## The Spirit Level

It is very clear from The Spirit Level that “society needs to move away from greed or excess toward a way of life more centered on values.” When people are brought together they find out that ”others share[d] their views”. Whether you look from the divine command theory, utilitarian, or Kantian view-point you can see how inequality within a society, no matter the size, really is not ethical at all.

When looking at the Divine Command Theory you do not have to look far to see that it inequality is not moral at all. John 13:16 says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” In the USA, trust has fallen from a high of 60% in 1960 to a low of less than 40% by 2004. You can infer that one can’t feel on the same level with people if they can’t trust the other. The chicken or the egg question brought up was does inequality create low levels of trust, or does mistrust create inequality? Through various reasoning’s you can see that inequality creates low levels of trust.

What does trust have to do with anything? For our generation it is normal to not have much trust in others, which is all we know. When speaking from a younger ones perspective, it is very weird to think that we could trust everyone. One reason why I chose to go to SMU was because I felt like I could trust a higher percentage of people here than at other schools. If that level of trust that I have with other SMU students was obtained throughout the whole society the world would be a much different place.

The most favored ethics theory in The Spirit Level is Utilitarianism by far. An astronomic amount of facts are brought up that defend their idea that equality within society maximizes the utiles that a society, and then as a world as a whole, gains. Poor health and violence are more common in unequal societies. The poor health is not just limited to those in the bottom quartile or ten perfect. It affects everyone at every level within the society. The top suffers, not as much as those at the lowest quartile, but nonetheless suffer when the society is unequal. A shocking statistic that Wilkinson and Pickett brought up was that a study over a million British children – one in ten between the ages of 5 and 16 - are estimated to be mentally ill. It has been suggested that in any secondary school with 1,000 students, 50 will be severely depressed, 100 will be distressed, 10-20 will be suffering from OCD and between 5-10 girls will have an eating disorder. These are just children right now, this is the next generation that has to lead the world. A world that will have more inequality, more mental and physical health issues, as well as violence.

Violence in unequal societies is much higher than in equal ones. In the USA, prison populations have been increasing steadily since the early 1970s. In 1978 there were over 450,000 people in jail, by 2005 there were over 2 million: the numbers had quadrupled. This contrasts sharply with what has been happening in some other rich countries. Wilkinson and Pickett bring up the startling facts that “through the 1990s, the prison population was stable in Sweden and declined in Finland; it rose by only 8 per cent in Denmark, 9 per cent in Japan. More recently, rates have been falling in Ireland, Austria, France and Germany.” The more equal countries have either seen a decline, or at worst, a slight increase in their prison population. Going back to an earlier point, violence is due in part to a lack of trust. People have to be made to feel more worthless. When people are made to feel worthless there are “more fights, more brawls, more scuffles, more bottles and more knifes and more young men die.” Inequality and violence go hand-in-hand.

Using the Kantian ethics theory you can feel …

Capitalism, as learned through our textbook and notes, is favored and disfavored by many. It is favored because it offers a natural respect for property and it’s marketing of well-being. It is disfavored because it tolerates higher levels of poverty in comparison to other economic systems, normally high inequality, and it’s near complete basis on monetary value. Some countries that have a capitalist economy however do very well with equality; an example used much in the book is Sweden. The free market economy of Japan is used as well. Unlike Japan, Sweden achieves its equality due to taxes. Sweden has one of the highest tax rates with roughly fifty percent of their GDP coming from tax revenues.

(a) an emphasis on the moral equality of individuals in most systematic ethical schemes

religious ethics

Utilitarian ethics

Kantian ethics

(b) criticisms and defenses of (forms of) capitalism discussed in Chapter 4 of our textbook (along with a few related pages of Chapter 3),

(c) John Isbister's essay on justice and equality of opportunity

(d) the debate, treated in Chapter 5, between the narrow and broad views of corporate responsibility.