

[Every man a king](#) [1]

Written by [Dr Eamonn Butler](#) [2] | Tuesday 5 July 2011



Waiting for friends at a museum in Cambridge, I whipped out my iPhone, plugged in the earphones, and dialled up [Prokofiev's First Piano Concerto in D Flat](#) [3], performed by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. Then it hit me, how amazing it was that I could get around 80 of the world's top musicians to play for me whenever and wherever I wanted. Three hundred years ago, maybe kings might have been able to do that, but nobody much below that rank could.

Then I started counting. I have the London and Berlin Philharmonics on there too. Plus a whole slew of other musicians ? world-class guitarists like John Williams, top singers like Nora Jones. I figure I have about 1,000 top musicians ? plus all their backing crews ? in the palm of my hand. And not only that. Within ten minutes' walk of where I was in Cambridge, I figure there are 118 restaurants and 72 pubs. That's maybe 1,000 people prepared to cook up and serve me my lunch. If I was prepared to walk for 20 minutes, I could probably find as many again. That makes me better off than Louis XIV, who I think had only 1,500 personal cooks. And why do I need to walk anyway? Like Louis's coachmen, a fleet of taxi drivers stand by to take me anywhere I want to go ? and a lot quicker.

In just 300 years, the market system has made every one of us ? even those deemed so poor that they receive state welfare benefits ? at least as wealthy as the Sun King, and in most respects, a lot wealthier. When ordinary people aspire to live better, there is no shortage of innovative entrepreneurs who will find ways to make it happen, in return for the small reward that millions of ordinary people willingly pay for that service. I have no doubt that in another 300 years, the market system could make the poorest people on the planet as rich as the super-rich are today. My only doubt is whether our politicians will let it.

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [5]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/economics/every-man-a-king>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/economics/every-man-a-king>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/authors/dr-eamonn-butler>

[3] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrT4jHW7K00>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>