

Here is Cerberus. Offered as something we believe worth wrestling, that we may yet end the hell of Empire and restore the Earth.

Section I of VII. Everyone Knows the World is Ending. Thesis 1 to 7 of 49.

1. **Everyone knows the world is ending.** *Almost no one understands why.* 70% of wildlife has disappeared in the past 50 years. Only 4% of total mammals remaining on the Earth are wild. The inch of topsoil that feeds the whole planet is fast turning to dust. Temperatures rise, storms rage, nuclear weapons proliferate, and individual tyrants sit upon draconic fortunes larger than any held in human history while the rest of us are *exhausted just paying the rent*. These are not unrelated tragedies, or inevitabilities of human nature, but **a war**. A war we have been losing for 5,000 years. A war we didn't start, but that we could still win—if only we knew we were fighting it.
2. **There is no one in charge.** The enemy is not just kings and billionaires, but *the machine that rules them too*: An engine of history older than all of the nations yoked to its drive and left as ruins in its wake. World leaders are nuclear-armed fools in its grasp, hostages compelled to keep feeding this beast they serve or be devoured by it. Their insatiable master is "Empire" - a self-replicating parasite system birthed when the human drive for individual control was able to break the bonds of kinship and establish the first ruling class. It might most simply be understood as *a global social and ecological crisis that has evolved the capacity to defend itself* - in large part by convincing *us* to defend *it* while simultaneously preventing us from being aware of it at all.
3. **This isn't the first "end of the world"—but it may be the last.** Empire is a world-eater: Born in the first breaking of covenants of reciprocity and balance, it spreads across the Earth devouring lands and peoples, always collapsing in fire under the weight of its own extension, each time reforged with ever more destructive weapons and ever wider reach by those most deeply infected with its sickness. *Collapse offers no hope and there is nowhere left to run*. Each cycle births a more complex monster, spreading further and deeper, leaving behind poisoned soils and broken bonds. The danger is not that **the** world will end, but that beautiful, diverse and infinitely sacred worlds are shattered again and again, each time leaving us less material capacity to sustain life. This is the Hell of Empire to which we are condemned unless its curse is broken. The Earth and our ancestors gave us a treasure, sacred belonging in a life-giving world unlike anything else we know. This birthright is being sacrificed before our eyes to enrich some few far in excess of any individual's capacity to enjoy. We are forced to arm these executioners, and clean their knives.
4. **This machine survives through hate, division, and selective reward.** It severs people from land, from each other, from the web of life and history. It manufactures categories in our minds, actualized through violence. Race, patriarchy, ethnic war, borders invisible to the rich but barbed-wire prisons for the poor—all made real by people spilling blood to grasp *more* while their actions reproduce the false scarcity that creates our hunger.
5. **Our ignorance is cultivated by the machine.** We are fed wall-to-wall illusion and spectacle—the IV drip of corporate algorithmic slop served up on our commute through cloned stripmall and landscapes poisoned into silence. Captivity is made to feel like an inescapable reality. "There is no alternative" the feed quietly sings while the vampiric machines hum through the wires above.

6. **The honest operation of power is rarely discussed.** We are fed a pabulum of podcast pop-conspiracy because it protects the powerful, pits us against the weak, and comforts us with the thought that someone might be in charge after all. The TED-talk intellectuals and academics sell an endless stream of books about problems that *they know in their hearts we can't solve without a fucking revolution*. We are never taught how power *actually works*: how it reproduces, gets inside us - and how it might be seized. I have studied it for decades, like many before me, but you don't need a degree to understand. You need a curious mind and a beating heart.
7. ***This is one attempt to gather, understand and perhaps contribute to the knowledge of thinkers greater than myself***—scholars and fighters, individuals and nations, named and unnamed, remembered or forgotten. I do not intend to claim honor for other's knowledge - especially the sacred knowledge of reciprocity and kinship that long held balance in the world. I write as a settler descendant inside the heart of Empire, translating what I gather and try to understand into forms and language I hope may help others understand better in turn. This is originally written in English, using the languages of contemporary science, philosophy, emotion, and myth - not intended to mark any of these as the superior way of knowing but just to communicate as effectively as I can. I don't give you my name. I do not want prestige or profit. I only want to help break the machine my ancestors served, to which we all remain captive, and to strengthen the struggles that other nations and peoples already lead. I write out of grief for what is lost and love for what remains. The metaphors I offer—Cerberus, Hydra, the Vampire Class, the Vampiric Machine—are chosen intentionally as *symbolic tools* to help make the hidden visible and memorable. *When we understand Empire, we break its spell and can begin to destroy it.* When the Hydra is dead, we may finally discover who we could be.

Section II. The Emergence and Form of Social Power. Thesis 8 to 15 of 49.

1. ***The first mistake we can make is to assume that the 'common sense' notions we uncritically absorb as little grubs in the bowels of Empire provide a viable foundation of knowledge from which to act.*** In fact, as I hope you will see, much of what passes for 'common sense' is an agglomeration of *psychic garbage*, an overflowing sewer of our own neuroses, fixations, and complexes stirred in with the most baseless propaganda peddled by ruling classes across time. The good news is we are not hopelessly lost: These trash-islands in the mind can be recycled into valuable knowledge. Bad information becomes a tool to analyze the structures that imparted it, through critical, informed analysis of self, power and history¹. The bad news is that while contemporary humans have unprecedented access to accumulated knowledge, Empire's patterns ensure that most have no training in how to use this access intelligently. Outside of small circles of experts, the nature of reality and our real history remains largely untold: Underfunded, suppressed, and drowned out by the empty discourse that saturates cultural life, educational institutions, and the collective mind. We would be repeating the gravest mistakes of many of our revolutionary forebears in not making the most thorough attempt to extricate ourselves from the historical muck, so to begin the honest story of power, we must attempt to gain a steady foothold in bedrock first principles, looking back 3.7 billion years to when the category of matter often called "life" first emerged on Earth.

¹Two notably pessimistic scholars here are Althusser and Foucault, each in their own way arguing that our very sense of self is structured by power systems into forms that help Empire reproduce. Both offer valuable insight but overestimate Empire's capacity to perfectly replicate itself through the messy terrain of our creative, chaotic minds.

2. **The first emergence of power, or ‘capacity to act upon reality’ - is *movement; material force*.** It emerged with the universe itself, but its first expression as ‘life’ was through early organisms absorbing energy & matter from their immediate environment². This material power is the same that would later enable farming, sewing, carrying babies - as well as bullets and atom bombs. One day long ago some molecular formation, in ways still mysterious to us, became ordered into a system that reacted with its environment to replicate and mend. The process of life’s replication first resembled non-living phenomena like crystal formation, with one profound difference: Replication was imperfect, producing *diversity of forms* within a single reproductive line³. Natural pressures favored forms predisposed to more successful replication⁴. Over generations, some lineages grew more complex — from the first bacterial films on rock to the great stromatolite reefs that first breathed oxygen into our skies.

3. **As survival favored life with greater capacities, senses emerged: *Bodily systems within organisms that could detect the surrounding world, enabling more favorable action.*** At first, reaction was automatic. Eventually, the first stirrings of mind appeared, as living cells began to store traces of past experience—physical marks that shaped how they would act in the future⁵, enabling **recognition, evaluation**, and perhaps **choice**. The result was a *subjective map of reality (specific and accessible only to one being) materially inscribed and interpreted within a being’s own structure. This map, and its reading and writing, is the realm of Psyche, our second emergent dimension of lived reality and therefore of power.* The first ancestors to breach this realm were the Cnidarians - jellies - the first to form nerve nets that could store information 600 million years ago⁶. Crucially, we must recognize that the Psychic is in no way divided from the Material. It is a real dimension of lived reality, inseparable from the very structures that give rise to it within the body itself. For beings with this capacity, the physical world can now and forever hold meaning - a new dimension emanating from the pre-existing material terrain.

4. **Collective behavior shapes new forms of life, and new life forms, like the first multicellular organisms.** Just half a billion years after life began—long before Psyche herself appeared—organisms found strength in togetherness. They grouped in defensive formations, sent chemical signals, swarmed toward food or away from danger. Those able to coordinate, even across species, often endured with greater success. The tiny engines inside our cells that burn food to produce energy⁷ and the structures in plant cells that turn sunlight into sugar and oxygen⁸ were both joined in cooperative matrimony long ago, when organisms of different species entered into a mutually-beneficial embrace. For more than a billion years these partners have danced in reciprocity in the bodies of trillions of living beings —giving carbon for oxygen, oxygen for carbon— balancing the atmosphere itself⁹. Even dominant science now finds that all multicellular beings, ourselves included, are not islands of one, but collectives of many¹⁰.

² Lane, N. (2015). *Vital question: energy, evolution, and the origins of complex life*. WW Norton & Company.

³ Cairns-Smith, A. G. (1966). The origin of life and the nature of the primitive gene. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 10(1), 53-88.

⁴ Darwin, C. (1859). *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (J. Murray, London).

⁵ Squire, L. R., & Kandel, E. R. (2003). *Memory: From mind to molecules* (Vol. 69). Macmillan.

⁶ Moroz, L. L. (2009). On the independent origins of complex brains and neurons. *Brain Behavior and Evolution*, 74(3), 177-190.

⁷ Sagan, L. [later L. Margulis] (1967). On the origin of mitosing cells. *Journal of theoretical biology*, 14(3), 225-IN6.

⁸ Margulis, L. (1981). Symbiosis in cell evolution: Life and its environment on the early earth.

⁹ Odum, E. P., & Barrett, G. W. (1971). *Fundamentals of ecology*.

¹⁰ Margulis, L., & Fester, R. (Eds.). (1991). *Symbiosis as a source of evolutionary innovation: speciation and morphogenesis*. MIT press.

You—and every human you will ever know—are an ensemble of thousands of species and trillions of tiny organisms acting in concert to extend your shared lives.

5. **With the development of Psyche, collective life crossed a threshold and the self-aware Social was born.** Some organisms that could inscribe memory *began to recognize Others as beings with their own inner worlds*. Symbols like gestures, calls, and words made it possible to share our private maps of reality; to bridge our minds. From birdsong¹¹ to the dancing democracy of beehives¹² to elephants mourning their dying kin¹³, this sharing of internal realities enabled coordination and deliberation—group actions able to transform the world. As this capacity grew, networks of individuals linked by shared maps could become larger coordinated bodies: Hives, villages, armies, movements with collective memory and belief¹⁴. **This third dimension of reality, the social, is one's influence within a network of linked, thinking individual selves**, each with their own mental maps and material capacities. These three emergent dimensions of lived reality - the material, the psychic, and the social - now come together to constitute the irreducible triad of any individual or group's power, or "capacity to Act"¹⁵:

cA (Power; capacity to Act) is determined by an actor's Material (**m**) capacities (strength, endurance, access to food, tools, money, unconscious or 'automatic' network collaborations, etc), which are themselves mediated by their Psychic (**p**) internal mapping (beliefs that may increase or decrease capacity to act and the form of action based on their truth, emotional effect, practical utility, etc). Both of these can be extended or denied through Social networks (**s**) - composed of all beings with whom you are psychically and materially linked to varying degrees. Relying on their own material power and psychic sense-making, others can enable or restrain *your* access to larger networks of **m**, **p**, and **s**.

Or more simply: **cA=m*p*s**. Like an outpost, a war camp, every individual or network has this finite but all-important capacity - power within a given arrangement of reality to reshape that reality, thereby potentially altering their own and others' balance of power. *Freedom is a recursive formula, expanded through action that builds the capacity to act.*

6. **About 300,000 years ago, modern humans emerged in the African savannah, already woven into living landscapes in which material survival depended upon keen observation and shared knowledge.** For the first 95% of our species' history, peoples across the planet studied & honed their relationships with animals, plants, and our world based on reciprocity and balance - knowledge fiercely protected by many surviving peoples even to this day. They secured surpluses of food, medicine, shelter, and leisure not by treating nature as a machine to be optimized, but by holding care for all life as a sacred obligation. Each culture's life-world was uniquely rooted in its land: in Miwatj and Noongar Boodja, for example, controlled burn techniques increased edible tubers, grasses, and game; in the grasslands of He Sápa, the Oceti Sakowin coordinated hunts and enforced social law to regulate vast bison herds and fertile prairie; and we now know that even the Amazon rainforest is not a 'wilderness', but a cultivated forest-garden, fed by rich black-earth soils first engineered by the Arawak and their neighbors.

¹¹ Marler, P. R., & Slabbekoorn, H. (2004). *Nature's music: the science of birdsong*. Elsevier.

¹² Seeley, T. D. (2011). *Honeybee democracy*. Princeton University Press.

¹³ Sharma, N., Pokharel, S. S., Kohshima, S., & Sukumar, R. (2020). Behavioural responses of free-ranging Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) towards dying and dead conspecifics. *Primates*, 61(1), 129-138.

¹⁴ Tomasello, M. (2014). *A natural history of human thinking*. Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ *Author's note: You may find yourself asking here, is there not some other, greater, more-than-human force of love and justice outside the material, psychic, and social weave of our known reality? G*d willing, I pray there is.*

Systems like these sustained what researchers have called “the original affluent societies”, finding that even those hunter-forager peoples living in the shadow of modern Empire enjoy comparable health and much more free time than most of us do today - averaging 15-20 hours of necessary survival labor per week. Historically, many of these peoples were well aware of intensive grain agriculture but rejected it, instead protecting diverse life systems rooted in the land. The soils of every continent still bear the traces of these worlds, tended by communities for millennia, now often buried and near-forgotten under Empire’s concrete and steel.

7. **The biggest lie you’ve been told is that our modern conditions of rent, wage labor, inequality, and pollution are the result of the ‘march of human progress’ that our ancestors consented to join in exchange for the fruits of civilization.** The bitter truth: no matter who your ancestors were, at some point they were robbed, enslaved, or coerced into the imperial system. We lost. Some resisted longer, some preserved traditions, and you may even find yourself today in the master’s chambers of this burning house — but nobody entered Empire by choice. In fact, for most of human history we did all we could to crush Empire before it could begin. Hierarchies of skill, age, and ritual existed everywhere - and often were necessary for larger-scale coordination - but they were made fragile, conditional, and accountable. Among the !Kung, Inuit, Mbuti, and Andamanese, prestige was real but never secure: boastful hunters were mocked until they shared, quarrels were settled in song-duels, selfishness was ridiculed in collective singing, meat was forcibly redistributed, and when arrogance could not be checked, would-be tyrants were sometimes killed outright. Leadership was utilized but made dangerous: among the Haudenosaunee, clan mothers could strip a sachem of title and tear down his longhouse; among the Shilluk of the Nile, a king’s body was tied to the fertility of the land and could be ritually killed if he failed; among Inuit bands, leadership rotated with the seasons; while in highland Mesoamerica, village offices cycled through families so no position hardened into rule. Material surpluses, too, were constrained before they could turn into a throne: on the Northwest Coast chiefs gained honor only by giving wealth away in potlatch; in the highlands of Papua New Guinea moka exchanges turned excess pigs into communal feasts; foragers like the Hadza and Anishinaabe divided food on the spot, blocking hoards. Cosmology anchored action in sacred obligation: people were taught respect for land, waters, and sky, whether through the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, Yolngu teachings that Country is Law, and the widespread recognition of rivers and stones as persons and kin. These are not myths of a golden age but the truths upon which good relations are built: reciprocity, redistribution, kinship with all beings. Enlisted in this task the three dimensions of power (material, psychic, and social) form the three heads of a guardian beast I call **Cerberus** — the force that for time beyond time kept the vampires of domination in hell where they belong. Marx and Engels were right that modes of production shape social life, but implied an over-deterministic, mechanical dynamic. For millennia, communities used democratic technologies to keep abundance common and power accountable. The breach was slow: new forms of agriculture and storage bent psychic and social life away from kinship over thousands of years, too gradually to trigger Cerberus’ countermeasures. Step by step, a symbolic capture took hold: surplus was ‘managed’, then ringed with walls and force—and turned into rule. That slow capture shows why history is not a chain of inevitable stages but a terrain of struggle — and why knowing how Cerberus was lost can teach us to capture it again.