

Power Dynamics in *Minions: The Rise of Gru* through Hobbes's Leviathan

Belinda Angela Suawah¹, Hayden Reinhart Christensen Hidajat², Tan Farren Keitaro³,

Sharren Rose Gani⁴, Noell Raja Pasaribu Habeahan⁵

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Email: belinda.angela.suawah@sekolahmakarios.id, hayden.christensen.hidajat@sekolahmakarios.id,

tan.farren.keitaro@sekolahmakarios.id, sharren.rose.gani@sekolahmakarios.id,

noell.raja.pasaribu@sekolahmakarios.id

*"But everything should be done in
a fitting and orderly way."*

1 Corinthians 14:40 (NIV)

ABSTRACT

This study uses Hobbes's Power Theory, *The Social Contract Theory*, from Leviathan (1651), as the main lens to analyze the movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*. Using a qualitative method of the research minions ac, the film's narrative, the research identifies three main Hobbesian parallels: **1)** The Minions' initial chaotic and ungoverned behavior perfectly represents the State of Nature, characterized by self-interest and disorder. **2)** Gru's early actions, including his challenge to and theft from the Vicious 6, illustrate the inherent Hobbesian struggle for power and the conflict between individual ambition and existing authority. **3)** Gru's ultimate rise to leadership and the imposition of rules demonstrates the creation of the Leviathan (sovereign authority), which is necessary to curb chaos and unify the group with a shared purpose. The study concludes that the film supports Hobbes's central thesis: that strong authority and control are essential for transitioning from anarchy to a stable, purposeful society. It demonstrates that modern animation can serve as a literal case study for the Social Contract, where subjects trade total freedom for the protection of a "Sovereign." This research calls for further research by contrasting Hobbes's "fear-based" authority with Machiavellian "virtue" to see how Gru maintains power.

Keywords: *Authority, Leviathan, Hobbesian, Leadership, Minions*

INTRODUCTION

Animated movies are a form of literature which plays a significant role in helping people to understand themselves by showing a character who is emotionally relatable to them, which helps them see their own feelings more clearly. Literature also helps people to understand their lives and the world around them by giving life lessons, ideas, ways to solve problems, and showing how other people think and experience life in different places and times. Animated movies are a blend of storytelling, visual art, symbolic elements and life lessons.

In real-life, young people challenge and resist parental, institutional, or work expectations and systems made by the older generations. Many people chose to break free from authority and instead create their own path. (Pandolfini, Petkova, Verlage, 2022). This issue is seen in many kids literature works such as storybooks and movies, where a character resists authority and control, allowing them to do whatever they want with their free will.

The issue mentioned can be seen in the animated movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, directed by Kyle Balda, released in July 2022. The story is about young Gru in the 1970s who dreams to become the world's greatest supervillain, showing the genre of comedy and action. The movie is rated PG (Parental Guided Suggested) due to rude humor and mild violence. *Minions: The Rise of Gru* entertained many people and got nominated for Annie Awards (storyboarding, animated effects), Saturn Award for best animated movie, and Cinema Audio Society Award for outstanding sound mixing.

Inspired by his favorite villain group, the Vicious 6, Gru tries to join them but ends up being rejected. After being rejected, Gru stole their prized Zodiac Stone, but he ended up being hunted down by the Vicious 6. Along his runaway journey, Gru teams up with his mentor, Wild Knuckles, and learns what it truly meant to be a real villain and a friend. The main theme of the movie is ambition and resistance to authority, illustrated through Gru's desire to become a supervillain despite being rejected by older, established villains. The movie highlights that power always produces resistance and knowledge is a form of power. In the movie, Gru resists the authority of the Vicious 6, this relates to our real-life parallels where young people challenge existing systems made by the older generations. Michel Foucault (1978), argued that "*a complex web of social relations*" (p. 95), means that our real-life situation no system is "*absolute*". The other example is how Wild Knuckles teaches Gru the "proper" way to be a villain. In our real-life situations, in workplaces, industries, even politics, individuals gain power through knowledge transfer and mentorships, this shows us how the one who can define the "truth" holds power. "*Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth.*" (Foucault, 1980, p. 133)

This study uses Hobbes's Power Theory, *The Social Contract Theory*, from Leviathan (1651), as the main lens to analyze the movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*. According to Hobbes, humans naturally seek power for safety and survival. Hobbes states "*The life of man ... is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*" (Hobbes, 1651, Ch. 13), this quote explains how a human life has always been bad without authority. In the state of nature, people tend to follow their own self-interest and desire, making them live in constant fear, danger, and conflict. Hobbes explains how to manage the

constant fear a group of people experience, they will need a higher power to control and manage them. Without a higher power to control them, it will be harder for people to survive. “*During the time men live without a common power to keep them in awe, they are in that condition which is called war... of every man against every man.*” (Hobbes, 1651, Ch. 13), when people are not governed by authority, society will fall out of control. Hobbes believes that a government or authority is necessary to create a safe and peaceful society. To create a safe place, people must exchange their individual power and free will to the *Leviathan* (the authority or government), “*The only way to erect such a Common Power ... is to confer all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men ... that may reduce all their wills ... unto one will ... This done, the Multitude so united in one Person is called a COMMONWEALTH...*” (Hobbes, 1651). This act creates a deal where no one hurts each other for the sake of surviving, which creates a place that feels safe. The *Leviathan*’s main task is to make sure that their people feel safe and in control. This theory acts as a framework to analyze how Gru manages to authorize and to stop the minion’s chaos.

Previous journal articles have examined and used Thomas Hobbes’s *Social Contract Theory* as the main lens of their analysis. In the journal article, *Unveiling Power Relations: A Comparative Analysis of Individual and Group Influence in Wish (2023) Movie* by Harahap, G. V. S. T., Simbolon, G. M. H., Pasaribu Habeahan, J. A. M., Brasco, P. P. I., & Varen Raist, the authors found that the movie, *Wish*, shows power and control through the main character’s desire for freedom and the ruler’s control and surveillance to keep order, reflecting Hobbes’s social contract theory. While the previous study has explored Hobbes’s idea through thematic analysis of how the animated movie, *Wish*, interprets Hobbes’s idea. Meanwhile, this study will address how literature, specifically the animated movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, help people to understand what are the consequences of authority and freedom, according to Hobbes. ‘

The main argument of this paper is that without authority and control, the world would become full of chaos. The state of nature is a state where life is full of constant fear, where people use their individual power to survive, “*In such condition, there is no place for Industry... no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death: and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*” (Hobbes, 1651, p. 89). Hobbes’s statement explains how without a ruler, life is chaotic, showing how power is necessary to stop the chaos going on. To stop the chaos, people must come to an agreement to transfer their individual power and unite under one sovereign (the “*Leviathan*”). The sovereign has the role to become the “center” which creates unity among the people, and without them, chaos will occur. This concept fits the story of how Gru

manages to order the Minions, and lead them as they begin the journey of becoming the great villains.

Based on the above issue, this study reveals how the Minion’s chaotic actions at the beginning of the movie reflect Hobbes’s concept of “state of nature” and Gru’s leadership in *Minions: The Rise of Gru* represent Hobbes’s idea on how authority and control is needed in order to stop the chaos going on. The study examines how Gru’s leadership in *Minions: The Rise of Gru* represents Hobbes’s idea that authority is needed to bring order to chaos; in what ways the Minions’ chaotic actions at the beginning of the movie reflect Hobbes’s concept of the “state of nature”; and how *Minions: The Rise of Gru* reveals the consequence of authority and freedom.

Binary Oppositions

Chaos	Order
<p>This sets back in Minions 2015 when the minions do not have any leader. When they do not have any leader their action is really chaotic and uncoordinate, because of this they often doing something really stupid and because of their stupidity they often kill their leader one of example is when the minions follow napoleon two of the minions get up to a cannon and when the cannon bout to shoot one of the minion decide to stand at the end of the cannon which make the cannon point down to the napoleon and got killed.</p> <p><i>"From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies."</i> (Hobbes, 1651, p. 77) (Chapter XIII)</p>	<p>When the minions follow Gru to become their leader the minions begin to work together to build inventions, plan missions, and help Gru achieve his dreams. When gru was kidnapped kevin, stuart and bob work together to find gru, even though they struggle a lot they are still loyal to find Gru no matter the obstacle. And also this shows that the minions are loyal to their leader.</p> <p><i>"The only way to erect such a Common Power... is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will."</i> (Hobbes, 1651, p. 106) (Chapter XVII)</p>

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method and a content-based analytical approach to examine the movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022). Through a cinematography and semiotics analysis, and guided by Hobbes’s social contract theory as its main lens to conduct the research, this study explored the representation of social contract, the transition of chaos to order, and the formation of leadership in the movie. *Chaos vs. order* was considered as the binary opposition. The data from this

study were provided from scenes, dialogues, and actions done by the characters (specifically the minions) in *Minions: The Rise of Gru*. The main focus is the important scenes, dialogues, and actions from the movie that highlights the representation of social contract, state of nature, and leviathan according to Hobbes. As for the procedures, firstly, the movie was watched repeatedly. Whilst watching the movie, the scenes were analyzed. Then the key scenes were chosen and were identified whether it reflects the social contract, state of nature, or the leviathan.

Discussion

1. Gru's Leadership: Bringing Order To Chaos

When Gru appears, everything slowly begins to change. Even though Gru is still a child who knows his desire, has a clear dream of becoming a great villain. The Minions see his confidence and feel drawn to him. His strong purpose gives them something to believe in, and their messy behaviour becomes more organised. They help him build tools, join his



missions, and support his goals. They follow him not because they are forced to, but because he gives their lives meaning and direction. With Gru, their actions finally connect to a clear purpose, and the chaos that once controlled their lives begins to fade. Gru becomes the center that holds them together. This situation aligns with Hobbes's concept of social contract, to create a Leviathan, in this case Gru, everyone must agree to trust and surrender their individual power to the chosen Leviathan. In this story, the social contract happens when the minions see Gru's confidence. They feel safe around him and they think Gru is "stronger" than them, making Gru the perfect leader to authorize them, the minions. *"The only way to erect such a Common Power ... is to confer all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men ... that may reduce all their wills ... unto one will ... This done, the Multitude so united in one Person is called a COMMONWEALTH..."* (Hobbes, 1651) When the minions see Gru and agree to choose him as their leader, they surrender all their power to Gru, making Gru the person who has the authority to bring order to chaos.

Even though Gru becomes the leader for the group of the minions, sometimes the minion just forgot or didn't listen to Gru and it causes chaos. This aligns with Foucault's idea, he states *"Where there is power, there is resistance."* (Foucault, 1976/1990), explaining how authority will never be

perfect. When Otto gets the necklace that Gru gives and tells Otto to get back to the base, on the way back to the base Otto sees someone having a birthday party and he sees a rock with googly eyes and decides to trade the necklace for a rock instead of bringing the necklace to the base. This situation aligns with Hobbes's concept, where when a person has no authority, they will instead follow their own self-interest, which makes them out of control and chaos.



However, the movie also shows that having a leader does not mean everything becomes perfect. When Gru gives Otto the important necklace, he trusts Otto to take care of it and bring it home safely. On the way, Otto becomes distracted by a party and notices a cute stone with funny eyes. Otto likes it so much that he trades Gru's necklace for the stone. This choice, which seems simple to Otto, creates a serious problem because it leads to Gru being kidnapped. This situation aligns with the main issue we are facing today, where many people deny authority and choose their own desires instead. The consequence of this action is when Gru disappears, the Minions fall back into confusion. They start panicking, shouting, and running around without a plan. They do not know what to do, and everything quickly becomes messy again. Gru's absence shows that the Minions still need guidance to stay focused. This takes us back to Hobbes's concept, where without authority, "*The life of man ... is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*" (Hobbes, 1651, Ch. 13). The quote explains that without laws, authority, and control, people tend to feel scared and become violent.



2. The Minions's Chaotic Actions Before A Leader Steps In

In the movie, the Minions begin as creatures who live with full freedom but have no clear direction. They wake up each day and act based on whatever they feel, and their actions often bring trouble to themselves and everyone around them. They move from one idea to another without thinking, and every small moment can easily turn into a disaster. They break things by accident, interrupt each other, and create problems faster than they can fix them. Even though they look cheerful, their world is messy and unstable because no one is there to guide them or tell them what they should do. Their constant mistakes show how difficult life becomes when



everyone acts without a goal or a leader to follow. This is why authority is necessary to bring peace. “Government ... is only necessary because in an ideal, anarchic state of nature, various problems arise that would make life more insecure than under the protection of a minimal state.” (Locke, 1690/2003, p. 61) Locke also explains that a life without government or authority will be filled with serious problems because there are no laws or judges to resolve them.

Before the minions meet Gru, they live without any purpose or direction. They keep searching for a leader but always fail because no one accepts them. Which means there is no rule or law, and they act based on their own will, without control they live full of fear and chaos. In the beginning, the minions act without thinking. They are uncoordinated and often destroy things around them. For example, when Otto trades the Zodiac stone for a rock, which causes more problems. This shows without leadership, the minions' freedom brings chaos instead of harmony.



At the scene where minions arrived at the airport and were looking for a way to get to San Francisco without money, they came up with an idea that they thought was brilliant: they would fly the plane themselves and steal the pilot and flight attendant uniforms when they weren't paying attention, then put them on. Once they were on the plane, chaos ensued as the minions flew the plane recklessly and nearly crashed into another plane and a communication tower. This scene shows how the minions represent Hobbes's concept of how without authority, everything will be chaos. “During the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called War...” (Hobbes, 1651/1994, p. 76). In the scene, the minion's situation represents “war”,

3. The Consequences Of Authority and Freedom

When Gru becomes their leader, the minions start to change. They begin to work together, build inventions, and follow plans. Gru acts as the “Leader” who keeps them united and focused. However, authority brings consequences. The minions must obey Gru's rules, and when they act on their own, problems happen like when Otto's mistake leads to Gru



being kidnapped. The movie shows that authority and freedom need to exist in balance. Too much freedom creates danger, but too much control limits individuality. With Gru's guidance, the minions learn discipline and showing that real order comes from trust, not fear. This scene shows that too much freedom creates danger when minions act on their own, problems happen. “Where there is no

law, there is no freedom.” (Locke, 1689/1980, p. 17) this quote tells us that Locke doesn't see freedom as “doing anything you want” but he argues that when there is not any structure and rules, people will end up unsafe, this applies directly to the minions that their total freedom leads to chaos and danger.

Even with all the panic, the Minions try their best to correct their mistakes. They work together, stay loyal, and begin their journey to rescue Gru. Their effort shows that they care deeply



about him and that they are willing to face challenges in order to fix what went wrong. They learn that freedom needs responsibility, and being part of a group means their actions affect everyone, not just themselves.

Through this journey, the Minions realise that they do not follow Gru out of fear, but because he gives them direction, support, and a sense of purpose. The movie shows that a leader helps people use their abilities in a way that works for the whole group. With teamwork, trust, and guidance, the Minions grow from chaotic creatures into a stronger and more united group. This scene shows how Gru acts as a leader who represents real leadership based on trust, not fear. *“A leader is best when people barely know he exists... When his work is done, they will say: we did it ourselves.”* (Lao Tzu, trans. 2006, p. 17) this quote teaches that true leadership is based on trust and guidance, not fear and strict control. Gru doesn't rule by fear but he guides, protects, inspires.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals how the movie, *Minions: The Rise of Gru* explores the implementation of Hobbes's social contract theory, where a society must be controlled by a government so that the people could achieve a peaceful life without having to live in constant fear. This social contract concept is seen in the interactions between Gru and the minions. Before Gru came in and controlled the minions, the minions lived in total freedom, but their freedom created chaos and danger. The situation represents the human state of nature, where when a government is not in control yet, people tend to live in constant fear and live based on their self-interest, which can lead to danger. But, when Gru came in, the minions behaved better. The minions willingly accept Gru's authority and give him their individual power. This reflects Hobbes's idea of people agreeing to accept authority from a Leviathan.

However, the movie also shows how authority is never perfect, highlighting Foucault's idea of power resistance. When the minions ignore Gru's authority, they return to chaos. This proves

Hobbes's point that people who act according to their own desires can cause harm to others or themselves. But, the movie also highlights Locke's and other expert's ideas of how authority must be balanced with freedom. Through Gru and the minions, the movie illustrates and demonstrates the importance of leadership, trust, and cooperation to bring order to chaos. It shows how Hobbes's theory is not only about controlling others, but also about creating peace and safety through shared agreements between the leader and the followers.

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