

Our Enemy, the State: The Pyramid Against the Circle

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A quick glance at the evening news should be enough to convince even the most disengaged citizen that we live in “grim times.” This recognition, although accurate, is a cliché, since the same could be said about almost every era for the last thousand years in the West.

That’s not to say there’s not joy to be had, moments in which the human spirit erupts with creativity or transcendence, or even years when things seem to work just right, for some people, that is, and usually only for a while. Simultaneously, though, even in the best of periods often no less than a few miles away, some horror is being perpetrated, or the harmony of an entire era or locale is suddenly exploded by some monstrous event.

Unique to the Modern World

Barbara W. Tuchman’s 1978 classic, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, makes the point that the years she describes in the 20th Century, filled with wars, riot, crime, and instability, were similar to one 700 years earlier. It’s been said that “civilization is a bloody sword,” and perhaps it is here that we should look for answers to the recurrence of the mass misery inherent in human affairs administered by the political state. This apparatus, unique to the modern world, is the central institution which makes all others possible and whose rationale for existence is supposedly the peaceful and efficient administration of daily life, something we are told is impossible by a voluntary association of those who are now ruled.

The English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), argued that life in a state of nature would be, “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” Although Hobbes may have proved his last assertion by his long life span, the others are rubbish he wrote to defend the concept of an absolute sovereign with unlimited powers of rule and punishment, such as his patron, the English monarch. In fact, the opposite is true.

Pre-state society, although manifesting numerous forms among tribes and bands, was highly egalitarian, depending heavily on communal forms of cooperation for its very existence. If we were to crudely represent its form schematically, it would be that of a circle where every being and even inanimate objects were interconnected.



circle

All held hands in a symbolic circle — all the people, all the plants, all the animals, the rocks, the rivers. What we would call mythopoetics expressed and emphasized that close relationship between all beings through ritual, dance, song, and rhythm. This circle nurtured homo sapiens through their early existence and came to define the social and psychological qualities which make up the definition of what it means to be human. Among people, kinship was usually defined matrilineally, and each being and object was invested with a particular spiritual character. There were 110 authoritarian rulers.

At a certain point in the development of the species, that circle was cleaved and its circularity shattered. In its place arose stratified, class society. The reason for this epoch-shaking occurrence in many separate regions of the world, and in some cases almost simultaneously, is extraordinarily complex, but in the place of the Society of the Circle there arose a fundamentally different arrangement of how human affairs would be administered. This form can be represented schematically as a pyramid.



triangle

This newly emerged class and state society was entirely different from what had come before it. Now, each being and thing was assigned a particular category that carried with it differing degrees of power, or lack of it.

At the pinnacle of the pyramid was the archon, the absolute ruler. (By the way, if you want life without a ruler, you are an an-archon-ist).

Beneath the ruler was a small class which shared most richly in the wealth of the society.

Beneath them was a layer devoted to promulgating social mystification — essentially stories which announced that the archon was divinely ordained to rule, that the stratified nature of society was similarly heavenly defined, and that either the Society of the Circle never existed or, if it did, it was evil. Their task was to inculcate what Wilhelm Reich would later identify as a “mass psychology of submission” into the ruled — personalities who are more frightened of rebellion than of the consequences of their subjugation.

The spiritual forms which dominated the Society of the Pyramid became formal religions which needed to be interpreted through a class of priests, all of whom expressed their fealty to the ruler. Also, a multiplicity of gods was eliminated and in a move of a certain spiritual economy, One God was enshrined: a male god who

rules from the sky, who blesses the ruler; a punitive god who condemns rebels against authority, temporal or spiritual.

Once the gods who had previously resided in the trees were exterminated, and replaced by the Sky God, the sacred grove becomes timber. Trees are no longer our sisters, but a “natural resource.” Nature becomes desacralized and open for human stewardship (exploitation).

These myths were extremely important, particularly early on, to justify why one man, and a class of men, suddenly had more power and wealth than others, in fact, absolute power and wealth in contradiction to the former arrangement of social relationship of relative equality.

Beneath the priests were men armed with weapons. These armored protectors of the state are necessary to prevent an individual, or worse, an aggregate of individuals, from attempting to re-assert the previous myths that everyone and everything held hands, and that no one person should have dominion over another. The first line of defense is to fool people, but ultimately the state can be defined as men at arms in service to the ruler and his class.

Beneath them in the pyramidal beehive is a mid-class of administrators. They develop numbers for warehousing and slave counting, transforming formerly convivial tasks of providing sustenance into bureaucratized categories of work and distribution.

Beneath them are the slaves of the early societies. Here, finally are people who actually engage in activity that has something to do with providing for human needs, although they are also pressed into service to build megaliths, actual pyramids, ziggurats, etc., devoted to glorification of the ruler, and to the endless interstate wars which begin almost immediately. The surplus of the wealth they produce is looted by the master class; the slaves are left with only the necessary amount to reproduce themselves.

Beneath the slaves are the animals. Once the brothers and sisters of the human family, now reduced to meat machines with no character other than to be consumed.

Beneath the animals, the inanimate objects. Again, previously connected to humans as family, they now exist only to serve the pyramid.

The entire structure is hierarchal. Society-wide corruption abounded.

All wealth flows upwards; all authority flows down. The entire apparatus is created to protect and extend the wealth, power, and privilege of a few at the expense of the many and the planet itself. There was no Golden Age of the state; it emerged as a racket for the rich and has never relinquished its criminal character. It can't be reformed, or, said with correct emphasis, the state cannot be re-formed. Its form is that of a racket.

By the way, the schematic representation of these two models of society on the preceding page are highly out of proportion, and, hence, misleading. In relative size, the circle would appear alongside the pyramid thusly:



small circle and triangle

Actually, the proportion is even greater between the two, but if presented accurately it would make the circle almost invisible to the eye, while the pyramid would fill the entire page. Societies of the Circle are small and convivial; Societies of the Pyramid are marked by their gigantism in every regard; another aspect which crushes the individual beneath its weight, and makes its presence in human affairs appear immutable.

Although previously, tribal and band association marked most of human history, 6,000 years after their emergence, Societies of the Pyramid dominate the planet. *Terre Incognita*, land unknown to the Leviathan (Hobbes' and then Fredy Perlman's word for such societies), ceased to exist a century ago, and the entire planet was brought within its grasp.

Along the way, a few of the ruled objected to rulers having absolute power and wealth and devised schemes variously called democracy or socialism. These well-meaning Reformers accepted the Pyramid as a given but hoped if their system was installed, it would function more fairly toward people. Nothing was mentioned about the other parts of the circle — the other creatures, all of nature, since the Reformers saw them little differently than the rulers they hoped to replace.

On two continents in the West, experiments were tried over several hundred years along lines proposed by the Reformers. But, ultimately, little has changed. Instead of a single ruler, a ruling class operates the mechanism of the political state.

The importance of the priest class diminished as the main instrument of mystification, only to be replaced by Modern Communications which fooled the ruled as well as had Formal Religion. No differently, the purpose is to instill what Wilhelm Reich identified as a "mass psychology of submission" into the ruled — personalities who are more frightened of rebellion than of the consequences of their subjugation.

The armed body of men remained as the bedrock of the new racket in case individuals, or worse, an aggregate of individuals, attempted to say that this new state of affairs looked just like the old one. Slaves were replaced with what some who

tried to organize the new category of those creating wealth through their labor as wage slaves to indicate that they were rewarded slightly for their efforts.

All real wealth continues to flow upwards and all real authority still flows downward. The entire structure is hierarchical. Society-wide corruption abounded.

Not much had changed.

There were a few isolated Dreamers and Visionaries who saw through the entirety of the racket and demanded that a new world based on the concept of the Society of the Circle be reestablished. The democratic and socialist Reformers thought that what the Society of the Pyramid had created could serve as the basis of a new society and celebrated the Modern Machinery and the Labor of the Leviathanic form.

Others, who realized that it was the Modern Machinery itself and human effort turned into Labor that was no less the problem than the form of rule, advocated a much smaller and simpler way of living. Thus far, they've had little success and meet with derision and scorn from the Reformers who say that the Leviathanic form only needs tinkering to perfect it — not its destruction or elimination.

Interestingly, the one significant time the ideas of the Dreamers and the Visionaries were realized in the modern epoch was within a Leviathanic state that half a millennia earlier had sent the pathogens of the West's toxic culture beyond its geography to a new sector of the world. Occurring immediately before a second intra-Leviathanic world-wide conflict, the Society of the Circle became a reality for a short period before it was destroyed by a Holy Alliance of Reformers and Leviathan. The tale of this short moment is only remembered by the small number of Dreamers and Visionaries remaining. The others tell it as a story of conflict between the Reformers and Society of the Pyramid.

As a new millennium opened, the idea of reform of the pyramid suddenly seemed no less preposterous than its elimination and replacement with what had preceded it. Although the Society of the Pyramid's apparatus, its mode of rule, its looting of wealth from the ruled and the planet, its armed might, and obfuscation devices dominate everywhere, its Modern Machinery is beginning to unravel the web of life; many of its fuels that power its Modern Machinery are either toxic and/or running out. Armed conflicts rage out of control with even the mightiest of the rackets unable to fully overpower their weaker opponents. Starvation spreads, and pandemic disease reminds some of another plague which killed half of Leviathan's population centuries before.

Those who want the Circle back think that the Pyramid may collapse of its own weight. In its wake lies the wreckage of Nature and hundreds of millions of beings ground beneath its wheels. The Dreamers and Visionaries number so few that a thoughtful observer might think their vision of another world is not possible.

But if it's not, what then? More of this?

Author's note: It's said that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. The title of this essay comes from Albert J. Nock's 1935 classic libertarian text. The idea of the circle and the pyramid comes from David Watson although I'm sure he cribbed it from someone else. Both he and I have been developing these concepts in numerous talks we've given recently. Finally, the style is a poor imitation of Fredy Perlman's writing in *Against His-Story; Against Leviathan*, and even Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*.

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