

"Challenges to the Creation of an Egalitarian Society: the Long View of Human History."

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Abstract: This talk explores challenges to the creation of an egalitarian society—that is, a free society of equals, without oppressive social hierarchies—from what we know about different types of human society across human history. All human beings originally lived in hunter-gatherer bands, which, along with tribal societies, are remarkably egalitarian. While these social forms prove that humans have moral psychologies that make us capable of living as equals, the checks and norms that bands and tribes institute against bullies and narcissists indicate that psychological tendencies toward hierarchy are also deeply rooted in human psychology. As societies increase in scale, they become capable of delivering greater prosperity, and dramatically reducing interpersonal violence. But the administration of large scale societies introduces new forms of hierarchy. The challenge for egalitarians today is how to secure the peace and prosperity of scale without succumbing to oppressive hierarchy, which activates bullying and narcissistic tendencies in human beings. I suggest some broad strategies for dealing with this challenge.