

The Fledgling Phoenix

principles of Pachacuti; exercise of the intellect, commonality of purpose, and global unity. Without exercising his intellect, the animal man was not equipped to compete in the prevailing environment. Without commonality of purpose the species was at the mercy of rogue individuals and the intellect was a loose cannon on a heaving ship. Without global unity, man could not exercise the collective restraint to remain within the bounds of his ecosystem. Surely these were 'take home' lessons of the Collapse.

He explained to the timid that the Collapse had not been just the end of a civilisation, but also the start of another; that it contained within its turmoil and its horrors, the seeds of repetition, the start of a new contest by fractured groups of individuals. Left to run its course by happenstance it was unlikely to produce a re-emergent civilisation any better equipped for long-term survival than had been the previous one. He knew without doubt that, wherever the environment permitted habitation, human societies were, even now, busy exercising intellect on the thorny issues of survival and growth; prepared to make a mortal contest of it with not just the environment and other species but with their own fellows as well, if necessary.

He felt equally certain that the contest would be, already was, one of social order and technology, of piecing together a society of effective size and of regaining the collective skills and knowledge lost in the Collapse.

He was still sometimes caught by surprise to realise how easily that past knowledge had been lost, how dependent it had proven to be on social stability, how illusory its apparent durability.

He pondered the eons that had passed in its accumulation. Over hundreds of millennia, thousands of generations, ever since someone had first picked up a stone to throw at prey or quarry, man had been developing a collective knowledge bank, building on past learning the structures of future study, the sharp end of his research ever probing and penetrating the unknown edge, the envelope of restraining ignorance.

His rambling thoughts led him to ponder where that sharp end of research had been at its apex of travel in 2015, located deep underground beneath Switzerland. Here, thousands of men and women had, in the interest of scientific curiosity, built the CERN