

Thought for a few seconds >

This manuscript offers a clear, tightly argued reinterpretation of Hobbes that is easily strong enough for an "average" philosophy or political theory periodical, and potentially for something slightly above that tier with some sharpening. I'll structure the review as follows:

1. Brief summary
2. Major strengths
3. Major points for revision
4. Minor points (style, referencing, structure)
5. Overall recommendation

(I'll treat it as a single-author paper and use "the author" throughout.)

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1. Summary of the manuscript

The article re-reads Hobbes as a theorist of *functional limits* on state power rather than as a straightforward apostle of absolutism. It aligns with, and systematises, recent revisionist work (Curran, Sreedhar, Baumgold, Kavka, Hampton etc.) while pushing a particular thesis:

- Hobbes's grounding of sovereignty in **de facto power** (rather than continuing consent or moral authority) demystifies political authority and makes its **instrumental and conditional nature** visible.
- The **inalienable right to self-preservation** is not a marginal exception but the **central organising principle** of the system, structuring both the doctrine of resistance and the conditional nature of political obligation.
- The sovereign's wide powers over religion, property, censorship, and punishment remain **instrumentally subordinate** to the protective function; this yields implicit constraints via necessity and proportionality.
- The article argues against simple assimilation of Hobbes to modern libertarianism, but claims that his framework contains "structural features" compatible with a robust, secular political individualism that illuminates contemporary debates on state power.

The paper is organised in five parts (self-preservation and individualism; *de facto* sovereignty; "absolutist" objections; resistance and the "true liberties of subjects"; contemporary relevance) plus a well-curated reference list.

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2. Major strengths

(a) Conceptual clarity and control of the secondary literature

The manuscript displays impressive command of both classic and recent Hobbes scholarship. The selection of interlocutors is judicious: Strauss, Macpherson, Gauthier and Warrender on the "old" debates; Curran, Sreedhar, Lloyd, Mansell etc. on the more recent wave. Citations are apt rather than merely decorative, and the author does a good job of signposting where they align with or diverge from particular scholars.

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The distinction between **methodological** and **normative** individualism is particularly useful, as is the insistence that Hobbes is not a liberal or libertarian in any simple sense despite the individualist structure of his theory.

(b) Strong, coherent thesis

The core claim – that **de facto sovereignty** plus an **inalienable right of self-preservation** generate *functional* limits on state power – is clearly articulated and sustained across the paper. The manuscript is not content with a vague "Hobbes had some rights after all" thesis; it offers a more targeted structural insight: that a state which openly presents itself as a secular machine of coercive protection is, conceptually, less prone to ideological mystification than one cloaked in divine right or "popular will". That is original enough to justify publication, especially for an "average" periodical.

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(c) Textual sensitivity without pedantry

The paper engages substantively with Leviathan passages on:

- the right of nature and self-preservation;
- the void nature of covenants not to defend oneself;
- the identity of sovereignty by acquisition and institution;
- the "true liberties of subjects";
- the conditionality of obligation upon protection;
- the right to resist particular commands (especially in cases of capital punishment, self-accusation and military service).

The textual use is accurate and judicious; there are no obvious misquotations or tendentious wrenchings from context.

(d) Mature handling of tensions

The section engaging Mansell's "coherence" objection is quite good. The author freely admits that there *is* a tension between sovereign interpretation of natural law and the inalienable right of self-preservation, but reframes it as a tension between **legal authority** and **natural liberty** that Hobbes himself acknowledges. That intellectual honesty strengthens the piece; it reads as a serious contribution rather than an apologetic gloss.

3. Major points for revision

These are the changes that, in my view, would most improve the manuscript and raise it from "solid article" to "stand-out" in an average journal.

(1) Sharpen the novelty claim and delimit the target

At present, the paper sometimes reads as a **clean, well-written synthesis** of revisionist Hobbes scholarship. It is more than that, but the distinctive contribution could be flagged more forcefully and earlier.

- The abstract already gestures at novelty ("de facto sovereignty... creates a transparent account... exposing conditional and instrumental nature of sovereign power").
- However, the introduction does not clearly spell out:
 - Exactly how this goes beyond Curran's rights-based reading or Sreedhar's work on self-defence;
 - Which existing interpretations are being explicitly challenged.

Suggestion

- Add 1-2 explicit paragraphs in the introduction labelled (implicitly) "Contribution".

For example:

- One paragraph stating: "Most revisionist work has focused on *rights retained* by subjects; this paper instead foregrounds the **structural consequences** of *de facto* sovereignty for how we conceptualise state power, including a specific account of necessity and proportionality constraints".
- One paragraph contrasting the argument with, say, Curran (rights as proto-liberal) and Sreedhar (resistance) and stating how your *de facto*-power lens reframes those debates.

This will help reviewers see that the piece is doing more than simply collecting and endorsing the revisionist consensus.

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(2) Clarify the "necessity" and "proportionality" criteria

The paper introduces two limiting criteria to distinguish protective from non-protective uses of power:

- a **necessity** criterion (genuine contribution to peace and security);
- a **proportionality** criterion (no systematic threat to fundamental self-preservation).

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This is promising, but currently somewhat under-developed and vulnerable to the obvious objection you yourself anticipate: almost anything can be *claimed* to be for security.

Questions a referee is likely to ask:

- Are these criteria *Hobbes's* criteria, or are they a modestly anachronistic reconstruction?
- Where, if anywhere, does Hobbes himself talk in quasi-proportionality terms (e.g. punishments being productive, excessive, undermining industry, religious persecution destabilising peace)?
- How do these criteria interact with the fact that subjects have no institutional veto or adjudicative mechanism? Are they only **analytic** limits (what counts as properly Hobbesian sovereignty) or also **normative** constraints that entail *legitimacy* when violated?

Suggestion

- Make explicit whether you are offering:
 - a *strictly exegetical* claim ("Hobbes can be read as already endorsing necessity and proportionality constraints");
 - or a *reconstructive* one ("Hobbes's own logic yields, by extension, something very like these constraints").

• Anchor each criterion in one or two very specific Leviathan passages to deflect charges of projection. For example, on punishment that provokes further disorder, on taxation and property, on religious persecution producing civil war.

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(3) Deepen the comparison with consent-based theories (especially Locke)

The section contrasting Hobbes with consent-based theories is intriguing but currently somewhat compressed. You suggest that Hobbes may *conceptually* avoid certain forms of state idolatry because the state is never "us". This is one of your more striking philosophical claims.

However, in its current form it risks being read as either:

- a slightly glib swipe at democracy ("the tyranny of the majority can be worse"), or
- a gestural aside that is not integrated into the main argument.

Suggestion

- Either shorten this to a restrained paragraph clearly labelled as a conceptual note, or

- Expand it into a focused subsection *ill/worthy self-rule in consent-based systems and transparent externality* of Hobbesian sovereignty.

Clarify what you are not making empirical claims about actual regimes, only conceptual ones.

- Perhaps engage directly with modern republican readings (Skinner, Pettit) who would dispute your characterisation of popular sovereignty.

This will reassure a referee that you have not simply toed around the "Hobbes as absolutist" tradition.

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(4) Consider one focused engagement with a *hostile* reading

You do engage Strauss and Macpherson in the background, but a skeptical referee might say:

"Yes, but if Hobbes says the sovereign may censor, commandeer property, direct religion and execute dissidents, isn't that *functional* absolutism, whatever formal caveats we attach?"

You already answer this in substance, yet it might be worth adding one explicit paragraph that stages the absolutist objection in its strongest form and responds crisply:

- Even if self-preservation is inalienable, the space still overwhelmingly empowers the sovereign."

Your response could emphasise:

- the analytic status of self-preservation as non-derogable;
- the conditional nature of obligation evaporates with protection;
- the way these two together shift Hobbes from an "unlimited right to command" to a "functionally defined office of protection".

This will reassure a referee that the article matters beyond Hobbes studies.

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4. Minor comments

(a) Stylistic / rhetorical points

These are comparatively small, but an "average" periodical referees will almost certainly raise some of them.

The prose is elegant and very readable, with an appropriate level of formality. For example, some of the early sentences in the introduction and Part I could be pruned slightly without loss of nuance.

• Slightly like this is nice, but significant "work stylistically, but a few evaluative adverbs ("profound", "formidable", "peculiarly vexing") to keep the tone a touch more austere.

The phrase "political idolatry" is vivid and effective, but you might want to introduce it earlier, then return to it in the conclusion for rhetorical symmetry.

Similarly, in Part III you might want to deal with religion, property, and punishment more quickly, so readers can quickly locate the relevant section.

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