

Thoughts On Watching the Movie “Elysium”

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I've been watching a prediction of where humanity is headed if we continue to destroy the biosphere, increase our planet's human population far beyond the carrying capacity, and allow a tiny minority to escape the consequences of their actions and their values.

The introductory comment of the movie “Elysium” is, “In the late 21st century earth was diseased, polluted and vastly overpopulated. Earth's wealthiest inhabitants fled the planet to preserve their way of life.”

The IMDB summary is “In the year 2154, the very wealthy live on a man-made space station while the rest of the population resides on a ruined Earth. A man takes on a mission that could bring equality to the polarized worlds.”[1]

The main character Max (Matt Damon) lives in squalor with everyone else in Los Angeles. He is abused by the robot police, accused of disloyalty for making a joke, and is threatened with firing after they break his arm. He makes his way to work in a factory later in the day and a breakdown in a mechanical door leads his supervisor to threaten *him* with firing unless he goes inside a radiation chamber to free the door. The door shuts and he is subjected to lethal radiation. The manager of the factory is irritated that production is blocked. He is not concerned that Max will die and orders that the supervisor remove the victim to avoid soiling the bedclothes on which he has been placed.

Meanwhile, the ultrawealthy who profit from the exploitation of the huddled masses live on a space station, Elysium, where they protect themselves and their children from the consequences of their policies. The director of security (Jodie Foster) is frustrated by the vestiges of human rights enforced by the ruling committee and plots to take over the government to enforce her fascist, authoritarian policies on all of humanity.

I think that this movie speaks to some fundamental beliefs of what I derisively call *Republican Family Values*. There is no sense of shared humanity; life is a zero-sum game; the only legitimate belief is that protecting the privileges of the powerful is an

essential and justifiable policy no matter the extent and degree of suffering imposed on the exploited masses.

I hope that Trump and the Trump cultists don't watch the movie. They're dangerous enough without seeing and emulating the examples of inhumanity in the film.

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So how reasonable is it to construct a future with such astounding inequality and exploitation? Is it just a commie-pinko nightmare or are there reasons to be concerned already?

I won't go into the issue of resource exhaustion, the climate crisis and the anthropogenic extinction event. I want to focus on the issue of greed, its effects on humanity and the planet, and the broken feedback system that allows the exploiters of resources and people to escape the consequences of their evil lack of shared humanity.

Psychological research has already indicated that people who have either grown up extremely wealthy or who become so tend to have sociopathic tendencies. “Psychologists at the University of California, Berkeley, have conducted seven studies involving nearly a thousand participants from college students to senior citizens indicating that the rich are, indeed, different from the rest of us.

Although the scientists concede that there are exceptions, “the really well-to-do have lost a little of their moral character,” psychologist Dacher Keltner, coauthor of a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, said in a telephone interview.”[1]

The myth of success-through-hard-work continues to be used to justify economic inequality. Americans are told, “...[T]he truth is there's only one thing you can't go without if you want to succeed in any area of life, and that's hard work.... Successful entrepreneurs wouldn't have been able to manage people effectively, build products people love, run a big company, organize their time well and work with big sums of money, if they hadn't started from nothing and earned the chance to get to every next step.

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Millionaires also weren't that good at handling their money, investing wisely or networking. It took them years, trial and error, and patience to make a fortune.”[3]

Yes, “The number of Millionaires, defined in the report as those with a net worth between \$1 million and \$5 million, climbed to 10.23 million [in 2018], an increase of 250,000 compared with 2017. Including the wealth segments referenced below, there are 11.8 million Americans with a net worth of at least \$1 million.”[4] With a census population of ~327 million people[5], that's ~3.6% of the US population. The median annual income (not wealth) of the US population in 2018 was ~\$50,000.[5]

Unfortunately, “The wealth gap between upper-income and lower- and middle-income families has grown wider this century. Upper-income families were the only income tier able to build on their wealth from 2001 to 2016, adding 33% at the median. On the other hand, middle-income families saw their median net worth shrink by 20% and lower-income families experienced a loss of 45%. As of 2016, upper-income families had 7.4 times as much wealth as middle-income families and 75 times as much wealth as lower-income families. These ratios are up from 3.4 and 28 in 1983, respectively.”[6]

According to some studies, “...[T]he top 0.1 percent of the people own about the same as the bottom 90 percent” of the income distribution in the US. A more conservative study reported that “...[A]nother study found that the top 0.1 percent owned about 15 percent of all household wealth, while the bottom 90 percent owned 29 percent.” [7]

Another economic analysis pointed out that the 0.01% of the US population have seen explosive growth in their income and wealth. For example, the top 0.01%'s share of total income rose from 2.5% in 1995 to 5.1% in 2015, whereas the top 0.99% of the

income distribution saw an increase from 12.8% to 16.9% of total US income.[8] Thus the 0.01% of the income distribution saw a doubling of their proportion of national income compared with an increase of about 1.3 times for the rest of the top 1%.

The structural inequality of the US is rooted in historic patterns of racism and sexism. “Structural inequality is a system of privilege created by institutions within an economy. These institutions include the law, business practices, and government policies. They also include education, health care, and the media. They are powerful socializing agents that tell us what we can achieve within the society.

Inequality is structural when policies keep some groups of people from obtaining the resources to better their lives. It prevents those who are discriminated against from realizing the American Dream. They do not have a chance to pursue their idea of happiness. Structural inequality clouds this vision and limits economic growth for the whole society.”[9]

Structural inequality includes discrimination in education, housing, healthcare, race, gender and media.[9]

In conclusion, the propaganda that has been accepted by rightwing commentators argues that everyone in the US can become wealthy. Differences in wealth are entirely due to individual failures. Allowing a tiny percentage of the population to amass increasing proportions of national income and wealth is perfectly normal and healthy.

I hope that readers who take the time to examine the references below will come to realize that these positions, were they made into materials, would be excellent fertilizer for gardens and fields, even though they might smell even worse than they already do.

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