
Security in the Philosophical Thought of Thomas Hobbes

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the research, whose findings are presented in this article, was to determine the contribution of Thomas Hobbes to the materialist-empirical concept of security.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The main research problem was formulated as the question: What is the place of the materialist-empirical concept of security in the philosophical thought of Thomas Hobbes? The research process utilized both theoretical and empirical methods characteristic of social sciences, including source analysis, case studies, and expert interviews (Wiśniewski). European literature on the subject was reviewed alongside empirical material derived from eleven interviews with Polish experts representing security studies, philosophy, sociology, and political science. The research focused on Hobbes's views on the state as both the guarantor and subject of security.

Findings: The materialist-empirical concept of security in Hobbes's work is illustrated in his most significant work, "Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil". Leviathan emerged from a pessimistic view of human nature and humanity's longing for political stability. The realization of this longing was the security provided by the state, which wielded both military and spiritual-religious power. Security and stability arose from limiting human absolute freedom, including mitigating or even eliminating evils such as distrust, hostility, and unrestrained aggression. This security, stability, and peace were to be guaranteed by a state established through a social contract that could not be broken. For Hobbes, without the state, there is no internal security, order, or structure that enables society to live and develop. At the same time, Hobbes acknowledged that the state is not always capable of ensuring external security. This necessitates international agreements and supranational institutions that effectively guarantee global security.

Practical Implications: The practical implications primarily relate to the need for a more in-depth and critical examination of the works of Thomas Hobbes. Specifically, Hobbes's views should be subjected to comprehensive scientific reflection from the perspective of security studies.

Originality/Value: The research findings highlight the significant contribution of Thomas Hobbes to the modern framework of the materialist-empirical concept of security.

Keywords: Security, war, security concepts, Hobbes, Leviathan.

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1. Introduction

Security, as a state or process aimed at ensuring the survival and unrestricted development of individual and collective entities, has always been and remains a fundamental (existential) need of humanity. For centuries, people have gathered in various types of communities to secure this safety.

However, functioning within a group has always entailed accepting prevailing rules and principles. Thus, individuals who join a group, consciously or unconsciously, relinquish a portion of their freedom.

This dynamic is recognized by Hobbes, who describes human life in society and the relationship between the state and its citizens. Starting from the premise that humans are governed by the same laws that govern nature, Hobbes explains human individual activity through the laws of nature. In his view, by instinct and natural disposition, everyone is concerned solely with their own affairs; everyone loves only themselves and acts as an egoist. The sole objective is self-preservation, and the only good is one's own benefit.

According to Hobbes, an objective measure of good and evil emerges only with the establishment of the state, particularly through the enactment of laws and the delineation of citizens' rights and obligations. The state itself, as an artificial construct, arose from human fear and reason—an escape from the state of nature filled with dangers and characterized by the war of all against all.

When analyzing Hobbes's views on security, it is essential to consider that his life and work coincided with a turbulent period in European history, marked by the development of modern philosophical systems between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Historians of philosophy emphasize that Hobbes's system was shaped by materialist metaphysics combined with rationalist methodology and monarchist politics.

It was a naturalistic system, excluding idealistic, spiritual, or free elements. It was deterministic in its theory of nature, sensualist in its theory of knowledge, and egoistic in its theory of action. Notably, Hobbes's system was deductively constructed, embodying the spirit of the 17th century (Tatarkiewicz).

2. Literature Review

In the literature on the subject, evaluations of Hobbes's work are not uniform. Hobbes begins his political philosophy with a critique of the perception of humans as beings created for political life, cooperation, and collaboration to fulfill their needs.

Hobbes refers to the views of philosophers who considered early humans living in small or larger tribes, concerned only with their own security rather than the collective good, killing others primarily out of distrust toward anyone unfamiliar or different. These views were gradually verified through the experiences of Hobbes's long life (he lived 91 years).

In the work *The History of Thought*, Hobbes's views are systematized under the significant title *The Mouth of Leviathan*. It emphasizes that in the 17th century, nearly all Europeans lived under state authority. This era also saw the first modern attempts to explain the origins of the state. Thinkers of the time highlighted that both the governed and the governing have rights and duties.

This systematization identifies seven key topics concerning Hobbes's views on humanity, the state of nature, freedom, the state, political systems, religion, and tolerance. According to Hobbes:

1. Humans are by nature egoistic and have malevolent tendencies;
2. The original state of nature is one of absolute individual freedom, which in practice means a war of all against all;
3. By renouncing freedom, humans gain the opportunity for a secure existence;
4. The state, a conscious and artificial creation of humans, arises through conquest and the social contract, established to provide citizens with a life free from fear and with a sense of security;
5. Any form of government should be accepted in principle, though aristocratic rule (elite governance) is preferable to democracy;
6. Religion should be under state control to eliminate all forms of religious fanaticism;
7. Tolerance may be limited by the state, which has the right to eliminate views threatening its existence (Kurmanowa).

In *The History of Western Philosophers*, Thomas Hobbes is described as one of the greatest political philosophers. It is noted that *Leviathan* remains controversial but is the first work to attempt to make politics a science. It can be placed alongside Galileo's achievements in dynamics and William Harvey's in physiology. Hobbes modeled his ideas on Euclidean geometry, whose significance he realized by chance in his forties. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that Hobbes's words are not merely political theory. *Leviathan* and his other works form a coherent philosophy.

Researchers of Hobbes's life and works emphasize that he possessed extensive knowledge of the social functions of religion. Hobbes advocated for a state religion headed by the monarch. This solution would avoid the dilemma of whether a citizen's loyalty should lie with secular authority or spiritual authority. At the same time, he believed that if someone privately wished to believe in something else without publicly manifesting their beliefs, the state should not intervene, punish, or stigmatize them.

Hobbes maintained that where sovereign power does not extend, individuals should be free. Freedom, for him, is the silence of the law; where state law does not regulate an issue, it grants citizens the freedom to act. However, even under the rule of an unfaithful sovereign, individuals should obey, regardless of whether the ruler violates divine commandments.

This is because individuals promised obedience to the authority by entering the social contract and thus have a primary obligation to fulfill this promise. According to Hobbes, the legislator or ruler, not the citizen, is accountable to God for violating divine commandments (Popkin).

Roman Tokarczyk, in his book *The History of Legal Philosophy*, assesses Hobbes's philosophy as imbued with voluntarism, rationalism, empiricism, and atheism (Tokarczyk). Representing Hobbes as an atheist seems difficult to reconcile with the fact that his major work, *Leviathan*, contains over seven hundred biblical references, and the assertion of religion's significance for humanity is a central feature of its argumentation (Popkin).

However, one can agree with the view that according to Hobbes, by transitioning to the state-based condition, people relinquished significant portions of their rights and assumed obligations that restricted their absolute freedom. This freedom was curtailed by state laws, which ensured personal security necessary for a comfortable and happy life.

Hobbes, presenting the main catalog of natural laws, held that the protection of human life is their primary purpose. Natural and state laws are interdependent; natural laws become effective only after the establishment of state laws—positive laws. Among human positive laws, some define the rights of subjects, while others specify obligations and penalties for those who violate them.

Hobbes further distinguished between fundamental and non-fundamental laws. The former are those laws without which the state loses its foundations and collapses entirely, like a building whose foundations have been destroyed. The latter are of lesser importance and pertain, for instance, to disputes between subjects.

For Hobbes, the pre-state form of social life was a continuous war of all against all, but, as Tokarczyk emphasizes, it also provided absolute freedom. Within this

freedom, humans in the state of nature, seeking to annihilate others, chose paths of moral evil, symbolized by Behemoth, the mortal land god with no stronger rival on earth.

Of the two mortal Gods, Hobbes chose Leviathan, the sea god, who seemed better suited to achieve security and peace in exchange for limitations on absolute freedom. Behemoth, as a symbol of moral evil, appeared to represent absolute freedom or the illusion of such freedom, entirely impractical for communal life.

By transitioning from the state of nature to the state condition, humans relinquished nearly absolute freedom in exchange for security and social order. The primary function of the state, symbolized by Leviathan, is to protect security and guard against threats from others. On its behalf, the state may use commands, which Hobbes called orders, in the form of positive law.

However, the axiom of Hobbes's natural law doctrine remains the principle of self-preservation as the highest good and human right. Hobbes argued that the purpose of human obedience to the state is self-preservation, or personal security. Therefore, the duty of obedience ceases when the state uses its power against the subject and the principle of self-determination—pursuing life rather than death. When the state acts against the life of a subject, the individual should not forfeit the right to self-defense.

Moreover, Tokarczyk identifies various contradictions in some of Hobbes's assertions, which do not invalidate his entire system of social philosophy. This is a system that Hobbes arrived at through the combination of observations of the civil war with a logical analysis of the rules of social order. He did not aim to formulate an exhaustive catalog of ethical and legal norms or undermine long-standing rational state institutions.

Recognizing the limitations of his doctrine, he provided a masterful insight into the acquisitive psyche of capitalist market individuals formed in England during his lifetime (Tokarczyk).

In Magdalena Środa's opinion, Hobbes was convinced that the state is a uniquely human creation, artificial and designed to realize the potential of human nature, including protecting individual rights and citizen security. Since all people are by nature distrustful and constantly in competition, reason dictates that individuals should seek peace and its maintenance for their security and self-interest, suppress their aggression, and enter into agreements.

The consequence of such agreements is the renunciation of force in exchange for guarantees of safety. A person who feels threatened may do anything to protect their life (Środa).

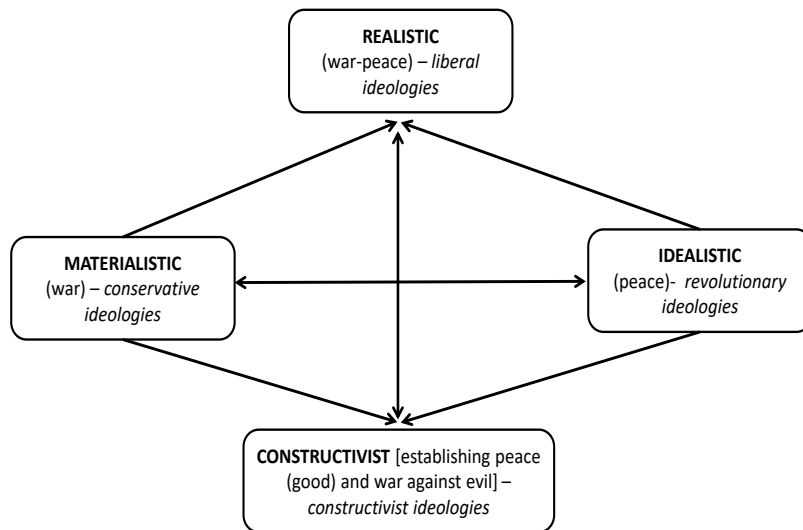
3. The Materialist-Empirical Concept of Security in Hobbes's Views

Philosophical concepts of security have been shaped by social realities since the dawn of history. Currently, in European philosophical reflection, several approaches to this issue can be identified. One such approach divides security concepts into four groups:

1. **Realist concepts** based on liberal ideologies, where two phenomena dominate social life: war and peace;
2. **Materialist concepts** rooted in conservative ideologies, focusing on war;
3. **Idealist concepts** inspired by revolutionary ideologies, advocating peace;
4. **Constructivist concepts** in which social activity is directed toward combating evil and creating peace.

A hypothetical representation of these philosophical concepts of security is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Hypothetical Representation of Philosophical Concepts of Security



Source: Świniarski

The foundations of the materialist-empirical concept of security were laid by ancient philosophers. Plato, in his work *Laws*, addressed the issue of security as follows: “Enemies are all for all in public life, and in private, each for himself (...) within each of us, a war rages against oneself” (Plato). Hobbes developed this concept and gave it a distinct dimension. For Hobbes, the state of nature before the emergence of

the state was a condition of war and mutual distrust, threatening humanity with annihilation—a kind of civil war and universal anarchy.

In this state, there is no ideal, peaceful existence, but rather pervasive fear and distrust, as everyone knows that anyone can kill anyone else. Everyone is an enemy, rival, and competitor to others. In this state, natural freedom consists of the liberty to choose any means that bring individual benefit, including unreasonable and brutal methods. This condition can be described by the formula *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all).

This natural equality and democracy of fear result in free humans sustaining their lives and existence through war, attack, and defense, primarily through aggression and similar actions. Hobbes perceives humans here as they are by nature, not as they should or desire to be—as cultural beings forming society and the state. By nature, humans are akin to wolves, compelled like wolves to fight for survival by hunting, attacking, and robbing others.

Due to this inherent aggressiveness, it seems that the calling of natural humans is to exist in a perpetual state of war. Hobbes partially contradicts Aristotle's fundamental assertion in *Politics* that humans are naturally social and political beings destined for communal life. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes states: "Men find no pleasure in social life (on the contrary, they find much discomfort) where there is no power able to keep them all in awe" (Hobbes).

Thus, collective, communal life organized within the framework of the state is an artificial existence, imposed on the natural life that appears to be individually pleasurable and happy, free from the influence of reason, culture, and restrictions on the free choice of any means that bring benefit, pleasure, and satisfaction. One could even say that Hobbes believed natural happiness and pleasure could be found in life outside the state, community, and society; that by nature, humans are asocial, individualistic, and inclined to isolation—not necessarily among friends, as humans are always prepared to fight and engage in conflict.

It is challenging to find friends among others if one competes with them, distrusts them, and narcissistically desires fame, exaltation, and domination over them. Friendship, after all, requires cooperation, trust, and mutual affection (Świniarski and Chojnacki).

According to Hobbes, the permanent state of war, conflict, aggressiveness, and lack of friends is driven by three fundamental causes rooted in human nature:

1. Competition;
2. Distrust;
3. Desire for glory.

These causes also seem to be premises for natural happiness, consisting of many pleasures and the absence of discomfort. This happiness is not yet subject to evaluation in terms of good and evil, right and wrong, or other ethical categories. In this state of primordial anarchy and pleasure derived from plunder, murder, and enslavement, war is a natural means and a law of nature. This law finds its foundation in the highest natural right—the right to self-defense by any means possible (Hobbes).

Such a right to self-defense leads to conflict and fighting and justifies the war of all against all, which does not only involve direct combat but also the readiness to engage in it. Hobbes states: “War consists not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known [...] the nature of war consists not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace” (Hobbes).

The state of peace, therefore, is characterized by the absence of competition, distrust, and the exceptional status of anyone, including their particular fame and position among citizens. Consequently, the denial of the natural state of war, conflict, and aggressiveness is an idealized state of peace, devoid of competition, distrust, and the desire for glory (Świniarski and Chojnacki).

This idealized state of peace arises from the guidance of reason and emotion. Its condition is the restriction of natural liberty in the choice of all means that bring individual benefit and pleasure. Thus, according to the dictates of reason, every person should strive for possible peace. However, when peace cannot be achieved, the citizen may resort to means that benefit them, including in war, using weapons, raids, and armed conquests.

Freedom in the state of peace and absence of readiness for combat is the lack of external obstacles to obtaining what reason dictates to humans. Reason, in turn, suggests that through labor and agreement, a comfortable life can be attained, avoiding death. This requires individuals to be willing to relinquish some of their liberty for the common good. For their own benefit, every individual should be prepared to:

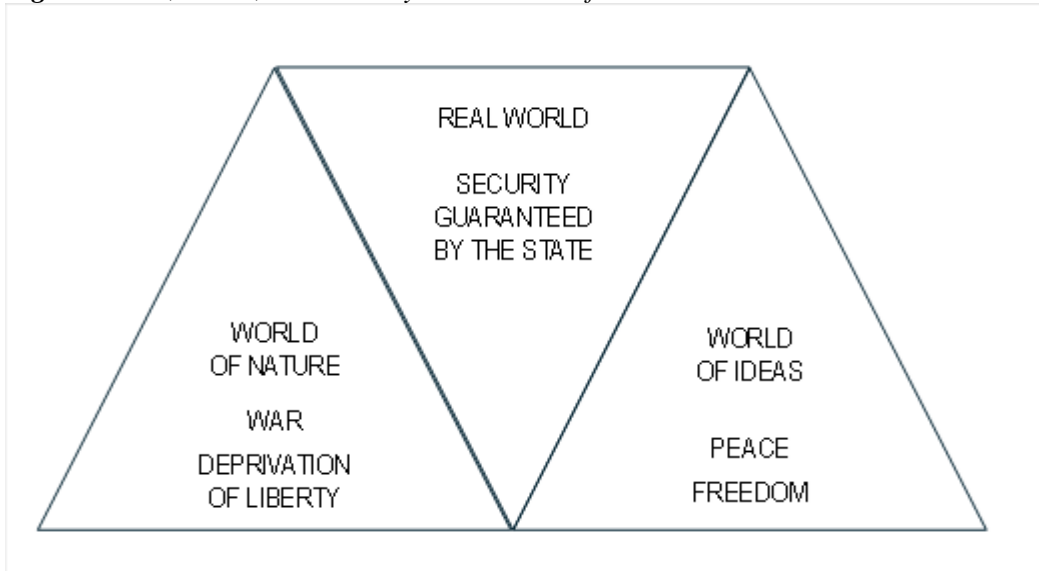
1. Renounce their liberty to the extent that they can recognize it in others;
2. Keep agreements;
3. Show gratitude for kindness;
4. Practice mutual courtesy and social adaptation;
5. Forgive easily;
6. Respect prohibitions against hatred, contempt, and insults;
7. Abandon pride and recognize the equality of all people;
8. Observe prohibitions against arrogance and uphold the equality of rights;
9. Treat everyone equally in accordance with the principle of equity (reason);

10. Share equally in the use of common resources; and respect other laws of nature.

Hobbes emphasizes that “the laws of nature always oblige in conscience, but in effect only when security is assured” (Hobbes).

Interpreting Hobbes’s arguments and assertions in *Leviathan* in the spirit of Platonic idealism, one might conclude that while the world of human nature as a body subject to the laws of living nature is a world of war and readiness for it, the world of reason, in contrast, is one of idealized peace, concord, the absence of competition, distrust, and the desire for glory. Pressed between these two worlds, the real world is one of security guaranteed by the state (Figure 2).

Figure 2. War, Peace, and Security in the Views of Thomas Hobbes



Source: Own elaboration.

The relationships between the world of nature and the world of reason, as depicted in the figure, clearly point to the necessity for humans to relinquish their natural rights and personal freedom in favor of security. The less freedom there is, the more security is achieved.

Conversely, the greater the security, the less war and enslavement exist. It is worth noting, however, that extreme scenarios (the top or bottom of the figure) are not achievable. People who do not compete, are completely trusting, and have no desire for fame would neither be able to live, survive, nor thrive in an environment that is inherently aggressive and filled with mutual conflict.

Exiting the state of nature and abandoning a "wolf-like" attitude toward others marks a transition to a civilized state and a positive attitude among citizens toward one another. This civic mindset was dictated by reason when fear, terror, and distrust had reached their peak. In this situation of anarchy and civil war, people, guided by reason, created the state through a social contract among all.

This state, replacing the nature-rooted state of war, guaranteed security, thus ending civil war. The instruments of this guarantee are the institutions of the state, law, and the police. Nevertheless, individuals always retain the inherent right to take matters into their own hands, using all possible means to defend themselves (Świniarski, Chojnacki).

Experts in security studies generally agree that Hobbes represents a materialist-empirical concept of security. They emphasize that their evaluation is based on the principal theses of *Leviathan*. However, less definitive evaluations of Hobbes's views on security are found among experts representing other academic disciplines. These scholars identify certain inconsistencies or a lack of coherence in Hobbes's arguments. Nonetheless, the vast majority of philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists classify Hobbes as a proponent of absolutist statism and royalism.

4. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The research process presented in this article highlights the significant contribution of Thomas Hobbes's philosophy to the understanding of the essence of security, viewed through the lens of the materialist-empirical concept. In Hobbes's reflections, security is positioned between distrust, which fosters war, and unlimited trust, which fosters peace. As an intermediary state, security limits both the "war of all against all" and the idealized peace and universal harmony. Security is an artificial, conventional, and inherent feature of the state, which is established to guarantee it.

Thus, in Hobbes's view, there is no personal security outside the state (*extra civitatem nulla securitas*); it exists only within the state and is ensured by instruments such as law and the police (Schmit). Without the state, law, and police, not only is security absent, but so too is justice. As Hobbes writes:

"This war of every man against every man has also the effect that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues" (Hobbes).

In the natural state of war, anarchy, and civil conflict, there is no distinction between good and evil except as subjective perceptions. *"In this state of war, there is neither property nor dominion nor distinction of mine and thine; only that belongs to a man which he can acquire, and as long as he can keep it"* (Hobbes).

It is only within the state, which aims to rationally and emotionally negate the primal natural state of anarchy—manifesting as violence, aggression, and attacks—that private property, wealth, security, limited trust, and freedom become possible. This freedom consists of the absence of external obstacles caused by other people in pursuing what reason and emotion dictate.

In Hobbes's considerations, the pursuit of peace is driven by fear, desire, hope, and the calculation of increasing the chances of survival. This increased chance of survival shapes security guaranteed by the state. Security is achieved by limiting natural freedom, individualism, and combativeness.

In exchange for these limitations, the state guarantees security by ensuring the preservation of citizens' lives, protecting them from death, and providing hope for a comfortable life and prosperity achieved through systematic labor rather than war. States (cities, kingdoms), which Hobbes describes as large families, strive, as families once did, to ensure security under the pretext of danger and fear of attack or violence.

To this end, they attempt to dominate or weaken their neighbors through overt violence or covert machinations, as they have no other means of securing themselves. Hobbes justifies these actions, which later generations regard with respect (Hobbes). From Hobbes's philosophical arguments, two types of security familiar to us today emerge:

1. **Internal security**, guaranteed by the state to its citizens under the social contract;
2. **External or international security**, achieved by the state subordinating its neighbors through military or political means.

Security, as a form of organized social life within the state, combines (or blends) natural impulses for egoistic struggle and war with rational and emotional aspirations for peace rooted in culture. It is worth briefly referring to the work of generations of anthropologists, especially Hofstede, Bond, and Hall, who argued that human relationships are shaped by the culture from which individuals originate.

Similarly, cultural programming can influence perceptions of internal, national, and international security (Górnikiewicz). The blending of natural impulses with cultural programming results in mutual limitations of both natural instincts and aspirations derived from reason and emotion. This blending is expressed in the social contract, through which people created the state and transferred to it the prerogatives to limit their natural freedom in exchange for security guarantees.

Thus, the primary role of the state, as an artificial and conventional construct, is to guarantee security. This guarantee involves the state protecting the lives, property,

and dignity of its citizens. The instruments of internal security are defined by the prerogatives of the social contract, which impose limitations on individual freedom.

External security, on the other hand, depends on the state's strength and activity on the international stage. The lack of effective international authority and full enforcement of international law leads Hobbes to view international relations as a state of war between all states. These wars, according to Hobbes, are not subject to axiological evaluation; they are neither just nor unjust.

However, he considers victorious wars of conquest or domination over other states as legitimate and morally acceptable. Subjugating weaker states to stronger ones imposes order on the natural state of war between all states, reduces anarchy in international relations, and decreases mutual distrust, thereby increasing international security.

Hobbes's reasoning leads to the notion that order and security in international relations can be guaranteed by something akin to a world government. This government, resembling *Leviathan*, would have no equal in power and thus act as a hegemon or global leader (Szczurek).

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