

The Dragons of Brno

Fredy Perlman against History's Leviathan

Max Cafard

1996

Hanging above the entrance way to the Town Hall of Brno, the capital of Moravia, is a Dragon. The famous Dragon of Brno. The Monster, which stares down through glassy eyes upon all who enter this seat of political power, was brought back long ago from a strange and distant land.

Some might call this awe-inspiring beast a mere "crocodile." But to the good citizens of Brno of an earlier age, it must have represented everything exotic and remote. In all probability, it was precisely such a creature that was called "Leviathan" in Biblical times.

This specimen still hangs today in the passageway as an enduring image of Otherness. In fact, at this late date it might be taken as the symbol of the conquest of the Other by Civilization. It is the once untamed nature, the archaic, the primitive, the anarchic—now safely embalmed and displayed for the amusement of the burghers and tourists.

Another less famous Dragon was born in Brno on August 20, 1934. A Dragon who breathed fire against Leviathan. It might seem strange that I label Fredy Perlman a Dragon, since he was one of the great Ranters against Leviathan, an aspiring Dragon-slayer who announced the coming destruction of the Beast, and who was the avowed enemy of everything we think of as Dragon-like. But in fact he had much in common with another sort of Dragon. Not the life-destroying, monstrous Dragon of the West, but rather the more primordial, life-affirming one of the East. The Chinese, Taoist Dragon. The Dragon of dance, joy, celebration, and the affirmation of community and nature. The Dragon of Otherness, the very antithesis of the Western Dragon of Power and Domination. Fredy Perlman is the Anti-Dragon of Brno.

And yet a third Dragon emerged long ago in Brno. One that is truly a monstrous Beast. For Brno is the birthplace of not only Fredy Perlman, but as he himself tells us, it is also the home of the nation-state, the modern incarnation of Leviathan. At the beginning of the modern epoch, the people of Moravia formed a defensive league and thereby inadvertently created a mutant Creature that was "a precursor of what we will call a 'nation state.'"

The Dragon was called "Greater Moravia," but its true importance was its identity as "the prototype of the Leviathinic form." It was to become, as Nietzsche put it "the coldest of all cruel monsters." It would also become Moloch, the awful Deity who requires the sacrifice of children by their parents. And it would become Behemoth, the gigantic and grotesque Creature inspiring horror and fear. And finally, it would become the most horrifying Dragon, the avaricious reptilian Beast that hoards all that it can conquer.

As His-story moves on, this Monster, this Dragon of Brno, takes on many aspects. To what degree the Monster is Capital, to what degree it is the State, and to what degree it is the technological Mega-machine, is not always clear in this complex story. The Monster plays many roles in this tragedy called "The Slaughter-Bench of History." We may call it Leviathan, Moloch, Behemoth or Dragon without fear of error. It is important, though, that we understand Leviathan's greatest transformation, the one necessary before the Monster could finally turn upon itself. As Fredy Perlman pointed out, this was its world-historical transition from Worm-Leviathan to Octopus-Leviathan.

Against His-story



Against Leviathan!

But Leviathan has a long His-story before its final metamorphosis. Fredy Perlman announces that “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.” He recounts in his great epic the entire ugly and brutal story of this Creature and its destruction of the Earth.

Miserable Status of Zekhood

He begins the narrative at the Cradle of Civilization, where he turns back the world-historical baby blankets to reveal a monstrous, Satanic infant Leviathan. As we find the Creature in ancient Sumer, its apparatus of hierarchy and domination is already fully developed in the brutal class system. The “Lugal,” the paradigmatic Boss, and his staff of “Ensis” or underbosses, look to foreign captives to do their work. These captives are “the first zeks,” who are “the workers, proletarians, full-time laborers.” Quickly, though, the general populace is reduced to the same miserable status of zekhood, which is to be the ultimate fate of humanity in general.

The ideology of domination follows immediately. “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.” The entire universe is reconceived as a Leviathan ruled by a psychotic, power-mad Boss. God the Father is born. Monistic metaphysics arises out of the monistic monopoly of power.

The businessman, the man who reduces all being, including his own, to economic value, also emerges in Sumer. This is “a human being whose living humanity has been thoroughly evacuated.” As Fredy Perlman’s story shows, the term “Belly of the Beast” is a far from pejorative term for such a being. It is an appropriate term for the natural environment that breeds him, and to which he is perfectly adapted. This business-being is indeed a kind of digestive bacterium for the Monster. He breaks down the living protoplasm of culture, soul and spirit into inorganic matter to be metabolized by the deathly body of the Beast. He is one “who thrives in, and on, the Leviathan’s material entrails. People reduced to things are among the objects in the beast’s entrails and obviously fair game to this hunter for profits.”

The social and psychological cent that holds the entire Leviathanic edifice together is patriarchy. Leviathan is in a sense only the male ego and male aggressiveness expanded into a vast social or rather alai-social system. “When we speak of real History, of History proper, we mean His-story. It is an exclusively masculine affair. If women make their appearance in it, they do so wearing armor and wielding a phallus shape. Such women are masculine.” It is only in our own time that we can clearly see what such a “States-Woman” could possibly be. The most highly-developed specimen thus far was Mad Maggie Thatcher, the Iron Lady, a Phallic Mother if there ever was one.

For a more perfect example we must wait for a Woman of Steel, the deadly Stalinism of the future. Fredy Perlman points out the many aggressive, masculine images that pervade the dominant culture over the ages. “The whole affair revolves around phallus shapes: the spear, the arrow, the Ziggurat, the Obelisk, the dagger, and of course later the bullet and the missile.” This imagery is perhaps obvious, but worth remembering, as is the fact that these images are all phantom forms of the phallic ego, the ultimate lethal, annihilating missile directed at everything in the world that still lives.

Fredy Perlman shows us that Leviathan’s long His-story is the story of the denaturing, objectifying and mechanizing of all of reality. “As the generations pass, the individuals within the cadaver’s artificial entrails, the Ensi as well as the zek, the operators of the great Worm’s segments, become increasingly like the springs and wheels they operate, so much so that sometime later they will appear as nothing but springs and wheels.”

The reduction of the universe to dead matter is not, as many believe, a product of the Enlightenment and the Newtonian world-view. The process is implicit in the His-story of Leviathan from the beginning. The Worm and the Octopus both eat away at the organic community and turn all to dead matter. The living world is slowly disenchanting or murdered symbolically, and then, to an increasing degree, it is literally killed. At the same time, dead objects are fetishized, given power as if they were animate beings.

Fredy Perlman is among the few who have understood the role played in this process by politics of monotheism. Akhenaten he says “was the first revolutionary totalitarian,” who established monotheism, but “did not have

to invent what had been the common practice of his Ziggurat-raising neighbors for more than fifty generations.” Monotheism is the mortal enemy of the Spirit. It is at the core not only of every imperialistic religion, but also of every dogmatism and sectarianism, including dogmatic sectarian anarchism. It is even at the core of dogmatic, imperious atheism (most brilliantly shown by Flannery O’Connor, through Hazel Motes, the fanatically monotheistic atheist anti-hero in *Wise Blood*).

Ironically, the remnant of latter-day revolutionaries still fight the good monotheistic fight against the monotheism of the Monster. Yet the Octopus has already mutated monotheism into polymorphous idol-worship. And the authoritarians long ago perfected monotheism, so the world is not interested in a new improved leftist, revolutionary or quasi-anarchistic version. The only alternative is to break with both orthodox monotheism and reactive crypto-monotheism. To affirm polytheistic Nature, the Household of many spirits, the Tao of many tans, the sacred Unity of diverse modes of sacred being.

Fredy Perlman traces the spiritual conflict between these alternative paths. It begins when Moses proclaims “Leviathan’s declaration of war against all life”: that Man should “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Some want to find an idea of “stewardship” in this dominion, a concept that itself reflects delusions of human self-importance and control of nature more than it does human humility and forbearance. Rather, “dominion” expresses the imperialistic will of the Satanic God of Power who wars with Divine Love and Divine Wisdom (which are sometimes called “Satanic”) between the lines in the Bible and other ancient texts that record this battle for the human Spirit. Perlman, like Blake, is one of the few eye-witness reporters of that war, though we have all lived His-story on its front lines.

While Moses speaks for the Satanic God of Power, Hesiod, having a memory of primal justice, denounces the “Monster Divine.” He laments a fateful decline of humanity that will continue until a “race of iron” prevails for whom “might shall be their right,” so that in the end “one man will sack another’s city” and “men will praise the evil doer and his violent dealing.” Fredy Perlman sees in Hesiod’s ideas the beginnings of the critique of domination. He also sees that the great spiritual teachers of two and a half millennia ago were engaged in an archaic, anarchic critique of destructive power that was far more powerful than today’s superficial radical “agendas.”

Not only Lao Tzu, but also Zarathustra and Gautama taught a Way of peace, non-domination and compassion in opposition to the devastating path of Leviathan. Ideals of the “Golden Age,” “Eden,” and the “Reign of the Yellow Emperor” (that is, the Earth itself) all judged Leviathan harshly in contrast to the memory of Primitive Anarchy.

Later, Fredy Perlman points out, the anarchic critique continued as a certain “Joshua” spread the radical message that “the Kingdom of God is within you,” rather than in the will of the Monster. The liberating visions of all these dissidents were turned into hierarchical religions by kings and priests, and reduced to fundamentalisms by partisans of the authoritarian ego. Finally, these visions are ignorantly attacked by fanatical leftist sectarians as if they were nothing more than these travestied versions.

Spark of Life in Their Eyes

The quest for liberation did not, of course, die out, and it often reached new heights. In a much later age, the Movement of the Free Spirit spread over Bohemia and Moravia itself. Western history saw one of those rare periods in which the Spirit was willing, and the Flesh was too. Moravia became for a moment the spiritual center of the universe. Jan of Brno then revealed that “private property is the original sin.”

Needless to say, the partisans of the Free Spirit were slaughtered in a brutal reaction, but a few survived, and quietly whispered their Secret to other enemies of Leviathan who were identified by the spark of life in their eyes. The Secret was transmitted from generation to generation in Brno, until Fredy Perlman would finally bring it to the New World. To Detroit, “the Strait,” symbolizing the long and narrow channel through which the truth must pass between the great sea of the primordial community and the vast Ocean of the Spirit lying in the future.

This battle against Leviathan continues, though the Creature has transformed itself radically over the ages. The crucial mutation of the Beast began in ancient times, though its consequences are just now beginning to become evident. “The Phoenician Octopus and its later Greek, Venetian and other offspring will come to be seen as something altogether different from the Assyrian Worm.” The Cold War thus began forms. “There is no doubt that the

two Leviathans differ. The artificial Worm's claws and fangs, its armies, are usually attached to the body, whereas the tentacles of the artificial Octopus detach themselves from the body and can be said to move about freely."

It is inevitable that mortal combat will eventually break out between the Worm, the heavy-handed and heavily-armed State, and the Octopus, the supple, stealthily-moving Capital. "Both live off the surplus product of zeks' labor. But the Worm uses most of its surplus to enlarge its head and body, its officials and armies, whereas the Octopus keeps most of its surplus continually circulating between sources and destinations." The State builds up a cumbersome vertical structure, a heavy, and finally unsupportable, external skeleton. Capital spreads out horizontally, like the tentacles of the Octopus, or a vast spider's web.

Better yet, we might call it a rhizome. In traditional battles between the two Monsters, "the one tends to have greater wealth, the other greater power." But in the end, the triumphant Octopus has more wealth and also a much more subtle and effective form of power. Its tentacles extend ever further outward, first reaching each point in physical space and then invading every corner of the psychological and imaginary realms. The Octopus tames the Worms and transforms them one by one into additional tentacles. This is the New World Order.

Yet the Worm is not dead. The secret of nationalism is in the human tendency to revert to archaic mass-identifications. Out of the destruction of communal freedom came the authoritarian membership society, the breeding-ground of the Worm Leviathan. This grotesque social formation has been largely eroded by the Octopus Leviathan, but it remains a powerful atavistic psychological force. "Under the banner of the big lie, people whose free communities are repressed beyond retrieval nevertheless retrieve lost communities, lost kinship and lost freedom, but only during the instant when they slaughter imagined enemies of all they lost."

Beneath the exterior capitalist rationality of post-modernity seethes the psychotic, fascistic rage for egoistic, sadomasochistic identification. The mass-man only feels good when he consumes, but haunted by Otherness, he only feels really good when he kills.

The final stage of His-story is globalization by the Octopus Leviathan, as the Europeans "carry the Beast to the world's last places of refuge." The End of History is near. Not Mr. Fukuyama's triumph of sham democracy, but rather the victory of the Plutocracy, of the Octopusocracy, of the last Leviathan. The European brain, the mind of the Monster, is fully absorbed into the Machine. Europeans (and this increasingly means everyone, as the global monoculture develops) "are zeks, administrative zeks and menial zeks, children and grandchildren of zeks." But "the last Leviathan's zeks are not conscripts but volunteers." Those who do not go voluntarily into a madhouse go voluntarily into a workhouse. It's important to add, though, that they hate the work, even though they've forgotten how to play. The Machine knows how to amuse the inmates just enough to keep them and itself running.

Leviathan's process of universal conquest, its relentless globalization, is founded on its monistic view of reality. The Monster is driven toward the annihilation of the Other. "The monism is self-confirming. Everything is artifice, and whatever is not will soon be artifice. There is nothing outside but raw materials ready and waiting to be processed and transformed into Leviathanic excrement, the substance of the universe."

Some raw materials resist the transformation more than others, but none can withstand the inexorable March of Progress. What needs to be added is that the monism becomes more and more disguised in the pluralism of its manifestations. If the ecological world view finds in free nature a non-dominating, self-realizing unity-in-diversity, the Leviathanic world of domination increasingly appears as an oppressive, destructive unity-in-diversity. The unity is in the Monster, the diversity in its infinite number of tentacles, which cover everything, intertwine, form the ultimate Gordian knot, and dominate our view of reality.

On The Side of Machines

And where do we human beings and what is left of our human community fit into the End of History? Fredy Perlman's diagnosis for our own age sounds at first rather dismal. History seems to become a Night of the Living Dead, with the hapless humans cowering before the advancing lifeless Creatures. Progress, he notes, always works on behalf of destruction, for the segments of the Worm, the tentacles of the Octopus "being dead things, may corrode" but "they never die." Moreover, as the monster destroys the social fabric, the "human communities, once dead, stay dead." In short, "death is always on the side of the machines."

Yet, we should not despair, for the segments do corrode, and the spirit that regenerates community does not die. The good news is that the entire Monster is beginning to destroy itself, and there is hope for a new beginning, for regeneration. Even the Octopus's own ideology, post-modernism, if read carefully, reveals a fatal judgment on itself. While some insecure but eminently flexible radical theorists rush to adapt themselves to the post-modern tidal wave of the future, and others who are even more insecure are driven by panic into sclerotic reactive modernism, the logic of disintegration points us toward neither modernism nor postmodernism, but rather in the direction of pre-ancientism. Fredy Perlman, like us, was a radical pre-ancientist imbued with the spirit of creative regeneration.

Let's begin again! The Earth does it every year. And the human community can do it occasionally, too. The tradition of revolutionary pre-ancientism has always existed. At the beginning of Civilization and domination, people could still "remember that their own ancestors once lived in communities of free human beings," and that they "communed with animals, with Earth, with the spirit of the sky and the spirit of the apple tree." The memory has never been completely lost. The possibility for surviving the self-destruction of the Monster depends on our capacity to remain in touch with our roots in nature and in our human community, and on our ability to express that creative Spirit that pervades nature and ourselves.

We have grounds for hope. Once the Human Spirit slumbered within a small band of pathetic, gerbil-like creatures, hiding in the bushes, guarding their treasure of slowly-gestating soul, waiting for the age of Monsters to end. Now, the human Spirit hides in remote corners of the psycho-geographical map, waiting for the latter-day Monster to collapse under its own weight. Perhaps there is gestating within that Spirit a new emergent realm of being. Perhaps we can venture out and strategically place a cosmic evolutionary banana peel in the Monster's path.

Fredy Perlman has helped us understand that the final contradiction of the dominant world order is neither economic nor political. In a sense it is ecological, but more basically it is metaphysical. Leviathan is the dream of Infinite Power. Leviathan is the Bad Infinity made historical. The Infinite in History ultimately runs aground on the finite.

As Fredy Perlman puts it, "Leviathan, the great artifice, single and world-embracing for the first time in His-story, is decomposing." The story of Leviathan is the story of conquest of the Other, and there is now no Other left to conquer. The Cold War was the last battle in the conflict between the Worm and the Octopus, and the outcome was certain before the battle began. There is only one barrier left in the way of the End of History. and that is regressive mass political psychosis (in the form of nationalist fanaticism or religious fundamentalism).

So, Fredy Perlman's verdict on His-story is accurate: "Having swallowed everyone and everything outside itself, the Beast becomes its own sole frame of reference. It entertains itself. exploits itself and wars on itself. It has reached the end of its Progress, for there is nothing left for it to progress against except itself."

Just as His-story begins with the death of the ancient Uroboros, the Cosmic Serpent, the closed Circle of Nature, it ends with the Dragon of Anti-Nature swallowing its own tail, and devouring itself Leviathan cannibalizes itself, and seeks to devour everything else with it. The only question that remains is whether humanity and the living Earth can survive this final Fall into nothingness.

If we do survive our encounter with the Beast, Fredy Perlman will have helped us find our Way around the Dragon and the Abyss.

Note: All quotations are from Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan*. The various names he gives to Leviathan have been capitalized in accord with the rest of the text.

fifth Estate

Max Cafard
The Dragons of Brno
Fredy Perlman against History's Leviathan
1996

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/347-spring-1996/the-dragons-of-brno>
Fifth Estate #347, Spring, 1996

fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net