

# A Foucauldian Reading of Huxley's *Brave New World*

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**Abstract**—Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is a nightmarish depiction of a post-human world where human beings are mass-produced to serve production and consumption. In this paper, I discuss the manipulations of minds and bodies with reference to Foucault's biopower and disciplinary systems that make the citizens of the world state more profitable and productive. I argue that *Brave New World* depicts a dystopian systematic control of mind and body through eugenic engineering, biological conditioning, hypnopaedia, sexual satisfaction, and drugs so as to keep the worldians completely controlled, collectivized and contented in a totalitarian society. The world state eradicates love, religion, art and history and deploys language devoid of any emotions and thoughts to control the mind that judges and decides. I argue that *Brave New World* anticipates the Foucauldian paradigm of resistance, subversion and containment, ending in eliminating the forces that pose a challenge to the ideology of the world state.

**Index Terms**—science fiction, discipline, biopower, dehumanization, consumption, suppression

## I. INTRODUCTION

Huxley's *Brave New World* is the archetype of science fiction defined as 'a genre of fiction dealing with the impact of imagined innovations in science or technology, often in a futuristic setting' (Yeoman et al, 2012, p. 509). In the widest sense of the word, science fiction is a grave portrait of posthumanism, 'an international intellectual and cultural movement supporting the use of science and technology to improve human mental and physical characteristics and capacities' (Noyce, 2010, p. 43). *Brave New World* has been extensively analyzed from the critical lines of feminism, psychoanalysis and cultural materialism. In this article, I will analyze *Brave New World*, deploying Foucault's theory of docile bodies and discipline and punishment. I argue that *Brave New World* is a representation of man's dystopia ruled by the utilitarian World State which strips humans of love, freedom, family, religion and art 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). *Brave New World* represents a world where 'the attempt to recreate human beings in the likeness of termites has been pushed almost to the limits of the possible' (Huxley, 1959, p. 24). I argue the controllers of the world state suppress emotions and thoughts to condition the citizens mentally and physically and to turn them into instruments of stability for the benefits of the state.

## II. DISCUSSION

In the world state, the citizens' bodies and minds are regarded as the possession of the government. Children are not born out of sexual intercourse between a couple, but they are scientifically manufactured in the same manner Henry Ford manufactured model T cars. Huxley states that a biologically superior ovum fertilized by a biologically superior sperm is, given the best prenatal treatment, decanted as Alpha pluses, Alphas and Betas. Another biologically inferior ovum, fertilized by a biologically inferior semen is exposed to 'Bokanovsky's Process' in which ninety six twins made out of one egg are, after being treated prenatally with alcohol, decanted into Grammas, Deltas and Epsilons. Mond, one of the world state controllers, maintains that these groups 'are the foundation on which everything else is built' (p.195).

The pillars of mankind, love, marriage, motherhood and parenthood, vanish from the landscape of the world state because they date back to the decadent social scale and because these human states of being with what they spawn of 'endless isolating pain, [...], uncertainties and poverty', Mond asserts, force people 'to feel strongly. And feeling strongly, [...] how could they be stable?' (p. 35). Mond eliminates language that expresses thoughts and emotions, the sources of instability.

The world state, learning from the examples of previous civilizations, asserts that physical punishment for mass regulation is devoid of advantages and a fertile soil for the nourishment of instability. Instead of coercive mechanisms of control such as military force, Foucault (2003) focuses on the 'disciplinary power' which is based on surveillance, moving away from the 'absolute expenditure of [sovereign] power' to that which entails 'minimum expenditure and maximum efficiency' (p. 36). Foucault (1980) outlines the

new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus. (p. 89)

Thus, the world state, in the name of absolute stability, deindividualizes its citizens and pushes them down to become machine-slaves by ‘methods of ectogenesis, neo-Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopaedia’ (p.43), guaranteed, non-violent means for the establishment of civilization. Mond maintains that ‘government’s an affair of sitting, not hitting, you rule with the brains and the buttocks, never with the fists’ (p. 42). The world state aims at stabilizing the individuals, as there is ‘no civilization without social stability. No social stability without individual stability’ (p. 36). Thus, individual stability, achieved by the eradication of individuality, is the cornerstone upon which the world state builds its production-consumption system.

Hypnopaedia, the “greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time” (p. 23), is a form of disciplinary power that controls the inhabitants’ minds and prevents them from thinking about themselves. The children are exposed to an overflow of consumption-idealization lessons that hold them captive to the service of the world state’s consumption system. Nicholas Murray (2003) argues that *Brave New World* focuses on ‘the manipulation of the citizen by mass media and modern consumer capitalism’ (p. 256). As consumption is the noble end of the world state, mending old goods rather than buying new ones is considered highly antisocial. Huxley modifies well-known proverbs to create stylistic effects that highlight his criticism of an excessively technological society. The modified proverbs strengthen the importance of drugs and mental escape, on the one hand, and extreme capitalistic consumerism, on the other. After ‘Elementary Class Consciousness’, the children untiringly and joyfully repeat: ‘I love flying, I do love having new clothes’ [...], ending is better than mending [...], and ‘the more stitches, the less riches’ (pp. 41-42), which is a denunciation of ours, a stitch in time saves nine. The implication of these dull slogans is two-fold. First, these consumption-inspiring proverbs are inculcated in the minds of children and become their ideals. Second, the children’s mental and thinking powers are curbed as the sleep-teaching lessons form the constitutions of their minds. Director of Hatchery and Conditioning centers tells his mechanized students that:

Wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopaedia[...]. ‘Till at last the child’s mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the *suggestions* is the child’s mind. And not the child’s mind only. The adult’s mind too-all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides-made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are *our* suggestions!’ (p. 23, original emphasis)

These lines imply that the citizens are the property of the world state. The absolute dispossession of mankind of itself is encapsulated in the italicized pronoun ‘*our*’ which is used only in this context over the course of the novel. The use of this pronoun is ideological; it shows that these reasonless and meaningless suggestions form the linguistic, social, political and historical constitutions of the children’s minds. Such mind manipulation anticipates Althusser’s argument that ‘it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power’ (Althusser, 1971, p. 128). Althusser argues that ‘all ideology hails or interrelates concrete individuals as concrete subjects’ who subjugate themselves to the ideology of the dominant power by acting according to the indoctrinated ideas they received (pp. 175, 162). The manipulation of language through hypnopaedia constructs social reality according to the dictates of the world state:

‘But every one belongs to every one else’, he concluded, citing the hypnopaedic proverb. The students nodded, emphatically agreeing with a statement which upwards of sixty-two thousand repetitions in the dark had made them accept, not merely as true, but as axiomatic, self evident, utterly indisputable’ (p. 34).

Thus, language is manipulated by the repetition of certain slogans through hypnopaedia, which convinces the members of this state to believe that these slogans are axiomatic, self evident, utterly indisputable. As a result of conditioning, when the worldians become adults, they perform their social function efficiently.

The world state reigns over its citizens in the cradle of consumption where it feeds on them by leaving them ‘no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think’ (p. 47). The world state closes the doors of solitary amusements that impoverish consumption. Mond maintains that: “We condition the masses to hate the country, [...]. But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus” (p. 18). The individuals are also conditioned to hate books and nature through ‘books’ coupled with ‘loud noises’, and ‘flowers’ with ‘electric shocks’ thus the children of the world state will, therefore, “grow up with what the psychologists used to call an “instinctive” hatred of books and flowers” (p. 17). In Foucauldian terms, the world state works ‘to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, exhort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls’ (Foucault 1980, p. 139), and thus produce the docile bodies that follow the dictates of the world state. Book-and flower-hatred conditioning stems from the awareness of the impact of reading books and enjoying nature. First, reading books and enjoying nature arouse the individuals’ imagination and curiosity that lead them to the den of truth and spiritual awareness. This awareness will spur them on to question the ideology of the world state. Second, reading books and enjoying nature requires solitude; therefore, they will drive the state worldians away from their roles as a means to satisfy the insatiable hunger of the profit market. Huxley suggests that solitude is inimical to totalizing utilitarian schemes of governance, because when the worldians are alone they are more apt to have wayward thoughts about the world state. Furthermore, the worldians

'can't consume much' 'and [...] can't tend the wheels' of the profit system if they 'sit still and read books' (pp. 36, 42), says the Controller, showing that maximising the efficiency of performance is based on suppressing the potential usefulness of intellectual self-development.

The world state rules over humans and dehumanizes them to assimilate them in the social body of the world state where 'everyone belongs to everyone else' (p. 37) is a manifesto of the collapse of individualism and its eternal shackle in the social body of the world state. Huxley's gloomy description of the world state where 'the light was frozen, dead, a ghost' and the citizens are like 'rams', lambs', 'chickens', and 'dogs' (pp. 3, 8, 105) suggests that the utopian aspirations of the world state lead to dehumanization. In the world state, to use Foucault's terms, 'the subject is not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified' (1989, p. 67). The world state deploys socialization programs designed to assimilate the worldians into the ideology of the world state. In the Solidarity Service, the worldians burst into meaningless songs that reflect their melting into the social body and their mechanized minds following the assembly line of Ford's machines where there is no place for individuality and deviation from the set code of behaviours:

Ford, we are twelve; oh *make* us one,  
Like drops within the Social River;  
Oh, make us now together run  
As swiftly as thy shining Flivver (p. 70, my emphasis).

These lines encapsulate the smooth overflow of the social river that is put into motion by overcoming the whirlpool of individualism. Metaphorically speaking, the state worldians to the state are as rhyme to the poem in the sense that both of them are used to achieve harmony. The harmony of the world state is achieved by the annihilation of individualism and plucking the worldians' wills. The repetition of the verb 'make' indicates the loss of the worldians' individualities in the sense that they cannot make anything, but they are objects to be formed. The worldians are instruments in the hands of the world state where everyone mingles with the other to achieve the wholeness of the state.

The world state eradicates class conflict that is based on social inequality, greed and egoism since class conflict disrupts their socio-political-economic structure. Foucault argues that 'continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms' are essential for the dominant power structure. Foucault (1990) argues that 'Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm' (p. 114). The worldians' subjugated minds and bodies are conceived according to Foucault's doctrine of genealogy that 'carefully exposes the tiny influences on bodies that, over time, produce subjects defined by what they take to be knowledge about themselves and their world' (Prado, 2000, p. 36). By such corporeal manipulation, the World State creates 'a population of slaves who love their servitude' and 'come under the illusion that they are individually substantial, autonomous unities' (Prado, 2000, p. 36). The world state creates docile bodies 'that serves as the physical expression of subjection and conformity' (Foucault, 1979, p. 138). The world controllers, therefore, dedicate lessons to make the worldians happy with their position in the world state; 'the secret of happiness and virtue' is to be satisfied with your position to like what you are required to do. Mond states that "all conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable [sic] social destiny" (p. 12). The following dialogue between Lenina and Henry stretches this point further: "I suppose Epilsons don't really mind being Epilsons," she said a loud. "Of course they don't. How can they? They don't know what it's like being anything else" (p. 64). The state worldians, divided into 'Alphas [...], Betas [...], Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons' (p. 3), are manufactured to fulfill preordained vacancies which are essential for the manifestation of the World State's motto—'Community, Identity, Stability' (p. 3). Thus, children are conditioned to follow the ideology of the world state and they are predestined through conditioning systems: "We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future [...] World Controllers" (p. 21).

The use of the term 'Predestination', a theological belief which means that man is predestined to go to hell or heaven before birth, underlines the world state's mocking of the invisible world and playing the role of God by their act of conditioning and predestination, believing that 'what man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder' (p. 17). This idea of conditioning and predestination is based on John Locke's concept of the *tabula rasa* in the view that the mind of a human being is like a blank sheet at the time of birth and on which everything is written through experience. Locke argues that 'humanity no longer ought to be understood as the bearers of some divine image or, more importantly, handicapped by any notion of original sin which establishes human beings as essentially dysfunctional' (Alsford, 2000, p. 11). Huxley criticizes Locke's enthusiastic embrace of man's ability to create his own paradise through biological engineering since *Brave New World* bears witness to a nightmarish fear of ideology and minority that pushes mankind down and crushes its humanity.

The world state eradicates cultural, aesthetic and religious contemplative experiences, which impede materialist welfare. Religion is replaced by a kind of worship of Henry Ford, whom the worldians perceive as the lord of their civilization. The year calendar of the world state begins in A.F 632, 'this year of stability' (p. 2), after Ford's introduction of the Model T. Thus, our previous calendar A.D beginning with the birth of Christ is erased from the world state and Ford becomes the lord of stability. The elimination of religion emanates from the view that spiritual values, which cover all the intellectual and emotional ground and provide their devotees with uplifting rites, are

contrary to machinery, happiness and scientific progress. Huxley (1959) states that Soma, an euphoric drug that enables the world state 'to give their subjects the direct experience of mysteries and Miracles—to transform faith into ecstatic knowledge' (pp. 163-64), is a substitute for religion used by the world state as a guarantee against any disruptive ideas. Huxley (1959) argues that 'Religion, Karl Marx declared, is the opium of the People. In the *Brave New World* this situation was reversed. Opium or rather Soma was the people's religion' (p. 100). Religion, from the world state controllers' point of view, is sought by the inflicted people who crawl to find solace in the laps of religion where they can feel the benevolence and solace of God. But, in the World State, there is no need for the "individuals" to embrace religion or be dependent on God as they do not experience the phases of life. The worldians are themselves immortal youths of absolute happiness. Mond, in his speech to John, states:

"You can only be independent of God while you've got youth and prosperity; independence won't take you safely to the end". Well. We've now got youth and prosperity right up to the end.' What follows? Evidently, that we can be independent of God. "The religious sentiment will compensate us for all our losses." But there aren't any losses for us to compensate" (p. 206).

This quotation implies that the world state is embracing nihilism; God 'manifests himself as an absence' as he is not 'compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness' (pp. 206-07). Religion manifests itself as absence in the minds of the worldians because religion is in the mind of the conscious individual not in the "mind" of the mindless collective.

The World State legalises sexual freedom as a precautionary act against any form of destructive emotional tension that threatens the stability of the community. *Brave New World* is, in Foucault's words, a 'wholly secular culture, dominated by economics, supported by technology, and dedicated to the—within carefully set limits—Freudian pleasure principle with its emphasis on libidinal appetite' (Baker, 1982, p. 97). Mond asserts the importance of satisfying passions because their suppression threatens the stability of the state; "chastity means passion, chastity means neurasthenia. And passion and neurasthenia mean instability. And instability means the end of civilization. You can't have a lasting civilization without plenty of pleasant vices" (p. 209). The on-the-spot satisfaction of desires is embodied in the use of 'zippers' (p. 31) where there is no 'interval between the consciousness of a desire and its fulfilment' (p. 38). Women in the world state are indoctrinated to be promiscuous and they have 'Pregnancy Substitute' and wear 'surrogate cartridge belt' (pp. 33, 43) to keep their fitness. 'Everyone says I'm awfully pneumatic, said Lenina reflectively. Perfect, Bernard said aloud. And inwardly, she thinks of herself that way. She doesn't mind being meat' (p. 80). In another context, the word 'pneumatic' is used as a descriptive adjective of chair, 'pneumatic chair' (p. 208), which suggests that the world state reduces women to commodities to be devoured and consumed.

The inability to express thoughts and emotions creates problems in the characters' love relationships. In seducing John the savage, Lenina recites lines from the Community Songs:

Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun,  
Kiss the girls and make them One.  
Boys at one with girls at peace;  
Orgy-porgy gives release' (p. 73).

While John delivers a poetic line from Shakespeare to Lenina, she gets perplexed, saying: "For Ford's sake, John, talk sense. I can't understand a word you say" (p. 168). While John clings to Elizabethan notions of romantic love as found in Shakespeare, Lenina perceives herself as a piece of "meat" (p. 45), seductively saying, "Hug me till you drug me, honey" (p. 176). Huxley (1929) maintains that 'love is the product of two opposed forces—of an instinctive impulsion and a social resistance acting on the individual by means of ethical imperatives justified by philosophical or religious myths' (p. 295). The abortion of John's love due to the absence of its foundations, chastity and 'social resistance' shaped by 'philosophical or religious myths', is a metaphorical representation of the divorce between science fiction, lacking 'historical situatedness', and pre-modern arts. The abortion of such a marriage is an absolute metaphor for the deformed form of life that science delivers.

In addition to suppressing religion and passions, the world state vanquish literature for it provides a critical understanding of humanity: "There were some things called the pyramids, for example [...] And a man called Shakespeare. You've never heard of them of course [...]. Such are the advantages of a really scientific education" (p. 44), says the Controller. The novel's title, taken from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, suggests that Huxley dramatizes a confrontation between the values represented by this future dystopia and those represented by the traditional past, personified by Shakespeare (Grushow, 1962, 45). Firchow (2007) suggests that 'Huxley's satire of the future Fordian utopia is based on a deliberate impoverishment of human nature when contrasted with the wealth of human experience as displayed in the great literature of the past (i.e. John Savage's Shakespeare)' (p. 15). Through the juxtaposition of past and present narratives, *Brave New World* creates a future society full of void. John asks Mustapha Mond: "Why don't you let them see *Othello* instead [of the feelies]?" (p. 193). Mond claims that the idea of stability and "human progress" makes *Othello* incompatible with the modern world. This "world is not the same as Othello's [because] the world's stable now" (p. 193). Furthermore, the world state bans Shakespeare because it is old and beautiful. "Beauty's attractive", Mond explains, "and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones" (p. 193). John the Savage's acquaintance with Shakespeare, which enables John to formulate potentially

disruptive thoughts and emotions, discloses the reason behind the controllers' attempt to erase Shakespeare and other literary works from the landscape of the world state.

The world state wages a propaganda against "the past; by the closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments by the suppression of all books published before A. F 150" (pp. 43-4). Teaching history is obsolete, for history stimulates free thinking, which will, in turn, allow individuals to contemplate human flaws, diminishing their feelings of happiness. 'Most historical facts *are* unpleasant' (p.19), Mond says, justifying his introduction of the sleep-teaching phrase, 'History is a bunk' (p.29), to the mass conditioning process. Mond's list of the great civilizations, 'Jerusalem, Rome, and Thebes' and the mythical figures, 'Odysseus and King Lear, Jesus and Pascal' (p. 29) is a historicization and rationalization of their inferiority; they are "a whole collection of pornographic old books" (p. 204) and out-of-date tales of humanism lodged in Mond's safe to be gnawed by dust. Foucault (1980) calls this 'a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history' (p. 117). The obliteration of the past and future suggests that the worldians live in an eternal present which makes interest in history meaningless. As manipulation of history can be considered as a means for achieving stability and preserving the *status quo*, Huxley suggests that an access to the records of the past is vital to the mental health of any society. 'It is only through our historical 'situatedness'—with all that this entails in terms of our hopes and fears—that we come to terms with our condition as human beings and seek an authentic mode of existence in the world in which we find ourselves' (Alsford, 2000, p. 3). The worldians lack historical awareness because of the absence of the 'I' which is melted in the 'social river' that is put into motion by overcoming the whirlpool of individualism.

*Brave New World* prefigures Foucault's paradigm of resistance, subversion and containment as it ends in eliminating the opposing voices and asserting the power of the hegemonic ideology. Foucault (1979) asserts:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.

Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no escaping it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner (p. 95).

To protect the collective social body of the world state from the plague of individualism, the non-conformists are exiled to Iceland. To remain in control over 'the unsettled minds of the higher castes', Mond must subdue these "new" and "ingenious" ideas that pose a challenge to the ideology of the world state (p. 154). Bernard, a physically deformed yet extraordinarily intelligent psychologist, is an outsider whose awareness of his conditioning, his desire to know and experience passion and his criticism of the world state compel the world state controllers to exile him to Iceland. According to the Director, Bernard, who is perceived as 'a conspirator against Civilization itself' (pp. 129-30), puts "The security and stability of society in danger [...] by his heretical views on sport and soma, by the scandalous unorthodoxy of his sex-life, by his refusal to obey the teachings of Our Ford and behave out of office hours [...]. "[H]e has proved himself an enemy of society" [...]. For this reason I propose to dismiss him" (pp. 129 130).

Helmholtz has 'the happiest knack for slogans and hypnopaedic rhymes' (p. 57), which lead the world controllers to consider him "a little too able" (p. 78). While Helmholtz wishes to invent words that 'can be like X-rays, if you use them properly-they'll go through anything', [...] 'Hush' said Bernard suddenly, and lifted a warning finger; they listened' (p. 60). Bernard's and Helmholtz's excess of senses suggests that they are 'suspicious with' the world state as the world state is 'suspicious with' (p. 60) them. In the disciplinary world state, the effects of power are felt on every member of the world state to the extent that 'each person will exercise this surveillance over and against himself' (Foucault, cited in Farrell 2005, p. 104). Huxley asserts that 'what the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals' (p. 58). And their awareness and consciousness of their individualities will, of course, spur on the world state to exile them to Iceland where they can no more threaten the security and stability of the world state.

The failure of the world state to secure its civilization completely by eradicating all "savage" reservations causes the narrative's conflict. John's rebellious presence contains a hope for a potential utopia. John's cry "O brave new world that has such people in it" (p. 121) suggests the possibility of transforming the nightmarish existence into a utopia. However, John's knowledge of Shakespeare makes him worse off because he transcends reality and lives in the fictional world of Shakespeare's protagonists. Booker (1994) explains that 'Literature for Huxley can be a powerful humanizing force, but it can be a negative one as well, especially if its readers lose the ability properly to distinguish fiction and reality' (p. 59). John uses literature to create a utopia, playing the role of the rebellious hero. He borrows a line from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to talk to the mindless citizens of the world state: "Listen, I beg of you," cried the Savage earnestly. 'Lend me your ears ...' [but John] had never spoken in public before, and found it very difficult to express what he wanted to say" (p. 185). The worldians cannot grasp anything John says, for sleep-teaching lessons constitute their linguistic competency. In the end, "[r]age was making him fluent; the words came easily, in a rush" (p. 187). Forced to choose between conformity or death, John chooses to hang himself rather than lose his individuality and personal values. He ends his existence without offering the worldians any catharsis or any possibility of freedom from the confines of conditioning. Thus, *Brave New World* ends in containing the opposing voices and consolidating the

ideology of the world state.

### III. CONCLUSION

This article deployed Foucault's theory of docile bodies and disciplinary systems to analyze the world state controllers' mechanization of the subjects' bodies, perception and ideology. *Brave New World*, a monstrous anti-Bildungsroman, is a nightmarish depiction of a society controlled by technology and artificial fertilization and an attack upon man's trust in progress through science and mechanization. The ideology of the world state, which depends on mass production and consumption, eliminates religion, history and individuality to produce subjected bodies for the benefit of the state.

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