

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

When considering this viewpoint, one must question what it means to be ‘rich’ or to be ‘poor’ and what is meant by being ‘deserving’ of what one has. While Merriam-Webster defines ‘rich’ as “having abundant possessions and especially material wealth”, alternate interpretations of what it means to be rich include having a plentiful wealth of cultural and travel experiences or feeling loved and accepted by family and friends. On the other hand, while ‘poor’ is often used to describe a person’s economic situation and standard of living, living standards vary greatly between different countries. For example, 2017 data shows that the United Kingdom has a GNI of 43,160 PPP Dollars placing the poverty line at 25,896 PPP Dollars; compared to India which has a GNI of 7,060 PPP Dollars (2017), the poverty line in India falls far below the threshold for poverty in the UK. Therefore, determining how ‘poor’ people are varies drastically between different parts of the world.

Practically, it could be possible to draw the line between rich and poor if the redistribution of wealth was organised in a closed system within sovereign nations. However, some of the most deprived countries in the world, such as Burkina Faso and Somalia, have significantly lower GDP and GNI when compared to more developed nations such as the USA, Japan or the UK; this means that the ‘poor’ in lower income countries would receive significantly less wealth distributed to them in comparison to higher income countries, not addressing the problem of global inequality. To attempt to address this, a global system of taxation and redistribution could be implemented through the world bank of which 185 countries are members. However, due to the vast gap in GDP and GNI between High Income Countries and Low Income Countries, people living in relative poverty in the United Kingdom could be taxed in order to facilitate the redistribution of wealth to people who are ‘rich’ relative to their country. Moreover, this phenomenon could lead to people who are relatively ‘rich’ in deprived countries to relocate to Higher Income Countries in order to receive the tax benefits as opposed to pay them. Not only does this diminish the benefit that ‘poor’ people in their home country receive from tax benefits, it also decreases opportunities for investment and the expansion the productive potential of the economy over time. Moreover, the five countries that are not members of the World Bank (Andorra, Cuba, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and North Korea) would not be taxed and therefore not receive the benefit of the redistribution of wealth from around the globe.

Despite difficulties of executing this redistribution of wealth, is this practice ethical and morally upstanding? In order to tackle this question specifically, it must be determined how this will occur and to what extent this obligation extends to. Taxation has existed since the implementation of the annual taxation of livestock in Mesopotamia over 4,500 years ago. It could be argued that some form of taxation to an organised and just authority is necessary for the state to function and succeed as taxes pay for roads, emergency services and other vital services that are crucial for the survival of a society. However, many would argue that enforced taxation by a national or global entity violates the non-aggression principle in which libertarian ideology is based. The principle holds that aggression against the person or property of others is always wrong; this renders minimum wage laws, anti-discrimination laws, public schools and public roads immoral and unacceptable. While this principle may have moral upstanding, the practicality of enforcing this dogmatic axiom is arguably impractical.

Through taxation, it seems that the redistribution of wealth within countries and indeed globally does not have the practical legitimacy nor moral upstanding to be implemented in the real world. It could be argued that the ‘rich’ should be legally obliged to donate to NGOs or to charities that

specifically aim to tackle problems associated with poverty such as homelessness, unemployment and deprivation. However, this would induce the same moral objections as to taxation as this would be mandated under Law in the same way that a tax is. Moreover, A follow-up affect of this could be that voluntary donations to charities that seek to help war veterans, lifeboat and air rescue services and research into a variety of terminal illnesses could decrease drastically as 'rich' people have less money to donate as a greater percentage of their income is forcibly being taken for charitable causes.

It could be argued that 'rich' people have earned their money through their hard work and dedication in a system of capitalism that facilitates and rewards this hard work. Privatisation of trade and industry create incentive to create profit and improve one's own standard of living; this system allows for individuals with entrepreneurship and talent to become 'rich' through selling their products or services in a free marketplace. This creates incentive to become rich and an opportunity to do so, making the 'rich' in capitalist societies deserving of their money. However, it is argued that people who have inherited large amounts of wealth, known as 'trustafarians' may not work as hard for the money they possess as a single mother working three jobs, nevertheless, they have more money and would be considered 'rich' as opposed to '. From this angle, the 'rich' in capitalist societies do not deserve their money. Similarly, in formerly communist societies, such as Russia, oligarchs who did not earn their vast wealth can be seen as undeserving of their money and status as 'rich'.

Considering this, while aggressive global taxation may not be ethically just, a greater tax on inheritance distributed within the borders of individual countries may be a viable solution to closing the gap between the 'rich' and 'poor', however, global taxes are unjust and impossible to effectively determine who pays and how much is paid.