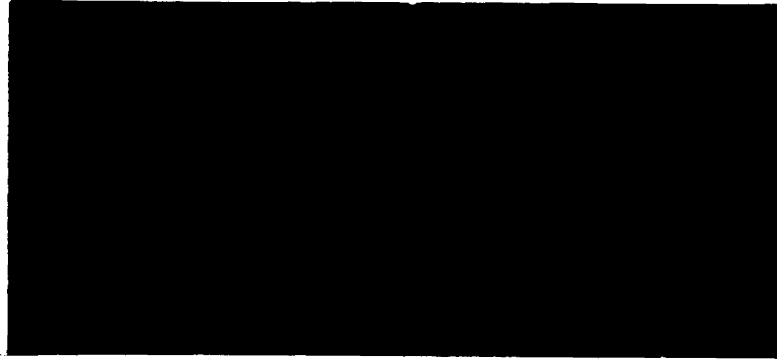




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**THE RETURN OF THE STATE**

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The state is an object of analysis that appears to exist simultaneously as material force and ideological construct, as something both real and illusory. This seemingly obvious yet paradoxical fact is the source of considerable theoretical difficulty. Not the least of these difficulties is that the network of institutional arrangement and political practice that forms the material substance of the state tends to be diffuse and ambiguously defined at its edges, whereas the public imagery of the state as an ideological construct tends towards coherence, unity and function. The scholarly analysis of the state is liable to reproduce in its own analytical tidiness this imaginary coherence, and misrepresent the incoherence of material practice.

Drawing attention to this liability, Philip Abrams (1988) argues that we should distinguish sharply between two objects of analysis, the "state-system" and the "state-idea." The first refers to the state as a system of institutionalized practice, the second to the reification of this system that takes on "an overt symbolic identity progressively divorced from practice as an illusory account of practice." We should avoid mistaking the latter for the former, he suggests, by "attending to the senses in which the state does not exist rather than those in which it does" (p. 82).

This seems a sensible suggestion. But if the coherence and definition of the state indeed arise from the state-idea, then subtracting this from the state's existence as a system of power makes the limits of the system difficult to define. Foucault argues that the system of power extends well beyond state: "One cannot confine oneself to analyzing the State apparatus alone if one wants to grasp the mechanisms of power in their detail and complexity ...," he suggests. "In reality, power in its exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous" (1980a, 72). If so, how does one define the state apparatus (as even Foucault still implies one should) and locate its limits? At what point does power enter channels fine enough and its exercise become ambiguous enough that one recognizes the edge of this apparatus. Where is the exterior that enables one to identify it as an apparatus?

The answers cannot be found, it is argued here, in trying to separate the material forms of the state from the ideological, or the real from the illusory. The state-idea and the state-system are better seen as two aspects of the same process. More exactly, the phenomenon we name the state arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, non-material form. Any attempt to distinguish the abstract or ideal appearance of the state from its material reality, in taking for granted this distinction, will fail to understand it. The task of a theory of the state is not to clarify such distinctions but to historicize them.

This paper is in three parts. The first examines an earlier attempt to separate the material forms of the state system from its ideological forms, which dominated post-war U.S. social science. The

second analyzes the more recent "return of the state" as a reaction to this earlier phase, reintroducing an ideological dimension as the core of the state phenomenon. The third part outlines an alternative approach.

In the post-war period, there have been two distinct responses in mainstream American social science to the difficulty of relating practice and ideology in the concept of the state. The first was to abandon the state, as a concept too ideological and too narrow to be the basis for theoretical development, replacing it with the concept of political system. In rejecting the ideological, however, systems theorists found themselves with no way of defining the limits of the system. Their empiricism had promised precise definitions, but instead they were unable to draw any line distinguishing the political order from the wider society in which it functioned.

The second response, since the later 1970s, has been to "bring the state back in" (Evans et al. 1985). This neo-institutionalist work has defined the state in a variety of ways, most of which take it to be not just distinguishable from society but partially or wholly autonomous from it. In order to re-establish the elusive line between the two, however, the literature has made the state/society distinction correspond to a distinction between subjective and objective, or ideal and real. It has done so by reducing the state to a subjective system of "decision-making," a narrow conception that fails to fit even the evidence that neo-institutional authors themselves present.

An alternative approach, presented in the third part of this paper, begins with the assumption that the elusiveness of the boundary between state and society needs to be taken seriously, not as a problem of conceptual precision but as a clue to the nature of the phenomenon. Rather than hoping we can find a definition that will fix the state-society boundary (as a preliminary to demonstrating how the object on one side of it influences or is autonomous from what lies on the other), we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced.

The distinction must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities, it is argued, but as a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained. The ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were the external boundary between separate objects is the distinctive technique of the modern political order. The technique must be examined from a historical perspective (something the neo-institutionalist literature fails to do), as the consequence of certain novel practices of the technical age. In particular, it can be traced to methods of organization, arrangement and control that operate within the social practices they govern, yet create the effect of an enduring structure apparently external to those practices. This approach to the state can account for the salience of the phenomenon, but avoids attributing to it the coherence, unity and absolute autonomy that result from existing theoretical approaches. The conclusion to the

paper summarizes its argument in the form of five propositions on the study of the state.

### 1. Abandoning the State

Advocates of the two successive approaches to the problem of the state have been unable to agree about the nature of the difference between them. The neo-institutionalists distinguish their work from the earlier political-systems literature by characterizing the latter as "society-centered" (Skocpol 1985, 4). Systems theorists have responded that their work did not locate explanations solely in society but examined a complex interaction between society and governmental institutions (Almond 1988, 853), and that the return of the state represents a regression "to a conceptual morass from which we thought we had but recently escaped" (Easton 1981, 322). It would be clearer, I would argue, to read this debate among mainstream social scientists as two equally unsatisfactory responses to the problem of relating what they would call the subjective aspect of the state to the objective.

When American political science eliminated the term state from its vocabulary in the 1950s, it was not on the grounds that the focus of political analysis should be moved from state to society but that the word itself suffered from two related weaknesses: its ideological use as a political myth, as a "symbol for unity," produced disagreement about exactly what it referred to (Easton 1953, 110-12); and even if agreement might be reached, these symbolic references of the term excluded significant aspects of the modern political process (pp. 106-15). These factors do not themselves account for the demise of the state concept, however, for its weaknesses and ambiguities had long been recognized (Sabine 1934). What made the weaknesses suddenly fatal was the changed post-war relationship between American political science and American political power. This can be seen from re-reading what was written at the time, particularly in documents describing the "mission" of the discipline. Post-war comparative politics, according to a 1944 APSA report on the future of the field, would have to relinquish its narrow concern with the study of the state ("the descriptive analysis of foreign institutions") in order to become "a conscious instrument of social engineering" (Loewenstein 1944, 541). This intellectual machinery would be used for "imparting our experience to other nations and... integrating scientifically their institutions into a universal pattern of government" (p. 547). To achieve these ends, the discipline had to expand its geographical and theoretical territory and become what the report called "a 'total' science" (p. 541). "We can no longer permit the existence of white spots on our map of the world," the report said, employing metaphors reflecting the imperial climate of post-war American politics. "The frontier posts of comparative government must be moved boldly" (p. 543), both to encompass the globe and, by expanding into the territory of other disciplines (anthropology,

psychology, economics and statistics), to open up each country to far more detailed methods of observation and questioning and thereby "gain access to the true Gestalt of foreign political civilizations" (p. 541).

Political Science had to expand its boundaries to match the growth of post-war American power, whose ambitions it would offer to serve. It is no coincidence that the particular theoretical territory into which post-war comparative politics first expanded was that most closely involved in colonial administration, the structural-functionalism of British social anthropology--where the argument for abandoning the state had already been made. The first "contribution to the discipline of comparative politics," as it described itself, to propose abandoning the concept of the state and replacing it with that of political system was a pre-war work in social anthropology, African Political Systems by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1). The state as an entity separate from society "does not exist in the phenomenal world," the authors claimed; "it is a fiction of the philosophers" (p. xxiii). Only the detailed study of the structures and functions of concrete political systems would uncover "the universal, essential characters which belong to all human societies" and produce "a veritable science of human society" (p. xi). Borrowing concepts and research methods from fields like anthropology, political science planned not simply to shift its concern from state to society but to open up the workings of the political process to far closer inspection. The field was to become a discipline of detail, pushing its investigation into the meticulous examination of the activities of political groups, the behavior of social actors, even the motivations of individual psyches.

The opening of this new territory to scientific investigation seemed even more urgent by the 1950s, when post-war American optimism had turned into political uncertainty. It was what Easton (1953, 3) gravely called "our present social crisis"--the launching of the Cold War and the accompanying domestic struggle against subversion--that made suddenly imperative the elimination of ambiguity from political vocabulary and the construction of general social-scientific laws broad enough to include all significant political phenomena and "pass beyond the experience ...of any one culture" (p. 319).

The Research Strategy for Western Europe proposed in 1955 by the new Comparative Politics Committee of the Social Science Research Council, chaired by Gabriel Almond, criticized once again the "too great an emphasis on the formal aspects of institutions and processes," but now spoke of the need for a change in terms of "urgent and practical considerations." In the major Western European countries, the committee reported, "large bodies of opinion appear to be alienated from the West, politically apathetic, or actively recruited to Communism." The state was too narrow and formal a focus for research, because "the basic problems of civic loyalty and political cohesion lie in large part outside of the formal government framework." Research was needed that would trace the

degree of political cohesion and loyalty to the West beyond this formal framework, "into the networks of social groupings, and the attitudes of the general population." Such close examination could confirm the committee's expectation that, in cases such as France, "there is at least the possibility of breaking the hold of the Communist party on a large part of its following" (Almond et al. 1955, 1045).

The sort of analysis now needed was illustrated the previous year with the publication of Almond's first major work in comparative politics, The Appeals of Communism. This study of "the vulnerability of the free world to Communist penetration" (for which it recommended the remedy of using organizations like the AFL-CIO to finance the creation of pro-American labor movements in Western Europe) was based on a survey questionnaire administered to 221 former members of American and West European communist parties, and on thirty-five "clinical case histories of Communists" supplied to Almond by psychoanalysts who had American former communists as patients (Almond 1954, ix, xiv). Abandoning the state, political science could now penetrate even the psychiatrist's office in the search for political explanation.

The scientific tone of this literature seemed to offer the empiricism of political science a solution to the state and its ideological connotations. Yet abandoning the ideological unity of the state created a science whose object, the political system, had no discernible limit. The ever expanding empirical and theoretical knowledge that would have to be mastered by the future scientist of comparative politics, Almond warned in 1960, "staggeres the imagination and lames the will." Despite the initial tendency "to blink and withdraw in pain," he wrote, there could be no hesitation in the effort to accumulate the knowledge that will "enable us to take our place in the order of the sciences with the dignity which is reserved for those who follow a calling without limit or condition" (Almond 1960, 64).

Advocates of the shift from the formal study of the state to the meticulous examination of political systems realized that they were embarking on a scientific enterprise "without limit." They assumed, however, that the very notion of system would somehow solve the question of boundaries. "Once we begin to speak of political life as a system of activity," wrote Easton,

certain consequences follow...The very idea of a system suggests that we can separate political life from the rest of social activity, at least for analytical purposes, and examine it as though for the moment it were a self-contained entity surrounded by, but clearly distinguishable from, the environment or setting in which it operates (1957, 384).

Easton's language here already indicates the problems. Like the theory of the state, systems theory depends on the political being clearly distinguishable from its social "environment." Rather than an actual distinction, however, we are told that it is only "as



though" the distinction exists, "for the moment," and merely as a consequence of speaking of politics as a system. The basic tenet of systems theory, that the political realm is discrete and thus identifiable as a system, reflects a temporary phenomenon arising only from "the very idea of a system."

The question of boundaries created even more difficulties for Almond. The concept of political system, he said, was intended to "separate out analytically the structures that perform political functions in all societies," and therefore implied the "existence of boundaries"--the points "where other systems end and the political system begins." The boundary required a "sharp definition," otherwise "we will find ourselves including in the political system churches, economies, schools, kinship and lineage groups, age-sets, and the like" (1960, 5, 7-8). Yet this is precisely what happened. The edge of the system turned out to consist not of a single, sharp line but of numerous, shifting associations that "man the boundaries of the political system" (p.9). These "interest-articulation" structures, as Almond called them, were virtually limitless, for they were said to include every conceivable form of collective expression of demand, from "institutional" groups such as legislatures, churches and armies, to "associated" groups such as labor or business organizations, "non-associated" groups such as kinship or ethnic communities, and "anomic" groups such as spontaneous riots and demonstrations (p.33).

In attempting to eliminate the ambiguity of a concept whose ideological functions prevented conceptual precision, the systems approach substituted an object whose very boundary unfolded into a limitless and undetermined terrain.

## 2. The Return of the State

Even if the boundaries of the political system proved as ambiguous as those of the state, the latter concept suffered from one more weakness in the opinion of systems theorists. The state seemed to Easton (1953, 111-12) "less an analytic tool than a symbol for unity, ...a myth." It represented something "transcendental" that "symbolizes the inescapable unity of one people on one soil." The imprecision that made the term unsuitable as an analytic tool was the source of its political strength as a mythic or ideological construct.

Yet for this very reason, despite its unsuitability for constructing a universal science of politics, the concept of the state refused to disappear. By 1968, J.P. Nettl was remarking that although the concept was out of fashion in the social sciences, "it retains a skeletal, ghostly existence," which "no amount of conceptual restructuring can dissolve" (Nettl 1968, 559). The state, he wrote, is "essentially a sociocultural phenomenon," which occurs due to the "cultural disposition" among a population to recognize what he called the state's "conceptual existence" (pp. 565-6).

Notions of the state "become incorporated in the thinking and actions of individual citizens" (p.577), he argued, and the extent of this conceptual variable could be shown to correspond to important empirical differences between societies, such as differences in legal structure or party system (pp. 579-92).

Clearly the importance of the state as a common ideological and cultural construct should be grounds not for dismissing the phenomenon but for taking it seriously. Yet Nettl's understanding of this construct as a subjective disposition that could be correlated with more objective phenomena remained thoroughly empiricist. A construct like the state occurs not merely as a subjective belief, but as a representation reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers. The ideological forms of the state are an empirical phenomenon, as solid and discernible as a legal structure or a party system. Or rather, as this paper argues, the distinction made between a conceptual realm and an empirical one needs to be placed in question if one is to understand the nature of a phenomenon like the state.

Such questions have not been raised. In fact the conceptual/empirical distinction has become the unexamined basis of a new literature. A decade after the publication of Nettl's article, the state re-emerged as a central analytic concern of social and political science. "The lines between state and society have become blurred," warned Stephen Krasner's Defending the National Interest (1978, xi), one of the early contributions to this re-emergence. "The basic analytic assumption" of the neo-institutionalist approach it advocated, "is that there is a distinction between state and society" (p.5). The new literature has presented this fundamental but problematic distinction, as in Nettl's article, in terms of an underlying distinction between a conceptual realm (the state) and an empirical realm (society). Such an approach appears to overcome the problem the systems theorists complained about and re-encountered, of how to discern the boundary between state and society: it will be assimilated to the apparently obvious distinction between conceptual and empirical, between a subjective order and an objective one. As we will see, however, this depends on both an enormous narrowing of the phenomenon of the state and an uncritical acceptance of this distinction.

Neo-institutional approaches to political explanation present the state as an autonomous entity whose actions are not reducible to or determined by forces in society. This approach requires not so much a shift in focus, from society back to the state, but some way of re-establishing a clear boundary between the two. How are the porous edges where official practice mixes with the semi-official and the latter with the unofficial to be turned into lines of separation, so that the state can stand apart as a discrete, self-directing object? The customary Weberian definition of the state, as an organization that claims a monopoly within a fixed territory over the legitimate use of violence, is only a residual characterization. It does not

tell us how the actual contours of this amorphous organization are to be drawn.

The new theorists of the state have not filled in the organizational contours. They have retreated to narrower definitions, which typically grasp the state as a system of "decision-making." The narrower focus locates the essence of the state not in the monopolistic organization of coercion, nor, for example, in the structures of a legal order, or in the mechanisms by which social interests find political representation, or in the arrangements that maintain a given relationship between the producers of capital and its owners, but in the formation and expression of authoritative intentions. Construed as a machinery of intentions--usually termed "rule-making," "decision-making," or "policy-making"--the state becomes essentially a subjective realm of plans, programs or ideas. This subjective construction maps the problematic state/society distinction on to the seemingly more obvious distinctions we make between the subjective and the objective, between the ideological and the material, or even between meaning and reality. The state appears to stand apart from society in the unproblematic way in which intentions or ideas are thought to stand apart from the external world to which they refer.

#### **Krasner: Beginning at the Subjective Level**

The logic of the neo-institutional approach can be illustrated from the writings of almost any of its major advocates. Two examples will be discussed here, the work of Stephen Krasner and Theda Skocpol.

Krasner (1978) starts from the premise that the state should be understood essentially as a subjective process of policy-making. His study of the relationship between corporate overseas investment in raw materials and U.S. foreign policy "is premised on the intellectual vision that sees the state autonomously formulating goals that it then attempts to implement against resistance from international and domestic actors" (p.10). This autonomous state is narrowly construed, for its meaning is limited principally to just two executive offices, the Presidency and the Department of State, which are said to enjoy a "high degree of insulation from specific societal pressures" (p.11). Krasner considers the possibility that other offices, such as the Pentagon, the Treasury, the Commerce Department or the CIA, might "be thought of as part of the state," but decides to discount them on the grounds that "their behavior has varied. At some times they have acted to promote collective goals, at others to further specific societal and bureaucratic interests" (p.11). Thus the author sustains his "intellectual vision" of the state as an autonomous promoter of collective goals by excluding from consideration state organs that sometimes fail to live up to this vision.

The book analyzes U.S. government policy towards the control of foreign raw materials by American multinational corporations. It seeks to show that the state is autonomous from these "societal"

interests, by proving that U.S. policy has been shaped by neither strategic nor economic interests (which would indicate some degree of corporate influence) but by a consistent "ideology."

Strategic interests are eliminated as an explanation for foreign raw materials policy by simply defining "strategic" to mean only cases where the territorial or political integrity of the U.S. is directly threatened (pp. 313-14). Under this definition, American efforts to protect oil interests in the Persian Gulf, for example, are said not to have been strategically motivated, because the physical survival of the United States or its political system was not at stake.

Economic interests are eliminated as an explanation largely on the ground that an explanation in economic terms "does not account for the relatively passive American response to the dangers posed by economic nationalism" (p. 316). Krasner's most important evidence for this alleged passivity is the American reaction to Muhammed Musaddeq's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951-53. Leaving aside the fact that its victim was a British not an American corporation, this case offers no support for the author's thesis. It is true that the United States was initially less hostile than Great Britain towards a conservative Middle Eastern nationalist like Musaddeq, especially in a case where no American assets were affected and where support for such nationalism enabled the U.S. to challenge Britain's dominant position in the region. Yet the passive American response consisted of first helping to enforce the British-led embargo on Iranian oil and then, when the resulting collapse of Iran's economy failed to change Musaddeq's policies and radicalized his support, organizing a coup to remove the elected government and restore the authoritarian power of the Shah (Gasiorowski 1987).

Krasner bases his argument that American policy "cannot easily be explained in terms of corporate interests" on the fact that the U.S. did not initially pressure Musaddeq to allow U.S. multinationals access to Iranian oil (p. 127). But the interests of the oil companies did not lie in acquiring access to Iranian oil. They lay first in preventing the Iranians from marketing their oil themselves through independent dealers, which would break the oil majors' monopoly of the world market and the illegal system of price-fixing dependent on it, and second in halting the U.S. Justice Department's criminal investigation of this price-fixing system. The U.S. government complied with both these wishes--and as a bonus forced the Iranians to let American companies share in the control of their oil. (The two architects of this policy, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA director Allen Dulles, were both former partners in Sullivan & Cromwell, the law firm that represented the oil majors in the Justice Department's anti-trust case [Kwitny 1984, 163].)

Having appeared to refute economic and strategic explanations for U.S. policy towards foreign raw materials investments, Krasner presents the case for ideology as the explanatory motive. His decisive evidence here does not consist of any of the raw materials cases analyzed in the book, but rather the Vietnam war. He does not

argue that America's ideological justifications for the war against Vietnam were logical or consistent. In fact he admits that there was no "clear definition of American goals" (p.322) and that the rationales that the government gave for the war "just do not make sense" (p.321). This might suggest that ideological justifications were adapted according to political need, or reflected conflicts within the administration, or were simply a confused attempt to defend a war in which even those responsible no longer believed. Krasner considers none of these possibilities, but declares instead that lack of consistency and rationality are the "hallmark of an ideological foreign policy."

The possibility that economic interests might have played some role alongside ideological motives in prolonging the war, given the large profits of arms corporations, is dismissed with the remark that it would have been easier to sustain high military spending "by picturing the Soviet Union and China as implacable enemies than by engaging in a land war in Southeast Asia" (p.324). Even if one were to agree with this unproven claim it would not demonstrate that corporate interests played no role in sustaining the war; yet the book's entire argument for state autonomy rests on this single assertion.

In neo-institutional political science, the alleged autonomy of the state is in large part produced definitionally. The amorphous object of analysis is reduced to something called "policy," meaning the intentions and desires of certain state officials. The state becomes this disembodied ideality, which is characterized in terms like the "national interest" and examined not as a rhetorical effect but as a self-generated and governing idealism.

### **Skocpol: The State as an "Actual Organization"**

The contributions of historical sociologists like Theda Skocpol to neo-institutionalist theory appear to offer something very different from the work of political scientists like Krasner. Skocpol's work on the politics of the New Deal and her earlier comparative study of social revolutions are based on detailed readings of carefully constructed case studies. Moreover, she explicitly rejects a "voluntarist" approach to the study of the state. States and Social Revolutions (1979), the work on which I will focus, argues that neither the occurrence nor the outcome of major social revolutions can be explained by the ideological visions of revolutionary or state leaders (pp.169-70). The book proposes instead a "structural" or "organizational" approach to the state, in which revolutionary collapse and the building of new states are explained neither by societal factors alone nor by the subjective intentions of political actors, but by the structural vulnerabilities and potentials of states themselves.

Despite these differences, however, it can be shown that, like other neo-institutionalist approaches, Skocpol's argument remains a voluntarist, ideological explanation. Once again, the clear boundary

between state and society, on which the argument for autonomy depends, relies on an essential subjectivity as the basis of the state's distinctiveness. Skocpol later moves beyond this subjectivity. But as soon as she does, the boundary of the state--and the evidence for state autonomy--disappears.

Skocpol's explanation of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions focuses on the collapse of autonomous states, whose autonomy is to be demonstrated by showing that the collapse comes as a consequence of the state's own flawed policies and institutional ties with society rather than any larger conflict between dominant social classes (p. 48). As with other neo-institutionalist theorists, the first step in the argument is to narrow the definition of the state to ensure that apparatuses into which "non-state" elements may penetrate are excluded. To this end, Skocpol distinguishes "fundamental" state organizations from the broader "political system." "The state properly conceived," she writes, consists of "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority." Such organizations represent only a part of "overall political systems," which may also include "institutions through which social interests are represented in state policymaking as well as institutions through which non-state actors are mobilized to participate in policy implementation" (p. 29). This distinction between the "state properly conceived" and the "political system" is clearly vital to the argument for state autonomy, yet it is made only in passing and we are given no actual means of knowing whether a given institution belongs merely to the political system or to the "state proper." In practice the difficulty is overcome by substituting for the latter phrase even narrower terms, in most cases simply "the monarchy."

Having narrowed the meaning of the state, the next stage in the explanation is to present an interest or policy of the state that brings on the revolutionary crisis. In all three pre-revolutionary societies, Skocpol argues, "monarchs were interested in appropriating increased resources from society and channeling them efficiently into military aggrandizement or state-sponsored and centrally controlled economic development" (p. 49). As in Krasner, this interest of the state is to be the basis of its autonomy. The interest in military aggrandizement and economic development must be construed not in relation to any broader commercial or political interests, but as the state's independent desire.

In France, for example, revolutionary collapse was brought on by the state's costly involvement in foreign wars, as it competed for markets, trade routes and colonies. Skocpol explains this involvement in ideological terms, as something "necessary for the vindication of French honor on the international scene," adding, almost as an afterthought, "not to mention the protection of seaborne commerce" (p. 60). France is called a "commercial power," but we are told nothing about the extent or nature of this commerce or the broader kinds of political or economic interests involved (the trading companies, the commodities traded and their producers,

the industries served, the role of finance houses, of the shipping industry, or of colonization corporations). The possibility that interests of this sort might be at least as significant a factor in state policy as the ideology of French honor is dismissed, it seems, for on the following page the state's involvement in "protracted and repeated general warfare" is attributed simply to the monarchy's unwillingness to abandon its "martial ambitions," and three pages later we are told that what "carried the eighteenth-century Bourbon monarchy into an acute financial crisis" was "its unquenchable penchant for war" (pp. 61-64). The initial crisis of the state is reduced to a question of ideology--an interest in "the vindication of French honor," the pursuit of "martial ambitions," or an unexplained "penchant for war." A seemingly self-formed monarchical or national interest becomes the irreducible element in the explanation of state behavior.

This narrow, subjectivist image of the state, however, is contradicted in Skocpol's case by her own further explanation of revolution. In responding to the crisis brought on by defeats in war or other external threats, she explains, the state is constrained by its "institutional relationships" with the landed upper classes. Skocpol provides very detailed accounts of these relationships for each of her case studies, from which it becomes clear that the pre-revolutionary state is something much larger and more amorphous than a monarch. Although the "organizational" approach to the state insists that states are "actual organizations" whose boundaries are distinct from society (p. 31), Skocpol's illuminating account of these organizations in France, Russia and China shows that the boundaries are in practice impossible to draw. In all three cases, the provincial and local power of the state is inseparable from the political power of the landed classes.

In France the state structure is described not as an actual organization but as an "extraordinary complex ...and multiply layered" network of seigneurial domains, municipal corporations, provincial assemblies, and parlements, maintained through the system of venality of office whereby revenues are raised from the sale of state offices, which become individual possessions to be rented, re-sold or bequeathed (pp. 52-3). Russia and China present analogous pictures, but in the latter case Skocpol drops the increasingly awkward distinction between state and society and introduces the more fluid metaphor of "two 'worlds'," an agrarian economy and society and an apparatus of imperial administration. The interpenetration of the two worlds was so extensive, we are told, that the separation between them exists only for analytic purposes (p. 68). The separate existence of the state as an actual organization thus disappears altogether. Skocpol eventually acknowledges the impossibility of distinguishing state and society by bringing the two terms together in a single phrase and referring to the three countries as "'statist' societies" (p. 167).

Similar problems arise in the second half of States and Social Revolutions, where the analysis moves from the causes of revolutionary collapse to the subsequent emergence of strong

centralizing states. Once again these developments are not to be explained in terms of broader socio-economic transformations. If anything, "to a significant degree it is the other way around: the changes in state structures that occur during social revolutions typically both consolidate, and themselves entail, socioeconomic changes" (p. 164). In France, for example, the revolution represented a social and economic transformation "only" in that capitalist marketing and property relations came to prevail (p. 179), and these changes are said to have been largely caused by the more far-reaching changes in the structure of the French state (p.164).

If the transformation of the state is not to be attributed to social and economic factors "outside" the state, how is the emergence of a strong state after the revolution to be explained? Once again, the only means of isolating an institutional explanation is to fall back on ideology. The particular content of a revolutionary ideology does not explain the revolution's outcome, Skocpol argues, but in all three cases the leaders of the new state were men already "oriented to" the process of state building. This common orientation came from growing up in pre-revolutionary societies in which state employment was the most common path to prosperity, and had been reinforced by the external threats their countries faced from more advanced capitalist powers, to which active state intervention seemed the only adequate response (p. 167). The explanation locates the cause of state actions, indeed the very origin of modern, centralized states, within the intentions of state officials.

On close inspection, however, even this subjectivist explanation of the emergence of strong states ultimately fails to shift the locus of causation from society to state. The reasons we are given for the leaders' subjective orientation to state building are thoroughly social and economic. They relate to particular pre-revolutionary societies in which private wealth was accumulated through a market in public offices, and in which local capitalist development lagged behind the spread of capitalist relations in adjacent countries.

Moreover, Skocpol's comparison of how strong states actually emerged in post-revolutionary France, Russia and China reintroduces all the broader social and economic factors that the discussion of leaders' subjective orientations is intended to reduce in significance or exclude. In the French Revolution, for example, she claims that the emergence of centralized state power was not something the dominant economic classes desired, and was the result less of class interests than "the exigencies of waging wars and coping with their domestic political repercussions" (p. 178). Yet the fact that an outcome may not have been desired by any one party to a social conflict does not mean it cannot be understood as fundamentally a product of that conflict. Besides, Skocpol goes on to acknowledge that constructing a strong state was not just an exigency of war, but a major reason for embarking on militarist policies in the first place (pp. 116, 189, 195). In the Russian case



she demonstrates a similar process, in which major turns in the development of the Soviet state are explained by reference to socio-economic relations in the country and the bases of support for the regime (pp. 217-225). Yet Skocpol concludes that the "shape" of the Soviet state was determined not by such economic and social factors but by how the "leadership exercised and deployed state power in Russian society" (p. 220).

### The Unity of the State

The arguments advanced by Krasner and Skocpol in favor of a neo-institutional approach to political analysis face a common problem and respond in a similar way. The problem, as they both more or less admit, is that the edges of the state are uncertain, social forces seem to penetrate it on all sides, and the boundary between state and society as a result is very hard to determine. They respond by giving the state a narrow definition, personified as a policy-making actor. Like personhood, statehood is conceived in fundamentally idealist terms. The state stands apart from society as a set of original intentions or preferences, just as persons are thought of as units of autonomous consciousness and desire distinct from their material or social world. However uncertain its edges, the state, like the person, is an essential unity.

This image of unity is preserved even in analyses that introduce the element of conflict between different parts of the state apparatus. Such conflict is an important indication of the permeability of state boundaries because it enables one to trace the way wider social differences reproduce themselves within the processes of the state. But in the neo-institutionalist literature such wider connections are not examined. The essential unity of the state is taken as given, and conflicts are treated as secondary phenomena internal to this larger unity. Indeed the impact of such internal conflicts on policy making is turned into part of the evidence for the state's independence from society.

In her work on the New Deal, for example, Skocpol argues that state and party organizations should be treated as "independent determinants" of political outcomes (1981, 156), for they have "their own structures and histories, which in turn have their own impact upon society" (p. 200). Her argument is based on the failure of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and liberal Democrats during the reformist phase of the New Deal (1935-38) to transform the federal government into a fully interventionist, social-democratic state (pp. 191-99). The principal reason for this failure was that popular support for FDR's reform program was not reflected in Congress, where conservative interests were powerfully entrenched. This entrenchment was due to the influence of southern Democrats (reflecting, of course, political and economic arrangements in the South that excluded Blacks from participation) and in general to the local control of congressional elections by "machines or special agglomerations of organized interests" (p. 195). The conservatives in Congress blocked spending on social programs for the poor, and

led the opposition to administrative reforms for fear that they "would disrupt existing symbiotic relationships among Congress, bureaucrats, and organized interest groups in the society at large" (p. 194). Despite the election of a president with a program of popular reform, the power of conservative and other "organized" interests in society was sufficiently represented within the state to derail the reforms. Skocpol interprets this as evidence for the argument that state institutions are essentially independent determinants of political outcomes. In fact the case offers an excellent example of how conflicts within the state reflect the penetration of wider social forces.

### 3. An Alternative Approach

The neo-institutionalist literature begins from the assumption that the state is a distinct entity, opposed to and set apart from a larger entity called society. Arguments are confined to assessing the degree of independence one object enjoys from the other. Yet we have seen that in fact the line between the two is often uncertain. Like the systems theorists before them, the neo-institutionalists have been unable to fix the elusive boundary between the political system or state and society. An alternative approach to the state has to begin with this uncertain boundary. In a given area of practice, how is the effect created that certain aspects of what occurs pertain to society, while others stand apart as the state? More importantly, what is the significance of effecting this distinction?

To introduce such an alternative approach, one can begin with a case discussed in Stephen Krasner's study of U.S. foreign policy: the relationship between the U.S. Government and the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco), the consortium of major U.S. oil corporations that possessed exclusive rights to Saudi Arabian oil (Krasner 1978, 205-12). The case illustrates both the permeability of the state/society boundary and the political significance of maintaining it. After World War II, the Saudis demanded that their royalty payment from Aramco be increased from 12% to 50% of profits. Unwilling either to cut its profits or to raise the price of oil, Aramco arranged for the increase in royalty to be paid not by the company but in effect by U.S. taxpayers. The Department of State, anxious to subsidize the pro-American Saudi monarchy, helped arrange for Aramco to take advantage of a loophole in U.S. tax law, whereby the royalty was treated as though it were a direct foreign tax, to be paid not from the company's profits but from the taxes it owed to the U.S. Treasury (Anderson 1981, 179-197). This collusion between government and oil companies, obliging U.S. citizens to contribute unawares to the treasury of a repressive Middle Eastern monarchy and the bank balances of some of the world's largest and most profitable multinational corporations, does not offer much support for the image of a neat distinction between state and society.

Krasner copes with this complexity by arguing that the oil companies were "an institutional mechanism" used by central decision-makers to achieve certain foreign policy goals, in this case the secret subsidizing of a conservative Arab regime. Policies that might be opposed by Congress or foreign allies could be pursued through such mechanisms, "in part because private firms were outside of the formal political system" (pp. 212-3). This explanation offers only one side of the picture: the firms themselves also used the U.S. government to further corporate goals, as the Aramco case illustrates and as several studies of the oil industry have demonstrated in detail (Anderson 1981, Blair 1976, Miller 1980). Yet despite its failure to portray the complexity of such state/society relations, Krasner's explanation does inadvertently point to what is crucial about them. The Aramco case illustrates how the "institutional mechanisms" of a modern political order are never confined within the limits of what is called the state (or in this case, curiously enough, the "formal political system"). This is not to say simply that the state is something surrounded by para-statal or corporatist institutions, which buttress and extend its authority. It is to argue that the boundary of the state (or political system) never marks a real exterior. The line between state and society is not the perimeter of an intrinsic entity, which can be thought of as a free-standing object or actor. It is a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained.

The point that the state's boundary never marks a real exterior can suggest why it seems so often elusive and unstable. But this does not mean the line is illusory. On the contrary, as the Aramco case shows, producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power. The fact that Aramco can be said to lie outside the "formal political system," thereby disguising its role in international politics, is essential to its strength as part of a larger political order.

Many similar examples could be explored, such as the relationship between state and "private" institutions in the financial sector, in schooling and scientific research, or in health care and medical practice. In each case it could be shown that the state/society divide is not a simple border between two free-standing objects or domains, but a complex distinction internal to these realms of practice. Take the example of banking: the relations between major corporate banking groups, semi-public central banks or reserve systems, government treasuries, deposit insurance agencies and export-import banks (which subsidize up to 40% of exports of industrialized nations), and multinational bodies such as the World Bank (whose head is appointed by the President of the United States) represent interlocking networks of financial power and regulation. No simple line could divide this network into a private realm and a public one, or into state and society. At the same time, banks are set up and present themselves as private institutions clearly separate from the state. The appearance that state and society are separate things is part of the way a given financial and economic

order is maintained. This is equally true of the wider social and political order. The power to regulate and control is not simply a capacity stored within the state, from where it extends out into society. The apparent boundary of the state does not mark the limit of the processes of regulation. It is itself a product of those processes.

The approach to the state advocated here does not imply an image of the state and private organizations as a single, totalized structure of power. On the contrary, there are always conflicts between them, as there are between different government agencies, between corporate organizations, and within each of them. It means we should not be misled into taking for granted the idea of the state as a coherent object clearly separate from "society"--any more than we should be misled by the vagueness and complexity of these phenomena into rejecting the concept of the state altogether.

Conceived in this way, the state is no longer to be taken as essentially an actor, with the coherence, agency and autonomy this term presumes. The multiple arrangements that produce the apparent separateness of the state create effects of agency and partial autonomy, with concrete consequences. Yet such agency will always be contingent upon the production of difference--upon those practices that create the apparent boundary between state and society. These arrangements may be so effective, however, as to make things appear the reverse of this. The state comes to seem an autonomous starting point, as an actor that intervenes in society. Statist approaches to political analysis take this reversal for reality.

What is proposed here, instead, is an approach to the state that refuses to take for granted this dualism, yet can account for why social and political reality appears in this binary form. It is not sufficient simply to criticize the abstract, idealist appearance the state assumes in the neo-institutionalist literature. Gabriel Almond, for example, complains that the concept of the state employed in much of the new literature "seems to have metaphysical overtones" (Almond 1987, 476) and David Easton argues that the state is presented by one writer as an "undefinable essence, a 'ghost in the machine,' knowable only through its variable manifestations" (1981, 316). Such criticisms ignore the fact that this is how the state very often appears in practice. The task of a critique of the state is not just to reject such metaphysics, but to explain how it has been possible to produce this practical effect, so characteristic of the modern political order. What is it about modern society, as a particular form of social and economic order, that has made possible the apparent autonomy of the state as a free-standing entity? Why is this kind of apparatus, with its typical basis in an abstract system of law and its almost transcendental association with the "nation" as the fundamental political community, the distinctive political arrangement of the modern age? What particular practices and techniques have continually reproduced the ghost-like abstraction of the state, so that despite the effort to have the term "polished off a quarter of a century ago," as Easton (1981, 303) puts it, it has returned "to haunt us once again"?

Neo-institutionalist theorists of the state have ignored these historical questions. Even theorists who adopt an historical perspective, such as Skocpol, are unable to offer an historical explanation of the appearance of the modern state. Committed to an approach in which the state is an independent cause, Skocpol cannot explain the ability of the state to appear as an entity standing apart from society in terms of factors external to the state. The state must be an independent cause of events, even when those events, as in a case such as revolutionary France, involve the very birth of a modern, apparently autonomous state.

### The Appearance of Structure

To illustrate the kind of explanation that might be possible, one can return to Skocpol's account of the French case. As we have already seen, pre-revolutionary France is described by Skocpol as a "statist" society, meaning a society in which the power and privileges of a landed nobility and the power of the central administration were inextricably bound together. We can now describe this situation another way, as a society in which those modern techniques that make the state appear to be a separate entity that somehow stands outside society had not yet been institutionalized. The revolutionary period represents the consolidation of such novel techniques. Skocpol characterizes the revolutionary transformation of the French state as principally a transformation in the army and the bureaucracy, both of which became permanent, professional organizations whose staffs were for the first time set apart from other commercial and social activities and whose size and effectiveness were vastly extended. For Skocpol, such changes are to be understood as the consequence of an autonomous state, whose officials desired to embark on the expansion and consolidation of centralized power. We are therefore given little detail about the techniques on which such revolutionary transformations rested.

How was it now possible to assemble a permanent army of up to three-quarters of a million men, transform an entire economy into production for war, maintain authority and discipline on such a scale, and so "separate" this military machine from society that the traditional problem of desertion was overcome? By what parallel means were the corruptions and leakages of financial administration brought under control? What was the nature of the "mechanical efficiency and articulation," in a phrase quoted from J.F. Boshier (Skocpol 1979, 200), that in every realm would now enable "the virtues of organization to offset the vices of individual men"? What kind of "articulation," in other words, could now seem to separate mechanically an "organization" from the "individual men" who composed it? Rather than attributing such transformations to policies of an autonomous state, it would be more accurate to trace in these new techniques of organization and articulation the very possibility of appearing to set apart from society the free-standing apparatus of a state.

An exploration of such questions would have to begin by acknowledging the enormous significance of those small-scale, polymorphous methods of order that Foucault calls disciplines. The new bureaucratic and military strength of the French state was founded on powers generated out of the meticulous organization of space, movement, sequence and position. The new power of the army, for example, was based on such measures as the construction of barracks as sites of permanent confinement set apart from the social world, the introduction of daily inspection and drill, repetitive training in maneuvers broken down into precisely timed sequences and combinations, and the elaboration of complex hierarchies of command, spatial arrangement and surveillance. With such techniques an army could be made into what a contemporary military manual called an "artificial machine," and other armies now seemed like collections of "idle and inactive men" (cited Fuller 1955, 2:196).

Disciplinary power has two consequences for understanding the modern state--only the first of which is analyzed by Foucault. In the first place, one can move beyond the image of power as essentially a system of sovereign commands or policies backed by force. This approach is adopted by all the neo-institutional theorists of the state. It conceives of state power in the form of a person (an individual or collective decision-maker), whose decisions form a system of orders and prohibitions that direct and constrain social action. Power is thought of as an exterior constraint: its source is a sovereign authority above and outside society, and it operates by setting external limits to behavior, establishing negative prohibitions and laying down channels of proper conduct.

Discipline, by contrast, works not from the outside but from within, not at the level of an entire society but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them. As Foucault puts it, a negative, exterior power gives way to an internal, productive power. Disciplines work locally, entering social processes, breaking them down into separate functions, rearranging the parts, increasing their efficiency and precision, and reassembling them into more productive and powerful combinations. These methods produce the organized power of armies, schools, bureaucracies, factories, and other distinctive institutions of the technical age. They also produce, within such institutions, the modern individual, constructed as an isolated, disciplined, receptive and industrious political subject. Power relations do not simply confront this individual as a set of external orders and prohibitions. His or her very individuality, formed within such institutions, is already the product of those relations.

The second consequence of modern discipline is one that Foucault does not explain. Despite their localized and polyvalent nature, disciplinary powers are somehow consolidated into the modern, territorially-based, institutionally structured order of the modern state. Foucault does not dismiss the importance of this larger kind of structure; he simply does not believe that the understanding of power should begin there: "One must rather conduct an ascending

analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms... and then see how these mechanisms of power have been-- and continue to be--invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc., by ever more general mechanisms..., [how they] came to be colonised and maintained by global mechanisms and the entire state system" (Foucault 1980b 99-101). Yet Foucault does not explain how it is that disciplinary powers do come to be utilized, stabilized and reproduced in state structures or other "generalized mechanisms."

An obvious example of the relationship between infinitesimal and general mechanisms can be found in law, where the micro-powers of disciplinary normalization are structured into the larger apparatus of the legal code and the juridical system. In discussing this case, Foucault falls back on the notion that the general structure is an ideological screen (that of sovereignty and right) superimposed upon the real power of discipline. "[O]nce it became necessary for disciplinary constraints to be exercised through mechanisms of domination and yet at the same time for their effective exercise of power to be disguised, a theory of sovereignty was required to make an appearance at the level of the legal apparatus, and to reemerge in its codes" (1980b, 106). The organization of law at the general level "allowed a system of right to be superimposed upon the mechanisms of discipline in such a way as to conceal its actual procedures" (105). Foucault steps away again from the implication that the general level is related to the micro-level as a public realm of ideology opposed to the hidden realm of actual power, by recalling that disciplines, too, contain a public discourse. But he provides no alternative terms in which to conceive of the way in which local mechanisms of power are related to the larger structural forms such as law in which they become institutionalized and reproduced.

The relationship between disciplinary methods and their stabilization in such forms as the state, I would argue, lies in the fact that at the same time as power relations become internal, in Foucault's terms, and by the same methods, they now take on the specific appearance of external "structures." The distinctiveness of the modern state, appearing as an apparatus that stands apart from the rest of the social world, is to be found in this novel structural effect. The effect is the counterpart of the production of modern individuality. For example, the new military methods of the late eighteenth century produced the disciplined individual soldier and, simultaneously, the novel effect of an armed unit as an "artificial machine." This military apparatus appeared somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as though it were a structure with an existence independent of the men who composed it. In comparison to other armies, which now looked like amorphous gatherings of "idle and inactive men," the new army seemed something two-dimensional. It appeared to consist on the one hand of individual soldiers, and on the other of the "machine" they inhabited. Of course this apparatus has no independent existence. It is an effect produced by the organized partitioning of space, the regular distribution of bodies, exact timing, the coordination of

movement, the combining of elements, and endless repetition, all of which are particular practices. There was nothing in the new power of the army except this distributing, arranging, and moving. But the order and precision of such processes created the effect of an apparatus apart from the men themselves, whose "structure" orders, contains and controls them.

A similar two-dimensional effect can be seen at work in other institutions of the modern state. The precise specification of space and function that characterize modern institutions, the coordination of these functions into hierarchical arrangements, the organization of supervision and surveillance, the marking out of time into schedules and programs, all contribute to constructing a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert "structure" that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives. Indeed the very notion of an institution, as an abstract framework separate from the particular practices it enframes, can be seen as the product of these techniques. Such techniques have given rise to the peculiar, apparently binary world we inhabit, where reality seems to take the two-dimensional form of individual versus apparatus, practice versus institution, social life and its structure--or society versus state (cf. Mitchell 1988, 1990).

The state needs to be analyzed as such a structural effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, meta-physical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist. In fact the nation-state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern technical era. It includes within itself many of the particular institutions already discussed, such as armies, schools and bureaucracies. Beyond these, the larger presence of the state in several ways takes the form of a framework that appears to stand apart from the social world and provide an external structure. One characteristic of the modern state, for example, is the frontier. By establishing a territorial boundary and exercising absolute control over movement across it, state practices define and help constitute a national entity. Setting up and policing a frontier involves a variety of fairly modern social practices--continuous barbed-wire fencing, passports, immigration laws, inspections, currency control and so on. These mundane arrangements, most of them unknown two hundred or even one hundred years ago, help manufacture an almost transcendental entity, the nation-state. This entity comes to seem something much more than the sum of the everyday activities that constitute it, appearing as a structure containing and giving order and meaning to people's lives. An analogous example is the law. Once again, one could analyze how the mundane details of the legal process, all of which are particular social practices, are so arranged as to produce the effect that "law" exists as a sort of abstract, formal framework, superimposed above social practice. What we call the state, and think of as an intrinsic object existing apart from society, is the sum of these structural effects.



To approach the state as set of structural effects is very different from a structural approach to the state. Structuralism takes for granted the idea of structure--a framework that somehow stands apart from material reality as its dimension of order--and does not ask how this apparently meta-physical separation is brought about. By approaching the state as an effect, one can both acknowledge the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their elusiveness. One can examine how it is that the state seems to stand apart from society and yet see this distinction as an internal arrangement. The boundary of the state is merely the effect of such arrangements and does not mark a real edge. It is not the border of an actual object.

To conclude this critique of approaches to the state, the argument for a different approach can be summarized in a list of five propositions:

1. The state should not be taken as a free-standing entity, whether an agent, instrument, organization or structure, located apart from and opposed to another entity called society.
2. The distinction between state and society should nevertheless be taken seriously, as the defining characteristic of the modern political order. The state cannot be dismissed as an abstraction or ideological construct and passed over in favor more real, material realities. In fact this distinction between conceptual and material, between abstract and real, needs placing in historical question, if we are to grasp how the modern state has appeared.
3. For the same reason, the prevailing neo-institutionalist view of the state as essentially a phenomenon of decision-making or policy is inadequate. Its focus on one disembodied aspect of the state phenomenon assimilates the state/society distinction to the same problematic opposition between conceptual and material.
4. The state should be addressed as an effect of mundane processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance, which create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society. The essence of modern politics is not policies formed on one side of this division being applied to or shaped by the other, but the producing and reproducing of this line of difference.
5. These processes create the effect of the state not only as an entity set apart from society, but as a distinct dimension of structure, framework, codification, planning and intentionality. The state appears as an abstraction in relation to the concreteness of the social, and as a subjective ideality in relation to the objectness of the material world. The distinctions between abstract and concrete, ideal and material, and subjective and objective, which most political theorizing is built upon, are themselves partly constructed in those mundane social processes we recognize and name as the state.

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