

# Global elite critical thinking

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



In the Economist debate over the presence and legitimacy of the 'global elite,' Jamie Whyte and Daniel Ben-Ami argued both for and against, respectively, the right of the global elite to have the majority of wealth in the world. They also discussed whether or not they subjectively 'deserved' to be there, and whether their status on the top was beneficial for the whole of humanity - whether they 'served the masses'. Jamie Whyte argued for the legitimacy of the elite, as they are providing services and purposes that are proportional in importance to their income and level of power. Conversely, Daniel Ben-Ami claimed that the nature of being a part of the elite was doing whatever it took to withhold needed resources and progress from the masses, so that they can keep it for themselves. For the purposes of this analytical essay, I chose to analyze Ben-Ami's argument. It is my finding that, while Ben-Ami is indeed critical of the global elite and their fear of progress, the problems run deeper than that, and that some of the stances that he attributes to the elite, particularly in regards to global warming, are misinformed.

In his opening statement, Ben-Ami sets forth his initial argument by emphasizing that he will not be discussing corrupt politicians or weighing the validity of those claims, as he feels that they are redundant and obvious - no one would argue that that behavior should be tolerate. Instead, he argues that the elite, while having worked in the past (notably the 1950s and 60s) to 'promote mass affluence,' their stance of late has moved in a more conservative direction. (Opening 20) Progress is no longer a big issue for them, instead favoring policies and directions that maintain the status quo.

Ben-Ami argues that the primary reason for this hesitation towards progress comes from all of the moral, social and environmental stipulations that must be made in order to justify forward movement. On the subject of global warming, he states that the elite have become more focused on instead restricting and limiting people's lifestyles in order to consume less, instead of actually innovating new technologies and solutions for the problem. They have resorted to navel-gazing at their current activity instead of looking for new ways out of the situation.

Economic progress is curtailed at every turn by the arguments of the elite: that we are consuming too much, that any new advances would just hurt future generations. They have turned progress into a curse, advocating stagnation before things get any worse. Ben-Ami also throws out the argument that all of this is part of an ulterior motive to hold onto resources for themselves, and that human progress is being halted by the limits of the elite.

Ben-Ami's rebuttal picks apart Jamie Whyte's arguments that the global elite has a legitimate right to be there, as they offered needed services to the people and were justifiably rewarded for them. Ben-Ami states that the people have long been removed from true choice in our democracy - that the candidates offered for leadership roles are far too similar in policy as to provide a real difference, thus promoting apathy and curbing progress further. Elites themselves " have lost faith in their ability to take society forward." (Rebuttal 24) Therefore, a culture of limits has been imposed on the masses, thereby encouraging them to stay where they are, use less and

buy less, extending the elite's pessimism to everyone. Ben-Ami cites China as an example of a country that has not shirked from progress, and as a result is thriving and flourishing. He also discusses the change in the definition of development from the 50's ideal of lifting up poorer countries to developed levels to a more modern context of keeping the very poor from becoming completely hopeless. This shift in attitudes is indicative of the more restrictive, less progressive stance the global elite has taken in managing the economy and society as a whole.

In his closing statement, Ben-Ami states that "the elite is curbing, rather than promoting, popular consumption and aspirations", which is the crux of his argument, disputing many of the commenters and participants who claimed that the elite promoted excessive consumption that would lead to our downfall. In fact, Ben-Ami most prominently returns to his anti-environmentalist argument that the global elite are embracing attitudes leading to diminished, less consumptive lifestyles in order to prevent having to move forward with new solutions to the global warming problem. This, according to Ben-Ami, would lead to widespread stagnation and a deadening of contemporary society. The elite is anxious about progress in Ben-Ami's eyes, and as a result takes whatever steps it can to avoid that sort of momentum in society.

Ben-Ami's argument is relatively sound, but there are a few mistaken assumptions in it that prevent it from being a truly comprehensive view of the global elite, and therefore mistakenly represents them as a completely conservative, totally restrictive group. They are restrictive to be sure, but not

for the reasons that Ben-Ami claims. He claims that the global elite, especially in regards to global warming, are going for a more conservative, less consumptive stance, but with all of the opposition regarding even the existence of global warming by lobbyists, it cannot be argued that they are completely for limiting consumption, as that would also hurt their profit margins. Any attempts at environmentalism tend to skew towards pandering to a more environmentally conscious public, while still attempting to turn it into a brand and sell it.

I posit that there is more consumerism going on today than less, and the global elite are attempting to perpetuate that in the guise of being 'eco-friendly.' As a result, Ben-Ami's argument is less than sound, as he believes that the global elite are attempting to get people to change their lifestyles around to account for less usage. While this might help circumvent global warming, it would make more sense for businesses to want to spend the development money creating new solutions and techniques, as well as develop new technologies, that can allow the public to not worry about the environment when they consume. This would bring about greater consumption and more profit for the companies the global elite operate. As a result of this reasoning, it is simply not feasible that the global elite would want to encourage more conservative spending, as it would lower their profit margins far too much.

Ben-Ami's stance seems to come from the global elite's love for the status quo, which is certainly true of their stances. However, that same hatred of progress and change would make them fear the change to a more eco-

friendly environment, as it would cost too much to change their business model and fundamentally alter the way they operate. (Freeland 2011) It would be in the global elite's best interest to keep things the way they are, as change would provide the chance to lose what they have. In this respect, I believe that Ben-Ami is incorrect; the global elite does not want to further ecofriendliness, unless greatly beneficial incentives were provided to justify the cost.

Ben-Ami has a number of good points to make about the idea that the global elite does not serve the masses - they are more interested in their own interests than that of the people, they deliberately hinder or discourage progress in the name of maintaining the status quo, etc. (The Truth 2010) However, some of his examples are slightly muddled, such as the global warming initiative; he attributes an ecofriendly nature to the elite that, for the most part, does not exist. Regardless of the efficacy of his examples, the fact remains that his call to action rings true: the global elite must take a greater responsibility for the people whose futures they hold in their hands, and allow progress to continue.

## **Works Cited**

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