

# **Energy Tribes & Energy Policy**

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**Different  
sets of beliefs**

**Different  
cultural values**

**Overlapping  
sets of rationality**

Policy for whom?

Policies can move forward  
only if embraced  
by a large majority  
for a long time

Politicians are not motivated  
to legislate for benefits  
that will be realized  
beyond their term

**Difficult  
problems**

**Representative  
democracies**

**Responsive to  
electorates**

**Stable  
approaches**

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural Theory

Disparate views

*“Clumsy”* solutions

# **“Energy Tribes”**

Different attitudes

Different beliefs

Different solutions



Different  
political & personal  
world views

Fashion policies  
so that they acknowledge  
different ways people  
see reality


# 4 primary ways of organizing, perceiving & justifying social relationships:

Egalitarianism

Individualism

Fatalism

Hierarchy



Caputo, R.  
(2009). *Hitting  
the Wall: A  
Vision of a  
Secure Energy  
Future*. Morgan  
& Claypool  
Publishers.

These world views  
determine the way people  
perceive & attempt to address  
climate change or energy security!

# **Egalitarian social setting**

Nature is fragile,  
interconnected & ephemeral

Man is caring

Institutions distribute  
unequally & are distrusted

“Ecologists”

# **Hierarchical social setting**

World is controllable, nature is stable as long as it is not pushed beyond limits

Man is flawed but redeemable by long-lasting, trustworthy institutions

# **Hierarchical social setting**

Environmental experts  
determine the limits of nature

Statutory regulations ensure  
economic activity is kept  
within those limits

# **Individualist social setting**

Nature is benign, resilient & able to recover from exploitation

Man is self seeking & atomistic

Markets should be unfettered

# **Individualist social setting**

Inequity is good

Massive benefits to  
top executives (US)

Institutions should work with  
the grain of the market



# **Fatalistic social setting**

Man is fickle & untrustworthy

Fairness is not to be found  
in this life

Neither rhyme nor reason  
works with nature!

No possibility of effecting  
change for the better

# Another look at Energy Tribes

Business as Usual

Middle of the Road

Radical Change Now



Thomson, M. (1987). Among the Energy Tribes: A Cultural Framework for the Analysis and Design of Energy Policy. *Policy Sciences*, 17, 321-329.

Different bounds on what is:

Credible/incredible

Possible/Impossible

Sensible/Foolish

Rational/Irrational

Cultural Theory is descriptive  
but has normative implications

People argue from different  
premises & will never agree

Failures & successes  
make sense to only  
a subset of the public

Each way of organizing & perceiving distills elements of experience & wisdom!

These are missed by the other mindsets!

Only “*messy*”, “*clumsy*” solutions work!