Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), an English mathematician and philosopher, owes his fame mainly to his works of political theory, especially *Leviathan*, published both in England and France in 1651, during the period of the English Republic (1649–1660). Hobbes argued that the only way to avoid a continual state of war was for members of society to agree to surrender the independent power that they possessed in the state of nature to a sovereign who would possess absolute power and would legislate on their behalf and maintain order. The bearer of this sovereign power would also determine the religious life of the people. Hobbes’s theory of government was secular in the sense that government was instituted by men, not by God. Hobbes, a royalist, was hostile to the members of the clergy who had exercised influence within the English government at the time of the revolution. His philosophy of nature was that all reality was material; there were no incorporeal spirits. Hobbes was no atheist, but he believed that God was himself corporeal, an unusual but not heretical position in Christian theology. His attitude towards spirits, and his belief that nature operated in a mechanical way, led him to dismiss the powers of witches and demons. In *Leviathan* Hobbes discusses witchcraft and demonology in three separate contexts. In Chapter 2, which is a discussion of human imagination, Hobbes classifies the belief in witchcraft as a mere fancy to which the vulgar sort of people subscribe. He denies that witches have any power but that they should nonetheless be punished because of the threat they pose to the order of society. In Chapter 34, he discusses whether the demons referred to in the Bible were incorporeal, as contemporary theologians argued. Hobbes, consistent to his materialist philosophy, argues that the spirits (angels and demons) created by God and referred to in the Bible were substances and thus possessed bodies. For Hobbes, an incorporeal body was a contradiction in terms. Finally, in Chapter 65 Hobbes attacks the entire
study of demons by Greek philosophers and Christian theologians, denying once again that there are any incorporeal spirits. For Hobbes, demons either have bodies or they are the product of human imagination. He concludes by interpreting the words of Scripture to support his argument.


**Chapter 2. Of Imagination.**

From this ignorance of how to distinguish dreams and strong fancies from vision and sense did arise the greatest part of the religion of the gentiles in time past that worshipped satyrs, fauns, nymphs, and the like; and nowadays the opinion that rude people have of fairies, ghosts, and goblins, and of the power of witches. For, as for witches, I think not that their witchcraft is any real power, but yet that they are justly punished for the false belief they have that they can do much mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can, their trade being nearer to a new religion than to a craft or a science. And for fairies and walking ghosts, the opinion of them has, I think, been on purpose either taught or not confuted to keep in credit the use of exorcism, of crosses, of holy water, and other such inventions of ghostly men. Nevertheless, there is no doubt but God can make unnatural apparitions. But that he does it so often as men need to fear such things more than they fear the stay or change of the course of nature, which he can also stay and change, is no point of Christian faith. But evil men, under pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say anything when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue. It is the part of a wise man to believe them no further than right reason makes that which they say appear credible. If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away and with it prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience. . . .

**Chapter 34. Of the Signification of Spirit, Angel, and Inspiration in the Books of Holy Scripture.**

The disciples of Christ, seeing him walking upon the sea (Matt. 14:26 and Mark 6:49) supposed him to be a spirit, meaning thereby an aerial body, and not a phantasm; for it is said they all saw him; which cannot be understood of the delusions of the brain (which are not common to many at once, as visible bodies are, because of the differences of fancies), but of bodies only. In like manner, where he was taken for a spirit by the same apostles (Luke 24:3, 24:7), so also when St Peter was delivered out of prison, it would not be believed; but when the maid said he was at the door, they said it was his angel (Acts 12:15) by which must be meant a corporeal substance, or we must say the disciples themselves did not follow the common opinion of both Jews and
Gentiles that some apparitions were not imaginary, but real, and such as needed not the fancy of man for their existence; these the Jews called spirits and angels, good or bad, as the Greeks called the same by the name of demons.

And some such apparitions may be real and substantial, that is to say, subtle bodies, which God can form by the same power by which he formed all things and make use of as ministers and messengers (that is to say, angels) to declare his will and execute the same when he pleaseth in extraordinary and supernatural manner. But when he hath so formed them they are substances, endued with dimensions, and take up room and can be moved from place to place, which is peculiar to bodies; and therefore are not ghosts incorporeal, that is to say ghosts that are in no place, that is to say, that are nowhere, that is to say, that, seeming to be somewhat, are nothing. But if incorporeal be taken in the next vulgar manner, for such substances as are perceptible by our external senses, then is substance incorporeal a thing not imaginary, but real, namely, a thin substance invisible, but that hath the same dimensions that are in grosser bodies. . . .

And as the Gentiles did vulgarly conceive the imagery of the brain for things really subsistent without them and not dependent on the fancy, and out of them framed their opinions of demons, good and evil, which because they seemed to subsist really, they called substances, and because they could not feel them with their hands, incorporeal; so also the Jews upon the same ground without anything in the Old Testament that constrained them thereunto, had generally an opinion (except the sect of the Sadducees) that those apparitions, which it pleased God sometimes to produce in the fancy of men for his own service and therefore called them his angels, were substances, not dependent upon the fancy, but permanent creatures of God, whereof those which they thought were good to them, they esteemed angels of God, and those they thought would hurt them, they called evil angels or evil spirits; such as was the spirit of Python, and the spirits of madmen, of lunatics and epileptics; for they esteemed such as were troubled with such diseases, demoniacs. . . .

**Chapter 45. Of Demonology and Other Relics of the Religion of the Gentiles.**

. . . This nature of sight having never been discovered by the ancient pretenders to natural knowledge, much less by those that consider not things so remote (as that knowledge is) from their present use, it was hard for men to conceive of those images in the fancy and in the sense otherwise than of things really without us; which some, because they vanish away, they know not whither nor how, will have to be absolutely incorporeal, that is to say, immaterial, or forms without matter (colour and figure without any coloured or figured body), and that they can put on airy bodies, as a garment; and others say [they] are bodies and living creatures, but made of air or more subtle and ethereal matter, which is, then, when they will be seen, condensed. But both of them agree on one general appellation of them, DEMONS. As if the dead of whom they dreamed were not inhabitants of their own brain, but of the
air or of heaven or of hell, not phantasms, but ghosts, with just as much reason as if one should say he saw his own ghost in a looking glass or the ghosts of the stars in a river, or call the ordinary apparition of the sun of the quantity of about a foot, the demon or ghost of that great sun that enlighteneth the whole visible world; and by that means [they] have feared them, as things of an unknown, that is, of an unlimited power to do them good or harm; and consequently [they have] given occasion to the governors of the heathen commonwealths to regulate this their fear by establishing that DEMONOLOGY (in which the poets, as principal priests of the heathen religion, were specially employed or reverenced) to the public peace and to the obedience of subjects necessary thereunto, and to make some of them good demons and others evil; the one as a spur to the observance, the other, as reins to withhold them from violation of the laws.

What kind of things they were to whom they attributed the name of demons appeareth partly in the genealogy of their gods, written by Hesiod, one of the most ancient poets of the Grecians, and partly in other histories, of which I have observed some few before, in the twelfth chapter of this discourse.

The Grecians, by their colonies and conquests communicated their language and writings into Asia, Egypt, and Italy; and therein, by necessary consequence, their demonology, or, as St Paul calls it, their doctrines of devils. And by that means the contagion was derived also to the Jews, both of Judaea and Alexandria, and other parts, whereinto they were dispersed, and the name of demon they did not, as the Grecians, attribute to spirits both good and evil but to the evil only. And to the good demons they gave the name of the spirit of God, and esteemed those into whose bodies they entered to be prophets. In sum, all singularity, if good, they attributed to the Spirit of God, and if evil, to some demon, but a kakodaimon, an evil demon, that is a devil. And therefore they called demoniacs, that is, possessed by the devil, such as we call madmen or lunatics, or such as had the falling sickness, or that spoke anything which they, for want of understanding, thought absurd. As also of an unclean person in a notorious degree, they used to say he had an unclean spirit; of a dumb man, that he had a dumb devil; and of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:18), for the singularity of his fasting, that he had a devil; and of our Saviour, because he said, he that keepeth his sayings should not see death in aeternum, Now we know thou hast a devil; Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead. And again, because he said they went about to kill him, the people answered, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? (John 7:20) Whereby it is manifest that the Jews had the same opinions concerning phantasms, namely, that they were not phantasms, that is, idols of the brain, but things real and independent on the fancy.

Which doctrine if it be not true, why (some may say) did not our Saviour contradict it and teach the contrary? Nay, why does he use on divers occasions such forms of speech as seem to confirm it? To this answer that, first, Christ saith A spirit hath not flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), although he show that there
be spirits: yet he denies not that they are bodies. And whereas St Paul says, *We shall rise spiritual bodies* [I Cor. 15:44], he acknowledgeth the nature of spirits, but that they are bodily spirits, which is not difficult to understand. For air and many other things are bodies, though not flesh and bone, or any other gross body to be discerned by the eyes. But when our Saviour speaketh to the devil and commandeth him to go out of a man, if by the devil be meant a disease, as frenzy or lunacy or a corporeal spirit, is not the speech improper? Can diseases hear? Or can there be a corporeal spirit in a body of flesh and bone, full already of vital and animal spirits? Are there not, therefore, spirits that neither have bodies nor are mere imaginations? To the first I answer that the addressing of our Saviour’s command to the madness or lunacy he cureth is no more improper than was his rebuking of the fever or of the wind and sea, for neither do these hear. Or [no more improper] than was the command of God to the light, to the firmament, to the sun, and stars, when he commanded them to be; for they could not hear before they had a being. But those speeches are not improper, because they signify the power of God’s word; no more is it improper to command madness or lunacy (under the appellation of devils by which they were then commonly understood) to depart out of a man’s body. To the second, concerning their being incorporeal, I have not yet observed any place of Scripture from whence it can be gathered that any man was ever possessed with any other corporeal spirit but that of his own by which his body is naturally moved.

But if there be no immaterial spirit nor any possession of men’s bodies by any spirit corporeal, it may again be asked why our Saviour and his Apostles did not teach the people so and in such clear words as they might no more doubt thereof. But such questions as these are more curious than necessary for a Christian man’s salvation. If we require of the Scripture an account of all questions which may be raised to trouble us in the performance of God’s commands, we may as well complain of Moses for not having set down the time of the creation of such spirits as well as of the creation of the earth and sea, and of men and beasts. To conclude, I find in Scripture that there be angels and spirits, good and evil, but not that they are incorporeal, as are the apparitions men see in the dark or in a dream or vision, which the Latins call spectra and took for demons. And I find that there are spirits corporeal, though subtle and invisible, but not that any man’s body was possessed or inhabited by them and that the bodies of the saints shall be such, namely, spiritual bodies, as St Paul calls them.