
The History Of Capitalism: From Band To State Conforming To E. K. Hunt And Jared Diamond

From Band to State: The Transition from Feudalism to Early Capitalism

It takes just a simple observation of modern society to note that most societies are stratified. Still, there persists the ruling classes that govern society and the lower classes that toil. *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond and *Property and Prophets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies* by E. K. Hunt include explains as to why the masses of society would give up their autonomy and resources to benefit the elites. This paper will discuss Diamond and Hunt's understanding of ideologies that serve to preserve the social stratification of societies. After analysis of both Diamond and Hunt's claims, it will be shown that the two theories of societal development follow the same line of reasoning. Throughout society's transition from its agrarian roots to feudalism and to the robust capitalism of today, religion has played a large role at every stage. This paper will show that the economic development of society is largely dictated by the religious ideology of the times.

To begin with, Diamond argues in his book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* that societies naturally progressed through the arbitrary categorizations of band, tribe, chiefdom, and state. Diamond suggests the development from band to state be simplified to a societal evolution from egalitarianism to kleptocracy as a way to combat the limitation of categorizing societies by size and not characteristics. To maintain these newly developed stratified societies, institutions of power used four methods to maintain social cohesion. In summary, the following methods allowed the elites to maintain their higher status and "more comfortable lifestyle" at the expense of the commoners (Diamond 276).

The first solution in maintaining the new stratified society is to "disarm the populace, and arm the elite" (Diamond 277). Societies in the first two stages of societal development—bands and tribes—possessed few advanced weapons due to their size and technological limitations. Since bands and tribes consist of relatively small numbers of people, there is a reduced chance of encountering rival bands or tribes, reducing the necessity for weaponry. In addition, the weapons used to hunt posed little threat since it was not as advanced as modern technology. As society progressed to a kleptocracy, weaponry became more advanced. The advancement of weaponry was met with the specialization of society, a factor that helped maintain social cohesion. Hunters became warriors who became soldiers, thus creating the separation between a disarmed populace and an armed elite, one loyal to the chief, king, or government. Thus, a

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small, armed elite served to maintain social cohesion and stratification because it prevented a popular uprising against the higher classes.

Secondly, the elites “redistributed tribute in ways popular to the masses” in order to maintain social cohesion and to prevent unrest (Diamond 277). The elites must appease the masses and their concerns. Although the resources extracted from the populace largely benefit the upper classes, the populace must be led to believe that they are also receiving some compensation for the fruits of their labor, whether it be in the form of work, a portion of goods, or taxes. For example, this “redistribution of tribute” can occur in the form of security from outside threats, the creation of government and laws, and stability and order (Diamond 277). This method of maintaining social cohesion is still in effect today: tax money is redistributed among popular causes such as social welfare programs, defense and security, education, etc. The masses, when they believe the elites are supporting the development of society as a whole, do not detest the stratification of society and believe that all the social classes are performing duties essential to the function of society.

Thirdly, institutions of government and methods of law enforcement did not only “maintain public order and curb violence,” but they also promoted a general sense of happiness (Diamond 277). Diamond states that while tribal people were more egalitarian than modern societies, the same cannot be said of their pacificity. In fact, extensive research performed among tribal groups reveals that “murder is the leading cause of death” due to a lack of laws and means of enforcement (Diamond 277). The lack of a centralized government and code of conduct made murder and honor killings a suitable way to settle disputes within tribes and among rival groups (Diamond 277). The elites used the armed, loyal members of society to constitute institutions of protection, security, and law enforcement. This in turn reduced the temptation of murder as a resolution and promoted happiness and stability among the commoners.

Lastly, Diamond cites religion—one that justifies kleptocracy—as a way to preserve social stratification (Diamond 277). Diamond makes a clear distinction here between beliefs and religion. He states that bands and tribes had established supernatural beliefs (Diamond 278). These supernatural beliefs gave rise to explanations as to the origin of humankind and the organization of the universe. However, these beliefs lacked three main features that made them useful to the ruling elites. One, they did not justify the function of a central authority; two, they did not justify the distribution of wealth to the ruling elites; and three, they did not promote peace among non-related peoples (Diamond 278). Once beliefs were transformed to include these three points, they became a centralized religion and a tool at the disposal of the elites to maintain social stratification. In summary, religion preserved social cohesion by justifying the ruler’s power usually through divinity, by making the sacrifices of the individual a good deed to society and the divine, and by curbing violence.

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Now that Diamond's ideology has been examined, the concept of feudalism will be explained to further illustrate how Hunt's ideology of social stratification compares to that of Diamond. During feudalism, laborers, also known as serfs and peasants, were of the lower class. The collective upper class of religious lords and members of the secular nobility ran the manors. The lord of the manor provided safety and protection for the serfs (Making of Economic Society). Hunt argues that late feudal ideology was based largely around the Christian paternalist ethic. The Christian paternalist ethic was a religious ideology that justified the feudal system. This ideology states that the lords of the manor were paternalistic figures that were to be respected and bowed to by the "children of society" or the weak and poor (Hunt 8).

In comparison, Diamond and Hunt's understanding of the ideologies that contributed to the stratification of society are more similar than they are different. Hunt's understanding of division of labor and feudalism ensures an unarmed populace, a system of compensation for goods, and a code of "mutual obligations" and rules (Hunt 6). Lastly, the Christian paternalist ethic covers Diamond's observation of the need for a religion that justifies the kleptocracy. However, Hunt's argument differs from diamond in the sense that it is not a holistic, general theory. Hunt's explanation of ideologies is confined to the Feudal Ages whereas Diamond's theory can be applied to any societal development of stratification.

Just as a combination of factors led to the stratification of society, another set of factors led to the transition from feudal economies to the early capitalist societies of the 17th century: the Crusades, and Calvinism, and mercantilism.

The Making of Economic Society states that the effects of the Crusades on economic and social ideology are "ironic" due to the Churches vigorous rejection of capitalistic endeavors (Making of Economic Society 35). Nonetheless, the Crusades played a pivotal role in transitioning society from the stagnant backwaters of feudalism to the bustling empires of the early capitalist age. The Crusades—the religious clash between slumber feudal society and sophisticated Byzantium luxury—caused merchants and expeditionaries to desire the exotic, luxury goods from the East. Thus, the Crusades changed the individual by first introducing them to a life of excess and not just stability.

In addition, the transition from feudalism to mercantilism only gets more ironic when the rest of religious influences are evaluated. Not only did the actions of religious officials such a new doctrine of economic operation, but also the arrival of Calvinism justified the kleptocracy, as Diamond would say. Calvinism also allowed early capitalism to thrive (Making of Economic Society 38). Calvinists believed in "the fervid pursuit of one's calling" (Making of Economic Society). Thus, even the merchant and trade was included in this. The merchant was transformed from a sinful thief into a man of god strongly dedicated to his work and his calling. Calvinism provided the religious foundation upon which the early capitalist societies and

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constructed.

Lastly, the feudal ideology and the concept of the individual within society were drastically altered by “the intellectual awakening, world explorations, the discovery of large quantities of precious metal,” and “the creation of the new nation-states” (Hunt 29). This new early capitalist ideology can be summed up in one word: mercantilism. In brief, the ideology of mercantilism stated that a state’s powers rested in its economic dominance. Thus, states built up reserves of silver and gold at the expense of far away lands and people. They created monopolies with their colonies and maintained an extensive system of balanced trade. The mercantilist ideology differed greatly from the ideology of feudalism. In mercantilism, the state assumed a larger role and control over its citizens. Additionally, the individual within society became less self-sufficient and relied even more on the increased specialization of the day. Not only did mercantilism make individuals within a state dependent on the rest of the populace within the border, but it also transformed the state and the individual into entities dependent on foreign bodies. Mercantilism served to further increase the specialization of labor and the interdependence among states and colonies.

In conclusion, analysis of Diamond and Hunt’s understandings of ideology in relation to social stratification highlight that religion is an important aspect of economic policy. Religion is one of the justifiers of social stratification. The Christian paternalist ethic served to justify feudalism. Furthermore, religious occurrences such as the Crusades and the arrival of Calvinism transformed the stagnant feudal towns into the booming early capitalist empires of the 17th century. This shows that religion affects economic transformations in society just as much as urbanization, changes in technology, and expansion, and in some cases the influence is even greater.

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