



What Is Tribalism?

DEFINITION:

“Tribalism” refers to (participation in) a social condition—namely, a certain manifestation of collective identity. (It arises from a mindset that can be called a “tribilistic mentality”.) **This social condition metastasizes when “collective identity” develops three elements.**

Tribalism itself is not a form of collective identity; it involves collective identity. It is a possible condition that arises from a certain mode of collective identity (namely, the kind of collective identity that involves bimodal alienation). **The primary underlying condition for tribalism is bimodal alienation.**

Not all forms of collective identity manifest as tribalism. In other words, not all forms of c.i. are dysfunctional. (We assume that tribalism is inherently dysfunctional in nature; while c.i. is not inherently dysfunctional.)

There are three elements that set tribalism apart from what could be considered more healthy manifestations of c.i. (i.e. those involving pro-social communal solidarity and sense of fraternity, as found in constructive social movements and genuine civil activism). Each of these distinguishing elements involves a psychological / social condition that is unhealthy (dysfunctional) in various ways—and, when merged with collective identity, entails a certain kind of social-psychological dysfunction: “tribalism”.

ELEMENT 1:

An “us” in contradistinction to “them” demarcation is naturally found in a “healthy” social movement or group definition—where members are distinguished from non-members, and thus derive an important part of their identity from participation in (and belonging to) the relevant group.

Tribalism metastasizes when this reasonable “us as opposed to them” distinction mutates into a more derisive “us VS. them” dynamic.

Obviously, a certain kind of “vs.” is inevitably involved when a collective movement is “standing up to” or “speaking out against” a dominant power structure, or protesting a problematic state of affairs. But this is a logistical matter more than a tribal matter. This non-tribal form of “vs.” pertains to power structures and to (sets of) particular people, not to groups (qua tribes) per se.

Thus, tribalism (as opposed to healthier manifestations of collective identity) involves a collective narcissism (a sort of group narcissism or exceptionalism, as well as a tribe-centric worldview). Moreover, it involves antagonism between the in-group and the out-group. This antagonistic mindset defines “sides” (as in a feud of some kind)—thus establishing “teams” pitted against one-another. It thereby couches issues in terms of a feud between these “sides” and judges people strictly based on tribal (team) affiliation.

ELEMENT 2:

The aggrandizement of the group (qua tribe) is pursued for its own sake. The tribe can be a particular race (tribalism in the form of racism), a particular nation (tribalism in the form of hyper-nationalism / super-patriotism), adherents to a certain system of dogma (tribalism in the form of a pathological following of an ideology), subscribers to an institution (tribalism in the form of cult activity, i.e. religion), or any combination thereof. Whatever its nature and context, **the tribe becomes an end in itself.** The aggrandizement of the tribe itself is the sumum bonum of the tribe—the sine qua non of all its members. All other concerns are subordinated to that end.

With tribalism, then, the tribe is glorified, romanticized, fetishized, and even deified. Tribal chauvinism ensues. This takes the form of tribal hubris, braggadocio, and false pride. The in-group is glorified while the out-group is demeaned in some way. In this scheme, what WE do is, by definition, righteous, while what THEY do is, by definition, suspect. When the narrative involves a cosmology of Good vs. Evil, then Good = Us and Evil = The Other.

Allegiance / loyalty to the tribe is imbued with inherent value. Such sacred allegiance / loyalty is deemed the highest virtue, and thus often becomes an obsession. By the same token, any deviation from these highest virtues is deemed the ultimate vice: heresy / infidelity / blasphemy.

Meanwhile, the other (in the form of the other team, or a member thereof) is typically vilified, demonized and / or dehumanized. Here, outsiders are deemed somehow inferior to the insiders—strictly by dint of group affiliation. Certain entitlements / privileges are bestowed upon the tribe itself (i.e. given to members of the in-group, BECAUSE they are members of the in-group). These entitlements / privileges aren't afforded to the other (members of the out-group). It's as though the tribe was uniquely privileged by divine ordinance / providence (what could be called "the chosen group" syndrome). Some sort of tribal "honor" is typically a part of this mindset—where the pride (the "good name") of the tribe is prized above ALL else.

No longer is group solidarity based on a collaborative effort or used merely as a vehicle for cooperation and mutual support; it has become something different—something more than mere solidarity / fraternity—based on element 3.

ELEMENT 3:

The collective identity trumps any given member's identity as an individual. Here, one's individuality is, as it were, swallowed up by the collective (in what is called "submersion"). Consequently, the member defines himself as a member of the group first and foremost—and esteems himself (and others) primarily (or entirely) in terms of that affiliation (or lack thereof). This is not the case with healthier (i.e. pro-social) manifestations of collective identity (e.g. organized labor, civil rights activism).

Thus, "I think of myself first and foremost as a Yankees fan—and want others to think of me first and foremost as a Yankees fan. This is the most important thing about me. Without this, I have little identity worth talking about. For this is the primary element of my identity. It defines, more than anything else, what I care about, who I am, how I think, what I want, and what I do." Here, autonomy is abdicated, groupthink metastasizes, and all people are defined by group affiliation (categorized as in-group and out-group) rather than—most fundamentally—as fellow human beings. Tribal membership is the ultimate standard by which people are judged and esteemed. This criterion trumps all other modes of identity (i.e. it transcends all cross-cutting cleavages of categorization).

Once Element 3 is merged with the other two elements, hostility / militancy often ensues: a mission to defeat the menacing outsider: the enemy / infidel. (Typically, there exists some sort of heresy, insofar as sully the good name of the tribe is

essentially paying inadequate tribute to something that has been deemed sacred / sacrosanct. Here, the other is an “infidel”, a heretic, a subversive: the designated enemy...strictly by dint of his tribal affiliation.)

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS FOR TRIBALISM: BIMODAL-ALIENATION:

When collective isolation (isolation from the other in which the unit of isolation is the group) is married with submersion in the group (alienation from the self, whereby autonomy and self-esteem are—often unwittingly—abdicated), the condition primed for tribalism to metastasize. This involves forms of provincialism, insularity and parochialism. This seems to be a penchant with which we are all, as homo sapiens, primally hardwired.

It is helpful to note the antithesis of tribalism: cosmopolitanism (what the Greeks called “agape”; what Marx called “species being”). Rawls invoked this mind-frame with his “original position” as did Kant with the Categorical Imperative—tools that can be used to overcome the innate penchant toward tribalism with which we are all afflicted.

OBSERVATIONS:

Tribalism encompasses a wide range of seemingly disparate phenomena (from ideological fanaticism to religiosity, from racism to hyper-nationalism / super-patriotism), connecting them via a common, underlying m.o.

Tribalism invariably contributes to the fragmentation of humanity—breaking it into disparate factions. This Balkanization of mankind into mutually antagonistic groups entails that members lose touch with each other’s shared / common humanity (the universals that bind all humans into a global community). Instead of one’s fellow human being viewed/treated first and foremost as a fellow human being (a mentality that is retained in more healthy manifestations of collective identity), any person is esteemed, above all, based on membership status.

By contrast, constructive (non-dysfunctional) social movements and healthy group identities tend to retain a sense of common / shared humanity, as the collective identity compliments (rather than trumps) one’s identity as a human being (i.e. as an autonomous individual, sovereign over his own mind).

Obviously, collective identity needn’t (and often doesn’t) engender tribalism. “I think of myself as one of these, whereas you are one of those. I am one X amongst a community of Xs. I may be a member of this group, but when it comes to my



humanity, that membership is beside the point.”Here, distinguishing between members and nonmembers is simply a practical demarcation of collective identity.**It is when collective identity develops elements 1, 2 and 3 that tribalism metastasizes.**In such a case, the scenario is couched in the following terms: The insiders pitted against the outsiders (i.e. the good guys vs. the bad guys—as defined by tribal affiliation).In other words, individuals are judged / defined based primarily / exclusively on tribal affiliation.This is to be contrasted to non-tribalistic collective identity, wherein people are defined / judged on an individual-by-individual basis (i.e. based on prudent criteria).With tribalism, the individual is defined / judged via associations / generalizations / stereotypes based on group membership, as opposed to as an individual based on actual merit.“I esteem you (or not) simply by dint of the fact that you are a certified member of tribe X.”

When I define myself as a member of a group (when my identity is, in part, a function of my affiliation with a category of people), I think of myself in some important way as a gay man, a Latin, an immigrant, a Republican, a Yankees fan, a factory worker for that company, an American, an African American, etc.Be the criterion sexuality, ethnicity, citizen status, political party affiliation, choice of team support, employment status, nationality, or being a member of a formerly oppressed group, this is an element of who I am, but it doesn’t (necessarily) trump my conception of myself first and foremost as a human being—as a sovereign individual.In other words, in partaking in collective identity, my individual autonomy need not be compromised.Rather, my autonomy is reconciled with and harmoniously married to my collective identity.My collective identity matters, but it doesn’t CONSUME me, and trump absolutely EVERYTHING.

People partake in collective/group identity for myriad reasons.C.I. is typically found when one is engaged with others in a cooperative effort involving emotional investment and that has an effect on one’s self-image or self-esteem (a collaborative project that requires camaraderie and solidarity, and thus has an impact on one’s very identity).This sense of brotherhood can be based on a shared enterprise (e.g. a civil rights movement, a labor union strike), shared interests (a political campaign supporter, a yacht club member, a rock band follower, a sports-team fan), and/or a shared heritage (a fellow proletarian, a fellow Quaker, a fellow basketball fan, a fellow chess-player, a fellow alumnus of a university, a fellow company employee, a fellow secular* Jew).Any of these collective identities may exist with or without tribalism.

Once we think of ourselves as a member of a category to a degree (and in a way) that trumps our conception of ourselves as members of the global human community, we circle the wagons, engage in group-think, subordinate our autonomy to the collective, and operate with our fellow tribe members as a uniquely privileged faction of mankind. The criterion by which the tribe is defined becomes the defining feature of our existence. We view our membership to the tribe as an end in itself. Allegiance/loyalty to the tribe is maintained for its own sake—as a sacred duty. Meanwhile, the criteria by which we judge / esteem ourselves and others are based primarily (if not exclusively) on group-membership status. In other words, we engage in tribalism.

Here, the only “truth” is the truth of the tribe. The ultimate end is the tribe. One is beholden to the tribe above all else. “Justice” merely means what is good for the tribe. The C.I. is no longer a means to a higher end, a vehicle for a higher good that transcends the group. The highest good IS the tribe itself, and all is done to this end. The highest calling is to serve the tribe. The tribe is its own justification; it is an end in itself.

Tribalism has both a quantitative and qualitative aspect. Independent of degree, there is a strong correlation with “right wing” / “fundamentalist” / anti-intellectual mentalities. Tribalism isn’t binary, it’s a spectrum. It’s not an either/or, but an aspect that may or may not be present in varying degrees. “Tribalism”, then, is not necessarily an all or nothing category, but is often a matter of being “an element of”, an aspect or facet of a group.

A tribe is something we are or belong to; collective identity is something we have—and can, indeed, have without engaging in tribalism. In an analogous way: A religion is something one belongs to; spirituality is something one has—and, of course, can have without engaging in religionism (qua institutionalized dogmatism).

- Here, the modifier “secular” is used, since being a Hassidic / Orthodox practitioner of Judaism ipso facto entails tribalism, whereas many secular (a.k.a. “cultural”) Jews are not engaged in tribalism. Certain movements are inherently tribalistic (e.g. Salafism, Nazism, Revisionist Zionism, Evangelical Christianity, the Republican Party, etc.)

TRIBAL INDICATORS (a.k.a. “red flags”):

1. Overt signifiers (conspicuous displays of tribal affiliation):

This is not a matter of wearing one's advocacy for a group / cause "on one's sleeve" (a perfectly reasonable behavior). Rather, it is a more pretentious exhibition of tribal membership, whereby one bases one's pride, self-esteem, and identity on the petty and superficial (e.g. garb). This is typically done in the form of dressing oneself in "silly" or absurd outfits. The thug who wears his pants below his gluteus maximus is a comic example of this. The Orthodox / Hassidic Jew who dresses himself in asinine garb is an obnoxious example—silly and pathetic as it may be.

Discrete displays don't qualify for this phenomenon (e.g. the Christian who wears a necklace with a cross). Nor do "just for fun" displays (e.g. sports team paraphernalia), or reasonable modes of exhibition (e.g. a t-shirt with symbols / text advocating for a cause or expressing a personal interest). Using clothing to express oneself (i.e. as an individual with certain tastes and interests) doesn't qualify as a tribal signifier. Mere expression—even if via signature attire—is perfectly reasonable behavior.

With ANY display, the person is essentially saying: "I want you to think of me as an X," where X can be someone who is a Christian, a gay-rights activist, a Red Sox fan or likes Van Halen (each not necessarily tribal)...or is a Hassidic Jew or Nazi "skin-head" (each necessarily tribal). The distinction is crucial.

An effective litmus test is as follows: Upon crossing paths with a person exhibiting a display representing X-hood, **can one candidly greet him with, "Hello, X" without coming off as rude?** (This must be done stoically, without a hint of mockery or of being patronizing. Those who insist that this can't be done without a hint of patronization or mockery with "certain" cases only FURTHER support the point of the exercise...as will be demonstrated.)

If **yes**, then: The display is not necessarily a tribal signifier.

If **no**, then: The person is most likely engaging in tribalistic behavior.

Thus, when passing a person on the street with a Van Halen t-shirt, greeting him with, "Hello, Van Halen fan" will typically be met with amicable affirmation. When passing a person wearing a Yankees baseball cap, greeting him with, "Hello, Yankees fan" will be typically met with amicable affirmation. When passing a person with an "I support gay rights" pin on his lapel, greeting him with, "Hello gay rights activist" will most likely be met with amicable affirmation.



However, if one passes a Hassidic Jew dressed as a Hassidic Jew, greeting him with, “Hello, Jew” will typically be met with suspicion or even offense. Why? We take as given that the person has so dressing himself in order to ensure that anyone who encounters him will be sure to think of him as a member of THAT TRIBE. Yet, by honoring this implicit request, one EXPOSES the absurdity of the behavior. The tribalist—on some level—realizes this when a bystander “plays along” with his charade, indulges him, and consequently exposes its irrationality. By obliging his request to be thought of in a certain way, he is forced to face the dysfunction of his C.I. The tribalist is thus resentful of the state in which he’s put himself. (Yet, of course, he has no one to blame but himself.)

(Picture doing this with a Scientologist wearing a tribal signifier, or with a Republican, or with a thug, or with a Sikh. Each one is implicitly declaring to all passers-by, “I want you to think of me as a Scientologist / Republican / thug / Sikh.” Yet when his implicit request is actually honored, he immediately becomes resentful or antagonistic. He’s been forced to confront his own tribalism. Such is a consequence of the derangement and degeneracy that is the tribalistic mentality.)

For those who insist that one can’t do this fairly with formerly oppressed / persecuted people, the point of the exercise is only bolstered. The passer-by didn’t have anything to do with that oppression / persecution. Moreover, if the passer-by says this to anyone who belongs to a group that has been oppressed / persecuted who ISN’T engaging in tribalism (e.g. an Armenian, a gay man, a black man, or certain Palestinians) who are conspicuously displaying their collective identity, then this problem doesn’t occur. That is, of course, the point of the test.

2. Asinine behavior / speechifying performed in public (in order to assert one’s loyalty to the tribe and/or to glorify the tribe)

Nation of Islam preachers on the streets of New York are an obvious example, as are the creepy promotions tables set up by Scientologists in the subway system. This behavior goes beyond mere proselytizing / evangelism (behaviors indicative of cult activity, commonly found with various Christian sects). Here, the behavior is a brazen announcement that “WE are the insiders and YOU are the outsiders. WE are uniquely special in some way, and YOU ARE NOT. We are superior to you simply by dint of our tribal affiliation.”

Preposterous and ridiculous behavior, just like preposterous and ridiculous garb, is indicative of dysfunctional thinking and/or psychological problems (pathologies, delusions, obsessions, insecurities, etc.) Tribalism is but one form that such things can take.

More subtle acts are also indicative, when such acts are taken too seriously (i.e. when they become obsessions). Thus, secret handshakes performed “just for fun” are not tribal indicators. However, once taken too seriously, they become tribal indicators. A Christian who covets the crucifix around his neck far too much (or judges others based on whether they have a crucifix around THEIR neck) is another example. The fanatical Christian evangelist preaching gibberish on the street corner—when on behalf of a particular church—indicates he has succumbed to a tribalistic mindset (in-group = saved; out-group = unsaved).

3. Formal policies of militancy / hostility toward the out-group

The Israeli government’s atrocious and despicable policies toward the Palestinians is the most infamous contemporary case. Indeed, Revisionist (right-wing) Zionism is tribalism on steroids. Tragically, the examples are legion: The Hutu genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, the Turkish genocide against the Armenians, the Junjaweed genocide against the out-group in Darfur, the U.S. government’s crusade against “communists” in developing countries in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s, etc. Any case of ethnic cleansing is an archetypical example. However, the pogroms don’t have to be based on ethno-centrism (i.e. racism). Any persecution against non-members also qualifies—be it the Gestapo’s imprisonment of subversives, the Nazi extermination of non-Aryans, the Inquisition’s execution of heretics, or the Taliban’s draconian punishment of non-compliant people.

“Tribalism” is a concept meant to capture the underlying modus operandi of otherwise seemingly disparate phenomena. A key to remember is that tribalism exists in DEGREES. Thus, there are typically various ELEMENTS OF tribalism in any given social phenomenon—to various degrees. It’s therefore difficult to point to any one thing and say, “THAT is ‘tribalism’...” lest we select archetypical examples for didactic reasons. What is the “epitome” of tribalism? It’s hard to say.

Meanwhile, examples of behavior / thinking that exhibit hallmark features of tribalism are legion.



The important point in the definition is that it trumps all cross-cutting cleavages. In other words, if “Red Sox Nation” is the prevailing tribalistic mindset, then this transcends black a/o/t white or asian Red Sox fans, Christian a/o/t secular Red Sox fans, Democratic a/o/t Republican Red Sox fans, American a/o/t Venezuelan Red Sox fans, etc. Meanwhile, if one is a super-patriotic American, whether a fellow patriot is a Red Sox fan or a Yankees fan is a secondary matter that is trumped by the ultimate tribe.

It seems that any alliances between the two factions of fundamentalist Islam are largely instrumental in nature. That is, they are forged for the purposes of pure utility for each tribe at hand—a collaboration that is effected only as a means to the greater end: the aggrandizement / benefit of the tribe (which is an end in itself).

This may be why, say, Saddam Hussein, though not giving a shit about Islam per se, gleefully collaborated with Salafist elements when he saw it as serving his ultimate ends (aggrandizement of his regime)...and why fundamentalist Shia will willingly collaborate with Salafists out of sheer opportunism: they do it IN SPITE OF, not because of, the alternate tribal identities involved. Obviously, the Islamic jihad against the Great Satan allows otherwise disparate factions to collaborate, to further their own respective ends—which, on THAT matter—are shared.

Regardless, it is ultimate ends that matter at the end of the day—for the same reason a Red Sox fan may find himself rooting for a normal foe in a non-Red-Sox game in special circumstances where that normal foe’s victory will indirectly benefit the Red Sox down the road.

But when it all comes down to it, at the end of the day, the prevailing tribal demarcation (the tribe’s interest) trumps all other cross-cutting cleavages of demarcation. The petty feuds of political factions to which James Madison referred in Fed. 10 is a case in point: Here, loyalty to one’s own political tribe may trump any dedication to public service (dedication to the public interest) for public officials who’ve become partisan (succumbed to tribalism in the form of political parties).

Such petty feuds are, presciently, precisely what Madison feared. The last decade has been a case in point.

We all—as humans predisposed to the phenomenon—partake in tribalism in various ways to various degrees. The moment one can label oneself and fellow travelers under a certain taxonomy, the mere existence of categories sets the stage for tribalistic mentalities to metastasize...be it Italian a/o/t Irish or Republican a/o/t

Democrat or Christian a/o/t Muslim. The point is the threshold where the mere “a/o/t” transforms into more of a “vs.” (and “submersion” ensues). The former is merely a pragmatic distinction, while the latter is a pitting of two SIDES in a mutually antagonistic feud. The former may still accommodate agape, “species being” and the categorical imperative...while the latter is less amenable to such things (since it Balkanizes mankind into seemingly irreconcilable, disparate factions).

Pedestrian, common, every-day instances of activity exhibiting ELEMENTS OF tribalism are ubiquitous. So it depends on the degree to which the tribalism plays a role psychologically and socially that will determine which examples are salient.

There is no shortage of examples of tribalism. Tribalism is inherently right-wing in nature...though, as left-wing movements get carried away (succumb to what I call the “Robespierre Syndrome”), they invert and ironically become right wing in nature. (Obama-mania is a recent example of this. It basically became a militant cult for some...a mirror image of the G.O.P...replete with idolatry.)

Salafism, Nazism and Revisionist Zionism are, of course, blatant cases. Maoism and Stalinism were clear cases, as was the Hutu vs. Tutsi feud in Rwanda. Here in America, the Republican Party since 1980 is an obvious case-study. The KKK and mafia families are great examples too, as are urban street gangs. (Any ideology that begets a cult-like movement is a case-in-point.)

The degree to which the in-group is glorified while the out-group is demonized tends to correspond to the extent to which the other is rendered a subaltern population (dehumanized and thus deemed less valuable than members of the anointed tribe). This could be done for various reasons.

When the out-group is dehumanized, marginalized, viewed as somehow inferior creatures, or inherently heretical in some way, tribalism is afoot.

Such a mindset—pathological in the more extreme cases—sets the stage for anti-social behavior (the oppression and persecution of the other) while providing a rationalization for it. That tribalism fosters iniquitous activity is one issue; that it gives such activity ideological validation is another. This has been demonstrated by Nazism as well as by Salafism and Revisionist Zionism. The phenomenon takes the form not only of racism (ethno-centricity), but of hyper-nationalism and/or fundamentalist religionism as well.

TRIBALISM: NARRATIVES & HETERONOMY:

Alasdair MacIntyre noted: “Man is...essentially a story-telling animal. That means I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question of ‘Of what story do I find myself a part?’” This narrative conception of the self is pivotal in how we conceive ourselves and our role in the world. In a way, this puts us at the mercy of the narrative of which we find ourselves a part.

MacIntyre thus continues: “I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only qua individual... We all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone’s son / daughter, a citizen of this or that city. I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation... Hence, what is good for me has to be the good for someone who inhabits these roles. I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation a variety of debts, inheritances, expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral [point of departure]. This is, in part, what gives my life its moral particularity.”

Existential orientation is established via the narrative to which we subscribe... as is what is “good” and of value, what is important and what is “right”. This is heteronomously-established identity and sense of purpose and moral direction. Insofar as we surrender to this PRESCRIBED narrative, we abdicate our autonomy. “For the story of my life,” MacIntyre says, “is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.”

Heteronomy is the vehicle for collective identity, but it is also the gateway to tribalism. When my identity and life purpose is primarily defined by group membership—thus trumping any autonomously-established identity / purpose, I INHERIT my morals and values from the circumstances in which I find myself—from accident of birth. I am thus rendered merely a function of the history of the group with which I’m affiliated. The moral system to which I’m beholden is, then, unique to my own group, since it is a product of that group. To be part of that group is to be a character in that group’s narrative. My *raison d’être* is dictated by my membership status in THIS group as opposed to THAT group.

What about a narrative in which we are all, most fundamentally, fellow humans—part of the same group—a group that subsumes all *homo sapiens*. This UNIVERSAL narrative, the narrative of humanity, transcends all tribal distinctions, thus instantiating a moral system that pervades all mankind as a global community. This requires AUTONOMY, as only autonomously can we intuit and embrace the universal principles we all CATEGORICALLY share.

Human solidarity must trump all other modes of solidarity. Here, there can be no subaltern portion of the human population. There are no humans relegated to the out-group. Cosmopolitanism / species being PRECLUDES the communitarianist morality of tribalism. Member-based morality / value is rendered anathema due to agape. Any insular solidarity of the tribe is trumped by the universal solidarity of the human race. Any exceptionalist moral code privileging the in-group over the out-group is trumped by universal principles.

Whether ethno-centricity, hyper-nationalism, or radical religionism (i.e. racism, super-patriotism or cult mentality), tribalism is predicated on heteronomy. For it is a function of a narrative prescribed BY the group FOR the group—a scenario entailed by the legacy of the collective. Instead of appropriating a narrative for oneself, one is appropriated by the narrative.

The clash of competing obligations / loyalties / allegiances / expectations / interests from disparate groups is entailed by mutually incompatible moral microcosms—moralities that emanate from correspondingly mutually incompatible narratives. This is enabled by heteronomous individuals.

The Balkanization of mankind ensues from this condition. The ability (nay, the motivation) to be in touch with our shared humanity, to grasp GENUINE universals, is thereby undermined—nay, countermanded.

Marxian species being entails viewing oneself, ultimately, as a member of the human community—the community that transcends all communities. This is the omni-community—in which divisive tribal divisions evaporate. Such a frame of mind is based on the universals to which we all—as autonomous individuals—have access. The community of mankind engenders a solidarity that takes precedence over the provincial / myopic allegiances / loyalties demanded by tribal-membership-as-primary-referent.

Who holds a stake in what? Based on what? What is one's sumum bonum? What is the sine qua non of one's life? Answering such questions reveals the ultimate grounds of our modus operandi.

Why are we tribalistic AT ALL? Why would we EVER be tribalistic? It seems to be eminently pragmatic: sticking together with a designated clan, circling the wagons, watching each others' backs, having a mutual support system at one's disposal, having a group of comrades one can "count on" and TRUST in this big, bewildering world of myriad others. (That is: others who are out there, whom we CAN'T trust,



whom we CAN'T depend on...or even relate to.)However, in a modern, civil society, this becomes unnecessary.For cosmopolitanism is no longer untenable, intractable.We no longer need to relate to other solely as fellow tribe members; we can now relate to other humans as other HUMANS.We CAN, now, have a global community—whether our brothers are in physically close proximity or on the other side of the planet.

When tribal honor and loyalty to one's own group trumps adherence to universal principles, what are the consequences?The communitarian m.o. engenders provincialism—and even insularity: a delimited sphere of ultimate concern.We lose sight of our shared humanity as we fixate on the differences that divide us—basing our conception of outsiders on whatever we DON'T share.But what don't we share other than our own artificial constructs?

We have the power to change our narratives.But only when we are autonomous can we emancipate ourselves from the tribe-based narratives in which we are often ensconced.Prejudices based on artificial constructs disintegrate when the terms of tribalism are rebuked.When once we had a moral obligation to our tribe's doctrine (a social construct), due to the narrative unique to IT...we now recognize a moral obligation to the moral law (a universal), due to a narrative that encompasses all mankind.

We must ask: From where DO our moral systems derive?What is their ULTIMATE basis?From what source does our esteem, our pride, our right-ness stem?If we look to foundations, we find that tribalism is built upon (seemingly solid) constructs, not on genuinely solid ground—on bedrock that exists independently of any group's proprietary system.With tribalism, fidelities and fealties to one's own group's system take precedence over adherence to that which transcends the tribe.This can only work insofar as one is heteronomous.

What of the ground that we ALL ultimately share—in spite of social constructs—in spite of tribal affiliations?It is a ground that can only be vividly discerned and fully appreciated insofar as one is genuinely autonomous.Only a narrative that encompasses humanity in its purview can accommodate such a ground—a narrative in which my role, above all, is as a human among humans.Such is a narrative concerned with the entire human race.



Agape (i.e. species being) and autonomy are symbiotic. Tribalism and heteronomy are symbiotic. The kind of narrative we employ (in order to make sense of ourselves and our world) will indicate which mode of existence we're in. One mode involves a concerted / conscientious choice to discern Reality; the other mode involves passively allowing ambient circumstance to determine our reality for us. Which role am I MOST FUNDAMENTALLY playing in my narrative: a human or a member of a delimited group?

Can ethics only ever be a social construct—a byproduct of circumstance? Is morality merely a creature of local convention—a degree of adherence to ambient social norms? Is what we call “justice” simply an artifact of our own group’s history—a proximate historical accident? Are such things functions of tradition / legacy / precedent...or do they exist independently thereof?

How we answer such questions determines whether we are relativists or recognize an objective Reality. Relativism paves the way for tribalism—as tribalism is predicated on the communitarian mentality. Recognition of a CATEGORICALLY shared Reality enables us to transcend tribal divisions.

In the end, any obligation we feel we may have to a particular group / institution (due to membership or allegiance) must always be subordinate to Kantian “duty”: the obligations we all have (as human beings) TO ALL OTHER humans qua fellow humans. This is what Marx called “species being”, what the ancient Greeks called “agape”, and what Appiah calls “cosmopolitanism”. It follows from Kant’s categorical imperative. Such a mode of thinking involves standards that are categorically universal, thus dissolving the conditions on which tribalism depends.