How To Make The World Better Economically

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The desire to make the world economically better begins with a moral question: why do societies capable of producing extraordinary wealth still leave many people without secure housing, healthcare, education, food, time, or meaningful work? The original essay approaches this question through Langston Hughes's poem "Tired," Dean Baker's economic writing, the metaphor of "worms" that consume social wellbeing, and a personal desire to redirect resources toward ordinary people. That framework remains useful. Hughes expresses frustration with a world organized through injustice, while Baker argues that economic outcomes reflect policy choices rather than natural law. A better world therefore requires more than growth. It requires institutions that distribute opportunity, bargaining power, security, and the gains from productivity fairly. Markets can support innovation and coordination, but they do not automatically produce justice. (Baker, 2022; Hughes, 1926; International Labour Organization, 2024)

Langston Hughes's "Tired"

In "Tired," Hughes speaks in a voice exhausted by injustice and by explanations that never produce change. The poem's desire to "cut the world in two" is not a technical policy proposal. It is an image of impatience with hidden structures. Cutting the world open would reveal what is wrong inside. The speaker wants to examine the arrangement rather than accept suffering as inevitable. This emotional demand is important because economic debate often hides human consequences behind abstract statistics.

Economic Frustration as Political Knowledge

Being tired of inequality can become either resignation or inquiry. Hughes's poem turns exhaustion into a demand to identify mechanisms. Who sets wages? Who owns productive assets? Who pays taxes? Which services are treated as rights, and which are sold according to ability to pay? Who receives protection during crisis? These questions convert a vague sense of unfairness into political economy. Emotion does not replace evidence, but it can identify problems that official measures ignore. (Stiglitz, 2012)

Dean Baker's Argument

Dean Baker frequently argues that upward redistribution is produced through laws and institutions, including patent rules, financial regulation, corporate governance, trade policy, professional licensing, and macroeconomic choices. Wealth concentration is not simply the reward for neutral market contribution. Government establishes the rules within which markets operate. When rules increase monopoly rents, weaken labor bargaining, protect excessive fees, or socialize losses, the resulting inequality should not be described as the unavoidable product of technology.

The “Worms” in the Economy

The original essay uses worms as a metaphor for policies and institutions that consume public resources while remaining hidden. A useful definition would include monopoly power, corruption, tax avoidance, discrimination, predatory finance, weak labor rights, unaffordable healthcare, exclusionary housing, and political capture. Not every large business is a worm, and small firms can also exploit workers or customers. The metaphor should identify harmful conduct and incentives rather than condemn organizations solely because of size.

Economic Growth and Distribution

Economic growth can improve living standards by increasing goods, services, technology, and public revenue. Its benefit depends on distribution. If productivity rises while wages stagnate and essential costs increase, national income may grow without ordinary families feeling more secure. A better economy asks who receives gains, whether people can meet basic needs, and whether growth damages future wellbeing through pollution or instability. Gross domestic product is useful but incomplete.

Market Power

Competition can encourage lower prices, innovation, and better service. Market concentration can allow firms to raise prices, suppress wages, restrict suppliers, or acquire competitors before they become threats. Antitrust enforcement, interoperability, open standards, and scrutiny of mergers can reduce harmful concentration. Regulation should distinguish scale that creates efficiency from power used to block competition. A policy that protects an incumbent under the language of innovation may become one of the worms the essay seeks to expose.

Intellectual Property

Patents and copyrights can reward innovation and creative work, but they also grant temporary exclusive rights. In medicine, a monopoly can support research while producing prices that restrict access. Policy should balance incentive with competition, public funding, transparency, licensing, and timely generic or biosimilar entry. It is inaccurate to assign one fixed amount, such as $400 billion, to drug companies without specifying the period and method. The broader point is that monopoly rules determine both innovation rewards and public cost.

Healthcare

Healthcare illustrates how markets, public policy, professional practice, insurance, and human need intersect. Patients cannot always compare prices or delay treatment. A person experiencing an emergency has limited bargaining power. Economic improvement requires access to preventive, primary, mental-health, reproductive, chronic-disease, and emergency care without catastrophic financial exposure. Payment reform should protect quality and patient choice while reducing administrative waste and unjustified price variation.

Education

Education expands capability, civic participation, and economic opportunity, but unequal funding and high costs can reproduce class advantage. A better system invests in early childhood, schools, vocational pathways, higher education, adult learning, libraries, and digital access. Education should not be viewed only as a private investment in future wages. Society benefits from informed citizens, skilled workers, scientific research, culture, and lower barriers to participation.

Childcare

Childcare is economic infrastructure because it allows parents to work and children to develop. When care is unaffordable, families—especially women—may reduce employment, while caregivers remain underpaid. Public support can improve access and workforce stability. Policy should recognize different family preferences and maintain quality rather than fund only the cheapest available supervision. Childcare investment combines employment, gender equity, and child wellbeing.

Labor Bargaining Power

Workers negotiate individually with organizations that may have more information and resources. Unions, sectoral bargaining, minimum standards, wage transparency, and protection from retaliation can rebalance power. Labor rights should cover safe conditions, predictable pay, leave, and freedom from discrimination. Stronger bargaining does not eliminate management or markets. It gives workers a more meaningful role in distributing the value they help create.

Minimum Wages and Earned Income

Minimum-wage policy sets a floor beneath competition. The appropriate level depends on economic conditions, enforcement, and interaction with benefits. A nominal wage is insufficient if employers violate the law or misclassify workers. Earned-income tax credits and related supports can supplement low wages, but public subsidies should not become a permanent substitute for employers paying fairly. Policy should evaluate employment, income, prices, and family wellbeing together.

Precarious and Platform Work

Gig and platform work can offer flexibility but may shift business risk, equipment cost, waiting time, and injury onto workers. Legal classification affects wage, insurance, leave, collective bargaining, and unemployment protection. A better economy allows innovation without creating a workforce excluded from basic standards. Flexibility should be genuine for both parties rather than a label placed on insecurity.

Taxation

Taxes fund public goods and shape distribution. A progressive system asks people with greater capacity to contribute more, while avoiding loopholes that allow income to be converted or shifted merely to reduce tax. Tax policy should be evaluated through effective rates, administration, avoidance, economic behavior, and the quality of services financed. Raising revenue without competent spending will not create trust; underfunding essential institutions also creates long-term cost.

Wealth and Inheritance

Wealth provides security, investment opportunity, housing, education, and political influence. Large inheritances can transmit advantage independent of effort. Estate and gift taxation, capital-gains rules, and universal asset-building proposals address this issue in different ways. Policy should protect ordinary savings and family stability while questioning permanent dynastic concentration. Equal legal rights do not produce equal opportunity when starting assets differ dramatically.

Housing

Housing costs can absorb wage gains and push families far from jobs and schools. Supply restrictions, speculation, discrimination, infrastructure, financing, and income all influence affordability. A better policy combines more housing in appropriate locations, tenant protection, homelessness prevention, fair lending, public and nonprofit options, and transportation. Treating every housing problem as either insufficient supply or landlord misconduct alone misses the interaction of markets and institutions.

Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness need safe housing, healthcare, income support, and services tailored to their circumstances. Mental illness or substance use may be relevant for some but does not explain every case. High rent, eviction, domestic violence, disability, job loss, and family conflict also matter. Punishing people for sleeping in public does not create housing. Effective policy coordinates prevention, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable supply.

Social Insurance

Unemployment insurance, disability support, pensions, paid leave, and health coverage reduce the risk that one shock becomes permanent poverty. Social insurance is not merely charity; it pools risks that individuals cannot manage efficiently alone. Programs should be accessible, adequately funded, and protected against fraud without making legitimate applicants navigate humiliating obstacles. Administrative simplicity is an economic benefit.

Small Business

The pandemic showed that businesses differ greatly in access to credit, digital infrastructure, legal advice, and reserves. Large firms often had greater capacity to continue operations, while small enterprises faced closure. Support should be transparent and connected with payroll, viable activity, and public goals. Small firms also need competition policy, affordable healthcare, simple taxes, broadband, and access to finance. Romanticizing small business should not excuse poor labor standards.

The COVID-19 Shock

COVID-19 produced unequal economic effects. Technology, delivery, pharmaceutical, and financial firms sometimes gained, while hospitality, retail, arts, care workers, and informal businesses faced disruption. Public support prevented deeper hardship but also revealed weaknesses in benefit systems and supply chains. The lesson is not that every company profit during crisis was illegitimate. It is that emergency policy should protect people, preserve productive capacity, and prevent opportunistic extraction.

Trade and Globalization

Trade can increase variety, specialization, and productivity, but its gains and costs are distributed unevenly. Workers and regions facing import competition may experience long-term disruption. Trade agreements also affect intellectual property, investment, labor, and environmental rules. A better global system enforces labor rights, supports adjustment, allows development policy, and prevents corporations from using jurisdictions against one another. National protectionism alone cannot solve global supply chains and may raise consumer costs.

Climate and Economic Welfare

Economic improvement must account for climate risk, pollution, and resource depletion. Growth that destroys health, agriculture, or infrastructure transfers costs to future people and vulnerable communities. Public investment in clean energy, resilient transport, efficient buildings, and adaptation can create employment while reducing risk. Transition policy should support workers and regions dependent on high-carbon industries rather than demand sacrifice without alternatives.

Public Investment

Infrastructure, research, education, health, and environmental protection can produce benefits private investors cannot capture fully. Government has an important role in long-term investment. Projects require transparent selection, procurement, maintenance, and evaluation. Building a visible asset while neglecting operations can waste resources. Public investment should expand capability rather than serve as a channel for politically connected contracts.

Financial Regulation

Finance directs savings toward investment and helps households manage payments and risk. It can also generate crises, predatory lending, excessive fees, and speculation. Capital requirements, consumer protection, transparent products, and resolution rules reduce systemic danger. Financial innovation should be evaluated according to social function. Complexity that primarily hides risk or extracts fees does not automatically improve the economy.

Democratic Accountability

Economic rules are shaped through political institutions. Wealth can purchase lobbying, expertise, media, and campaign influence, creating a cycle in which economic power strengthens political power. Transparency, anti-corruption rules, voting access, independent administration, and public participation are economic reforms as well as democratic ones. A policy technically designed for the public can be captured during implementation.

Measuring a Better Economy

A better-world agenda needs measures beyond GDP. Relevant indicators include median income, poverty, wealth distribution, employment quality, housing burden, health, education, environmental quality, leisure, security, and mobility. Measures should be disaggregated by region and demographic group to reveal unequal outcomes. No dashboard can decide values automatically, but broader measurement prevents one aggregate number from hiding deterioration elsewhere.

My Priorities

My priority is to direct social resources toward healthcare, childcare, education, housing, and opportunity for people who are excluded from prosperity. These programs should be designed as capability-building institutions rather than temporary publicity. I also support policies that reduce monopoly rents, protect labor, and make taxation more effective. The aim is not to punish every successful company. It is to ensure that success does not depend on weak bargaining, avoidable illness, political influence, or barriers that prevent others from participating.

Responsibility of Individuals and Institutions

Individuals make choices about work, education, saving, consumption, and community. Those choices matter, but they occur within wages, laws, health, family resources, and market structure. Economic policy should expand responsible choice rather than lecture people whose options are narrow. Institutions should be accountable for the environments they create. A person cannot budget their way out of every housing shortage, medical bill, or discriminatory barrier.

Conclusion

Langston Hughes's "Tired" expresses the emotional urgency to cut open an unjust world and discover what is wrong. Dean Baker's economic perspective shows that many apparent market outcomes are produced through policy choices. The worms undermining prosperity include monopoly, corruption, weak labor power, unaffordable essentials, exclusion, and rules that transfer wealth upward. A better world requires economic growth, but also fair distribution, social insurance, public investment, accessible healthcare and education, affordable housing, climate responsibility, and democratic accountability. Economic betterment is not achieved by one payment or slogan. It is the continuing design of institutions that allow ordinary people to live securely and participate meaningfully in shared prosperity.

Works Cited

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