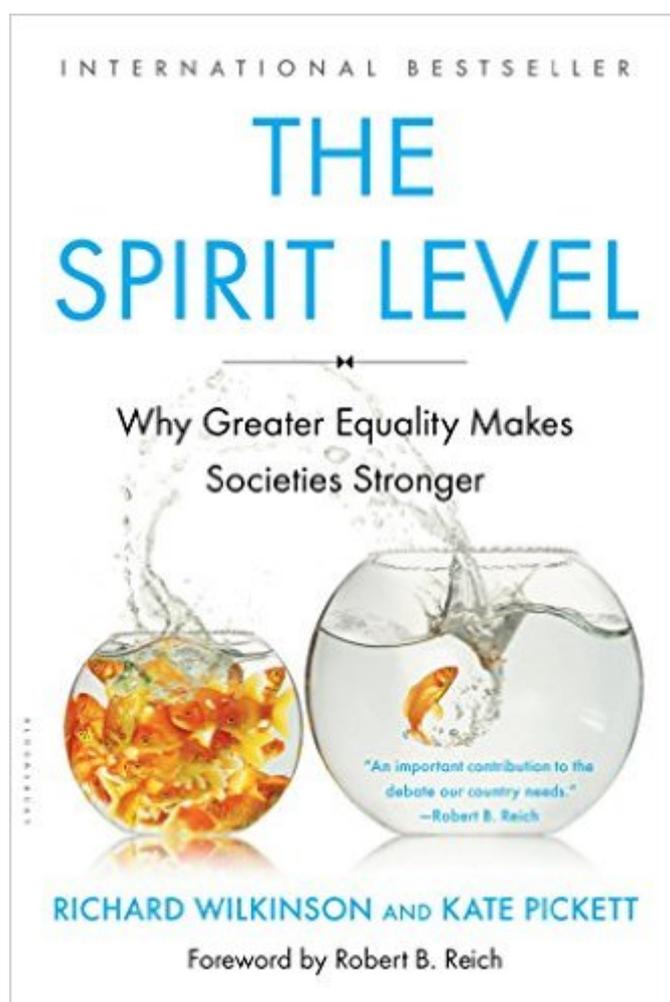


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The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger



Synopsis

It is a well-established fact that in rich societies the poor have shorter lives and suffer more from almost every social problem. The Spirit Level, based on thirty years of research, takes this truth a step further. One common factor links the healthiest and happiest societies: the degree of equality among their members. Further, more unequal societies are bad for everyone within them-the rich and middle class as well as the poor. The remarkable data assembled in The Spirit Level exposes stark differences, not only among the nations of the first world but even within America's fifty states. Almost every modern social problem-poor health, violence, lack of community life, teen pregnancy, mental illness-is more likely to occur in a less-equal society. Renowned researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett lay bare the contradictions between material success and social failure in the developed world. But they do not merely tell us what's wrong. They offer a way toward a new political outlook, shifting from self-interested consumerism to a friendlier, more sustainable society.

Book Information

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury Press; Reprint edition (May 3, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1608193411

ISBN-13: 978-1608193417

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (158 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #33,536 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Social Policy](#) #44 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Political Economy](#) #65 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Class](#)

Customer Reviews

I welcome this book. It is a superb summary of the problems that inequality actually creates. Inequality issues are often presented as being about the poor, but this book shows that we are all poorer for living in more unequal societies. Inequality is as bad for the rich as it is for the poor. Society is poorer as inequality becomes greater. The impacts of inequality show up in poorer health, lower educational attainment, higher crime rates, lower social capital, lower trust, lower co-operation the more unequal the society becomes. Wilkinson and Pickett give us clear evidence for these

statements. For the last twelve years we have endured in the UK a Labour government that preaches equality (then wonders "equality of what?") whilst actually presiding over increasing inequality and reducing social mobility. Wilkinson and Pickett present their evidence well, in summary and clearly. I have the benefit of having been reading the research work on inequalities over several years so I recognised their evidence. If you need further evidence then you could follow the references, or read some of Wilkinson's *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier* earlier works, or Michael Marmot's useful book, "The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity." Their presentation of evidence is strong, and it is difficult after seeing their evidence to argue in favour of greater inequality at all.

"The Spirit Level" by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett is a groundbreaking piece of social science research and analysis. In this assiduously researched book, the two British academics demonstrate a powerful link between income inequality and a host of social ills including obesity, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and crime. This compelling book should give every thinking person pause to reconsider how we might be able to do much better as individuals and as a society. This is a story that could not have been told five years ago. New data available from the World Bank has allowed the authors to make comparisons between market economies from around the world, as well as comparisons within the 50 U.S. states. Mr. Wilkinson and Ms. Pickett painstakingly show how the degree of income differential within and between states is highly correlated with social dysfunction. For example, the U.S., U.K. and Portugal -- where income is highly concentrated at the top -- consistently score worse in nearly every social problem when compared with Sweden and Japan, where income is much more evenly distributed. Crucially, Mr. Wilkinson and Ms. Pickett explain that reducing income differentials at the low and high ends decreases the stress and anxiety that comes from status competition, therefore improving life outcomes for everyone (not just the poor). This is an important insight because it sweeps away the commonly held notion that social dysfunction is someone else's problem; by showing that life expectancies level off and actually decrease at a certain income level, the authors argue convincingly that we are all in it together.

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