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Egalitarian Planet: Five proposals to elevate society by reducing disparity

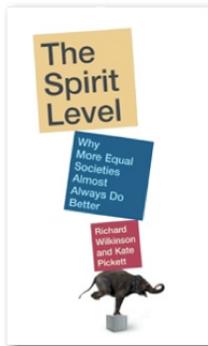
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Is inequality the primary cause of human suffering? Does disparity in wealth, power, opportunity, and education inevitably lead to despair and social discontent?



Egalitarians, like the authors of the recent best-seller, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, believe inequity is the culprit in a plethora of social ills: it corrodes trust, community life, and social mobility, it increases anxiety and excessive consumption, and contributes to mental and physical illness, drug use, imprisonment, obesity, teen pregnancy, violence, and other corrosive psycho-social maladies.

My own [recent examination of Denmark](#) observed that the little Nordic nation was simultaneously ranked #1 in "Egalitarianism" on the GINI Index **and** #1 in "Happiness" by *Forbes*. My conclusion from this is that:

SAME SOCIAL STATUS + SHARING = SMILES

Egalitarianism seems to be a desirable societal goal, but how can we achieve it? Humanity exists on wildly different class and financial levels around the globe—how can this vast gap be bridged? When I pitched the question to five different transhumanist philosophers, a quintet of diverse suggestions bounced back.

James Hughes (author of *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future*) believes **democratization aided by technology** is the best medicine to cure inequality. He proposes [all quotes are his] that we provide "equal access to education" by developing the "visionary, handheld AI tutor that Neal Stephenson imagined in *The Diamond Age* that maps the child's developmental needs, and leads them through a personalized dialogue to knowledge and critical thinking, drawing on the best pedagogies."

Hughes recognizes that economic progress in poor nations requires stable, accountable governments and large investments in infrastructure, education, and health care. Gains in these areas could be attained, he believes, via "communication technologies that increase government accountability, and by developing cheaper ways to build roads, communication networks, public sanitation, and health service delivery."

Hughes also believes the United Nations needs to become a "vehicle for popular democratic expression, instead of a club of nation-states represented by their diplomatic

elites.” With sufficient influence and jurisdiction, the UN would be able to equitably distribute wealth and political control. Hughes sees his vision enabled by “technologies that break down nation-states and ethnic identities and replace them with transnational political identities, organizations, and campaigns.”

Alex Lightman (author of *Brave New Unwired World: the Digital Big Bang and the Infinite Internet*) does not regard today’s economic disparity as the root cause of suffering. Instead, he asserts, “the fundamental inequalities are intelligence, imagination, ambition, and action. Someone with 10% more of all four than his chiral twin could have four orders of magnitude more wealth over a lifetime.”

Of the four qualities mentioned, Lightman regards “**increasing intelligence** as the primary objective of a more egalitarian planet.” He’d uplift global IQ in multiple ways, including “[biofeedback of brain waves](#), nootropics, like the movie *Limitless*, only more limited, and exercise—read *Spark* by John Ratey.” Lightman also believes that “brain size matters. An obese twin will have a brain that is 8% shrunken compared to his non-obese brother. Reduction of obesity to pre-Earl Butz levels in the early 1970’s before the catastrophe of corn is a priority for the increase of intelligence.”

Imagination can be enhanced, Lightman claims, by “promoting respect and reading of science fiction. Teach it in schools.” Ambition can be strengthened if we “study the root causes of brain function, and get people to exercise more, which will fix addiction, depression, and other mental issues that reduce ambition.” And finally, action? Lightman’s plan to promote activity is to offer, “free classes in how to stop procrastinating, for everyone, in lieu of welfare, pensions, subsidies.”

David Pearce (author of *The Hedonistic Imperative*) proffered advice that mirrored his devotion to the abolition of mental suffering. Like Lightman, he does not regard equity in wealth and class as the ultimate goal.

“Happiness based on social status is a so-called ‘positional good’,” he said. “No amount of material wealth can create more of it [happiness]. Suicide rates and other ‘objective’ indices of psychological distress—chemical depression, etc.—are actually worse today than they were for our hunter-gatherer ancestors on the African savannah. Even in a fairer society of unlimited material abundance—even if blessed with the all the technical marvels that transhumanists anticipate—our quality of life won’t be significantly improved unless we also redesign our reward circuitry. In my opinion, only **genetically recalibrating our ‘hedonic set-point’** can radically enhance our well-being.”

Pearce believes his proposal is “technically feasible right now. For example, benign genes for our children via preimplantation genetic diagnosis could potentially enrich everyone’s quality of life—and allow all humans to be born ‘winners’.” He also suggested “BioHappiness Education” as a policy measure for egalitarian bliss, and he praised genetic research on 5-HTTLPR (serotonin transporter) and the [COMT Val158Met genotype](#).

Giulio Prisco (author of *Engineering Transcendence*) was initially adverse to my query, replying, “I don’t want an egalitarian planet where everyone is the same as everyone else because this could only be achieved by suppressing personal autonomy, free-thinking and diversity, and would result in an extremely boring planet. But I do want a MORE egalitarian planet...”

After thinking about it a little more, Prisco offered a fascinating proposal, inspired in part by the work of a famous German anarchist.

“Extreme inequality depends on how the economy is structured,” Prisco explained. “A possible solution to this is the idea of **Perishable Money**—money with an expiration date, a concept originally devised a century ago by [Silvio Gesell](#). In this financial system, there are no taxes and you keep all the money you make, but as soon as you are paid money, it starts to ‘decay’—perhaps losing all value after one month, or a certain % per day. So, you want to spend all your money on basic goods like food and rent. If you wish to accumulate money and save it for later, you must go to an exchange center operated by the community and convert your extra money to a non-perishable form, but you must pay fees to do this. The fees would be the equivalent of taxes, they would provide the

money that the community needed for public works, health care, etc.”

In Prisco’s analysis, “this system would be as fair as the current system—or fairer—and much simpler for everyone. It would also be very easy to implement now, with e-money.”

Mike Treder (co-founder of the Center for Responsible Nanotechnology) believes economic egalitarianism is an intrinsically valid stance because: “It is a false assumption that anyone in modern society, by themselves, with no help from anyone else, earns money. What we call ‘earnings’ is really just an arbitrary allocation of each individual’s estimated contribution to overall economic production.”

According to Treder, each person’s financial income should not be regarded as a personal possession, but as a provisionally assigned piece of the total pie—and quite probably an unfair piece at that, either too much or too little.

Furthermore, says Treder, “It is only because a complex infrastructure is in place, because an organized system of economics is working, and because government has been instituted, that we are able to have jobs and incomes at all. We all pay taxes to keep that system functioning, because without it, none of us could earn a tenth of what we are making now.”

The challenge, then, is for each of us to recognize that our sense of ownership over personal wealth is invalid. “In truth,” says Treder, “whatever wealth you possess is not ‘your money’. You didn’t earn it by yourself with no help from others. It’s simply a share of total production—and often, because the system is imperfect, that share gets distributed unfairly. **Adjusting income tax rates progressively** can help to restore an appropriate balance.”

Obviously, the handful of policies listed above are only a paltry smidgen of the innumerable ideas that could propel our planet towards egalitarianism. Please, readers, even if you despise egalitarianism, post your own ideas, rants, initiatives, and outside-the-box-brain-dumps in the comments section below. We’re not seeking consensus here—IET is a “think tank” so help us fill up the tank with your thoughts.

Hank Pellissier, the IET's Managing Director, is the author of two e-books *Why is the IQ of Ashkenazi Jews so High? - scientific factors that influence intelligence*, and *Invent Utopia Now: Transhumanist Suggestions for the Pre-Singularity Era*

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