

BOOK REVIEW

NATURE, CULTURE, and INEQUALITY

Author: Thomas Piketty
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OVERVIEW

In spite of the UN's SDG goal 10 'Reduce inequality within and among countries', inequality continues to be a perennial problem in the world. According to the 2025 World Social Report, if progress continues to be slow, "leaving no one behind will remain a distant goal by 2030". Thus, this book, 'Nature, Culture and Inequality' is an apt and timely publication, highlighting the trends in global inequality and advocating the urgent need to bring about changes in social structure to promote equality.

The author, Thomas Piketty renowned for his work on equality, is the co-director of the World Inequality Lab. A Professor at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and Paris School of Economics (PSE), makes his mark in public economics by having several book publications to his credit, namely 'A Brief History of Equality' and his bestselling book 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century'. In his book 'Nature, Culture and Inequality', he provides an interesting explanation of the inequalitarian system - the diversity of the socioeconomic inequality in the world, by tracing the relationships between nature, culture and inequality. Piketty confirms that inequality is not due to differences in personal talents, natural resources, or ingrained preferences for equality, but arises from nature in terms of climate related disasters and destruction of nature and culture in terms of the social and political structures present in respective countries. He strongly advocates the need for a new system – "participatory, democratic and ecological socialism", (p.5) to deal with the issue of inequality.

REVIEW

In Nature, Culture, and Inequality, Piketty explores the historical trajectory of the social inequality in various regions, namely Western Europe, North America, Latin America and South Africa, and trends towards greater social equality. The author's superior work is attributed to the rich historical analysis of data over three centuries, taken from the World Inequality Database, and insightful examples from various regions, providing an interesting account of different aspects of inequality in various sections of the book. The author employs practical approaches to measure inequality and presents analysis of income distribution, distribution of wealth and gender inequality in terms of women's share of total income, and

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contrasts between the top 10% and bottom 50% of the population. These, together with incidents of union pressure, economic crises, racial discrimination, and colonization, the author presents a realistic illustration of diversity in the egalitarian system across regions. This interesting and thought provoking approach by the author enables the reader to clearly visualize the criticality and urgency of the issue. Another important point made by the author is that social inequality is not a permanent issue but rather a changeable one, thus, bringing hope to the readers that socio economic inequality can be managed by establishing a sound system.

The author devotes a large section of the book to such economies as Sweden, Western Europe and the United States. He provides an interesting account of how Sweden from an extremely inegalitarian country became an egalitarian country due to its transformation from a system of voting rights based on property ownership where the richest had enormous power, through social and political change towards a social democratic system in the twentieth century. Another important trend towards equality in Europe evidenced by the named examples of France, Germany and the United Kingdom, is the rise of the welfare state and the increase in public spending on education, though inequality in the distribution of educational funds persists. In the United States, a shift towards progressive taxation in the twentieth century and advancement in education, brought about a reduction in income inequality. These cases confirm the author's stance that 'political structures and historical developments have led to progress towards greater equality. Thus, no country is egalitarian or inegalitarian by nature.

In the final section of the book, Piketty highlights two important aspects. Firstly, the need to bring certain sectors such as education, healthcare, and transportation out of the marketplace and away from being profit driven. He believes that this is important to bring about better distribution of power, more equal participation in decision making and a reduction in income and wealth disparity throughout the world. Second, he stresses the imperativeness in reducing inequality posed by climate and environmental issues, mainly global warming and carbon emissions. The author proposes the establishment of a system that would require countries to make reductions in the proportion of their carbon emissions. The author ends the book by calling upon social science researchers - historians, sociologists and political scientists to play an important part in the movement towards social equality. The author compellingly conveys the case for a more egalitarian society and effectively instigates the readers interest to engage in this noble pursuit.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the book *Nature, Culture and Inequality* inspires readers to actively engage and participate in the creation of a more equitable society. The core message of providing equal opportunities for all and ensuring an equitable distribution of income and wealth, by creating a democratized society and reducing environmental disparities, has been clearly communicated in simple language. The author manages to hold the readers' interest and attention by providing sufficient country cases and comprehensive data to illustrate the severity of the issue. Though the author has overemphasized certain countries, such as Sweden, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and has not discussed countries where income inequality is on the rise, the book successfully conveys to readers, the mistakes, challenges and trends towards equality faced by the some of today's more egalitarian countries. Overall, this book is highly recommended for anyone who is looking for clearer perspectives on egalitarianism.

REFERENCE

SDG Knowledge Hub. (2025, May 13). *World Social Report 2025 builds case for new policy consensus*. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/world-social-report-2025-builds-case-for-new-policy-consensus/>