that, given Descartes’s well-known originality, it is peculiar that Descartes would incorporate

15 PWD, 171; pg. 171
16 Ibid.
such unoriginal arguments into his philosophy. Of Descartes’s three arguments for doubting the senses, Hobbes only mentions two: the argument of the uncertainty of the senses, and the dream argument. Hobbes does not even mention Descartes’s deceiving God argument, which is Descartes’s only original argument. His silence on the matter could indicate his agreement to it.\footnote{Strauss, \textit{Hobbes’s Critique of Religion}, 2011, pg.117}

Descartes acknowledges that Hobbes was correct to question the originality of his project. In response to the issue, Descartes explains that his intention in introducing the unoriginal arguments was to demonstrate that they are “merely plausible”.\footnote{PWD, II, 171; pg. 121} Descartes introduces a novel usage of these ancient arguments. As Descartes explains, “I was not trying to sell them novelties… I wanted to prepare my readers to study things which are related to the intellect, and help them distinguish these things from corporeal things”.\footnote{Ibid.} He wanted to introduce the arguments in order to invite replies to the meditation.\footnote{Ibid.} Descartes wanted to demonstrate the “firmness of the truths” which he will propose in later Mediations.\footnote{Ibid.} By introducing the sense deception arguments in order of difficulty, he provides a basis for the reader to raise concerns, and return to them if necessary. Descartes’s intention in bringing up the older arguments was to lead the reader towards the last argument. Descartes adds that he could have not left them out any more than a medical writer could have left out a description of the disease when discussing a new cure.\footnote{Ibid.} Descartes needed to clarify his reasons for doubting the senses in order to lead the reader towards his only original argument, the deceiving God argument. It could be that Hobbes simply does not need to be slowly introduced to it.
This could mean that Hobbes at least accepts the validity of the possibility of a deceiving God as a reason to doubt the existence of things. After all, Hobbes does not share the same kind of opposition to the senses as Descartes. It is not that Hobbes is against following the senses in general, but rather, following the senses without using reason.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, Hobbes has dealt with the issue in other writings. In \textit{Elements of Law}, Hobbes discusses, “the great deception of sense, which also is by sense to be corrected”.\textsuperscript{24} In other words, the senses are capable of correcting the errors they make. When we do not use reason to judge the properties of objects, it is only through the senses that we can correct sense deception. Hobbes continues, “For as sense telleth me, when I see directly, that the color seems to be in the object, so also sense telleth me, when I see by reflection, that color is not in the object”.\textsuperscript{25} To Hobbes, we can correct our errors by reflection. Although our perception of qualities is impacted by our relation to objects, it does not mean that we cannot arrive at an understanding of those objects. To Descartes, the sensory ideas like color are obscured in the mind. Color provides us with “only very obscure information” about objects in the external world, and the qualities of objects such as color “their images in our thought are always confused, and we do not know what they might be”.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, Descartes uses his methodology to correct our interpretation of qualities. To Hobbes, we are deceived when we take qualities like color to be a direct property. Nevertheless, we can use our senses to direct us towards the correct answer. For example, in Meditation one, Descartes discusses whether or not he can be sure if his body is in fact his own body. Under Hobbes’s view, all Descartes would need to do is look at an object that reflects, like a mirror or some other sort of surface that reflects. From there, Descartes would be able to discern that his body is in fact his own body.

\textsuperscript{23} PWD, 171; pg. 171
\textsuperscript{24} Hobbes, 2013, \textit{Elements of The Law} pg. 7
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Descartes, Principles, Iv.200
Descartes, on the other hand, remains skeptical, and from this he is able to doubt the senses altogether.

Hobbes has also dealt with the dream argument. Hobbes’s approaches the issue by using common sense. The difficulty of distinguishing whether we’re in a sleeping state or a dreaming state is something that Hobbes does not deny. To Hobbes, the difficulty in distinguishing between the two can lead us to the right answer. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes, “it is a hard matter and by many thought impossible to distinguish between sense and dreaming. For my part, when I consider…. That being awake, I know I dream not; though when I dream, I think myself awake”.27 Even though our dreams may feel real at the time, it becomes evident that they were an illusion upon awakening. Hobbes holds that the images we derive in our dreams are created from imagination, memory, and in absence of the senses.28 When we think that we are awake, we utilize our memories of things we perceived in the past to create an image of what it is like to be awake. We can distinguish our dreaming state from our waking state through the senses. When we are awake we receive new information through the senses, while when we are dreaming, we are merely recycling our memories of information we received through the senses in the past. While this is a memory, we do not experience them in our dream as a memory, which is what makes distinguishing between the two states very difficult. However, when I am awake, I may reflect on the dreams I had in the past. It also becomes far less difficult for me to consider my experiences in my dreams in terms of memory when I am awake. When I reflect on the memory of a dream, the senses show me that I was dreaming.

Hobbes and Descartes both use the dreaming argument in order to demonstrate the significant role of the senses, and specifically, how they relate to our understanding of the world.

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28 Ibid.
To Hobbes, Descartes’s reintroducing of the dreaming argument does not allow us to fully appreciate how the senses may lead us to the correct answers. The distinction between objects of the senses and knowledge of things derived from the intellect can be explored in the context of the dreaming argument, which is what Hobbes does when he considers the difference between sense and dreaming. If we produce knowledge derived from the senses only when we are awake, then we can discuss being awake in terms of having senses. If the things we perceive in our dream are only things derived from the intellect, then we can discuss them in terms of dreaming. This is a position which Hobbes seems to accept. This is because for Descartes, the senses do little else but lead us to error. Thus, Descartes introduces the dreaming argument in order to demonstrate that the senses are deceiving. When Descartes introduces the argument, he only focuses on the fact that when people dream, they usually do not realize they are dreaming. However, this is not all that we can learn from the dreaming argument. In fact, it is the most superficial part of the argument. From the dreaming argument, we can rationally infer many conclusions about consciousness, thinking, and the senses by using prudence and experience. This is exactly how Hobbes seems to approach it. Descartes may very well acknowledge the ability to formulate conclusions through the senses, but he is more hesitant to trust such conclusions. This is because Descartes is concerned with the uncertainty of knowledge derived from the senses. Hobbes not only reintroduces the dreaming argument in the context of sense and dreaming, he also is open to the possibility that sensory knowledge is uncertain. While this notion is enough for Descartes to reject the senses altogether, it is not enough for Hobbes to reject them.

If Hobbes is being deceived by a deceiving God, then Hobbes cannot rely on his way of discerning between reality and imagination through the senses. When Hobbes explains that only
the senses can correct sense deception, he suggests that man is the cause of the deception. This is why the only way to correct sense deception is through the faculty of senses by reasoning through our erring, so that we will not make the same mistake again. If God is the source of deception, then Hobbes cannot reason his way out of it. If Hobbes accepts this possibility, he is forced to accept the possibility that objects of the senses may not contain as much reality as previously assumed.

If the deception is in the part of God, then he cannot trust sensory knowledge. Hobbes turns to the things known by the intellect. In other words, Hobbes turns to the realm of ideas, or consciousness. For Descartes, the possibility of a deceiving God is what “makes the retreat into consciousness necessary”. If Descartes is being deceived, then the things known to him by the intellect must have a higher reality than objects of the sense. He is able to take refuge in the internal world, or inside his mind, where the only fact that is directly assessable to him is the existence of the self. From this immediate awareness of his own existence, and by reflection, he can re-orient himself in the world. This is, of course, the position that Descartes takes in the Meditation. He cuts himself off from all of the external world, finds a certain principle, and then re-orient himself in the world. When Descartes enter into the internal world, our knowledge is limited to knowledge of the self, and thus, all knowledge must be oriented in terms of the self. With this knowledge of the self, we can begin to examine other things, and then arrive at an understanding. Both Hobbes and Descartes begin to tackle the deceiving God scenario with the retreat into consciousness.

Before we go any further, we must acknowledge what the retreat is, and what it is not. The term ‘retreat into consciousness’ must be taken metaphorically. The term may be somewhat

29 Strauss, 2011; pg. 95
30 Strauss, 2011; pg. 98
misleading at first glance. It brings to mind Descartes’s infamous mind-body dualism. Hobbes
does not envision the self as an immaterial thing, while Descartes attributes consciousness to the
immaterial soul.31 This makes it difficult to imagine how the philosophers can both use the
retreat as a basis for reflecting on ideas. The difficulty is solved by taking Descartes’s dualism
out of the picture when considering this term. Descartes approaches the issue of sense deception
like a medical doctor. He wants to understand how the problem works in the brain by bringing
forth images to the mind. By bringing those images forward, Descartes can attain a higher
awareness of those images. When we focus on the materialist part of Descartes’s theory, we are
left with a clearer metaphor of the retreat.32 The retreat to consciousness is simply a means to
reflect on objects within the mind of the observer. Descartes presents different images through
description. His presentation of those things gives a basis for Hobbes to consider them.
Therefore, the retreat into consciousness is nothing more than the bouncing back and forth of
ideas.

31 See Hobbes’s objection to Descartes’s theory of the soul: PWD II, 173; pg. 122
32 Dennett, Daniel, 1991, Consciousness Explained, pg. 107: When we remove the dualism from Descartes’s
philosophy, we get an explanation of consciousness. As Dennett explains, it is like a “Cartesian Theater”, which is a
small movie theater in the brain that projects images of things, and a homunculus responds to them. This is a more
useful metaphor for explaining how Descartes presents his arguments to us. He presents an idea, and invites us to
imagine it, sort of like a movie.
INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

Hobbes will retreat into consciousness in order to entertain the possibility of a deceiving God. Hobbes will reflect on Descartes’s refutation of the deceiving God possibility, which consists of a rational demonstration of God’s truthfulness. Descartes’s refutation begins with the idea of God. After fully considering the matter, Hobbes will raise an objection to Descartes’s notion that we have an idea of God. Before considers this, Hobbes must establish whether or not he will accept the deceiving God argument.

If Hobbes is to accept the possibility, he will need to consider the significance of adopting such a view. The nature of the deceiving God possibility presents several key assumptions that must be taken into account. The first, and most critical assumption has to do with God’s existence. By accepting the possibility of a deceiving God, we make the assumption that God exists. Since the possibility of a deceiving God makes it such that we cannot know whether or not we are dreaming or sleeping, we cannot know whether our idea is truly the product of the imagination, or whether it is a product of our waking experiences. In order to safeguard ourselves from God’s deception, we must make sure that the idea of God originated only through the intellect, in absence of the senses. The purpose of attaining an idea of God is to provide a basis for reflection on God for the retreat apart from the external, error prone world. If God is a deceiver, then we must not only reflect on the notion of God, but all the rest of our ideas. There is no basis for us to be certain whether anything that we believe to exist, does in fact exist in the external world. Thus, we must organize our knowledge in order to meet the complexities that the deceiving God scenario presents. We must classify our knowledge based on existence so that we can consider the idea of God appropriately. In sum, the deceiving God possibility raises many difficulties. Hobbes must consider whether or not the acceptance of this
possibility is justified.33 Since Hobbes has yet to take a stance on the matter, he turns to Descartes’s argument. He will use Descartes’s classification of thought as a basis to consider whether or not the deceiving God possibility is justified.

Descartes categorizes his ideas into different categories of thought. Since he cannot be sure that anything he believes to exist does in fact exist, Descartes cannot categorize his ideas by their physical reality. Instead, he categorizes his ideas based on their mental reality. To Descartes, ideas that are images of things contain the most mental reality. Descartes notes that he holds some ideas that are like images of things. In these cases, we can apply the term ‘idea’ to them. For example, when he thinks of “a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God,” he is thinking of images of things.34 These images exist in his mind with a degree of mental reality. Thus, when Descartes will reflect on God, he will reflect on an image of God. After considering Descartes’s stance, Hobbes will try to find his own.

Regarding the existence or non-existence of other things, Hobbes demonstrates a willingness to distinguish them metaphysically. However, this sort of investigation becomes difficult when he takes into account that there are many things which we cannot prove to exist. After Hobbes rationalizes through this, he will establish that God is incomprehensible. If God cannot be comprehended, then he cannot conclude anything about the existence or non-existence of God. Hobbes’s materialism becomes methodical.35 Methodical materialism differs from metaphysical materialism. Metaphysical materialism relates to the reality, or the existence of material things, that can exist independently from the mind. When Descartes presents an object that Hobbes has perceived in the external world, he can easily reflect on it in terms of an image.

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33 The necessity of having a rational justification for taking on the deceiving God possibility was central to Hobbes’s first objection. PWD, II, 171; pg. 171
34 PWD, II, 37; pg. 26
35 Strauss, 1953, Natural Right and History pg. 174
Hobbes’s materialism becomes methodical when Descartes presents an object that Hobbes has not perceived. Methodical materialism relates to the logical possibility of certain linguistic transformations. The use of the most vague, complicated language will demonstrate ideas with more clarity in the mind than the use of direct, discrete images. When Hobbes is unable to reflect on ideas in the way that Descartes lays out, he will try to formulate an idea through language. He will describe the incomprehensible through language. Language will make the incomprehensible, somewhat more comprehensible.

Hobbes begins his objection to Descartes by reflecting on the images that Descartes groups together. Hobbes will consider each image on a case by case basis in order to evaluate whether or not the deceiving God possibility is justified. He begins by taking the metaphysical materialist stance. He will attribute existence to the images by their metaphysical existence. He will show that we can only verify the existence of things that have the capacity to be perceived by us in the external world. However, it is not that we need to directly perceive them. As metaphysical materialism holds, the external world exists even if we were not observing it. In contrast to Descartes, when dealing with visible, material things, Hobbes holds that the external world exists outside of his mind.

I will summarize his argument to clarify. First, Hobbes will break down each of their images to makes his point. Hobbes points to the fact that when he thinks about a man, he is aware that the idea of the image he holds is composed of a certain color and shape. Hobbes can doubt whether or not this image he has resembles a man in the external world. Similarly, when Hobbes thinks of the sky, he is aware that his idea of the sky holds a certain shape and color. Hobbes can also doubt whether or not this image resembles the sky in the external world. In the case of the

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37 PWD II, 179; pg. 126
man, as well as the sky, Hobbes can compare his idea with evidence from the external world. Thus, when it comes to visible, material things, we can easily form an image of them in our minds. In the case that we want to doubt whether or not our images of things resemble their reality, we can directly perceive them. Our direct perception of those things serve as evidence, verifying that ideas of things resemble things in the external world. If our images do not resemble reality, then we can correct our ideas of them through direct perception.

Hobbes must now take a stance. Hobbes has two choices. He must either assume that reality is perceivable. If this is true, then he not is being deceived. Or, Hobbes may assume that reality is not perceivable, and thus, he is being deceived. In the case of visible things, we can assume that they exist. We can perceive them with no real justification for doubting them. Hence, we do not need to assume that what we are perceiving is incorrect. There is no rational justification for assuming that our perceptions of visible, material things are wrong. Until we are granted a justification, there is no reason for assuming that we are being deceived.

Hobbes considers whether or not the possible existence of something known as non-existing gives him a reason for taking on the deceiving God stance. Hobbes considers the case of the chimera. While Hobbes is aware of the shapes and colors in the image of the chimera, he is forced to doubt it differently. He can doubt whether the image of he has of the non-existent chimera is actually capable of existing, or if the chimera perhaps resembles something else which may or may not have existed. The issue is that in the case of the chimera, there is no evidence of its existence in the external world, and thus, he cannot doubt whether or not it exists.

If faced with evidence for the existence of something non-existent like a chimera, Hobbes can make one of the following assumptions. Hobbes can assume that the chimera exists.

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38 PWD II, 179; pg. 126
However, it seems irrational to consider the existence of a creature that is no longer believed to exist. Hobbes can assume that he is presented with false evidence. If this is true, he must assume at least one intelligent being capable of plotting this sort of false reality exists, such as a deceiving God. Still, Hobbes has not been presented with sufficient evidence of such a creature existing. It follows then that he does not need to assume its existence. Thus, he is not being deceived. The possible existence of things we believe to exist, but are unintelligible will lead him to accept the possibility that he is being deceived. First, Hobbes attempts to examine the notion of an angel, which introduces new possibilities. In the case of a chimera, Hobbes at least has an idea of what a chimera is supposed to look like. In the case of an angel, Hobbes has no idea what it should look like. Unlike a chimera, people believe in the existence of an angel. Therefore, Hobbes has a reason to assume that angels exist.

Hobbes begins by reflecting on his own idea of an angel. Hobbes describes his idea in terms of a sequence of specific images. First, the image of a flame comes to mind, and then, of a child with wings. Since Hobbes is “sure” that the image he has does not resemble an angel, and hence, it is not the idea of an angel. Hobbes must find a reference point for comparison.

Hobbes turns to the common opinion about angels. As Hobbes explains, the name ‘angel’ is granted to “invisible and immaterial creatures who serve God”. Yet, the idea of an angel is composed of ideas of visible things. Therefore, we have no idea of an angel. Even though we have no idea of an angel, we assume that it exists.

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39 Ibid. Since Hobbes is aware of the composition of the figure, he can put it together easily. Insofar as he has the right shapes in his disposal, he can create an image of a non-existing thing, like an artist.
40 PWD II, 180; pg. 127
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
What follows from this is that there are a few different sources of deception. It could be
the angels. The very nature of angels makes them deceptive in a sense. If they are immaterial and
invisible, then they are not perceivable. If they are not perceivable, then we cannot establish their
existence by perception. It follows that we cannot take away the possibility that invisible beings
are floating in the air amongst us. We can also assume that we are the cause of deception. This is
a sort of deception, according to Descartes’s own sense of the term. Deception is when the senses
produce the wrong conclusion. In this case, the senses lead us to believe that angels do not exist,
whereas we believe that they do exist. Since to Hobbes, the belief in angels is what justifies their
existence, he need not assume this is the case. Hobbes cannot take away the possibility that God
is the deceiver. Hobbes makes it clear in his definition that angels are said serve God. Next,
Hobbes will entertain the notion that God is a deceiver. He begins with the notion that God
exists. He will turn to religious text in order to examine God more closely. It will provide him a
basis to begin to comprehend a few notions related to God, as in the possibility of angels.
Religious teachings make angels comprehensible, while at the same time, demonstrating their
incomprehensibility. The same is true in the case of God. Regarding this, Hobbes states the
following:

We have no idea or image corresponding to the sacred name of God. And this is why we
are forbidden to worship God in the form of an image; for otherwise we might think that
we were conceiving of him who is incapable of being conceived. It seems, then, that there
is no idea of God in us. 43

Hobbes couples his notion that we cannot have an idea of God with standard biblical
teaching. Since the teaching promotes the belief that God cannot be conceived of, we cannot
have an idea of God. It seems, then, that God is incomprehensible. God is incomprehensible
because men are incapable of comprehending God. It follows that Descartes’s refutation of the

43 PWD II, 180; pg. 127
deceiving God scenario is flawed from the very beginning. As a result, Descartes cannot rid himself of the possibility of a deceiving God. God is incomprehensible, therefore he may very well be deceptive. It is an open argument with no simple solution. Instead of investigating a way out of deception, Hobbes adopts the much more practical view that God is incomprehensible. It becomes Hobbes’s certain principle.

Next, Hobbes will entertain his newfound principle, that God is incomprehensible. Hobbes needs to demonstrate that the principle is applicable to more than one case. If the incomprehensibility of God is to be Hobbes’s certain principle, it cannot only be compatible with religious views. Hobbes will consider another perspective to evaluate whether or not God can be said to be incomprehensible. Specifically, someone that may not have an idea of God. Hobbes must form his own by using experience. Hobbes denies that we have an idea of God, but he does not deny that we can form an idea, and give it the name ‘God’. Hobbes agrees with Descartes that what we think in connection with the name ‘God’ does not originate in ourselves.44 However, it does not follow that what we think of needs to come from anything other than external objects. Thus, we do not need to assume that God is the cause of our ‘idea’ of him. As Hobbes will show, we can assume that we produced the idea of God, by utilizing reason and experience.

We infer a cause to our ideas, and conclude that the cause is God. To illustrate, Hobbes turns to the example of a blind person. A blind person can sense heat when he approaches a fire, without seeing what it really is, or understanding the names and labels associated with the term ‘fire’. It is only when he hears it called ‘fire’ that he concludes that fire exists.45 In this case, the blind man is inferring that the source of heat he is sensing is fire. Since he is blind, he cannot

44 PWD II, 187; pg. 131
45 Ibid.
know for certain that what he is feeling is in fact fire. He has no means to doubt whether or not the heat he is sensing is in fact coming from a fire. This is because he holds no image in his mind of the fire to evaluate if the image he has of fire is the likeness of fire or not. He can only be aware of the fact that he is sensing something hot, which people call fire. From this, he infers the existence of fire. We can do the same thing when we think of God. When someone recognizes that there must be a cause to his images or ideas, he is eventually led to the possibility of an eternal cause, which “never began to exist and hence cannot have a cause prior to itself”. While we are capable of inferring this, we cannot say that we have an idea of that eternal being. Hobbes says, “He merely gives the name or label ‘God’ to the thing that he believes in, or acknowledges to exist”. Thus, we cannot have an idea of God, even if we acknowledge God’s existence. The ‘idea’ of God is formulated with reason and experience. Hence, it is based on the external world, and is prone to the deception introduced by the deceiving God scenario. The notion that God is incomprehensible remains unshaken.

Hobbes turns his attention to Descartes’s idea of God. Hobbes will demonstrate that Descartes’s idea does not resemble God. Not only does it not resemble God, but it does not demonstrate anything more than our capacity to articulate vague notions through language. Ultimately, the very characteristics that Descartes designates to God makes God incomprehensible. Hobbes raises his objection by first reflecting on the attributes of God, as Descartes lays out, in order to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Hobbes uses his method in order to evaluate each attribute associated with Descartes’s idea of God.

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46 PWD II, 180; pg. 127
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 PWD II, 187; pg. 131
By the term ‘God’, Hobbes understands a substance. Hobbes rationalizes, rather than assumes, that this substance is infinite. This is because it is not possible for him to “conceive or imagine any supposed limits or extremities” without imagining other limits beyond those limits. Hence, we can say that God is an infinite substance based on the fact that when Hobbes thinks of this substance he imagines an infinite chain of limits, with each limit going beyond its previous one. What does not follow from this idea is a connection between the term ‘infinite’ and the idea of the infinite nature of God, which is exactly the connection that Descartes describes in his argument. What does follow from the idea is another idea, which is the idea of Hobbes’s own boundaries and limits. Thus, reason shows us that God must be infinite. We can compare this idea with our human experience of feeling finite. Yet since we do not have an idea of what it is to be infinitely unbound, we cannot really have an idea of infinity. We are really just thinking of our own finite nature in order to try to conceive infinity.

To Hobbes, we cannot have an idea of God’s independence through images, but we can through language. When we say that God is independent, we are merely saying that God belongs to the class of things the origins of which we cannot imagine. When we say that God is infinite, we are just saying that God belongs to the class of things that we consider unbound. We cannot really imagine the attributes of God without borrowing from our own understanding of these attributes. Therefore, we cannot have any idea of God. From Hobbes’s point of view, only God can understand his own attributes. As Hobbes points out, “what sort of idea is it which has no origin and no limits?” From the human perspective, understanding God’s infinity seems to be impossible. However, that is not to say that we cannot imagine or conceive these attributes, as

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50 PWD II, 186; pg. 131
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Hobbes admittedly does in his objection. We can rationalize through what attributes God may hold, and then construct a manner of understanding these attributes by utilizing language. However, all this demonstrates is our ability to understand things through language. It does not demonstrate anything about the attributes of God. The problem is when we assume that our idea of God’s attributes represent God’s true attributes. When we do this, we attribute characteristics to God that may or may not belong to him. For instance, Hobbes is not convinced that God must necessarily be supremely intelligent. Descartes would need to also explain what he means by ‘supreme’ intelligence. We cannot have an idea of supreme intelligence. Further, attributing this characteristic to God assumes that we can know God’s understanding. Yet, it is not feasible for us to have any idea of God’s understanding, let alone his supreme intelligence. When we say God is supremely intelligent, we are using language to understand that which we cannot fully conceive or imagine.

Therefore, Hobbes at least suggests that our conceptions of God seem to be more connected with language and names than with the thing-in-itself. For instance, when we think of God as infinite, we cannot help but think of our understanding of infinite, rather than the infinity of God. Since, for the reasons we have seen, Hobbes does not think that we can have a true idea of infinity, language at least allows us to discuss and explain it. From the human perspective, ideas like God cannot really be separated from his attributes. The attributes we suppose God to have are connected by language. Hobbes’s point is that it is highly unlikely that Descartes does have an image of God. This is simply due to the incomprehensibility of God. The idea of God belongs to the category of things that we cannot attain an image of, but is made more intelligible through language.

54 PWD II, 187; pg. 131
INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF NATURE

A significant component of Descartes’s idea of God is that he created the world. Since all Descartes can know under the deceiving God stance is that God exists, he uses his image of God to conclude other things about him. From his idea of God, he concludes that God must have created the world. To Hobbes, even if we assume that God exists, the assumption is not sufficient proof of creation.

Hobbes constructs an image of creation. He will construct an image of creation by using the memories of things he has seen in the past. For example, Hobbes can construct an image of creation of man by turning to his memory of seeing a person being born, or growing up to the size and shape that he has now. From there, we can couple our understanding with our belief that God created the world, and infer that he did in fact create the world. However, this idea is not really what we mean when we discuss creation. When we discuss creation, we are talking about God’s intervention in the natural world. Thus, the question of creation has to do more with nature then it does with God’s attributes. Under Hobbes’s view, the example above merely demonstrates our ability to imagine that the world may perhaps have been created, and is “not sufficient proof of creation”. When discussing creation, we are not really referring to our capacity to imagine that the world was in fact created, but to our belief that God created the world.

To Hobbes, our belief that God created the world is open to doubt. We can further investigate our belief, insofar as we present an argument. Descartes did not demonstrate an argument for creation. Since it is part of his idea of God, he merely assumes it. His ‘idea’ of God is composed of several notions. Hobbes points to the fact that there are many contradictory

55 PWD II, 188; pg. 132
56 Ibid,
notions within Descartes’s idea of God. As Hobbes explains, “Even if the existence of something infinite, independent, supremely powerful etc. has been demonstrated, it still would not follow that a creator exists”. It is possible that something exists that we suppose to belong to class of things that is infinite, independent, and supremely powerful. If this being exists, its very nature makes it incomprehensible. Therefore, we cannot have an idea of creation. This is only because of the flawed nature of Descartes’s presentation. Hobbes argues that “he ought to have given a better explanation of the ‘idea’ of God, and he should have gone on to deduce not only the existence of God but also the creation of the world”.

If we are looking at it from a religious point of view, the same holds true. Since Christianity promotes the belief that God cannot be conceived of, we cannot demonstrate the existence of God or creation. Hobbes’s point is that we cannot say with certainty that God created the world, just because we believe that God exists. When we do this, we are really just making an incorrect inference. We turn to our idea of ‘creation’, rationalize that there must be a cause, and infer that the world is created by what we give the name ‘God’. The problem to Hobbes is neither in the idea of creation itself, nor in the rationalization that it compels us to make, but rather in the inference that follows it. Hobbes does argue that we can make a “correct inference” concerning creation, which is: “There exists a being whom we believe to have created all things; therefore, the world was in fact created by him at some stage”. Hence, we can infer that God created the world at some point in time, but we must admit that attributing the creation of the world to God is a leap of faith.

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57 Ibid.
58 PWD, II, 180; pg. 127
59 PWD, II, 189; pg. 133
60 PWD II, 188; pg. 132
To Hobbes, we can only arrive at an understanding about things that are produced. Things are either produced by nature, or produced by man. Since human beings did not create the world, creation of the world in incomprehensible to us. When investigating nature, we begin with the assumption that nature is incomprehensible. The incomprehensibility of nature does not pose a threat to the possibility of a natural science. We can still arrive at an understanding of existing things in the natural world. In fact, it is due to the incomprehensibility of nature that we must remain skeptical regarding the natural world. Thus, we are given a reason to bring our observations to doubt, and carry on an investigation. In other words, we can conduct science.

61 Stauss, 1952, pg. 174
The deceiving God possibility poses a threat to the intelligibility of nature. Insofar as God is not a deceiver, we can be certain that our scientific observations that seem to be true to us, must certainly be true. Thus, we can produce knowledge of nature. If God is a deceiver, then I cannot produce knowledge. Thus, nature is incomprehensible under the deceiving God scenario. That is not to say that we need to be certain of anything else other than God’s truthfulness for Descartes’s project to function. At the very least, he must demonstrate the truthfulness of God in order to rid himself of the deceiving God scenario. Descartes acknowledges that although we can demonstrate the truthfulness of God through the *Meditations*, there are some things that we cannot know.62 Descartes admits that, since God is infinite and goes beyond human comprehension, there are limits to what our finite minds can understand.63 However, God’s truthfulness must be verified, or else his entire foundation falls apart. If we question the correctness of this statement, we open the possibility of erring. Therefore, Descartes invites us to doubt God’s truthfulness by introducing the deceiving God argument. After conducting Descartes’s meditation, we must be able to arrive at knowledge of the truthfulness of God for Descartes’s project to work.

Descartes must rid himself from deceiving God possibility, because he orients his philosophy towards understanding nature. Descartes is only able to fully explore the nature of his body after he secures all knowledge on God’s truthfulness. The *Cogito* is concluded before Descartes provides a basis for knowledge. It is essentially an inference that Descartes makes about his body. It allows us to know, at the very least, that I exist as a thinking thing. He is only

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62 Kennington, *On Modern Origins* 2004; pg. 97
63 PWD II, 9; pg. 10

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able to derive the *Cogito* from the possibility of a deceiving God. From the possibility of being deceived, it follows that I exist. From the fact that ‘I exist’, I can now investigate what kind of thing I am. He establishes that he is an un-extended thing, *res cogitans*. The essence of *res cogitans* is consciousness. It can be discerned from *res extensa*, which is an extended entity. Even though Descartes argues that the soul, as the source of consciousness, is immaterial, he leaves in the possibility that consciousness could be an accident of the body.\(^\text{64}\) In his objection, Hobbes states, “It can be that the thing that thinks [*res cogitans*] is the subject to which mind, reason, or intellect belong; and the subject may thus be something corporeal. The contrary is assumed, not proved”.\(^\text{65}\) Descartes writes to Hobbes in response, “I certainly did not assume the contrary, nor did I use it as the ‘basis’ of my argument. I left it quite undecided until the Sixth Meditation, where it was proved”.\(^\text{66}\) Descartes is pointing to the fact that his proof of the independence of the mind and body, or *res cogitans* and *res extensa* was established in the Sixth Meditation.

If God’s truthfulness cannot be demonstrated, it is impossible to explore the connection between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, in any detail, because the exact nature between the two varies. Despite the differences, God’s truthfulness pulls together the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Therefore, he can continue to inquire on the independent nature of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This principle “rests on the insight of rational theology that God is absolutely truthful”.\(^\text{67}\) Descartes’s proof of their independence follows from the argument that all things that appear to be clearly and distinctly independent, are in fact independent. This certainty and truthfulness of

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\(^\text{64}\) Strauss, 2011; pg. 98
\(^\text{65}\) PWD II, 173; pg.122
\(^\text{66}\) PWD II, 175; pg. 123
\(^\text{67}\) Strauss, 2011; pg. 98
the independent nature of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* is safeguarded by the existence of a truthful God.

Hobbes

On the other hand, the deceiving God argument does not pose a threat to Hobbes’s philosophy. To Hobbes also, the deceiving God argument symbolizes the incomprehensibility of nature. Since Hobbes holds that the incomprehensibility of nature opens the possibility of a natural science, he does not need to find an argument to rid himself of that possibility. Moreover, Hobbes orients his philosophy towards the understanding of civilization, rather than nature. Since nature is incomprehensible, Hobbes separates the study of nature from the study of civilization. Hobbes’s separation of political science and natural science is demonstrated in Hobbes’s model for classifying knowledge. In Hobbes’s classification, Hobbes begins by defining science as “knowledge of consequence, which is also called philosophy”. From there, Hobbes distinguishes between natural philosophy, and political philosophy. While natural philosophy examines the “consequences from the accidents of bodies natural,” political philosophy examines the “consequences from the accidents of *politic* bodies”. Hobbes’s entire classification of knowledge is divided by his definition of natural and political philosophy.

Under Hobbes’s view, it is impractical for us to assume that we can know the truthfulness of God. Hobbes adopts the much more practical view that God is incomprehensible, and thus, his truthfulness cannot be proven. Under Descartes’s view, a God that is not truthful, or that deceives, would not provide an adequate basis. Hobbes thinks that proving God’s truthfulness is impossible. In his objection to Descartes, Hobbes argues the following: “…Descartes should

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68 Hobbes, 1994; pg. 48
69 Hobbes, 1994; pg. 48
70 Hobbes, 1994; pg. 48
have considered whether the proposition ‘in no case can God deceive us’ is true, if taken in a
universal sense; for if this proposition is not universally true, then the conclusion ‘therefore
corporeal things exist’ does not follow”.

We cannot make the fundamental conclusion that God is truthful. The impossibility of
establishing the proposition ‘in no case can God deceive us’, especially in a universal sense, at
least suggests that God is incomprehensible. God is incomprehensible, therefore, Descartes
cannot demonstrate God’s truthfulness. For the same reason, Descartes cannot go so far to say
that God is not deceptive. Since God is incomprehensible, there are simply no means to
demonstrate his truthfulness, or establish whether or not he is deceptive. It is important to note
that, for Descartes, God’s truthfulness does not eliminate the possibility of erring, or being
deceived. For instance, we can still err in mathematics. Yet we cannot attribute this error to God,
since erring in mathematics is a human error. Descartes requires that we are not deceived in
cases where our erring would “suggest and intention to deceive on the part of God”. This is
why Descartes must prove that this God must be truthful. As Descartes explains, it is
“contradictory that God should have such an intention”. As Hobbes continuously explains,
when Descartes appeals to the attributes of God, he is pointing to unverifiable evidence.
Descartes is using his beliefs about God’s nature to demonstrate that God does not deceive. To
Hobbes, Descartes cannot prove that God does not deceive. If we cannot rid ourselves of this
 possibility, then we cannot make conclusions about God’s intentions.

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71 PWD II, 195; pg. 136
72 PWD II, 195; 134
73 PWD II, 195; pg. 134-35
INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD AND POLITICS

Now that we have examined both Hobbes and Descartes’s argument, we must establish which philosophy presents the best argument. Overall, Hobbes’s stance that God is incomprehensible is more practical than Descartes’s stance. It is impractical for Descartes to safeguard all knowledge on God’s truthfulness. He introduces an impractical basis to rid ourselves of a practical problem. God’s truthfulness is supposed to alleviate us from the problem of sense deception. For the problem of sense deception is not only a problem for science, but also an issue that impacts our daily lives. It falsely promises to solve the issue of deception in dreaming, as well as in the case that God is a deceiver. We must be able to deal with sense deception in the best way possible, to the best extent we can. If we cannot rid ourselves completely of sense deception, we must at the very least be honest about that fact. If only Descartes did not require us to arrive at the notion of God’s truthfulness, then his experiment would have been much more practical.

It is worth exploring whether or not Descartes is justified in proposing the deceiving God scenario. Recall that for Hobbes, the question of whether or not Descartes is justified in raising those questions is central to his first objection. First of all, Hobbes questions whether or not Descartes’s presentation of his three arguments for sense deception is justified from the very beginning. Still, Hobbes must have been persuaded by the possibility of a deceiving God. With the exception of unoriginal arguments presented in Meditation I, Hobbes thinks through every other Meditation with the aid of Descartes’s assistance. I consider Descartes’s presentation to be valid. In Descartes’s justification in his response to Hobbes’s question of originality, Descartes takes the position of a medical writer. At the very least, his presentation helps people

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74Referring to the PWD: Consider the presented format of their correspondence in comparison to the other objections. Hobbes and Descartes have a unique ‘back and forth’ style conversation for each Meditation.
understand the problem that he wishes to cure. In other words, Descartes’s *Meditations* successfully provided the reader a basis to entertain the issue of sense deception. The problem is not with Descartes’s presentation, but his solution to sense deception.

It is impractical, if not unfair, to ask all his readers to arrive at that conclusion. There is simply no means for everyone to verify the truthfulness of God, nor is there any evidence of God’s truthfulness through experience. It would seem then that we cannot meditate on the truthfulness of God unless we already had an idea of God’s truthfulness prior to our retreat into consciousness. In the case that we do not have an idea of God at our disposal, we can use Descartes’s idea of God’s truthfulness to attempt to attain the same conclusion. As his ‘idea’ of God is full of contradictions, it is unlikely that everyone will arrive at the same conclusion as Descartes. In fact, Hobbes arrives at very different conclusions in his objections. Even after he borrows Descartes’s idea of God, and rationalizes through it for himself, he still arrives at different a conclusion. Instead, Hobbes’s certain principle is that God is simply incomprehensible.

Hobbes’s stance that God is incomprehensible is more politically stable than Descartes’s stance. Descartes invites too much contention over God. While Descartes only requires that we acknowledge God’s truthfulness, he invites us to examine the idea of God which is, and has always been a matter of conflict. This is why Hobbes’s stance is much better than Descartes’s. Hobbes is concerned with the fact that the comprehensibility of God is historically a matter of contention. Through this contention, God has become even more unintelligible to man. It does not follow, however, that we should lose hope in the possibility of peace. Hobbes gives us a basis to entertain the possibility of a peaceful order by turning to what comprehensible, which is

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75 Strauss, 2011; pg. 113
civilization. Contention is solved by focusing on the comprehensibility of civilization, apart from nature and God. We can continue to discuss and attempt to understand God, insofar as we acknowledge the possibility that we are mistaken. By acknowledging that God is incomprehensible, we are able to come to an agreement. We turn the contention into a conversation by establishing that we cannot judge the validity of any position regarding the comprehensibility of God. While idealistic, the world would be a more peaceful place if we all agreed that God is incomprehensible. This is a notion that should not be lost in political life. Historically speaking, man’s relationship with religion has been the root cause of some of the world’s most violent wars. It must be noted that, of course, belief also inspires benevolent actions. Still, even in our contemporary society, those that use belief to justify crimes pose a great threat to society. The enlightenment has not reached the entirety of the global community. As the extreme actions of religious fundamentalists show, it is evident that many are still in the dark. We should advocate for the truth that is the incomprehensibility of God.

Far too often are those crimes committed with intention of pleasing God’s will. If only everyone were to arrive at the conclusion that God is simply incomprehensible, then there would be no basis for people to pretend to know God’s will. If we could all accept that God is simply incomprehensible, there would be no justification for religious fundamentalists to enact violence, sexism, and bigotry under the pretense that they know God’s will. Many times, there is not necessarily a biblical reason for this pretense. After all, while religions vary, the incomprehensibility of God is a common thread in the Abrahamic religions. This may be a common thread in the written, biblical tradition. As the evidence shows, the message is not always embraced by those that need it the most. Politics can be used as a vehicle to promote violence and intolerance in the name of religion. Insofar as this is the case, we cannot simply
wait for extremists to come to their senses, as we are still waiting for that moment to obtain. Instead, politics must divorce itself from those that seek to use it as a means for physically and mentally harmful ends. To succeed where religion has failed, politics must have a distinct moral doctrine that is universally applicable, and accessible to all.

Hobbes focuses a great deal of his philosophy towards solving civil disputes through means enacted and produced in civilization itself. The justification for using political artifacts is demonstrated through the state of nature thought experiment, which describes a hostile, and essentially barbaric reality. In this exaggerated scenario, the political artifacts of civil society are no longer used as a means towards peace, but instead, as a means towards civil war.76 One does not need to imagine a scenario where the political world is connected with the natural world. For one, it does not include any miracles.77 We are not asked to imagine the possibility of God’s intervention in the world. Since God is simply incomprehensible, Hobbes does not need to pretend to understand God’s ways. Hobbes only requires that we consider what we know, which is civilization. From there, we retreat into consciousness. We can all reflect on the necessity of a peaceful political order by entertaining a situation where there is no peaceful political order. We begin with nothing but knowledge of the self to situate ourselves in that hostile environment that Hobbes asks us to entertain. Then, we try to find a principle to enact as a basis for social order. Instead of looking for a true principle like for Descartes’s foundation, we attempt to discover a universally applicable principle. When it comes to establishing a peaceful order, applicability reveals truthfulness. The more applicable it is to people, the more truthful the principle. It is only applicability that can bring about success in this situation. Hobbes’s principle is “fear of violent

76 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 1952, pg. 196.
77 Strauss, 2011, pg. 112-113
death”.

As a result, it becomes both the principle that justifies politics order, and the right to self-preservation. From this skeptical basis, Hobbes discovers a firm foundation to ground his political or new moral doctrine. This principle is easily discoverable to all. First, it is established through pre-scientific thinking. It only requires is common sense, and some consideration. By reflection on the extreme scenario, and backed up by comparison of our experiences, the principle is shown to be applicable to man in both cases. This fear is not only universally assessable, but also universally applicable. Both the religious and non-religious individuals can arrive at this truth, for it is greater than fear of religious superstition. It is evidently a common thread amongst human beings that we can all use as a practical guide. On the contrary, Descartes’s principle of a truthful God is not evidently a common idea to all. Descartes’s did not consider the extreme case of an atheist, nor any case other than his own. As a result, it becomes both the principle that justifies political order, and the right to self-preservation. From this skeptical basis, Hobbes discovers a firm foundation to ground his political or moral doctrine. Hobbes offers much more practical guidance than Descartes’s, for what can be more practical than politics.

Hobbes opens up the possibility for attaining moral knowledge with expediency, whereas Descartes’s philosophy does not. Hobbes simply recognizes that God’s incomprehensibility renders nature incomprehensible as a result. Nature has become a politically contentious notion due to the relationship between God and nature. In order for Hobbes to settle the dispute, while maintaining universal applicability, he formulates a political doctrine for political life, separated from religion, and nature. As a result, moral or political knowledge is its own separate field of study.

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78 Hobbes, 1994, pg. 58
79 Strauss, 1952, pg.198
Under Descartes’s view, moral knowledge is dependent on the development of modern natural science. Descartes holds that, until we fully investigate nature, it will appear to be morally neutral. While the possibility of a deceiving God may pose serious moral considerations, Descartes discusses God without much consideration of his moral authority. While God’s truthfulness alleviate us from this possibility, the demonstrations are “agnostic” regarding what is considered right or wrong.80 To Descartes, until we discover the fundamental principles of physics, we cannot produce any sort of moral knowledge. Science will eventually lead us to morality, but we must patiently wait for us to attain such knowledge. In Descartes’s tree of science or philosophy, Descartes lays out his plan in his classification of the sciences. He uses the image of a tree to demonstrate his entire plan for the sciences, from order to purpose. The principles of metaphysics compose the “foundations” of the grounding of science, and “the tree of philosophy” exists for the sake of producing “fruits”.81 The branches are composed of the sciences. Among them, medicine, mechanics, and morals are the highest branches of the tree which yield the best “fruits”.82 We must be careful not to produce error as the condition of the roots will impact the entire tree of philosophy, including the ‘fruits’. This also means knowledge of morality will not be derived from conventional sources since it might “impede or guide” our understanding of nature.83 Since attaining moral principles would certainly take some time, as both the name and order of the tree of philosophy suggests, it cannot provide moral guidance with the same expediency as Hobbes’s philosophy.84

80 Ibid.
81 Descartes, 1991; pg. xxiv
82 Ibid.
83 Kennington, 2004; pg. 137
84 Note that Hobbes gives straightforward definitions of political matters. This is the most fundamental characteristic of the Leviathan. For example, see Hobbes, 1994, pg.89: Hobbes makes complex notions like justice and injustice easy to identify, and understand.
Descartes philosophical project allows him to be all too trustworthy of scientific progress. His own understanding of God’s truthfulness gives him a means to place an unfounded trust in the sciences. Since he cannot know for certain, he instead faithfully trusts that knowledge of nature will necessarily yield sustainable moral notions. It is unlikely that nature will produce long-lasting moral principles that are powerful enough to meet the ever-changing landscape of political life. Political matters need to be met with some expediency. It is unclear how these unforeseeable natural moral principles merit our unbending trust. It is unsustainable for scientific progress to outstrip moral progress. This is the type of situation that Descartes invites by promoting a slow pathway for securing knowledge, all from the same source. Descartes does not see a problem with his investigation. At the very most, he provides his followers with three moral maxims, but they are merely provisional guides that primarily aims at re-grounding our trust in the status quo.\textsuperscript{85} There is little to do about unexpected, unforeseeable future. Since attaining knowledge will take some time, Descartes forces us to wait patiently.

Descartes should have considered the opinions of others while he was putting together the pieces of his philosophical project. His vision for the sciences was met with a good amount of criticism from many notable figures. He attained passionate responses from well-known philosophers like Hobbes, to his close friends and colleagues. Many of the critiques raised against his project have to do with his unparalleled trust in science. Although he invites the attention to his project, he need not change his opinions. His understanding of the truthfulness of God allows him to trust his opinions, and thus, he has no reason to change his views. Instead, he championed his own cause. In fact, in defense of his philosophy, Descartes goes so far to say that the “principles of physics” are “harmless”.\textsuperscript{86} Based on Descartes’s agnostic depiction of nature,

\textsuperscript{86} PWD III, 537; 299
it makes sense that he would say this. The principle of harm is most instructive in human life. In nature, the question of harm is irrelevant. Although nature does not operate in terms of ethical principles, it is naïve of Descartes to assume that the principles of physics are harmless. Everything is in some degree a part of physics. Clearly, not everything is harmless. Descartes should have considered the role of human action. As for the principles of physics themselves, they only truly become principles once we discover them. I mean principles in the most rigid, scientific sense of the term. Human beings are unique in the sense that we have the tendency to attempt to understand natural phenomena, and designate names and labels. We are the ones that discover and give meaning to natural occurrences.

While physics is morally neutral, the principles of physics can be employed for harmful purposes. The harm is not as much in the usage of the principles as it is the harm caused by the usage. Since Descartes wanted to approach the sciences like a medical doctor, he must consider the fact that physics can be used to harm others. It cannot be doubted that the principles of physics are largely responsible for the great improvement in our quality of life. This is something that Descartes takes into account. The purpose of his organization of science is directed towards the improvement of life through sustainable principles derived from knowledge of nature, or physics. However, Descartes fails to realize the contrary scenario. Physics can be harmful when its principles are used to harm others, such as in the case of international wars, and civil conflict.

This may not be a notion that Descartes takes into account, yet is an important notion for Hobbes’s philosophy. Hobbes’s classification of the sciences consists only of existing things, either natural, or artificial. In some cases, it becomes questionable whether or not one can fully divorce the natural from the artificial. For instance, this is the case of machines. When faced with this difficulty, Hobbes deals with it, rather than merely avoid it. Unlike in the case of angels or
God, machines belong to the category of perceivable objects. Thus, Hobbes must deal with it. In the case of machines, they contain elements of both the natural and the artificial. This is because people utilize scientific principles in order to create the machines. Hobbes turns to what is the most essential, which is the role of production. Regardless of the intention, it cannot be doubted that the machines were in fact produced. Thus, Hobbes holds that it is the production of the machines that distinguishes them from natural existing things. Production is a human activity that helps us discern natural things from artificial things. Artificial things are produced by men, whereas natural things are not.\textsuperscript{87}

By considering the role of production, Hobbes gives us a basis to hold the each other accountable in the case that physics is used for harmful intentions. As Hobbes explains, in the case of machines, “….although the true mother of them be science, namely, the mathematics… they are brought into light by the hand of the artificer”.\textsuperscript{88} Hobbes points to the artificer’s role in introducing those inventions to us. Men are to be held accountable for the artifacts that they create. There is a hidden incentive for men to create artifacts that improve the quality of life. If one must be accountable for the artifacts they produce, then one might as well be celebrated for his contributions. In the case that the artifacts are harmful, he will be held accountable. Hobbes’s acknowledgment of where physics falls short makes his philosophy much more sustainable, and much more likely to bring about peace than Descartes’s.

Another instance where the natural meets the artificial has to do with human beings. While man is central to political philosophy, man is also part of physics. Hobbes, yet again, considers the role of production. Man is able to “make himself into a citizen… man works on

\textsuperscript{87} Strauss, 1953; pg. 8
\textsuperscript{88} Hobbes, 1994; pg. 51
himself, influencing and changing his nature, so that he becomes a citizen”.\textsuperscript{89} The citizen and the state are both works of art produced by men.\textsuperscript{90} While the state is by far the greatest, and most powerful work of art, it is mainly an “artificial man”.\textsuperscript{91} Human beings have turned the state into an artifact. When we become citizens, we become part of that artifact. Man becomes a component of that artifact, but he is not a machine.\textsuperscript{92} It merely refers to the fact that society raises man from an animal to a civilized person. Hobbes’s definition of man allows for an understanding of man as a part of the political world, apart from the natural world. This opens the possibility of a political science. By classifying man and politics under the same umbrella, we can now consider a science that focuses on just that. We can have a political science that studies the citizen and the state.

Descartes’s philosophy leaves out that possibility. First of all, Descartes description of a human being is largely apolitical. Descartes’s understanding of human nature is composed of only extension and consciousness.\textsuperscript{93} This is a private, rather than a public description of a human being. The existence of our very nature as such is pulled together by a notion truthful God. The understanding of this notion requires a great amount of self-reflection. It is a ‘truth’ that we must arrive at individually. It is not evidently connected to anything political. It is an apolitical conception of man. Furthermore, Descartes philosophy orients us in nature, not in civilization.

There is no grounds for a political philosophy or science as commonly understood in Descartes’s approach to science. Descartes eliminates the functions of the senses as he holds that reality is not demonstrated to us through senses.\textsuperscript{94} By eliminating the role of the senses in his

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[	extsuperscript{89}] Strauss, 1953; pg. 7
\item[	extsuperscript{90}] Hobbes, 1994; pg. 3
\item[	extsuperscript{91}] Ibid.
\item[	extsuperscript{92}] As demonstrated in the section titled, “Hobbes’s Hidden Agreement”, Hobbes’s political philosophy includes the problem of sense deception.
\item[	extsuperscript{93}] PWD, II 28 pg.19: Man is \textit{res cogitans} and \textit{res extensa}
\item[	extsuperscript{94}] Schall, \textit{Cartesianism and Political Theory}.1962; pg. 276
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science, Descartes leaves no grounds for a political science. Insofar as political science deals with the understanding of the best order for human beings to flourish, we must take account the significant role that sensation plays in man’s calculations. There can only be grounds for a “strict mechanical” analysis of politics, and since the mechanical side of man is said to be “normal and good”, there is little room for improvement. While our investigations in the sciences will eventually lead to moral knowledge under Descartes’s view, this moral knowledge will be derived independently from the sensations that impact our conceptions of things, especially political things. Therefore, this moral science must produce different evidence than a political science.

Descartes’s philosophy places too much emphasis on the imagination. He asks that we place all this effort in order to arrive at an idea of a truthful God. He works with the idea of a truthful God to demonstrate God’s truthfulness, after all. Certainly, reality cannot always match up to imagination. Descartes’s basis is far too idealistic, and leaves us with no tangible basis to ground ourselves in reality. Hobbes’s philosophy does the opposite. He begins by placing the citizen in the center of civilization. Under Hobbes’s philosophy, man is grounded in the commonly shared, readily accessible, political reality.

95 Ibid.


