

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

The issue of whether or not the rich should be obliged to give to the poor is the foundation for political thinking and thus polarises left and right-wing political parties. In the developed world the rich give to the poor via the taxation system. This enables governments to collect a percentage of earnings, inevitably resulting in the highest earners making the greatest contribution, with income tax rates in the UK being up to 45%. The welfare state sees those funds distributed to the poorest in society and underdeveloped countries by way of state aid.

From a worldwide perspective, many people living in “absolute poverty” cannot afford to survive. UNICEF found that 22,000 children worldwide die each day due to poverty, a statistic that starkly highlights the problem of financial inequality. Developed countries give aid to the third world and while some argue for greater global redistribution of wealth, others contend that domestic needs should come first.

As to what the rich ‘deserve’, arguably those born into wealthy families do not deserve their wealth as they did nothing to earn it; equally, whereas self-made rich individuals have gained from their efforts, often they have a natural intelligence they have done nothing to earn. Hard work therefore only goes so far in generating wealth because if a person’s capacity for learning is predetermined then someone with a low IQ who works as hard as someone with a high IQ can never be as successful and wealthy.

In many respects, the world would benefit from an obligation on the rich to give to the poor. The mortality rate of those living in poverty would decrease and their quality of life would increase. Many see selflessness as a quality bringing happiness, so the rich themselves may benefit from helping others. International relations can improve where nations help the poor in other countries, reducing the chance of war, for example during the 1973 oil embargo when international tensions involving the Yom Kippur War hugely increased oil prices for Britain, and many people could not afford electricity and heating.

Despite this, there are arguments against the rich giving to the poor or at least limiting aid to sums required for survival (i.e. only helping the “absolute poor”). Many people feel that some welfare systems, such as that in Britain, are excessively generous and stifle people’s enthusiasm to work and better themselves as they may be better off claiming benefits. Helping the poor in other countries can create dependency, a form of neo-colonialism. Companies such as BT moving call centres to less developed countries is superficially aiding those countries but as headquarters tend to remain in developed countries, the jobs created allow no room for progression and workers are vulnerable to a change of strategy. Such companies may also exploit these workers by paying low wages, taking advantage of the lack of alternative employment and the absence of minimum wage legislation.

The rich passing their wealth to the poor to create equal division of wealth among citizens would amount to communism, a form of government still in use. In theory, communism ensures everyone has enough to live by and society is fair but in practice it can create corruption when those in power take wealth for themselves, for example, the Chinese Communist Party in China. Also, it can be perceived as unfair by those who work hardest, and is difficult to enforce, for instance Stalin had to use violence to force Eastern European countries such as Czechoslovakia to adopt communism during the Cold War, and Gorbachev and other Eastern European leaders eventually had to abandon it in the 1980s and 1990s.

Arguably the rich deserve to keep their wealth for themselves. Many wealthy people work hard for their money and would rather buy luxuries than give money to the poor, some of whom choose not to work. Being obliged to give to the poor can be demotivating e.g. Ronald Reagan had to pay 90% of his filmstar earnings in tax, a reason he gave for turning down some roles. As to the broader complaint of inequality, life is not fair in many respects; some people are more prone to disease, for instance.

On the other hand, there are reasons why rich people do not deserve their wealth. As explained in the introduction, IQ is pre-determined so some people can work as hard as others but achieve and earn less, unfairly

rewarding the naturally intelligent over those with less intelligence who apply the same or greater effort. Even where IQ does not influence success and wealth, sports stars such as Lionel Messi become rich from natural talents they were born with. In some instances, entrepreneurs could not have made money had they been born in underdeveloped countries such as Somalia where education is limited and the economy is poor, exemplifying how a lot of the time wealth is in virtue of luck.

In conclusion, in the developed world the rich give to the poor in the form of taxes and in a democracy the people broadly choose the tax regime they think appropriate by their votes. There is much to be said for equal opportunities and rewards for those who work hardest. A basic standard of living for all by means of the welfare system, free education and free healthcare is desirable with equal opportunity to improve oneself. People of all world faiths would also agree with some form of help for the poor. I would conclude by advocating a moderate position, requiring a balance to be struck between abject poverty and a punitive taxation system. Every citizen should have enough to survive and have opportunities in place to help them help themselves. Aid for the poor internationally and the global redistribution of wealth is another question, involving myriad issues such as contraception, civil wars and corrupt leaders.