

# TRIBE

---

*The Rules That Must Bind Us All*

*by*

*Eric D. Miller*

*2026*

When Many Gather and Power Enters the Room

A Continuation of the Collection

All animals are equal,  
*but some animals are more equal than others.*

— George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

## **When Many Become a Tribe**

A relationship between two people already requires alignment of self-honesty, truth, ethos, and trust. When many individuals gather, the complexity multiplies dramatically. Each person arrives with their own wants, desires, needs, fears, and histories. What feels essential to one may feel burdensome or irrelevant to another. Left to themselves, these disparate impulses do not naturally harmonize. They compete.

This is the moment a collection of individuals becomes something more — or begins to fracture. A tribe forms when people recognize that continued coexistence requires more than goodwill. It requires boundaries that apply to everyone, including those who currently hold power. Without such boundaries, the strongest desires, the loudest voices, or the most organized factions inevitably dominate. Equality under rules is not a natural state; it is an achievement that must be deliberately maintained.

The Stoics understood that human beings are social animals by nature, yet they also recognized that our social nature does not automatically produce justice. Justice requires deliberate structure. When that structure is absent or selectively applied, what remains is not community but hierarchy enforced by power. The tribe then becomes a vehicle for the ambitions of a few rather than a context in which many can flourish.

## **The Necessity of Rules That Bind Everyone**

Rules exist for a reason that goes beyond convenience. They create a shared map. When rules are known, consistent, and applied equally, individuals can orient themselves within the group. They know what is permitted, what is required, and what will bring consequence. This predictability is not oppression; it is the condition that allows freedom within bounds rather than the chaos of competing wills.

When rules apply to all, they serve as a restraint on power. The person or group currently in authority is limited by the same standards that govern everyone else. This is the essence of equality under law. It is not the naive belief that all people are the same, but the recognition that without common boundaries, difference becomes domination. The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must — Thucydides' ancient observation remains accurate whenever rules are selectively enforced or easily altered by those who benefit from the change.

A tribe that allows its rules to be bent for some and rigid for others has already begun to dissolve as a genuine community. What remains is a hierarchy wearing the language of equality. The appearance of fairness is maintained while the substance is steadily eroded. Over time, those who are consistently disadvantaged lose faith in the rules themselves. Compliance becomes fear rather than consent, and the tribe's cohesion becomes brittle.

## **The Leaders Who Alter the Rules**

Every tribe eventually selects or elevates some individuals to positions of greater influence. These people are given, or take, the authority to interpret, modify, and enforce the rules. This concentration of power is often necessary for coordination and decision-making. It is also inherently dangerous.

Power changes how a person thinks. Not always dramatically, and not always with conscious intent, but reliably. The person who can alter rules experiences a different relationship to those rules than the person who must simply obey them. Distance grows between the decision-maker and the consequences of the decision. Incentives shift. What was once a clear boundary begins to look like a tool. What was once a shared standard begins to look like an obstacle to be navigated or removed when inconvenient.

This is not a modern discovery. It is one of the oldest patterns in human history. The person who gains the ability to change the rules for others while remaining exempt from those changes occupies a fundamentally different moral position. They no longer stand inside the tribe in the same way. They stand above it, even if they continue to speak its language. The temptation to use that position for private benefit — whether material, status, or the simple pleasure of control — is constant. Only character formed before power is granted offers meaningful resistance to that temptation.

## **Animal Farm as the Perfect Illustration**

George Orwell's "Animal Farm" remains the clearest modern parable of this process. The animals begin with a set of rules — the Seven Commandments — intended to prevent the return of human tyranny. The rules are simple, known to all, and meant to apply equally. "All animals are equal" is not merely a slogan; it is the foundational boundary that makes the new society different from the old.

The pigs, through intelligence and organization, gradually assume the role of rule-makers and enforcers. At first, the changes are small and justified by necessity. Then they become more frequent and more self-serving. The rules are rewritten in secret. The original commandments are altered one by one until they no longer constrain the pigs at all. By the end, the only remaining commandment is "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." The boundary has been erased for those who hold power while remaining fully in force for everyone else.

What makes "Animal Farm" so powerful is not that the pigs are uniquely villainous. It is that their behavior follows a predictable pattern once they gain the ability to alter and enforce rules without meaningful restraint. They do not need to be cartoonishly evil. They simply need to be ordinary creatures who have acquired extraordinary power over the rules that govern others. The outcome is almost inevitable: the rules come to serve the interests of the rule-makers rather than the interests of the community as a whole.

The tragedy is not only what happens to the other animals. It is what happens to the pigs themselves.

They lose the capacity to see the original vision clearly. They become the very thing they once opposed, and they no longer recognize the transformation. Power has altered their thinking so thoroughly that exploitation feels like leadership and equality feels like a threat to order.

## **The Character of Those Who Hold the Power to Change Rules**

This is why it matters profoundly who is chosen — or allowed — to alter and enforce the rules of a tribe. Technical competence is not enough. Intelligence is not enough. Even good intentions are not enough if they are not joined to a character that has already been tested in smaller matters. The person who has not practiced self-honesty when the stakes were low will not suddenly discover it when the stakes are high and the temptations are greater.

A leader who can change the rules must be evaluated on a different standard than those who merely follow them. We must ask not only what they promise, but what pattern their past conduct reveals when they have had the opportunity to bend standards in their favor. We must ask whether they treat rules as shared boundaries or as instruments of their own will. We must ask whether they have demonstrated, over time, that they can subordinate their own desires to principles that apply equally to everyone — including themselves.

The Stoic tradition offers a useful frame here. The person fit to rule others must first have demonstrated the capacity to rule themselves. Without that prior mastery, power does not elevate; it merely amplifies whatever weaknesses already exist. A person who cannot consistently align their own conduct with their stated principles will, when given the ability to rewrite the principles, eventually rewrite them to fit their conduct.

## **The Ongoing Requirement**

The health of a tribe is never settled once and for all. It requires continuous attention to the alignment between rules and those who make and enforce them. When leaders are chosen who have already shown themselves capable of self-honesty, consistent truthfulness, and ethos under pressure, the rules are more likely to remain boundaries rather than tools.

When leaders are chosen for other reasons — charisma, expediency, shared faction, or the hope that power will improve them — the pattern observed in “Animal Farm” becomes the probable outcome.

This is not a counsel of despair. It is a counsel of clarity. The same principles that sustain healthy relationships between individuals scale upward, but they become more consequential and more fragile at each level.

Self-honesty, truth, ethos, and trust do not become less important when many are involved; they become the only things that prevent the tribe from reverting to the rule of the strongest or the most cunning.

The work remains personal even when the stakes are collective. The person who would lead must first have shown themselves fit to be led by the same standards they would impose on others. And the members of the tribe must retain the clarity to recognize when that fitness is absent — before the rules themselves have been rewritten to make recognition impossible.

— *End* —