

Private Property and Social Classes

On the other hand, private property has been most important in encouraging people to utilize their talents, work hard, and accumulate wealth. And this in turn, led them to scientific research and technological development as a way to make new things that enrich their lives and enhance their incomes. Meanwhile, the accumulation of wealth and scientific and technological knowledge have caused societies to be divided into classes separated from each other by socioeconomic gaps and sociocultural divides, leading to competition and at times conflict. For example, the tribal society, which preceded the development of the private property institution and did not experience the advancement of science or technology, was a homogeneous society, made up of one class that knew no societal conflict. In contrast, the agricultural age, which witnessed the full development of the private property institution and little technological advancement, was less homogeneous and experienced competition and conflict. People who owned more land were able to enslave and exploit others who did not; they also were able to use their wealth to produce more and enhance their prestige and power. And with wealth controlled by a minority, classes appeared, causing conflict and planting the seeds of freedom. However, the agricultural society experienced little progress because it was unable to advance either scientific research or technological development, causing the accumulation of knowledge to lag behind; it had to wait for the industrial age to activate it.

During the age of industry, the pace of scientific discoveries and technological innovations accelerated, causing all aspects of life to be affected, particularly the economic activities. Large corporations and the industrial state were the first to realize what science and technology could do to advance their interests and help them achieve their goals. As a consequence, scientific research and technological development activities were institutionalized, facilitating the systematic advancement and accumulation of knowledge. While industry employed the new technologies to raise productivity and enhance profitability, the state used industry to build well-equipped armies with guns, cannons, ships and more. And as economic activities multiplied and diversified and banking and trade expanded to serve the fast growing economies and investment ventures, a new society emerged having three classes. While the rich and poor

classes had existed for some ten thousand years without change, the industrial society gave birth for a middle class for the first time in history. Although its economic role was initially limited, the middle class distinguished itself by a high degree of awareness regarding its societal role, its place in society, and its rights. Such awareness led this class to become the most active segment of the industrial society, promoting democracy and employing it to enhance its societal role and protect its social and economic interests. However, the accumulation of wealth and knowledge and the increasing cost of having the right education have led to widening the socioeconomic and sociocultural gaps in society, causing the middle class to lose much prestige and power and awareness. Today, no middle class has enough awareness and power and self-confidence to protect its interests and maintain its position.

No age has ever been free of conflict or competition; people, however, often fought and competed for the same things, making competition more negative than positive. During the tribal times, tribes fought one another to steal the animals that the other had and to kill or kidnap their children and rape their women. Jared Diamond says in his book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, that until 7500 years ago, people used to kill whoever they found in their way, suspicion rather than trust had characterized tribal relations and dominated their interaction with the other. However, stealing the property of others and hurting them did not change life in society; it made the defeated feel the loss of dignity and honor and property, while making the victor feel good having destroyed the life of the other. Conflict, therefore, was horizontal rather than vertical, which made people and societies move in place, not in time; it was a zero-sum game that changed nothing. During the agricultural times, things began to move slowly as the nature of competition and conflict changed slightly. Nevertheless, the movement of society remained largely in place rather than in time. In fact, neither the tribal nor the early agricultural peoples were able to develop a conception of time.

During the industrial age competition was more positive than negative, causing more construction than destruction; meanwhile conflict was vertical leading to change and material and cultural progress.

During the knowledge age, technologies lead the way causing the industrial society to be transformed and to make information and telecommunications and services the main economic

activities. Since the middle class came as a result of industrial expansion and diversification, the movement toward services weakened this class tremendously.

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