

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

- Michael Smith

The rich should be obliged to give to the poor, but not necessarily because they don't deserve their wealth. To assess the title statement comprehensively, we must first break it down into its two separate assertions. The latter concerns the justification of the rich's wealth: whether or not it is right for an individual to have a disproportionately large sum of money compared to his peers. Only once this is assessed, can we comment on whether or not the rich should be obliged to give to the poor. Of course, this obligation already exists in our society in the implementation of taxation and the welfare state, thus, the purpose of this essay will be to highlight the necessity and moral legitimacy of both policies.

The rich gain their wealth in 3 ways: via inheritance, through hard work, or through illicit activities such as theft and embezzlement.

Those who acquire their wealth via inheritance genuinely don't 'deserve what they have' as they have done nothing to earn it – they were simply lucky enough to be born into wealth. While a more comfortable life for one's children is perhaps a suitable reward for hard work, to argue in support of the 3% of millionaires<sup>1</sup> who gained their incomes solely through inheritance seems intrinsically flawed. Both the left and the right agree that hard work should correlate with success, so surely it is hypocritical to validate the creation of millionaires who have never worked a day in their lives, while 13 million harder working citizens live in poverty<sup>2</sup>.

The remaining 97% of millionaires proclaim themselves to be 'self-made', and therefore 'deservedly' wealthy. To be so, they must have acquired their wealth through hard work, or work that society deems valuable. However, no one, no matter how hard working, earns their wealth entirely through their own personal enterprise. Invariably, the rich rely on those beneath them to build and maintain their corporate empires: only with the aid of free education, healthcare and the welfare state can companies guarantee a steady flow of workers and consumers, and without these, their empires would cease to prosper. Moreover, equality of opportunity is far from a realised concept in today's society. Those born into affluent areas, with rich parents and useful contacts, have more opportunities to succeed economically. While these 'self-made' entrepreneurs may have worked hard, they were lucky enough to find themselves in circumstances where their hard work could be rewarded. Conversely, there are those that work equally hard, yet due to a lack of opportunity are socially restricted and destined to perpetuate a cycle of generational poverty. Lastly, while we generally agree that hard work should be rewarded, there is a limit to how hard one can work, and therefore, arguably, a limit to how much one deserves to earn. Jeff Bezos is currently the richest man in the world, valued at over \$150,000,000,000<sup>3</sup>, a ludicrous sum of money for an individual to own, and one that no amount of personal enterprise can reasonably justify. While it's feasible to **gain** billions of dollars from hard work, it is not justifiably **earned**, and is therefore undeserved. This is not to say that the hard-working rich do not deserve a majority of their wealth— only that their work is aided by factors outside of their control, thus, a portion of their wealth should be redistributed to those that need it.

The final method of procuring wealth, through the aforementioned illicit activities, is self-explanatorily wrong. If one breaks the law and consequently harms another, naturally the wealth they acquired should be redistributed back to those they stole it from. However, the moral wrongfulness of theft is disputable considering we have already argued that the rich are undeserving of the totality of their wealth. What if one

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chrishogan360.com/how-many-millionaires-actually-inherited-their-wealth/>

<sup>2</sup> "Households below average income: 1994/95 to 2014/15". Department for Work and Pensions. Retrieved 21 January 2017

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/#eae1757251c7>

were to steal this evidently 'undeserved' wealth and gave it to the poor in a 'Robin Hood'-esque fashion? Surely that is morally righteous? The flaw in this argument lies in the assumption that it is up to one man to decide what is a 'noble' cause and what is not. In the thought experiment 'How Many Men?' Andrew B. Napolitano makes the distinction between taxation and theft<sup>4</sup>, claiming that it is the number of people who 'steal' one's money that creates this distinction. Similarly, if one man were to destroy a building for their own sense of morality, it would be viewed as outrageous by the public, though, if a government were elected into office with the promise of destroying said building for the good of society, it is a legally and morally justified policy.

Thus, it is abundantly clear that the rich, no matter the source, are undeserving of the totality of their wealth. It logically follows that they should be obliged to give some of it to society. If this concerned only a moral obligation, there would be no need for debate, as everyone agrees that charity as a concept is a noble endeavour. The contentiousness of this idea derives from it concerning a legal obligation – that of forcibly requisitioning one's wealth and redistributing it to those less fortunate, which admittedly at first glance seems akin to theft. Although, this perception of taxation stems from the view that the government takes our money and then spends it on the public. Instead, if we think of taxation as the repayment for the service of creating a prosperous society provided by the government, taxation seems far less objectionable. In short, taxation is the price we pay to live in an organised society, rather than primitivistic anarchy.

Thus, the rich should be obliged to give to the poor, not because the rich do not deserve their wealth, but because they do not deserve the **totality** of it, and far more importantly - no one deserves to live in poverty.

984 words excluding foot notes.

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<sup>4</sup> Napolitano, Andrew B. (October 18, 2011). "Chapter 13 Theft by Any Other Name". *It Is Dangerous to Be Right When the Government Is Wrong: The Case for Personal Freedom*. Thomas Nelson Inc. pp. 221–225. [ISBN 978-1-59555-350-8](https://www.amazon.com/It-Dangerous-Be-Right-When-Government-Is-Wrong/dp/978-1-59555-350-8).