

1973-06-18b [LIFE CHANCES] Life Chances & Class Conflict

One prevalent idea not to be given much credence in this work, save begrudgingly, is that the older highly stratified societies had to breed class antagonisms which were kept down only by force or by allowing some social mobility for the more ambitious types (the most dangerous in any event) to rise. The Marxist live off such a theory, and even common-sense historians who don't care for Marxist dialectics fall into the assumption that it must have been that way basically always.

The occasional periods of peasant uprisings give absolute proof of conflict, so the argument goes. But it just doesn't wash, even with that evidence. Most uprisings were by groups that accepted the general fact of their belonging to a certain strata of society, and the revolt as often as now demanded vindication of traditional rights or at most a fairer share of the whole for their strata if the conditions of life had improved generally but they had not got their share.

The disgruntledness of our individual ideal-types should come forth in some measure, however, as part of the tensions of life chances and life risks that we shall try to make part of their rational life plans. It is a very broad field in which to let the imagination wander, especially since one in this respect needs to be specific in order to make the point clear, and thus the immediate historical events of the time would enter the picture. On the whole, the immediate historical scene will be kept out, and only the general social conditions proffered as the context for the rational life plan. Too, by choosing periods of relative social stability, one will be avoiding the moments when any ideal-type would have to have a good element of rage and rebellion in his spirit.

The question of whether our ideal-types were happy or not is also largely irrelevant. The words of Rawls on how the multitude of associations which are non-comparing allow many life fulfillments that are independent of each other, makes it easy to imagine king and peasant as both happy if their rational life plans are respectively (no matter how different in substance) fulfilled. Then, too, in older societies the naturalness of a hierarchy of orders was much more fully believed in than it is today.

Lastly, Erikson-type problems of childhood identity crisis will not be considered, unless one can discover a history of that phenomenon that shows change, and so the parent-child relationship which lies behind the inheritance question would be affected.