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

Before setting out my argument, it is imperative to first state what I consider the definition of ‘to be obliged’ and ‘to deserve’ is. ‘Obligation’ suggests that a party has a moral duty to another and in this context of wealth redistribution, this obligation should not occur solely because of legal rule (taxation). In contrast, the normative concept of ‘to deserve’ suggests qualities/ actions which merit reward. I believe that the notion of obligation negates the concept of deserving and that while the rich may feel obliged to give the poor, the reason for this is not because they do not deserve the wealth they have earned.

One perspective supporting the need for compulsory redistribution originates from the existence of inherited wealth, a view enforced by the philanthropist Carnegie who considered “the man who dies…rich, dies disgraced[1]”. This normative judgement highlights the apparent moral ‘obligatory’ need for redistribution due to the belief that inherited wealth only generates further inequalities in both income and wealth (a consequence of wealth and income being mutually reinforcing). Children who receive inherited wealth could be considered to have obtained this financial security undeservedly since they themselves had not taken any entrepreneurial risks and hence not earned the wealth through their own actions. The apparent unfairness of this financial security is supported by Warren Buffet who states ‘your skills fit a market economy’ which implies that those on the low income bracket may receive smaller income then what they ‘deserve’. A particular example of this are nurses whose services, although deriving minimal revenue, provide massive benefit for the welfare of society as a whole through their labours. Consequently, the rich ought to feel morally obliged to give monetary payments to the poor to ensure equality of opportunity for children born into poverty.

However, it must be evaluated that the welfare of the children may have suffered through their parents having to work intense and antisocial hours to achieve this wealth indicting it unfair for the suffering of both the parent and child go unrewarded. This argument though is less valid when wealth is passed down many generations, ensuring financial security for those who were not originally directly offset by the suffering. Nonetheless, as the rich have a declining marginal utility of income[2], redistribution subsequently appears a suitable idea because the loss in utility to the wealthy from whom the dollar is taken is not as great as the gain to poor who receives the dollar.

There is also the necessary consideration that the rich may have obtained their wealth through deceitful and immoral practice. An example of what could be considered immoral practice is the concept of wage slavery which is an idea first stated by Cicero who commented “whoever gives his labour for money sells himself and puts himself in the rank

[1] Rimel, Rebecca W. “Charity and Strategy: Philanthropy's Evolving Role.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 145, no. 4, 2001, pp. 587–595.
[2] Weisbach, David A. “Should Legal Rules Be Used to Redistribute Income?” The University of Chicago Law Review, vol. 70, no. 1, 2003, pp. 439–453.

of slaves[3]". This statement suggests that underpaid wage earners only sell themselves to their employer (the rich) and do not generate any value for themselves, unlike a craftsman for example who sells the product that he produces. In this interpretation, it subsequently appears that skills of the workers are unfairly extorted.

This wage slavery could perhaps be considered justified because of how the nature of reward in business is tied to huge entrepreneurial risk. The business owners take risk through the purchase of capital (which is then supplied to the workers) and employment of labour with the ultimate aim of earning wealth. As labour is only one of many costs for the owner, it could hence be argued that the owners (the rich) are entitled to higher rewards through the cumulative risk undertaken. A solution to this wage differential is to ensure a wage cap so that the owner can only be paid a certain times more than his workers (the poor).

Finally, there is the argument that if the rich are obliged to give to the poor, whether taxation is the optimum method of achieving this. Taxation (a legal rule) can cause distortion in labour/leisure choice in the labour market, as stated by Laffer who said that tax rates beyond the optimum tax rate alter the trade-off between working and leisure and consequently, the desire to be entrepreneurial is removed. This crucially causes a reduction in economic growth and thus transfer payments made to the poor i.e. through welfare benefit through a decline in tax revenue collected. The rich could view high tax rates as impinging upon their liberty as the legal rule of taxation can be seen as a form of state coercion, which is otherwise punishable by a prison sentence if not obeyed. The rich may alternatively be instead be philanthropists and willing to give greater monetary sums to the poor permitting that they were certain that their wealth would be used to empower people, as evidence through the success of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

To conclude, all societies require redistribution to an extent and the trade-off is best matched by taxation. However, I find it untrue that the common reason why the rich feel both 'obliged' to give to the poor is because they do not 'deserve' what they have. Instead, there is always the element of human nature which ensures that rich want to give to not only maintain social cohesion, but most importantly to improve social welfare and provide public goods, such as healthcare and education, that would not otherwise be provided by the free market.

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Word Count: 1000 (excluding question statement and references)

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[3] Cicero, Marcus Tullius (1 January 1913) [First written in October – November 44 BC]. "Liber I" [Book I]. In Henderson, Jeffrey (ed.). De Officiis [On Duties]. Loeb Classical Library [LCL030] (in Latin and English). XXI. Translated by Miller, Walter (Digital ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp. 152–153