

## **A societies and B societies**

All large societies take the shape of a pyramid, as we see in monetary economies when we measure individual incomes.<sup>100</sup> But the pyramid can hide two rather different social and moral structures.

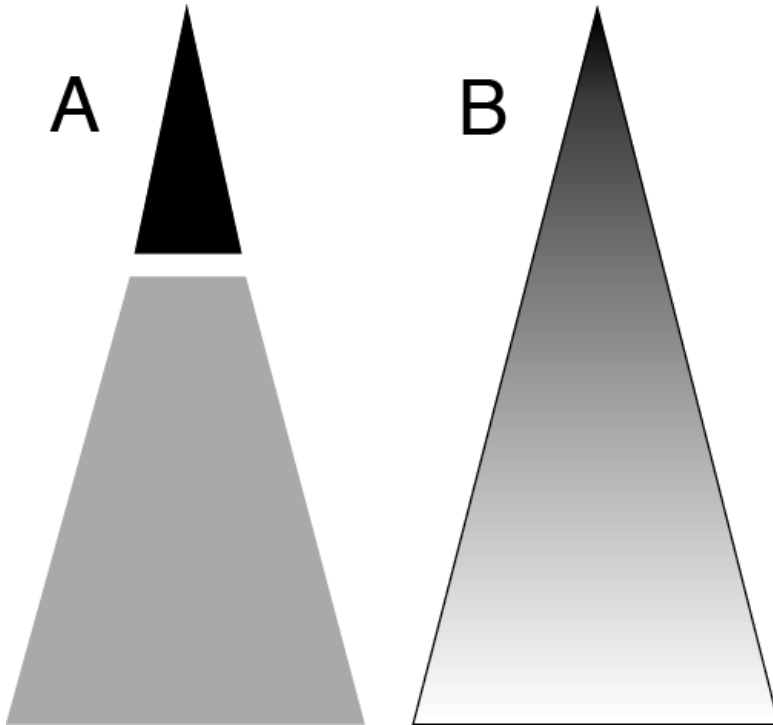
In southern societies, the preponderance of dependent characters multiplies superior-subordinate relations and, as in the Late Bronze Age in the Near East, society tends to split ideally into two sections: a dominant upper class and a dominated production sector.

This also has significant effects on morality.

In southern societies the members of the upper class in their mutual interactions develop an ideology that stresses their lofty status and the upper class becomes, in the terminology of the Rovina delle Nazioni, a dominant aristocracy,<sup>101</sup> i.e. a superior political entity that the morally subjugated producing classes are not in a position to challenge.

In northern societies this split into two parts instead does not take place. There are individuals and families that are more or less wealthy or prestigious, but the idea of a separate, upper social class is absent.

We can portray the two types of society as follows:



**A** is the ideal model of an aristocratic society: with the upper class clearly divided from the rest of society.

**B** by contrast is an inherently egalitarian society, “bourgeois” in today’s terminology, in which there may be significant differences in power and well-being between individuals but not a separation into two sections of society.

If northern societies can be described by the **B** structure, in the south we alternate between cases like those of the Near-East Late Bronze Age, in which the **A** structure is very clear-cut, to other mixed structures influenced by a market economy that attenuates in incomes *but less in consciences* the distinction between an aristocracy with the power, and the productive base of society.

Instead, market economy logic, centred on wealth rather than rank, leans towards the **B** structure, as explained in 1771 by the Norman economist Turgot, an enthusiastic supporter of the advent of the free market and of an ‘English-type’ society instead of the **A** of the Ancien Régime in France:

[Instead of the distinction between those who own land and those who don’t which assigns different rights to each group] there is another distinction: between rich and poor [and which] does not affect in any way the primacy of the rights of citizens, in relation to whom rich and poor are perfectly equal; this distinction, on the other hand, *does not by any means divide society into two classes*. There is no precise limit [beyond] which one is rich and one is poor; and the whole society presents in this regard as a succession of imperceptibly downgraded nuances, from the [richest banker] to the beggar pleading for pennies in the street.<sup>102</sup>

In Europe the most **B** society is the Dutch. The great historian Johan Huizinga: Whether we fly high or low, we Dutchmen are all bourgeois: lawyer and poet, baron and labourer alike. Our national culture is bourgeois in every sense you can legitimately attach to that word. The bourgeois conception of life is shared by all classes or groups of our people: urban and rural, property-owning or not.<sup>103</sup>

An extreme case of society **A** with a sharp separation between its two parts is described by Ignazio Silone in an imaginary village in southern Italy where the peasants are the subservient, despised productive class:

Ruling over all is God, master of heaven. This everybody knows.  
Then comes the Prince of Torlonia, master of the earth.  
Then come the prince’s guards.  
Then come the prince’s guards’ dogs.  
Then, nothing.  
Then, still nothing.  
Then, still nothing.  
Then come the peasants.<sup>104</sup>

A good indicator of these differences is the success of Marxism, with its type **A** division between proletarians and capitalists. It took root in Latin countries and Germany, where ‘in people’s minds’ society was divided into a high and a low part, but much less so in Holland and England,<sup>105</sup> type **B** societies. In the United States its success was so limited that the German sociologist Werner Sombart in 1906 wrote the book *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?*

It might be considered inappropriate to say English society, with all its titled aristocrats, is “bourgeois”.

But it is simply that the wealthy English used their riches to imitate the prestigious ways of life of the continental nobility. However, no matter how pleased with themselves they might have been, they did not really feel, like the nobles of the continent, that they were almost a different race from the rest of the population.

De Tocqueville underlines this English peculiarity as follows:

In continental Europe, the feudal system... became a caste; only in England did it become an aristocracy... Nobles and non-nobles engaged in the same business together, took up the same professions and, more significantly, intermarried. The daughter of the greatest lord could wed a new man without shame.<sup>106</sup>

In **A** societies, people are judged primarily on their family background, but the fact that little-known people belong to the upper class can also be deduced from the observation that they ‘speak well’ and do not carry out manual activities. The members of the lower class are of modest family, incapable of refined speech and do manual work.

The syntax of a language becomes sophisticated and complex thanks to the effort of those who ‘speak well’ in order to stand out in the crowd.<sup>107</sup>

Like the previous ones, these aspects are illustrated more extensively in *La Rovina delle Nazioni*, which also notes how, although the English language derives from Germanic as the German, its grammar and syntax are much simpler because English society is **B** whereas German is largely **A**.

In Anglo-Saxon societies, in fact, polished language counts for much less than in Germany, and people are assessed primarily on what they can do. Social mobility is also greater.

In England, the sailors of the Royal Fleet press ganged in drinking dens that proved capable could become officers and even ship captains, while in France it was impossible for them to become officers because these had to come from the nobility or at least from the upper bourgeoisie.

The differences between **A** and **B** societies thus become particularly visible in their different ways of assessing people:

in **A** societies social position counts above all: *who's your father?*

in **B** societies individual skills: *what can you do?*

The difference between these two typical questions might seem to be of cultural origin, but we will soon meet a population in which a persistence of longer than 2000 years is documented for the second. And such a long time certifies a genetic root.