

Keira Wallace Flint

Merton Law essay competition

“The rich should be obliged to give to the poor because they don’t deserve what they have.”

This statement poses various questions. At what income are you determined as rich, or poor? How much should the rich be obliged to give to the poor? Who does deserve what they have? These answers are subjective and should consider, the current rate at which the ‘rich’ give to the ‘poor’, the effect that giving to the poor would have on society and what determines entitlement to wealth.

While it is uncertain whether the top-earners should be ‘obliged’ to share their wealth with those on lower incomes, it is certainly true that they already are. This is through income taxation, which currently at its peak stands at 45% for income over £150,000 in the United Kingdom. The majority (around 23.8%) of taxpayer money is used for welfare funding, which is vital for those on the poverty line. Considering the rich are taxed on a much larger portion of their income, they do give a considerable amount to the funding for welfare schemes and therefore the poor who benefit from these. Furthermore, if the ‘rich’ were obligated to give a significant amount of their wealth to the poor, by law, rather than voluntarily, then perhaps the incentive to become ‘rich and successful’ would be lost. If living on the poverty line, results in free money from those that are wealthy, then the youth may question the point in working hard to earn a large wage, if you had to give it away and what would be so terrible about being ‘poor’ if the rich provided for you? It has always been a conservative belief that large public spending on welfare and ‘handouts to the poor’ cause a decline in work ethic and aspiration.

Although, it can be argued that, the top earners could donate a portion of their income to those in need, without the loss of this income affecting their lifestyle significantly or at all. A recent example that has caused controversy on where the rich should donate their money, is the fire of the Notre Dame Cathedral. While it is one of the most visited landmarks in the world and a huge part of Parisian culture, it has been criticised that the €1 billion easily raised, for the restoration of the roof and spire, by French billionaires and companies in just 24 hours, could have been used to aid the poor. The promptness of which they raised this money shows how much more they could be doing for those in need. There is a similarity with the wealthy in the United Kingdom also, many of whom do not engage in any meaningful philanthropy. Only two-fifths of British people earning more than £250,000 made a charitable donation in 2017. The average amount given to charity, by those two-fifths of earners, was only £1,000. Therefore, much more could be done by the top earners, to make an impact on poverty.

On the contrary, the statement exclaims that the wealthy “don’t deserve what they have” and that is why they should give to the poor. If entitlement to wealth is based on work ethic, then the statement may be true for some of the rich. For example, it could be argued that inherited wealth, ‘old money’ is not worked for by the younger generations that are born into this and so do not deserve what they have. However, who is entitled to your wealth, if not your descendants? Additionally, in the present day, there is a lot of new money and self-made

successful businessmen and businesswomen, with the rapidly growing industry of technology, with Artificial Intelligence, Bitcoin, social media, and the online market for example. In 2018, 400,000 new millionaires were made across the world. These successes are entitled to their own money, that they have worked for.

In summary, I disagree that the “rich should be obliged to give to the poor because they don’t deserve what they have.”, due to the reasons, I have highlighted. The top earners already contribute to welfare through taxes (which they pay more of), being obliged to give what you have to the poor would take away the incentive and drive to become wealthy, and the rich deserve the money they have just as much as anybody else does. Although I do believe that the rich should voluntarily give more to the poor, through charity donations, as the money would have a much bigger and meaningful impact on the lives of the poor, than themselves, they should not be obligated to by law.