

What are the limitations to theories that attempt to explain global inequality and how can we move towards a more accurate explanation?

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Part I: Introduction

Global inequality is a pressing issue. A select few hold the majority of the world's wealth, and millions of people live on less than one dollar a day. We naturally must wonder, why? Why are many regions of the world mired in poverty even while other parts of the world prosper economically?

There are many theories about what has caused some countries to be rich and others to be poor; yet, each theory makes ideological assumptions about humanity. In order to truly identify the cause of inequality, we must be willing to investigate those biases, accept that the fact that we are interpreting ever-growing history, and accept that a true answer lies in a combination of such theories.

Part II: Historical Context

The inequality gap between different countries in the world is well known: "Very roughly and briefly: the difference in income per head between the richest industrial nation, say Switzerland, and the poorest nonindustrial country, Mozambique, is about 400 to 1" (Landes 3). As can be observed in Appendix 1, the majority of wealth in the world is concentrated in Europe, North America, and Australia, while the majority of poverty is in Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Latin America.

As far as just how unequal the world is, "estimates suggest that poorest half of the global population possesses barely 1% of global wealth, while the richest 10% of adults own 86% of all wealth, with the richest 1% of the planet having nearly half of the world's wealth" (Ezra). Despite efforts of aid organizations, the UN Millennium Development Goals, and poverty

reduction agencies, this problem persists, with seventy percent of people living in countries in whose income inequality has increased over the last 30 years (Oxfam).

Theories of how to solve the problem of global poverty and inequality hinge on initiatives involving economics, good policy and government, micro financing, sustainable development, and civil rights reform. However, the question of how this inequality came about has no definitive answer. Since large-scale, cross-cultural and cross-continental interactions began hundreds of years ago, there have been theories as to why some places turn out wealthier than others. These explanations of unequal development revolve themes of geography, governmental institutions, history, culture, and (in the past) genetics. While these theories may each have merits, each has undertones of ideological beliefs about humanity that are influencing the research necessary to understand the plight of inequality.

Part III: Summary and Analysis of Past Research

Geography

Jeffery Sachs, a professor at Columbia University and a prominent economic theorist on combating modern poverty, sees geography as one of the factors impoverishing nations and accountable for the success of others: “Many of the world’s poorest countries are severely hindered because they are landlocked, situated in high mountain ranges, or lack navigable rivers, long coast lines, or good natural harbors” (57). This example illustrates some of the simple ways that geography can isolate or make crop production or transportation more difficult and therefore hinder economic development in certain environments.

While Sachs work mainly focuses on theorizing economic solutions to poverty, the geographic factors that he points out are backed by many, including biologist and anthropologist,

Jared Diamond. (See his theory graphically in Appendix 2, Figure 1). Diamond sees geography and the way it has influenced development as the determining factor of global history and inequality.

In his book and PBS series, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Diamond explains how 11,000 years ago geography began to give extreme advantages to the people who began to farm, over of be hunter-gatherers: “[Hunter-gatherers] were always going to be at a chronic disadvantage” (*Guns, Germs and Steel*). This was because cultures that transitioned to agriculture were able to reap the rewards of large mammal domestication, increased caloric intake, food surplus, and a sedentary lifestyle. However, not all peoples have made that transition at same time, and Diamond argues that this disparity was due to how apt the geography was to support productive agriculture as well as how the practices of farming were able to spread across the landmass.

Diamond thinks that geography can influence how easily tangibles (like plants, animals and technology) are shared and even how ideas and knowledge spread. The ability for people, skills, ideas, plants and animals to spread across a land mass is known as diffusion. Diamond claims that a larger continent size makes diffusion easier by providing more space for ideas to spread to. He also argues that the orientation of continents plays a role in allowing for diffusion. He thinks that diffusion is most easily facilitated on an east-west axis, roughly following latitude. When diffusion travels on an east-west plane the ideas and tangibles can follow similar climate, flora and fauna. However, when people, agricultural techniques, or plants and animals travel north-south they must pass through and adapt to different climate zones, making the diffusion more difficult (*Guns, Germs and Steel*). Many of Diamond's arguments and examples stem off of this claim that north-south continental orientation results in more isolation and less diffusion, while geography that enables east-west diffusion is at an advantage. (See Appendix 2, Figure 2

for axis of major continents). Diamond thinks that all of these geographic factors lined up to allow Eurasia to advance faster than other areas.

When Europe began to move out to and conquer and colonize other parts of the world, they had been able to develop what Diamond calls, the ‘tools of conquest’, guns, germs, and steel. He says that these tools were again a product of geographical advantages. Since the beginnings of farming and domestication, food surpluses allowed Eurasians to have larger populations and do work in non-agrarian areas. This included keeping armies and innovating with guns and steel, which gave immense combative advantages in conquest. Guns obviously gave Europeans a military advantage in clashes with lesser-armed populations in Africa and the Americas. European are an example of latitudinal diffusion, as gunpowder was initially from China and diffused across the continent to Europe. Steel, unlike guns “is almost uniquely European technology” (Guns, Germs and Steel). Steel was created to assure security during the fierce nature of early European development: “In the tenth century, Europe was just coming out of a long torment of invasion, plunder, and rapine, by enemies from all sides.” (Landes 31). That need for safety from these invaders, resulted in the innovation and weaponization of steel, which was used as armor and in swords and was perfected just in time to use for the conquest of the New World (Landes).

As per Diamond, germs were also a major, yet invisible, weapon for the Europeans during conquest. As Europeans began to sweep across a world unfamiliar with them, they brought germs that were unfamiliar and had deadly effects, even before violence began. The Eurasian germs that were deadly to large populations of Native Americans were largely a result of living with, and becoming resistant to, the germs derived from domesticated animals. Native

Americans simply did not have that resistance because they did not have large domesticated mammals, another effect of geography.

Germs played a different role in the development of the tropics. According to David Landes, one of the reasons that poverty is so prevalent in tropical regions (See Appendix 1) is because that climate cultivates diseases more prevalently than other areas: “Tropical countries, do not know frost; average temperature in the coldest month runs above 18°C. As a result, they are a hive of biological activity, much of it destructive to human beings. Insects swarm as the temperature rises, parasites within them breed and mature more rapidly” (7). The effects of germs in the form of tropical diseases still affect economic growth in Africa and other tropical regions: “It’s been estimated by eminent economists that the 1% negative growth each year in Africa over the last half a century can be attributed entirely to malaria” (Guns, Germs and Steel).

The theory that geography determined global history and modern inequality with its factors of agriculture, diffusion, technological and conquest, seems succinct and sensible enough, however, its conclusions are a little more difficult to swallow. What this theory says about humanity has many implications: that all people are equal, that geographic luck has determined current economic status (which is fixed because geography is unchangeable), and that human nature is to develop technology given the resources.

As he says himself, Jared Diamond (and by extension the geography theory) assumes equal ability among all peoples:

I am convinced that people around the world are fundamentally similar. Wherever you go, you can find people who are smart, resourceful and dynamic. No society has a monopoly on those traits. Ultimately what’s far more important is the hand

that people have been dealt, the raw materials they've had at their disposal. (Guns, Germs and Steel)

This was the very fact that Diamond hoped to prove through his theory, that people around the world are all equally capable, and which groups succeed or fail is purely a result of geography. Not every critic (including those much more educated than I), would agree that a non-racist thesis was the result of Diamond's work. It is an honorable quest, to disprove racist theories that presume wealth for certain groups of people based off of the amount of technologic and economic advancement that they achieve. The belief that some groups are fundamentally smarter, more resourceful or stronger allows stronger groups to exploit or oppress the others. The equality belief that is behind the geography theory was indeed a right one because it assumes that one group of people is not better than another, leaving an un-racist platform.

Another conclusion that results from the argument that geography is the single important factor in determining wealth is that success or failure is up to luck. Europeans became powerful solely because they had the good fortune of being born on land that was geographically 'better', and this allowed their societies to advance faster. If it is up to luck of geography who succeeds and who does not, there is has been no reward for hard work, innovation or intelligence. Modern reform efforts and dreams of free will would be useless because geography has predetermined the outcomes for our civilizations. To claim (as Diamond does) that geography was irreversibly the platform responsible for advancement, has determined our global economic landscape and left our influence useless is not accurate. Luck of geography may have played a role in initially determining which locations got a 'head-start'. However, geography could not have caused such a large head start that un-privileged locations were unable to catch up in the 11,000 since the initial differences between sedentary and nomadic cultures began to arise.

Additionally, geography is no longer the major factor in determining wealth, as digital technologies, high-speed travel and international relations have broken down many of the diffusion barriers. Globalization has made technologies (especially guns and steel) available to all. Food production is no longer a central focus of most people. Modern science allows us to grow crops in nearly any environment, and cure many deadly diseases. Through policy and global economic we are able to encourage growth in places that geographically would have been doomed; thus proving that we can impact our own destiny. Geography was not the singular and irreversible prophesy to determining which areas got lucky and which did not.

The geographic explanation of history and inequality also assumes that humans automatically strive for development. Diamond assumes that given the geographic benefits of resources, time, or diffused ideas, humans will naturally develop and innovate technologies which allow for more ease and larger populations. He did not take into account that perhaps humans choose not to create such technologies, even if they live in places than can support that development. His hypothesis assumes that humans, by nature, will follow a path to more material goods, ease, and reproduction. While there are many modern arguments for living simply, with fewer people and less technology for spiritual, cultural, rational, or environmental reasons, there are also ancient groups of people that contradict Diamond's assumption. One such group is discussed here by James Blaut, a critic of Diamond's:

Diamond simply assumes that [Aboriginal Australians] would have [developed technology and agriculture] had it not been for environmental barriers. Of course, parts of Australia are moist enough to support farming. But these regions, says Diamond, did not become agricultural because of their isolation from farming peoples outside of Australia. The logic here is murky... Diamond finds barriers

to diffusion that just did not exist. Probably, Australians *chose* not to adopt agriculture because they managed quite well without it... (Blaut)

I, like Blaut, have a very hard time accepting the founding assumption of the geography theory that given the resources humans will follow a certain pattern and path to development of agricultural, new technologies and leadership. Humans do seek to progress in an almost animalistic way, but as Aristotle argues, we are the masters of reason, and reason can often lead us away from development, as could have been the case for the Aboriginal Australians. I must disagree with Diamond that humans naturally move towards development, with the deciding reason being a desire to remain hopeful for humanity to see reason, and to turn away from development and technological progress, as it becomes more dangerous to our planet.

While Diamond's theory may seem like a clean-cut explanation of the past 13,000 years, the assumptions about luck, development, and equality, are more complex and at times his thesis seems irrelevant to the modern world. Thankfully, there are other theories that seek to fill some of these holes and, of course, offer their own.

Institutions

The book, *Why Nations Fail* offers a different cause for global inequality:

It's all about institutions. It's really about human-made systems, rules, regulations - formal or informal - that create different incentives, it's the formal rules and laws, but it's also the norms and common practices of a society... The key difference between rich countries and poor ones is the degree to which a country has institutions that keep a small elite from grabbing all the wealth. (Robinson and Adamson)

The authors' main argument is that the economic state of a country is mainly dependent on the politics, incentives, and stability that have been created by leadership.

The prime examples of how institutions affect how economically prosperous nations are occur in areas that have few other factors that are different. They have identical geography, cultures, and peoples, but very different living conditions. One example that Robinson and Acemoglu cite in their book is the city of Nogales on the Arizona-Mexico border. On both sides of the border, the city is surrounded by Sonoran desert, is inhabited by Chicano-descended peoples, and until 1853, they had the same history. Now, Nogales, Arizona, U.S.A. has three times the average income of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, more public amenities and rule of law, and less crime. These differences have arisen around this political line in the last 120 years and were "shaped by different institutions" (9). The institutions that we create to uphold our countries, the political structures, corruption checks, liberties, justice systems, stable currencies, markets, and roads, allow citizens to prosper and keep the economy running.

Acemoglu and Robinson place importance not only on the protections of political institutions and rule of law that are crucial to determining economies prosperity, but also on the incentives that those institutions provide to citizens. As they say "economic institutions shape economic incentives; incentives to become educated, to save and invest, to innovate and adopt new technologies, and so on" (42). These economic incentives are set up through the political institutions and it is these incentives that give individuals the power to improve themselves and their societies (42).

One of the main influences that Acemoglu and Robinson see to creating incentives and successful institutions is whether or not the governing institutions are inclusive or extractive (73). Here they explain the difference and definitions of the two:

“To be inclusive, economic institutions must feature secure private property, an unbiased system of law, and a provision of public services that provides a level playing field in which people can exchange and contract; it must also permit the entry of new businesses and allow people to choose their careers... We call such that have opposite properties to those that we call inclusive, extractive economic institutions- extractive because such institutions are designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset of society to benefit a different subset.” (74-76)

Continuing, they think that “extractive economic institutions naturally accompany extractive political institutions” (81). Naomi Klien, makes a similar argument in the *Shock Doctrine*, arguing that political regimes that resort to brutality are doing so in order uphold economic policies that marginalize and impoverish much of the population (159). *Why Nations Fails*, argues that these extractive political and economic regimes not only marginalize people but also are bad for the country as a whole and will eventually cause them to fail, even if currently is economic growth taking place (Levine).

Their theory leaves us with several conclusions and questions about their biases and ideological assumptions. First, throughout their book Robinson and Acemoglu promote a certain types of political systems as the key to economic and governmental prosperity. Next, Robinson and Acemoglu encourage us to be optimistic for several reasons believe that extractive, marginalizing regimes (while they may be profitable for a certain amount of time) will

eventually fail and give way to inclusive, more humane and economically stable governments. Their theory promotes the idea that inequality is a changeable and immediate problem that we can fix with improved leadership. Lastly, their theory embraces the chaotic and random nature of history and its events in determining the present and the future, this is an additional bias, and also a very interesting perspective to work into a theory that is attempting to explain how the state of the world came to be (Levine).

As mentioned previously, Robinson and Acemoglu think that each country's political institutions are what affect the way individuals and the country as a whole pursues and distributes wealth. It also became evident the type of inclusive political institutions that they support, democratic, capitalistic, protected property and social rights, and John Rawl's inspired programming to "level the playing field". Their book is therefore biased to this account, seeking out the places that have implemented this type of system and promoting them as inclusive institutions that had economic success because of that. While the factors that play into creating these inclusive institutions, the authors place incredible weight on this system as being the one that encourages the most economic prosperity. They often cite the United States as exemplifying these programs, and while this may be true, it seems that they have a bias towards the "inclusive" systems that they live, work and were raised in.

By emphasizing that extractive regimes that seek to push wealth from one subset population to another, will fail, the authors optimistically suggest, to paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., that arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice. They believe that the extractive, marginalizing, oppressive regimes around the world "impede economic growth" and will eventually fail (83). This is optimistic, that bad, extractive leaders and bad policy, regardless of their current profit margin, will eventually implode and not be prosperous, but is it true? They

think so and back that up with many examples and much evidence, but I must wonder to what extent was this thesis built off of that wishful thinking bias.

That bias is not the only way in which *Why Nations Fails* offers a breath of optimism. The institution explanation differs from the geography argument, because, instead of blaming poverty on an uncontrollable factor, it is controllable and more immediate. Inequality becomes something determined by recent human events and structures, and is equally changeable and manageable, by human institutions. This message is hopeful, insisting that “poverty is not the inevitable result of bad geography, bad culture, bad history. It's the result of us: of the ways that people choose to organize their societies. And that means we can change things” (Adamson and Robinson). This theory implies that we as individuals, community members and particularly societies’ leaders and policies have control over our lives, our wealth, and our futures, if only we can ensure, set up and fight for strong and inclusive institutions to protect us. Because of the immediate and accessible nature of this argument, humans are have the power and opportunity to affect our institutions and country’s economics.

An additional bias in the work is the way it expresses the existential belief “there is a real sense in which history (and the future) is random. Many small unpredictable incidents or small differences in initial circumstances can lead to... success or failure” (Levine). According to Levine bias makes the book part of a modern economic and evolutionary theory. I appreciate this bias, as it allows for unexplainable events, and leaves room for other factors to play into determining history. Diamond’s theory exemplifies the opposite of this acceptance of randomness. In his theory every turn of history can be accounted for by some (however grasping) influence of geography that is built on an assumed human nature. Never the less, allowing for

randomness in a book that attempts to explain how the wealth became distributed and draws upon history to explain the present and predict the future is a curious choice of bias, yet I think moves towards accurate explanation of history and human actions.

History

Institutional advantages are not exclusive to modern politics; historical institutions also affect what areas have prospered economically and which are impoverished. The institutions set up by native civilizations, colonists, and conquistadors can continue to impact prosperity today. *Why Nations Fail*, provides this example of how different areas of modern Peru were impacted by the Spanish colonial institution- the *mita*. The *mita* rationed food, provided infrastructure and leadership, set up mines and roads, and organized native peoples into communities, so as to best exploit their labor. Those institutions continue to affect different areas today in the provinces of Claca and Acomayo:

Both are high in the mountains, grow the same crops, are inhabited by Quechua-speaking descendants of the Incas. Yet Acomayo is much poorer with its inhabitants consuming about one-third less than those in Claca. Acomayo is not connected to other areas of Peru with roads and its crops are grown for subsistence, Claca has surfaced roads and sell their crops on the market for money. The major historical difference is that Acomayo was in the catchment of the Potosi *mita*. Claca was not. (Robinson and Acemoglu 18)

The effects of colonization, violent pasts, date of independence, the manner in which countries gained independence, and from what type of ruler seem to affect economic outcomes today. For example,

After independence, the United States experienced five years of instability during the Civil War between 1860 and 1865, Mexico experienced almost non-stop instability for the first 50 years after independence in 1821... As the United States began to experience the wealth that came with the industrial revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century, Mexico got poorer. (Robinson and Acemoglu 31)

These differences lead to the innovation gap which “is certainly one of the most fundamental reasons why the richest and the poorest countries have diverged, as well as why the poorest of the poor have not been able to get a foothold on growth” (Sachs 62). In addition to post-independence factors, Mexico and the United States had very different stories of independence and occupation. As you can see through these examples, history, its institutions, and the way it played out lead to differences in wealth today.

The argument that history lead to what places are poor and which are not, is equally as uncontrollable as geography. The past is past, and if history was the determining factor of inequality, then we can do little to change its influences on poverty, wealth, and inequality. In addition, to this disheartening conclusion, the history argument gives power to contempt between nations. If history was the factor that determined modern success, then impoverished countries and marginalized groups of people can blame past adversaries, rulers, and leaders for the perpetual state of their nation. We can see how that scenario would lead to contempt for those

that now benevolent, used to rule unjustly. Using history to justify present inequality, leads to the idea that the situation is fixed and can be blamed on someone or sometime else who should be accountable for solving the problems. This theory is unproductive because it allows impoverished countries to push their poverty and frustration off on others instead of working to deal with it whether that be though national or international operations.

Culture

In addition to geography, history, and institutions, some turn to culture and particularly religion to explain why some populations are wealthier than others.

One of the prominent theories on culture as a leading cause to economic success came from Max Weber, who wrote *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in 1905, which supported the idea that Protestant values of “hard work and prudence were consistent with what he called Capitalism” (North). Weber claimed that those values gave the Dutch and English an economic upper hand. However, Max Weber blatantly failed to explain the economic success (at the same time) in “China where there are no Christian ties, and France and Italy that were predominantly Catholic” (North).

This religion as a determinate to wealth has been revamped for the 21st century. A Gallup poll from 2010, shows that countries that are more religious are poorer, and those that are wealthy have smaller percentages of the population that is religious. This has spurred the theory that religion is bad for economics (Crabtree). One explanation is that those who are more religious are hoping for some grand afterlife, accept a plan for the present, and give into the idea that they are meant to be destitute, and therefore do not work to get out of poverty. The facts

from this poll are also used to further argue that widespread protestant values are what allow the United States to be wealthy and have higher levels of religiosity, while most other wealthy nations report significantly lower religious beliefs (“Why Some Countries are Poor and Others are Rich”). While the poll is touted by proponents of atheism or nationalistic Protestants, it is questionable which factor is the cause and which the effect. As opposed to a high amount of religion causing poverty, those strong religious beliefs could be caused by the poverty, especially when religion is seen as a coping mechanism to the poverty. It seems unrealistic that personal beliefs adopted in the last few thousand years, could be attributed as a major cause of poverty. The top ten countries with highest religiosity all happen to have per capita income of below \$5,000 per year and all ten gained their independence in the last 60 years, showing a correlation with extended colonial influence that could have also lead to increased religious views. Six of the ten least religious countries have an income of over 25,000 per capita, and were the countries doing the colonizing. Crabtree explains that the four countries that go against that trend were subject to religious persecution under the former SSR and Vietnam.

Not only can these cultural/religious arguments be questioned with data and additional correlations, but, they claim that one belief system is better than the other, not only in terms of whatever spiritual holding you can gain, but also that one type of belief will make you wealthier. This is an corrupt way to view religion and culture, as a means to more wealth, not livelihood, or enlightenment. Additionally this culture and religion argument is dangerous because it assumes superiority to those cultures, norms, and beliefs that have ‘resulted’ in economic prosperity, regardless of morality or truth. This argument assumes that there is something wrong fundamentally wrong or inferior to non-wealthy cultures or religions. It places an overt and

judgmental significance on the importance of wealth for every culture and person, while deemphasizing other important aspects like happiness, meaning, family, morals and kindness.

That being said, there are certain aspects of culture that may hold weight in the way that culture influences economics. For example, “cultural or religious norms in the society may block the role of women, leaving half the population without economic potential, or political rights, and education, thereby undermining half the population in contribution to overall development” (Sachs 60). According to the authors of *Why Nations Fail* the importance of culture as a determinant of wealth is only in how it relates to institutions: “Social norms, which are related to culture can sometimes support institutional differences, other aspects of culture, such as the extent to which people trust each-other or are able to cooperate are important, but are also an outcome of institutions” (Robinson and Acemoglu 57). Other cultural arguments that emphasize religion and cultural superiority are discriminatory, incorrect, and cannot be proven.

Genetics

One last explanation of how some got rich and others remained poor, assumes genetic differences between peoples. Jared Diamond says,

Probably the commonest explanation involves implicitly or explicitly assuming biological differences among people... as European explorers became aware of the wide differences among the world’s peoples in technology and political organization, they assumed that those differences arose from differences in innate ability. With the rise of Darwinian theory, explanations were recast in terms of natural selection of evolutionary descent... the displacement of less

technologically-advanced peoples exemplified survival of the fittest. (Diamond 18)

There are many factual and moral objections to this theory. First, it again assumes that all people automatically want to develop new technologies given the chance. Second, this theory presumes that all peoples were given equal natural resources with which to create their new technologies, which is not true. This theory also assumes that technological advancement and wealth are a direct result of genetic intellectual superiority. This correlation is untrue: “Sound evidence for the existence of human differences in intelligence that parallel human differences in technology is lacking” (Diamond 19).

Lastly, this theory promotes the idea that some peoples are inherently better and more valuable than others, which is the logic that encourages violent oppression of groups of people. This is a racist and violence-encouraging ideal that should not be inaccurately reflected in our explanations of history. It was these arguments that caused and led to the rationalization and acceptance of the murderous conquest and destruction of countless Native societies. It was these genetic arguments that justify repressive acts, such as slavery and the American Eugenics movement, among others. The inaccurate and immoral conclusions that the genetics arguments draw can be dismissed as a viable explanation to the inequality in the world.

Eurocentrism

One critique of modern theories of inequality that deserves being noted in order to better understand any biases is Eurocentrism. According to Ellen Wood, the author of *The Origin of Capitalism*, Eurocentrism is “the implicit view that societies and cultures of European origin constitute the "natural" norm for assessing what goes on in the rest of the world” (Woods).

Eurocentric explanations of history assume superiority to Europeans. They are a result of the current reality that European dominated areas (Europe, North America, Australia) are wealthier and more politically stable than other areas.

James Blaut wrote a book called *Eight Eurocentric Historians* and sees this old idea manifest into the modern explanations of history, even as we look for scientific facts:

Eurocentric historians today support their views with "hard" evidence drawn from agronomy, climatology, demographics, etc. rather than openly racist claims. Few today would argue that the Europeans were genetically endowed with gifts for invention or rationality, or chosen by god. Rather, fortuitous historical circumstances moved them to the head of the class. ("James M. Blaut: Eight Eurocentric Historians")

On Blaut's list of Eurocentric historians, are several of the authors examined in this paper: Max Weber, Jared Diamond and David Landes, the author of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*.

While Blaut died before he could publish his self-proclaimed non-Eurocentric historical explanations to global inequality, his allegations of Eurocentrism should be investigated in all of the theories reviewed. It goes without saying that the only people ever to use superiority arguments to skew their actions and telling of history were not Europeans; but, indeed all peoples that have ever encountered peoples different than themselves. Perhaps doing an investigation of Eurocentric storytelling, and not of other biased storytelling, is Eurocentric in its self. However, as this paper is focusing on the stories that tell us why inequality arose and left many Europeans wealthy, it is the bias that shall be detailed.

Eurocentrism hinders our ability to relay history truthfully. Eurocentrism stems out of the current reality of European wealth. However, if and when this changes, then the basis within Eurocentric arguments will not only be every visible, but the ‘scientific’ arguments will be moot. In 200 or 400 years, if China or South America is the leading economic world power, the same geographic, historic, institution, economic, or cultural arguments will be reworked and the histories retold, with the same factors working for a different bias, thereby contributing to a different reality.

Eurocentric bias in explanations of the world and inequality is dangerous. It marginalizes other populations and reasons that Europeans are better and more deserved, be that because of geography, politics or a racist agenda. Eurocentrism skews storytelling to cast Europeans in a formidably better light and justify their wrongs as a path to current success. The prevalence of Eurocentrism is understandable because European-dominated areas hold most of the world’s wealth. Therefore, explanations of how wealth became distributed to be seeking to explain European success using stories that mold to that conclusion.

Genetics obviously used racist Eurocentrism as a mean to justify European conquest and wealth. Cultural explanations such as those crafted by Max Weber are also Eurocentric as they attempt to explain how Europeans accumulated wealth because of cultural superiority. Blaut notes that, “with his emphasis on European rationality, Weber is a forerunner [of Eurocentrism]. Although he enjoys enormous prestige as a founder of modern sociology, there is a racist streak in some of his work...” much of it belittling to the Chinese (James M. Blaut: Eight Eurocentric Historians). Analyzing Eurocentrism in Diamond’s seemingly anti-racist theory about geography, bias in more difficult to identify.

It is through Diamond's theory of latitudinal diffusion where Blaut points out that Diamond biasedly interpreted geography to tell a story that leaves Europeans on top. However he was forced to grasp, stretch and convolute his single-factor theory in order to get the desired pro-European effect. He uses the same geography and its ability to facilitate diffusion to reach the different conclusions, but it seems very forced and is all in the name of creating a theory that leave Europe on top. Diamond stresses the fact that a lack of barriers to diffusion was what gave Europeans the ability to share ideas and crops and gave them an advantage after the fall of the Fertile Crescent society. However, in later sections of his book, Diamond claims that in the 10th and 11th centuries, Europe had far too many mountains and peninsulas to be able to create a unified, diffusible state and politically it was that un-diffusible geography that gave it the advantage over Asian powers. As Blaut says:

[Diamond] introduces a tortuous theory to the effect that, not only is too little diffusion a hindrance to development, but so, too, is too much diffusion. Like the second of the Three Bears, Europe had just the right balance between too little differentiation and too much, and this, mysteriously, led to more intense diffusion of innovations in Europe than in China. (Blaut)

Blaut sums this up to biased Eurocentrism which struggles to follow its own logic in an attempt to give Europeans geographic benefit over Asians (which, as with Weber seems to be where Eurocentrism appears most often).

Diamond has only a weak defense to these accusations of Eurocentrism. Claiming that his thesis cannot be Eurocentric, because it focuses more on the telling the history and "interactions between different non-European peoples" (18). David Landes, another prominent

historian, does not even attempt to defend his work from critiques of blatant Eurocentrism, saying he prefers what he sees to be truth to political correctness (xxi).

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's theory about institutions seems free from the trap of Eurocentrism, until David Levine points out,

By contrast to their view on China, Acemoglu and Robinson implicitly argue that the West will continue to grow because our institutions are inclusive. This is a bit ironic, since at the moment, we are in crisis and the Chinese are not. Will the West continue to grow forever? (Levine)

While this may be an hypothesis that is yet to be proven true or false it places Daron and James, squarely into the Eurocentric trend of overly placing faith into the European-dominated West. This may be an evidence-based hypothesis, but it still falls into Eurocentrism, classically failing to explain the superiority of Europe over China. Many of the Eurocentric biases investigated here, including Weber and Diamond, Eurocentrism seems to be most evident when theories attempt to explain why and how Europe was advantaged over China.

This is not the only way in which Robinson and Acemoglu profess a Eurocentric bias, they also do so in their likening and definition of inclusive political institutions. As mentioned previously, they seem to define those inclusive political institutions that shall reap economic and governmental success as something remarkably similar to the system used in most European dominated countries. This too shows a Eurocentric bias that places confidence in an particularly European way of doing things and classifying it as the normal and right way, as opposed to alternatives in other areas of the world particularly Asia.

Part V: Conclusions

Conclusively determining an ultimate factor that has caused human history to ensue as it has, distributing wealth in the way it has, is quite a challenge. Seemingly all of the major theories contain ideological assumptions and historical biases. To approach a realistic theory, we must always keep those ideological assumptions about questionable human tendencies for development, superiority (or lack thereof), blame, and the ability to control the 'fate' that each theory suggests. When thinking about creating an explanation of inequality or global history, academics must remember the philosophical implications that biases in their arguments can hold, in order to be aware of and work to justify any ideological assumptions. They must be willing to investigate, question, or defend the ideological biases that they will infuse into their work.

Some biases may be beneficial to have, while other would be best merely investigated and if included in the theories require more explanations than merely being philosophic underpinnings. For example, I think that it is important that explanations of the state of the world rely on the bias and the assumption that all peoples are equal, that one group is not better than the other. When one group is promoted as better than another it leads to racism and oppression, therefore equality is an important factor and an adequate assumption to include in this type of meaningful work. An additional assumption that I think is legitimate to include in this type of work is that we humans can control our futures, our will and create our circumstances. This is the type of bias the Acemoglu and Robinson create when they argue that it is human born institutions that most affect our prosperity. This bias is empowering for change and allows inequality to be a pressing and present issue instead of something determined solely by the past.

These theories about inequality unequivocally rely on explanations of the past and therefore are interpretations of history as based on present knowledge and the bias of current

realities. We cannot conduct scientific research on events that took place thousands or hundreds of years ago; yet more and more, we turn to scientific and historic explanations to answer our questions. As eloquently stated by George Barraclough, “the history we read, though accepted as fact, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments” (Carr 13). As we seek to understand inequality through the lenses of the past we are forced to interpret. Our answers to this question increasingly depend on interpretation of incomplete, age-old data and how it connects to a changing modern landscape.

If we hope to have a more complete answer, we must realize that our interpretations, no matter how seemingly scientific, will reflect current ideology and events- however, the present is not stagnant. While we struggle to interpret the world, we must realize that the realities we hope to explain are changing. As mentioned previously, if and when the global landscape of wealth changes, all these explanations of inequality will have to be reworked, likely with the same factors, to fit a new reality. The most complete explanation to what has caused the course of history to lead to today’s events and inequality will withstand time and a changing present.

One way that we can attempt to create a more realistic explanation of inequality is to combine the major theories, and see how they tie into each other chronologically, as factors. In Eurasia, geography led to more beneficial farming practices; in turn this created food surpluses. These food surpluses were able to support non-subsistence members of the community and leaders, which allowed for more advanced institutions that supported those peoples. Guns, germs and steel were partly created as a result of geography but also were a result of chosen innovation that was affected by institutions such as cross-cultural trade and political circumstances. The conquest that they allowed created new institutions with colonial expansion.

Some of this conquest set up institutions that, along with colonial histories, influenced how different locations developed. From there, modern institutions, and to a lesser extent cultural norms as they relate to economics have played a role, dictating institutions that affect citizens' ability to prosper. Geography continues to influence wealth directly through allocation of (dwindling) natural resources, while political institutions play the major role in wealth distribution and livelihoods. While inequality cannot be explained so simply, I merely hope to illustrate the way these theories are not mutually exclusive, and can lead into each other. All of the factors have a role to play.

In order to find the most suitable answer, and continue researching how inequality has come about in the world, researchers must first identify biases and implications, as they will play out in their theories. They must realize that history is changing, therefore, the truest explanation must be valid not only for today's Eurocentric reality, but will be able to adapt with time. They must draw on each other's work to build more cohesive theories that do not grapple to define every instance with the same factors. If and when those criteria are met, the likes of historians, economists, political scientists, geographers, scientists, and anthropologists will be able to come together with a truer theory of how the world got to where it is today and what has made some places rich and others poor. The answer to that question will help us not only to evaluate our biases and unlock the past and present, but will also inform how we can move forward to more equality and understanding of humanity.

Appendix 1

Map 1: Extreme and Moderate Poverty by Nation

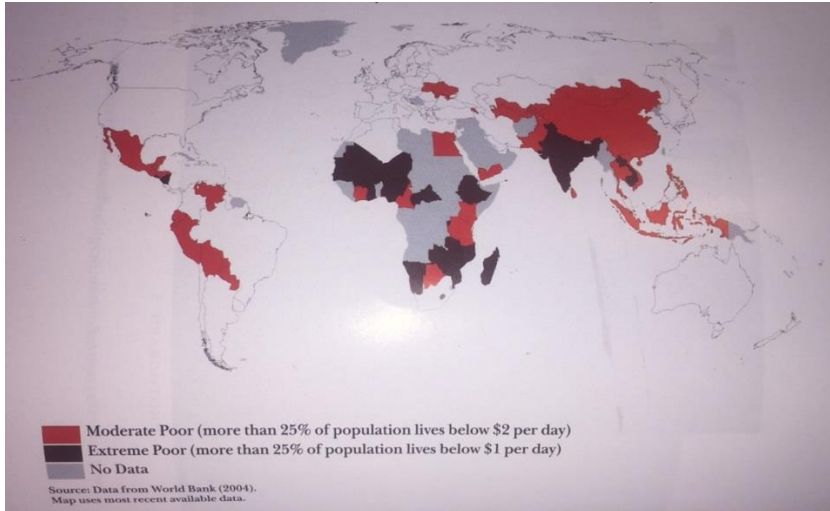


Image from *The End of Poverty*.

Map 2: Map of Per Capita Income

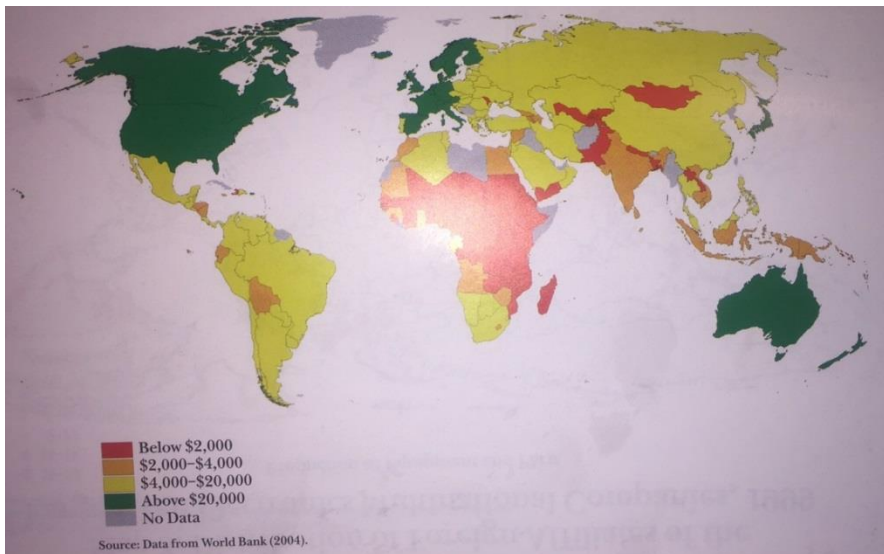


Image from *The End of Poverty*

Appendix 2

Figure 1: Jared Diamond's Explanation of World Wide Inequality Due to Geography.

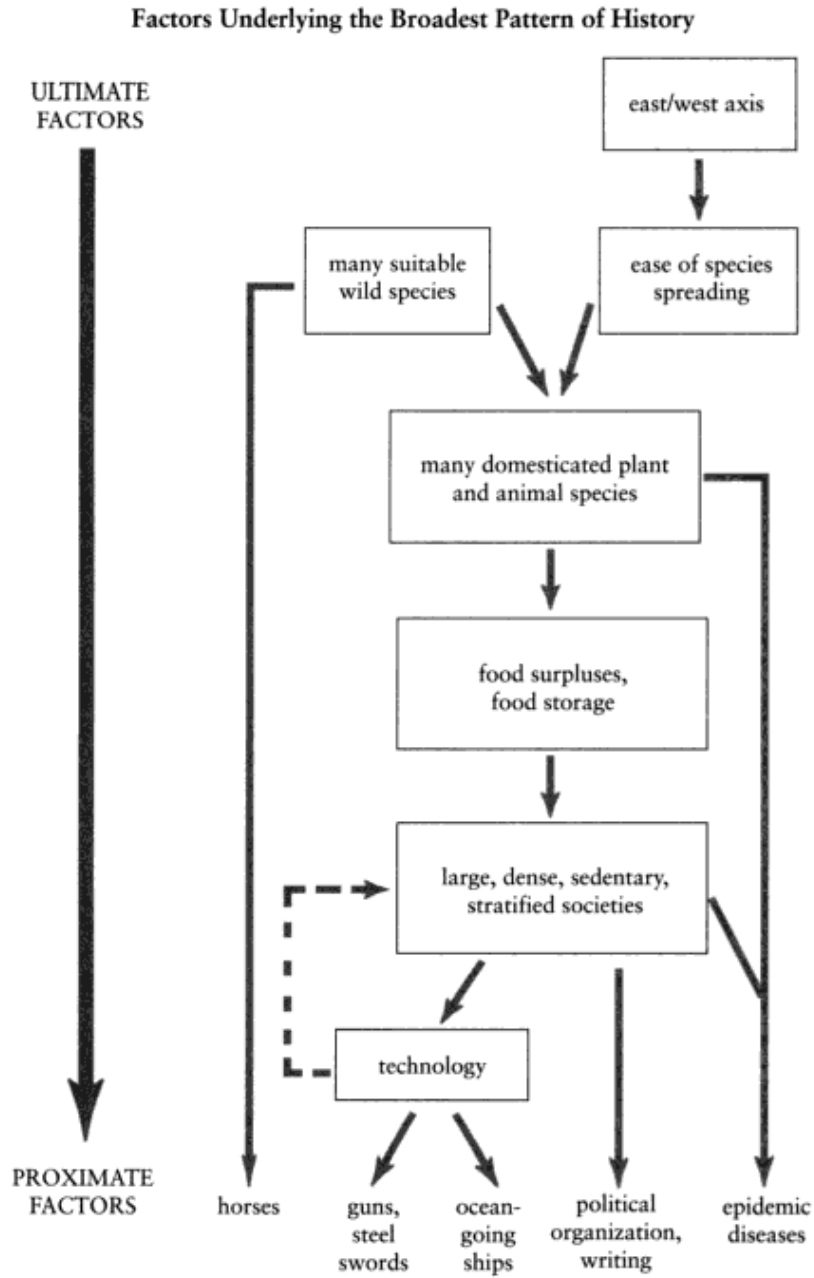


Image from *Guns, Germs and Steel*

Figure 2: Axis of Major Continents

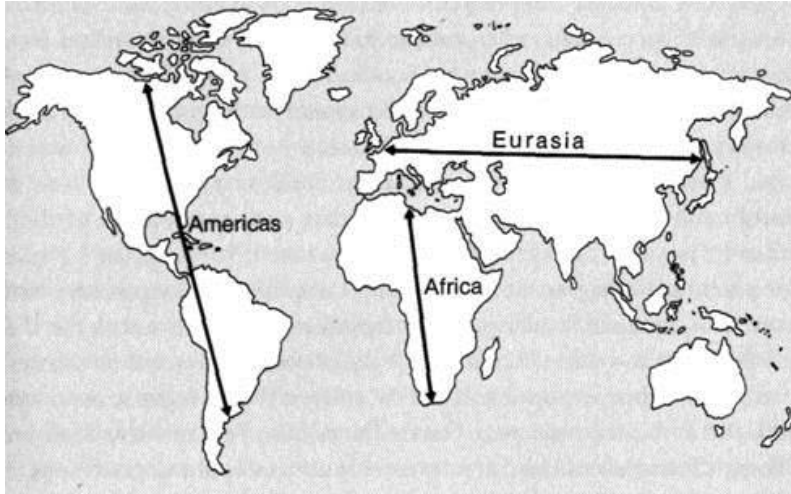


Image from *Guns, Germs and Steel*

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