Chapter 6: Hierarchy’s Apologists: 5,000 years of clever and contradictory arguments that inequality is natural and inevitable

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Chapter 5: Hierarchy’s Apologists:

5,000 years of clever and contradictory arguments that inequality is natural and inevitable

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“All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful: the Lord God made them all. …
The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate,
He made them, high or lowly, and ordered their estate.”
-Anglican hymn by Cecil F. Alexander

When Captain Cook happened upon the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, he found the largest-scale political units that existed in Polynesia at that time. The Hawaiian Islands were made up of either large-scale chiefdoms or small-scale states, depending on where you’re willing to draw the line between chiefdom and state. The island chain’s polities were led by paramount chiefs who owned the land and appointed local chiefs and land managers who in turn allocated land to peasants in exchange for corvée labor. Paramount chiefs held life-and-death power over their subjects and lived off their subject’s labor. The paramount chief held a position at the top of a single hierarchy of political and economic power as well as religious and social position.

Like dominant ideologies in Captain Cook’s home of Great Britain and in all or most societies, the dominant ideology in Hawaii justified the level and form of inequality that happened to exist there, portraying that form of inequality as natural and inevitable. Also, like most such ideologies, it strikes outsiders as less than fully convincing—if not bizarre and implausible. The paramount chief was the highest born,
most direct descendant of the mythical, semi-divine founder of the Hawaiian people, and only the chiefs were endowed with the founder’s divine essence. Those with successively lower places in the hierarchy were successively lower-ranking, less-direct descendants, who were, therefore, less worthy of wealth, power, and social position than the higher descendants. They were better suited to taking orders, working more, and receiving less.³

All of this might have seemed like a silly superstition or a terrible injustice to Captain Cook and his men, who saw their own society as civilized, reasonable, and enlightened. Of course, their society also had enormous economic, political, and social inequality. Britain had a king,⁴ a hereditary House of Lords, and a House of “Commons” that represented only the small minority of male property owners in a small part of Britain’s empire. This structure held power over an enormous empire, in which only a tiny portion of the population had any significant share of political or economic power, and in which most people were unenfranchised subjects and many were slaves. The ideological beliefs justifying the British Empire seemed quite reasonable and natural to the British, but they must have seemed equally bizarre to Hawaiians.

Of course, neither the typical Briton nor the typical Hawaiian simply accepted inequality on the strength of its ideological justification. Both societies enforced their hierarchies by the threat of strong legal and social sanctions. In that way—as this chapter shows—both societies reflect a pattern that has existed throughout the world from prehistoric chiefdoms to modern industrial states. Although every unequal or hierarchical society has strong human-created rules and human-enforced powers that ensure the existence of that inequality, popular beliefs do not credit those rules as the source of inequality. Dominant ideologies almost always assert the rules enforcing hierarchical relations merely reflect inequality that naturally and inevitably exists, or in a variant that has become common in modern western parlance, the inequality that must necessarily exist without an enormous sacrifice in freedom. Even reformist ideologies
tend to assert—whether out of tactical or sincere motives—that the existing inequalities are only minor corruptions of the true and natural inequality that must necessarily exist.

This chapter reviews the history of the belief that inequality is natural or inevitable from prehistory to modern times. It shows how this belief continues to play an important role in many contemporary political, social, and economic theories. This chapter is not a history of justifications of inequality per se; only of the role played in such theories by the claims that inequality is natural, inevitable, or inevitably in conflict with freedom. Not all justifications of inequality rely on such claims. Justifications of inequality can be framed as pure normative arguments that do not necessarily involve empirically testable premises. They can also be based on claims that an unequal society is more efficient or productive or that it has some other desirable characteristic that more equal societies lack. Such claims are empirically testable, but not with the type of information this book examines. In the discussion below, two central claims (along with several supporting claims) stand out as testable with research into the anthropology and archaeology of small-scale societies: (1) inequality is necessary, natural, or inevitable and (2) equality and freedom are necessarily, naturally, or inevitably in conflict.

The chapter sets up the next, which tests the claims of natural or inevitable inequality against anthropological evidence. Claim 1 can be examined with the question: has anthropology observed societies with substantial equality of the relevant kind. Claim 2 can be examined with the question: if anthropology has observed egalitarian societies, has equality come at the expense of freedom (as defined by those making the claim of a tradeoff). Several other claims involved in explaining the supposed inevitability of inequality in different societies will also be testable.

Before we begin our survey, we need to address two questions: what do we mean by inequality or hierarchy? And, what do we mean by necessary, natural, or inevitable inequality? Human beings are different and unequal in many ways: in height, weight, lactating ability, strength, intelligence, skill, effort, smell, and so on. If this is
what one means by inequality, it is obvious—and uninteresting—that all humans and all societies are unequal in many ways. But differing in these ways does not imply that people necessarily differ in political power (called it “power”), economic power (for lack of a better word call it “wealth”), and social position. Economic, political, and social inequalities are outcomes of human interactions. They are affected by the way humans interact and the rules and conventions humans create. We are primarily interested in political, economic, and social stratification, which we define as structured or systemic inequalities that are seldom unchangeable but do have a notion of being permanent or long-lasting. The question is whether sustained inequalities in power, wealth, and/or social position are necessary, natural, or inevitable. Do innate human differences or the dynamics of feasible types of social interaction necessarily lead to substantial, systemic inequalities of power, wealth, or social position?

The words necessary, natural, and inevitable can be used interchangeably in some contexts. But natural and inevitable are not always interchangeable. Natural inequality can be used to refer to all inequality that is the necessary result of human social interaction even if individual humans do not have great innate differences between them. Under this meaning natural and inevitable are interchangeable. But natural inequality can also be used to refer only to inequality that stems from innate differences in human beings. Under this meaning natural and inevitable inequality are not interchangeable. It is tempting to define “natural inequality” as the belief that inequality of power, wealth, and social position stem from innate differences between people and “inevitable inequality” as the belief that inequalities of power, wealth, and social position are the necessary result of human interaction whether or not they stem from natural differences among people.

But there are three reasons not to impose these definitions on a historical study. First, there is a great deal of overlap between them. Second, few people in the history surveyed below use these terms in these ways. Third, most people who believe inequality is natural also believe that it is inevitable and vice versa. One could believe
that although inequality is the natural expression of human differences, it would be possible to prohibit human differences to find their natural expression in inequalities of power, wealth, and/or social position. However, few people who seek to justify inequality make this argument. People who believe inequality is inevitable whether or not it stems from natural differences between people, also tend to believe it does in fact stem from natural differences. As the survey below shows, even those whose justification of inequality does not require on claims of innate difference tend to make claims that inequalities in power, wealth, or social position do reflect innate differences.

Even when the two terms are not used interchangeably, they are usually used together, and so imposing a distinction on the whole of the history is not necessary. We are most concerned with the claim that inequality necessarily exists and less concerned with where it stems from. But we will examine claims about the causes of inequality because they are informative about the truth or falsity of its inevitability. To be clear about this issue, we use the phrase “natural or inevitable” and distinguish between them in the few cases where a distinction is necessary.

These terms are further complicated because the term “inevitable” can be used universally or conditionally. “A” is inevitable; it necessarily exists in all circumstances. Or “A” is inevitable given B; it necessarily exists when B exists. By saying that inequality is inevitable one can mean that it exists in all circumstances, but one might instead mean that it exists in all societies that have some characteristic—such as freedom or peacefulness.

Although the claim of natural or inevitable inequality is only a small part of the discussion of inequality, the history of the use of this claim is enormous. Claims about natural or inevitable inequality have been made since prehistory and have been used to justify enforced social hierarchies as different as monarchy, slavery, serfdom, chiefdom, the caste system, class-based capitalism, and so on. Almost every society with substantial inequality has some popular ideology claiming that the inequality of that society is not only justified but natural or inevitable and not ultimately attributable
to the coercive legal structure that supports inequality. Therefore, this chapter is free to be selective and will focus mainly (but not entirely) on western societies.

1. Some things to look for in the discussion to come

Once one notices how pervasive the claims of natural and inevitable inequality are, it becomes apparent how much the explanations for inequality in different societies conflict with each other. One group’s ideology says inequality on the basis of A is inevitable because of reason B while another asserts basis C for reason D, and so on. Differences in human characteristics are converted very differently into inequalities of power, wealth, and social position in different societies. Societies differ both in what characteristics they pick out for favor and in how much they reward favored characteristics. This is true even within western industrial market economies. Some societies with similar economic, cultural, and political systems have very different levels of economic inequality and mobility. Societies with very different cultures differ even more in the type, form, degree, and justification of inequality.

Inequalities of wealth and power are not simply expressions of differences in ability, ambition, or any other characteristic. As this chapter shows, how human differences are converted into social, economic, and political inequalities depends heavily on socially contrived rules and customs that vary substantially over time and place. Knowledge that these contrived rules sound implausible to outsiders suggests caution to anyone who might think their society’s hierarchy at all approximates a true natural inequality. The conflict between so many explanations for inevitable inequality probably raises doubts about all of them. These conflicting explanations cannot all be true. Perhaps none of them are true. If so, either inequality is not inevitable or inequality has some underlying cause that has a strong tendency to be misidentified.

Nevertheless, it sometimes seems like everyone everywhere thinks that their society has it just about right. Although imperfect, the inequalities in their society are
very close to being the natural political, economic, and social expression of innate human differences.

If the stated explanations for the inevitability of inequality are all doubtful, why are they so widely accepted? The functionalist theory of ideologies (that ideologies tend to survive if they justify useful institutions) doesn’t itself explain the mechanism by which those ideologies become accepted. Two explanations for such a mechanism are immediately apparent. First, powerful people toward the top of the hierarchy are strongly invested in it. To protect their position, they have reason to promote—perhaps disingenuously—the belief that the existing inequality is natural and inevitable and to silence challenges to that belief.

Second, people have a tendency to believe things favorable to themselves. People at the top of the hierarchy are, therefore, likely to believe—genuinely—that the hierarchy is justified and perhaps inevitable. Of course, from this same perspective, people lower in the hierarchy apparently have as much reason to disbelieve natural inequality as those at the top have to believe it. However, those at the top are likely to be more powerful, more respected, better educated, more influential, and so on. Therefore, they are in a much better position to make their belief dominant—if not completely accepted—than those at the bottom.

Although these explanations are plausible, they don’t explain why these “system-justifying ideologies” (as defined by John Jost and his coauthors) are popular not only with the elites, but also with the masses who would seem to have a powerful reason to disbelieve them. People at the bottom of the scale might want more changes to the system than others, but the revolutionary who rejects wholesale the dominant ideology of her society (the Harriet Tubman or the Frederick Douglas) is truly rare even in greatly unequal societies.

Melvin Lerner proposes an answer, suggesting that all people—not just those who most obviously benefit from current social organization—have strong reasons to believe in a just world. In order to function, people need to believe that their actions
will produce something like the results they want. In order to go on with their daily lives, people need to believe that the world, or their small corner of it, “is essentially a just world, where, given the qualifiers, ‘by and large’ and ‘in the long run,’ people can and do get what they deserve.” To paraphrase the movie, “The Truman Show,” we all accept the reality of the world around us.

Hopefully, the rest of this chapter puts the modern philosophical discussion in historical context. If claims of natural inequality turn out to be true, theorists might have managed to find part of the truth—the conflicts between explanations and the reasons to expect bias notwithstanding. If not, our modern philosophers and scientists might simply be part of a long line of thinkers who succumb to these biases and came up with clever and conflicting rationalizations to justify inequality by seeing cultural constructs of their society as products of the nature of the universe.

2. The oldest claims of natural inequality

Although sometimes Westerners perceive any and all indigenous peoples as collective representatives of some state of nature, the Hawaiian chiefdoms discussed in the introduction were actually relatively large-scale societies of the sort that developed only in the late Stone Age. The hierarchical nature of those societies was unknown to people in smaller-scale (and likely much older) forms of social organization. As the following chapter discusses in much greater detail, most band and autonomous village societies (which predate chiefdoms by thousands or perhaps hundreds of thousands of years) seldom if ever hold beliefs that some people have any greater right to power, wealth, or social position than anyone else. To the extent that people in observed hunter-gatherer bands assert beliefs in natural inequality, those tend to be based on seniority, ethnocentrism, and gender.

Seniority doesn’t seem to be a very significant form of inequality and it is certainly very far from the kinds of hierarchies people attempt to justify with claims of natural or inevitable inequality. Although younger adults in band societies might defer
to the influence of their elders, they are rarely if ever under their power; they do not noticeably differ from their elders in wealth; and they fully expect to become elders in their turn.

Ethnocentric beliefs have been ubiquitous around the world and throughout history (including in observed small-scale, nonstate societies), and they’re often used to justify conflict and inequality, but they work as a justification of inequality within a society only if that society has ethnic divisions. Band and autonomous village societies tend to have only one ethnic group in a given polity, and so ethnocentrism isn’t useful as a justification for inequality within the group. Ethnocentrism plays a part in intra-group inequality only in much larger-scale societies, probably beginning with the appearance of chiefdoms, some of which held slaves with a different ethnic identity than the slaveholder.

That leaves gender as the basis for the oldest belief in natural inequality within society. There is a great deal of variability in the manifestation of gender inequality within small-scale societies, usually stemming from differing economic roles in terms of sex-based division of labor. Although men tend to do more of the hunting and women more of the gathering and childcare, in the smallest-scale societies, this common division of labor usually does not translate into significant differences in power. Most observed hunter-gatherer band societies afford women substantial power, autonomy, and general equality with men. Typically, the smaller the scale and the more closely the sexes work together, the less sexist their beliefs tend to be. Some bands have greater gender equality than most state societies have had until perhaps the twentieth century. For example, when the seventeenth century Jesuit missionary, Paul Le Jeune, encountered the Montagnais-Naskapi of the St. Lawrence valley, he wrote with revulsion about the political power and relative equality of women. Similarly, many forager societies often taken as modal manifestations of egalitarian social structure, such as the !Kung, also exhibit general equality in terms of gender status.
In contrast, small-scale societies with greater degrees of sedentism and differentiation in terms of sex-based division of labor often have high levels of gender inequality. The Baruya, for example, are an acephalous (leaderless), horticultural autonomous-village society in Papua New Guinea who believe that sperm is a life force that not only produces children but also has many other benefits such as bringing on puberty in both genders and enabling women to produce milk for their offspring. Baruya men use this belief to justify significant male privilege. Because Baruya men produce this life force and women receive it, many Baruyas claim men are essentially givers and women are takers. Although, the factual claims in Baruya explanation of gender inequality probably seem laughably false and extreme to most people, most people in contemporary state societies, those societies probably have gender inequalities that are absent in Baruya society.

Compared to most autonomous village societies, the Baruya (and some nearby related groups) maybe be extreme in their sexism, but to the extent that band and autonomous village societies have beliefs in natural inequality, beliefs in inequality of the sexes are most common. With our usual qualifiers about the extent to which modern hunter-gatherer bands and autonomous villages are similar to prehistoric societies of similar scale, we can say that sexism is the oldest ism.

3. Prehistoric justifications for stratification

Prehistoric societies are, by definition, nonliterate, and so we have no record what societies in the deep past said about inequality, but historically known chiefdoms, all around the world (in North and South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Islands), often had ideologies similar to that of Hawaiian chiefdoms in which a chief or a group of chiefs claimed natural superiority based on descent from a mythical, often semi-divine or divine, founder. Hawaiians shared some version of this ideology with all other Polynesian groups, presenting an
interesting case that provides some evidence for the antiquity of that ideology. Polynesians are the most geographically dispersed indigenous people who can be identified as a related group by both linguistic and DNA evidence. On first contact with the West, Polynesians occupied islands in a triangular area nearly 5,000 miles per side defined roughly by the three points of New Zealand, Hawaii, and Easter Island.

All or most Polynesian peoples had a similar ideology behind their chiefs or headmen. There are three reasons to surmise that they brought this ideology with them when they dispersed out of Melanesia. First, some version of this hereditary ranking system existed in virtually every Polynesian society no matter how large or small. It would be very unlikely for such diverse societies to invent the same institution separately over and over again.

Second, most Polynesian societies have very similar names for people of high-ranking birth. Separated people, even if they initially speak the same or similar languages often pick different words for new ideas. For example, consider how different the North American word “cell” (phone) is from the British word “mobile.” If the differing Polynesian groups had separately invented the ideology supporting their separately invented chiefdoms after they separated from each other, it is very unlikely that they would have all chosen similar words to describe it.

Third, not all Polynesian societies were technically chiefdoms. Some had significantly smaller-scale and less integrated political systems with alternate bases for political control. The chosen form seems to have depended on what was appropriate for the available resources and the population density of their islands. And for the most part Polynesian band and village societies chose institutions typical of observed small-scale societies throughout the world with one important exception: most or all Polynesian band and village societies recognized—at least nominally—some form of hereditary head man, even if the smaller-scale Polynesian societies granted him little or no power. And their word for head man was usually linguistically related to other Polynesian languages’ words for chief.
Together, all this evidence strongly supports the conclusion that Polynesians descended from a group of people who lived in chiefdoms and that those chiefs claimed superiority of birth for reasons similar to those claimed by Polynesian chiefs at the time of contact with literate societies. If so, the ideology of hierarchy by reason of naturally high birth is thousands of years old. Just how long ago Polynesians began to disburse out of Melanesia is a matter of contention among anthropologists. Genetic evidence suggests that dispersal began 3,000 or 4,000 years ago (1,000 or 2,000 BCE), if not earlier. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that it might not have gotten into full swing until 1,000-1,500 years ago. It seems safe to say that the chiefdom political system began along the Pacific fringes of Southeast Asia during the early-to-middle Holocene; that is, by 5-6,000 years ago at the latest. If dispersal began by 1,500 years ago, as the archaeological evidence suggests, we have traced the ideology back at least one-fourth of the way to the first appearance of chiefdoms in Southeast Asia. If dispersal began 4,000 years ago, as genetic evidence suggests, we have traced the ideology more than halfway back to that first appearance of chiefdoms in Southeast Asia, and about one-third of the way back to the first appearance of chiefdoms on Earth, in the Middle East, perhaps as early as 12,000 years ago (10,000 BCE).

Can we connect this ideology all the way back to the first chiefdoms? Although there is no particular reason to expect a strong break in ideology between the first appearance of chiefdoms in Southeast Asia and the dispersal of the Polynesians, no one can prove for certain whether there was or was not a change in ideology. Archaeologically, earlier chiefdoms show similar signs of inequality as later chiefdoms do. Our best guess is that the earliest chiefdoms had an ideology similar to those of pre-contact Polynesian Chiefdoms, but it remains unproven.

The evidence from very different Polynesian societies also attests to the power of this ideology. If it can survive when it is obviously not to the liking of those in low birth, and in societies with little or no inequality to justify, it must have some power in human minds—as much as it seems implausible to those who haven’t grown up with
it. A racist might think they’re smarter than pre-contact Polynesians, but for the soberer among us, this evidence might make us wonder how many of our beliefs about inequality or anything else seem plausible to us only because we’ve grown up with them.

4. Ideologies of archaic states

The preponderance of evidence suggests that all of the earliest states in Central and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and east Asia had extreme inequality and despotic rulers. They also had remarkably similar justifying ideologies—despite an obvious lack of direct contact between some of them. These ideologies were not so different from the Polynesian chiefs’ claim to a natural right to rule. Most rulers of archaic states claimed to be the highest born descendants of divine, semi-divine, or at least divinely favored founding ancestors. Some rulers (in times and places as far-flung as Egypt in 2000 BCE and South America in 1500 CE) actually claimed to be divine themselves.19 This idea was a popular export. Roman Emperors started claiming divine status only a few decades after their nominally republican predecessors claimed the right to kill anyone who would declare himself a monarch.

As in Polynesian chiefdoms, dominant ideologies in archaic states tended to claim that it was natural for a single person to be at the top of what people in industrial capitalist societies tend to think of as a combination of several very different hierarchies, combining political and economic power with social and religious status. In the way that modern people inherit economic power, ancient leaders inherited both economic and political power. This combination of powers is true not only for the monarch but also throughout the socio-economic and political hierarchy. In the earliest states, a high position in one of these was a high position in others; and no one seemed to think that economic and political inequality required separate justifications. The separation of economic and political power has been a gradual process over the course
of thousands of years, and it is only in the modern era when ideologies justifying economic power separately from political power became most prominent.

5. Classical philosophy

Virtually all classical philosophers—including Roman republicans and Greek democrats—assumed enormous inequalities between people. Greek democracy was for a small group of people—excluding all women and most men. Belief in the natural equality of male citizens was combined with the belief in their natural superiority to women, slaves, foreigners, and noncitizen residents called metics. The size of the citizen population in Athens was so small compared to noncitizens that by a strict modern standard, it might be called an oligarchy rather than a democracy. However, Athenian democracy was much broader than oligarchy usually connotes—say, the image of a ten-member Politburo or a few hundred wealthy landholders. The Athenian government, by contrast, included thousands of people, some very rich and some very poor. It, therefore had to deal with many of the issues that modern people associate with democracy.

Even the small sliver of equality embodied in Athenian democracy was too much for many prominent Athenian philosophers. Although Athenian philosophy was to some extent a product of the relative freedom of the city-state’s democracy, philosophy was not a driving force behind Athenian democracy. In fact, philosophy and democracy—the two great ancient Greek contributions to modern political thought—grew up largely in opposition to each other, and that anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian tradition still influences modern philosophy.

Plato’s dialogues are egalitarian in two important ways: they recognize some equality between the sexes (at least in their ability to become rulers or “Guardians”), and they call for a meritocracy rather than a strictly inherited aristocracy. These two nods to egalitarian ideas make the dialogues unusual for their time, but the apparent egalitarian sentiments of his work end there. Slaves and metics are necessary for the
polis’s functioning, but their welfare is of little concern to the polis’s government. Even the free citizens are assumed to be vastly unequal. The meritocratic system in Plato’s *Republic* is designed to bring out the natural inequality of people. It rejects democracy, political equality, and hereditary privilege in favor of a system of trials to sort people so that those who are naturally wiser and more virtuous can rule over other classes. Once tests determine individuals’ places in the hierarchy, their social, economic, and political positions are permanently fixed. Plato is so distrusting of the lower orders (even among the free citizens) that *the Republic* suggests leaders tell a “noble lie” to disguise their true intentions from the less worthy members of the public.\(^\text{24}\) In, “Crito,” the character Socrates uses a runaway slave as an example of a person of worthy of extreme moral disapproval.\(^\text{25}\)

Although somewhat friendlier to democracy than Plato’s dialogues, Aristotle’s work argued for the natural subordination of women, slaves, and non-Greeks. The climate was too hot in the Middle East and too cold in most of Europe to produce men capable of full citizenship like the Greeks. Even the elite democracy practiced among Athenian men was to him inherently unstable and a threat to the natural hierarchy that exists between the male citizens.\(^\text{26}\) He discussed a cycle by which too much democracy would lead to demagoguery, unachievable promises of economic equality, and eventually tyranny. Aristotle explicitly defended slavery. He would not have found it necessary to do so unless there were ancient Greeks who held the view that no man was a natural slave, but records of them are sketchy. It is hard to find any rigorous attack on slavery in surviving philosophical literature of the period.\(^\text{27}\)

Despite the outpouring of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, few prominent philosophers rejected natural hierarchy. Despite a Roman law tradition proclaiming the freedom and equality of all men, the elite class of the Roman Empire took their authority and the existence of slavery for granted and felt little need to make a serious defense of it.\(^\text{28}\) Other pre-Christian Greek and Roman philosophers from
Xenophon in the fourth century B.C.E. to Plotinus in the third century C.E. espoused ideas of natural inequality.  

6. Christianity and other Abrahamic religions in the medieval period

Religion has the potential to provide a counterpoint to secular assertions of natural hierarchy. In fact, some anthropologists speculate that one of the initial functions of religion in the Paleolithic era was to justify the replacement of dominance hierarchies observed in other primates with the reverse-dominance egalitarianism that has been observed in modern band societies (see the following chapter). According to Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus, the justification for equality in this life among many band and autonomous village societies is that the only true alphas or betas are in the heavens or the afterlife: the living are all equally gammas. If Flannery and Marcus are right, this egalitarian form of religion probably held sway for hundreds of thousands of years, but as social conditions changed, it proved sufficiently malleable to pave the way for the reemergence of inequalitarian ideology as people formed larger-scale societies. Early chiefs found it easy to alter it just enough to justify hierarchy, claiming that, for one reason or another, the ultimate alphas in heaven especially anointed the chiefs for leadership and privilege in this life.  

People have been putting religion to this use ever since.

The Abrahamic faiths that came to dominate Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East by the early medieval period also have potential to provide a counterpoint to claims of natural hierarchy, but they too have been used to justify it. All three of them greatly stress the equality of humanity before God, the fraternity of believers, and the responsibility of those who are better off to help those in need. Yet, almost any religious doctrine that involves belief in an almighty god has one element that is very friendly to hierarchy. That is, in the words of Roger Waters, “What God wants, God
gets.” An almighty god could shape Earth’s history to fit a plan. If hierarchy exists, God either made it happen or let it happen. Perhaps then, the unseen hand of God is the ultimate cause of inequality—rather than the willful decisions of the humans who make and enforce the rules that appear to be the proximate cause of inequality. If so, perhaps everyone should accept the inevitability and justice of existing inequalities. Perhaps God’s divine providence gave everyone a station in life in accordance with his divine plan, and their worth as an individual is to accept that station and fulfill that role.

An closely related idea, called “the Great Chain of Being,” offered another explanation of, and justification for, natural hierarchy. Although this theory has roots in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek and Roman philosophers and was not stressed in the sacred literature of any of the Abrahamic faiths (which all grant stress fraternity and charity), it was strongly embraced in medieval and early modern Christian, Jewish, and Islamic theology and even by some modern philosophers and writers such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Alexander Pope.

According to the theory, the universe must be perfect, and a perfect universe must be a plenitude. That is, it must be “full,” with every possible place occupied. And every place in that plenitude is defined hierarchically in order from the highest and closest to God to the lowest and farthest away. Every species of plant and animal, and every inanimate object occupied one of those places. At a smaller scale, every individual human held a particular place in this hierarchy as well, also ordered from high to low.31 Why a full universe should be thought more perfect than a selectively curated universe with the most interesting mix of things (whether high or low) is a mystery to the authors of this book, but the long chain of reasoning that ended at the Great Chain of Being seemed eminently reasonable to a good deal of ancient, medieval, and early modern thinkers.32 People at the time found the argument so convincing that theologians and philosophers made little effort to verify this theory either by reference to sacred texts or by some sort of empirical investigation.33
Secular leaders and church authorities were able to use ideas like divine providence and the Great Chain of Being to give doctrinal support to extreme hierarchy. Christian thinkers as early as St. Augustine, writing in the fifth century, argued that philosophy was addressed only to a small number of well-bred natural elites.\textsuperscript{34} Eight hundred years later, St. Thomas Aquinas, defended monarchy and slavery as institutions that might be necessary and are capable of being just. He embraced the Great Chain of being and argued that differences in people’s bodily natures ensured they were not equally disposed to knowledge, virtue, or wisdom.\textsuperscript{35} The tenth century Islamic philosopher, Al-Farabi, argued that people are naturally divided into classes, and that a supreme ruler must order the ranks of people into a hierarchy educating them and assigning them duties appropriate for the virtues of which they are capable.\textsuperscript{36} Maimonides, the twelfth century Jewish philosopher, did not rely on the Great Chain of Being, but he declared that divine law endowed kings with life-and-death power over the people.\textsuperscript{37}

This sort of thinking provided a surprisingly powerful and popular justification for inequality in Europe throughout the medieval period and into the modern age. The Great Chain of Being was taken to be scientific truth for at least 1500 years.\textsuperscript{38} The worth of every individual was in fulfilling the role assigned to him or her by God’s providence. Equality before God, even among the brotherhood of believers, was relegated to judgment day.\textsuperscript{39} Both Luther and Calvin endorsed the belief that God gave people stations and vocations appropriate to that station.\textsuperscript{40} Andrew Michael Ramsay, sometimes called “the Chevalier,” writing in 1722, asserted that men with “Superiority of their Mind, Wisdom, Virtue and Valour, are born fit to govern, whilst the vast Number of others … to obey,” because “the Order of Providence” and “the Order of Nature contrived it thus.” Following the lead of more than a millennium of philosophical and theological thought, he felt no need to provide any evidence that the people in power actually have this superiority.\textsuperscript{41}
7. Conservatism

Although the Great Chain of Being sounds very medieval, the justification of hierarchy with reference to some kind of divine province, divine law, or human nature was still common in the 1800s and continues today among some conservatives. The conservative movement took shape in the late 1700s in the defense of monarchy and of the political, social, economic privileges of the aristocracy against criticism from people who would be later known as writers of early liberalism or of the enlightenment. Conservatism relied heavily on the idea of natural aristocracy, and this naturalness often had a theological explanation. For example, Joseph de Maistre, writing in the late 1700s, declared, “simple good sense and the experience of centuries do not permit us to doubt [t]his privilege of aristocracy is really a natural law.”

At least since Edmund Burke, conservatives have also relied nonreligions theory that sounds like a secularized adaptation of divine providence. According to the theory, the world is too complex for any social reformer to understand. Prevailing social arrangements and even common prejudices reflect the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors through generations of trial and error. Therefore, existing institutions and their accompanying inequalities between the very rich and the very poor or the very powerful and the powerless must be preserved even if no one knows why they exist. The differences in hierarchies across cultures is not taken as evidence that this theory is correct but that different hierarchies are appropriate for different cultures and races. This theory replaces divine providence with the assumption that trial and error have already played themselves out, and few more trials are necessary, or at least they should only be attempted in the most incremental ways. Accumulated wisdom, rather than (or along with) divine providence assure that current arrangements are better for everyone and beyond our comprehension—better than any improvements a social reformer might devise. If a hereditary hierarchy exists in law or in custom, it must be for the benefit of everyone, even the people at the bottom of the hierarchy.
Herbert McCloskey, reporting on an extensive survey of conservative literature listed as one of the “essential elements of the conservative outlook” the belief that “Men are naturally unequal, and society requires ‘orders and classes’ for the good of all. All efforts at levelling are futile and lead to despair.” Many nineteenth Century British conservatives continued to believe in a divinely-ordained, unalterable distribution of authority and mental capacity, which corresponded closely to the actual existing hierarchy in Britain from the landed aristocracy on down.

American conservatives also credited God for ordaining inequality. John C. Calhoun argued that liberty must not “be bestowed on a people [such as African-Americans] too ignorant, degraded and vicious, to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it,” because “an all-wise Providence has reserved it.” Any effort to get rid of the hierarchy, “must ever prove abortive, and end in disappointment.” According to Calhoun, the belief that people are born free and equal, even in a “state of nature,” is “contrary to all observation. … It never did, nor can exist; as it is inconsistent with the preservation and perpetuation of the race.” Seemingly incongruously with his arguments against equal freedom, Calhoun also argued, “the necessary effect of leaving all free to exert themselves to better their condition, must be a corresponding inequality.”

Writing as late as 1986, Russell Kirk, in his famous history of conservatism, not only chronicles the long history of conservatives who rely on arguments from divine providence, but also praises it as the primary reason for conservatism, unfortunately no longer holding the place it deserves in the political debate. Kirk shows how Edmund Burke, by far the most influential early conservative, relied heavily on divine providence, arguing that each individual’s “station” in life was assigned by the “divine tactic” of a just God. Kirk quotes Burke as calling social and political equality “that monstrous fiction, which, by inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walk of laborious life, serves only to aggravate and embitter that real inequality, which it never can remove.” Kirk’s words in description
of Burke provide a testable claim, “In nature, obviously, men are unequal; unequal in mind, in body, in energies, in every material circumstance.” This quote flows gracefully from innate or personal differences to socially and legally constructed differences with no mention of the significance of that shift or even that it is a shift. Kirk doesn’t confine his inegalitarianism to material inequalities. Democratic levelling, he argues, “perverts the natural order of things;” substantial equality of power is simply not possible. He also finds arguments relying on natural inequality and divine providence in the works of John Adams, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Babington Macaulay, James Fenimore Cooper, W. H. Mallock, Paul Elmer More, and others.

8. Inequality on the egalitarian plateau

By the Renaissance, Christianity had dominated European philosophy for more than a thousand years. But gradually thereafter, more and more philosophers felt the need to begin with secular premises. Although Christian theology has still not disappeared from Western philosophy, and although a political ideology might not be so different from a religion, arguments relying on a divinely ordered hierarchy with some born as the better of others have increasingly become unpopular. Since the Enlightenment or earlier, more and more political philosophers came to feel obliged to begin on what is now called the “egalitarian plateau.” That is, inequalities should be justified in terms of some assumption of a fundamental moral equality all people or all citizens. Few, however, felt obliged to end with the conclusion that there should be a significant decrease in inequality—especially not in economic inequality and often not social and political inequality either.

The more prominent trend has been the system-justifying attempt to explain why respect for sometimes enormous inequality of outcome reflects respect for some deeper principle of moral equality on that egalitarian plateau. And many prominent philosophers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries argue that outcome inequality is not only more but natural and/or inevitable despite the moral
equality of all people. Current inequalities might be somewhat corrupted, but with the necessary reforms, whether large or small, the more natural and more humane hierarchy that will inevitably emerge might not be so different from the current hierarchy, if perhaps a little less extreme or with more deserving people in each place.

Hobbes’s social contract theory is not necessarily an argument for natural inequality, but it is an early example of a “functionalist” argument for political power, and it has often been used as an argument that people living together inherently need hierarchical political power. A functionalist explanation for inequality is a justification for it based on some good that inequality does for everyone without arguing that the people at the top of the hierarchy are inherently better than anyone. No one deserves to be the leader in Hobbes’s theory, but he argues that people cannot live together in peace without some political power to maintain order. He favors an absolute monarchy, although admits that sovereign power could conceivably be democratic. Therefore, he does not necessarily argue that inequality is an inevitable feature of human society, but his argument is often taken to mean that there must be at least some hierarchy; even under democracy some people have to have power over others to enforce the rules that keep the peace. Some contemporary philosophers make this claim of hierarchy explicit (see below).

If Hobbes’s argument is used as a functionalist argument for hierarchy, it is also an argument for inevitable inequality. Although it does not imply that inequality exists in all possible human conditions, it does say that inequality exists whenever humans live together in peace. Therefore, under this version of the functionalist argument, inequality inevitably exists in all human societies, because if humans cannot live together in peace, they cannot form a society (the basic reason behind Hobbes depiction of the state of nature as solitary).

The title of Robert Filmer’s book, Patriarcha: A Defense of the Natural Power of the Kings Against the Unnatural Liberty of the People, makes his position on natural inequality very clear. Filmer’s book is a religious-based justification of hierarchy, but
it begins on—or at least closer to—the egalitarian plateau. It does not require everyone to have a place specifically designated by God, and only one divine action is essential. God gave the Earth and the right to rule it to the first man, Adam, who passed it on to his sons, and after generations of division the worlds’ kings have inherited Adam’s power.54 One who accepts the historical premises of Filmer’s argument could accept this part of his argument while rejecting divine providence, rejecting the Great Chain of Being, and accepting some version of moral equality. A moral equal might happen to inherit the right to be king because the previous king just happened to bequeath the kingdom to them. Notice how similar Filmer’s justification of monarchy is to the Polynesian justification of the power of chiefs. In Filmer’s story, the leader’s power is inherited from a mythical founder, Adam, who—although not technically semi-divine—has a supernatural birth, a supernatural lifespan, divine favor, and authority granted directly by the deity.

After Locke refutes Filmer’s argument—in part for its historical implausibility—he outlines a theory of appropriation (discussed in much greater detail elsewhere in this book), which includes his own version of the Polynesian story of the mythical founding ancestor. Locke does not seek to justify the political inequality of kings but the economic and social inequality of landowners. His theory of property ownership was meant to justify unequal wealth, but it did not directly bestow political power to landowners. He used a modified version of the Hobbesian state-of-nature argument to justify government with a greater degree of political equality than Hobbes recommended. Although Locke, like many political theorists of his time and later, accept the prevailing institution of limiting voting rights to property owners, the idea that justifications for political and economic inequality were one and the same thing is absent in Locke, and political theories have increasingly treated them separately.

In Locke’s theory, landowners gain their authority by having a connection to a mythical “original appropriator.” Locke’s appropriator is the first person (presumed male) who generations ago, took a piece of unclaimed land and improved it with his
labor, thereby gaining the natural right to permanent, tradable, and heritable ownership of that land. Current property holders are to be taken as the heirs of the original appropriator of the particular plot of land they hold.

Had Locke known about the story popular in Hawaii at the time, he probably would have taken it to be “primitive,” and he would have had at least three reasons to believe his argument was more sophisticated than theirs.55 First, Locke’s original appropriator is neither semi-divine nor supernatural. All the appropriator can claim is the possession of the type of human virtues favored by God (such as hard work and foresight). Second, Locke does not require an implausible chain of father-to-son connections between current property holders and the original appropriators. The land might have been bought and sold or awarded in a legal settlement for wrongdoing many times between original appropriation and today. Unfortunately, even this more flexible connection between modern landholders and the mythical original landholder is implausible in nearly all cases of landownership throughout the world (see Chapter 4). Third, Locke and most present-day Lockeans deny the need to show any connection between the original appropriator and current property holders. The story is about what could have happened rather than what actually happened.56

Locke’s intent is to justify both the existence of landownership and significant inequality of possession. He does not claim inequality exists in the state of nature (before the establishment of money, trade, and government), but once trade is established, Locke argues that property holdings necessarily become unequal over time. Locke wants to change society very little. The current inequality between the Crown and landowners gives too much power to the Crown, but the general pattern of inequality between landowners and propertyless workers is not only just but inevitable in any society that respects the rights to life, liberty, and property. Society might need to tweak landownership a bit to ensure the right person owns each estate and perhaps to make sure every propertyless person has access to employment or charity as appropriate. But greater changes are unneeded and possibly unsustainable.
Although Hobbes and Locke don’t rely heavily on natural differences between people, many other thinkers of the period did. John Milton, for example, drew a distinction between those capable of great deeds and the ignorant masses, who, he believed, neither desired liberty nor were capable of using it. Benedict Spinoza favored a rather aristocratic form of democracy, because he believed people’s natural differences necessitate a hierarchy that could not be eliminated without destroying social order. Rousseau, Hartley, Condillac, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Paine all agreed that skills and talents were rooted in nature in a way that ensured significant political, economic, and/or social inequality, although they disagreed about exactly what talents were most important, and some argued for a significant decreased in the level of inequality.

Montesquieu argued that there weren’t great natural differences between people, but he also argued that commerce would necessarily produce great inequalities. This argument later became connected to the argument that inequality is the necessary product of freedom, because of or despite innate inequalities.

Surprisingly, given the uses to which Adam Smith’s ideas have been put subsequently, he was not as egalitarian as most other prominent eighteenth-century political philosophers. Like Hobbes and Locke, Smith began with an assumption of basic human equality, and like Locke, he believed in private property rights and a trade-based economy. But Smith did not believe that natural differences between people, whether in virtue, effort, or talent, were the primary motivation for trade. Quite the reverse, people cultivate differences because they trade. As Smith saw it, trade allows people to realize the productive benefits of specialization. Like Locke, Smith accepted that any trade-based economy results in some inequality of outcome and requires an ownership class to make investments. But Smith was also critical of many existing privileges, which he saw as the results of government-created market distortions including guilds and government-chartered corporations. He was more concerned that these distortions caused inefficiency than inequality, but he was aware that most of
them were put in place to maintain inequality, and he believed that the freer economic system he advocated would become more equal than the economy of royal privileges he criticized. Therefore, although Smith is no egalitarian, neither is he one of the strongest defenders of the inevitability of inequality. Whether or not, he failed to foresee how unequal a trade economy without government intervention can become, his connection between commerce and freedom became extremely important to later arguments connecting inequality to freedom (see below).

Although the U.S. Declaration of Independence declares all men to be created equal, the idea of natural inequalities leading inevitably to hierarchy was popular with many of the framers of the United States, including the authors of the Declaration. For example, John Adams thought inequality was a fact of nature that could not be rationally denied. “Nature, which has established in the universe a chain of being, and universal order … has ordained that … no two men are perfectly equal in person, property, understanding, activity, and virtue, or ever can be made so by any power less than that which created them.”60 Jefferson was a little more concerned that government action was needed to ensure that the higher positions in society were held by the natural aristocrats of virtue and talent rather than the artificial aristocrats of wealth and birth. Like many thinkers of his era he believed that equal opportunity would lead to a more just but similarly unequal hierarchy.61

Perhaps the clearest statement of this sort of thinking comes not from a philosopher but from a novelist. In Owen Wister’s 1902 novel, The Virginian, the narrator says, “It was through the Declaration of Independence that we Americans acknowledged the eternal inequality of man. For by it we abolished a cut-and-dried aristocracy. … we decreed that every man should thenceforth have equal liberty to find his own level. By this very decree we acknowledged and gave freedom to true aristocracy … [because] true democracy and true aristocracy are one and the same thing.”62 The egalitarian plateau for Wister’s narrator is equality of opportunity, which
will naturally lead to a better hierarchy that has the same shape but greater merit than the old hierarchy.

Even Karl Marx was a believer in natural inequality. He is best known for his revolutionary egalitarian sentiments, but that ideal was to be reached only in the far-off higher phase of communism. Before then, society would require the dictatorship of the proletariat as it progressed through the transitional phase of state socialism. Marx’s idea of economic justice in this phase is surprisingly similar to liberal writers of the era:

[An] equal right is an unequal right for unequal labor. It recognizes no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment, and thus productive capacity, as a natural privilege. It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right.63

Every specific hierarchical system had critics in the era, but the idea of natural hierarchy in general seems to have few critics.  

9. (Pseudo-) scientific explanations for inequality

In the 19th and 20th centuries, as religious explanations continued to decline in popularity, scientific-sounding explanations for natural inequality became popular. However, even if the many thinkers involved agreed that some sort of inequality was natural, they often disagreed about its why it was natural. Some believe the natural superiors could come from any social station if the right education and opportunities were available; others believed that natural differences were highly heritable and that the natural aristocracy would probably correspond closely to existing imperfectly selected aristocracy.

This second belief was so widespread that much of the education in Britain and the United States was predicated on the belief that the lower classes had a significantly different mode of thought than the higher classes. Steven Shapin and Barry Barnes describe this belief as the “head and hand” analogy. In this theory, every society is like
a human body. Some people are like the head. Their mentality is intellectual, complex, and active. Some people are like the hands. Their mentality is sensual, simple, and passive or automatic. The higher orders not only exceeded their subordinates in mental capacity; they had an entirely different way of thinking. According Shapin and Barnes, a wide consensus of people writing about education in mid-nineteenth century Britain wrote confidently as if these differences in mentality were something that members of all cultures would recognize.64

This belief in a fundamental intellectual divide between the upper and lower classes paved the way for the eugenics movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Francis Galton founded the movement, defining it as the scientific effort to improve the human gene pool by better breeding.65 Although the movement collected a lot of data, it never proved very scientific. The recommendations of top eugenicists turned out to be influenced by class and race prejudice much more than even a superficial analysis of the data they collected. The main strategies of the movement were extremely simplistic: little more than efforts to get the lower classes to breed less and the upper classes to breed more.

Eugenics made an enormous impact both on political thought and on practical legislation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most infamously in Germany but also in many other Western countries including Britain, the United States. Many laws (some overtly racist or sexist) were justified on eugenic grounds, including government-sponsored contests to assess families on their fitness, bonuses for the fitter races to have more children, miscegenation laws, selective immigration laws, eugenic screening programs for military and other institutions, coercive sterilization, and prohibitions against marriage by the feebleminded, drunkards, and other supposedly unfit individuals.66

Although both eugenics and the head-and-hand ideology stem from the same sort of belief in the innate superiority of the upper class, eugenics is even less respectful toward the lower class. The head needs the hand. Although the head must take
paternalistic authority over the hand, the head must respect what the hand does well and show concern for its welfare. However, the eugenic superior has no need for the eugenic inferior at all. The lower classes are nothing but a drag on the progress of their social and biological betters. Although the fit person might have charitable concern that the unfit (who manage to get born) do not suffer, the most important thing for the long-term improvement of the human race is to ensure that the unfit do not breed.

In extreme, the eugenicist’s goal is to create the first human society with no need for inequality. In this sense, eugenics is not permanently committed to the inevitability of inequality. As long as genetic make-up of the human race remains as it is, inequality is inevitable, but as eugenic breeding does its work, no one knows how equal a well-bred society might become.

Belief in eugenics was not confined to those who wanted to extend upper-class privileges. It was nearly ubiquitous across the political spectrum. The Catholic Church and some other Christian groups were exceptions, but many and perhaps most liberals, socialists, social democrats, reformers, and conservatives adopted eugenic thinking in the first half of the twentieth century. Supporters on the right tended to believe that fitness closely tracked current social position, while supporters on the left tended to believe that it did not. But both sides agreed that heredity caused enormous, unalterable inequality in nearly all physical and mental aspects of humanity—including the tendency to criminal behavior.

activists attended a eugenics conference to explain that African-Americans were becoming “more like you.”

Thomas Henry Huxley, though not necessarily a eugenicist, claimed that scientific observation supported the belief that inequality was ubiquitous. After admitting, “inequalities of condition must be less obvious among nomads than among settled people,” he added, “But it is a profound mistake to imagine that, in the nomadic condition, any more than in any other which has yet been observed, men are either ‘free’ or ‘equal.’”

Although eugenic thinking has not yet completely disappeared from western thought, the eugenics movement was already becoming discredited before the Second World War exposed the connection between Nazi eugenics strategies and the holocaust. Several scientific factors were important to discrediting the movement. These included the realization that it would take hundreds or thousands of generations of consistent breeding to have any noticeable effect on the kinds of factors eugenicists hoped to change and the realization that so many environmental factors affected human positions that it was nearly impossible to say that any person’s position was attributable to genetic factors.

The most pertinent aspect of the eugenics movement for our purposes is the readiness of so many prominent people across the political spectrum to accept it, demonstrating how many people were looking to science or resorting to pseudo-science to confirm rather than to challenge long-held cultural beliefs about the natural inequality of people.

The ubiquity of eugenic thinking at the time seems to be an excellent example of Jost’s system-justifying ideologies and Lerner’s explanation of a belief in a just world. Because it is painful to believe that injustice is behind so much suffering or to believe that it could happen to anyone, most people—even those who sincerely want to relieve suffering—wished to believe that some aspect of the sufferer’s nature is to blame rather than society’s contrived rules.
10. The far right

The “far right” (now sometimes called “alt right”) is a twentieth century term, sometimes retroactively applied to authors who strongly support natural inequality usually with an element of classist, nationalist, or racist explanations of inequality whether based on scientific, religious, or philosophical reasoning. Oswald Spengler expressed the sentiment in 1934: “society rests upon the inequality of men. That is a natural fact. … ‘Equal rights’ are contrary to nature.”

Julius Evola justified inequality very differently than Spengler, but agreed about its naturalness. He declared, with very little argumentation, “The principle according to which all human beings are free and enjoy equal rights ‘by nature’ is truly absurd;” “the hierarchical idea in general, derives from the very notion of a person;” “Where there is equality there cannot be freedom;” and adds for good measure that ordinary people did not demand equality before they “fell under the spell of … subversive ideologies.”

Not only is hierarchy natural, inevitable, and consistent with freedom but also it is something that ordinary people naturally accept in normal circumstances. Like Calhoun, Evola uses “freedom” to mean the freedom of the aristocrat. To him, the aristocrat is a real “person” while other people are just “individuals.” Apparently, people are naturally so unequal that only the freedom of aristocrats is important.

11. Contemporary political philosophy and social science

The belief in natural inequality survives in various guises in contemporary social science and political philosophy, most particularly in connection with justifying enormous inequality of property rights and the inequalities of power and social position that go along with it.
A. Property rights and freedom

Probably the most popular assertion of natural inequality in recent literature is the claim—most commonly asserted by propertarians—that inequality is the natural and inevitable outcome of a free society. This idea has its roots in Smith, Hume, Montesquieu, Locke, and even Aristotle, although none of them clearly endorsed the now-prevalent version of it or made it the centerpiece of their argument as contemporary propertarians do. By the late twentieth century, belief in this conflict became popular both in philosophy and in practical politics as an important part of the rights-based or freedom-based argument for unregulated capitalism.

Robert Nozick’s argument that “liberty upsets patterns” is probably the most influential expression of the belief in the inevitable conflict between freedom and equality. He asks the reader to begin with whatever distribution of property they most prefer (calling it D1). This distribution could be any level of equality or distribution according to talent, virtue, merit, or any other criteria. Beginning with the reader’s favored D1, Nozick asks them to imagine millions of people choosing to pay Wilt Chamberlain to play basketball for their entertainment, changing the distributional pattern from D1 to D2, in which Chamberlain is a millionaire. The choices of individuals break whatever pattern of equality people might have established at D1. To maintain any pattern or any specified level of equality, Nozick argues, government “would have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults.” He concludes, “no end-state principle or distributional patterned principle of justice [such as economic equality] can be continuously realized without continuous interference with people’s lives.”

Propertarians then call on the government or other legal authority to be indifferent to how much property people have to all the contrived rules that establish and maintain a system in which some have enormous amounts of property and others have nothing. They call this indifference, “equality before the law” or “equality under the law.” Supposedly, this conception of equality is essential to respect for natural
rights and to any realistic attempt to make humans as free as possible, and supposedly it is incompatible with any other kind of equality. It therefore implies a conflict between freedom and economic equality. In the words of Friedrich Hayek,

> From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other.

Many other propertarians make similar claims. Jan Narveson writes, “private property, with all its ‘inequalities,’ is, if properly acquired, perfectly all right, and is so because it is a natural outcome of a principle of general liberty.” These assertions are very similar to those of Julius Evola and John C. Calhoun discussed above.

Most propertarian authors do not seek empirical confirmation or falsification for the claim that freedom and equality are inevitably in conflict. They seem to believe that they have fully established the existence of the tradeoff by a-priori reasoning, so that they have little need to confirm their conclusions empirically. But it is a testable claim. If there are (or could be) societies that are both equal and free (in the relevant sense), the claim is falsified.

This conflict is the only version of the inevitable inequality claim that propertarian arguments necessarily require. Nevertheless, many propertarians make additional, ancillary claims about natural inequality. Some propertarians argue that equality is not only unattainable without sacrificing freedom and human rights, but also that it is unattainable at all: any effort to create a more equal society in terms of wealth or social position will require substantial inequalities of power so that it will sacrifice freedom without achieving its goal of attaining equality. For example, the thrust of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* is an argument that creating equality requires an intervening authority that necessarily accrues unchecked power and thereby makes everyone unfree.
Many other propertarians make the impossibility claim. Murray Rothbard’s essay, “Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature,” concludes, “[E]galitarians are acting as terribly spoiled children, denying the structure of reality on behalf of the rapid materialization of their own absurd fantasies … the egalitarian goal is, therefore, evil and any attempts in the direction of such a goal must be considered evil as well.”

Tibor Machan writes, “[T]he only relevant equality is equality under the law …. To strive politically for universal equality of any other kind is to strive for what is impossible and therefore wrong to pursue.” Not only is equality in conflict with freedom, it is unachievable even at the sacrifice of freedom. Obviously, this empirical claim is easily testable. If Machan and Rothbard are correct, there can be no societies with substantial equality of both wealth and power.

One advantage of reliance on the claim of conflict between freedom and equality is that it doesn’t require proof of the superiority of anyone in terms of virtue, divine favor, ability, or any other characteristic. It requires only cumulative effects of property rights and trade. Yet few, if any, people who claim that freedom naturally creates equality resist making or implying other claims about natural inequality.

One possible reason for the additional claims is that reliance on the freedom-claim alone also has a substantial disadvantage. That is, its unpleasant do think the enormous differences between rich and poor have nothing to do with some differences of merit. Although people might get ahead by skill, talent, or virtue, they also might get ahead by luck, inheritance, or questionable dealings. Why one person gets ahead is unimportant if the issue is freedom. Anyone who relies on a conflict between freedom and equality to justify hierarchy has to accept that not everyone who gets ahead will be in any way meritorious and that meritorious people might end up at the bottom of the economic hierarchy.

If one relies solely on the claim of conflict between freedom and equality, one cannot say anything about the relative merits people who succeed. This advantage frees the theorist from having to substantiate any claims about the better off actually having
any superior characteristics. But it comes with a disadvantage: it is less attractive to think of the people ending up with billions of times the wealth of other people without being more meritorious than them in any way. Perhaps for this reason, many propertarians go on to claim that those who end up better off are naturally superior in some way even though we should, theoretically, accept market inequality if some just happen to be born into deep poverty while wealthy dynastic families live in luxury because of privileges their family acquired by dumb luck generations ago.

Claims about the merits of the rich and powerful abound in propertarian literature. Rothbard, for example, writes, “in every organization or activity, a few (generally the most able and/or the most interested) will end up as leaders, with the mass of the membership filling the ranks of the followers.” He employs the Burkean conservative claim that prejudices reflect accumulated intuitive wisdom, supposing that “redheads are excitable,” that men really are natural leaders, and that women are better at jobs requiring, “housewifely skills,” “patience,” “sex appeal,” and “contact with children.” This sort of reasoning is supposed to explain why some groups end up with more wealth than other groups—because they really deserve it.

Hans-Hermann Hoppe, writing in the twenty-first century, connects a private-property with a wide variety of explanations of natural inequality:

[T]he maintenance and preservation of a private property based exchange economy requires as its sociological presupposition the existence of a voluntarily acknowledged ‘natural’ elite — a nobilitas naturalis.

The natural outcome of the voluntary transactions between various private property owners is decidedly non-equalitarian, hierarchical and elitist. As the result of widely diverse human talents, in every society of any degree of complexity a few individuals quickly acquire the status of an elite. Owing to superior achievements of wealth, wisdom, bravery or a combination thereof, some individuals come to possess ‘natural authority’, and their opinions and judgments enjoy wide-spread respect. Moreover, because of selective mating
and marriage and the laws of civil and genetic inheritance, positions of natural authority are more likely than not passed on within a few—noble—families. Here he repeats a eugenic error about the effectiveness of selective breeding that was scientifically discredited more than a half century before he wrote. But notice not only are Hoppe’s elite better than everybody else; they also benefit everyone else. Hoppe does not believe that current elites in the world today always have superior breeding and virtue, because governments have created avenues for less virtuous people to get ahead. He believes it will take the establishment of a propertarian system to realize all the benefits of natural inequality and selective breeding.

At least some propertarians go beyond class-based elitism into downright racism. Richard Hernstein and Charles Murray have tried to explain the racial gap in income and wealth in the United States as the result of natural differences between the races, but this analysis has been resoundingly discredited. As flawed as Hernstein and Murray’s arguments are, at least they attempted to present empirical support. The attempt to make propertarian theory more attractive by claiming that the elite really are better than everyone else runs into the difficulty that western scientists have been trying to prove the superiority of western elites for hundreds of years without success. They failed so resoundingly that no reputable scientist believes it today.

It is tempting for propertarians to try to have it both ways, to imply or to state outright that the observed inequalities in a market economy really do reflect differences in skill, effort, natural ability, or other desirable attributes, while backing away from any responsibility to substantiate those claims on the grounds that after all, the theory is about freedom not merit.

Nozick tries to have it both ways. He never uses obvious scoundrels or lucky fools as the people who get ahead in his system. He picks popular people, such as Wilt Chamberlain and Henry Ford, to make the point that “liberty upsets patterns.” Wilt Chamberlain came from humble origins and childhood illness to be adored by millions of fans around the United States. Nozick could have made the same point with a story.
of Landlord X who senses that people might be interested in saving money on rental apartments and who are uninterested in diligently researching whether lower rent in a particular building is attributable to fewer safety features. He therefore builds apartment buildings with lead pipes, lead paint, and fewer precautions against fire. Many people of lesser means choose to save time, effort, and money by moving into those apartments without paying close attention to the risk of living there. As a result, his tenants and their children get cheap apartments; some also save effort by not researching safety features; some die in fires; some of their children grow up with lead poisoning; and Landlord X and his children become wealthy and healthy.

This example is less attractive, but it just as well allows Nozick to make his points, (1) that the wealth of third parties—those who chose not to deal with that landlord—is unaffected (still fitting the original pattern) and (2) that “Any distributional pattern with any egalitarian component is overturnable by the voluntary actions of individual persons over time.” It is much more pleasant to think of wealthy people being like Wilt Chamberlain rather than Landlord X, but like Landlord X, Nozick doesn’t call attention to the less attractive features of the things he sells.

Nozick further argues, “[I]f almost anyone would have bought a car from Henry Ford, the supposition that it was an arbitrary matter who held the money then (and so bought) would not place Henry Ford’s earnings under a cloud. In any event, his coming to hold it is not arbitrary.” To readers who see Ford as a hardworking, farsighted entrepreneur, Nozick’s argument implies, without stating outright, that capitalism has a cleansing effect: even if the starting point is arbitrary, eventually property will get into the hands of people with desirable characteristics—and their “coming to hold it is not arbitrary.”

But, of course, this claim is only true if, no matter what, everyone really would have bought a car from Henry Ford—only if capitalism has perfect equality of opportunity—and it stretches credulity to suppose it is. To make the implication, Nozick ignores all of the arbitrary factors that keep people from getting ahead and the
extent to which a small change in the rules of exchange might have significantly changed the level of reward to people who sell cars. Nozick quickly softens his claim:

Distribution according to benefits to others is a major patterned strand in a free capitalist society, as Hayek correctly points out, but it is only a strand and does not constitute the whole pattern of a system of entitlements (namely, inheritance, gifts for arbitrary reasons, charity, and so on) or a standard that one should insist a society fit.91

Here Nozick recognizes that gifts, charity, and inherence don’t always reward benefits to others, but by its absence from the list, he subtly implies that exchange does in fact reward merit. Yet, the same sentence denies any responsibility for him to prove that market exchange or any other form of exchange does in fact reward meritorious activity.

Nozick implies that his system rewards the “better endowed” when he criticizes John Rawls’s egalitarian system for not offering enough to them. He notes that this argument does not imply that “the better endowed should get even more than they get under the [propertarian] entitlement system.”92 For this complaint against Rawls’s system to be a reason to prefer Nozick’s system, Nozick must assume that the better endowed actually do get more in his system than Rawls’s system. But he is not entitled to this assumption because he has denied any responsibility to show that his system actually rewards merit. For Rawls the better endowed are people who thrive “under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.”93 Therefore, if Nozick wants to conclude that the better endowed are better off under his system than under Rawls’s system, he has to assume that the people who thrive under his system are the same people who would have thrived under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. For this argument to work, capitalism has to be a natural meritocracy. Nozick could always deny that claim and fall back on the claim of freedom, but if so, he would have to sacrifice this criticism of Rawls.
Some propertarians use the presumption that capitalist outcomes reflect natural differences in merit to attempt to shame people who question inequality. Hayek claimed that calls for equality are motivated simply by “envy.” Nozick suggests that people who have egalitarian sentiments have them because they might actually be inferior, writing, “one possible explanation why certain inequalities rankle so; is not due to the feeling that this superior position is undeserved, but to the feeling that it is deserved and earned.”

Nozick is trying very hard to have it both ways. He would like his readers to believe claims (like those of Rothbard, Hoppe, and Murray) that people who thrive under capitalism are naturally superior to people who do not, but he wants to deny that his argument requires proof of any such claim.

**B. Other contemporary schools of thought**

Propertarians are not the only people keeping claims of natural inequality alive. At least one school of contemporary political thought, made up of followers of Leo Strauss, has explicitly sought to reintroduce the ancient Greek conception of natural aristocracy into modern political theory, if only to make it compatible with modern, liberal democracy. Like Plato, Strauss prefers the rule of an elite group of philosophers as the highest ideal, but he is willing to accept the rule of wealthy gentlemen if, as expected, his preferred ideal is impractical. Rulers need the consent of the vulgar masses, but hopefully in a representative democracy, ordinary people will come to admire the achievements of gentlemen and grant upper-class males power through a modern electoral process.

Another way in which natural hierarchy has become popular in contemporary political thought is through the functional explanations of inequality, in which inequality exists (at least partly) because it provides some necessary value for everyone—not just for the people at the top of the hierarchy. Functionalist explanations for inequality include the need to get the more capable people into the
more demanding positions and to motivate everyone to work by offering differential rewards. One functionalist explanation of inequality, inspired by Hobbes, is that the enforcement of rules requires an inequality of power. The connection between the need for political power and inequality is more explicit in some modern theories than it was in Hobbes.

For example, Ralph Dahrendorf uses functionalist reasoning to argue that equality is impossible, writing:

[B]ecause sanctions are necessary to enforce conformity of human conduct, there has to be inequality of rank among men. …

Time and time again, anthropologists have told us of ‘tribes without rulers,’ and sociologists of societies that regulate themselves without power or authority. But in opposition to such fantasies, I incline with Weber to describe ‘every order that is not based on the personal, free agreement of all involved’ … as ‘imposed,’ i.e. based on authority and subordination …. Society means that norms regulate human conduct; this regulation is guaranteed by the incentive or threat of sanctions; the possibility of imposing sanctions is the abstract core of all power.

… [I]nequalities among men follow from the very concept of societies as moral communities, then there cannot be, in the world of our experience, a society of absolute equals. … the idea of a society in which all distinctions of rank between men are abolished transcends what is sociologically possible and has a place only in the sphere of poetic imagination.98

On one hand, he leaves open the possibility of egalitarian societies if they could be based on the personal, free agreement of all involved. On the other hand, by dismissing reports of egalitarian societies as fantasies that can’t be moral communities and that belong to the sphere of poetic imagination, he states unequivocally that no such communities exist.
J.R. Lucas argues along similar functionalist lines and takes it to a farther-reaching conclusion that “it is foolish to seek to establish an equality of wealth on egalitarian grounds … because if we do not let men compete for money, they will compete all the more for power.”

As recently as 2012, Melvyn Fein uses a combination of functionalist, evolutionary, and human nature reasoning to support his claim that human beings are “hierarchical animals.” According to Fein, “most researchers” recognize “hierarchical arrangements are universal. Despite numerous attempts to prove otherwise, every known society, both large and small, has exhibited some form of stratification.” He accuses anyone who favors “greater equality” to have “foreclosed objective explorations into the nature of human ranking systems.” They merely “imagine” that “social coercion can produce greater fairness. This, however, needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed.” He spends an entire chapter chiding those who believe greater equality is possible for failing to look at the facts.

Despite his complaints about other researchers’ lack of attention to the facts, Fein’s book is not well sourced and doesn’t offer much empirical support. His book has a bibliography but no citations connecting his claims to his sources, and so he presents no verifiable evidence for his far-reaching claims, such as “In societies of every shape and dimension, human beings vie to determine who is superior to whom.” He recognizes that at least some small-scale societies are less hierarchical than large-scale societies, but makes three arguments to explain away that evidence. First, the most observed egalitarian societies are marginal (and therefore, apparently, unrepresentative). Second, no societies are completely equal. Third, relatively egalitarian societies must expend effort to maintain equality.

Chapter 6 examines the truth of these claims, but it’s important to realize how little they deliver to support Fein’s conclusions. First, even if egalitarian societies are unusual, as long as they exist, they disprove the claim of impossibility.
Second, no one argues for *complete* equality. Modern egalitarian literature is virtually unanimous in the belief that complete equality is an impossibility because equality in one way necessarily requires inequality in other ways. To each according to their need is equality in one sense. It conflicts with to each according to their virtue, their effort, their weight, etc. The issue is not the possibility of complete equality in all ways but the possibility of substantial equality of wealth, power, and social position or the possibility of substantially *more* equality that defenders of natural hierarchy employ their arguments to attack.

Third, that egalitarian societies have to expend effort to maintain inequality proves only that at least some humans have a tendency to try to dominate others. The need to expend effort to maintain equality does not prove that equality is impossible or that people prefer to be dominated by others than to be equal to others. Reversing the second two arguments shows their weakness. All hierarchical societies expend enormous effort to establish and maintain inequality with strong enforcement of coercive laws that grant power over resources to some and lesser or no such power to others, indirectly giving those who control resources power over other people as well.¹⁰⁴

That the maintenance of inequality requires effort proves only that people have a tendency to resist it. It does not prove that the maintenance of inequality is impossible, undesirable, or an unnatural human behavior. In addition, there are no societies that have achieved *complete* inequality or *complete* hierarchy. That is, there are no societies in which every individual has a unique place, in which no two people are equals, and in which no rules apply equally to more than one person. The absence of complete hierarchy hardly proves greater hierarchy to be impossible or undesirable.

In the same way, the absence of complete equality and the effort needed to maintain equality in no way imply that it is impossible, undesirable, or unnatural to have greater equality than whatever level of equality happens to exist right now.
The limitations of Fein’s argument don’t prevent him from making strong empirical claims that hierarchy is natural and universal and that it must, therefore, provide evolutionary advantages to all.\textsuperscript{105}

One interesting feature of Fein’s explanation for natural inequality is that it can explain why there are so many conflicting explanations for natural inequality around the world and over time. If the true explanation for inequality is that people have some deep innate desire making them want to dominate each other, it might be unseemly for the people at the top of the hierarchy to claim that they dominate others simply because they like doing it. They might want to justify that domination by making another more acceptable explanation for the existence of a hierarchy.

It is easy to dismiss Fein as a bit far out, but functionalist explanations or explanations based on natural differences in human ability are popular today even in liberal-egalitarian literature. Isaiah Berlin considers the unequal distribution of natural gifts to be a well-known obstacle to economic equality.\textsuperscript{106} He endorses the inevitability of material equality, writing “in societies where there is a high degree of equality of economic opportunity, the strong and able and ambitious and cunning are likely to acquire more wealth or more power than those who lack these qualities.”\textsuperscript{107}

John Rawls’s difference principle is built on the acceptance of functional inequality—arranging social and economic inequalities to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society. Rawlsianism accepts inequality to whatever extent (large or small) is necessary to achieve that goal by enticing more capable people to accept more responsible positions and by motivating everyone to put forth effort. Rawls makes no statement about how much inequality he thinks that will be, leaving open the possibility that inequality within a Rawlsian system could be great or small, pending the results of a future investigation.\textsuperscript{108} Although most Rawlsians read his work as implying social organization needs a substantial overhaul, depending on one’s opinion about the level of incentive needed to elicit effort, one can also be read as requesting a small tweaking of the system. John Tomasi, for example, incorporates
Rawlsian ideas into an economically egalitarian theory supporting a version of propertarianism.\textsuperscript{109}

Another functionalist explanation came from Soviet sociologists, who faced the task of using an ideology that praised equality to justify a system that obviously had enormous inequalities of power and to some extent of wealth as well. The favored strategy was to claim that capitalist inequality was based on class and was therefore exploitive, but Soviet inequality was a reflection of the natural division of labor and was therefore natural.\textsuperscript{110} Presumably, they didn’t believe they had perfected the natural division of labor, but as so many societies before them, they claimed to have more closely approximated it than any other system in recorded history.

When Westerners think of a society with unnatural and oppressive inequality, they probably think of the caste system of India. Although the prevailing Western view of what inequalities are natural has changed immensely since the two first came into close contact during the colonial period, the prevailing Western view of the caste system has changed little. It seems as unnatural to the authors of this book as it does to most westerners, but no less a mind than Mohandas Gandhi thought that the Indian caste system, based on spirituality and cooperation, was far closer to the approximation of the true natural system. He thought that although the existing caste system in India was corrupt, it could be reformed because the spiritual basis for inequality under the caste system was natural and therefore good.

Gandhi also believed that the Western capitalist system based on class and pitting people against each other in competition was unnatural and therefore inherently corrupt. Sympathy for the caste system is much less popular in India than it was in his time, but Indians retain (at least for now) a popular skepticism about class-based inequalities associated with the growing market system in India.\textsuperscript{111} Westerners might be tempted to suppose Gandhi was foolish because he failed to see the naturalness of the inequalities in market economies. If so, they would be like people in so many other
societies supposing that their form of inequality was a closer approximation of true natural inequalities than other cultures’ systems.

12. Conclusion: testable claims

The history reviewed in this chapter reveals both wide agreement that inequality is inevitable and strong disagreement about how, why, and in what ways people will inevitably be unequal. Dominant ideologies tend to assert that the level and type of inequality in society is close to that which is natural and inevitable. But few espousing these beliefs making any attempt to prove that assertion. We shouldn’t accept it without strong evidence, and this chapter has provided reasons to doubt such suppositions. Extremely different, and conflicting, assertions seem reasonable in different cultural contexts because life is a little bit like the Truman Show: we all “accept the reality of the world with which we are presented.”

It’s possible that the people in superior positions in a market economy really are more deserving as Nozick implies. In the same way, it’s possible that an all wise providence made John C. Calhoun the master of slaves because African Americans are too ignorant, degraded and vicious to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying liberty. It’s possible that redheads are more excitable and women are less capable of leadership as Rothbard suggests. It’s possible that some people have the mentality of the head and other people have the mentality of the hand. It’s possible that all people have a unique position in the Great Chain of Being. It’s possible all people really should have a place in the old Hindu caste system. It’s possible that Hawaiian chiefs really were divinely favored descendants of a semi-divine founder. And it’s possible that Baruya men’s sperm contains a magical life-force without which women could not supply milk really or children could not reach puberty. But, almost all of these claims directly contradict all the others. Perhaps instead, the rules enforcing inequality in each of these societies are the real causes of inequality, and the ideologies attesting to the
inevitability of those rules are just window dressing. We suggest a cautious skepticism about these claims or any like them.

It certainly seems like a mistake to accept any such claim as a justification for forcing some people to accept inferior wealth, power, or social position unless and until convincing evidence can be found to verify claims, especially in light of how willing different societies are to accept such different claims with little or no scrutiny. Accepting such claims without convincing evidence is a mistake that has been made in many times in many ways in many places for a very long time, but usually only a few dissenters worry that their society is making a similar mistake.

Most contemporary Westerners would easily recognize the self-serving errors in claims of eugenics, head-and-hand theory, the Great Chain of Being, the life force in Baruya men’s sperm, the deification of Inca or Roman monarchs, or the high-born, divinely favored Hawaiian chiefs.

But are contemporary Western beliefs about the naturalness and inevitability of inequality really so different? The most popular justification of unequal private property involves a story in which current property owners are the successors for a mythical “original appropriator.” Current property holders don’t claim to be “highborn,” but they have something better: they got their property through “free trade” of property rights, which implies that they might actually have done something deserve what they got or that it was the inevitable outcome of people exercising their freedom in a natural setting. Is this fanciful story any less mythical, any more connected reality, any more natural and inevitable that the pre-contact Hawaiian system of high and birth?

Chapter 4 already discussed the mythical original appropriator, but more remains to be done. Several claims discussed in this chapter are testable with anthropological evidence from small-scale societies. The two central claims are (1) equality is impossible to obtain (efforts to create it either entirely fail or replace one kind of inequality with another), and (2) equality is inevitably in conflict with freedom. To state these claims in reverse: (1) inequality is inevitable, and (2) inequality is an
inevitable result (or the natural expression of) free human interaction. We can also at least tentatively examine some of the explanations for inequality, such as that inequality is functionally necessary for the enforcement of rules; inequality of wealth, power, and position is the inevitable result of people’s inequality of in talent, virtue, or other attributes; inequality is the inevitable result of people’s natural desire to form hierarchies—resurfacing as inequalities of power as equality of wealth is established.

The following chapter examines these claims in light of evidence from anthropology and archaeology. It is important to examine claims in light of how they are used. They are used to support existing levels of inequality of social position and economic and political power and to head off arguments that society should move in the direction of greater equality of wealth, power, and social position. We will not find societies in which every person is the same in every way, but we will find societies with very high levels of social, economic, and political equality. We will find a much higher degree of equality than proponents of the thesis of inevitable inequality usually defend. This evidence proves the possibility that at least some kind of society can exist that is equal in the way egalitarians propose. The evidence in the following chapter will have to be combined with evidence from chapter 10 to show that egalitarian societies can also be free societies.

**Bibliography**

1. The publisher notes that most hymnals (now) omit this verse. [Alexander, #907]
4. The king ruled by grace of God but didn’t really claim to be descended from the mythical founder King Arthur.
5. This claim has been put into serious doubt by contemporary research, such as [Wilkinson, 2009 #947]
7. [Jost, 2005 #970], especially p. 261.
8. [Lerner, 1980 #948], p. 24-25.
9. Egalitarian social systems probably existed more than 200,000 years ago and possibly existed as early as 1.8 million years ago (see Chapter 1).
10. [Leacock, 1978 #968]; [Hayden, 1986 #969].
11. [Leacock, 1978 #968].
The dialogues suggest a selective breeding program to help produce better future leaders, but they don’t appear to suggest that the eugenic progeny automatically becomes leaders.

Of course, being fictional dialogues they are not designed to clearly state exactly what Plato or Socrates believed. It’s fairer to say they present ideas to be considered.

Leibnitz has probably the most plausible explanation of reasoning along these lines. For a quick summary and a discussion of how the earthquake and tsunami that hit Lisbon in 1755 helped to challenge this kind of thinking, see {Stark, 1998 #967}, pp. 1-13.

It is hard to fathom what kind of empirical investigation could be used to test this claim.

We don’t discuss racist and ethnocentric justifications of ideology any further, partly because the history of modern slavery and the accompanying ideology of racism is so well-known, and partly because there are relatively few ethnic groups in any society, leaving a great deal of inequality to be explained at the individual level.

A functionalist theory of political authority or inequality should not be confused with a functionalist theory of ideology.
the chief in power, held it because he was the rightful heir of the leader of the original colonizing expedition. No landowner in Britain can make that claim.

56 [Locke, 1960 #54], Second Treatise, Chapter 5; [Widerquist, 2007 #476]. See also Chapters 2-4 of this book.


58 [Rosen, 1987 #923], p. 460.

59 [Carson, 2007 #925], p. 20-22.

60 Quoted by [Kirk, 1985 #919], p. 97-98.


62 [Wister, 1902 #927].

63 [Marx, 1958 #186].

64 [Shapin, 1976 #917], p. 232-235, 246.

65 [Hasian, 1996 #928], p. 1.

66 [Winter, 2014 (Forthcoming) #977].

67 [Kevles, 1985 #929], especially p. 10, 63, 64, 88.

68 [Winter, 2014 (Forthcoming) #977].

69 [Huxley, 1998 #936].

70 [Kevles, 1985 #929], especially p. 84, 85, 173.

71 [Jost, 2005 #970]; Lerner, 1980 #948.

72 [Splengler, 1934 #938], p. 50-51.

73 [Evola, 2002 #937], p. 136-142.

74 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 160-163.

75 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 163.

76 [Hayek, 1960 #197], p. 85-87; [Machan, 2006 #413], p. 315.

77 Chapter 9 addresses this claim.

78 [Hayek, 1960 #197], p. 87.

79 NTS, CITE: add citations.

80 [Narveson, 1998 #329], p. 3.

81 See above.

82 [Hayek, 1944 #243].

83 [Rothbard, 2012 #953].

84 [Machan, 2006 #413], 315.

85 [Rothbard, 2012 #953].

86 [Hoppe, 2001 #766], pp. 118.

87 [Hoppe, 2001 #766], p. 94-121.

88 [Hernstein, 1994 #199]; [Fischer, 1996 #939]

89 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 164.

90 [Nozick, 1974 #53], 158.

91 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 158.

92 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 193-195; quote on p. 194, emphasis added.

93 [Rawls, 1971 #42], p. 302.

94 [Hayek, 1960 #197], p. 93.

95 [Nozick, 1974 #53], p. 241.


97 [Davis, 1945 #945].

98 [Dahrendorf, 1968 #660], p. 172-176.

99 [Lucas, 1965 #955], p. 304-305.

100 [Fein, 2012 #944], p. 27 and viii.

101 [Fein, 2012 #944], ix.


103 [Fein, 2012 #944], p. 27-60.

104 [Widerquist, 2013 #895].

105 [Fein, 2012 #944], p. 60.

106 [Berlin, 1978 #946], especially p. 92.

107 [Berlin, 1978 #946], p. 92.

108 [Rawls, 1993 #28; Rawls, 1999 #860; Rawls, 2001 #39].

109 [Tomasi, 2012 #974].

110 [Béteille, 2003 #916], p. 17.

111 [Béteille, 2003 #916], p. 17-19; 82.
112 {Manning, 2013 #954}. 