

INTEGRAL LIFE +



# THE GREAT DIVIDE

Globalization, Populism and Stumbling  
Towards a Post-Scarcity World

Robb Smith

# CONTENTS

Our Current Moment .....	3
Metacrisis .....	4
Invitation Rejected .....	4
The Great Divide .....	5
Brexiting the Planet.....	8
Politically Incorrect .....	11
No Reason to Attend Your Party .....	13
Beggar They Neighbor.....	14
Capital Spanks Labor, and Badly .....	15
The Rise of the Machines .....	16
The Rich Get Richer .....	16
Outdated Mindsets .....	18
Wrapping Up .....	22
Expand Your Mind. Thrive for Life. ....	23

## OUR CURRENT MOMENT

Populism is on the rise. Too many people feel left out of the march of prosperity and more people than ever believe that the future will not see their kids better off than they are today. The rich get richer while the middle class remains stagnant. There is a growing and robust backlash to political correctness and immigration. And artificial intelligence threatens to make the coming jobs war even worse than previously anticipated...

From these trends and others, there is a palpable sense that we're going through an important evolutionary moment, that the developed world has started a soul-searching conversation about the dangers of the 21st century if we stay on our present course. From stalled global growth and massive wealth inequality, to the declining availability of good jobs and the "terror" of immigration, we're seeing a kind of convulsion within economic and political systems stuck in the late 20th century,

leaving too many people with a sense of despair.

While it's easy to see how major political events like a presidential election in the US, Brexit in England, or a refugee crisis in Europe shine a bright light on our differences, I contend they are symptomatic of deeper, massive colliding forces that are surfacing right now and explain much of the paradigm shift we're undergoing:

- 1) Our technology, economics, culture and politics have globalized, becoming interdependent, worldcentric and multicultural at the same time that
- 2) People are divided into two huge but different stages of psychological development—tribalists and globalists—which represents a “Great Divide” in values, viewpoint and capacities, and which react very differently to globalization, and
- 3) Globalization is no longer producing sufficient rewards to motivate tribalists to continue playing the globalist game, threatening the universal values

and modern liberalism upon which modern democracies are based.

## **METACRISIS**

These colliding forces and their byproducts are truly part of a broader economic and ecological “metacrisis” (to use a term from integrative metatheorists like Sean Esbjorn-Hargens and others) that entails a full-spectrum of the behavioral, systemic, cultural and psychological dynamics that are driving a set of intersecting wicked problems across the economy, ecosystem, culture and body politic. Though these forces are not new (they have been with us since the beginning of globalization after World War II), what *is* new is the failure of globalization to provide enough rewards to tribalists to overcome the nativism intrinsic to its psychology. Due to demographics, technology and globalization, real income growth has stalled, leaving the tribalists behind in a game that is rewarding altogether too few. Predictably, populists are rising up to take advantage of the situation. They reduce complex realities to tweets.

They prey on tribalist blindspots. Worst of all, they work to ensure that tribalists’ hidden ideological biases keep them supportive of self-defeating policies.

The punchline, which those of us in the integral philosophy community have been saying for years, is that our civilizational operating system is not adequate to our current moment. No one wins when our political and economic systems buckle under the weight of simplistic thinking and knee-jerk demagoguery. And yet, despite all the murk and pain involved, the breakdown of civilizational operating systems like we’re witnessing now has always served as the dirty engine room that drives breakdown, adaptation, renewal and new progress for coming generations.

Let's dive deeper into what's really happening.

## **INVITATION REJECTED**

In “The Transformational Life” (my TED talk of 2012) I outlined how globalization and technology (like smartphones) have enabled and

exposed evolutionary forces that are driving unprecedented life complexity and identity disorientation. These forces are fragmenting our perspectives, world views, communities and behavior in ways that are deeply unsettling (especially if we haven't updated our own life "operating systems" accordingly). I outlined a few important skills that would especially be required to thrive in the 21st century, skills like mindfulness, empathy, service and humility (indeed, timeless skills).

What I didn't explain is that for more than half the population—and all of us at times—how easy it is to perceive as threatening the call to become a *part* of a bigger, interdependent global *whole* that we don't fully understand, is not native to us, and does not seem to be benefiting us. And yet that's exactly what globalization asks of us. Jump in, the water's great. But once we understand the Great Divide between tribalists and globalists, we can see why tribalists are beginning to reject the invitation.

## THE GREAT DIVIDE

By looking at data from developmental psychologists we can ascertain some rough markers as to the values, viewpoint and identity (as well as level of perspective-taking capacity) of adults in the developed world. Though there are ten progressively complex "shapes of mind" along a spectrum of psychological development, for our purposes there is a single dividing line near the middle of the spectrum that I believe bears most heavily on the reaction to globalization: right near the middle of the stages is a "Great Divide" that marks the transition into the values, viewpoint and identity of a global, worldcentric mental operating system. Anyone who is operating to the right of the Great Divide most of the time—someone whose values, viewpoint and identity are situated in one of the later stages—is able to take a critically-objective view of their own viewpoint.

"Globalist" is not an arbitrary term: this maturation into critical rationality undergirds what

philosopher Ken Wilber calls “worldcentrism,” as it is critical distance from oneself that transforms and extends one’s tribe-exclusive values to people who are quite unlike oneself in a more universal way. This capacity is the foundation of modern liberalism, of equal rights (regardless of religion, sexuality or gender), and of economic cosmopolitanism.

Developmental psychologist Susanne Cook-Greuter describes the first stage to the right of the Great Divide (what she calls the “conscientious” stage) as following:

Our educational systems are geared towards producing adults with the mental capacity and emotional self-reliance of the [conscientious] stage, that is, rationally competent and independent adults. Democracy as a form of government is based on the idea of a citizenry that has the capacity to think independently and to make reasoned and informed choices...They have gained a measure of independence and self-authorship that makes them feel they are the masters of their ships. As captains of their own

self-enterprise they are no longer as vulnerable to being accepted or excluded as [earlier-stage] adults are...They can now notice contradictions and inconsistencies both within themselves and in the belief systems they adhere to. They may see that the way a problem is framed is the problem. Conscientious adults are committed to work towards the betterment of humanity according to what they consider an ideal future... Feedback can now be listened to without necessarily agreeing with it or feeling one’s whole identity has been diminished. Whether the critic is right, misinformed, or misjudged me, the response is useful information both about myself and about the critic... In general, [conscientious adults] are concerned with reasons, causes, goals, consequences and the effective use of time. They believe that the truth about themselves can be found and are motivated to figure things out and to inquire.

Globalists, who occupy the stages to the right of the Great Divide, have capacities to “notice contradictions,” to see that *problem*

*frames* are often the real problem, and to no longer be as vulnerable to fear of criticism or exclusion from an in-group. This is indeed a great leap of capability in a democracy because it represents for the first time a native capacity to resist demagoguery. It can see and find lacking the demagogue's preference to take complex global matters and reduce them to overly-reduced, simple-sounding, fear-based pseudo-principles. It can begin to see and judge proposed policies, or lack thereof, on the merits by considering broader data sets—economic, sociological, psychological, political and otherwise—and by consciously acknowledging their own ideological biases. Because they can see and hold themselves accountable for their own ideological biases for the first time, they are more capable of seeing when and how others do so or not.

On the left side of the Great Divide are the stages of development I'm collectively calling Tribalists. Tribalists tend to hold their values, viewpoint and identity in a pre-global,

ethnocentric stage of development. Developmentalist Robert Kegan describes the "socializing mind" of this stage as one that looks to received authorities for their sense of truth, giving heavy preference and meaning to tribal leaders (whether cultural, ethnic, business, political or religious makes no difference for our purposes). Cook-Greuter describes this stage non-pejoratively as "conformists" who value and defend the simplicity of the tribal social structure:

Conformist adults actually relish the dependency that group membership bestows. It provides safety in numbers and a new sense of power. The self is defined by and generated by the expectations and values of those others to whom one "belongs." Conformists tend to accept norms without inspection or questioning. Their cognitive world is divided into simple categories, and types of people, mostly based on external distinctions...The boundaries between self and others, however, are confused, literally fused and blurred. On the one hand, there is total acceptance of the family and in-group (such as

peer groups in adolescence), on the other hand, we see blind rejection of deviance and out-groups. It's "them" against "us" now instead of [an even-earlier-stage] person's lonely stance of "me" against "them," which included everybody else (even family members). For the Conformist, you are either ally and friend and approve of us and what we do, or you are the enemy. The more status the group has, the more [conformists] feel worthy as one of its members. If it took some effort to fulfill the required demonstration of obedience and submission, they feel honored to be admitted and wearing the insignia that tell others so.

When compared to the globalists on the other side of the Great Divide, it's easy to see what a large difference the tribalist psychological structure entails in terms of its reaction to globalization and its intrinsic vulnerability to demagogues (especially ones who have celebrity, wealth and are unreflectively perceived as "winners").

Let's speak plainly: the march of globalization is asking tribalists to not only *see* more complexity than they are able to, and to value nuanced distinctions that literally are not yet meaningful to them, but it's also asking them to *join* a global tribe. It's asking them to give up some *independence* to become an even smaller part of a bigger, more complex, *interdependent* and globalized whole. When understood this way, it's not surprising that, from Britain to Europe to the U.S., their answer is increasingly "hell no."

## **BREXITING THE PLANET**

This tension between independence and interdependence is a core tension at the center of globalization, felt by every individual as we move ever-towards a more integrated, globalized, multicultural world. We all face a choice between integrating ourselves into the full scope of planetary economic, technological, political and ecological systems and cultures, versus rejecting integration and attempting to preserve our autonomy within a

smaller but more independent nation (and its more understandable native culture and routines). We all face a choice whether we brexit the planet. We may not literally be able to do so, but we can certainly fight hard to resist interdependence, interconnection and internationalism.

It is clearly no accident that the rise of populism is accompanied by a call for rejecting international trade deals that would otherwise increase global economic interdependence, for building walls to keep out those unlike ourselves, for a policy of scant refugee support, or for a policy of withdrawing from the foundational commitments of NATO.

Many commentators see these as *political* positions, but they are better understood first as *psychological* ones: withdrawal to a more isolationist footing politically is isomorphic with the psychological meaning-structure of the tribalist. Even during the few weeks this article was being edited, two major commentators arrived at similar conclusions to my own but

without getting to the deeper psychological dynamics, with Thomas Friedman calling this a distinction between "web people" and "wall people," and conservative commentator David Brooks calling this a distinction between globalists and nationalists.

Notice, too, that if a tribalist agrees to become a smaller part of a bigger global whole, he's implicitly agreeing to abide by an expanded set of norms, and broader set of sensitivities in language and behavior that extend towards people very different from himself. On the contrary, it's easy to imagine why tribalists, now given cultural cover by populist politicians all over the world (from Donald Trump in the US to Marine Le Pen in France to Norbert Hofer in Austria), seem to be finally giving voice to their deeper, exasperated truth: "We never agreed to be a part of this global body, and we reject you forcing us towards it."

It's not an exaggeration to point out that this tension lives inside every one of us: how much do I want to be a smaller part of a

bigger, more complex world that I can never fully understand even as it demands more of me? Or would I rather be a relatively bigger part of a smaller tribe that I have some chance of understanding, relating to and in which I might think gives me a higher chance to succeed?

Ben Judah reports in the New York Times that as he traveled around England talking to those who supported Brexit, a prevailing message was they supported leaving because “it’s not my England anymore... We don’t recognize our country anymore.” This is a tribal response to a globalizing world, a desire to recapture something understandable, something manageable, something known.

It also surfaces in how religion plays a central role for tribalist voters seeking more stability through their political views. Even hundreds of years after the separation of church and state, the U.S. Republican party platform of 2016 demands that religion guide legislation and “that man-made law must be consistent with God-given, natural rights” and that a biblical education in public schools

“is indispensable for the development of an educated citizenry.” As developmental psychologist James Fowler describes in his seminal work *Stages of Faith*, the tribalist experience of the divine is a:

conformist stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgments to construct and maintain an independent perspective...[they have] an ideology, a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified it for examination and in a sense is unaware of having it. Differences of outlook with others are experienced as differences in ‘kind’ of person.

Identifying and conforming with a tribal in-group, rejecting those who are different, and fighting hard to preserve the relative simplicity of yesteryear are all part of a largely unexamined fabric of moral certitude. Because they cannot see their moral standpoint as a mental object to examine and subject to

critical scrutiny, they don't *have an ideology*; rather, their *ideology has them*. And because these forces are at least partially hidden to their mental examination, the invitation to integrate into a bigger community, in this case a global one, is seen as wildly threatening. Their sense of self is not yet as expansive as that which it is being asked to submit to. Without the broader cognition and skills that produce the worldcentric self-authorship of the globalist, tribalists often don't feel at home in a complex, multicultural world (this seems to be less true of the younger generation, digital natives who have rallied to the progressive populism of Bernie Sanders).

Naturally, then, fear of losing oneself expresses itself as nativism, xenophobia, nationalism and isolationism: an attempt to continue progress by forcing regress to a simpler and earlier form of social organization that is smaller, more independent and more homogenous with one's self and tribal identification. It doesn't matter if that tribe is the nation (e.g., Brexit, or Trump's "Make

America Great Again") an ethnic group (e.g., #BuildThatWall), a religious group (e.g., the Christian preferences of the Republican platform, above) or otherwise, as long as it feels closer to what's known, safe and understood.

## **POLITICALLY INCORRECT**

It's worth noting that globalists are not helping their own case. What insults those who might otherwise give integration and pluralism a chance is the shadowy underbelly of universal values themselves: a squeamish, anti-discerning sensitivity that through political correctness and thought policing makes it almost impossible to make a valid judgment without looking over one's shoulder for the identity brigade. This is the shadow of global multiculturalism, and until it becomes as sophisticated as the distinctions it's attempting to preserve, there will be little room to invite those who value independence over integration into a bigger political and social whole. There will be no genuine pluralism.

This is why one of the central differentiators for all Trump supporters is their support for rejecting political correctness. Their instinct has merit because they see that sensitivity to speech has evolved in some contexts into a punitive bludgeon that threatens independence of thought (and the freedom of speech upon which liberalism is based). And though globalists might be able to see that political correctness threatens to decimate fine-tuned critical discernments, they often come to the wrong conclusion, thinking that personal and political validity claims are identical. They're not. Subjective perception of micro-aggression does not trump all other systemic, developmental, pedagogical and political considerations. We can preserve and dignify the validity of one's personal experience, perspectives and feelings with sincere questions of truthfulness, while also pressing for hard-nosed (and sometimes off-putting) critical judgments about culture, politics and social systems with sincere aims toward group goodness and systemic functioning. (See Yale University's halloween

costume fiasco for example, where it struggled to teach its kids, many of whom will be aspiring globalists, to create within themselves this simple but powerful psychological differentiation.) It's ironic that Trump-supporters are fighting against the inherent narcissism of political correctness by supporting a candidate who, I believe, has narcissistic personality disorder.

We need to preserve honest directness because if there was ever a time for truth telling, now would be it. Because the stakes are so high, it's important that we're clear and honest: the bigger whole everyone is being invited to join—a globalized, multicultural society—is more complex and faster-paced than ever before; it *does have* far more “otherness” within it; and *it is* far more fragmented in its values, customs, and ways of life than the nation or community is. It is a world where digital natives prosper, cosmopolitanism reigns, and economic and job fluency are presupposed for participation. And *it is* simply more challenging for absolutely everyone.

But the real problem, as we'll soon see, is not that complexity is growing or that the Great Divide exists. It is that the rewards that globalization used to promise are slipping away, removing the single most powerful developmental tailwind of the modern era, which for more than half a century has fueled people towards globalist values. These rewards used to mask the Great Divide because the promise of a good job, of meaningful work that also created a sense of prosperity and an ability to get ahead in life, was more valuable than the parochial bonds of the tribe. But there is now irrefutable and substantial evidence to claims of those on both sides of the Great Divide that our prevailing paradigm is failing. We've now entered a strange world where the rewards of globalization accrue disproportionately to globalists at the same time that tribalists continue to support policies that make them worse off and only accelerate these disparities.

## **NO REASON TO ATTEND YOUR PARTY**

Until recently there were very significant rewards for participating in globalization: good jobs, a rising standard of living for all, lower-cost consumer products, and a geopolitically stable, economically-interconnected world. Despite the extra effort that might have been required of people for better training, more education and more cultural tolerance, globalization produced a remarkable period of success for the Western middle class after World War II.

Today is a different story. The elephant in the room, a surprise discovered only too late by Britain's Remain movement and U.S. political parties both, is that these rewards have largely evaporated for too many in the middle class, creating a groundswell of anti-immigrant populism that is upending the political establishment. The global economic system has eviscerated a feeling of progress for hundreds of millions of people—540 million, to be exact, according to McKinsey—and in the process fueled active resistance to continued globalization. When the 1% own

half of all the global wealth, and when the middle class has had stagnant real wages for decades, the system is plainly failing to compel anyone to cross the Great Divide and adopt a global multiculturalism. After all, with economic facts on their side, why should they?

Just consider the data. In the 70-odd years since the allies won WWII, half that time was wildly beneficial to the western middle class, with rising real incomes, rising prosperity, improving social safety nets, relatively equally-shared wealth, stable healthcare and manageable higher education costs.

The second half of that period, however, roughly since the inflation crisis of the late-70s, has seen the opposite: stagnant real median income, higher personal indebtedness, massively unequal wealth distribution, and crises in retirement savings, educational costs and healthcare costs. Pew Research Center reports that the US middle class has seen its share of aggregate national income drop from 62% in 1970 to 43% in 2014.

Where did that money go? Almost exclusively to the upper class, which saw its share of aggregate national income go from 29% to 49%. What's more, since 1983 median family net worth has stayed stagnant for both the lower class and the middle class, while doubling for the upper class. They also report that nearly half of all Americans would struggle to make a \$400 emergency payment if they had to; they'd be forced to sell something in order to meet their needs. Even the average retirement account is worth only about \$14,000.

## **BEGGAR THEY NEIGHBOR**

These economic differences matter. In a fascinating 2007 study on "relative deprivation," Cornell economist Robert Frank asked people whether they'd prefer to live in a bigger house than they do now even if their neighbors had a bigger one than that, or whether they'd prefer to live in a smaller house but was still bigger than their neighbors. People chose the smaller house—as long as it was bigger than

their neighbors! This is an important finding about human psychology: we're willing to be less well off as long as we think we're better off than the next guy.

For the white, western middle class, they feel they've been losing ground against their neighbors for a long time, and it's created a pressure cooker of anger, resentment and resistance. Populism is a simple reply to a massive failure of our political leaders and economic experts to create a bridge that could preserve the benefits of globalization, technology and the flow of capital and labor, but preserve the hard-won gains that benefited labor. Indeed, it's precisely in the last several decades that capital has trounced labor for dominance.

## **CAPITAL SPANKS LABOR, AND BADLY**

The last several decades have seen disproportionate economic returns to capital versus labor. One of the reasons real wages have stagnated is that good jobs are scarce and will get more so in the coming years.

Gallup chairman Jim Clifton writes in *The Coming Jobs War* that we are entering a jobs war where the 1.2 billion “good jobs” of today, which are currently sought by 3 billion workers, will decline to 800 million good jobs over the next few decades, a period when our population grows from 7 billion to 9 billion. Consider the implication: the sense of competitiveness, the scarcity of good jobs, and the downward pressure on wages all will get worse from here on out for the worker in a developed country. If you think it feels hard to get ahead now, just wait a generation.

And make no mistake, a lack of good jobs is the lifeblood of populism. In Gallup's global survey, Clifton writes that *a good job is the single most important thing on people's minds* around the world, transcending religion, race, credo and national interests. Let me reinforce that: people-tribalists and globalists alike-would be content to play the globalization game, even beyond any “tribal” preferences, if they could attain a well-paying, modern, good job.

They would play it *if* they feel they can win. Unfortunately they know the game is stacked against them.

## **THE RISE OF THE MACHINES**

Consider that the job numbers Clifton cites may be generous because even 5 years ago they couldn't have fully accounted for the rise of artificial intelligence and other machine and computer automation systems coming online now. McKinsey reports that

last year, we showed that currently demonstrated technologies could automate 45 percent of the activities people are paid to perform and that about 60 percent of all occupations could see 30 percent or more of their constituent activities automated, again with technologies available today.

Let that sink in: well over half of all industries could see almost a third of their jobs get eliminated through automation in the next ten years.

## **THE RICH GET RICHER**

Who benefits from those jobs being replaced by machines? Mostly it's not labor. Rather it's the owners of capital—the shareholders, investors and founders who own the companies creating and deploying the automation. The automation that replaces 100 workers with 10 workers for the same cost will usually give the lion's share of that wealth creation to capitalists (and the company's customers). While it may give a relative income boost to the 10 remaining workers, especially if those remaining 10 are more differentiated in their skills than the 100 were, it's still a net loss of wage income.

Such is the case of much of the platform economics of new technology: from AirBNB and etsy to Amazon.com and Facebook, there is no industry yet immune to the ways that software is reconfiguring our real lives, and therefore our economic lives. Uber and Tesla even have it in their sights to change the very nature of an asset-intensive industry like transportation. As venture capitalist Marc Andreessen has

aply stated, "software is eating the world." I've described this trend as the noosphere itself getting hacked.

In each case, entrepreneurs and the capitalists who back them are attempting to create massive wealth for themselves by displacing jobs with industry-disrupting computer-based innovations. They are keeping most of the wealth created because many of the platforms are predicated on replacing human labor with much less resource-intensive computer power. Overall national wealth might go up but it becomes more unevenly distributed as a net positive share of workers either lose their jobs or are forced to seek other work. To the extent that every industry is going through some dislocation of this kind, the net effect is that a large proportion of workers are at best treading water in real income.

It is through system dynamics like this that the rich simply get a lot richer. Capital increases its dominance over labor because labor-eliminating innovation gives most of its incremental profit-generation back to those who own

the capital to begin with. And the size of the efforts underway to do so is truly massive: there are now thousands of startup "bootcamps" designed to run experiments upon which new companies can be built; there is over \$40 billion in annual venture capital fueling these startups to scale up; there are hundreds of billions of dollars of acquisition capital deployed by large companies in their attempt to keep up with this innovation (understanding that to do so is barely a fool's errand as the next industry-threatening innovation is right around the corner, and yet powerless to do anything but deploy more cheap capital as needed to try to stay relevant). Right now there are probably more than 50,000 startup companies—social experiments by any other name—being run in an attempt to disrupt an existing industry, change a workflow, or solve a problem.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a former member of the National Venture Capital Association and (many years ago) was named an SBA Young Entrepreneur of the Year, so I have been an active participant in

venture capital and entrepreneurship my entire career. I love innovation, and have always believed that entrepreneurs provide the lifeblood of economic progress. But I also see how our economic and political system dynamics are “stuck” in the self-limiting patterns outlined in this book. Working *in* the system is no longer adequate: we need more innovators working *on* the system, and to do that they need to understand it.

Entrepreneurs are unwittingly contributing to the gradual decimation of labor. I’m not impressed by most entrepreneurial efforts anymore, nor most economic development efforts. They are simply reshuffling a declining deck of cards, not thinking hard about how to change the game that’s being played. And unless they do so, and unless policies change, wealth and income disparity will get worse. And that will drive more anger, more despair, and ultimately fuel the rise of dangerous politicians.

## **OUTDATED MINDSETS**

It doesn’t help that politicians themselves seem confused about the current state of the global economy. I’ve not heard any major party candidate honestly admit any of the facts or trends that I’m outlining in this piece: that entrepreneurs gain when jobs are eliminated; that software platforms are fundamentally monopolistic; that manufacturing is disappearing around the world; that zero interest rate policy has distorted the price of investments worldwide. Many policy makers assert that fiscal austerity, low tax rates and knee-jerk rejection of increased sovereign debt are the prudent way forward, a sort of economic Puritanism. There seems to be no support for investing in productivity-creating infrastructure or innovation, never mind that on a real basis (after-inflation) the money is basically free (i.e., its real interest rate approaches zero).

And yet there’s reason to believe their assessment is wrong. If we are truly in a secular stagnation as some of the world’s smartest economists are beginning to suspect, than our core global

economic problem is that we have too much savings relative to the investments we're seeking to make. We have an oversupply of savings against an under-demand for investment, and it shows up in an historically-low price for capital (as effectively-zero interest rates around the world). Think about that for just a moment: that is the (capital) market's way of saying that on balance there are few return-generating investments worth making.

How could we possibly have come to a moment where people are willing to accept zero return on their savings in exchange for a promise to merely pay it back at face value at a later date? One answer is that we're seeing economic growth faltering around the world.

Economic growth is driven by population growth and productivity growth. Between aging demographics in the west and technology that is not producing the same level of productivity gains as it once did, we may be looking at a future of far lower growth than we've seen

since World War II. If growth stagnates, so does the ability to generate the economic returns that reward savers in the form of profits and interest, and workers in the form of wage-paying jobs.

Of course, it's not helping that central banks (like the US Federal Reserve Bank) may be trying to solve the wrong problems. They're clearly focused on money supply, asset prices, unemployment and inflation, but not nearly enough on the income that can help drive consumption to begin with. If 99% of people don't have discretionary money to spend as consumers, and a majority of the world's wealth is tied up in what media theorist Douglas Rushkoff calls the "wealth obesity" of 400 families and corporate balance sheets, it won't matter how much you inflate asset values (stocks, housing, bonds etc.) because the everyday Joe won't have money to spend. The system will stagnate, the money flows will become like sludge. And you can expect Joe, who has lost his job to a low wage worker in the developing world, and who you are politely asking to adopt your global values,

to throw the finger in your face and vote for the loudest, most bombastic, regressive, and populist political candidate he can find.

This is precisely why we need serious discussions about new economic and social policies if we're to maintain a stable, sustainable and interconnected civilizational model. It's not an ideological matter, it's a practical one: the state of technology has evolved to a point where we have too few good jobs available in a planet growing to 9 billion people. Only a relative handful of people will shortly own almost everything, but it will be a Pyrrhic victory because it will undermine social life as we know it. If you think our political leaders face tribalist intransigence now, just wait. If we don't change course, those who are angry at losing now will be joined by an ever-growing portion of the world's population.

In any case my concern is less about economic progress per se and more about the consequences of entering a post-work world with a Great Divide sitting right in the middle of it and an operating

system that is still designed primarily around managing scarcity. If we enter a post-scarcity world with scarcity still on the minds of 99% of people and over half of them in a tribalist mindset, we're in trouble. It's a recipe for civilizational breakdown, enduring political gridlock and unnecessary human suffering.

On the contrary, the world we're entering, in my view, does not represent the end of prosperity. In fact, only now, when a significant number of people have enough prosperity that they don't have to work again—and the jobs are disappearing in any case because we're able to meet all of our needs with less work—do we enter a period that could be called *the birth of the post-scarcity world*. We're at the birth of a real global prosperity, and it only looks like the end of prosperity because our operating system is designed to spread the rewards in such a drastically-disproportionate manner. The developed world certainly has enough prosperity. The task ahead is to figure out how to better share it so that everyone can participate

in the prosperity of a post-work world.

If we care about supporting a globalized world of more universal values, and an integrated world of greater interdependence, than we need to consider the dynamics that our civilization faces at this unique moment and be willing to update any of the outdated ideologies of the past. In the short-term this may call for supporting policies of "predistribution" (not redistribution)—policies that ensure adequate minimum wage rates, sufficient retirement and healthcare benefits, job retraining and education, a robust social safety net and the like.

In the long-term it will require our social entrepreneurs to innovate on the nature and meaning of work (as we're seeing with work-sharing, democratic workplaces, B-corporations and the like), the role and nature of money (as we're seeing with the blockchain and alternative currencies), the nature and mechanisms of assets (as we're seeing in crowd sharing, ride sharing and the like), and other areas. And, perhaps most difficult

to imagine today, it will be critical for politicians themselves to become innovators, proposing to run policy experiments that could scale up if successful. Incidentally, this will be a nod to the best instincts of the political right: successful models amidst this much global complexity largely do not emerge from national governments, but must be innovated through a lot of experimental learning at smaller scales.

Ironically though, these kinds of government-led policy experiments require some form of active intervention of government, and yet government is often seen by tribalists as the ultimate impinger on freedom and independence. Hence there emerges a paradoxical lock-in effect in our body politic, a seeming-intractable bind where the people who would most personally be served by a more balanced and integrated set of policies are the very people who resist it on ideological grounds.

Said differently, we've passed what in terms of complex systems is called a *regime shift* where the "free market" will not on its own

ameliorate the wealth disparities created by monopoly-creating technologies. If we don't change course we will continue to end up with a few "haves"—mostly globalists, digital natives, technology entrepreneurs and asset managers, who collectively have almost all of the wealth—and a huge proportion of have nots, stuck in a mindset that wants more opportunity at the same time their frustration and anger continue to grow. Most problematic, we will continue to undermine the propulsive rewards for tribalists to continue to expand their mindset, values, and skills beyond defensive nativism and populism and into the universal values and modern liberalism supported by a globally-interconnected and interdependent world.

## **WRAPPING UP**

This short essay, though fully deserving of a book-length treatment, makes the case that a few great forces have been colliding this past century—economic and cultural globalization on one hand and a “Great Divide” between

tribalist and globalist mindsets on the other. On the left side of the Great Divide, tribalists represent more than half the population and find their primary self-validation in groups structured around received authority. On the right side of the divide, globalists generally have a broader capacity to take the self-critical perspective upon which universal modern values are premised. Though economic globalization and a tribalist mindset are not natural bedmates, economic progress masked these differences after World War II. But in the past several decades, globalization and the job-replacing function of technology has created a breakdown of economic progress as measured by wealth equality and real income for too many across the developed world, one symptom of a broader economic and ecological metacrisis. The fault lines between the two great colliding forces of globalization and tribalism have now been exposed, and a very public fight is underway between anger-tapping populists and establishment-driven globalists. And yet neither side has an answer for what may be ahead: good jobs

will become much more scarce in coming years; entrepreneurs and capitalists continue to use platform technologies and artificial intelligence to eliminate jobs and accelerate wealth disparities; global growth is projected to be lower than it has in a century; policy makers can barely agree on the problem, much less mount a concerted policy reply that moves much beyond 20th century thinking. The net effect is that the greatest force that drives global evolution towards interdependence, universal values, and expanded mindsets looks to be slowing down.

If this analysis is correct, we have real work to do. To address the system dynamics, we need to first understand them and ask ourselves how we might progress from here. My criticisms are leveled mainly at globalists: their failure to create an integrated system of social and economic development is evident. For too long they've been narrowly focused on maximizing wealth, as if it is, by itself, the end towards which all social efforts should work. But if that narrow thinking

remains our religion in the 21st century, the world that is created is not a world that most people will want to live in, even those who are economic winners. Our best and brightest must channel their efforts with more wisdom and greater understanding than those who have come before them.

## **EXPAND YOUR MIND. THRIVE FOR LIFE.**

The Great Divide is just one example of the seismic changes underway in the 21st century. To thrive you not only need to better understand your world, you also need to expand your mind and build the inner skills that will help you unleash your full impact. You can do so by joining Integral Life, where Robb and other transformational experts will provide you the principles, perspectives and practices—delivered weekly straight to your inbox—that represent the leading-edge of advanced personal development. A one-year membership to Integral Life usually costs \$199, but with our

special, limited-time offer, you can get it for just \$99 today.

[Click here to get started.](#)

---

*Robb Smith is a leading social entrepreneur in human development. He is CEO of Integral Life, a global community for advanced personal development, and the founder and CEO of Chrysallis, the most comprehensive personal and professional development experience available on the smartphone. He can be found [@robbsmith](#).*