



Of Religion

Thomas Hobbes

Seeing there are no signs nor fruit of religion but in man only, there is no cause to doubt but that the seed of religion is also only in man; and consisteth in some peculiar quality, or at least in some eminent degree thereof, not to be found in other living creatures.

And first, it is peculiar to the nature of man to be inquisitive into the causes of the events they see, some more, some less, but all men so much as to be curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evil fortune.

Secondly, upon the sight of anything that hath a beginning, to think also it had a cause which determined the same to begin then when it did, rather than sooner or later.

Thirdly, whereas there is no other felicity of beasts but the enjoying of their quotidian food, ease, and lusts; as having little or no foresight of the time to come for want of observation and memory of the order, consequence, and dependence of the things they see; man observeth how one event hath been produced by another, and remembereth in them antecedence and consequence; and when he cannot assure himself of the true causes of things (for the causes of good and evil fortune for the most part are invisible), he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth, or trusteth to the authority of other men such as he thinks to be his friends and wiser than himself.

The two first make anxiety. For being assured that there be causes of all things that have arrived hitherto, or shall arrive hereafter, it is impossible for a man, who continually endeavoureth to secure himself against the evil he fears, and procure the good he desireth, not to be in a perpetual solicitude of the time to come; so that every man, especially those that are over-provident, are in an estate like to that of Prometheus. For as Prometheus (which, interpreted, is the prudent man) was bound to the hill Caucasus, a place of large prospect, where an eagle, feeding on his liver, devoured in the day as much as was repaired in the night: so that man, which looks too far before him in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long gnawed on by fear of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep.

This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the dark, must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse either of their good or evil fortune but some power or agent invisible: in which sense perhaps it was that some of the old poets said that the gods were at first created by human fear: which, spoken of the gods (that is to say, of the many gods of the Gentiles), is very true. But the acknowledging of one God eternal, infinite, and omnipotent may more easily be derived from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several virtues and operations, than from the fear of what was to befall them in time to come. For he that, from any effect he seeth come to pass, should reason to the next and immediate cause thereof, and from thence to the cause of that cause, and plunge himself profoundly in the pursuit of causes, shall at last come to this, that there must be (as even the heathen philosophers confessed) one First Mover; that is, a first and an eternal cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the name of God: and all this without thought of their fortune, the solicitude whereof both inclines to fear and hinders them from the search of the causes of other things; and thereby gives occasion of feigning of as many gods as there be men that feign them.

And for the matter, or substance, of the invisible agents, so fancied, they could not by natural cogitation fall upon any other concept but that it was the same with that of the soul of man; and that the soul of man was of the same substance with that which appeareth in a dream to one that sleepeth; or in a looking-glass to one that is awake; which, men not knowing that such apparitions are nothing else but creatures of the fancy, think to be real and external substances, and therefore call them ghosts; as the Latins called them imagines and umbrae and thought them spirits (that is, thin aerial bodies), and those invisible agents, which they feared, to be like them, save that they appear and vanish when they please. But the opinion that such spirits were incorporeal, or immaterial, could never enter into the mind of any man by nature; because, though men may put together words of contradictory signification, as spirit and incorporeal, yet they can never have the imagination of anything answering to them: and therefore, men that by their own meditation arrive to the acknowledgement of one infinite, omnipotent, and eternal God choose rather to confess He is incomprehensible and above their understanding than to define His nature by spirit incorporeal, and then confess their definition to be unintelligible: or if they give him such a title, it is not dogmatically, with intention to make the Divine Nature understood, but piously, to honour Him with attributes of significations as remote as they can from the grossness of bodies visible.

Then, for the way by which they think these invisible agents wrought their effects; that is to say, what immediate causes they used in bringing things to pass, men that know not what it is that we call causing (that is, almost all men) have no other rule to guess by but by observing and remembering what they have seen to precede the like effect at some other time, or times before, without seeing between the antecedent and subsequent event any dependence or connexion at all: and therefore from the like things past, they expect the like things to come; and hope for good or evil luck, superstitiously, from things that have no part at all in the causing of it: as the Athenians did for their war at Lepanto demand another Phormio; the Pompeian faction for their war in Africa, another Scipio; and others have done in diverse other occasions since. In like manner they attribute their fortune to a stander by, to a lucky or unlucky place, to words spoken, especially if the name of God be amongst them, as charming, and conjuring (the liturgy of witches); insomuch as to believe they have power to turn a stone into bread, bread into a man, or anything into anything.

Thirdly, for the worship which naturally men exhibit to powers invisible, it can be no other but such expressions of their reverence as they would use towards men; gifts, petitions, thanks, submission of body, considerate addresses, sober behaviour, premeditated words, swearing (that is, assuring one another of their promises), by invoking them. Beyond that, reason suggesteth nothing, but leaves them either to rest there, or for further ceremonies to rely on those they believe to be wiser than themselves.

Lastly, concerning how these invisible powers declare to men the things which shall hereafter come to pass, especially concerning their good or evil fortune in general, or good or ill success in any particular undertaking, men are naturally at a stand; save that using to conjecture of the time to come by the time past, they are very apt, not only to take casual things, after one or two encounters, for prognostics of the like encounter ever after, but also to believe the like prognostics from other men of whom they have once conceived a good opinion.

And in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion; which, by reason of the different fancies, judgements, and passions of several men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different that those which are used by one man are for the most part ridiculous to another.

For these seeds have received culture from two sorts of men. One sort have been they that have nourished and ordered them, according to their own invention. The other have done it by God's commandment and direction. But both sorts have done it with a purpose to make those men that relied on them the more apt to obedience, laws, peace, charity, and civil society. So that the religion of the former sort is a part of human politics; and teacheth part of the duty which earthly kings require of their subjects. And the religion of the latter sort is divine politics;

and containeth precepts to those that have yielded themselves subjects in the kingdom of God. Of the former sort were all the founders of Commonwealths, and the lawgivers of the Gentiles: of the latter sort were Abraham, Moses, and our blessed Saviour, by whom have been derived unto us the laws of the kingdom of God.

And for that part of religion which consisteth in opinions concerning the nature of powers invisible, there is almost nothing that has a name that has not been esteemed amongst the Gentiles, in one place or another, a god or devil; or by their poets feigned to be animated, inhabited, or possessed by some spirit or other.

The unformed matter of the world was a god by the name of Chaos.

The heaven, the ocean, the planets, the fire, the earth, the winds, were so many gods.

Men, women, a bird, a crocodile, a calf, a dog, a snake, an onion, a leek, were deified. Besides that, they filled almost all places with spirits called demons: the plains, with Pan and Panises, or Satyrs; the woods, with Fauns and Nymphs; the sea, with Tritons and other Nymphs; every river and fountain, with a ghost of his name and with Nymphs; every house, with its Lares, or familiars; every man, with his Genius; Hell, with ghosts and spiritual officers, as Charon, Cerberus, and the Furies; and in the night time, all places with larvae, lemures, ghosts of men deceased, and a whole kingdom of fairies and bugbears. They have also ascribed divinity, and built temples, to mere accidents and qualities; such as are time, night, day, peace, concord, love, contention, virtue, honour, health, rust, fever, and the like; which when they prayed for, or against, they prayed to as if there were ghosts of those names hanging over their heads, and letting fall or withholding that good, or evil, for or against which they prayed. They invoked also their own wit, by the name of Muses; their own ignorance, by the name of Fortune; their own lust, by the name of Cupid; their own rage, by the name Furies; their own privy members by the name of Priapus; and attributed their pollutions to incubi and succubae: insomuch as there was nothing which a poet could introduce as a person in his poem which they did not make either a god or a devil.

The same authors of the religion of the Gentiles, observing the second ground for religion, which is men's ignorance of causes, and thereby their aptness to attribute their fortune to causes on which there was no dependence at all apparent, took occasion to obtrude on their ignorance, instead of second causes, a kind of second and ministerial gods; ascribing the cause of fecundity to Venus, the cause of arts to Apollo, of subtlety and craft to Mercury, of tempests and storms to Aeolus, and of other effects to other gods; insomuch as there was amongst the heathen almost as great variety of gods as of business.

And to the worship which naturally men conceived fit to be used towards their gods, namely, oblations, prayers, thanks, and the rest formerly named, the same legislators of the Gentiles have added their images, both in picture and sculpture, that the more ignorant sort (that is to say, the most part or generality of the people), thinking the gods for whose representation they were made were really included and as it were housed within them, might so much the more stand in fear of them: and endowed them with lands, and houses, and officers, and revenues, set apart from all other human uses; that is, consecrated, made holy to those their idols; as caverns, groves, woods, mountains, and whole islands; and have attributed to them, not only the shapes, some of men, some of beasts, some of monsters, but also the faculties and passions of men and beasts; as sense, speech, sex, lust, generation, and this not only by mixing one with another to propagate the kind of gods, but also by mixing with men and women to beget mongrel gods, and but inmates of heaven, as Bacchus, Hercules, and others; besides, anger, revenge, and other passions of living creatures, and the actions proceeding from them, as fraud, theft, adultery, sodomy, and any vice that may be taken for an effect of power or a cause of pleasure; and all such vices as amongst men are taken to be against law rather than against honour.

Lastly, to the prognostics of time to come, which are naturally but conjectures upon the experience of time past, and supernaturally, divine revelation, the same authors of the religion of the Gentiles, partly upon pretended experience, partly upon pretended revelation, have added innumerable other superstitious ways of divination, and made men believe they should find their fortunes, sometimes in the ambiguous or senseless answers of the priests at Delphi,

Delos, Ammon, and other famous oracles; which answers were made ambiguous by design, to own the event both ways; or absurd, by the intoxicating vapour of the place, which is very frequent in sulphurous caverns: sometimes in the leaves of the Sibyls, of whose prophecies, like those perhaps of Nostradamus (for the fragments now extant seem to be the invention of later times), there were some books in reputation in the time of the Roman republic: sometimes in the insignificant speeches of madmen, supposed to be possessed with a divine spirit, which possession they called enthusiasm; and these kinds of foretelling events were accounted theomancy, or prophecy: sometimes in the aspect of the stars at their nativity, which was called horoscopy, and esteemed a part of judiciary astrology: sometimes in their own hopes and fears, called and fears, called thumomancy, or presage: sometimes in the prediction of witches that pretended conference with the dead, which is called necromancy, conjuring, and witchcraft, and is but juggling and confederate knavery: sometimes in the casual flight or feeding of birds, called augury: sometimes in the entrails of a sacrificed beast, which was haruspicy: sometimes in dreams: sometimes in croaking of ravens, or chattering of birds: sometimes in the lineaments of the face, which was called metoposcopy; or by palmistry in the lines of the hand, in casual words called omina: sometimes in monsters or unusual accidents; as eclipses, comets, rare meteors, earthquakes, inundations, uncouth births, and the like, which they called portenta, and ostenta, because they thought them to portend or foreshow some great calamity to come: sometimes in mere lottery, as cross and pile; counting holes in a sieve; dipping of verses in Homer and Virgil; and innumerable other such vain conceits. So easy are men to be drawn to believe anything from such men as have gotten credit with them; and can with gentleness, and dexterity, take hold of their fear and ignorance.

And therefore the first founders and legislators of Commonwealths amongst the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience and peace, have in all places taken care: first, to imprint their minds a belief that those precepts which they gave concerning religion might not be thought to proceed from their own device, but from the dictates of some god or other spirit; or else that they themselves were of a higher nature than mere mortals, that their laws might the more easily be received; so Numa Pompilius pretended to receive the ceremonies he instituted amongst the Romans from the nymph Egeria and the first king and founder of the kingdom of Peru pretended himself and his wife to be the children of the sun; and Mahomet, to set up his new religion, pretended to have conferences with the Holy Ghost in form of a dove. Secondly, they have had a care to make it believed that the same things were displeasing to the gods which were forbidden by the laws. Thirdly, to prescribe ceremonies, supplications, sacrifices, and festivals by which they were to believe the anger of the gods might be appeased; and that ill success in war, great contagions of sickness, earthquakes, and each man's private misery came from the anger of the gods; and their anger from the neglect of their worship, or the forgetting or mistaking some point of the ceremonies required. And though amongst the ancient Romans men were not forbidden to deny that which in the poets is written of the pains and pleasures after this life, which divers of great authority and gravity in that state have in their harangues openly derided, yet that belief was always more cherished, than the contrary.

And by these, and such other institutions, they obtained in order to their end, which was the peace of the Commonwealth, that the common people in their misfortunes, laying the fault on neglect, or error in their ceremonies, or on their own disobedience to the laws, were the less apt to mutiny against their governors. And being entertained with the pomp and pastime of festivals and public games made in honour of the gods, needed nothing else but bread to keep them from discontent, murmuring, and commotion against the state. And therefore the Romans, that had conquered the greatest part of the then known world, made no scruple of tolerating any religion whatsoever in the city of Rome itself, unless it had something in it that could not consist with their civil government; nor do we read that any religion was there forbidden but that of the Jews, who (being the peculiar kingdom of God) thought it unlawful to acknowledge subjection to any mortal king or state whatsoever. And thus you see how the religion of the Gentiles was a part of their policy.

But where God himself by supernatural revelation planted religion, there he also made to

himself a peculiar kingdom, and gave laws, not only of behaviour towards himself, but also towards one another; and thereby in the kingdom of God, the policy and laws civil are a part of religion; and therefore the distinction of temporal and spiritual domination hath there no place. It is true that God is king of all the earth; yet may He be king of a peculiar and chosen nation. For there is no more incongruity therein than that he that hath the general command of the whole army should have withal a peculiar regiment or company of his own. God is king of all the earth by His power, but of His chosen people, He is king by covenant. But to speak more largely of the kingdom of God, both by nature and covenant, I have in the following discourse assigned another place.

From the propagation of religion, it is not hard to understand the causes of the resolution of the same into its first seeds or principles; which are only an opinion of a deity, and powers invisible and supernatural; that can never be so abolished out of human nature, but that new religions may again be made to spring out of them by the culture of such men as for such purpose are in reputation.

For seeing all formed religion is founded at first upon the faith which a multitude hath in some one person, whom they believe not only to be a wise man and to labour to procure their happiness, but also to be a holy man to whom God Himself vouchsafeth to declare His will supernaturally, it followeth necessarily when they that have the government of religion shall come to have either the wisdom of those men, their sincerity, or their love suspected, or that they shall be unable to show any probable token of divine revelation, that the religion which they desire to uphold must be suspected likewise and (without the fear of the civil sword) contradicted and rejected.

That which taketh away the reputation of wisdom in him that formeth a religion, or addeth to it when it is already formed, is the enjoining of a belief of contradictories: for both parts of a contradiction cannot possibly be true, and therefore to enjoin the belief of them is an argument of ignorance, which detects the author in that, and discredits him in all things else he shall propound as from revelation supernatural: which revelation a man may indeed have of many things above, but of nothing against natural reason.

That which taketh away the reputation of sincerity is the doing or saying of such things as appear to be signs that what they require other men to believe is not believed by themselves; all which doings or sayings are therefore called scandalous because they be stumbling-blocks that make men to fall in the way of religion: as injustice, cruelty, profaneness, avarice, and luxury. For who can believe that he that doth ordinarily such actions, as proceed from any of these roots, believeth there is any such invisible power to be feared as he affrighteth other men withal for lesser faults?

That which taketh away the reputation of love is the being detected of private ends: as when the belief they require of others conduceth, or seemeth to conduce, to the acquiring of dominion, riches, dignity, or secure pleasure to themselves only or specially. For that which men reap benefit by to themselves they are thought to do for their own sakes, and not for love of others.

Lastly, the testimony that men can render of divine calling can be no other than the operation of miracles, or true prophecy (which also is a miracle), or extraordinary felicity. And therefore, to those points of religion which have been received from them that did such miracles, those that are added by such as approve not their calling by some miracle obtain no greater belief than what the custom and laws of the places in which they be educated have wrought into them. For as in natural things men of judgement require natural signs and arguments, so in supernatural things they require signs supernatural (which are miracles) before they consent inwardly and from their hearts.

All which causes of the weakening of men's faith do manifestly appear in the examples following. First, we have the example of the children of Israel, who, when Moses that had approved his calling to them by miracles, and by the happy conduct of them out of Egypt, was absent but forty days, revolted from the worship of the true God recommended to them by him, and, setting up (Exodus 32.1.2) a golden calf for their god, relapsed into the idolatry of

the Egyptians from whom they had been so lately delivered. And again, after Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and that generation which had seen the great works of God in Israel were dead, another generation arose and served Baal. (Judges 2.11] So that Miracles failing, faith also failed.

Again, when the sons of Samuel, being constituted by their father judges in Beer-sheba, received bribes and judged unjustly, the people of Israel refused any more to have God to be their king in other manner than He was king of other people, and therefore cried out to Samuel to choose them a king after the manner of the nations. (Samuel 8.3) So that justice failing, faith also failed, insomuch as they deposed their God from reigning over them.

And whereas in the planting of Christian religion the oracles ceased in all parts of the Roman Empire, and the number of Christians increased wonderfully every day and in every place by the preaching of the Apostles and Evangelists, a great part of that success may reasonably be attributed to the contempt into which the priests of the Gentiles of that time had brought themselves by their uncleanness, avarice, and juggling between princes. Also the religion of the Church of Rome was partly for the same cause abolished in England and many other parts of Christendom, insomuch as the failing of virtue in the pastors maketh faith fail in the people, and partly from bringing of the philosophy and doctrine of Aristotle into religion by the Schoolmen; from whence there arose so many contradictions and absurdities as brought the clergy into a reputation both of ignorance and of fraudulent intention, and inclined people to revolt from them, either against the will of their own princes as in France and Holland, or with their will as in England.

Lastly, amongst the points by the Church of Rome declared necessary for salvation, there be so many manifestly to the advantage of the Pope so many of his spiritual subjects residing in the territories of other Christian princes that, were it not for the mutual emulation of those princes, they might without war or trouble exclude all foreign authority, as easily as it has been excluded in England. For who is there that does not see to whose benefit it conduceth to have it believed that a king hath not his authority from Christ unless a bishop crown him? That a king, if he be a priest, cannot marry? That whether a prince be born in lawful marriage, or not, must be judged by authority from Rome? That subjects may be freed from their allegiance if by the court of Rome the king be judged a heretic? That a king, as Childeric of France, may be deposed by a Pope, as Pope Zachary, for no cause, and his kingdom given to one of his subjects? That the clergy, and regulars, in what country soever, shall be exempt from the jurisdiction of their king in cases criminal? Or who does not see to whose profit redound the fees of private Masses, and vales of purgatory, with other signs of private interest enough to mortify the most lively faith, if, as I said, the civil magistrate and custom did not more sustain it than any opinion they have of the sanctity, wisdom, or probity of their teachers? So that I may attribute all the changes of religion in the world to one and the same cause, and that is displeasing priests; and those not only amongst catholics, but even in that Church that hath presumed most of reformation.

Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Chapter 12 (1651).

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