

Is it better for the world to be wealthier or to be more equal?

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Turn on the television and many argue that the world is not what it should be. The news relates daily to extreme poverty and social inequality in the world, with these issues at the forefront of many politicians' minds. However, we have to ask ourselves can a perfect world exist? Should global wealth or global equality be valued higher, or could the two coexist?

The Oxford Dictionary defines equality as '*The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities.*' Already the definition of equality is broad, the world could have economic equality yet inequality in terms of age or sex. Achieving equality is a near-impossible task however many argue that achieving equality within countries is achievable. Richard Wilkinson's TED talk, 'How economic inequality harms societies', is an example of this belief. In his talk, Wilkinson compares GNI per capita to average life expectancy of many countries. This shows there is no correlation between a country's average wealth and life expectancy. However, within countries, there is a huge change from the richest neighbourhood's life expectancy and the poorest. The average life expectancy in England and Wales varies from 79.2 to 71.5, clearly showing that an economically unequal society has significant impacts on lives, even in the UK. Wilkinson's book, '*The Spirit Level*' provides a huge range of data showing that a more economically equal society is a better one to live in, thus equality within countries is something we should strive for.

Whilst economic equality is beneficial to lives, there are other forms of equality that are arguably detrimental to society, such as equality of speech. For example, equality of speech would inevitably mean that all people should be given the same voice and opportunity to be heard. Should we give equal opportunities to those with good intentions and those with bad? Is it equality if one person's words are more influential than another? Should we suppress someone's voice so we are all equal? Another issue with equality is the extent to which people will go to achieve it, namely should natural abilities be hindered in favour of giving everyone the same opportunities? If we were to give everyone an equal opportunity, we would have to remove anything that leads to an advantage in life. Many things give someone an advantage over another: having a stable family; being located in a city with jobs; having a good teacher. Opportunity equality is realistically unachievable in the UK, let alone globally.

Alternatively we should look at what a wealthier world would look like in the future. There is huge evidence that our world has, on average, got wealthier. Explicitly, the global GDP has risen fourfold from 1950 to 2010. Consequently more people than ever have access to internet, healthcare and education; meaning that global life expectancy has increased significantly from 50 in 1950 to 70 in 2010, according to the UNDESA. A wealthier world also has environmental benefits, which is crucial as the planet moves towards sustainability for the future. Now one ton of coal produces 12 times more electricity than it did a century ago, increasing its efficiency, reducing carbon emissions released per unit of energy acquired. Economically stable countries are also more likely to seek sustainable energy resources as they have the funds required to do so. A richer world would not only benefit individuals, but the planet too.

Alongside the benefits of a richer world, we also have to take into account who is benefitting. The BBC detail that the richest 1% of the world own 50% of the global wealth, meaning that 85 people have as much money as the poorest 3.5 billion. Chrystia Freeland's book *'Plutocrats'* states this is not only an international issue, but an intranational one: 'three decades ago the American chief executive made 42 times as much as the average worker; today this ratio is an obscene 380.' Clearly, this 'richer world' is benefitting the few over the masses. Resource pressure also counteracts against a global wealth increase; by 2030, nearly 50% of the planet will face water stress as the demand is sizeably increasing. Additionally, as a boosted economy only helps a select few, many countries remain heavily dependant on non-renewable energy sources, available at little cost, negating the aforementioned sustainable acts of developed countries.

30 years ago, the richest 1% of the United States owned 8% of the world's wealth. Today the top 0.1% of the United States own the same amount. This shows that despite a richer world, little is changing for the majority. To ask for a wealthier world in today's society benefits few, but to ask for a more equal world benefits many. A wealthier world hasn't led to a more equal one, but a more equal world could lead to a wealthier one.