

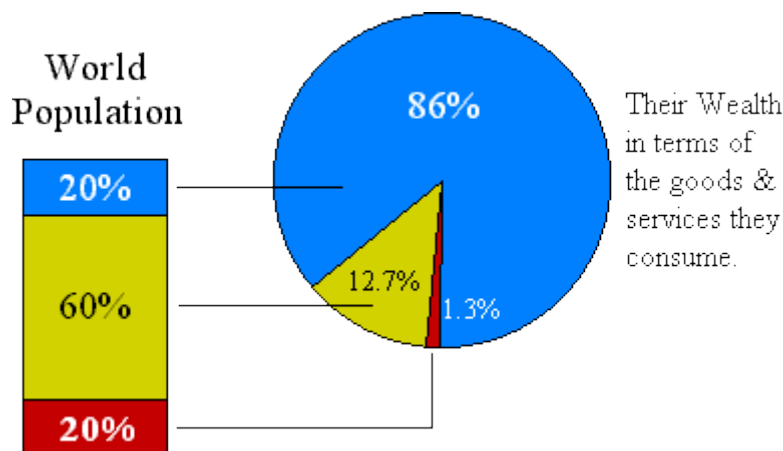
Chapter 8: The Family Estate

All human beings have the same basic needs. But most are denied the means of providing them, while a favoured few possess such means in unnecessary and obscene abundance. The consequential disparity of wealth breeds dichotomy of thought, which inevitably leads to conflict. [Footnotes]

Mankind finds himself in possession, by default, of all the bounteous resources of Planet Earth. He could reasonably be expected, therefore, to share them out equitably so that everybody, in every generation, had unconditional use of sufficient of them to turn his labour into his needs of life. Each family could then at least be economically self-sufficient, passing on to the next generation its wealth-producing resources as a birthright. But as I look outward into today's society, sadly, this is not what I see. I see instead a world of people of vastly differing levels of wealth and well-being.

Means of The Many

Every year, the United Nations produces a [Human Development Report](#). This gives quantitative data relating to the wealth and well-being of the world's people. It showed that in 1998, the richest 20% of the world population consumed 86% of all goods and services, while the poorest 20% consumed only 1.3%.



This would not matter if their 1.3% provided the poorest 20% with the means to live fulfilled and meaningful lives. But it doesn't. The portion of the poor is far below the minimum necessary to be able to do so. As regards quality of life, the middle 60% fare little better. They may have food, clothing and shelter. Nevertheless, they have to work very hard with pitifully inadequate resources just to survive. Even most of the top 20% are locked in high-stress jobs at which they barely make enough to meet the ever-rising cost of 'living normally' within their expensive society.

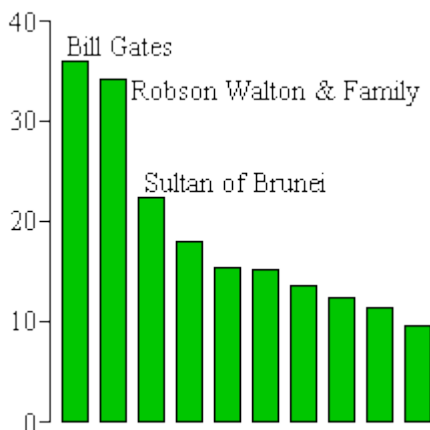
These relative consumptions of goods and services are measured in equivalent dollars. But is this meaningful? A loaf of bread costs more 'dollars' in the First World than in the Third World. But it is still a loaf of bread. Its value as food is the same wherever it is eaten.

More significant perhaps is that a First World consumer almost certainly does not own the means of producing his food. He undoubtedly possesses more assets than the Third Worlder in dollar equivalent value. Nevertheless, for most, these are solely to do with the [consumer side](#) of his domestic micro-economy. The typical First Worlder neither possesses nor controls any direct means of producing his needs of life.

Consequently, he cannot eat without money. He cannot get money without a job. He cannot have a job unless somebody employs him. Nobody has to employ him. He is economically vulnerable. The Third Worlder, on the other hand, may possess means of producing his food. They probably yield a lot less than the First Worlder consumes. Nevertheless, (war, crime, drought and pestilence notwithstanding) they are, as far as the individual is concerned, a more secure source of the basic needs of life.

The Favoured Few

With no means of turning his labour into his needs of life, the First Worlder is forced to depend on someone who has such means. In the global economy of today, that 'means' is capital. [Capital](#) is the money one has with which he can buy the labour of others in order to generate more money. The money thus generated is called profit. Strictly, the cost or monetary value of one's home is therefore not capital. The typical First World home only consumes wealth. It does not finance a profit-generating process. By this correct definition, capital is possessed by only a favoured few.



The adjacent chart shows the wealth of the top 10 richest individuals on this planet. The figures were taken from the [Sunday Times](#) 'Rich List 1999'. The scale is £billions (£ x 10⁹). On this scale, a bar representing my total assets - my house, its contents, car, money - would be one half of one thousandth of a pixel high! If my wealth were represented by the smallest bar on the chart (1½cm high on my screen), Bill Gate's bar would reach almost 5½ kilometres high. His wealth is 362,500 times as much as mine.

Does it then follow that he must have worked 362,500 times as hard as I have? Does it mean that he must have written 362,500 times the quality or quantity of [software that I have written](#)? Has he produced what an army of 362,500 systems analysts, developers and programmers like me could produce? I think not. However, it does expose popular misconceptions about free-market capitalism. It is a system that produces a handful of winners and billions of losers irrespective of individual ability, effort, virtue or, above all, need. It is, all things considered, a thoroughly reprehensible and evil system.

According to the U.N. [Human Development Report](#) 1998, the combined capital of the richest 225 people on Earth was equal to the combined income of the poorest 47% of the world population. In other words, they have enough capital to hire the labour of the poorest 47% of humanity for a year. That is a workforce of over 11 million each. The present (1999) workforce of the United Kingdom is said to be around 28 million.

Is Money Wealth?

*Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.*

- a Cree Indian Prophecy

There is only one source of mankind's needs and luxuries. That is the Earth's biosphere: the land. All our food is generated by a gossamer-thin biologically active coating that covers the planet's land surface. It is, on average, no more than 30cm thick. Everything else we use also comes from the land. Wood for building and fuel grows on it. Cotton and wool for clothing also grow on it. All other materials, from which all other things are made, are also derived either from what grows on land, or from what is dug out of it. The only other ingredient necessary to produce everything we have and use is human labour - both physical and intellectual.

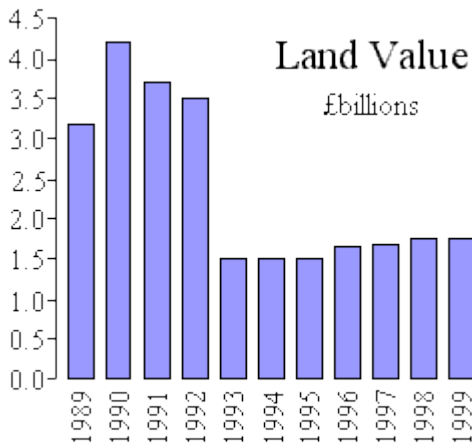
The labouring capability of one human resource unit is immediately and directly available to every fit person on this planet. Everybody has control of his own mind and body. He is free to use it whenever and for whatever he will. However, a fully operational human resource unit is no use whatsoever unless there is a natural resource to which its labour can be applied. A farmer is useless without a field and a plough. A carpenter is useless without wood and tools. A programmer cannot develop software without the use of a computer and the electricity to power it.

Ultimately, all these things are, or come from, the land. Land provides the materials and the energy to produce everything. Land also provides the space to do things, or to build the buildings within which to do things. If you have no land, you ultimately depend for your existence on somebody who has. All but a favoured few in this country have no land. Most of the favoured few are highly restricted as to what they can use it for, and rarely have any claim to the mineral wealth beneath its surface. That belongs to someone else.

The land on which one's house stands does not count because it is not economically productive. There are two reasons for this. 1) There is nowhere near enough of it to accommodate a productive process. 2) One is not allowed by law to use it for any purposes other than residential. True ownership of land is complete freedom to use it as you will. But with this freedom must also come moral responsibility. A farmer I know captured this in the words: "You should live as if you'll die tomorrow but farm as if you'll live forever."

He recognises that his land only belongs to him for the duration of his lifetime. It is a permanent portion of the limited surface of this planet. Hence it should be left in at least as good a state as it was found. All who occupy it owe this to those who will come after them - whoever they may be. On the other hand, he realises that his "day of reckoning" could befall him at any time.

Land is the only permanent capital. Its value is in its ability to generate wealth - its ability to produce, on an on-going basis, all the needs of human life. It is therefore the only true measure of capital value. It is not the price of land that fluctuates against a fixed dollar: it is the value of the dollar that fluctuates against the fixed immutable value of land. Land is the only true frame of reference against which capital value can be measured. The value of money, on the other hand, dances up and down to the chaotic rhythm of supply and demand, driven by the continuous ebbs and flows of a myriad fads and fashions. It is a rubber dollar, stretching and retracting according to where and when it is exchanged, its median drifting ever downwards in value with inflation.

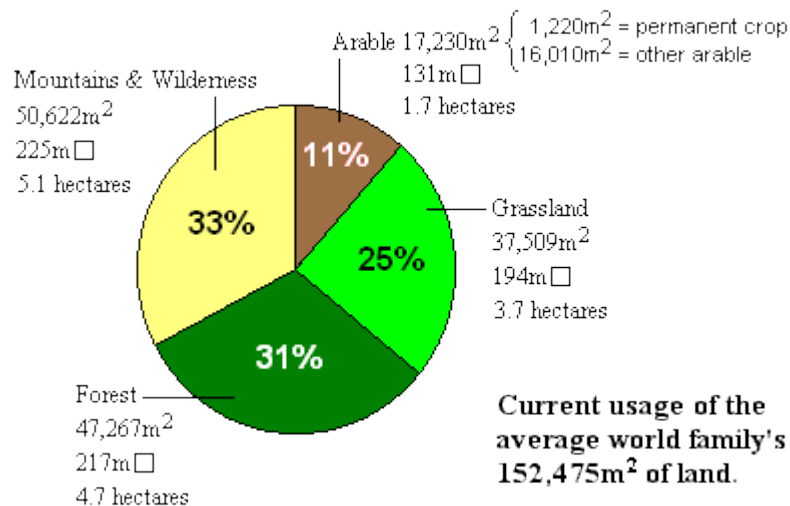


The adjacent chart shows the variation over time of the value of land owned by a certain aristocrat. The value of his land suddenly fell owing to a national crisis in farming. But the intrinsic value of land does not change just because it ceases to be used to grow crops. The value to humanity of a given portion of this planet's surface as a current or potential provider of needs is nothing to do with its market price. Ups and downs in the price of land are simply the market forces of supply and demand altering the value of money.

Money is not real wealth. It may command the services of others for a time. But this is transitory and fickle. Markets can crash, money can become worthless. Land, on the other hand, has permanent value. Land is real wealth.

A Fair Share

The average family on Earth has 7 members. Although the numbers of each generation at any given time varies from family to family, we may picture the 'generic' anthropological human family as being made up of 2 grandparents, 2 parents and 3 children. If all the land on Earth were divided out equally, each family would have about 15 hectares. Under present usage, this would comprise:



At full scale, the above circle of land would have a radius of just over 220 metres. That may not seem much as casually perceived. However, when properly organised and planted out, it would amount to quite a sizeable inheritance.

Obscene Wealth

Compare this with how much the real landowners of this country have. It's hard to find out how much of the United Kingdom is owned by whom. It is difficult if, as I, you do not have the right

means and contacts. One can get only an inkling of an idea from what information is freely accessible. In this regard, the only land owners with any degree of visibility are the royals.

I understand that the size (hectares) and usage of the Queen's two best known private estates are as shown in this table. Combined, they would provide the fair share of the planet's finite land surface for 1,867 generic families instead of one royal family.

Usage	Balmoral	Sandringham	Total
Farmed	187	6000	6187
Forested	3000	2000	5000
Wilderness	16813	0	16813
Total	20000	8000	28000

Perhaps some of our 1 in 5 families living in poverty and unemployment could become productive, happy, fulfilled human beings if given a fair share of the planet on which they were born. The usage of land on these royal estates is not the planetary norm. For its present owners it does not need to be so. For instance, over all, the royal estates have a much higher proportion of wilderness (60% as against 33%). However, I think this could be easily rectified under the hands of 1,867 owner-worker adult couples (that is 3,733 people) than under its present 200 full-time employees (1999AD).

I suspect that even larger chunks of the United Kingdom are in the free possession of a covert faceless few who are shielded from public view by the veil of anonymity.

Abject Poverty

There was a television documentary on the homeless of London. One of the unfortunate people featured was a young woman with a law degree. In the recession of the early 1990's she had lost her job. She could not keep up with payments on her flat. She was evicted. She had nowhere to go. She had no address. She therefore could not claim benefits. She lived on the streets of London. She became very depressed. She took solace in drink which she stole. She froze to death one winter's night in a well known London square. She was only 36 years old. [The case of this young woman is extremely poignant to me since, but for a providential contact abroad, this fate could so easily have befallen [my own daughter](#).]

This hapless young woman was a precious human life just like the Queen. Her height was most probably within the human norm of 175 ±25 cm, just like the Queen's. In good health, her weight was probably also within the human norm of 80 ±20 kg, just like the Queen's. Her body required 100 ±25 watts of power to run it, just like the Queen's. She had a 200 billion neurone brain in her cranium, just like the Queen. It contained an educated and active mind, just like the Queen's. She had hopes, desires, fears, just like the Queen.

Yet the laws of this land did, by negligent omission, dispassionately sentence this unfortunate young woman to a humiliating undeserved and untimely death, while to the Queen it bestows a level of abundance, which in the circumstances, I can only describe as obscene. Can one human life-form really be deserving of so much more than another? Why should one have 1,867 times her fair share of our planet while most have none at all?

Growing Disparity

Though this comparison of wealth and poverty may seem extreme, the gap between rich and poor is increasing at an accelerating rate in almost every part of the world. In the towns and on the streets of Britain, this disparity is becoming more and more open. One neighbour lives in luxury and takes holidays in Florida: the other lives in poverty and can barely afford to eat.

What has produced this uncaring disparity? What is the underlying socio-economic mechanism that sucks wealth out of the pockets of the poor into the coffers of the rich? Was it specifically designed and intentionally fabricated by the capitalist economic establishment? Or is it a Frankenstein monster that has taken control of its destiny?

There is a limit to the work any one human being can do. In a capitalist free market, the amount of wealth a given amount of work yields depends on prevailing circumstances. You get rich not so much by how hard you work, but more by happening to be in the right place at the right time - a phenomenon known as economic resonance. But this alone is not responsible for the visible extreme of economic disparity. Responsibility, in significant measure, must also be placed upon our glaringly crude system of inheritance.

Under our incongruous system of inheritance, a wealthy individual is free to decree how his wealth should be divided when he dies. He can divide it among his relatives. He can donate it to a church, a political party, a social cause, a medical charity, or even a cat's home. How he divides it does not have to be fair. It does not have to make any moral or economic sense. This may not seem so wrong when wealth is thought of as money. But when thought of as land, the wrongness is more obvious. There is only a certain amount of it. And if it is passed on unfairly or stupidly, it can fall progressively under the control of ever fewer increasingly inept individuals. Disparity is thereby compounded.

There are approaching six thousand million human life-forms on this planet. They all have the same basic life-supporting needs. I am certain that an interstellar visitor would be bewildered by the way most are deprived of even an adequate supply of the basics, while others bask in a scale of opulence hundreds of millions of times beyond what is necessary to sustain a rich and fulfilling human life.

Mutual Misunderstanding

Undoubtedly the greatest paradox our interstellar visitor would behold would be that, though each of these 6 billion human life-forms is equipped with the same powerful 200-billion neurone brain, they still can't communicate. They are still totally unable to understand each other.

When an infamous royal personage called Marie Antoinette was told of the plight of her starving and oppressed peasants, her ignorant retort is reputed to have been: "The peasants have no bread? Then let them eat cake!" She was able to view her peasants' problem only from within the context of her own opulent royal life-style. To her, the answer was obvious. The peasants should not be so slothful. They should do what she would do: chastise the baker for not having baked the bread, and in the meantime have a servant bring some cake from the pantry instead.

The truth was, of course, that the peasants had no food at all. A peasant family did not have the economic infrastructure of the royal household. It had nothing in reserve. Their means of turning work into the needs of life had been bled to death. But she had no experience of the peasants' economic processes. Her own royal life-style contained no counterpart. Her everyday environment was different. Her function and status within her society was different. This meant that the way she lived and thought was different.

So when whoever it was brought her this desperate message, the frame of reference her mind used to extract meaning from the words had nothing in common with the frame of reference used to encode meaning into them. The words she received were the words that were sent: but the message she received was totally different from the message that was sent. From where the peasants stood, Marie Antoinette must have seemed an evil dispassionate monster. However, I think that in all probability she was simply ignorant. She really didn't know. She genuinely could not understand. She was semantically blind to the peasants' situation. So I perceive it to be with the rich and royal of today.

One may laugh at the obviously ridiculous nature of what she said. But beware. The spirit of Marie Antoinette is alive and well in all of us. I have heard the voice of Marie Antoinette in the modern middle class housewife who criticises the slothfulness of the unemployed, the poor and the homeless. She is quick to pontificate about what they 'ought' to do - if not outspokenly, then certainly in thought and attitude, and more hurtfully by her political vote. Like Marie Antoinette, she is interpreting the thoughts and actions of those she criticises from the subconsciously assumed context of her own middle-class circumstances.

Her opinionated view is anything but the result of investigation or even a sincere and thorough thought experiment. She does not seek open-mindedly to understand why the unemployed, the poor and the homeless deface her precious society. Her quest is to justify her own opulence and appease her conscience for voting for a régime that perpetuates her opulence at the expense of caring for those in need of a little help. In formulating her argument, she did not think too deeply or incisively. Her argument is nevertheless well-rehearsed, concise, hard-hitting and, above all, able instantly to be fired from the hip to meet any adversarial challenge.

My sister-in-law once asked rhetorically: "Why should we [taxpayers] hand out money to the unemployed? After all, they don't earn it!" She did not think further to consider what 'we' *should* do with them. Should we let them starve to death? Should we subject them to mandatory euthanasia? No, that would be morally unacceptable even to the middle class mind. Should we put them to work for their [Benefits](#)? In that case, why not for a wage? But these shallow scenarios are never thought through.

The middle class housewife is just an example. As I said, the spirit of Marie Antoinette is still alive and well in all of us. However, there is an abode in which her spirit is at its most dangerous and frightening. And that is in the mind of a politician.

Politicians are of the same ilk whatever their party colour. They are all either lawyers or administrators. Their perceptual frames of reference are constrained to a mould determined by their uncommon experience and professional life-styles. Their way of thinking is eternally bounded by the limits of their narrow intellectual disciplines, which have no root or basis in the laws that govern nature and the universe. Their mode of argument is confrontational, adversarial, emotive, offensive, unruly. Their decisions are made by tired minds in the early hours of the morning after all-night sittings. Yet their decisions have binding effect on people whose lives and means they know not, and who are powerless to answer or resist them.

I have written to my Member of Parliament often since I ended up on [welfare](#). In one letter, I complained about the severe travel restrictions our miserly level of welfare places on someone seeking work. His implacable reply showed clearly that government ministers have no practical conception of the realities of such a restriction. It is hardly surprising when viewed from a context in which you can travel at any time from one end of the country to the other simply by flashing a credit card. I see the ghost of Marie Antoinette standing before the despatch box on the Tory front bench. "What?" she exclaims, "The unemployed cannot afford bus fares? Then let them [take the train!](#)"

These are the people who enact the laws that govern the socio-economic system that creates the disparity of wealth that breeds the dichotomy of thought that erects the barrier to communication that separates our minds from theirs. If they hear our cry but cannot understand it; if they see our plight but cannot perceive it, then how can our lives improve? The malevolent ghost of Marie Antoinette kinks and distorts the only conduit through which the [democratic process](#) can take place. With democracy thus stifled, what is left? We cannot escape the inevitable. Social equity and justice has never been won other than by armed revolution.

Conclusion

This rich bounteous planet is the inherited estate of the entire human family. It is passed on without encumbrance to each new generation of mankind. But we find it not divided equally among its inheritors. Equity plays no part in the way it is apportioned. From the opulent splendour of the Landed Estates to the wretched destitution of Cardboard City we see disparity of wealth on a scale that defies comprehension.

The human inhabitants of Planet Earth have long been divided by language. This Tower of Babel has forever frustrated mutual understanding. If you speak a different language, you do not just converse in a different syntax. You do not simply emit different sounds. You think different thoughts. You perceive the world differently. One nation can never fully understand another. Each is destined always to misinterpret its neighbour's intent. Thus divided, the nations of Planet Earth are already conquered and under subjugation.

Disparity of wealth divides a nation from within. It stifles social interaction. It frustrates cultural development. It attenuates empathy. It amplifies animosity. It turns class against class, neighbour against neighbour. It primes the detonator of bloody revolution. Minds exchange syntax but no longer communicate. A nation so divided is already conquered.

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