

# **HOBBS AND THE MITIGATED ADVERSATIVE ACCOUNT OF PUBLIC INTEREST: TURNING HELD'S READING INSIDE OUT\***

## ***HOBBS E A CONCEÇÃO ADVERSATIVA MITIGADA DE INTERESSE PÚBLICO: VIRANDO A LEITURA DE HELD DO AVESSO***

*Paulo Antunes\*\**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3603-0127?lang=en>

[pauloantunes@edu.ulisboa.pt](mailto:pauloantunes@edu.ulisboa.pt)

*Centre for Ethics, Politics and Society (CEPS-UMinho),  
Minho, Portugal.*

**RESUMO** *Este artigo explora o conceito de “interesse público” sob diversas perspectivas, incluindo considerações éticas e ceticismo. São analisadas as concepções “unitária”, “do bem comum” e “agregativa”, bem como as críticas ao seu carácter “holístico” e ao seu “valor factual”, com especial atenção à interpretação hobbesiana de Virginia Held. Embora as perspectivas hobbesianas partilhem algumas semelhanças com abordagens mais favoráveis ao interesse*

\* Article submitted on: 07/07/2025. Accepted on: 05/12/2025.

\*\* Researcher at the Centre for Ethics, Politics and Society (CEPS), University of Minho. Post-doc funded by the exploratory project *The Public Interest. The Politico-Philosophical Investigation* (EXPL/FER-ETC/1226/2021; doi.org/10.54499/CEECINST/00157/2018/CP1643/CT0004), hosted by the CEPS, 2024. PhD in Philosophy (FCT fellow: SFRH/BD/116938/2016) by the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL), 2021. Member of the Association for the Philosophy of Sport in Portuguese Language.

*público, distinguem-se em pontos cruciais. A proposta aqui apresentada, a “conceção adversativa mitigada do interesse público”, em particular numa variante hobbesiana, reconhece essas nuances, sublinhando a importância dos aspetos instrumentais e das complexidades inerentes ao conceito de “interesse público”. Esta abordagem acentua o equilíbrio entre ideais e governação prática, invertendo, em essência, a leitura de Held.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Conflito. Leviatã. Concepções de interesse público. Direito de resistência. Estado de natureza.*

**ABSTRACT** *This essay explores the concept of “public interest” through various lenses, including ethical considerations and skepticism. We examined “unitary,” “common good,” and “aggregative accounts,” alongside critiques of its “holistic” and “factual value,” while analyzing Virginia Held’s Hobbesian interpretation. Though Hobbesian views share some similarities with favorable public interest accounts, they differ notably. Our proposed “mitigated adversative account of public interest,” particularly a Hobbesian variant, recognizes these nuances, stressing the importance of both instrumental aspects and the complexities inherent in “public interest.” This approach underscores the balance between ideals and practical governance, effectively inverting Held’s reading.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict. Leviathan. Public interest conceptions. Right to resist. State of nature.*

*...whosoever beareth the person of the people ...if the public interest chance to cross the private, he prefers the private: for the passions of men, are commonly more potent than their reason.*

Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

## Introduction

The main goal of this essay is to articulate and clarify Hobbes’s position within the ongoing debate regarding the existence and foundational conditions of the “public interest.” As we explore this debate, we uncover a historical trajectory stretching from the roots of philosophy through the modern era (which features crucial figures like Hobbes), to contemporary thinkers, among whom Habermas stands as one of the most prominent.

It is within this very tradition of political thought that Virginia Held, in her foundational work *The Public Interest and Individual Interests* (1970),<sup>1</sup> systematically maps the extensive discourse surrounding this concept. She (1970, pp. 50-57) positions Hobbes as an advocate of a “preponderance theory” of public interest, specifically emphasizing the “preponderance of force” in shaping that “interest.”

Held’s analysis, however, is situated within a framework that explicitly affirms the very possibility of a “public interest”—a premise that is itself contested. This essay will navigate between these poles. Its objective is not to endorse Held’s optimistic premise, nor to cast Hobbes as a thinker who completely rejects the concept, but rather to articulate an intermediate standpoint: that a *mitigated adversative account of public interest*, while not exhaustive, offers a compelling framework for understanding Hobbes’s conception of “public interest.”<sup>2</sup>

The core of this framework is that it establishes a basic social and political threshold for a presumed public interest, all while consistently acknowledging the ever-present risk of a societal relapse into the “state of nature.” While one could justifiably label this a “moderate theory (or account) of public interest,” such a classification risks obscuring what truly sets Hobbes apart in this debate: namely, the unique factor which we will now examine.

To substantiate this reading, this essay will first establish the theoretical landscape by revisiting the fundamental aspects of “public interest accounts.” It will then explore the arguments of those who challenge the very existence of such an interest, thereby framing the central polemic. Against this backdrop, the analysis will turn to Hobbes’s *Leviathan* before, finally, engaging in a reassessment of Held’s interpretation. This final step will solidify the essay’s intermediate standpoint and demonstrate what truly sets the Hobbesian framework apart.

1 Held, born in 1929, is an American philosopher known for her contributions to moral, feminist, social, and political philosophy. Her groundbreaking work on the ethics of care has spurred extensive research into the ethical dimensions of caregiving and critiques of traditional gender roles. With a long and illustrious career, Held’s enduring influence underscores the relevance of her ideas, which we revisit here. We believe her 1970 work still offers insights worthy of renewed dialogue and exploration.

2 This article extends the research agenda established in Antunes (2024) by offering a more focused and deeper investigation of key questions outlined in that work.

## Public interest accounts: an overview

The predominant “accounts of public interest”—typically concerned with defining an “interest” as “public,” “general,” or “common”—include the “unitary,” the “common good,” and the “aggregative” models. (Instances where these terms are contrasted fall beyond the scope of this essay).

The following analysis will provide a condensed overview of these frameworks. To accurately reflect the discourse, this will occasionally involve synthesizing multiple perspectives within a single account. The objective is to capture the broad contours of each model without an exhaustive examination of their individual nuances.

### *Unitary account*

In the “unitary account,” the concept of “public interest” is often perceived as an *inherently justifiable political or distributive principle*: “[...] governments which have a regard to the common interest are constituted in accordance with strict principles of justice” (Aristotle, 2016, 69, 1279a 17-19). “Unitarian” perspectives do not derive the “public interest” from “private interests” or their combination as “independent interests” (as we will see, unless in some variations), but rather from a *comprehensive moral theory* that applies to and *unifies* both “public” and “private interests.” It is noteworthy that this perspective tends to view the latter as subordinate to or encompassed by the former, hence the term “unitary.”

The theoretical foundation of this account is rooted in Plato and Aristotle. While its influence echoes through later thinkers like Augustine, Aquinas, and even Hegel (manifested through the interconnection of History and Reason<sup>3</sup>)—each adapting it to a Christian or modern framework—this very lineage justifies a focus on its two foundational representatives. This analysis will, therefore, concentrate on the Greek models of Plato and Aristotle before considering how key subsequent variations developed from this origin.

According to Plato, the establishment of an “ideal city” and the shaping of a “perfected” type of human being constitute two aspects of the same endeavor. Nonetheless, this synthesis does not ensure the complete attainment of human perfection for each citizen. Instead, individuals could only partake in perfection as integral parts of the Whole, the singular perfect entity.

3 It is noteworthy that Held (1970, pp. 147-150) incorporates Marx within the unitary account as well. Our position diverges from hers on this specific point, but the particulars of our critique are developed at length in another work (Antunes, 2024, § 3.3).

In the Socratic dialogue that serves as the inspiration for his *Republic*, Plato (1992, 108, 433 a-b) contends that justice in a city can only be characterized by each class performing its designated role precisely (implicitly endorsing the ancient division of labor and expressing approval for social statism): “[...] justice [*dikaíosunē*] is doing one’s own work and not meddling with what is not one’s own.” Alongside social division, there arises the partitioning of the “virtues” of the city, including “wisdom” (*phrónēsis*), “courage” (*andreía*), and “moderation” (*sōphrosunē*) allocated to rulers, warriors—guardians—, and other social strata, respectively.

Building on this, Plato draws an analogy between the “city” and the “human soul.” The “virtues” of the city are inseparable from those of the human soul, and a *unified* human soul, indivisible, can only achieve “harmony” with the city it becomes an integral part of: “[i]t is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. So, if we ever find this happening in the soul, we’ll know that we are not dealing with one thing but many” (Plato, 1992, 111, 436 b-c).

Given that this dispersion is deemed unsuitable for both the “soul” and the “city,” the Greek author, speaking through Socrates, establishes the connection between the two as *indivisible*. The aim is to demonstrate the inherent *unity* that he presumes to exist in the relationship between both.

In Plato’s framework, even the most private interests of the “soul” are ultimately *united* with the “city,” where the public interest finds its expression.

A shift to Aristotle reveals discernible differences in emphasis,<sup>4</sup> yet a fundamental similarity in essence persists.

In close alignment with his mentor, Aristotle considered the “state” (you may say “city”) as an association or partnership. Analogous to any association, it should be established for the “good” (*kalón* or *agathón*) of the members of the community (*koinonia*). Given that the state represents the most extensive form of partnership, the “good” pursued by the state should be all-encompassing. Aristotle commences his first book in a suggestive manner:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think is good. But if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good (Aristotle, 2016, 1, I. 1252a 1-6).

4 For a detailed comparison between the two, see, for example: Herman (2013).

Now it is even clearer than in the platonic case referring to the “virtues” of the city: morality serves as the cohesive force *uniting* individuals and society. Any action deemed contrary to the common good, such as one acting solely for personal or group interests, is considered a “perversion” (Aristotle, 2016, 69, 1279a 20-30).<sup>5</sup> The “good” pursued by the state *unites* with that of every individual, as both the individual and the state seek virtuous lives.

This classical framework finds contemporary echoes in “deliberative” and “procedural” theories, which can be read as modern instantiations of the unitary account. While our analysis does not fully endorse this classification, we will include it here to acknowledge the scope of the current scholarly debate.<sup>6</sup>

Habermas can be seen as a representative of the former, the “deliberative” variant. He frames the “public interest” as a democratically deliberated concept universally acceptable within rational constraints (notably influenced, though not pursued here, by Kant). Deliberative democracy is conceptualized as a model or process of democratic political deliberation characterized by a set of theoretical-normative presuppositions. These presuppositions include the participation of civil society in the regulation of collective life.

According to Habermas (1982, 1988), participation and subsequent deliberation occur through a communicative, discursive, and active understanding. The prerequisites for effective deliberation are fully realized when we integrate what the author defines as an “ideal speech situation” (*ideale Sprechsituation*, Habermas, 1982), thereby reinforcing the call for a decision-making process rooted in a general and abstract nature, facilitating broader acceptance. The normative significance that arises from this concept is evident; it is from this “situation” that the optimal conditions must be drawn to inform the remainder of the deliberative process.

Habermasian deliberative democracy is founded upon deliberation and consensus-building. The rational, communicative (pre-existing) structures are geared towards nothing other than deliberating based on what is established as the most consensual within the given context. This process provides the space to ascertain what truly constitutes the public interest, relying on this deliberative-rational exercise. It serves as a process of prior learning and the retrieval of lived experiences and rationalizations.

According to O’Flynn (2010, p. 301), aligning with Habermas, deliberative democrats comprehend that decisions may not always hinge on numerical

5 The concept of the “golden middle way” (*mesón*) should not be overlooked (Aristotle, 2011, 97, 1132a 14-19), but it is advisable to defer its discussion for another occasion.

6 In our hesitation, we are supported by Boot (2019, 27 ff.).

strength but on the strength of arguments. In other words, it is not always necessary to have a quantifiable majority, and at times, minorities may be correct.

The deliberator might initially consider their own interest, but as the deliberative process unfolds, reasons can be presented that draw other individuals towards their standpoint. Consequently, “private interests” may transform into the “public interest.” This represents a departure from the perspective of ancient masters like Aristotle and Plato.

O’Flynn is also dedicated to the notion that the public interest and deliberation operate independently of each other; the public interest cannot be merely what is deliberated. Following Barry (to be discussed in the “aggregative account”), O’Flynn asserts that the public interest is not only an *interest universally shared*, but an interest shared by virtue of *being members (qua)* of the public. An interest shared in this manner, not solely deliberative, implies an *ideal political or distributive principle*: “[...] the account of political equality with which deliberative democracy is bound up implies that everyone should be prepared to take the broader view” (O’Flynn, 2010, p. 310).

This notion of an ideal, broader view finds one of its most influential expressions in Rawls’s theory of justice. For Rawls (1999, pp. 118-123), the “original position” behind a “veil of ignorance” is precisely a procedural device designed to simulate ideal deliberative conditions and force participants to adopt a universal perspective. However, Rawls’s framework ultimately resists a neat classification within the “unitary account.” While it shares the unitary emphasis on a single, impartial standard of justice, its procedural and individualistic foundations align it more closely with another account—that of the aggregative model—especially when analyzed from outside the strict confines of the unitary perspective.

At last, the “procedural account.” This account posits that the “public interest” is synonymous with the outcome of a fair democratic process, a *democratic decision-making process* (Boot, 2019, p. 27). This perspective shifts the focus from the substance of a decision—its underlying “principle” or “ultimate goal”—to the legitimacy of the “procedures” themselves. The core tenet is that if individuals and groups contend for influence within a framework that ensures plurality, equity, and other democratic attributes, the resulting outcome is, by definition, in the *public interest*. As such, when procedures are deemed fair and morally acceptable, the public interest is considered to have been served (Lasswell, 1962).

Building on this foundation, post-Rawls proceduralists often focus specifically on the process of lawmaking itself. Within this framework, justice

is conceptualized as the political ideal that guarantees equal respect and value to all participants in these procedures (Santoro; Kumar, 2018, p. 67). Yet, even within these process-oriented models, a morally justifiable political principle often re-emerges as the foundational element that aligns individual and state interests, thereby bridging the gap between procedure and the realization of a public interest.

To summarize, the unitary account's core features—a strong individual-collective unity and a comprehensive normative morality—create a framework that is, paradoxically, both flexible and rigid. The very call for a unifying morality introduces a degree of state and ethical inflexibility, the strictness of which becomes a key differentiating factor among its various interpretations.

### *Common good account*

Unlike what will be observed later, an intersection or network of private interests proves inadequate for the “common good account” as private interests are seen to overlap only partially. Moreover, when the overlap is extended, it tends to become unstable (Pettit, 2012, p. 244). This viewpoint can be attributed to Rousseau, although the concept of the “general will” (*volonté générale*) as an ideal condition, even a moral one, shares similarities with certain aspects of the “unitary account” (considering the diverse interpretations of the key works of the “citizen of Geneva”).

We should now consider the Rousseauian case and a more recent one for this account.

Extensive literature has explored Rousseau's ideas since he submitted his response to the Dijon Academy essay contest, and the contradictions among various interpretations reflect the paradoxical nature of his work. However, there are areas where a significant consensus exists, particularly regarding his position on the “common interest” (except when examining the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, where his reasoning appears to lean towards the impossibility of a public interest if the same social conditions persist).

Central to this consensus is Rousseau's conception of the “common interest” as an abstraction that identifies what is genuinely shared among a multitude of particular interests. This common element is not merely the sum of individual preferences but a distinct, overarching will. Consequently, any perspective that derives a public interest from a mere aggregation of majority opinion—prioritizing what is utilitarian for the greatest number—fundamentally contradicts Rousseau's intent, which seeks to transcend such arithmetic in favor

of a general will. An enlightening passage from Rousseau's *Du contrat social* (1999, II, ch. 1, 63) illustrates it:

[...] if the establishment of societies was made necessary because individual interests were in opposition, it was made possible because those interests concur. The social bond is formed by what these interests have in common; if there were no point at which every interest met, no society could exist.

Rousseau's logic of abstraction includes individuals even when they are unaware of their own interests. This does not negate the existence of the genuine "common interest." Such an "interest" only becomes apparent if it can be advantageous to everyone. It transcends the notion of "majority"; it constitutes something shared by all, irrespective of their awareness or desire for its realization. It remains the "common interest" even if, at first glance, it appears to benefit only a minority, as long as what is optimal for them aligns with the "interest" of all.

The "common good" serves as the Rosetta stone of all governance, signifying the evidence and guarantee of good administration: "[...] the general will can direct the powers of the state in accordance with the purpose for which it was instituted, which is the common good [...]; it is solely on the basis of this common interest that society must be governed" (Rousseau, 1999, II, ch. 1, 63). This entire construct is grounded in a theory of a "covenant," where the defense of "civil liberty" becomes an extension of what was originally part of "natural liberty," elevating individuals from a "savage" state to a condition of mutual civil recognition.

This framework rests on a foundational optimism. Since Rousseau portrays *human nature* as inherently "good"—a stark contrast to Hobbes's pessimistic view—it implies a general inclination toward the public interest and the common good. Yet, for all its philosophical power, Rousseau's formulation of the covenant possesses a critical limitation: it fails to provide concrete criteria for evaluating the substantive content of the "common interest," leaving its identification perilously abstract.

The lack of responses to these inquiries serves as the driving force for numerous authors, particularly those aligned with this "account," but also some others, to further elucidate its implications. They endeavor to explore proposals for comprehending a public interest that aligns with Rousseau's insights but offers more effective solutions. In other words, they aim to distance themselves from a potential "dictatorship of the minority," a totalitarianism of the "general

will,” and the exercise of power over the common interest instead of the reverse, among other considerations.<sup>7</sup>

One of the authors currently advocating for a focus on the “common good” is Pettit (2012, p. 244; see also Santoro; Kumar, 2018, p. 64), who is cognizant of the raised issues and asserts that humans must coexist, positing a normative assumption for humans to be a *post-social interest in the equitable sharing of certain goods*. The “common interest” is deemed satisfactory only if all individuals within a polity can be equally provided for, emphasizing the importance of universal public services (thus, corruption is considered a significant evil). “Common goods,” which are non-rivalrous or non-exclusionary, aid in understanding the “public interest,” encompassing entities such as schools, hospitals, and other public services (Santoro; Kumar, 2018, pp. 64-65).

Pettit (2004, 169) builds upon a preliminary framework he had previously developed, stating that the common good should be equated with the common interests shared by people as citizens, specifically public interests, rather than their “avowable net interests.” However, for the “common interest”—understood as the “citizens interest” with public interests—to be meaningful: “[...] the public interest should be identified with those measures—those practices and policies—that by publicly admissible criteria answer better than feasible alternatives to publicly admissible considerations” (Pettit, 2004, p. 169).

The concept of the “public interest” ought to incorporate a public reason oriented towards what is acceptable, particularly when compared to other feasible alternatives. Pettit (2004, p. 169) concludes by adding: “[...] the institutions of an electoral-contestatory democracy hold out the prospect that the public interest, so conceived, can rule in the political life of a society.” This ensures that the guiding principle, particularly in an electoral democracy, avoids transforming into a form of majoritarian or elitist dictatorship, and it is perfectly compatible with ensuring *the common good*.

In summary, a comprehensive provision of the “good(s)” must account for these considerations. This synthesis not only defines the “common good account” but also highlights the clear Rousseauian influences evident in Pettit’s work.

7 These critiques might not be readily embraced, particularly when one examines Rousseau’s objective (1999, I, ch. 6, pp. 54-55): “[f]ind a form of association which will defend and protect, with the whole of its joint strength, the person and property of each associate, and under which each of them, uniting himself to all, will obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.” This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract gives the answer”.

### *Aggregative account*

In contrast to the preceding “accounts,” the “aggregative” perspective centers on the understanding that a community is the *sum* of all its members. Consequently, there is no distinct public realm separate from private interests that are *aggregated* publicly. According to this viewpoint, if a policy aligns with the private interest of a majority, it is deemed to be in *the* public interest.

The primary thinker whose ideas trace back to this account is Bentham—though one could trace this lineage even further within the liberal tradition. This section will therefore examine Bentham’s foundational stance alongside that of a more recent and esteemed author whose work follows in his footsteps.

According to Bentham (1996, p. 12), a community is essentially the sum of its members, leading to the conclusion that the “[...] interest of the community then is, what? —the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.” In the same text, the author establishes a connection between an action, policy, and similar measures, and the interest of each individual based on its “utility” and its capacity to enhance overall “happiness.” Later, Bentham (1996, p. 40) conveys the idea that, in a balance, the generic positive tendency of an act is assessed by whether it has contributed to greater happiness for a larger number of individuals, not the reverse.

The core concept demonstrating the lack of a distinct public realm separate from privately aggregated interests—far from resembling any “unity”—is exemplified by the following: if a policy aligns with the private interests of a majority, it is deemed to serve the public interest.

Crucially, this perspective diverges from concerns associated with a “dictatorship of the majority.” The Bentham variant always prioritizes the greatest “utility” for the majority, which forms the basis of *aggregation*, and this can be understood as the “public interest.”<sup>8</sup>

While it is plausible to incorporate Rawls into this perspective by emphasizing shared interests resulting from an *overlap* of private ones, another prominent political-philosophical figure within this context is Barry. Renowned for his seminal work on the subject, *Political Argument* (1967, 173 ff.), Barry serves as a significant reference, cited, for example, by O’Flynn and others across various accounts.

According to Barry (1964, p. 4), an action is deemed in someone’s best interest if it enhances their likelihood of attaining their desires. In his words: “[...] a policy, law or institution is in someone’s interest if it increases his

8 Since the object of our study is not to delve into what “utility” is and how it is defined, a brief text summarizing some issues related to this conception is provided in this footnote: Kaplan (1960).

opportunities to get what he wants—whatever that may be.” Barry’s definition indicates an *aggregation* (or you may say an *overlap*) of individual interests (of opportunities) emanating from the public.

Barry aligns with the perspective that ultimately resolves into a *sum*, echoing Bentham’s viewpoint. Barry believes that Bentham’s utilitarian calculation is not unjustified in favoring the public, and in situations not resembling Rousseau’s, the public interest must be weighed against special interests. Although he argues that neither—Bentham nor Rousseau—should be followed exclusively (1994, pp. 15-16).

He contends that a “common interest” can vary depending on the context, while something in someone’s interest, potentially falling under the public interest, remains constant regardless of the circumstances. This nuanced perspective is one of the contributions he introduces to the conception (Santoro; Kumar, 2018, pp. 61-62). In accordance with Santoro and Kumar (2018, p. 62), the public interest can be circumscribed within this “non-competitive” perspective, representing the broadest collection (*aggregation*) of non-competing private interests among the members of a community.

Much like Rawls, Barry is associated with multiple approaches, and his principal contribution, as emphasized by O’Flynn (2010, p. 301), is encapsulated in the notion: “[...] that the public interest needs to be defined as an interest in which everyone in society shares in his or her capacity as a member of the public.” However, O’Flynn (2010, p. 306) acknowledges that Barry falls short of demonstrating why the “public interest” should take precedence.

Ultimately, whether the concept of the “public interest” is perceived as part of “utility” or intertwined with other frameworks becomes inconsequential. What truly matters is that, regardless of one’s perspective on the “public interest,” its definition relies on what members of the public collectively share as this “interest,” with a clear sense of *aggregation* (but as has just been pointed out, Barry’s definition can serve other purposes as well).<sup>9</sup>

9 As we have observed instances of the intersection of “accounts” in different authors, such is the case with Benditt (1973), who also builds upon Bentham, embracing the stance of the British philosopher: that something is in the “public interest” if it increases general happiness rather than diminishing it. However, in contrast to Bentham, “happiness,” for Benditt (1973, pp. 294, and 311), should not be construed as an “advantage” or “pleasure.” Ultimately, the author concludes his article aligning more closely with Rousseau: something is in the “public interest,” not because it serves the interest of each member of the public individually, but because it advances an interest of the public as a whole, *i.e.*, an interest shared by all.

### Adversative arguments: an overview

Now that we have covered the fundamentals of the various main “accounts” favorable to public interest, let us proceed to delve into the primary arguments typically raised against it.

To discuss what may be considered an unfavorable stance towards *the* public interest or the assertion of its *non*-existence, here are the three main arguments, each directed towards a respective opposition: to a “holistic value” (*the public interest does not exist as an extra-individual value*); to a “prevailing substantive value” (*the public interest does not exist as an always overriding substantive value*); and to a “factual value” (*the public interest does not exist as a fact*).<sup>10</sup>

#### *Argument against holistic value*

The first argument seeks to illustrate the idea that there is nothing *above* or *beyond* the individual, excluding any comprehensive view of society: the individual(s) must be the sole moral entity to consider, as an end in itself. Outside the understanding of these individualized subjects, there is no legitimate claim for communities, social structures, and the like. This adversative argument can easily be linked to “moral individualism” (Moroni, 2004, p. 154).

By presenting itself as a form of individualism, it emphasizes the individual, focusing on their unique characteristics rather than their group affiliation. Essentially, the differential treatment of individuals is linked to specific traits inherent to each person, overlooking their affiliation with any specific group, even if that group is defined as “humans” (Rachels, 1990, pp. 173-174). This individual remains irreducible to his/her context or community.

This line of argumentation corresponds to the rejection of the possibility of public interest present in the more libertarian-leaning liberal variants. It upholds natural law, modified but not abolished by liberal thought, asserting that individual rights naturally stem from it (although this does not necessarily require libertarianism, the Lockean comparison is enough). In this perspective, individual rights take precedence over any considerations of general and collective well-being. The primary role of the state, preferably minimal, is to ensure the protection of these rights, rather than pursuing any extra-individual

10 We opted, as it provides a sufficiently comprehensive synthesis of the adversative arguments, to adapt the triple definition presented by Moroni (2004, 152 ff.). The Italian author takes the starting point from the debate within the urban planning theory, not directly from a political-philosophical context. However, this does not hinder our theoretical exercise in any way (even though he rarely aligns with us on the general aspects considered). For purely expositional purposes, the order in which the description appears in this author has been altered.

good: “[t]he first duty of the Government is to afford protection to its citizens” (*apud* Heyman, 1991, p. 508).<sup>11</sup>

To reinforce this argument, it is challenging to find a more fitting example than that provided by Rawls’ most notable libertarian critic, Nozick (1999, pp. 32-33): “[...] there is no social entity with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. There are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives.”

For the proponents of this adversative argument, if public interest is commonly understood to extend *beyond* individuals and their interests, and if there is nothing *beyond* inter-individual relationships, then such an *interest* does not exist.

### *Argument against prevailing substantive value*

The second argument posits that the public interest lacks a *substantive value* that consistently supersedes and holds a superior status over private interest. It suggests that from an ethical perspective, the interests of individuals or groups should be considered equivalent or at least be able to coalesce and confront each other in the presence of comprehensive diversity without one being deemed superior to the other. This indicates a fundamental “relativism.”

This relativistic perspective need not be explicitly championed; it can be as nuanced as James’ proposal (1906, p. 53) when he correlated “truth” with “utility.” In this context, he elucidated pragmatism, a conception he co-founded, as a methodology that relativizes reality in favor of a specific subject, particularly that of “experience”: theories transform into tools (its pragmatic variation being “instrumentalism”) instead of absolute answers. Indeed, one can similarly argue that no “interest” or its fulfillment can be consistently advantageous.

In contrast to other philosophical perspectives, this critical position seems to particularly challenge Aristotelian eudaimonism. Aristotle’s assertion of “happiness” (*eudaimonía*) as the complete realization of human potential, the most “complete” or “perfect” (*teleía*) condition attainable, is likely a target of criticism within this context. Using an adversative tone, these arguments illustrate a rejection of a “prevailing substantive value,” suggesting that

<sup>11</sup> This statement is extracted from the Reconstruction Congress held in the U.S. after the American Civil War. It is part of an article that delves into the discussion surrounding the 14th Amendment: “[n]o State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (*apud* Heyman, 1991, p. 554). Through this, we grasp the emphasis on individual rights, particularly the inherent right to property, which essentially becomes the focal point around which all other rights orbit.

concepts such as “happiness” and “pleasure” (albeit not in a hedonistic sense) should not hold a *superior* position over other “values.”

Within the context of these two examples, it becomes clear that the refusal of public interest based on this critique sees advocates of this “interest” as embodying characteristics that are “dominant” (*overriding*), such as the “highest,” “universal,” “permanent,” “invariable,” and “absolute” (Kekes *apud* Moroni, 2004, pp. 157, and 166 n.).

For the proponents of this adversative argument,<sup>12</sup> any “interest” aligning with these descriptions, by negating what is seen as *unique* and *unyielding*, but not all-encompassing, is considered nonexistent, thus challenging the concept of “public interest” once again.

#### *Argument against factual value*

The third and final adversative argument—“public interest *does not exist as a fact*”—indirectly addresses any substantial character of/for public interest, emphasizing the empirical side of the critique. It points out the extensive diversity in contemporary societies, making it impossible for something like a “common interest” to prevail. Therefore, any broader social foundation benefiting *all*, for instance, such as reflected in urban planning, must be deemed unattainable due to the observed dispersion in society.

Thus, highlighted alongside a liberal and often pluralistic framework is a “[...] realistic [political] conception of public interest” (Moroni, 2004, p. 153). This “political realism” derives its significance from its grounding in factual circumstances, portraying the state as the formal arena where pluralistic interests interact.

It is precisely by inverting this factual premise—by asking what happens when this pluralistic arena fails to produce a common interest—that the “mitigated adversative account of public interest” begins to take shape. This new reading will serve as the basis for our subsequent interpretation of Hobbes.

For instance, this adversative stance may assign “preponderance” to “opinion” or to “utility” for most individuals.<sup>13</sup> It is the use of argumentation that compels it, presenting similar challenges regarding its relationship with some conception of the “public interest.” Fluctuations in plurality or regular dissent, for example, may hinder the establishment of significant preponderance. While

<sup>12</sup> Among them, any postmodern interlocutor can find their place: see, for example, Lyotard (2018, ch. 5).

<sup>13</sup> Held (1970, p. 57 ff.), by aligning the Humean proposition with Hobbes’s view on the concept of public interest through “preponderance,” implies a similar stance of “preponderance” for Hume. However, from our perspective, it also represents a “mitigated adversative position,” for different reasons that are not pertinent to delve into here.

insufficient preponderance by force could lead to more violence, here, it might result in almost insurmountable deadlocks, as often occurs with low-percentage majorities, leaving little room for robust coalitions.

It is essential to acknowledge that the tone may be more moral and peer pressure-driven than grounded in sound argumentation: “[...] every thing, which contributes to the happiness of society, recommends itself directly to our approbation and good-will. Here is a principle, which accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality” (Hume, 1983, II, § 5, 43).

Essentially, the pluralistic reality, whether defined by “opinion” or alternative avenues, fundamentally undermines the acceptance of anything resembling substantiality. Emphasizing state formality within the paradigm of “political realism,” contemporary policies, regardless of their content, epitomize the attainable, constituting the primary arena for any notion of the “public interest.”

Therefore, according to this adversative argument, the “public interest” lacks any inherent “factual value” or, if present, is merely *contingent* and subject to occasional consensus (or even—not so—occasional “force”...).<sup>14</sup>

### ***Mitigated adversative account of public interest: Hobbesian variant***

This groundwork now enables us to undertake the central comparative task: to place Hobbes’s *magnum opus* in direct comparison with the established accounts of public interest and in critical engagement with Held’s reading, thereby advancing our distinct interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Leviathan for a potential synthesis*

We have already seen how the promotion of “public interest” can take on multiple forms: the “unitary account” perceives public interest as the result of the *unity* between the individual and the state, and/or a *justifiable political or distributive principle* derived from a comprehensive moral theory; the “common good account” abstracts what is shared among individual interests, emphasizing *what is presumably common to everyone*; and the “aggregative

14 Without singling out any specific “account,” although we have already done so with Aristotle, utilitarianism appears particularly vulnerable to each of the adversative arguments, as it regards “happiness” as *transcending* the individual, “utility” as *substantive*, and both as *factual*. Essentially, for utilitarians, it is *empirically evident* in daily life that individuals pursue *happiness* and *utility*.

15 However, since this reading of Hobbes follows a comparison with the material outlined above and Held’s framework to directly confront her positions, the works of Lloyd (1992), Runciman (2003), and Vieira (2009) are recommended for further development of Hobbes’s ideas.

account” sees *the community as the sum of its members*, with policies aligned with the majority’s private interests considered as *the public interest*.

Our objective now is to cross-reference these theses with the thought of Hobbes. Even a brief comparison reveals that his ideas offer profound, and often challenging, insights that resonate with each of these perspectives.

Hobbes, in his work such as *Leviathan*, does not completely deviate from what the “unitary” proposal might mean. For instance, it happens when he emphasizes the need for a strong central authority (commonwealth) to avoid the “state of nature,” where life is “[...] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1972, I, ch. 13, § 9, 84 [62]). There, the “sovereign” acts as a *unified* authority tasked with preventing civil war, safeguarding the lives of its subjects, and enacting laws to define what is just and unjust, in an even procedural sense. In summary, the “sovereign” ensures social order and prevents chaos. (It becomes somewhat more intricate when making direct comparisons with branches such as the “deliberative,” but delving into this intricacy is not our current focus.<sup>16</sup>)

He also does not entirely depart from a “common good” proposition. Hobbes advocates for a social contract in which individuals relinquish specific rights to a “sovereign” authority in exchange for security and order. In Hobbesian terms, the “common good” involves establishing a stable society governed by the “sovereign” to prevent conflict.

Finally, regarding “aggregative account,” Hobbes’s social contract theory involves individuals agreeing to form a commonwealth, and the authority of the “sovereign” is derived from the collective will of the individuals. The public interest, in this sense, aligns with the *aggregated* interests of the community for peace and protection.<sup>17</sup>

These favorable arguments resonate with Hobbes’s ideas, particularly in the context of social contract theory and the necessity of a strong central authority to maintain order and security. Yet, in the Hobbesian universe, any such similarities with favorable accounts are perpetually vulnerable to being undone—either by the structural threat of a relapse into the “state of nature,” or, on a psycho-social level, by the human passion for “glory” or, as Hobbes (1972, II, ch. 27, § 13, 196 [154]) terms it, “vain glory.” It is this inherent vulnerability

16 However, it can also be seen when Hobbes (1972, I, ch. 46, § 32, 452 [376]) directly questions the role of morality in Aristotle.

17 Within Held’s framework (1970, p. 68), this is indeed a possibility: “[f]or Bentham, as for Hobbes and Hume, although conflicting individual interests may both be valid, the public interest cannot differ from the greater sum of individual interests.”

that opens the door to the adversative argument: that the *Leviathan* may be stripped of any authentic “public interest,” leaving it as a mere formality.

In this way, Hobbes’s framework does not merely lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration of arguments against the public interest; it actively precipitates the very adversative reading we have outlined here. Namely, the argument that rejects a “holistic value” which contends that there is nothing *above* or *beyond* the individual, dismissing any comprehensive view of society; the argument that rejects a “prevailing substantive value” which suggests that public interest lacks a consistent, *overriding* substantive value, such as the “highest,” “universal,” “permanent,” “invariable,” and “absolute”; and the argument that rejects a “factual value” which highlights the *extensive diversity* in contemporary societies, pretending that a common interest is unattainable.

A brief comparison with Hobbes’s thought reveals how each of these adversative arguments finds a powerful resonance in his work. Beginning with the first, the rejection of a “holistic value” aligns with Hobbes’s emphasis on the “state of nature.” Hobbes argues for a social contract where individuals, motivated by self-interest and fear in the “state of nature,” unite to create a sovereign authority. It is a covenant precisely because there is nothing *above* or *beyond* the individual and their mutual agreement to ensure peace.

For the second argument, Hobbes philosophy does not attribute inherent moral superiority to any particular *value* other than the preservation of life and avoidance of conflict. In the *Leviathan*, the sovereign’s authority is justified by its *practical ability* to maintain order and prevent the chaos inherent in the “state of nature,” rather than by appealing to a prevailing “substantive value.”

And the third argument can be related to Hobbes through his focus on the empirical realities of human behavior and its concern with the plurality of interpretations. Hobbes’s realism and emphasis on the tangible aspects of social order reflect a similar concern for the practicality of governance. The *Leviathan*, in Hobbesian terms, is a response to the *factual* challenges posed by the diversity and potentially conflicting interests of individuals in society (consider the fragmentation of the old world prevalent in England during his era). We have already seen how it started to take shape above.

However, like the previous discussion, it is insufficient to rely solely on surface-level relationships. Whereas the former case—the proposal of association embodied in the state—established the very realm of public interest, here it is the regression to the antecedent condition (even if hypothetical) that creates the opening for counterarguments. Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasize that we do not choose a “mitigated—but favorable—account” because the Hobbesian proposition originates from the belief in human malevolence, the

purportedly *natural tendency for humans to be wolves to one another*, and not from a more morally, normatively, or positively grounded speculation.<sup>18</sup> But it is not completely opposed to this either.

In essence, the starting point is inherently *adversative*, with the possibility of a *common* interest emerging only later. To establish a direct connection with the previously examined accounts and adversative arguments, we must recognize that Hobbes begins by addressing the argument from divergence. The construction of the state and the sovereign—and any favorable elements of public interest—can only be conceived *after* this foundational adversative premise.<sup>19</sup>

This groundwork now allows for a clearer understanding of our objective: to ascribe a “mitigated adversative account of public interest” to Hobbes. Consequently, our approach will not be a straightforward exegesis of his work. Instead, it will use this framework to systematically challenge and reassess Held’s interpretive proposal.

### *Held’s Hobbes and a Proposal for Its Reassessing*

It is noteworthy that Held’s interpretation of Hobbes, while situated in a short sub-chapter, aims to transcend the “preponderance of force” framework and establish her own theoretical standpoint. Yet, this discussion does not allow for an in-depth analysis of her viewpoint, so it is the pages dedicated to Hobbes that warrant this revisiting.<sup>20</sup>

For Held (1970, pp. 50-51), Hobbes regards the “public interest” as a concept applicable in situations of conflict, extracting it from the notion that what is desired by each individual is what is in their interest. After emphasizing Hobbes’s notion of the inherent drive to seek “power,” particularly in the “state of nature,” Held discusses an inherent conflict that leads the English

18 For a mitigated yet favorable conception, one might turn to Kant (2009, § 4), as he acknowledges the same contradiction that Hobbes addresses but does not theoretically adhere to coercion, but rather to *Sollen*: “[...] I understand by ‘antagonism’ the unsociable sociability [*ungesellige Geselligkeit*] of human beings, *i.e.* their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society.”

19 Indeed, as evidenced by the following passage: “[I]astly, the agreement of these creatures is natural; that of men, is by covenant only, which is artificial: and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required (besides covenant) to make their agreement constant and lasting; which is a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the *common benefit*.” (*emphasis added*, Hobbes, 1972, II, ch. 18, § 12, 113-114 [87]).

20 Despite this, one of the most illustrative excerpts of Held’s understanding (1970, p. 168) of the “public interest” is available here for consultation: “[...] for judgements of public interest to be valid, we must presuppose a method of deciding between rival claims that *x* is in the public interest and that *x* is not in the public interest. Hence, the meaningful use of the term ‘public interest’ presupposes the existence of a political system, however primitive or complex.”

philosopher to view “peace” as a “common interest.” She interprets this as an “instrumental” understanding of natural laws, suggesting that individuals merely instrumentally avoid conflict to maintain peace instead of perpetuating a state of *war of all against all*.

Hence, this instrumentalism leads individuals to establish a common power: “[s]ince, in the state of nature, the pursuit of his own interests by every man against every other produces a condition of war, men can recognize that it is in their interests to establish a common power to keep them all in awe” (Held, 1970, p. 53). But there is more to it:

In Hobbes’s view, as long as the sovereign is able to assure peace and perform the functions it was established to carry out, its continued existence, and hence capacity to declare what it considers to be in its interest, continues to be in the interests of a preponderance of individual subjects (Held, 1970, p. 54).

According to Held, there is a “preponderance” that the “sovereign” secures through “force,” and this “sovereign” ensures its own interest, which should align with the “public” given the circumstances of potential general conflict.

However, Held (1970, pp. 56-57) acknowledges that in Hobbes it is possible to derive a right to “disobedience,” a return (even if credibly momentary) to the “state of nature,” if the “sovereign” fails to maintain its “preponderance,” which could easily be mistaken for the “public interest,” except in such circumstances.

Held goes as far as to assert that in Hobbes, it is feasible for “*x* to be in someone’s interest” and “*x* not to be in someone’s interest,” but the validity of “*x* being (and not being) in the public interest” can be nullified if someone can overthrow another with whom they are in conflict.

That being said, we may recall how she rhetorically posed the question: “[o]ne may question, then, whether such establishment of a government able to declare what is in the public interest, or the maintenance of it once established, is in the interest of *all* [...]” (Held, 1970, p. 54), yet, this is not exactly our focus, nor is it the conclusion we believe her exposition and reflection should lead to. If Held recognizes the *instrumental* role of force in maintaining preponderance, why does she not interpret it as *mitigating* an inherently adversative stance toward public interest?

It appears that her interpretation may have been hindered by her choice to consolidate the fundamental aspects of a stance supportive of the existence of a public interest, while relegating most contradictory elements to the dichotomy between “individual” and “group interests” (Held, 1970, p. 50 ch. 2). However, more significantly, she overlooked the role she herself envisaged, that of a potential regression to the “state of nature.” In essence, this right (or

its equivalent) to subversion or disobedience, which may even align with the public interest (whatever that may entail at this stage of our investigation), as observed in Hobbes, underscores that the crux of the matter lies in the fact that open conflict either persists or poses a perpetual threat. Consequently, what falls under the “public interest” teeters precariously as long as it can.

It is true, as Held (1970, 50) observes, that Hobbes uses “public interest” in contrast to the “private,” but the direct quotes from Hobbes (1972, II, ch. 19, § 4, 124 [96]) himself can further strengthen our perspective: “[...] whosoever beareth the person of the people, [...] if the public interest chance to cross the private, he prefers the private: for the passions of men, are commonly more potent than their reason.”<sup>21</sup> Hobbes’s general conception leads us to reject the “common interest,” except when it is sustained by *force*. The “common good” and the “common benefit,” as Hobbes also employs, are likewise ensnared in the same conceptual entanglement.

That is why the concept of the “public interest,” when managed *instrumentally*, can also be viewed as a social construct, given that the underlying instinct is always the right to individual or collective survival. No matter how much the state maneuvers and force are exerted, human (natural) passions persist.<sup>22</sup>

So, as Hobbes himself acknowledges, the *right to resist* is instinctively recognized, or as he defines it “defend myself from force by force,” and this resistance can either oppose the public interest or align with it:

[...] a man may covenant thus, *unless I do so, or so, kill me*; he cannot covenant thus, *unless I do so, or so, I will not resist you, when you come to kill me*. For man by nature chooseth the lesser evil, which is danger of death in resisting; rather than the greater, which is certain and present death in not resisting. And this is granted to be true by all men, in that they lead criminals to execution, and prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such criminals have consented to the law, by which they are condemned (1972, I, ch. 14, § 29, 93 [70]).<sup>23</sup>

Given this, we cannot support a proposition for a “public interest account” in Hobbes’s philosophy, especially if it begins with the label of “prevalence

21 For an exercise that juxtaposes this Hobbesian idea with what could be labeled as “egoism,” see: Lloyd (2013).

22 Here we are not delving into the Hobbesian political intricacies, such as the debate between “monarchy” and “democracy,” which prompt the author to more openly advocate for ideas like this: “[...] in monarchy, the private interest is the same with the public” (1972, II, ch. 19, § 4, 124 [96]).

23 Our aim here is not to delve into the debatable aspects of Hobbesian coherence, where he accepts a right to resist while also advocating for the punitive authority of the “sovereign.” This contradiction has been present since the time of the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. Exploring this matter further in connection with our theme will be reserved for future studies. For more on “resistance” in Hobbes, see Plamenatz (2012, chs. 9-10); Schrock (1991); and Sreedhar (2010).

of force,” as a potentially *favorable* account should ensure that the “public interest” remains consistently viable, rather than fluctuating between “states” of existence and non-existence or merely being considered the “lesser evil.”<sup>24</sup>

Hobbes’s prevailing trend suggests the public interest non-existence (or are linked to a basic instinctive sense, such as the preservation of survival), except when artificially agreed upon and/or preferably guided by a “sovereign.” Therefore, as should be sufficiently established, it is for this exception that the Hobbesian variant cannot be solely and exclusively adversative, but rather *mitigated*.

### Conclusion (admittedly conditional)

Throughout this essay, we have delved into diverse perspectives on the notion of “public interest,” spanning from favorable stances that aim to anchor it in ethical, moral, or procedural principles to adversative viewpoints that scrutinize its existence or prevalence. Within the realms of the “unitary,” “common good,” and “aggregative accounts,” alongside adversative arguments challenging the “holistic,” “substantive,” and “factual value” of the “public interest,” we have conducted a comparative analysis with the Hobbesian perspective. All the while, we have remained committed to our initial objective of reassessing Held’s interpretation.

We observed that while Hobbesian proposals share certain similarities with accounts favorable to “public interest,” especially regarding the need for a sovereign authority to ensure order and avoid chaos, they also present significant divergences. Instead of being based on a comprehensive moral or ethical principle, Hobbes’s philosophy grounds “public interest” in the pragmatic need to avoid the “state of nature,” where the *war of all against all* prevails.

Furthermore, when considering adversative arguments against “public interest,” we noticed that the Hobbesian perspective offers valuable insights, especially regarding the *instrumentalization* of public interest to maintain

24 One noteworthy observation arises from Rousseau’s critique of Hobbes, whom he criticizes for advocating the use of “force” instead of aligning duty with socially crucial matters such as a sense of community, which inherently implies some form of “common interest.” While Held’s work outlines this excerpt (1970, 100), we believe its full implications merit further examination. So here is Rousseau’s indictment (1999, I, ch. 3, 48): “[...] what kind of a right is it that is extinguished when that strength is lost? If we must obey because of force we have no need to obey out of duty, and if we are no longer forced to obey we no longer have any obligation to do so. It can be seen therefore that the word ‘right’ adds nothing to force; it has no meaning at all here. ‘Obey the powers that be.’ If this means: ‘Yield to force,’ it is a sound precept, but superfluous; I can guarantee that it will never be violated.”

peace and ensure the sovereign's preponderance, which is not the hallmark of a favorable stance. However, the permanent threat of the "state of nature's" seems untenable in the long run, as societal aspirations appear to strive toward overcoming it.

Therefore, to describe Hobbes's efforts, we propose an approach of "mitigated adversative account of public interest": a *Hobbesian variant*, which recognizes both the favorable elements and the inherent challenges of Hobbes's conception of "public interest." This approach highlights the importance of considering both the instrumental aspects and the limits and instabilities of public interest, taking the context into account, without necessarily having to approach it in a "realistic" manner. It is not enough to just consider the plural fact (in a way, Hobbes's starting point); it needs to be historically contextualized.

Ultimately, this essay underscores the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the concept of "public interest," emphasizing the necessity for contextual and critical approaches that encompass both ethical considerations and the practical realities of politics. It navigates the delicate balance between ideal principles and the practical exigencies of governance, acknowledging the importance of real-world considerations (especially when the "state of nature" is perceived merely as a hypothetical scenario).

Through the analysis of the Hobbesian perspective, we hope to have contributed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of "public interest" and its implications for contemporary political theory and practice. Merely advocating for the existence of the public interest and reiterating arguments in its favor, or simply advocating for its non-existence or dismissing it as metaphysical (as is often the case), is not enough. It is vital to understand and endeavor to analyze it within the context where such an "interest" can be meaningfully understood and assessed. At times, a certain degree of "prevalence" may be preferable, while in other instances, it may not be, and sometimes, "resistance" becomes imperative. With this statement, we are not advocating the viewpoint we identified in Hobbes, but rather acknowledging that it compels the debate to consider more issues than it initially seemed to have taken into account or accepted.

In summary, the Hobbesian variant ought to be seen as nothing more than a version of the "mitigated adversative account of public interest," which calls for additional examination to enhance comprehension and identify further advocates and antecedents.<sup>25</sup> So, while acknowledging the merit, particularly in

25 As already indicated, this is where one might also eventually find what Held (1970, 57-63) considers as "Hume's Preponderance of Opinion."

exposition and thematic exploration, of Held's work, we find that our conclusion essentially turns her reading *inside out*, pinpointing what is most distinctive about Hobbes in regard to “public interest”—a permanently tense situation—, and compared to other participants in the same debate.

**Disponibilidade de dados:**

Todo o conjunto de dados que dá suporte aos resultados deste estudo foi publicado no próprio artigo.

**Ausência de conflito de interesses:**

O autor declara que não há conflito de interesses.

**Editor responsável:**

Mauro Luiz Engelmann.

**References**

- ANTUNES, P. [“Marx and Public Interest”] “Marx e o Interesse Público. Contributo para um debate político-filosófico Contemporâneo”. Lisboa: Página a Página, 2024.
- ARISTOTLE. “Aristotle’s Politics”. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- ARISTOTLE. “Nicomachean Ethics”. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- BARRY, B. “Political Argument”. 2nd impression. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967 [1965].
- BARRY, B. “The Public Interest.” *Aristotelian Society*, 38 (1), 1964, pp. 1-18.
- BENDITT, T. M. “The Public Interest.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 2 (3), 1973, pp. 291-311.
- BENTHAM, J. “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation”. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1789].
- BOBBIO, N. “Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition”. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- BOOT, E. R. “The Ethics of Whistleblowing”. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- HABERMAS, J. „Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. Band I“. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982 [1981].
- HABERMAS, J. „Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. Band II“. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988 [1981].
- HELD, V. “The Public Interest and Individual Interests”. New York: Basic Books, 1970.
- HERMAN, A. “The Cave and the Light: Plato versus Aristotle, and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Civilization”. New York: Random House, 2013.

- HEYMAN, S. J. "The First Duty of Government: Protection, Liberty and the Fourteenth Amendment." *Duke Law Journal*, 41, 1991, pp. 507-571.
- HOBBES, T. "De Cive/Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society". Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1972 [1642/1651].
- HOBBES, T. "Leviathan". Reissued. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1651].
- HOBBES, T. "The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic". 2nd modern edition. London: Cass, 1969 [1640].
- HUME, D. "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals". Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983 [1751].
- JAMES, W. "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking". New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908.
- KANT, I. "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim." In: *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1784], pp. 10-23.
- KAPLAN, M. A. "Some Problems of the Extreme Utilitarian Position." *Ethics*, 70 (3), 1960, pp. 228-232.
- LASSWELL, H. D. "The Public Interest: Proposing Principles of Content and Procedure." In: *The Public Interest. Nomos V*. New York: Atherton Press, 1962. pp. 54-79.
- LLOYD, S. A. "Ideals as interests in Hobbes's Leviathan: The power of mind over matter". Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- LLOYD, S. A. "Egoism." In: *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes*. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. pp. 125-127.
- LYOTARD, J.-F. «La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir». Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2018 [1979].
- MORONI, S. "Towards a Reconstruction of the Public Interest Criterion." *Planning Theory*, 3 (2), 2004, pp. 151-171.
- NOZICK, R. "Anarchy, State and Utopia". Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999 [1974].
- O'FLYNN, I. "Deliberating about the Public Interest." *Res Publica*, 16, 2010, pp. 299-315.
- PETTIT, P. "On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- PETTIT, P. "The Common Good." In: *Justice and Democracy: Essays for Brian Barry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp. 150-169.
- PLAMENATZ, J. "Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- PLATO. "Republic". Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992.
- RACHELS, J. "Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism". Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- RAWLS, J. "A Theory of Justice". Revised edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1971].

- ROUSSEAU, J.-J. “Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract”. Reissue. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1762].
- RUNCIMAN, D. “The Concept of the State: The Sovereignty of a Fiction.” In Q. Skinner and B. Stråth (eds.). *States and Citizens: History, Theory, Prospects* (pp. 28-38). Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- SANTORO, D., KUMAR, M. “Speaking Truth to Power: A Theory of Whistleblowing”. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018.
- SCHROCK, T. S. “The Rights to Punish and Resist Punishment in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*.” *Political Research Quarterly*, 44 (4), 1991, pp. 853-890.
- SREEDHAR, S. “Hobbes on Resistance: Defying the Leviathan”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- VIEIRA, M. B. “The Elements of Representation in Hobbes: Aesthetics, Theatre, Law, and Theology in the Construction of Hobbes’s Theory of the State”. Brill, 2009.