

Hobbes's critique of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories

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1. *The Hobbesian critique of Aristotelianism*

There is a deep difference between Hobbes's humanistic and philosophical education. Whereas his early humanistic education, between 1596 and 1602, is focused on Greek and Latin historians and poets (Homer, Demosthenes, Euripides, Thucydides, Livy, Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus), his philosophical education is carried out under the sign of Aristotle. At the Oxford Magdalen Hall, between 1603 and 1607, Hobbes studies logic and physique, without drawing from these disciplines a genuine interest.¹ The early signs of irritation towards the Aristotelian thought handed down by Scholasticism and taught at Oxford, where the metaphysical dimension of Aristotle was emphasized, will not be too long to filter through. This critical approach emerged at first with the recovery of the beloved humanistic studies,² during which Hobbes makes full use of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* though. The critique of Aristotelianism was developed organically at the level of natural philosophy (in relation to which Hobbes followed the way opened by Galilean physics);³ then, it was concentrated at the level of "first philosophy," concerning above all the problems of method and logic;⁴ and as we know from the first edition of *De cive* (1642), it eventually manifested at the level of political philosophy.⁵ Therefore, the critical comparison with Aristotle encompasses over a broad spectrum and involves Hobbes's entire philosophical system, from logic to physics, from ontology to ethics and politics, although in different moments of his thought. Herein it is not possible to deepen this wide spectrum of questions relating to a comparison between Hobbes and Aristotle. The analysis will be limited to a specific issue, *the doctrine of categories*, which regards above all "first philosophy" and implies some theoretical consequences at the level of

¹ For Hobbes's biography cf. Schuhmann 1998; Martinich 1999; Malcom 2002.

² Cf. Hobbes 1995. The Hobbesian texts which show clear signs of disconnection from Aristotelianism are the *Introduction* to the English translation of *History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides* (1629) and *Short Tract on First Principles* (1631 ca.). On Hobbes's moving away from Aristotle is still relevant the classic study by Leo Strauss (1936).

³ Besides the classical texts by Arrigo Pacchi (1965) and Aldo G. Gargani (1971), for the references to the Hobbesian natural philosophy cf. Shapin and Schaffer 1985 (2011²); Bertman 1991; Leijenhorst 2002; Lupoli 2006.

⁴ On Hobbesian "first philosophy" cf. Bernhardt 1985, 1988; Demé 1985; Zarka 1987; Bernhardt 1993; Esfeld 1995; Gert 2001; Weber 2005; Paganini 2007; Pettit 2008; Paganini 2010.

⁵ Besides the classical works by Crawford B. Macpherson, Raymond Polin, Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss, on the differences between the Hobbesian political philosophy and the Aristotelian tradition cf. Lessay 1988; Bobbio 1989; Zarka 1995; Altini 2012.

natural philosophy. In order to appreciate the foundation, the context and the reasons of the Hobbesian critique of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical background of “first philosophy” which Hobbes develops against Aristotle and which goes through all his theoretical works, from the first part of the *Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (1640) to *De motu, loco et tempore* (1643), from the first part of the *Leviathan* (1651) to *De corpore* (1655) and to *De homine* (1658).⁶

Besides the different formulations of Hobbes’s theory of knowledge in the *Elements*, *De motu*, *Leviathan*, *De corpore* and *De homine*, it exists a crucial principle of his consideration of knowledge: man really knows only the things whose causes depend on his activity (cf. *C*, §§ XVII.28, XVIII.4; *Cor.*, § XXV.1; *H*, §§ I.1, X.4-5). Man has an exact and undoubted knowledge, i.e. a scientific knowledge, only of what he does, of what he constructs, of what he is cause of, of what depends on his arbitrary will. This “construction” has to be obviously deliberate and aware. Only in this way, the world, which is a human creation, becomes completely overt, because man is its only cause. It seems quite clear that nature does not fall into the things built by man and for this reason the knowledge of nature is, and will always be, *hypothetic*:

No Discourse whatsoever, can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, past, or to come. For, as for the knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and even after, Memory. And for the knowledge of Consequence, which I have said before is called Science, it is not Absolute, but Conditionall (*L*, 98).

For Hobbes even the ontological fundamentals of natural philosophy (the body and the movement) are *supposed* to exist: science is the knowledge of the consequences, it is not the assessment of factual truths. This Hobbesian conception of knowledge is based on two distinct philosophical orientations: sensualism and nominalism. Despite their reciprocal connection, the first perspective is above all linked to natural philosophy, the second one to “first philosophy.”⁷

The origin of all man’s thoughts is the sensation, whose cause dwells in the external bodies, which generate effects operating on the perceptive faculties (cf. *E*, I.II; *MLT*, §§ XXX.3-6; *L*, I; *Cor.*, §§ XXV.1-4). Sensation is knowledge, but it is not science because it does not exist directly “in nature” without the mediation of reasoning. Sensation indeed is a distinctive

⁶ The following abbreviations have been used in referring Hobbes’s works: *E* = *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (Hobbes 1994); *C* = *De cive. The Latin Version* (Hobbes 1983); *Cor.* = *Elementorum Philosophiae Sectio Prima De Corpore* (Hobbes 1839-1845a); *H* = *Elementorum Philosophiae Sectio Secunda De Homine* (Hobbes 1839-1845b); *L* = *Leviathan* (Hobbes 2012a); *MLT* = *Critique du «De mundo» de Thomas White* (Hobbes 1973, my translation from Latin).

⁷ The most complete presentation of Hobbesian “first philosophy” is contained in the second part of *De corpore*.

feature of both human being and animal, while the reasoning (which uses concepts and images resulting from sensory perceptions, but not clearly identifiable with them) is the sole prerogative of man. It is then evident that this *subjectivist* conception of sensation⁸—as the first and necessary but *not sufficient* step towards the scientific knowledge—falls in the more general *constructivist* conception of knowledge elaborated by Hobbes. Evidence of all this is the hypothesis of the *annihilated* world, which is elaborated in order to clarify the mental character of conceptual contents of knowledge:

For the understanding of what I mean by the power cognitive, we must remember and acknowledge that there be in our minds continually certain images or conceptions of the things without us, insomuch that if a man could be alive, and all the rest of the world annihilated, he should nevertheless retain the image thereof, and of all those things which he had before seen and perceived in it; every man by his own experience knowing that the absence or destruction of things once imagined, doth not cause the absence or destruction of the imagination itself. This imagery and representations of the qualities of things without us is that we call our cognition, imagination, ideas, notice, conception, or knowledge of them. And the faculty, or power, by which we are capable of such knowledge, is that I here call power cognitive, or conceptive, the power of knowing or conceiving (*E*, 22).⁹

In the Hobbesian philosophy the extra-mental existence of the bodies is a pure supposition, which could be justified only in a rational way, not in an empirical one. Although knowledge is allowed only by sensation, it is clear for Hobbes that the phenomena do not correspond necessarily to reality. For this reason, if natural philosophy claims to be scientific knowledge, it should be based on “first philosophy.”

Alongside this particular interpretation of sensualism, the Hobbesian conception of knowledge finds its own immediate foundation in nominalism (cf. *E*, I.IV-V; *MLT*, §§ XIV.1; *L*, IV; *Cor.*, II-III; *H*, §§ X.1-2). The names of things do not correspond to the essence or to the nature of things, because

⁸ “Because the image in vision consisting in colour and shape is the knowledge we have of the qualities of the object of that sense; it is no hard matter for a man to fall into this opinion, that the same colour and shape are the very qualities themselves; and for the same cause, that sound and noise are qualities of the bell, or of the air. And this opinion hath been so long received, that the contrary must needs appear a great paradox; and yet the introduction of species visible and intelligible (which is necessary for the maintenance of that opinion) passing to and from the object, is worse than any paradox, as being a plain impossibility. I shall therefore endeavour to make plain these four points: (1) That the subject wherein colour and image are inherent, is not the object or thing seen; (2) That that is nothing without us really which we call an image or colour. (3) That the said image or colour is but an apparition unto us of that motion, agitation, or alteration, which the object worketh in the brain or spirits, or some internal substance of the head; (4) That as in conception by vision, so also in the conceptions that arise from other senses, the subject of their inherence is not object, but the sentient. [...] And from thence also is followeth, that whatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they are not there, but are seemings and apparitions only” (*E*, 23, 26).

⁹ On the hypothesis of the annihilated world cf. also *Cor.*, § VII.1.

they are imposed by the voluntary decision of men. The aim is to indicate and to mark the concepts of things *as they are thought in mind* (and not the concepts of things themselves).¹⁰ Only the institution of *names*, articulated in *discourses* throughout reciprocal connections, makes the human being able of science. Therefore, the truth does not consist in a form of *adequatio* between *res* and *verba*, but is the correct ordination and connection of the names inside the propositions. The truth does not concern the thing, but the proposition, i.e. the discourse (cf. *E*, §§ I.V.10, I.VI.2-4; *MLT*, §§ XXX.15-18; *L*, IV; *Cor.*, §§ III.7-8, III.10, V.1), allowed by the connection of names. The way the human being realizes this connection is the *calculation*:

When a man *Reasoneth*, hee does nothing else but conceive a summe totall, from *Addition* of parcels; or conceive a Remainder, from *Substraction* of one summe from another: which (if it be done by Words,) is conceiving of the consequence from the names of all the parts, to the name of the whole; or from the names of the whole and one part, to the name of the other part. [...] These operations are not incident to Numbers onely, but to all manner of things that can be added together, and taken one out of another. [...] For REASON, in this sense, is nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts (*L*, 64).¹¹

Since the subject of names is the only thing that can be taken into account in the logical-argumentative calculation (i.e. in the procedure of adding and subtracting the definitions), Hobbes states that the truth of a discourse consists in the correct ordination of names inside a proposition. Methodological or calculation errors, as the imposition of names of the *bodies* to the *accidents* (and vice versa), should be avoided (cf. *L*, 52-54; *Cor.*, VIII). The importance of denominations and of definitions determines in Hobbes the necessity of a comparison with the theory of universals (and implicitly with the Aristotelian doctrine of categories), in order to base the rational and demonstrative character of philosophical knowledge on the centrality of *nomenclature*. “The manner how Speech serveth to the remembrance of the consequence of causes and effects, consisteth in the imposing of *Names*, and the *Connexion* of them” (*L*, 52). According to Hobbes, the names can be proper and singular, if they refer to only one thing (John, this tree, etc.), or common to many things (man, tree, etc.)

every of which though but one Name, is nevertheless the name of particular things; in respect of all which together, it is called an *Universall*; there being nothing in the world *Universall* but Names; for the things named, are every one of them *Individual* and *Singular* (*L*, 52).

¹⁰ “A Name or Appellation therefore is the voice of a man, arbitrarily imposed, for a mark to bring to his mind some conception concerning the thing on which it is imposed” (*E*, 35).

¹¹ Cf. also *Cor.*, §§ I.2-3; *H*, § X.3.

Only the proper and singular name determines the image of one thing, while the universal name brings together many things thanks to their likeness in a particular accident.¹²

The conditional character, at the ontological level, of rational knowledge does not imply a diminution of the status of “first philosophy.” On the contrary, knowing with certainty means for Hobbes knowing the truth of propositions and the necessity of the consequences without worrying about the “correspondence” between theoretical and factual knowledge. Since the experience does not allow to achieve universal conclusions, the hypothesis of the annihilated world makes clear the purely mental nature of the knowledge. This hypothesis—representing the *tabula rasa* of the world of the experience by way of the substitution of reality with a mental experiment through which it is rationally recreated—establishes a separation between knowing and being, language and things, logic and ontology. Thus, Hobbesian “first philosophy” does not have an ontological overtone, but a logical-deductive one. In fact, it represents the procedural condition for the construction of an artificial methodological apparatus of calculation and of linguistic definition oriented to the knowledge of the bodies in movement. It forms the closely logical, rational and demonstrative frame of knowledge, which creates the conditions of possibility of natural philosophy (whose main features are not only logical-rational, but also empirical, inductive and experimental insofar related to the sense perception).

Once “first philosophy” affirmed that the scientific knowledge is based only on logical-linguistic processes of denomination and of connection between names by means of calculation, the Hobbesian natural philosophy is organized around the two concepts of *body* and *movement*. The use of these concepts in a deterministic framework (in a mechanistic and materialistic sense), which is modelled on the new Galilean science, brings to the front the relationship between cause and effect intended as the only way to explain the natural phenomena. The world consists only of bodies in which inheres the movement, considered as the cause of all the changes and of all the

¹² “The universality of one name to many things, hath been the cause that men think that the things themselves are universal. And do seriously contend, that besides Peter and John, and all the rest of the men that are, have been, or shall be in the world, there is yet somewhat else that we call man, (viz.) man in general, deceiving themselves by taking the universal, or general appellation, for the thing it signifieth. [...] It is plain therefore, that there is nothing universal but names; which are therefore also called indefinite” (*E*, 36). Here Hobbes seems to get closer to the Aristotelian argumentative structure which, in the *Categories*, distinguishes between universal substance and singular substances by attributing to the latter the logical and ontological priority in relation to the universal substance (cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 2a 11 – 2b 22): in fact, if the individual substances (Parmenides, Socrates, etc.) did not exist, also the universal substance would never exist.

natural phenomena. For the explanation of the latter is not necessary to postulate an Unmoved Mover: “There can be no cause of notion, except in a body contiguous and moved” (*Cor.*, § IX.7). The Hobbesian universe is a corporeal universe, in which *ens* is *matter* and from which is excluded any form of incorporeal essence, since even God is *corporeal*.¹³

The first principle of religion in all nations, is, *that God is*, that is to say, that God really is something, and not a mere fancy; but that which is really something, is considerable alone by itself, as being *somewhere*. In which sense a man is a thing real; for I can consider him *to be*, without considering any other thing *to be* besides him. And for the same reason, the earth, the air, the stars, heaven, and their parts, are all of them things real. And because whatsoever is real here, or there, or in any place, has dimensions, that is to say, magnitude; that which hath magnitude, wheter it be visible or invisible, finite or infinite, is called by all the learned a *body*. It followeth, that all real things, in that they are *somewhere*, are corporal (Hobbes 1839-1845d: 393).

Hobbes’s God is the primary cause of the universe (cf. *E*, I.XI; *C*, §§ II.21; XIII.1; XIV.19; *L*, XII) because it is—even it—matter in movement, i.e. a material principle. The God of the causes—which is corporeal but not personal, efficient cause of the movement, backbone of the mechanisms of the material universe and of its rationality—is not the biblical God nor the God of Scholasticism. The natural reason is able to recognize God only as primary cause. Body and movement are necessary and sufficient principles to explain, according to Hobbes, all the natural phenomena. The Hobbesian corporeal universe finds therefore in itself the reasons for its own functioning and for its own knowability by means of names, concepts, definitions, and calculation:

The *subject* of Philosophy, or the matter it treats of, is every body of which we can conceive any generation, and which we may, by any consideration thereof, compare with other bodies, or which is capable of composition and resolution; that is to say, every body of whose generation or properties we can have any knowledge. And this may be deduced from the definition of philosophy, whose profession it is to search out the properties of bodies from their generation, or their generation from their properties; and, therefore, where there is no generation or property, there is no philosophy (*Cor.*, § I.8).

¹³ On several occasions, Hobbes moves his criticism towards the spiritualistic identification between *ens*, substance, and essence elaborated by Scholasticism. In the *Appendix ad Leviathan* of 1668 (but also in *An Historical Narration concerning Heresy and the Punishment thereof*, published posthumously in 1680, and in *An Answer to Bishop Bramhall’s Book, called “The Catching of the Leviathan”*, published posthumously in 1682), Hobbes’s argumentation is based on deterministic and materialistic principles: nothing exists if it is not a body, i.e. a real *ens*, extended and located in space. For this reason, God cannot be nothing but a body: accordingly, despite its infinity, God is divisible in parts. Cf. Hobbes 2012b, 1839-1845c, d (“He knows I deny both, and say he is *corporeal* and *infinite*,” Hobbes 1839-1845d: 306).

2. The comparison between Hobbesian and Aristotelian doctrines of categories

Considering the general background of Hobbes's theory of knowledge, radically anti-Aristotelian and anti-Scholastic, his critique remarks on the Aristotelian doctrine of categories, included above all in *De motu, loco et tempore*, plays a significant role. In order to emphasize the difference between logic and ontology, Hobbes establishes the rational and demonstrative character of the philosophical knowledge—modelled on mathematics and geometry—on the *theory of universals* rather than on the relationship between cause and effect, and focuses on the critique of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories. Hobbes's position on the theory of universals makes explicit his reference to Aristotle from the very beginning of *De motu*:

Philosophy is the science of general theorems, or of all universals to do with material of any kind, the truth of which can be demonstrated by natural reason. The main part of philosophy, and the basis of all the other parts, is the science where theorems concerning the attributes of *ens* at large are demonstrated, and the science is called first philosophy. It therefore deals with *ens*, essence, matter, form, quantity, the finite, the infinite, quality, cause, effect, motion, space, time, place, vacuum, unity, number, and all the other notions which Aristotle discusses, partly in the eight books of *Physics* and partly in those other books which were subsequently called *Metà ta physikà*. It is these latter that gave first philosophy its present name, Metaphysics (*MLT*, § I.1).

As we know, *De motu* expresses a controversy against the attempts to mediate between the Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy and the new physical cosmology of Galileo and Copernicus proposed by Thomas White in *De mundo dialogi tres*—and implicitly against the metaphysical degenerations of all the Aristotelian-Scholastic traditions which have betrayed Aristotle's doctrines.¹⁴ Here it is clear that Aristotle is the point of reference for Hobbes's discourse on universals and, as a result, on categories. Firstly, it should be noted that Hobbes prefers the denomination of *first philosophy* rather than of *metaphysics*, in order to avoid the common misinterpretation of metaphysics as the science which transcends nature. Since in philosophy there are no supernatural knowledges, the reference to metaphysical entities is misleading because it threatens to reduce the philosophical discourse to revelation and not to a scientific demonstration. Secondly, Hobbes intends to address—just like Aristotle did, according to him—the problem of *ens*, considered as the most common and essential in

¹⁴ Despite his strong anti-Aristotelian controversy, Hobbes is well aware of the difference between Aristotle's thought and the Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrines which dominated the European universities between the XVI century and the XVII century. In several passages of his works he tends to distinguish between the genuine teachings of Aristotle and the Scholastic doctrines. Cf. *E*, § II.VI.9; *MLT*, §§ VI.1-4, VI.9; *L*, 24, 50, 956 ss., 1054 ss.; *Cor.*, § XI.7.

the philosophic issues which concern particular entities (sky, earth, animals, etc.) (cf. *MLT*, § IX.16). Nevertheless, here ends the agreement and begins the critical comparison with the Stagirite, regarding the science of the *ens* and the doctrine of categories.¹⁵

Although for Aristotle the categories indicate the way things are, by identifying their original and different features, the distinction between the theory of the Stagirite and the theory of Hobbes could not be represented simply as a difference between ontology and logic, between *res* and *verba*. The categories—which in the Aristotelian thought are ten: substance/essence (*ousia*), quantity, quality, relation, place, time, being in a position, having, doing and being-affected (cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 1b 25 ss.)—have a logical-linguistic value also for Aristotle because they are meant to solve the problem of the proper predication of the universal entities through the definition of the respective relationship between genus and species. However, the exclusiveness of the logical-linguistic dimension, with no regard for the ontological one, is a typical feature of the Hobbesian approach. The role of all the categories, including the essential category of substance, is to attribute the names to the different representations of the entities that are in the mind:

In the book he called *Categories*, i.e. *appellations*, Aristotle distinguished the names or appellations of things into ten types: certain names are assigned because of the species or of the images that arouse in the mind. These names answer the question: “What is it?” i.e. “What is the thing whose image we have?”. The category of *ousion*, or of essences, consists of these images. Other names answer a question concerning a part of the image: for parts of the image in the mind are its extent or size or shape, colour, and any other perceptible quality, e.g. the question: “How big is what we see or what we have the idea?” (*MLT*, § V.2).

Whereas for Aristotle the categories are the most universal genus of the being, for Hobbes they are *names*, i.e. denominations of the entities. In addition, in Hobbesian “first philosophy” the ten Aristotelian categories are reduced only to two, the *body* and the *accident*. On this anti-Aristotelian path, Hobbes recovers explicitly Plato’s bipartition between *ens* and *esse* (even if without applying the model of Platonic ideas, but he firmly retains the deterministic, materialistic and mechanistic perspective). The first genus indicates all the things that exist, i.e. the bodies; the second genus indicates the ways by which the entities are conceived, that is the accidents which inhere in the bodies (cf. *MLT*, § XXVII.1). However, it exists also a

¹⁵ *De motu* is the Hobbesian work in which the name of Aristotle recurs, in an explicit way, more frequently. Apart from the statute of “first philosophy” and from the doctrine of categories, the Hobbesian controversy against Aristotle devised in several directions: metaphysics (§§ VII.2-5, IX.16, XXVII.3-6, XXXV.1-9), physics (particularly with regard to the concept of movement and of change: §§ V.1, V.3, VI.4-9, XI.7-8, XIV.1-5, XXVII.7-12, XXVII.17-18, XL.2-8), astronomy (§§ V.5, VI.1), and geometry (§§ VI.2-4). For the Hobbesian critique of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories cf. also *Cor.*, VII-VIII, XII, XXVII-XXIX.

similarity between the Hobbesian and Aristotelian approach to the categories: Aristotle did not include the *being* in the categories—since the being is not a genus because it does not indicate something that is determined—as well as Hobbes, who considers the being as an accident of the body (cf. *MLT*, § XXVII.2. Cf. also *Cor.*, §§ VIII.1-3).

The first and basic category of Hobbesian philosophy is indeed the body, intended as a portion of space independent from the human thought. For Hobbes the substance is not the being in its first meaning, as Aristotle wanted to (cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 2a 10 ss., 2a 34 ss., 2b 6 ss.), but the thing of which we have an image in the mind. The same goes in *De motu* for the Aristotelian categories. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the crucial instance of the doctrine of categories—the determination of the differences between the things and their varieties—was wrong or useless. Also the task of Hobbesian “first philosophy” coincides with the definition of a series of regulated and ordered denominations. In Hobbes, this definition occurs through a *nomenclature* of the different terms, from *ens* to the body, from the matter to the form, from the essence to the accident (cf. *MLT*, §§ II.1-2, II.6, XII.3-4, XXVII.1-3, XXVIII.1-2, XXVIII.4-5), in order to define and clarify the names used in the argumentations so that their meaning is univocal.

True philosophy is clearly the same as a faithful, correct and accurate nomenclature of things; for it consists in the perception of differences. Now the only person who knows the difference between things seems to be someone who has learned to assign to separate things their own correct names (*MLT*, § XIV.1).

Following the order of the Aristotelian categories, which begins with *ousia*, Hobbes starts his work of nomenclature from *ens*, the most general name, in which two different species exist, the *conceivable ens* (man, animal, tree, etc.) and the *unconceivable ens* (God, angels, phantoms, etc.). From his own analysis Hobbes excludes all the entities that belong to the second species (the “incorporeal substances” of Scholastic philosophy and theology) because it is not possible to have their image in the mind. In contrast, he is namely interested in the entities of which we have an image, determined in the human mind by the corporeal space occupied by the *ens* itself:

Ens is everything that occupies space, or which can be measured as to length, breadth and depth. From this definition it appears that *ens* and *body* are the same; for the same definition is universally accepted for *body*; hence to mean the *ens* of which we discuss, we shall always refer to as *body*. Next, as *body* is that which has dimensions or which occupies a space in the imagination, then it is not important for its being body whether it is thin or thick, rare or dense, but only that it occupies space (*MLT*, § XXVII.1).

Ens and *body* are names of the same thing. Also *body* and *matter* are names of the same thing though. The only difference is in their consideration of the

thing: *body* indicates the existing thing regarded *per se*, *matter* indicates the thing as capable of being different entities (with no reference to immaterial substances). The equivalence between *ens*, body and matter allows a new and different consideration of the Aristotelian concept of *ousia*, from which any reference to the Scholastic idea of “incorporeal substance” is rejected.

The second and last category of Hobbesian “first philosophy” is the *accident* (which designates the representation of the way the body is conceived by the mind of the subject), equivalent both to *esse* and to the *actuality* (cf. *MLT*, §§ XXVIII.4-5, XXXIV.2, XXXV.1-2). In fact, although *esse* is not only a verb, but also a name (as, for example, in the preposition “to be a man is to be an animal”, which makes it necessary to enquire what “to be an animal” is the name of), *esse* means however that something happens to a body for the fact that it is conceived in different ways in its *actuality* (“Socrates is seated,” “Socrates is standing,” etc.). Thus, *esse* coincides with the attribution of an *accident*:

Esse is nothing but an *accident of a body* by which the way of perceiving it is determined and signalled. So *to be moved, to be at rest, to be white* and the like we call the accidents of bodies, and we believe them to *be present* in bodies, because they are different ways of perceiving bodies. That accidents are present and inherent in bodies must not be understood in the way we understand that a body is present in a body as a part in the whole, but in the way there is motion in a moved body. So *esse* is the same as *accident* [...] in Aristotle’s opinion itself, which states that *accident* is the same as *existence*, and *ens* as *that which exists* [...]. We must also note that the names of accidents do not always include the term *esse*; sometimes this latter is included in the verb infinite (as when we put “to live” for “to be a living creature”), and sometimes it is in the pure name, or in a name divorced from time, e.g. when “to flourish is life” is put for “to flourish is to live”. [...] Indeed, a great part of the task of philosophy consists in distinguishing, after a name has been pronounced, whether that name virtually includes the term *esse* or not; in fact, this is the same as distinguishing whether the thing signified by that name is a body or an accident (*MLT*, § XXVII.1).

Attributing a characteristic to a body by means of the verb “being” is equivalent to attribute an accident to this body, precisely in the sense that the property attributed happens to it. The accidents, or the ways we conceive the body, are therefore caused by the movement and represent the change. Almost paradoxically, the change coincides with *esse*. In Hobbesian “first philosophy” accident, *esse*, to exist, actuality, and “conceivable essence” indicate the same category and have the same meaning; for their part, body, matter and *ens* indicate the same category and have the same meaning (cf. *MLT*, §§ XXVIII.4-5). Consequently, the categories, or the genus, of the things are only two: the body and the accident. The body is an unalterable thing, which appears to us only under different species (and thus under different names) because of the happening of the accidents and cannot be generated nor destroyed. The accident is only the form under which the body “appears” and through which the body is nominated: the accident is therefore

generated and cannot be destroyed, but it is not a thing. In an ideal hierarchical scale, the accident is secondary compared to the body, because the body can be predicated and can exist *per se*, whereas the accident—which includes in itself all the Aristotelian categories, except for *ousia*—can be predicated and can exist only in respect of the body. In Hobbesian “first philosophy” only the body and the accident exist: all the categories (*ousia*, quantity, quality, etc.) and all the terms of the Aristotelian metaphysics (potentiality, actuality, form, etc.) fall in one of the Hobbesian categories, which establish and allow his natural philosophy.¹⁶ Since it is transformed, compared to the Aristotelian doctrine, in a nomenclature of what “happens” to the bodies, Hobbes’s new doctrine of categories represents the center of his “first philosophy”, compatible with the new Galilean physics and functional to a logical-linguistic foundation of the experimental results of the new science, according to which the world is only matter in movement. The Hobbesian distinction between the body and the accident, or between *ens* and *esse*, represents a systematization of the Galilean physics, to which it furnishes the universal methodological and logical fundament that only “first philosophy”—and not the natural philosophy—can determine.

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¹⁶ It is clear, for example, that the category of accident is a logical determination of the *movement* regarded as a universal cause capable to explain the happening and the change. Likewise, it is evident that Hobbes’s categorial distinction between body and accident represents the logical-linguistic declination of the Galilean physical distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

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