Against Leviathan

Community vs. the State

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This article, which began as a review of Frederick Turner's inspiring work of intuitive history, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness*, is now the introductory section of a book in progress treating similar and related questions—the origins of the state, the destruction of myth-centered, communitarian, free societies by authoritarian machines and economic social relations, the varied forms of resistance to and flight from the state, and other seminal and provocative problems.

Turner's book traces the emerging struggle against the wilderness (that is to say, the alienation from nature) which appears within a constellation of ancient slave states in Mesopotamia, follows the spiritual (or de-spirited) tendency up through Christianity with its historical, anti-mythic violence against the natural world and natural communities, leading ultimately to the slaughter of indigenous peoples by Christian-capitalist civilization in the Americas. Turner's achievement is impressive, to put it mildly, and he has synthesized a great deal of material into a beautiful and poetic, yet historically solid interpretation of the rise of civilization and humanity's wanderings within its labyrinth.

Fredy Perlman attempts to discuss Turner in light of other readings and research which he has done, suggesting some scenarios for the rise of the state and the subsequent (or concomitant) unraveling of human community, as well as drawing interesting comparisons between "primitive" and modern people's visions of the world and their activities. Our reading of both Turner and what has been written so far of Fredy's Against Leviathan has led to many fruitful, though admittedly inconclusive, discussions, and we hope that the publication of this excerpt will encourage more such discussion in these pages. Hopefully, the book will be published in its entirety in the spring of 1983.

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night"
—M. Arnold

"Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain…"
—T.S. Eliot

The darkling plain is here. This is the waste land: England, America, Russia, China, Israel, France…

And we are here as victims, or as spectators, or as perpetrators of tortures, massacres, poisonings, manipulations, despoliations.

Hic Rhodus—This is the place to jump, the place to dance. This is the wilderness. Was there ever any other? This is savagery. Do you call it freedom? This is barbarism. The struggle for freedom is right here. Haven't we always known it? Hasn't this been called a public secret? Hasn't it always been the big public secret?

It remains a secret. It's publicly known but not avowed. Publicly the wilderness is elsewhere, barbarism is abroad, savagery is on the face of the other. The dry sterile thunder without rain, the confused alarms of struggle and flight, are projected outward, into the great unknown, across the seas and over the mountains. We're on the side with the angels. "A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

Is moving its slow thighs…"

—W.B. Yeats

…is moving its slow thighs against the projected wilderness, against the reflected barbarism, against the savage face that looks out of the pond, its motion emptying the pond, rending its banks, leaving an arid crater where there was life.

In a wonderfully lucid book entitled *Beyond Geography*, a book which also goes beyond history, beyond technology, beyond civilization, Frederick W. Turner (not to be confused with Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontiersman's advocate)draws the curtain and floods the stage with light. Others drew the curtain before Turner; they're the ones who made the secret public: Toynbee, Drinnon, Jennings, Camatte, Debord, Zerzan among contemporaries whose lights I've borrowed; Melville, Thoreau, Rousseau, Montaigne, Las Casas among predecessors: Lao-Tze as long ago as written memory can reach.

To the human communities beyond Civilization's ken, there never was a secret. They knew all along that the king wore no clothes. But they never had access to the drawstrings of Civilization's curtain. Turner gives them access. He borrows their lights to see beyond geography. He sees with the eyes of the dispossessed of this once beautiful world that rests on a turtle's back, this double continent whose ponds emptied, whose banks were rent, whose forests became arid craters from the day it was named America. With their light

"…a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi

"Troubles my sight…"

Focusing on that image, Turner exclaims with Yeats,

"And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?"

The vision is as clear to Turner as it was to Yeats: the beast is Christianity.

"The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle."

Seers of old returned to share their visions with their communities, just as women of old shared their corn and men their hunt.

But there is no community. The very memory of community is a fogged image out of Spiritus Mundi.

The seer of now pours his vision on sheets of paper, on banks of arid craters where armored bullies stand guard and demand the password, Positive Evidence. No vision can pass by their gates. The only gong that passes is a song gone as dry and cadaverous as the fossils in the sands.

Turner, himself a guard, a professor, has the courage of a Bartolomé de Las Casas. He storms the gates, refuses to give the password, and he sings, he rants, he almost dances.

The armor comes off. Even if it is not merely worn like clothes or masks, even if it is glued to face and body, even if skin and flesh must be yanked off with it, the armor does come off.

Of late, many have been storming the gates. Only recently one sang that the net of factories and mines was the Gulag Archipelago and all workers were zeks (= conscripts, inmates, labor gangs). Another sang that the Nazis lost the war but their new order didn't. Ranters are legion now. Is it about to rain? Is it the twilight of a new dawn? Or is it the twilight in which Minerva's owl can see because day is all done?

New Ranters Point At Technology or Civilization or Both

Turner, Toynbee and others are focusing on the characteristics of the monster that is destroying the only known home of living beings.

Turner subtitles his book, "The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness." By Western Spirit he means the attitude or posture, the soul or spirit of Western Civilization, known nowadays as Civilization. J. Camatte called it Capital. It is thought that Marx called it Capital before Camatte. He didn't. I'll turn to Marx later.

Turner defines Wilderness the same way the Western Spirit defines it, except that the term is positive for Turner, negative for the Western Spirit: Wilderness embraces all of Nature and all the human communities beyond Civilization's ken.

In *A Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee expressed enthusiasm for history and for civilizations. After seeing the rise and fall of the Nazi Third Order and all the refinements it brought in its train, Toynbee lost his enthusiasm. He expressed this loss in a book he called Mankind and Mother Earth. The vision in this book is kin to Turner's: Mankind is rending Mother Earth asunder.

Toynbee's term Mankind embraces the Western Spirit as well as the human communities beyond Civilization's ken, and his Mother Earth embraces all life.

I'll borrow Toynbee's term Mother Earth. She's the first protagonist. She's alive, she's life itself. She conceives and births everything that grows. Many call her Nature. Christians call her Wilderness. Toynbee's other name for her is Biosphere. She is the dry land, the water and the earth enveloping our planet. She's the sole habitat of living beings. Toynbee describes her as a thin, delicate skin, no higher than planes can fly and no lower than mines can be dug. Limestone, coal and oil are part of her substance, they are matter that once lived. She selectively filters radiation from the sun, precisely in such a way as to keep life from burning. Toynbee calls her an excrescence, a halo or rust on the planet's surface, and he speculates that there may be no other Biospheres.

Toynbee says Mankind, human beings, in other words, We, have grown very powerful, more powerful than any other living beings, and at last more powerful than the Biosphere. Mankind has the power to wreck the delicate crust, and is doing it.

There are many ways to speak of a trap. It can be described from the standpoint of the self-balancing environment, of the trapper, of the trapped animal. It can even be described from the standpoint of the trap itself, namely from the objective, scientific, technological standpoint.

There are as many ways to speak of the wrecking of the Biosphere. From the standpoint of a single protagonist, Earth herself, it can be said that She is committing suicide. With two protagonists, Mankind and Mother Earth, it can be said that We are murdering Her. Those of us who accept this standpoint and squirm with shame might wish we were whales. But those of us who take the standpoint of the trapped animal will look for a third protagonist.

Toynbee's protagonist, Mankind, is too diffuse. It embraces all civilizations and also all communities beyond Civilization's ken. Yet the communities, As Toynbee himself shows, coexisted with other beings for thousands of generations without doing the Biosphere any harm. They're not the trappers but the trapped.

Who, then, is the wrecker of the Biosphere? Turner points at the Western Spirit. This is the hero who pits himself against the Wilderness, who calls for a war of extermination by Spirit against Nature, soul against body, technology against the Biosphere, Civilization against Mother Earth, god against all.

Marxists point at the Capitalist mode of production, sometimes only at the Capitalist class. Anarchists point at the state. Camatte points at Capital. New Ranters point at Technology or Civilization or both.

If Toynbee's protagonist, Mankind, is too diffuse, many of the others are too narrow.

The Marxists see only the moat in the enemy's eye. They supplant their villain with a hero, the Anti-capitalist mode of production, the Revolutionary Establishment. They fail to see that their hero is the very same "shape with lion body and the head of a man, a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun." They fail to see that the Anti-capitalist mode of production wants only to outrun its brother in wrecking the Biosphere.

Anarchists are as varied as Mankind. There are governmental and commercial Anarchists as well as a few for hire. Some Anarchists differ from Marxists only in being less informed. They would supplant the State with a network of computer centers, factories and mines coordinated "by the workers themselves" or by an Anarchist union. They would not call this arrangement a State. The name-change would exorcise the beast.

Camatte, the New Ranters and Turner encompass the villains of the Marxists and Anarchists as mere attributes of the real protagonists. Camatte gives the monster a body; he names the monster Capital, borrowing the term from Marx but giving it a new content. He promises to describe the monster's origin and trajectory but has not yet done

so. The New Ranters have borrowed lights from L. Mumford, J. Ellul and others but have not, to my knowledge, gone further than Camatte.

Turner goes further. His aim is to describe only the monster's spirit, but he knows it is the monster's body that destroys the bodies of human communities and the body of Mother Earth. He says much about the monster's origin and trajectory, and he speaks often of its armor. But it is beyond his aim to name the monster or describe its body.

It is my aim to speak of the beast's body. For it does have a body, a monstrous body, a body that has become more powerful than the Biosphere. It may be a body without any life of its own. It may be a dead thing, a huge cadaver. It may move its slow thighs only when living beings inhabit it. Nevertheless, its body is what does the wrecking.

If the Biosphere is an excrescence on the planet's surface the beast that's wrecking her is also an excrescence. The Earthwrecker is a rust or halo on the surface of a human community. It is not excreted by every community, by Mankind. Toynbee himself puts the blame on a tiny minority, on very few communities. Perhaps the cadaverous beast was excreted by only one community among the myriads.

Swimmers, Crawlers and Walkers

The cadaverous beast excreted by a human community is young, it is at most two or three hundred generations old. Before turning to it, I'll glance at human communities, for they are much older, they're thousands of generations old.

We're told that even human communities are young, that there was an age when all was water until a muskrat dived to the sea-bottom and brought earth to the turtle's back. So we're told. Supposedly the first walkers who benefited from the muskrat's exertions were giants or gods who are nowadays called dinosaurs. Modern graverobbers have been digging up these gods' bones and displaying the bones in glass cases of positive evidence. The graverobbers use these bone cases to bully all stories other than their own out of human memory. But the graverobbers' stories are duller than myriad other stories, and all their cases of bones shed light only on the graverobbers themselves.

The stories are as varied as their tellers. In many of the stories, memory strains to reach an age when it, memory, was lodged in a grandmother who knew the swimmers, crawlers and walkers as her kin because she walked on her hind legs no more frequently than they. In one ancient account, this grandmother fell to earth from a hole in the sky. In a modern account, she was a fish with a snout who, having playfully practiced breathing by sticking her snout above water, survived thanks to this trick when her pond dried up. In another account, the Biosphere swallowed several grandmothers before the general progenitor made her appearance, and it is expected that the Biosphere will swallow this progenitor's grandchildren. Toynbee may turn out to be wrong about the relative power of the two protagonists.

Many stories tell of miniature grandparents, midgets; a modern account calls them tree shrews. These midgets inhabited the earth while the giants, the dinosaurs, walked about in the light of day. Prudent tree shrews climbed down to feast on insects at night, not because the giants were mean, but because of the discrepancy in size. Many of the tree shrews were satisfied with this arrangement and they remained tree shrews. Some, undoubtedly a small minority, wanted to walk about in the light of day. Fortunately for these restless ones, the dinosaurs were among the grandmothers swallowed by the Biosphere. The former tree shrews could bask in the sun, or dance and play in broad daylight, without fear of being trampled. Minorities among these again grew restless; some wanted to crawl, others to fly. The smug, conservative majorities, happy with their capacities, fulfilled by their environments, remained what they were.

Better stories were erased from memory by the advance of written records.

And now many of the swimmers, crawlers, walkers and fliers are being exterminated.

Now the managers of Gulag's islands tell us that the swimmers, crawlers, walkers and fliers spent their lives working in order to eat.

These managers are broadcasting their news too soon. The varied beings haven't all been exterminated yet. You, reader, have only to mingle with them, or just watch them from a distance, to see that their waking lives are filled

with dances, games and feasts. Even the hunt, the stalking and feigning and leaping, is not what we call Work, but what we call Fun. The only beings who work are the inmates of Gulag's islands, the zeks.

The zeks' ancestors did less work than a corporation owner. They didn't know what work was. They lived in a condition J.J. Rousseau called "the state of nature." Rousseau's term should be brought back into common use. It grates on the nerves of those who, in R. Vaneigem's words, carry cadavers in their mouths. It makes the armor visible. Say "the state of nature" and you'll see the cadavers peer out.

Insist that freedom and the state of nature are synonyms, and the cadavers will try to bite you. The tame, the domesticated, try to monopolize the word freedom; they'd like to apply it to their own condition. They apply the word "wild" to the free. But it is another public secret that the tame, the domesticated, occasionally become wild, but are never free so long as they remain in their pens.

Even the common dictionary keeps this secret only half hidden. It begins by saying that free means citizen! But then it says, "Free: a) not determined by anything beyond its own nature or being; b) determined by the choice of the actor or his wishes…"

The secret is out. Birds are free until people cage them. The Biosphere, Mother Earth herself, is free when she moistens herself, when she sprawls in the sun and lets her skin erupt with varicolored hair teeming with crawlers and fliers; she's not determined by anything beyond her nature or being until another sphere of equal magnitude crashes into her, or until a cadaverous beast cuts into her skin and rends her bowels.

Trees, fish and insects are free as they grow from seed to maturity, each realizing its own potential, its wish—until the insect's freedom is curtailed by the bird's. The eaten insect has made a gift of its freedom to the bird's freedom. The bird, in its turn, drops and manures the seed of the insect's favorite plant, enhancing the freedom of the insect's heirs.

The state of nature is a community of freedoms.

They Might Think We're Playing

Such is the environment of the first human communities, and such it remains for thousands of generations. Modern anthropologists who carry the Gulag in their brains reduce such human communities to the motions that look most like work, and give the name Gatherers to people who pick and sometimes store their favorite foods. A bank clerk would call such communities Savings Banks. The zeks on a coffee plantation in Guatemala are Gatherers, and the anthropologist is a Savings Bank. Their free ancestors had more important things to do.

The !Kung people miraculously survived as a community of free human beings into our own exterminating age. R.E. Leakey observed them in their lush African forest homeland. They cultivated nothing except themselves; they made themselves what they wished to be; they weren't determined by anything beyond their own being—not by alarm clocks, not by debts, not by orders from superiors. They feasted and celebrated and played, full-time, except when they slept. They shared everything with their communities: food, experiences, visions, songs. The greatest personal satisfaction, the deepest inner joy, came from sharing

In today's world, wolves still experience the joys that come from sharing. Maybe that's why governments pay bounties to the killers of wolves.

S. Diamond observed other free human beings who survived into our age, also in Africa. He could see that they did no work, but he couldn't quite bring himself to say it in English. Instead, he said they made no distinction between work and play. This is a mealy-mouthed statement.

Does it mean that the activity of the free people can be seen as work one moment, as play another, depending on how the anthropologist feels? Does it mean they, the !Kung, didn't know if their activity was work or play? Does it mean we, you and I, Diamond's armored contemporaries, cannot distinguish their work from their play? (This would be true enough of those of us with heavy armors.)

If the !Kung visited our offices and factories, they might think we're playing. Why else would we be there?

I think Diamond meant to say something more profound. A time-and-motion engineer watching a bear near a berry patch would not know when to punch his clock. Does the bear start working when he walks to the berry patch, when he picks the berry, when he opens his jaws? If the engineer has half a brain he'll say the bear makes

no distinction between work and play; if the engineer has an imagination, he'll admit that the bear experiences joy from the moment the berries turn deep red, and that none of the bear's motions are work.

It is said, by Leakey and others, that the general progenitor of human beings, our earliest grandmothers, originated in lush African forests, somewhere near the homeland of the !Kung. The conservative majority, profoundly satisfied with nature's unstinting generosity, happy in their accomplishments, at peace with themselves and the world, had no reason to leave their home. They stayed. But a restless minority went wandering. Perhaps they followed their dreams. Perhaps their favorite pond dried up. Perhaps their favorite animals wandered away. These people were very fond of animals; they still remembered the earlier common progenitor and knew the animals as cousins.

The wanderers walked to every woodland, plain and Lakeshore of Eurasia; they walked or floated to almost every island; they walked from the land bridge near the northern land of ice to the southernmost tip of the double continent which would be called America more than a thousand generations later.

The wanderers went to hot lands and cold, to lands with much rain and lands with little. And wherever they went, they found nature beautiful, lush, unstinting. Perhaps some felt nostalgia for the warm home they left. If so, the presence of their favorite animals, their cousins, compensated for their loss. We can still see the homage some of them gave to these animals on the cave walls of Altamira, on rocks in Abrigo del Sol in the Amazon Valley.

Some of the women learned from birds and winds to scatter seeds. Some of the men learned from wolves and eagles to hunt. But none of them ever worked. And everyone knows it. The armored Christians who later "discovered" these communities knew that these people did no work, and this knowledge grated on Christian nerves, it rankled, it caused cadavers to peep out.

The Christians spoke of women who did "lurid dances" in their fields instead of confining themselves to chores; they said hunters did a lot of devilish "hocus pocus" before actually drawing the bowstring. These Christians, early time-and-motion engineers, couldn't tell when play ended and work began. Long familiar with the chores of zeks, the Christians were repelled by the lurid and devilish heathen who pretended that the Curse of Labor had not fallen on them. The Christians put a quick end to the "hocus pocus" and the dances, and saw to it that none could fail to distinguish work from play.

The door is wrong. Matri refers to mother, but Archy comes from an altogether different age; Archy refers to government, to artificial as opposed to natural order, to an order where the Archon is invariably a man. An-archy would be a better name for the door. The Greek prefix "an" means "without."

On the other side of the threshold, the possessed mother returns to her body and proceeds to share her experience with her kin, just as she shares fruits and nuts. Our tongues would be hanging out for the fruits and nuts. But her sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews are hungry for the experience. When the mother shares the experience, she also shares the thousands of generations of vision and insight, the wisdom that helped make her experience so meaningful, so frightfully profound. She doesn't apply chalk to a blackboard. She doesn't write a textbook. She hops. She sings. She begins the "lurid dance", the "orgy" that will one day terrify the Christians. Her cousins and nieces join in the dance. They let go, they abandon themselves to her songs, her motions; they too let themselves be possessed by the spirit of earth; they too experience the greatest joy imaginable.

The nephews also abandon themselves; they too are possessed, enriched. But when the ceremony is over, they sense that they've less to look forward to than their sisters. They know they're not creators of life, first beings. In The Flounder, Gunther Grass vividly portrays the inferiority complex of these nephews, these males in the state of nature. They're studs. They're sexual objects. They're the ones who preen and ornament themselves to make themselves attractive to women, like peacocks, ducks and other cousins of theirs.

The nephews take phallus-shaped spears and arrows to the woods, and they return to the village with meat. But they know that meat, if not as common as fruits and nuts, is still trivial compared to their aunt's trips of possession and self-abandon, for such trips bring one face to face with the very springs of Being. The nephews also seek visions. They too are heirs of thousands of generations of observation and wisdom. Their uncles saw to that. They know that the forest is not the thing it has become for us: a meat corral, a lumber factory. They know the forest as a living being who teems with living beings. They too, like their aunt, let go of themselves, let themselves be possessed by the spirit of a tree, of a place, of an animal. If they've learned much, and well, they even look up, above the forest. They strive for the sky. And on rare occasions the spirit of the sky possesses them. They fly. They become sky, feeling all its

motions, sensing all its intentions. They become the sky who mated with earth and gave birth to life. A man who returns to his village with such news is much and has much to share, more than mere meat.

What trips those must have been! Such profound celebrations of life have no counterpart, no analogy, in what Turner calls "the narrow, unsexed, anthropocentric version that Western Civilization has become uncomfortably familiar with..." Just how far progress has brought us is revealed by the occasional tourist who happens on a seer. The tourist listens to the old man who somehow slipped into our age from the other shore. The tourist sits fidgeting through what he calls a "seance," snapping photographs. At the end of it all, the tourist produces a photograph which proves that the seer didn't fly, didn't even rise from his seat. And the tourist leaves, happily convinced that they, not he, are dupes and morons.

Photographs show what we're most interested in: the surfaces of things. They don't show qualities, spirits.

Some of the people who left the human communities remembered some of the qualities. They remembered some of the joys of possession—not possession of things but possession of Being. They remembered—but vaguely, foggily. Surrounded by things, they lost the ability to express the qualities. They knew the age they had left was more valuable, more pure, more beautiful than anything they found since. But their language had gone poor. They could speak of what they lost only by comparing it to the things of their world. They called the forgotten age the Age of Gold.

Civilization, A Higher Stage?

An armored one asks: If the Age of Gold was so valuable, so beautiful, so pure, why did people leave it? If the Civilized remember it, why don't they rush back to it? If it was so comfortable, why don't farmers throw away their plows and return to digging sticks? This same questioner also asks: If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?

There are answers to these questions. But the questioner doesn't want to hear them. He already knows the answer. Humanity left the state of nature because Civilization is a higher stage. Higher stage of what? The armored one will never tell. He quickly turns to something else.

The theory of the higher stage is as old as Civilization itself. One of its more influential modern versions originated with a nineteenth century lawyer who lived in upstate New York, Lewis Henry Morgan. A consultant to speculating businessmen, a Republican politician and a racist, Morgan nevertheless found time to do a study of his neighbors in upstate New York, devastated remains of once-numerous Iroquoian communities. Morgan's racist predecessors Washington and Jefferson had insisted the Iroquoians were children, but Morgan thought the Iroquoians had reached a stage between childhood and adolescence. Morgan generalized his racism into a ladder, every rung of which gleams with racist polish. He made no effort to disguise his contempt; on the contrary, he flaunted it; such contempt was (and still is) a mark of refinement in America. He named the lowest rung, the stage of infancy, Savagery. He named the next rung, the stage of childhood, Barbarism. And of course he named the top rungs Civilization, the topmost American Civilization. On this topmost rung sat Morgan together with the best of the Great White Race. The professors of America were so grateful they elected Morgan president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The professors would later regret their vote. Morgan's racist ladder was borrowed by the agitator Karl Marx and the revolutionary businessman Friedrich Engels. Marx intended to patch the ladder but never found the time. It was Engels who patched Morgan's ladder. He didn't patch much. He borrowed the ladder intact, with all the racist polish of Morgan's nomenclature: Savagery, Barbarism, etc. Engels patched only the ladder's summit. He renamed Morgan's topmost rung, and he placed a yet higher rung above it. Engels changed the name of Morgan's Great White Race to Capitalist Class, and on the rung above it he placed the leaders and followers of his political party. And in this form, Morgan's racist ladder became the official religion of the USSR, China, Eastern Europe and many other revolutionized lands where the names of the rungs are stuffed into the heads of schoolchildren as a catechism.

Of course as soon as the agitators got a hold of the ladder, American professors didn't want to be caught with their hands on it. They forgot Morgan. This is easily done in places where memory is at the mercy of publishers of written words. But racism did not vanish from America, and Morgan's ladder was too good a thing to leave to

the agitators. The archeologist V.G. Childe, although himself a Marxist, gave the ladder an aura of respectability by filling its rungs with all the latest Positive Evidence. And the ladder came back to America, not quite as an official religion but more as a last resort, as something to use in emergencies. Reference to the state of nature always creates emergencies.

The ladder, the theory of higher stages, of course explains why people left the state of nature. That's what it's designed to do. The title of Engels' book is *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The explanation is simple, lucid, in fact mechanical, and can be taught in elementary schools. All we have to do is look away from living beings and concentrate on things. The ladder is a thing. So are its rungs. And the connections between lower and higher rungs are also things. They're devices. Childe misleadingly named his book Man Makes Himself, giving the impression that his subject was a living being. For Childe, Man himself is a thing, a container of objects and devices; Matter is the core and Man the excrescence.

The device responsible for Man's passage from the state of nature, called Savagery, to the rung called Barbarism, is a gadget called the Material Conditions, or more fully, the Level of Development of the Productive Forces. This same device is responsible for the passages to all the higher rungs. Marx and Engels, and also Morgan, lived at a time when the material conditions, literally the ground itself, slipped out from under the feet of the former rulers, the hated barons and bishops: capitalist owners of mines and factories were buying up the lands of the aristocrats. Marx and Engels prognosticated that the ground would similarly slip out from under the capitalists, and they projected their wish to the first dawn.

In terms of this projection, Man exists for thousands of generations as a Savage. Then, three hundred or so generations ago, material conditions become favorable for something higher than savagery. These conditions include agriculture, metallurgy, the wheel, etc. Once he has all these things, Man is able to generate a surplus product, a margin. (Turner, too, succumbs to this part of the theory.) This surplus, this margin, is what supports, literally feeds, the brave new world that now becomes possible, the kings and generals of armies and slavemasters and bosses of labor gangs. Man had always wanted rulers, permanent armies, slavery, division of labor, but he couldn't realize these dreams until the material conditions became ripe. And as soon as they did become ripe, all progressive-minded Savages leapt unhesitatingly to the higher rung.

(Reader: do me a favor and reexamine the theory of higher stages first. Then tell me if you still consider my caricature exaggerated.)

The theory of higher stages can be taught to small children because it is a fairy tale. There's nothing wrong with fairy tales. But the proponents of this one claim it is something else; they are contemptuous of fairy tales.

The so-called material conditions were nothing but aids to feasting, walking and floating. They were like canes to old men. Their variety and complexity attest to the ingenuity of human beings. But the centrality of such things to us is no proof that human beings in the state of nature revolved around fruits, nuts and canes. Little as we know of their great moments, we do know they were not industrial fairs, celebrations of new inventions, gadget displays. Things may have been useful, but they were trivia compared to the moments when one made contact with the beginning, the source of life, Being itself.

The trivia are ancient, and may have been more varied in the old days than they are now. When fruits matured on high branches, all kinds of hooked poles, ropes and ladders were devised to reach the fruits before monkeys reached them. People knew themselves as cousins of animals; they devised most of their implements when they tried to learn from, in fact copy, the ways of animals. On the banks of rivers and lakes, people devised all types of rafts and canoes so as to float like ducks and swans; they stored nuts for winter use after the manner of squirrels; they scattered seeds after the manner of birds; they wove nets after the manner of spiders; they stalked deer after the manner of wolves. Wolves have strong teeth and jaws. People sharpened sticks and stones. Our archeologists picture them chipping away, all day long, like zeks. We're projecting again. Those people were not coerced by what Toynbee calls "impersonal institutions." They had no reason to go on chipping after it stopped being fun.

Modern diggers have even unearthed the remains of ancient cities at places in Anatolia and the Levant, places later named Shanidar, Jericho, Catal Hoyuk, Hacilar. At Shanidar the whole community shared a cave as a winter shelter; the cave dwellers used metals. At Jericho people caved themselves in by building a wall, probably to protect themselves from hostile interlopers. But these people seem to have done little or no planting. To the north of them were people who planted seeds and herded animals but did not build cities or walls. And across the world from them

were the ancestors or predecessors of the Ojibwa, who practiced metallurgy on Lake Superior, making beautiful copper ornaments and implements.

None of these people developed "impersonal institutions." They remained kin. They went on sharing all they had and all they experienced. The copper users of Lake Superior didn't even plant seeds or herd animals. They undoubtedly could have, but they had no earthly need to. They did have dogs. Dogs apparently domesticated themselves, either because of an incomprehensible love for human beings or because of a parasitic urge. But what satisfaction could come from developing strains of parasitic, doglike elk or moose?

The material objects, the canes and canoes, the digging sticks and walls, were things a single individual could make, or they were things, like a wall, that required the cooperation of many on a single occasion. I would guess that the builders of the first of Jericho's walls ceased to be wall-builders the moment they were done; they returned to more important activities. I would even guess they built the wall in order to pursue the more important activities undisturbed.

As for the surplus product, the famous Margin these implements supposedly made possible: Sahlins and others have shown that communities with many implements and with few, in lush environments and in harsh ones, were all surrounded by surpluses. After all the people had eaten their fill, after all the insects and birds and animals had eaten their fill, there was still a virtual bounty that fell to earth and fertilized the next spring's new shoots. Many animals and many people stored what they expected to use during an average winter, but no one hoarded more than that; free people didn't need to.

Most of the implements are ancient, and the surpluses have been ripe since the first dawn. It was not material conditions that gave rise to impersonal institutions, but people, living beings, who gave rise to both. And it wasn't Man or Mankind who was responsible, but one isolated community, a tiny minority in Toynbee's words.

Furthermore, this tiny minority did not give rise to such institutions in the most favorable material conditions, say in the lush woodlands around the Great Lakes or the abundant forests of Africa or Eurasia. They did it in the midst of the least favorable material conditions, in a fiercely harsh environment.

Modern diggers have actually unearthed and deciphered tablets which shed a speck of light on some of the first moments of impersonal institutions.

The tablets are in Sumerian, a language that may have originated in Central Asia. The authors are the first literate men. The villages where they live are called Erech, Ur, Eridu, Lagash. The villages are located in the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. The place will be called a Fertile Crescent ages later, to explain why donkeys have tails. The first tablets don't speak of the place so favorably. They describe it as a hellish place and make one wonder why those people stay there. So far, more credit to them: they're tenacious. Toynbee will call the place a jungle swamp. The rivers flood yearly, fertilize the valley and turn it into a swamp. Women plant seeds. But one year the flood is so violent it carries off the crop as well as the houses. The following year there's not enough water, and the plants dry up and die in the burning heat of the sun. Surely the villagers must start thinking of returning to the more favorable material conditions of Central Asia, where they had time for more enjoyable activities. But they're tenacious. The grandmothers call the old men to a council. These men have been dreaming. The women urge the men to dream of a dependable water supply, neither too little or too much. The men are undoubtedly offended at being called away from their mental transports for the sake of such trivia. They probably have to be called to a second council and then a third, this last during a famine. The old men sluggishly respond. They may have seen how beavers assured themselves of a dependable water supply. They dream. They see that what's needed is a dam, canals and drainage ditches. But who is to build these? Certainly not the old men. They're not beavers. They call the young men together and explain the dream. The young men have been doing nothing at all, so they're eager to show themselves willing and generous givers. But no one knows how to proceed. The old men may or may not dream up the plans, but they certainly don't supervise the actual doing. They choose a strong young man, a Lugal; they tell him to go look at beavers; the old men then return to their more important philosophical endeavors.

The Time of the First Lugals

The Lugal, which means strong man in Sumerian, may or may not learn from beavers, and he may or may not do the planning. He certainly does the supervising. Wasn't he designated by the elders? When the ditches and canals are dug, the Lugal returns among his peers, proud but not yet haughty. Nothing has changed yet. Such cooperative ventures were infrequent but not uncommon in communities of kin. But this is Erech, a place where the gods obviously don't want people to live. A single flood carries the whole works into the sea. The women call the old men to another council. This time the elders choose a yet stronger young man and urge him to study the beavers more conscientiously or dream more profoundly. And this time the banks and dikes hold, at least initially. But Erech remains a materially wretched place, and before long the banks begin to crumble. The experienced Lugal is called to repair the banks and dikes. The Lugal and his cousins complain that they should have been called a moon sooner, when the banks were still repairable; now they have to rebuild the entire works. This happens twice, at most three times, before the Lugal insists on having a seat in the council of elders, so as to have a say in choosing the time to repair the dikes. Springs pass and winters pass, filled with feasts, festivals, dances and games. The elders of Ur, and even those of Lagash, designate Lugals to go study the irrigation works of Erech. One elder of Erech and then another die of old age; they're replaced on the council by newcomers. By now the Lugal is a more experienced elder than the newcomers, and he expresses himself about other things than dikes. He becomes haughty, and his cousins stand behind him. He and they, after all, are the ones who provide Erech with a dependable water supply. The Lugal even dares to tell an old grandmother where not to plant her seeds. One day the Lugal is found dead, murdered by a deity, a deity known to be in close contact with the insulted grandmother. A new Lugal is chosen, a less haughty one, and the elders are careful to keep him out of their council.

There's no positive evidence for any of this. The fact is that the Sumerian tablets are mysteriously silent about the deeds of the women and elders at the time of the first Lugals. And as time goes on, the tablet-scribes help people forget that Sumerian women were important, that elders once sat in council, that there was an age before the first Lugal.

But I'll return to my story. The people of Ur and those of Lagash have completed their water works. These grow more extensive every year. One year the drainage ditches of Lagash overflow into Ur's canals, flooding and ruining Ur's works. This so infuriates the Lugal of Ur, called Urlugal, that he leads his spear-armed cousins against those of Lagash. The enraged youth of Ur destroy their neighbors' water works and pursue fleeing Lagash people to the desert. In their rage they murder several foreigners, desert nomads whose paths they cross. When at last the besieged Lagashians beg for an end to the violence, the victors, Urlugal at their head, impose a fiendishly heavy burden on the defeated. The men of Ur demand reparations from the Lagashians, who are to rebuild their own waterworks and those of Ur as well. Lagashians unwilling or unable to support such a burden are invited to bring large gifts to the men of Ur, at specified periods. Urlugal is determined to keep track of all the tribute gifts owed to him, for he's as tenacious as those ancestors of his who did not abandon the Fertile Crescent. To keep track of the gifts and givers, he sends one or two of his cousins to Erech to study the marks some of Erechlugal's men have been making on clay tablets to keep track of the best times to repair dikes. Urlugal's men soon make clay tablets of their own, and onto these tablets they chisel wedge-shaped marks to signify the names of those in Lagash who still owe tribute gifts, and the amounts.

All of these events do not happen within a single Urlugal's lifetime. Urlugal is only one of the names of Ur's Lugals. The Sumerians have hundreds, perhaps thousands of Lugals, and the scribes invent yet more names of Lugals to fill the time between themselves and the first dawn, For the Sumerians, the interval between themselves and the Beginning is not as brief as it will later become for Christians. The tenacious Sumerians reckon in millions.

I latched on to Urlugal because of his telling name, so I'll stick with him. He's still collecting tribute from Lagash. His nephews are having a ball supervising the canal work of their neighbors instead of doing it themselves.

The Warriors Return

Now alarming news arrives. Some of Urlugal's cousins went hunting, perhaps in the forests of Lebanon. One of them returns, with barely enough life in him to tell his tale. The hunters were attacked by spear-armed nomads; all were killed but the teller. The attackers are probably kin of the foreigners killed by Urlugal's men during the foray against Lagash. Urlugal immediately prepares to lead his strongest cousins against the murderous foreigners. The elders try to cool the hotheads, suggesting that the foreigners were avenging the victims of Urlugal's initial raid, and another raid will only lead to more reprisals. But the hotheads will not be stopped. Urlugal and his cousins, still flushed by their victory over Lagash, set out towards the Lebanon forest. They actually find a camp of foreigners. They raze it to the ground and murder most of the nomads. On their way back with the captured animal herds, the men of Ur are attacked by another band of foreigners. The forest seems to teem with foreigners. Urlugal and many of his cousins are killed. The survivors abandon their loot and flee back to Ur in disarray. All Ur is in a rage. Someone reminds the angry crowd of the elders' prediction and he's immediately killed. The survivors and their cousins clamor for the appointment of the strongest and most determined among them as Lugal. The victors over Lagash will not be bested by mere foreigners, they will not be flies to spiders who live in no cities and plant no seeds. The council of elders, beset by the entire town's rage, hesitantly appoints the new Lugal.

A much larger force with stronger arms sets out against the foreigners. They send scouts ahead so as not to be trapped in another ambush. They even transport their supplies as well as Lugal himself on wheeled carriages; the Lugal can thus save his strength for the actual battle, and the men from Ur can move faster than any foreigners. They find several camps of nomads and raze every one of them to the ground. They return to Ur—this time not only with captive herds but with captive foreigners as well. The returning warriors are embraced by their worried kin. For a fortnight all Ur is taken up with feasts, dances, celebrations. The elders, men and women, prepare generous offerings to the spirits and powers who made the victory possible. Special offerings are made to the Lugal's deity.

When the celebrations end, the flushed warriors, the heroes, are not about to return to repairing the canals. The stint of the Lagashians is about to end. In fact, the Lagashians are complaining that they've already done more for Ur than they ever agreed to do. Who'll do the repairing now? The Lugal's cousins had long been supervising defeated Lagashians and they're not pleased by the prospect of replacing the defeated.

The captured foreigners are put to work on the canals. Each of the Lugal's cousins is now a Lugal, a supervisor. The Sumerian word is Ensi. This is a sub-Lugal, an assistant to the Lugal, a boss but not the boss.

Nomads continue to harass Ur's hunters and travelers. But news of their raids is no longer so alarming. The Lugal leads frequent expeditions against the unintelligible Semitic-speaking foreigners. The elders no longer object to these expeditions, prudently confining themselves to visionary and philosophical activities. Occasionally the Lugal consults an old man or woman about the likelihood of victory, but otherwise he keeps a respectful distance from them. The Lugal now looks forward to these expeditions, for each new raid brings new foreigners to Ur. There are now enough foreigners in Ur to repair the canals in every season. Soon the captives from earlier expeditions are recruited to expeditions against new raiders. Now foreigners don't only repair dikes. They also repair the houses of old men and women. They do the Lugal's chores and soon the chores of Ensis. Sumerian women still give birth to the plants in the field, but now they do this by maintaining close and continual contact with Earth and with the spirits responsible for nurturing the plants. The actual scattering of the seeds is done by captured foreigners.

And who are the foreigners? Surely we can recognize them as the first zeks! They're workers, proletarians, full-time laborers. The Sumerian language comes from another age. Just as it has no word like King, Ruler, Emperor, President, it has no word like Zek, Worker, Slave. They continue to call the lugal Lugal, and they continue to call the foreigners Foreigners. But in an incredibly short time, Ur abandons the exotic world of seers and visions. I've been using the present tense. Ur is Now. It's not exotic at all. It's our world.

What happened?

A Political Revolution

I've already disposed of the Marxist explanation. Favorable material conditions did not give rise to the first Lugal of Erech. Material conditions remained what they were for generations, and the people of Erech had no access to the best of them. Material conditions began to change only after the first Lugal, and from then on they change fast.

Pierre Clastres will say there was a revolution—not a material but a political revolution. This is a good way to put it, but it's true only in retrospect. The Sumerians obviously undergo a great change; we can call this a revolution, but they don't experience it as one. From the standpoint of the Sumerians, nothing changes. In a sense they never leave the state of nature. This is probably what accounts for the exoticism that will continue to cling to what we will call "early civilization." The Sumerians haven't become zeks. They're still possessed. Sumerian women still give birth, not as machines for the production of soldiers and workers, but as living beings in close contact with the sources of Being. Sumerian men, especially older ones, still seek contact with the spirits of the winds, the clouds, even of the sky itself. In fact, they devote themselves to their searches more completely than they ever could before. Now all their energies are devoted to the dances, festivals and ceremonies. They no longer have to concern themselves with the trivia of material survival. The trivia are all done for them. Furthermore, the Lugal and his men bring far more generous gifts to the spirits than could ever be given before. The Lugal's men have even built permanent shrines to all the spirits and powers, incredibly beautiful shrines, and around the shrines they're placed gardens and filled them with all the creatures of the deserts and forests. Never before have people shown such homage, such respect, to the beings responsible for life. It's true that the Lugal builds the greatest shrine to his own deity. This is obviously presumptuous on the haughty Lugal's part, since he can't know that the spirits accept the hierarchic arrangement into which he places them. This is a type of revolution. But the Sumerians are not now going to turn against the Lugal for his haughtiness. They've gotten used to it, and instead of irking them, it now makes them smile with a certain pride. It's thanks to him that they can devote themselves so completely to the well-being of their city.

I have to admit to my questioner that the Sumerians would not part with a single one of the implements they no longer ever use. They don't long to return to the timeless Golden Age. They're in the Golden Age, more so now than ever before.

But the golden Sumerians are no longer all of Sumer. In fact, in some modern accounts the golden Sumerians no longer even exist. They're dismissed with a single word. The word is Temple. The devotees of Inanna, the loving daughter of the Moon; the communicants with Anu, the spirit of the sky—these are not the administrators of the irrigation works, the builders of the great palaces, the heroes of the military encounters. These are what we call Priests and Priestesses, oracles and diviners. All that's left in Sumer from the state of nature has shrunken to what we call Religion. Perhaps some of the women who no longer scatter seeds, perhaps some of the men who no longer hunt or herd, feel some nostalgia for the old days. But there's no positive evidence of a "back to the land" movement among the Sumerian clergy. The scribes who chisel the tablets are the Lugal's hired men; they aren't hired to record the nostalgia of the clergy. The only clue we have are the gardens which the Lugal's men build and fill for the Temple's residents. They're strangely lush gardens for small towns surrounded by non-urban vistas and in walking distance from forests and mountains—and the Sumerians are such good walkers. Could it be, as Turner suggests, that the world outside the city is already becoming a wilderness? We should look carefully. The world outside Ur is not the wilderness our word designates. Their wilderness clearly is not the forest or desert, the plants or animals, since the nature-loving Temple residents have all these brought into the city. Could it be that their wilderness is the wilderness created by the Lugal and his men: the battlefields surrounding all of Sumer's towns, the settings of raids and counter-raids, the scenes of torture, slaughter and capture? A priestess who wanted to commune with the Moon by a forest pond would have to set out with an armed escort. It has become more practical to bring a shrunken pond and forest into the precincts of Ur.

And It All Runs Like Clockwork

If the former free community has shrunken to a Temple, an excrescence of that community has grown extremely large, for the Temple is now surrounded by a bustling city, almost modern every way except in its religion—perhaps not altogether modern but at least perfectly intelligible to us. There are rich and there are poor, since the families of Ensis are no kin of the foreigners and share nothing with them. There's a market, since the well-to-do no longer gather, grow or hunt their own food. There are works-projects administrators and their labor gangs. There are generals and their soldiers. There are record-keepers and there's even a school for scribes. And it all runs like clockwork.

Let's look more closely. If the people in the Temple are golden, those outside are of baser metals. The Semitic-speaking members of the labor gangs, married and with one or more children, not quite Sumerianized yet, remember better days. It might not be altogether insane to suppose that these first zeks love their Ensis no better than later zeks will love theirs. Some of the victories celebrated on the tablets are against foreigners already in Sumer; in other words, they are victories over rebelling zeks.

The foreigners are maltreated, overworked and despised. They are neither free nor whole. They're the dispossessed. Some of their children might face a brighter future, especially those who go to war and butcher other foreigners bravely enough. The Sumerians have not yet progressed to the higher stage of hereditary misery. Even so, the lot of the Sumerian zeks is in no sense golden. Rousseau, and before him de la Boetie, will wonder about situations like these. In any given labor gang, there are many zeks and only one Ensi. What keeps the zeks from ganging up against the Ensi? Why do people reproduce a miserable daily life?

Let's glance at the Ensis. They are materially well off, that's clear. But they might wish there were shrinks in Sumer. The Ensis are beset by fears, and at least one Ensi is paranoid. He's afraid to be murdered by the zeks in his gang; he has already executed several conspirators. He's afraid word of his incompetence might reach the Lugal. And, the gods forbid! he suspects someone in the Temple nurses a grudge against him.

There's something else about the Ensi. His zeks aren't free or whole. But neither is he. Except when they rise, or gang up against an Ensi, the zeks are not determined by their own nature or being, by their own choices or wishes. The tasks they spend their days on are not their own. But those tasks are not the Ensi's either. The Ensi knows of a work gang whose supervisor was murdered by zek conspirators. The murdered man was replaced by a man with a different outlook and altogether different interests. Yet once he was supervisor, the new man did the very same things as the murdered supervisor, and in almost the same manner. Strange thoughts come to the Ensi's mind. Could it be, he wonders, that the only man in Ur who is his own man is the Lugal? Now he wonders if even this is true. He has heard of a town whose Lugal was killed along with most of his Ensis in an uprising of zeks. When the Ensi first heard the story, he wasn't surprised that there was an uproar, that many of the activities which emanated from the Lugal's will come to a standstill. But now he remembers that very few activities came to a complete halt, even during the interregnum between Lugals. He even remembers that no council of elders replaced the dead Lugal; the elders stayed in the temple and locked its gates. Many of the town's activities, important ones at that, went on as before, like the clockwork of the Ensi's descendants. Yet stranger thoughts come to him. It seems to him that the town has a will of its own. But he knows it doesn't. The only one in town with a will is the Lugal. The Ensis only execute the Lugal's will. And if the zeks have a will at all, it's a will to break out. The Ensi concludes that it's pointless to think. Thinking is the job of priests and oracles.

An Artificial Animal...Carcass of a Worm

One of the Ensi's distant descendants in a much later Ur, a scribe called Thomas Hobbes, will know that the Ensi is trying to understand Civilization with ideas that come from the state of nature. This Hobbes will know that Ur is no longer in the state of nature, it is no longer a community of self-determined human beings. Hobbes will know that Ur is no mere city. Ur is a State, maybe even the first state. And a State, Hobbes will say, is an "artificial animal." It is something brand new, something neither Man or Nature dreamt of. It is "that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State, in Latin Civitas, which is but an artificial man." Like the thinking Ensi, Hobbes will

know that this artificial man has no life of its own, and he will ask, "may we not say, that all automata (engines that move by themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life?" The Ensi cannot yet visualize a watch. The more advanced Hobbes will no longer be able to visualize nature or human beings. He will ask "what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels…?"1." In a world of watches, the Leviathan will not appear as strange to Hobbes as it appears to the Ensi.

Hobbes will picture the Leviathan as an artificial English man: masculine, blonde, with a crown on its head, a scepter in one hand and a sword in the other, its body composed of myriads of faceless human beings, zeks.

Hobbes will insist that the Leviathan has the head of a man. He might agree with the yet later poet Yeats that the beast has "a lion body and the head of a man." But he will insist on the man's head. He will know that the zeks are headless, that they are the springs and strings that operate the body. He'll think the monster contains one free and whole man, the Lugal. Hobbes will be able to call the Lugal a King, Monarch, Ruler and other names besides, because his language will have been enriched by the intervening proliferation of Leviathans.

The philosophical Ensi already knows better than Hobbes that the beast has neither the body nor the head of a man, whether English or Sumerian. The Ensi knows that even the Lugal, the freest man in Ur, cannot go hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon and dancing at night, as his own spirit moves him. He knows of a Lugal who went off hunting only twice, and the second time, while the Lugal was in the woods, his favorite Ensi replaced him as Lugal, and the former Lugal had to beg for asylum in a neighboring city. The Ensi knows that a Lugal who let himself be determined by his own spirit would quickly be overthrown by Ensis or even zeks, and that even the Temple would be in an uproar.

The Ensi, less advanced than Hobbes, is as yet more familiar with living beings than with springs and watches. He cannot envision the Leviathan with either a human head or a lion body. He might use Hobbes' first description and think of the beast as an artificial animal, but not an animal as graceful and limber as a lion. He might think of it as a worm, a giant worm, not a living worm but a carcass of a worm, a monstrous cadaver, its body consisting of numerous segments, its skin pimpled with spears and wheels and other technological implements. He knows from his own experience that the entire carcass is brought to artificial life by the motions of the human beings trapped inside, the zeks who operate the springs and wheels, just as he knows that the cadaverous head is operated by a mere zek, the head zek.

Among the speculations this Hobbes will give as offerings to his Ur will be the claim that the zeks actually contracted themselves to imprisonment within the carcass, or as he will put it, that the head made an agreement with the body, if not in Hobbes' Ur then at least in the original Ur. The philosophical Ensi, who has by now retired to the Temple, already knows better. He knows the zeks are foreigners who were brought to Ur by force before they even understood the Lugal's language; the zeks agreed to no contract then, and they haven't done so since. The Ensi even remembers that the defeated Lagashians who contracted themselves to repairing Ur's canals made this agreement only at the point of spears. Furthermore, no Lugal ever advanced Hobbes' claim; he would have been laughed out of office. The Lugal knows that even the elders didn't appoint him, since the elders no longer do any appointing; they take care of the shrines. The Lugal claims that his power comes to him from the violent spirit who lodges-in the Ziggurat or artificial mountain. This sprawling man-made phallus shape is the real head of the Leviathan, and it makes no contracts.

Fredy Perlman
Against Leviathan
Community vs. the State
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