

Emma Fleeman

*Essay title:*

*The rich should be obliged to give to the poor because they don't deserve what they have*

There are several issues that arise when considering whether the rich should be obliged to give to the poor because they don't deserve what they have. The meaning of 'rich' should be considered, particularly the classification of who is 'rich'. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider who 'deserves' wealth. Therefore, the question perhaps is not as clear-cut as inflammatory newspaper headlines would have the general public believe, and instead we must question whether the rich deserve their wealth and begin by considering who actually is "rich".

In order to fully understand the question, the meaning of 'rich' must be ascertained. It is easy to look at the billionaires on various 'rich lists' and have a stereotypical image of the privileged wealthy few exploiting the hardworking general population. However, it is important to acknowledge the subjective nature of the term. To the average middle-class citizen, billionaires may seem grotesquely affluent, yet to someone on minimum wage, relying on state benefits, the middle-class worker could certainly be regarded as rich.

Indeed, if the concept of wealth is considered on a global scale, someone struggling on the UK minimum wage would seem rich to a worker in an underdeveloped country, who lives in extreme poverty. For example, in Nigeria, 60% of the population live on one US dollar a day or less. The definition of 'rich' held by such a person could mean that a worker on the UK national minimum wage of £7.83 an hour, relying on food banks to feed their children, should donate what little they have to those less fortunate as they can be regarded as 'rich' and therefore undeserving. This hardly seems a fair assessment because the subjective nature of the concept of 'rich' means that while to the billionaire, the UK minimum wage worker may be poor, to a person in a poverty-stricken society, the lowest paid UK worker would be richer than they could imagine.

Therefore, it should perhaps be considered that, instead of the 'rich' being obliged to donate money to the poor, those with an income in excess of a defined sum should be obliged to give a proportion of their wealth to the poor. This would remove the subjectivity inherent in the concept of 'rich', thereby ensuring that these measures would benefit the least affluent and most vulnerable in society.

It is now necessary to consider the meaning of the term 'deserve'. To be able to address the issue of donating money because the rich don't deserve what they have, it must be determined whether the rich deserve their wealth. To assess whether this is the case, the source of this wealth should be examined. There is a vast difference between those who are wealthy because of their birthright, for example members of the aristocracy who inherit wealth and privilege because a distant ancestor was the favourite of a ruling dynasty and those who were born into working class families, who secured their wealth through working tirelessly for the opportunity to better themselves and improve the lives of their families.

It seems reasonable to suggest that those who have merely inherited, rather than earned, their wealth should be obliged to donate to the poor because they have done nothing to amass the fortune they possess.

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The issue of who 'deserves' wealth becomes less clear-cut when considering the aforementioned number whose wealth is self-made. Many of these individuals are from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds and have worked tirelessly to improve their position in life. It is difficult to argue that these people are undeserving of the wealth they have worked so hard to gain.

Indeed, it can be argued that those who have created their own opportunities are perhaps more deserving of this wealth than some of those to whom they would be obliged to donate. A number of those living on low incomes can be seen as not 'deserving' wealth because they have not availed themselves of the opportunities that we take for granted. Whilst there are undoubtedly inequalities in British society, every child is entitled to free education. Yet sadly, some do not recognise the importance of this as a means of improving social mobility and life chances.

Despite this, it is important to recognise that there are poorer people who are willing to work hard and are therefore just as deserving of wealth as the self-made rich but have not had the good fortune to succeed. Perhaps therefore, instead of assuming that the entirety of the rich population is not deserving of their wealth and should be obliged to donate part of it, society should examine the elitist issues that remain institutionalised within our country. Rather than focussing on the rich simply donating their money, more measures to enhance social mobility should be in place to ensure that those who are the most deserving of wealth have the opportunity to earn it.

In conclusion, while it could certainly be argued that many of the richest in our society aren't deserving of their wealth due to the fact that it has been inherited from their families, those who have worked hard for their money certainly do. Furthermore, since people's perceptions of what constitutes being 'rich' may vary, it is unreasonable to say that everyone who may be seen as rich doesn't deserve their wealth. Therefore, I would argue that instead of the rich being obliged to donate to the poor, society should provide more opportunities for social mobility to enable the most deserving people to become wealthy, rather than the most privileged.