

Modern Nations That Act Like Primitive Tribes May Destroy the World

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Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Commentators are sounding the alarm that tribalism and tribal consciousness have come rushing back in the 21st century like a viral epidemic.

These commentators are particularly upset about the election of Donald Trump, who rode to power, they say, through the votes of a tribe of conservative white male racists wanting to be saved from hordes of dark-skinned freeloaders, many of them illegal immigrants.

The same phenomenon was feared to break out in France through the presidential candidacy of Marine Le Pen, though in that more “civilized” nation such an outcome was prevented by the election of “centrist” Rothschild banker Emmanuel Macron.

But isn’t it true that tribalism has been determining the actions of nations and their constituent factions for a very long time? And don’t the self-styled “progressives” who loathe Trump and Le Pen do so from the standpoint of their own tribal perspectives?

Another interpretation of the Trump victory is simply that those who voted for him wanted back the jobs that America’s tribe of oligarchs—enabled, for instance, by Democratic president Bill Clinton and NAFTA—had shipped overseas. So maybe whom you blame for things you don’t like depends on what tribe you yourself belong to.

Nevertheless, tribalism is a peril threatening humanity and the planet today. But it isn’t just the other person’s tribe that’s the problem. Let’s take a deeper look at what is really going on.

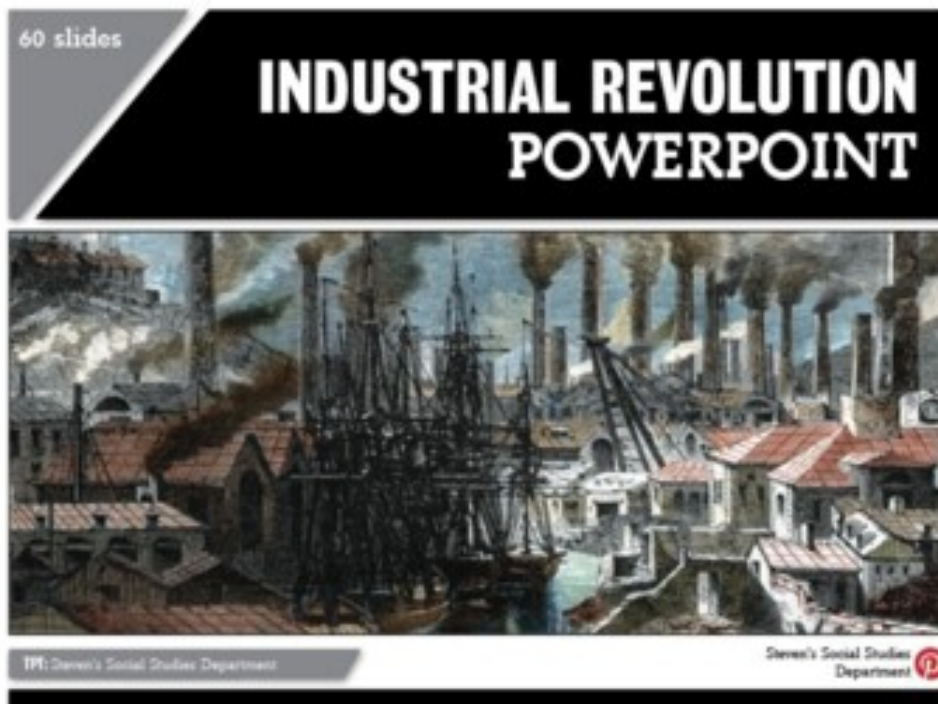
TRIBALISM THE RULE, NOT THE EXCEPTION

First, an observation: We cling to timeworn ways of thinking and don’t seem fully to realize how much the world is threatened by modern science and technology. Our machines, electrical systems, methods of mass industrial production, ability to extract resources, the vast amounts of waste we produce, our exponential population growth, the dominant role of computer processing, and our manufacture of huge arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological—all these have the capacity to destroy life on planet earth many times over, and has evidently already started to do so. A mass extinction of species has begun.

So what does your tribe think of that?

Humanity’s ability to control and put modern scientific processes to intelligent use is obviously stuck at the primitive, tribal level. To exercise control of these forces obviously requires the efforts of organized government. Of course many don’t think so. They seem to

believe that Monsanto ought to be allowed to spray Roundup anywhere they want and life will simply sail along as free as the breeze.



But since the start of the Industrial Revolution about 250 years ago, there have been many attempts to come up with systems of governance that can manage human life successfully under modern conditions. One such system is representative government of the type employed by the U.S. and other present-day republics, including countries like the U.K. that are a hybrid between traditional monarchical governance and representative institutions like Parliament.

The other general category is that of a ruling self-selected party or faction that controls or oversees all governing institutions while claiming to act in the name of an entire nation. Examples are the one in communist China—yes, China is still communist even if much of what you buy in Home Depot is made there—autocratic monarchies like Saudi Arabia, countries heavily influenced by a historic caste system like India, those ruled by a dictator or the military, like Turkey or Burma, or apartheid countries run by a religious/ethnic group like Israel.

Other nations transform themselves from time to time from one type into another. An example of a republic that is transitioning from communist party rule to a more representative model is Russia. Others, like Pakistan, go back and forth from a republic to a military dictatorship.

The problem is that all of these systems, republics included, have a tendency to revert to tribal rule, where the benefits of governance do not accrue to the nation at large but primarily to the ruling party. The political process in such countries becomes essentially a power struggle among similar but competing tribes. Often, as with the Republican and Democratic parties in the U.S., you can't tell one tribal elite from another in any essential way, as their differing slogans and mutual finger-pointing don't convey much substance.

So presidential elections, at least during the last generation, boil down to the entertainment

of watching two elites that bow to the same paymasters engage in a mud-wrestling match. In the end, someone or other is declared the winner, spends a few years enriching his supporters, and life goes on.

In republics in particular it has become extraordinarily easy for the wealthy controllers of industry or finance to gain and keep control by use of propaganda, rigging elections, handing out appointments or favors, writing laws that benefit their monopolies, controlling the intelligence agencies, along with the police and military forces, and dozens of other methods, great and small. A recent example is the influence the Pentagon has on Hollywood in churning out junk movies that glorify war.

In collectivist societies, the same tools of control are applied, though perhaps in not quite such a hypocritical way. At least their elites don't pretend so much that they are giving citizens a choice. But the ruling power nevertheless grants itself many privileges that ordinary contributors to social welfare do not receive and swiftly marginalizes or gets rid of anyone who complains. China and Israel are good examples.



But in either type of system, the real power stays within a relatively small, compact tribal grouping that usually gives priority to serving its own interests and those of its friends, relatives, and powerful supporters.

Leaders who break through these patterns may exist but are exceptional indeed. I believe that one of these may be Vladimir Putin.

INCOMPETENCE OF TRIBES TO GOVERN MODERN NATIONS

The present world catastrophe is partly a result of the total incompetence of insular and corrupt tribal consciousness to manage systems of such reach and potency as have been brought into existence by modern science and technology. Within the U.S., the thought of either of the two ruling tribes controlling the world's largest nuclear arsenal should scare the sh— out of us.

Another aspect of the dominance of tribalism is the resurgence of religious fundamentalism with apocalyptic overtones. Examples are Christian Zionism, Islamic Wahhabism, Talmudic Judaism, and, in India, the Hindu movement called Hindutva.

All these exclusionary doctrines are essentially violent—ISIS, for instance, espouses fundamentalist Islamic doctrines while it murders people. In Israel, rabbis sign public petitions advocating the bombing of Syria.



All fundamentalists reek of intolerance in their insistence that they possess the only God-ordained interpretation of religion and are totalitarian in demanding the perfect adherence on the part of anyone under their control to every rule and regulation the leaders happen to come up with.

Of course fundamentalism is essentially a fear-based reaction to a world that threatens the individual not armored against uncertainty with annihilation. But how can such groups sanely govern modern nation states? When a fundamentalist ideology takes over a nation, look out. It has happened today in a number of nations, including the U.S.

Every tribe also has taboos, with the fundamentalists having more than anyone. Of course some taboos may be quite rational and protective of important values. An example is a taboo against adultery that most cultures share. But other taboos may be quite irrational, such as the taboos nations have begun to impose against anyone raising questions about the so-called Holocaust.

Today the corporate-owned mainstream media has tribal taboos against certain writers who may write for "alternative" websites or present views not in agreement with the prevailing political dogmas. "Blacklisting" is another name for this type of taboo.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF TRIBALISM

Tribalism has deep roots in the human psyche and may be part of our evolutionary heritage. Many organisms move in tribal groups, from bacteria and viruses, to ants and bees, to higher mammals that live in herds, hunt in packs, etc.

Some researchers trace the tribal instinct to the fact that humans have a limited number of individuals they are capable of knowing well and having an emotional bond with. This number varies from "Dunbar's Number" of 150 to the "Bernard-Killworth Median" of 231. In any case, the number is extremely limited.

Social scientists know that for purposes of productivity, small to medium-sized groups work better than large faceless bureaucracies. But there is a downside as well. A functioning tribal group, while comfortable, is also deadly when it comes to encouraging or implementing new ideas. Non-conformism is quickly singled out and punished, even when the organization claims to be open to innovation.

Given all these limitations, it is no wonder that tribalism stands in the way of our being able to resolve today's threats that call humanity's very existence into question.

The term tribalism was invented by Western social science around 1861 and is defined as,

“loyalty to a tribe or other social group especially when combined with strong negative feelings for people outside the group.” (www.merriam-webster.com).

The word “tribe” is derived from the Latin *tribus*, used in Rome to indicate a grouping of Roman people.

The ancient Hebrews and other peoples also divided themselves into tribes, though the more enlightened Greeks were evolving beyond that. They had begun to see social life through the lens of citizenship in a *polis* where *all* shared both rights and responsibilities.

“Tribalism” as a modern word was utilized in the study of so-called primitive peoples that Westerners were encountering in their colonization of remote parts of the world. Obviously, we Westerners felt superior to these people, and not only because of our more advanced material culture.

For instance, there was also the “pure” whiteness of our skin. But we failed to realize that we are just as susceptible to the influence of tribal attitudes and customs as the non-Western cultures we despised.

Despite their pretensions, Globalism and the New World Order are not steps up from tribalism, or even from nationalism, which is tribalism writ large. What Globalism and the New World Order are is a takeover of the world by a small, conceited, and very wealthy tribe of international bankers that seeks to destroy all common human values for their own wealth and power.

THE DANGERS OF TRIBALISM

The opposite of tribalism is not uniformity of materialistic habits. Rather the opposite of tribalism is the understanding that the natural diversity of individuals, nations, religions, occupations, etc., can be brought into positive and productive relationship only by the mutual respect among people that acknowledges *universal human values*.



This respect has been fostered at times in history by the world's great religions and also by such documents as the U.S. Declaration of

Independence. This document was representative of the religion of Deism. It speaks of “entitlements” based on “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.” It says this of our common Creator:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Though it took time for these principles to start to be applied to all members of society, the intent was clear. *The basic rights of man do not apply selectively to individuals depending on membership in any particular tribe.* Rather they apply to everyone on earth as our common birthright.

Both Deism and the Declaration of Independence were products of the best thinking of the Enlightenment. It is when religions and nations revert to tribal consciousness that their founding principles are forgotten.

One reason tribalism is so dangerous is that it needs an enemy to thrive. Whenever we see a politician, a group, a media outlet, or other party scapegoating or demonizing another group, blaming someone else for its problems, trying to organize hatred into a political movement—we can be certain that tribalism is at work.

Not everyone gravitates toward a tribe of course. Many people feel suffocated in a tribal environment. Introverts may be content to be loners. Other people are traumatized by the tribal atmosphere.

Modern tribalism never looks at itself; it takes itself as a “given.” It takes pride in its lineage, its history, its virtue, its heritage. It sees itself as “chosen”—by history or by God. It elevates its culture heroes above those of other tribes. It always points to the “Other” as being to blame or setting a bad example. It uses lies, scorn, sarcasm, and ridicule as weapons.

Tribes boast about their superiority to other tribes. Hitler’s Aryan superiority and Obama’s American “exceptionalism” are cut from the same cloth—both self-delusionary. Every tribe is “exceptional” until its next humiliating defeat—or its annihilation, which many tribes in history have suffered.

An example of rank tribalism in history is the Pharisees of Israel. The portrait of the Pharisees in the Bible, up to and including their role in the crucifixion of Christ, is a masterpiece of art. Jesus’s response still rings true:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Tribalism may have had its place in history. As a way of organizing collective life, it was the next step up from an extended family, clan, or kinship group, often with its own identifiable language within the larger context of a language family.

Native American tribes in the eastern U.S., for instance, belonged to three language families—the Iroquoian, the Algonquian, and the Siouan. But membership in a tribe was fluid. New members could be adopted, including, on occasion, a few white captives or

frontiersmen who preferred Native American life.

While tribes often fought each other, both within and outside language families, the more enlightened leaders advocated unity within and across tribal lines. This became especially important as pressure from the whites increased, causing Native Americans to de-emphasize tribal distinctions in order to present a united front.

The Iroquoian Confederation—the Six Nations—was an example. So was the alliance led against the U.S. Army by the Shawnee war chief Tecumseh in the late 18th-early 19th centuries. Tecumseh's brother "The Prophet" advocated unity across tribal lines through the creation of a common Native American consciousness.

In all parts of the world, tribal identity tends to evaporate as the bureaucratic state extends its reach across all aspects of life, and particularly as local or native languages recede or disappear. In nations where diversity among races, religions, and nationalities are common, groupings with tribal characteristics may remain, but their importance for individual member identity is lessened. It has always been state administration by the bureaucracy that held empires consisting of diverse peoples together.

Thus recognition of diversity offers a way out, though regression is often the norm. As discussed above, the two major political parties in the U.S.—the Republicans and Democrats—have become narrow-minded tribes. For the Republicans in the 2016 election, their standard-bearer Donald Trump demonized immigrants. The Democrats, when they lost, saw Hillary Clinton blaming Russia, totally without evidence, and without any acknowledgement of her own shortcomings.



President Donald Trump became president in 2016 through the votes of 19.3% of the total U.S. population. His opponent, Hillary Clinton, received more votes but lost the election due to the anachronism of the Electoral College.

By no stretch of the imagination can this election, or this system, be called "democratic." It is clearly a case of one tribe eking out an advantage over another through whatever underhanded means were available.

Both parties have largely abandoned real issues to engage in "identity politics" and hot-button issues. That is, there are certain types of people whom we recognize as "us" and other types who are "them." For instance, while conservatives are vehemently against abortion, progressives favor gay marriage. Politics based on narrow social issues is also tribalism.

Many other types of groups in modern society, besides political parties, have tribal

characteristics. There are tribes associated with graduation from particular schools and universities, academic honor societies, holders of professional degrees or certificates, employment groups such as companies or non-profit organizations, labor unions, economic cooperatives, trade associations, military units, social clubs, secret societies, religious institutions, readers of various periodicals, sports teams and their fans, and many others.

Some such groupings may offer mutual aid to members or help those in trouble. They often provide material sustenance, along with spiritual guidance and comfort. In later life some provide a place for members to live upon retirement. At times these groupings have defined and enforced ethical standards for their members. The possibilities are endless. But when ego and fear enter in, tribalism rears its head.

Such groups are often the glue that holds society together, but all such groups give birth to constant temptations to tribal members, especially those in leadership positions, to lord it over the rest. The pecking order is found everywhere, even among prisoners in jail. Bullying is also common, as is passive aggressive sabotage by members who need to vent their anger toward the leaders but are afraid of being found out.

Also, even though such groups define and enforce ethical standards, they also cover up transgressions or help give their members “cover” when things go wrong or when other parts of society are fleeced. An example is the Western industrialized medical professions which, in collusion with Big Pharma, are often more interested in furthering the profit motive in allopathic medicine than finding ways to prevent illness.

Often the tribe descends to the level of a cult, where it is even more secretive and destructive. Modern industrialized healthcare has many characteristics of a self-serving cult.

Virtually everyone in society is a member of one or more tribal groupings. Even nuclear or extended families may have tribal characteristics. While families provide the core constituent of society, they are often so immersed in their own affairs that the outside world scarcely exists for them.

The activities of some tribes, though limited in scope, may have a positive tenor up to the point where they feel threatened. Or it can be the opposite, depending on how quickly outside forces are deemed a threat. When a family or other grouping is a healthy, functioning part of society, though, it is not really a tribe.

There are also tribal groupings of criminals. Tribal pathways in the world of organized crime are notorious and have been written about in depth. Double-crossers of the tribe may be killed in a gruesome manner.

Cult books like *The Godfather* glorify the tribal habits of crime bosses to the extent that the top man, the enforcer, is a hero because he takes care of his underlings and their families. Of course to get to the top you must have a long personal record of murders and other crimes in addition to your personal charm.

By the way, one reason we don't hear so much about the Mafia anymore is that they were able use their ill-gotten wealth to send their children to prestigious universities. Now the kids are running banks, hedge funds, and investment companies. Or they have joined the tribe of lawyers.

Meanwhile, other crime syndicates have stepped in, such as the so-called Russian Mafia.

The larger syndicates have the ability to operate internationally through the cooperation of corrupt officials in the nations and among the business operations they infiltrate or control.

Intelligence agencies that should be fighting organized crime are often in cahoots. These agencies are also tribes—MI6, the CIA, the Mossad, etc. There is not much difference between these and criminal gangs. Rare are the brave individuals who disclose inside information about these agencies and their misdeeds.



For instance, much has been written about possible collaboration between the CIA and the Mossad in both the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and bringing down the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, but not one person has come forward in all these years with first-hand eye-witness information. (See *Final Judgment: The Missing Link in the JFK Assassination Conspiracy* by Michael Collins Piper.)

Of course members of intelligence agencies are selected on the basis of their ability and willingness to keep secrets, and their ideology is such that they believe, no matter how horrendous their actions, that they are fully justified. Members are also well-paid and face prison or death if they “rat out” anyone.

Another type of criminal activity that has been alleged, and where the CIA has admitted its involvement, at least to some extent, has been participation in worldwide narcotics and illegal arms dealing. But here again, little has been entered into the public record due to tribal loyalties, pride in being part of a secret inner circle, and fear by participants of reprisals.

Nevertheless, whistleblowers occasionally come forward. A whistleblower is almost always a person who breaks the code of silence to disclose misdeeds of a tribe that are being kept secret. Notable examples are Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. I had my own experience of being a whistleblower after the Challenger disaster. Rarely, if ever, does a whistleblower escape reprisals.

Tribes can be tremendously mean-spirited. The White Anglo-Saxon Protestant tribe—WASPSs—that runs the U.S. has historically set out to destroy other tribes. They attacked Native American tribes with the U.S. Army, confined them to reservations when they didn’t simply annihilate them, and kidnapped Native American children to send them to schools designed to turn them into whites.

Later, under “urban renewal,” the WASPs who controlled government destroyed ethnic areas in large cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago—including Catholic, African-American, and Jewish neighborhoods. Their real estate lobbies also connived to eliminate

low-cost housing coops.

The actions of American WASPs show that tribes are often genocidal. The phenomenon of one tribe enslaving or killing off another still goes on today and not only in less-developed countries. Just ask the Palestinians.

Tribes are also extraordinarily conservative. They stick to the habitual ways that have worked in the past. Change almost never comes from within. Change either is forced from outside or is an adaptation to outside conditions.

Tribes cannot reform themselves, as a rule. Those who try to reform a tribe lead lonely lives. Many are the reformers who die in obscurity with only their conscience to keep them company.

So why are people so caught up in tribal structures if they inflict so much misery and pain? The answer is simple. The predominant human emotion is fear. We participate in a tribe because we are hoping it will alleviate that fear. But we carry our fears with us. This makes us easy marks for manipulation by the tribes to which we belong.

TRIBALISM AND TRUTH

I am convinced that in today's world, most tribes, as characterized here, are tempted, to a greater or lesser degree, to be doing the Devil's work. By contrast, groups that join together on the basis of positive values have an opportunity of forming a genuine community. But to form and maintain a community requires dedication, commitment to service, self-sacrifice, and adherence to truth.

Jesus said, "The truth shall set you free." Truth supports community and makes it possible. But truth is the enemy of tribalism.

Tribes hate the truth, because it might challenge their assumptions. A search for truth means a willingness to change. Tribes never want to change and never can change. Most just die out or are exterminated by other tribes.

What then is the antidote to tribalism, especially when those who break away may merely try to form their own alternative tribes?

Written constitutions were believed at one time to be a bulwark against tribalism—both top down from a ruling caste and bottom up from ignorant masses. Certainly the U.S. Constitution has provided some degree of protection against tribal tyranny, but, as noted previously, it is easy for factions to seize and hold power.

People have also thought that religion can protect against tribalism, though they all seem to end up with their own tribal hierarchies. This is especially the case where the religion is run by professional priests, the most highly structured being the Roman Catholic Church with its lifetime celibate clergy.

The question that is forgotten is whether the religious elite are any closer to achieving the aims of religion than simple believers, a question to which there is no unequivocal answer. While no one can doubt the right of an organized religion to define its belief system, this does not of itself make that religion more right—or give it more *rights*—than any other. And it doesn't eliminate tribalism in its midst.

When religions that to outsiders appear more or less equivalent in their fundamentals fight or persecute each other, including Christians vs. Muslims or Jews vs. everyone else, it is clearly tribalism at work, not a search for right and wrong. When one is secure in one's own beliefs, it is not necessary to attack others.

My own belief is that all the world's religions are pretty much the same. This short essay is not the place to explain that belief in detail, so I will simply refer you to the writings of one of the world's great geniuses, a man that Ralph Waldo Emerson saw as being on the same level as Plato; that person being Emmanuel Swedenborg (1653-1735).



Not only did Swedenborg (picture on the right) state that a sincere follower of any religion had an opportunity for salvation equal to any other, but he said he had paid many visits to Heaven and Hell where he saw that proposition proven.

Swedenborg was an independently wealthy scientist, not a churchman, though his father was a bishop in the Swedish Lutheran church, the same church that declared Swedenborg himself guilty of heresy for his teachings.

Swedenborg published numerous theological volumes anonymously in Latin. English translations began to appear in the 1780s, with Benjamin Franklin a subscriber to the first American edition. Among those influenced by Swedenborg were Robert Frost, Johnny Appleseed, William Blake, Jorge Luis Borges, Daniel Burnham, Arthur Conan Doyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Flaxman, George Inness, Henry James Sr., Carl Jung, Immanuel Kant, Honoré de Balzac, Helen Keller, Czesław Miłosz, August Strindberg, D. T. Suzuki, and William Butler Yeats.

Swedenborg's main point of contention with the Christian churches was his belief that merely having faith in one's salvation through belonging to and paying lip service to the doctrines of organized religion was not enough. Swedenborg actually believed what Jesus Christ taught:

that a man must repent of his sinful deeds and be reborn to a new way of life. He said, however, that if one does this, it is much easier than many people think to walk on the good path.

Swedenborg made clear that real religion means that I look at myself first before criticizing others. This is in contrast to the tribal fundamentalist who takes himself as being finished or completed because of the creed he espouses, the race he was born to, his social caste, or any other surface identifier he associates himself with.

Actually, there are thousands of attributes to which people can cling in order to make themselves appear “not as other men.” Not one of them means a thing when we look at life from a spiritual perspective.

Swedenborg said he received his mission through a visitation from Jesus himself. By implication, we can conclude that it is quite possible for a person to be a follower of a religion’s founder without belonging to a church or other organization claiming descent from that person.

At the same time, churches do exist that are based on Swedenborg’s ideas. See, for example, the website for the General Church of the New Jerusalem.

I personally have found many similarities between Swedenborg and the teachings of Native American prophets of the 18th and 19th centuries, who said they were taken to Heaven in trance and given teachings by a figure they called “the Master of Life.” These prophets have had a profound influence on modern Native American life.

Studying Swedenborg has helped me understand that spiritual practice, belief in God, efforts to lead a good life, and conviction that one’s true reward will come in the next world combine to give a person the courage and understanding to make a stand on the side of conscience when the tribe that expects one’s allegiance is demanding that one “go along to get along.”

As one writer on spirituality said,

“God and one person together make a majority,” no matter what compromises the tribe may be insisting on. I believe that to be true.

Please note that I am not saying that the existence in the world of a corrupt tribal consciousness explains everything; but I *am* saying that consideration of it can be a useful conceptual tool. It casts light on many things we fail to understand.

Above all it shows that warring tribes in possession of modern communication technology and weapons of mass destruction result in a peril unimaginable in past ages. For the ruling tribes to become even meaner, more dishonest, and more insular, as appears to be happening today, does not seem to provide the answer.

In fact I think it is fair to say that tribes today may destroy the world.

In this light the teachings of humanity’s great spiritual prophets gain a new urgency and may motivate us to ask what they were really talking about, as Swedenborg did.

This article is the fourth in a series. The next installment will take up the question of “Production and Profit.”

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