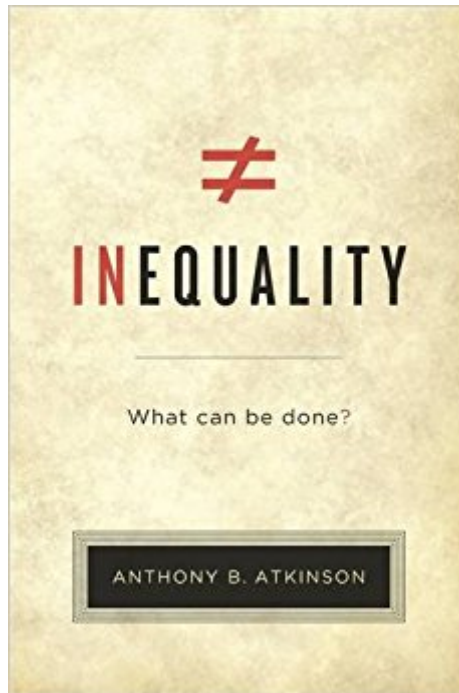




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Inequality: What Can Be Done?



Synopsis

Inequality and poverty have returned with a vengeance in recent decades. To reduce them, we need fresh ideas that move beyond taxes on the wealthy. Anthony B. Atkinson offers ambitious new policies in technology, employment, social security, sharing of capital, and taxation, and he defends them against the common arguments and excuses for inaction.

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Customer Reviews

Tony Atkinson, in many ways the father of modern inequality research, has [written] a terrific new book. (Paul Krugman New York Times 2015-05-23)[Atkinson] does not mind speaking uncomfortable truths. Among them: that the comfort and opportunity provided by wealth matter just as much as the consumption that wealth affords; that holding down a job may not be enough to provide most workers with a standard of living that keeps up with economic growth; and that economic power helps protect itself in subtle and pervasive ways which might well demand an interventionist government response. Sir Anthony's answer might not be the right one. But if his book reminds the reader how far out of fashion the policies of the post-war decades have fallen, it also conveys how skewed the economy of today might look to an observer from the not so distant past—or, perhaps, from the not so distant future. (The Economist 2015-06-06)Like it or loathe it, this is ambitious stuff. (Tim Harford Financial Times 2015-04-24)Provides us with the broad outlines of a new radical reformism—[Atkinson] sets forth a list of concrete, innovative, and persuasive proposals meant to show that alternatives still exist, that the battle for social progress and equality must reclaim its legitimacy, here and now—Witty, elegant, profound,

this book should be read: it brings us the finest blend of what political economy and British progressivism have to offer. This is a book written by an optimist and a citizen of the United Kingdom, Europe, and the world: the broad sense it conveys of a more just economy is one of its many appealing qualities. It will stand as a model whatever the outcome of one election or another. (Thomas Piketty New York Review of Books 2015-06-25) Atkinson takes a position that is in some ways more radical than Piketty. It will surely influence debate as the presidential campaign heats up. Atkinson has researched inequality and poverty for nearly 40 years, using rigorous quantitative analysis to assess the impact of tax rates and other policy measures on inequality and growth. [Inequality] focuses on the United Kingdom, but it's easy to extrapolate his ideas to the U.S. His book will embolden those who are tired of nibbling at the edges of the problem and skeptical of the argument that rising inequality is the inevitable result of globalization and technical advance. It should stimulate creative and bold thinking as the presidential candidates put their proposals before the public. (David Brodwin U.S. News & World Report 2015-06-15) The best of the new crop of books [on income inequality] is Anthony B. Atkinson's Inequality: What Is to Be Done? Not unrelatedly, it is also the most solutions-oriented. (Drew Nelles Globe and Mail 2015-05-30) Inequality: What Can Be Done?, is an effort to keep the issue of inequality on the agenda of politicians, economists, and citizens alike. [It] is explicitly solutions-oriented. The book offers a number of original policy suggestions. [Atkinson's] mastery of detail and comfort with costings mean that his proposals seem not only imaginative but also practically feasible. Inequality is now an issue that political parties, on all parts of the ideological spectrum, cannot dismiss. And that is partly because of the work of academics such as Thomas Piketty and Anthony Atkinson. The books by Piketty and Atkinson have prompted renewed attention to matters of economic distribution, and have strengthened a public movement that has put pressure on governments to tackle inequality. Atkinson's Inequality: What Can Be Done? deserves credit for contributing considerable intellectual resources to that important struggle. (Max Harris New Statesman 2015-05-26) When a giant among UK economists such as Sir Tony Atkinson publishes a book in which he gives prescriptions based on the work of a lifetime, it deserves to be taken very seriously indeed... The work is rich in ideas and practical proposals. (Michael Pinto-Duschinsky Standpoint 2015-05-01) [An] important contribution. Those who desire a thought-provoking guide to policy options [to address inequality] in advanced countries should grapple with Atkinson's work. (Martin Wolf Financial Times 2015-05-01) Atkinson is a pioneer of the study of the economics of poverty and inequality. His latest work, Inequality: What Can Be Done?, is an uncomfortable affront to our

reigning triumphalists. His premise is straightforward: inequality is not unavoidable, a fact of life like the weather, but the product of conscious human behavior. (Owen Jones *The Guardian* 2015-04-08) Atkinson thinks that the division between inequality of outcome and inequality of opportunity is largely false. He believes that tackling inequality of outcome is a very good way to tackle inequality of opportunity. (If you help a grownup get a job, her kids will have a better chance of climbing out of poverty, too.) Above all, he disagrees with the widespread assumption that technological progress and globalization are responsible for growing inequality. That assumption, he argues, is wrong and also dangerous, because it encourages the belief that growing inequality is inevitable. (Jill Lepore *New Yorker* 2015-03-16) Inequality has replaced house prices as a fashionable topic for discussion. But anyone looking for a serious treatment of the problem, rather than just a dinner party conversation, should turn to [this] book by [an] eminent economist who [has] made the study of inequality [his] life. (Paul Collier *Prospect* 2015-05-01) Tony Atkinson is the godfather of modern research on the distribution of income and wealth. Combining the statistical rigor of Simon Kuznets and the radical reformism of William Beveridge, he has been a role model for entire generations of scholars. (Thomas Piketty, Paris School of Economics) Tony Atkinson has done more than anyone else in helping us to understand the meaning of inequality, why it is important, how it has changed over time, and how it can be influenced. He is one of the great scholars of our time. (Nicholas Stern, London School of Economics and Political Science) Atkinson is a first-rate economist who long ago mastered the orthodoxy, and so is well-placed to take it to bits. Patiently, he explains why excessive profits may not be competed away, and why laissez-faire cannot be relied on to get the most out of every resource. Atkinson also has a keen sense of history. He explains how anti-trust laws in the U.S., nowadays narrowly justified in efficiency terms, were originally born out of concerns about fairness. He highlights, too, how the course of industrial technology has often been set by the planners' guiding hand. All this helps him break out of the frighteningly narrow terrain that economists concede to public policy. (Tom Clark *The Guardian* 2015-06-26) Atkinson has done a very good job by making suggestions that are actually being professed, albeit hesitantly, by governments. By taking head-on the basic apprehensions of doing so, he shows that if we do not employ these solutions, we are probably making excuses and do not want to shake the present equilibrium due to vested interests. For one who agrees with Piketty, this book will get a big nod, and for those who are not sure, it should probably remove some doubt. (Madan Sabnavis *Financial Express* 2015-07-26) When he publishes a book, one should pay attention: Atkinson is the best

expert on the topic of inequality, mastering the theory and the empirics as well as the relevant politics. This is a book that all concerned with growing inequalities and interested in policy ideas should read. Its general philosophy is that it is not easy to delineate the contours of a just society and perhaps illusory to set out to achieve it, but that it is definitely possible to determine a direction of improvement and to find levers that can realistically move us in the right direction. It aims at stimulating and enriching the policy debate, and there is no doubt that it will. (Marc Fleurbaey Science 2015-08-21)

Atkinson, a long-time expert on [economic inequality], seeks to lay bare the underlying issues in a manner accessible to non-economists. After covering the landscape of inequality measurement and theories of economic inequality, of both outcomes and opportunity, the author outlines a set of 15 fairly radical proposals to curb runaway inequality (assuming inequality needs curbing). These proposals include a minimum inheritance for all, a global tax on wealth, and a governmental role in influencing the direction of technological progress away from the kind that exacerbates inequality. They are bold and fresh proposals, but they have little chance of ever being adopted at least not in today's U.S. But that is beside the point. Inequality has long been believed to be an inevitable outcome of capitalism; the author rightly begs to differ. (J. Bhattacharya Choice 2015-09-01)

Atkinson's book is magisterial. It is the definitive analysis of inequality in Britain and how to reduce it, as viewed through the standard professional economics prism of Utilitarianism. While grounded in sophisticated theory and state-of-the-art quantitative evidence, the book carries through to specific policy recommendations on standard matters such as tax rates, benefits and tax reliefs. (Paul Collier Times Literary Supplement 2015-09-25)

Atkinson knows his stuff. He understands arguments used by free marketeers (largely successfully) to marginalize inequality as a front-and-center issue. This is why Atkinson devotes much space in *Inequality* to rebutting these arguments and asserting that tackling the rich-poor divide should, and can, be a priority. By presenting a strategic combination of new and established ideas, Atkinson shows why addressing the growing pervasiveness of inequality in the twenty-first century requires a sustained attack on many fronts. It also requires seeing economics not just as a debate about numbers but as a debate about people. Atkinson shows what might be possible if we stretch our collective imagination and focus on innovative ways to address what is emerging as the defining issue of our time. (Mark Triffitt Australian Book Review 2015-10-01)

There have been countless books on inequality in the recent past—some arguing that it is a pressing problem and others arguing that it is not—but Atkinson's stands above the crowded field. By pairing quantitative economic analysis with a clear moral argument, he provides lay readers with a bracing and

accessible guide to the current inequality debates. Atkinson's book represents the best case an economist can make on these issues. The fact that we even understand inequality as a real problem with nuanced constraints is something we owe to Atkinson, who helped make it the serious focus of inquiry it is today. This book is a forceful summary of that body of work, and stands as the best introduction to the concerns that will hang over all of our discussions of the economy in the 21st century. (Mike Konczal Pacific Standard 2015-11-01) One of the world's leading economists, mentor of Piketty and associate of Stiglitz, has written this accessible overview of why inequality matters, and why we need a series of urgent policies to tackle it. You don't need to be an economist to appreciate this impressive synthesis of his life's thinking and work. (Mike Savage Big Issue 2015-12-25) Though it has not attracted the celebrity attention, in many respects Atkinson's [Inequality] is more important than Thomas Piketty's pathbreaking Capital in the Twenty-First Century, and is the perfect sequel. Where Piketty explained the tendency of wealth and income to concentrate, Atkinson digs deeper into what drove this shift and why conventional remedies will not reverse the trends. He has a far surer grasp than Piketty of the political dynamics that made possible the anomalous egalitarian era of the 30 glorious years after World War II. (Robert Kuttner American Prospect 2016-01-01) Inequality is a real accomplishment. It represents the first comprehensive, realistic, and detailed proposal for countering growing economic inequality and it's done not by some energetic graduate student but by a seasoned economist who's been working on these issues for more than forty years. (Daniel K. Finn Commonweal 2016-07-08)

Anthony B. Atkinson was a Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, and Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Atkinson takes on a subject that is of great concern to most of us -- the problem of inequality. He distinguishes the inequality that exists within a nation and the inequality among nations, capturing the essence of the causes of each of these types of inequality. This book is partly economics, partly politics, partly sociology, and partly international affairs. It promises much because he is taking an innovative approach to the problem. His main thrust is on the problems arising from distribution. The book is technical and not an easy read for many who are not familiar with economics. Atkinson's proposals for action and reform are not merely fiscal or purely political. His appears to be a multi-prong approach and thus merits serious study. In theory, this might have been a nice plan but his proposals may lead one to query the practicality of his

views. He has a basic socialist approach in which he advocates greater government action such as creating a national pay policy with minimum wage, a capital endowment paid to all adults, progressive tax, and social insurance, but at the same time he also believes in continued social security contributions. The only problem with his admirable plan in creating a fairer distribution of wealth is that we have first to create sufficient wealth in those countries in which equality has little significance because everyone is mired in poverty. Francois Bourguignon's book, 'The Globalization of Inequality', 2015 Princeton University Press, may be a good companion to Atkinson's book. The stark reality is that good ideas about equality require strong government, but in capitalist countries, a government is as strong as its political base. There are no easy answers.

In prescriptive terms this book more than met my expectations but I would have preferred rather more historical description. I have watched videos of speeches given by Atkinson and find them rather more animated than this book though the message is the same.

I'm not an ethicist or economist. For me it is slow going but the topic and its presentation are thought provoking. I have recommended it to a few friends, but since we are relatively liberal the book is 'preaching to the choir'.

A truly inspiring read for those passionate about economic social justice. The book treats government policy in more depth than we ever hear in political debate these days

The best I have read about Inequality.

I need this for an political economy class.

Very impressive book!

Excellent, if dry, book on a subject I have been writing intensely about for more than two decades and on and off for more than 47 years.

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