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End Of The Warriors

Christian Michel*

Abstract: A primitive society is characterised by the absence of a state. As soon as the state emerges, human societies become divided into castes. Anthropologist Georges Dumézil discerned three such castes in all Indo-European societies: priests, warriors and producers. This paper seeks to understand why the producer caste was always considered the lowest of the three in terms of prestige, despite being the most numerous and arguably the most useful. Producers embody the values of life and nature; warriors are on the side of culture, they must resist the natural urge to flee in the face of mortal danger. The producer acts out of self-interest, the warrior does what is right. The debt owed by society to those who accept to lay their lives for its protection is infinite. It cannot be repaid in the producers' currency (money), but only in terms of prestige and power. But in accomplishing their mission, warriors must resort to all the methods forbidden to producers, killing, deceiving, coercing. Warriors were kept outside of society, even physically, in barracks and camps, so that their values would not infect the producers caste, nor would the bourgeois values of comfort, family life, and legitimate fear of death diminish the warriors' morale. The state bureaucracy today has usurped the debt owed by society to its warriors. Albeit bureaucrats are hardly at risk of their lives, they claim to have become our protectors (against unemployment, illness, old age. . .) and they have found new wars to wage against drugs, poverty, crime and terror. They claim the moral high ground over producers, continuing the division of society into castes that primitives resisted for so long.

* www.liberalia.com, e-mail: cmichel@cmichel.com

1 Priests, warriors, producers

Primitive societies have no experience of the state.¹ They have no use for it. This absence does not mean, as naive propagandists for democracy would have it, that these societies live under the thumb of a despot, an all-powerful chief who could well proclaim, following the French king Louis XIV, "The state is me". From the Inuits of the far North to the Aborigines of Australia, primitive societies generally do not appoint a chief. When they do, the chief reigns but does not govern. He only symbolizes the group's unity and its independence from other communities. The chief does not even exercise power in hunting and war. A primitive society's army is not made up of orders and counter orders; it is a group of irregulars. Insubordination is characteristic of such societies. If the chief wants to play chief, he is ostracized. If he persists, he is killed.²

Primitives are fiercely attached to the idea of political and economic equality, according to anthropologist Pierre Clastres, who has devoted a great deal of his work to this subject. Every individual has special qualities – one is a skilled hunter, another a fearsome fighter – but no type of prowess, even if it bestows prestige, can ever confer power. Primitive society rejects the rift between dominant and dominated, governing and governed, master and subject. Now, the state is the instrument of this fracture. It is the locus of power par excellence. All societies structured by the state find themselves irreparably and deeply divided between those who control its apparatus and those who are its subjects.

¹ Pierre Clastres (*La Société contre l'État*, Paris, Plon, 1974; English trans. *Society Against the State*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1977), even believes this can serve as a definition: The "primitive" society is one that has no experience with the state. "Primitive" can refer to groups of humans that died out during prehistoric times as well as those that lead the same existence today as they did 30,000 years ago.

² Pierre Clastres, "Liberté, Malencontre, Innommable" in *Recherches d'anthropologie politique*, Paris, le Seuil, 1980.

Primitives want nothing to do with such division.³

How then did the state come about? How did we move from the political equality of primitive societies to relationships characterized by class and dominance? The best known theory attributes the state's origins to economic factors, a theory that was evidently popularised by Marxists.⁴ The development of agriculture required deforestation, irrigation and the construction of lofts to store the harvest. In order to protect their investments from pillage, agricultural societies used part of their surplus production to maintain a corps of professional warriors. Such an approach never fails to be dangerous: those guarding against external aggression eventually came to guard an imprisoned, servile population.

Another theory views politics, rather than economics, as the founder of the state.⁵ Within certain societies, a group of priests developed what modern language calls an "ideology". This ideology no longer identified the group solely as a descendant of a mythic ancestor or in terms of totemic membership. Such a group could then subjugate

³ If I were to offer my own explanation for this refusal, I would start with the small size of the Primitives societies. While an ethnic group may easily number in the tens of thousands, the social organization of primitive peoples is characterized by clans numbering 200 to 300 members, sometimes only a few dozen. However, envy is no different among Primitives than among our contemporaries. The existence of wealthy people in Malibu or Monte Carlo is an abstract fact, we can rationalize the resentment we feel about it with "social justice" concepts. But if our cousin or co-worker gets rich, we have a much stronger emotional reaction. It is only when societies become large enough to create impersonal social relations that individual situations can become differentiated. Certain people institutionalise their power and accumulate wealth without encountering too much hostility. Many theoreticians of the state, such as Aristotle and Rousseau, view small societies as the ideal political unit. That notion, however, ignores the fact that conformism and resentment are often the natural complement to warm, personal relationships. "Keeping up with the Joneses" refers to the Joneses living down the street. We do not identify as well with the other Joneses. They become statistics that do not arouse the same feelings of envy and resentment. The obvious reference here is to René Girard's work, devoted to "mimetic rivalry," particularly *Mensonge romantique et Vérité romanesque*, Paris, Pluriel, 1978, and *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris, Grasset, 1972; English trans. *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

⁴ Friedrich Engels, *Origins Of The Family, Private Property And State*, International Publishers Company, 1990, available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884-fam/index.htm>. For examples of Marxist anthropology, see also V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, written after his enthusiastic trip to the Soviet Union in 1936 and Morton Herbert Fried, *The Evolution Of Political Society*, New York, McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1967.

⁵ Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité antique*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, 1998, Volume 3, chapter 3. English trans. *The Ancient City*, Trans. William Small, Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1964. Elman R. Service, *Origin of the State and Civilization*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1975. See also Elman R. Service, *Political Power and the Origin of Social Complexity*, in *Configurations of Power*, edited by John S. Henderson and Patricia J. Netherly, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1993.

others, not for the purpose of reducing them to slavery, but to assimilate them – given that filiation was no longer a criterion for belonging to the group.⁶ This acquisition-based, rather than endogenous, growth conferred a decisive numerical advantage both in war and the construction of infrastructure. The same ideology served not only to determine the society's "foreign policy," but also to justify the power of its creators – the priests and warriors – in their dominant caste positions.

2 The three orders

Whatever their relevance, these theories focus on three categories of players:

- Priests, vested with spiritual duties, whether they are magicians, shamans or prophets.
- Warriors
- Producers of wealth, i.e. all those who do not belong to the two previous classes and who carry out the work required by society.

Since George Dumézil published his works, we now know that this classification existed in all Indo-European societies.⁷ From Ossetians in the Caucasus to Vikings, from Greeks and Romans to Irish Celts and the many societies in India, Iran and the Slavic lands, all these societies were based on this tripartite model: priests, warriors and producers. Dumézil explains that this model does not claim to describe each society's reality, but the way in which the society represents its own reality through myths, legends and epics. This fact only strengthens the central paradox: Why would producers place themselves

⁶ This required a true paradigm shift. Totemism is as universal among primitive peoples as the absence of the state. Claude Lévi-Strauss explained its significance: "Saying that clan A descends' from bears and that clan B descends' from eagles is nothing more than a concrete and abbreviated way of viewing the relationship between A and B as analogous to the relationship between species". (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris, PUF, 1962). Agreeing to assimilate individuals from another clan thus marks the emergence of a new, broader conception of the human being, which would continue to expand in waves up until the universalism of today.

⁷ George Dumézil, *Heur et malheur du guerrier*, Paris, Flammarion, 1985 (English trans. *Destiny Of Warrior*, Chicago University Press, 1971) and *Mythes et dieux indo-européens*, Paris, Flammarion, 1992. For an introduction to the work of Georges Dumézil, see Wouter W. Belier, *Decayed Gods, Origin And Development Of Georges Dumézil's "Idéologie Tripartite"*, Brill Academic Publishers, 1991.

at the bottom of the social ladder when representing their world? After all, they are far greater in number than the other orders, especially if women are counted. Women rarely serve as priests and almost never as warriors. And they symbolize fertility, which by definition characterizes producers. In terms of what is useful for society, the occupations of farmer, carpenter, sailor or banker are essential. Shouldn't those who practice these occupations be honoured in literature and art? We know that not to be the case. Heroes are usually warriors and sometimes saints and artists. Villains are in business. What could explain such disrepute?

Free-market proponents, even less so than others, do not have the answer. They believe that all human behaviour is motivated by self-interest. While they are not wrong in principle, they have the tendency to measure self-interest only in terms of monetary profit and loss. Very few people, however, make their decisions solely on the basis of this one criterion.⁸ Many other considerations are at play. The following flowery lines, which come from a book published in the United States in 1995, *Ethics and Public Service*, effectively illustrate the bankruptcy of the *Homo oeconomicus* model when it attempts to explain human behaviour:

“Man’s feet may wallow in the bog of self-interest, but his eyes and ears are strangely attuned to the call of the mountaintop. There is a distinction between “I want this because it is in my self-interest” and “I want this because it is right.” Man’s self-respect is in large part determined by his capacity to make himself and others believe that self is an inadequate referent for decisional morality. This capacity of man to transcend, to sublimate and to transform narrowly vested compulsions is at the heart of all civilized morality”.⁹

The author contrasts taking action “because it’s the right thing to do” with acting out of self-interest. It is commonly agreed that personal gain motivates producers, merchants and capitalists, while doing what is right is the *raison d’être* of public service. And the heart of public service is the army, the warrior class.

⁸ “Intelligent beings never base their goals mainly on economic factors. In the proper sense of the term, our actions are not ruled by economic motives’. There are simply economic factors that influence our efforts to satisfy other goals”. Friedrich Hayek, *The Road To Serfdom*, University of Chicago Press, 1994; chap. VII (with an introduction by Milton Friedman).

⁹ Stephen Bailey, *Ethics and Public Service*. The quotation is found in James H. Tower, *Truth, Faith and Allegiance*, University Press of Kentucky, 1995.

3 Death and the warrior

At the core of the power relationship is the debt relationship. Producers get paid. They get paid, in money, the full cost of their work; if that were not the case, they would find other work. That is the basic premise of free-market economic theory. Once service is rendered and payment made, the legal relationship ends and no one has the right to demand anything from the other party. But how do we pay the warrior? Here is a man willing to sacrifice his own life to save yours, save the lives of your loved ones and protect your property from plunder and destruction. Should you pay for his services in dollars or ounces of gold? How can one ever completely repay him for such sacrifice? Homo oeconomicus goes bust. The debt never ends. What we owe the warrior can only be expressed in the intangible currency of prestige and power.

Their relationship to death, therefore, seals the respective social status of the warrior and producer. The producer walks on the riverbank of life, on the side of nature and biology. Like all creatures, he is driven by "the force through which things persevere in their being", as Spinoza said.¹⁰ The warrior, however, strides on the other side, that of culture. He has chosen the riverbank of death. Biology programs us to beget children and live old enough to see them reproduce in turn. But culture can replace this instruction by convincing some of us that it is glorious to be killed in battle at the peak of youth.¹¹ Thus opens the fracture separating the warrior from the rest of society. The warrior will always scorn the producer, the bourgeois, because the bourgeois fears death.¹²

¹⁰ "Life is the force through which things persevere in their being". Spinoza, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, in *Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, collected and translated by E. Curley, Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹¹ The Romans taught: "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*". The barbarian is the man who boasts about killing. He crows about piercing his enemies with his spear and carries their scalp on his belt. (Our modern pilots paint a roundel on the cabin of their airplane, but they do so to display the *planes* they have brought down, not the enemies they have killed. This distancing is not mere hypocrisy because the enemy pilot could have escaped by parachuting out). In societies civilized by Christianity, the soldier embodies the sacrificial victim giving up his life for the king, the fatherland or a cause rather than an idealization of the killer. The paradoxical result is that our civilized commanders did not hesitate to send far more men to a certain death than the barbarian chieftains would ever have dared. This conception of the sacrificial soldier peaked during the period between the Napoleonic wars and the Korean War with the butchery of the American Civil War and the two world wars. (We, Westerners, are less accepting of sacrifice; what cause today could be important enough to die for?). As it becomes more individualistic, more liberal and more capitalistic, our society becomes that of Eros gradually triumphing over Thanatos.

¹² See my essay, *How Should We Think About Economics Today?*, www.liberalia.com

The producer and the bourgeois are on the side of biology, which the warrior has apparently left behind. But isn't it precisely biology that dictates certain altruistic behaviours and sacrifices? Sociobiologists believe so; they argue that giving up one's life is sometimes the only way to ensure the survival of one's descendents and the perpetuation of one's genetic heritage.¹³ This theory, however, only applies to warriors from clans and from tribes related by blood. It cannot explain the accepted deaths of those defending the diverse populations of historical empires and modern states.

Nor does it seem credible to reduce soldiering to an expression of the aggressiveness that males apparently carry in their genes. War is not a series of fistfights. When projectiles (throwing sticks, blowguns, bows and arrows) made their appearance very early in prehistoric times, the hasty rage that made the hand tremble became a handicap. Those who felt such rage in combat did not live long. Modern warfare, which mobilizes all the resources of advanced technology, is even more dependent on cool heads and methodical and deliberate action. It is difficult to imagine an activity that is more rationalised and socialized than war.

We all die, of course, both producers and warriors, but we do not die the same death.¹⁴ Peasants, the bourgeoisie, women, you and I all die *from* something; we die *from* old age, *from* accidents, *from* illness. But the warrior dies *for* something; he dies *for* his king, *for* the fatherland, *for* the revolution. Bourgeois death is a simple link in the chain of events caused by biology and the whims of nature. It is history. It is history's shapeless, monochromatic pattern. The warrior's death, however, *makes* history. It offers history the adventurous and unexpected. Francis Fukuyama could thus write that the disappearance of warlike empires would bring about the end of history.¹⁵ The military function, which defies nature, reflects the human conscience's deliberate stand against biological evolution – which, in the final analysis, is the gist of history. For that reason, the death of warriors always takes on a grandiose and tragic dimension.

¹³ R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976.

¹⁴ Oswald Spengler, *Decline Of The West*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

¹⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End Of History And The Last Man*, London, Penguin Books, 1992.

4 The warrior's curse

From the beginning of history, the warrior class had special status in society. Plato demanded it, and chivalry exemplified it.¹⁶ The isolation of the warrior class from the rest of society was so strict that not only was access restricted – it was hereditary in most cases – but the warriors themselves could not assume any other role. Such a prohibition should surprise us. It is consistent that a privileged caste, living entirely off levies on the country's economic activity, would restrict membership. But why should they have been forbidden from lowering themselves by choosing another occupation if they had been insane enough to do so? Graduates of prestigious universities generally do not aspire to be refuse collectors and doctors typically have no desire to become nurses, but no law forbids them. In fact, if more college graduates were to work at jobs below their skill level, competition at the top would be less intense.

Historians offer many reasons for this segregation of the warrior class. One such reason, which may seem obvious, appears not to have been recognized: The moral values of warriors differ from those of producers. Physical courage brings honour to the warrior, but should be completely useless to a producer in a well-ordered society. The audacity to kill without remorse is required of the warrior, but obviously forbidden to the producer. Warriors are loyalists; producers are loyal. Soldiers are praised for using the types of ruses and traps for which capitalists are so reproached. All the great generals have won their laurels and gained respect and admiration for their ability to kill, abuse and deceive.¹⁷

Of course, they always claim a good cause, which results in the warrior's curse. To be good, he must be bad. To accomplish his mission of defending society, he must resort to

¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, London, Penguin, 1976 and *The Laws*, trans. Trevor Saunders, London, Penguin 1972.

¹⁷ Mo Ti, a Chinese man of letters who wrote the following around 400 B.C., condemned this inverted warrior morality: "If a man kills an innocent person and steals his clothes, spear and sword, he commits a more serious crime than if he entered a stable to steal an ox or horse. The wrong is greater, the offence more serious and the crime blacker. . . . But we see nothing wrong with committing a murder when attacking a country; we applaud and speak of justice. . . . When a man kills another, he is guilty and sentenced to death. Therefore, according to the same criterion . . . , he who kills 100 men should suffer far greater punishment Similarly, if a simple homicide is considered a crime, but multiple homicide, such as occurs when another country is attacked, is praised as good, can that be called knowing good from bad?" (quoted by S.B. Griffiths in his introduction to Sun Tzu, *The Art Of War*, Oxford University Press, 1972).

all the methods society condemns. We can therefore contrast, item by item, the morality of warriors with the morality of producers. Producers act out of self-interest; there are no higher values for them than biology and nature (their life and the lives of their offspring). However, the time-tested method to achieve these values is cooperation with others, and cooperation's golden rule is, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you".¹⁸ Warriors, however, do not defend their own interests (what type of self-interest could possibly motivate a person who has accepted death?). They expect no cooperation from others, "others" being whoever happens to be the enemy of the day. They do not gain what they want through negotiation and cooperation, but through conquest. And they especially do not want the enemy to do to them what they are doing to the enemy.

5 The "raison d'État"

This complete reversal of values within a society would be impossible without the construct, however cultural and artificial it may be, that we call the State. It is solely the *raison d'État* that makes existence possible according to the warrior's moral code.¹⁹ If this reverse morality were to spread beyond their closed caste, if murder, trickery and deception were to become the values of producers, who represent the vast majority of society, the very process of civilization would fail. Historically, the isolation of such unnatural behaviours was thus necessary to the community as a whole. Limiting them to a specific group, a closed caste like the hereditary nobility, was in the interest of the producers themselves. So the caste system did not function solely by restricting access to the ranks of the military aristocracy, but also by prohibiting these same nobles from

¹⁸ In a seminal book that has been justly acclaimed, Robert Axelrod, (*The Evolution of Cooperation*, Basic Books, New York, 1984) demonstrates that the most beneficial long-term behavioural model consists of treating others as they treat us; he bases his argument on game theory and the famous prisoner's dilemma. If it seems judicious to apply this model to everyday circumstances, it can be contrasted with René Girard's analyses in situations of serious conflict. (op. cit. and *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, Paris, Grasset, 1978, English trans. *Things Hidden Since The Foundation Of The World*, Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹⁹ There were warriors well before the appearance of the state. Primitive societies are the most warlike of all. But the very basis of my argument throughout this text is the following: In primitive societies, *all the men* are warriors and producers in turn. Violence and predation are committed against the outside enemy, not the members of the tribe. In modern societies, however, the dominant class of soldiers and civil servants exploits its fellow citizens rather than foreigners.

doing productive work – literally making work *ig-noble*.²⁰ Their “criminal” morality ran too great a risk of corrupting the entire social fabric.

But the reverse is also true. The warrior’s existence is so contrary to biology that he is always at risk of life-affirming values taking the upper hand. Nothing in our genes compels us to leave our home and family and go off to kill other members of our species. On the contrary, our genetic programming instructs us to flee danger. The soldier therefore must be subjected to constant discipline and kept apart from the rest of society to switch off these biological instructions. Let’s not forget that throughout history, the soldier’s daily lot was not war, with its rushes of adrenaline, but *preparation* for war. As a result, the endlessly repeated military exercises, the routine manoeuvres, the marches in quick time, the shared meals, the chants, the drills, the hard discipline of the barracks were nothing other than interminable training – similar to what an animal must be subjected to when made to act in unnatural ways.

Isn’t it the same for the other dominant caste, the priests? In a completely different setting, but for the same reasons, priests accept discipline that restrains, if not breaks, their natural impulses. With its rules and rituals, the convent is not that different from the barracks. Their common stated goal is to distance themselves from the world’s temptations. And what is more corrupting than bourgeois life – sex, family, comfort, money. . . ? Any abbot is well aware of it, and any conqueror knows that the “delights of Capua” represent the greatest danger on the path to his triumphs.

6 The intellectuals

A society in which warriors attempt to maintain the power of their caste and their ability to monopolize wealth must limit the influence of producers and of women. That is the task traditionally given to intellectuals, formerly the clergy and today the masses of

²⁰ Philippe du Puy de Clinchamps, *La Noblesse*, Paris, Que Sais-Je?, 1962. The occupations not considered suitable for French nobles included all the mechanical trades, even at the management level; farming leased land (except for land belonging to the king and royal princes); all types of trade; and low-level offices like notary, bailiff and prosecutor. After Colbert, the temptations of wealth began to corrupt the nobility and sea trading and the growing foundry industry were exempted from these restrictions. But it was only after World War I that the nobility finally felt free to embrace any type of profession.

teachers, scientists, artists and journalists that receive salaries from the State.²¹ With the influence conferred on them by a microphone or university chair, they make every effort to discredit the bourgeois values of productive cooperation and glorify predation. They believe that living off taxes is more honest than being paid by satisfied customers; if the cause is just, all means must be made available to ensure its victory.

As long as the entire society is measured against these perverse values, the warrior takes pride of place. He does “what is right” while others drag their feet “in the mud of self-interest”. Such acknowledged moral superiority leads to the exploitation of discredited producers while saving the dominant class from constant and costly recourse to violence. If society’s values should change and society lets itself be guided by the values of production, the warrior will lose the image of saintliness, of one who has “renounced self-interest”. How could he then justify continuing to exploit producers?

7 The warriors’ usurped heritage

This might be all very interesting – at least, the author hopes it is – but how does it concern us? Well, in more than one way, but the greatest source of our concern should be that modern governments and their bureaucracy base their moral superiority on the prestigious heritage of the military class.²²

Gradually, in the 1930s, with the New Deal in the United States, the Beveridge plan in Great Britain and the rise of social democracies throughout Europe, governments succeeded in portraying their image as that of *protector*. According to their slogans, they would save us from the scourges of unemployment and social inequality, the rapacity of multinational corporations and mafias, and the encroachment of foreign cultures. But

²¹ Ludwig von Mises, *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, Princeton, New Jersey, D. van Nostrand Company, 1956. See also in Robert Nozick, *Socratic Puzzles*, Harvard University Press, 1997, the chapter entitled *Why Do Intellectuals Oppose Capitalism?* How many brilliant minds of that time challenged the divine right of kings, aristocratic privilege and serfdom? How many dare today to attack the privileges of the state bureaucracy, who will seem as abusive to our descendants as Ancien Régime class structure does to us? Intellectuals do not care much for freedom; they traditionally align themselves with whoever is in power, whoever pampers them or from whom they expect even greater favours.

²² Saying “my country” brings to mind the memory of landscapes and the sounds of a language, but if this country is a state or aspires to be one, we also recall the piously learned names of bloodied fields where young men who fought for it lie buried. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites, Origins And History Of The Passions Of War*, Metropolitan Books, 1997.

isn't protection the soldier's duty par excellence? Now that the threat of military invasion has disappeared in the West, the soldier has permanently yielded the function of Great Protector to the bureaucracy. It is fascinating to observe how State employees cloak themselves in the quasi-religious mantle of prestige and respect that society has always conferred on its soldiers.

What official ceremony would do without a military parade, a band leading the way? The inauguration of heads of State, the unveiling of monuments, the celebration of national holidays and visits by foreign dignitaries all take place in front of an honour guard. Flags and national anthems irresistibly evoke the military history of the country. A modern state is an institution of living pseudo-soldiers governing in the name of real dead soldiers. Every State institution, crowned with the glory of its heroes, hijacks the debt owed by society for the blood shed by its soldiers. As repayment, government employees demand the right to act according to inverted military values. They always find a war to fight, 'war on drugs', 'war on poverty', 'war on crime', 'war on terror', that exonerates them from breaking their public commitments (electoral or other), stealing money through taxes, spying, cheating, censoring and using armed violence – aggressions directed not at a foreign enemy but their fellow citizens.

Producers are part of a web of cooperation; their peers forcefully call them to order as soon as they stray. But government employees do what producers dare not do, giving themselves permission in the name of cultural values: "public service", the "common good", the "higher interest of the state", "social justice", etc. If these causes are not strong enough, they invent wars'; witness this military vocabulary applied to all sorts of situations: war on drugs'; war on crime'; war on poverty' even. After all, the bureaucrat reasons, I'm not acting out of self-interest (right?); the means are just because I'm serving a just cause. How can petty considerations like individual rights and respect for privacy and property be raised against this state that I represent and for which people have faced death?

Government has grown to manage all aspects of our existence. As a result, humanity faces the danger of seeing the inverse morality of the military infect society as a whole. It was precisely this danger that the caste division, present throughout history, was designed to prevent. Our government officials forget that the warrior was being consistent in his refusal of life-affirming values. To him, the test of devotion to "public service" was

the supreme sacrifice. His heroic death, he thought, would atone for his violations of common morality. While claiming their right to be predators, state bureaucrats and pen pushers take no risks – not even the risk of losing their cushy jobs. They are valets dressed up in the clothes of their masters.

8 Tribute

A society in which a corps of soldiers holds the legal monopoly on violence, and is financially maintained by the masses of producers, is the social organization that we call “civilization”, or “political society”. The two words derive from the same root – the concept of “citizen”: *civis* in Latin and *polites* in Greek. Societies that reject politics and the division it creates between dominant and dominated, in which each man is a warrior and no man a chief, are called “savage” and “primitive”.²³ We have erected a deplorable epistemological barrier, as if civilization’s benefits, which distinguish us from “savages”, would be unimaginable without this social fracture. It is as if exploitation were a prerequisite for prosperity, extortion for justice, police power for establishing peace and letting art flourish.

At the core of the power relationship is the debt relationship, as we have noted in reference to Pierre Clastres. But the nature of society changes as the “direction” of debt changes. If the debt relationship trends toward society and away from the chief, as in primitive societies, society remains undivided. Those who enjoy the prestige gained from chieftainship – including the regalia of office, distinctive tattoos, special finery, not to mention women’s esteem expressed in sexual favours – must pay. This reciprocity does not shatter society’s homogeneity, nor does it involve any submission or breakdown into classes. “You want prestige? How much are you willing to pay us for our show of respect?” Political power, on the other hand, is established when the debt relationship is reversed, when payment originates in society and moves upward towards government. At first, political power was exercised over those who were *outside* society, those who had been conquered. Subjugating the alien meant imposing tribute. Then the state emerged. And the first act of the state was to raise taxes. Raising taxes is a bizarre philosophical transmutation in which armed robbery is no longer considered a crime but an act of civic

²³ This is the essence of the entire gun control debate, which so captivates Americans.

virtue.²⁴ The alien, subjugated and subject to taxes, is now located *within* society. The reverse morality of the warrior infects the social fabric itself, now split between dominant and dominated, exploiters and exploited. The state institution opens the type of social rift that was so fiercely rejected by primitive peoples and turns power against society itself.

9 Political society, warrior society

The strict egalitarianism valued by primitive societies prevented any type of progress.²⁵ Weakened by this immobility, most such societies died out. Progress involves continually adapting to evolution. If there is such a thing as evolution – and this does seem to be an accepted fact – humans have two ways to respond. They can decide to continually reform their collective organization or determine that it is the best possible and that nothing must change. If they choose the latter, their society will gradually clash with its environment until it calls its immobility into question, belatedly and at high cost. Without change, the society will disappear, which was the fate of the Primitives and the

²⁴ When I was a high school student in Paris, during the Algerian war of independence, I knew a National Liberation Front (FLN) militant whose mission was to impose a “revolutionary tax” on Algerian students and merchants in the neighbourhood. The French police arrested him for extortion. After the Evian accords, this zealous militant raised taxes for the new Algerian state from neighbourhood students and merchants, but now the French police supported him. His extortion scheme was exactly the same, but this time it was for a recognized state. Murder, coercion and theft are not forbidden in society, but they are reserved for the class of state employees.

²⁵ The law of primitive peoples was the law of their ancestors, and therefore immutable (the dead do not change their minds). Progress began when the chief’s desires became law, and his successor then felt free to want something else.

Soviet Union, among others.²⁶

When human beings give each other the right to innovate, each person may consider the various ways of living in the world both individually and collectively. Each is free to cut a new path or to follow those who seem to be moving in the direction of his or her goals. Philosophy, science, economics and spirituality are nothing but various disciplines whose value lies in leading us to more just relations with others and nature.

In the political organization of the world, however, this relationship to nature is not built individually, but society by society. Each society imagines an overall way of functioning and its citizens must comply. Within each state, detailed laws regulate how to live, marry, raise children and care for oneself, what to produce, consume, read and view, what rules should apply to business, under what conditions people should work, how much to save, etc. The models, therefore, do not differ within each state, but only *between* states. The distressing result is that instead of having tens or hundreds of thousands of ways of living together, developed by people who have come together voluntarily in a community based on affinity, ethnicity, culture or interests, we have been reduced to comparing life in a handful of political societies, i.e. organized according to military

²⁶ Primitive peoples strived to create an autarky within their clan. Only goods considered essential, in terms of usefulness and prestige, would be traded. The Soviet Union had the same policy and for the same reasons: the "open society" of producers is incompatible with the hierarchical order of the military. Europe broke away from other societies during the Renaissance, leaving them far behind; this can be explained by its ability to absorb foreign ideas and methods, which demonstrated its enormous self-confidence. Lévi-Strauss recalls in *Tristes Tropiques* that during the first encounters between the Spanish and Carib Indians, the Indians wondered whether the Europeans were gods or men and the Spaniards wondered whether these "savages" were humans or animals. The reverse would have been unthinkable. Thomas Sowell, in his book *Conquests and Culture* (New York, Basic Books, 1998), subtly notes that the great American empires were not conquered by a handful of Spaniards, but by all the technologies that the entire Old World had developed and traded at the time: Italian ships, Arab compasses, steel from Toledo, Chinese gunpowder, English cannons. The Aztecs cannot be reproached for not participating in this wave of innovation. However, opponents of globalisation might usefully ponder the cause of the Aztecs' collapse.

values.²⁷

The competition between political societies during the historical process of humanity's evolution has thus hinged on one single criterion for success – the power of the state, projected both internally and externally. In other words, our societies chose an organizational model that was based not on the producer's values (the most appealing, the least expensive) but on the warrior's values (the most powerful). And it was at the cost of horrifying and bloody power conflicts that today's dominant political model, social democracy, was imposed (first, colonization to eliminate primitive societies, then two centuries of all-out war over rival political systems – monarchy, fascism and popular democracies).

A multitude of social organizations would allow more people to find one that fit their values. If one such way of life harms nature, the effects would be limited by other less damaging practices. The social democratic monopoly, however, only affords us one single chance: it's make or break. And if it works this time, it has to work the next time and the next time. The more power is centralized (*a fortiori* under a world government), the more serious the consequences for humanity if one bad decision is taken. The first results do not seem to indicate, to say the least, that the emerging global political model is satisfying all human aspirations or blending in harmoniously with nature.²⁸

This begs the historically novel question: How can we pursue the evolutionary process within a social organization that is the only type authorized? The way we live in society and our adaptation to the environment are not hardwired in our genes. Like other kinds of knowledge, they must be discovered through trial and error. If governments forbid such experimentation, if they do not step aside for communities offering

²⁷ It would be more accurate to emphasize that throughout history, societies that were the most effective at waging war were those that gave the greatest respect to producers. This is only a superficial paradox. There is no doubt that danger and war taught human beings cooperation. Those who knew how to cooperate through good communications, advanced language and the acceptance of responsibility physically eliminated or at least drove out less developed tribes from lands well-stocked with game. During this historical period, societies in which confidence inspired investment, respect for other people's word favoured trade, and the state's predation did not totally destroy wealth, were able to equip the most fearsome armies. The more producers' values are respected *within* society, the better warriors' values can be expressed on the outside.

²⁸ In the absence of rival models, the caste of state employees has the wherewithal to hide its mistakes for a very long time. It suppresses the incriminating information, including by use of taxation and subsidies, which are nothing more than a form of censorship applied to the market.

other ways to live, aren't we just repeating the lethal immobility of primitive societies?

Drugs, mafias, terrorism, ecological and economic crises – sometimes the threat is imaginary and sometimes it is caused by the governments themselves. And when the outside threat is real, they are powerless to avert it. The modern avatar of the state, social democracy, has carved out an almost limitless market for itself – the legalization of theft, sold under the name “social justice”. What could be more appealing than a political agenda that promises: “If you vote for us, we will make sure other people pay for benefits that will not cost you any contribution, work, or worry”? Alas, Ponzi schemes do not last forever.³¹ Welfare states, like obsolete firms with saturated markets and rising costs, merge or join together in cartels, such as the European Union and NAFTA.

Such mergers, however, do not delay evolution, even though they are promoted as harbingers of a new world order. They do not protect us from reality. Human societies evolved very slowly during primitive times, when change was measured in millennia. It has now accelerated. All it took was a few decades to abolish the warrior’s ideology of the *line*: the “line” as a boundary between exploiters and exploited, public and private, national and foreign, as a social rift tearing apart all societies that are not “primitive”. Today technology surges up in unforeseen ways, upsetting hierarchies – the military organizations’ characteristic feature – and forcing the decentralization of power. Our transnational world is no longer based on “us and them”, the only structure that makes sense to the warrior. Instead, it favours mixed relations – cooperation in some areas and competition in others. For that reason, the new order no longer depends on the “line”, but on *networks*, which now organize societies of producers rather than warrior societies. That is why the time has come for “peaceful societies” to overtake “political societies”.

11 The peaceful society

Throughout our life, we come to create relationships with a few hundred people, and often far fewer. These are family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues. In a peaceful society, they are the only people we wish to know, based on love and shared

³¹ Charles Ponzi was an infamous American con man who managed to wipe out the savings of 40,000 investors in less than eight months in 1928. He promised them spectacular returns, which were, of course, paid to the first depositors with the money contributed by later investors. Others have imitated Ponzi (especially in Russia in the early 1990s), but none could reach the scale of the European states’ social “security” and pension schemes.

interests. We buy products from the rest of the world, we hear about it in the media. If we have a reason to meet one or another of the world's six billion individuals, we initiate contact. Many of us will willingly demonstrate solidarity with strangers when necessary. Most of the time, however, all we expect is non-interference; we want others to respect our property rights and to let us live in peace with the people we have chosen.

Politics on the other hand consists of prohibiting us from choosing our relationships. Governments superimpose another dimension onto the ties of friendship and common interest – that of citizenship. Relationships between citizens are not voluntary; they are forced upon them by the authorities. Citizens in a democracy do not engage in dialogues like friends or in negotiations like producers, that leave each party free to agree or to break the talks. The democratic way of interaction between citizens is through elections. Voting means adopting a method of resolving conflict that, like war, subjects losers to the will of winners. (The non-political solution consists of letting individuals do as they wish as long as they do not physically harm others).³²

Power therefore corrupts not only those who exercise it, but the entire social fabric. Obedience precludes trust amongst subjects. Each person is required to become an accomplice of the Master, an informer on his neighbour.³³ That is called civic duty. As citizens we have no other counterpart than the government. Citizens qua citizens have

³² The Nambikwara, like all non-political societies, have a good solution for preventing exploitation by the powerful: "If the chief appears too demanding, if he claims too many women for himself or if he is incapable of providing a satisfactory solution to the food problem in times of scarcity, discontent becomes manifest. Individuals or whole families will leave the group and go off to join some other with a better reputation" (Claude Lévi Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1973). Another relevant observation, valid for primitive societies in general but specifically referring to the Nuer of Kenya, is the following: "This lack of centralized, coercive power allowed people in primitive society to move on and move out when they found themselves unhappy with their circumstances. In our present state system, citizenship is not voluntary; one may leave the state one lives in, but only with the compliance of another state. Among the Nuer, if a whole community fought with its neighbour and was discontent with the outcome, it had the option of moving to a different section or a different tribe and taking up residence there. An individual had the same option." Eli Sagan, *At the Dawn of Tyranny, The Origins of Individualism, Political Oppression and the State* (Boston, Faber and Faber, 1986). Any desire to secede is brutally suppressed in political societies. Secession, which was costly when wealth consisted of agricultural land that could hardly be carried off, is once again becoming a threat to states with the development of the information society. When all wealth is information, which remains stored between the ears of its producers, it becomes a highly portable commodity. See my *Libertarianism and the Information Revolution* at www.liberalia.com.

³³ The laws on money laundering serve as confirmation. They were enthusiastically passed by the democracies which, like Switzerland, came across as defenders of individual freedom for a while.

no reason to engage in social intercourse other than to establish whether they are for or against the government. They support and strengthen it, in the hope of gaining individual benefit by imposing their own political choices.³⁴ If this strategy of conquest fails, if the other party wins, the victims do not have the innocence of slaves or serfs. Dominated and exploited, they are treated as they wanted to treat others. There is no innocent citizen.

12 Reconciliation

And what if citizens freed themselves? If society decided to reject domination and rid itself of the resulting financial and human cost, what a new “breakaway” this society would enjoy! What an example it would set for others – an example that would no longer be measured in terms of military power, but in terms of creativity, the range of opportunities offered to everyone, and adaptability to the environment.³⁵

The three “orders” described by Dumézil are not imaginary. We cannot conceive of a society without an openness to spirituality, without systems of defence and without production. But this tripartite structure is more constituent of the individual than of society. Each of us needs to be a priest, warrior and producer *all at the same time*. There is no need to divide society into classes, as was done at the dawn of civilization in the way described by anthropologists and historians. There is even less reason to organize these classes into a hierarchy of powers.

Human beings belong to nature, spring from it, and assess nature’s constraints as they act upon it. They transform nature with their work. But this very ability to transform nature makes us unique and results in something that is no longer nature in its pure form. Thus arise the two great functions – producer in the realm of nature and priest in the realm of the supernatural. Only the warrior is artifice.

³⁴ One can never quote Frédéric Bastiat’s definition often enough: “The state is the great fiction through which everyone strives to live at the expense of everyone else”. (*L’État*, essay published in the *Journal des Débats*, 25 September 1848 edition, available on the excellent Web site devoted to the great French economist: www.bastiat.org)

³⁵ Not counting the stocks of chemical, bacteriological and nuclear weapons accumulated by governments, the greatest threat to the environment results from the fact that the world’s single model of development is based on the search for power.

But just as the warrior is tempted to return to nature, as we have seen above, the priest is tempted to turn away from it. Nature is dethroned, becoming a source of affliction and corruption of the soul, a "valley of tears". As for the producer, the temptation is materialistic: the thing produced acquires greater importance than those for whom it is intended. This materialistic temptation is greatest amongst producers whose activity is pre-capitalist, like farmers and craftsmen, who lose sight of the fact that the real goal is serving others rather than producing things. Production is only the means for providing this service.³⁶

In human evolution, the purpose of the capitalist market is to integrate warrior values while reversing their goal – no longer protecting some, but serving all. The producer's world is divided between those who buy his products and those who have yet to buy them. That is the producer's only boundary. No "*raison d'État*" exists for him; as a result, there is no reason to invent an enemy. One does not make the supreme sacrifice for the sake of a balance sheet.³⁷ The way of the warrior becomes the way of business when the total devotion demanded of him is no longer related to his role as citizen, when he stops being loyal to a state in order to meet the needs of all human beings. Unifying rather than dividing humanity now becomes his calling. A new kind of warrior with no weapons other than imagination and the will to persuade, he rejects war and political artifice to embrace the values of reciprocity and life. A new kind of priest, he does not turn away from nature, but knows that his work as a producer can serve to humanize him. As a result, his eyes and ears are forever in harmony with high ideals.

The emergence of the state has exacerbated the conflicts amongst societies and di-

³⁶ See my *How Should We Think About Economics Today?*, www.liberalia.com.

³⁷ Freud believed that every society eternally acts out the conflict between Eros and Thanatos, the life and death instincts. The sublimation of this conflict on behalf of some higher cause provided consolation to its victims and subjects for the great plays of 17th century writers. Producers refuse to accept this conflict between happiness and collective values. The Romantics mock their bourgeois and feminine morality, which exalts life and productivity, as "petty" and "selfish". In a book with the titillating name, *Fellatio, Masochism, Politics & Love*, Leo Abse puts the following words in the mouth of one of the last individuals nostalgic for the warrior epics: "I have a profound sense of envy: Why should these men, simply through a chronological accident, have had the chance to serve their country so courageously whereas our own generation has been consigned to live in an era that history will quickly forget? It is impossible not to feel a sense of nihilism about an age in which the biggest issues seem to be about interest rates and Ron Davies' nocturnal activities, rather than life and death, war and peace. . . It is hard to find much purpose in the modern era, shorn as it has been of sacrifice and danger." One thinks also of Ernst Junger and the exacting warrior morality he defended during the two world wars.

vided them internally into antagonistic classes. This division reflects the three functions that each of us can and should exercise ourselves: spirituality; service to others (the warrior's true function); and the transformation of matter. When they are reconciled in the economy, these three functions can no longer cause the division of the social sphere. Humanity, reaching a more advanced stage of evolution, could then achieve the primitives' anarchist ideal.