
A View On Society In The Gospel Of Wealth Book

Andrew Carnegie, who wrote *The Gospel of Wealth*, had a particular view on how society should correctly work. He believed that with the wealth of millionaires, that he could recreate society to think of the rich as “trustees” to provide money to the poor. Carnegie gave away most of his capital to projects he thought that benefitted the community. He built over 2,500 libraries, endowed many parks, and he even gave money to universities and other foundations he thought would “improve the race.” Although I respect what Carnegie did for our culture, if I were a billionaire, I would pay more attention to the dire needs of the poor because I believe that this kind of giving contributes more to the common good.

Within the first few paragraphs of *The Gospel of Wealth*, Carnegie summarizes that throughout time, things have been revolutionized for the better and have created a better community for the world, but the problem seems to be the proper administration of capital, so that the ties between the rich and poor can continue in a balanced manner. Because of the wealth administration problem, the gap that has been made between the rich and poor has created a lot of tension between the two classes. Carnegie noticed, “The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization” (486). While we humans owe the progress of material conditions to manufacturing and improvements, it has created a market for competition. From competition, inequality rises and Carnegie believes only talented men can rise above everyone else and make more capital. However, men who have a talent to make large amounts of money can be the benefactors for society. This is where Carnegie notes that if they have a lot of money they don’t know what to do with, it can be used for the well-being of the race. Carnegie’s main focus was to solve the problem of how to administer money for the common good. He believed in helping mankind progress through philanthropy. Carnegie thought of three ways to distribute his surplus money: “It can be left to the families of the descendants; or it can be bequeathed for public purposes; or, finally, it can be administered during their lives by its possessors” (489).

The amount of poverty in the world is constantly on the rise. While communism was all for equality, it wanted to change human nature. However, Carnegie believed, “It is criminal to waste our energies in endeavoring to uproot, when all we can profitably or possibly accomplish is to bend the universal tree of humanity a little in the direction most favorable to the production of good fruit under existing circumstances” (489). With almost unlimited wealth, Carnegie can be seen as generous because he built many libraries. However, the conditions he created for his workers were not ideal. In an article, *Was Andrew Carnegie Generous?*, written by Daniel Putman, Carnegie is criticized as not being fair to his workers, but his help among the world outweighs his worker’s conditions. For example, Putman states, “Utilitarians may well rejoice at the results of what Andrew Carnegie did and it is quite likely that the good he did over time outweighs what his workers had to experience. But Carnegie's 'generosity' is tempered not by his lack of genuine motivation, nor by his attitude toward workers, but by the very specific fact that much of what he gave away was not his to give”. In fact, Carnegie’s wealth was only capable for him to achieve before the Roosevelt/Wilson reforms.

While Carnegie had dreams of creating a better society and providing culture to all, his confidence in poor people was slim and he once said, “the man of wealth thus becoming the

mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves” (493). I agree with Carnegie’s basic idea to create a better society by administering wealth among everyone, but I believe the money should be distributed to poorer people and their needs. For example, I would imitate many billionaires such as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates and Melinda Gates, have paired up within the past few years to give away half of their fortunes to charitable causes either during their lifetimes or in their will. If I had their money, I would consider doing the same thing they are doing: The Giving Pledge (created by the three billionaires mentioned above), has helped with numerous amounts of issues that plague today’s world. They have worked with providing vaccines, schools and even hospitals to those in South Africa who cannot afford to provide those things to their families. Another example of a charity I would donate to is ‘GiveDirectly’. The point of this charity is to give money to poor people in Kenya with no strings attached. It’s a simple charity because it’s economics 101: poor people will know what they need and if they’re given the money for it, they will most likely go out and buy it. This is an example of how when poor people are given a little help, they are most likely going to succeed by using that money as an investment in themselves. Heifer International is also another example of charity that I would donate too. In African countries, Heifer gives animals to poor families so they provide food and reliable income. They can collect dairy products such as milk, eggs and honey which can be traded or sold at a market. This sustainable income allows for families to build schools, agricultural opportunities and forms a community saving that funds small businesses.

Although one can appreciate what Carnegie has done for the world by building libraries and such, he did not address providing needs for poor people other than if he gave them money, they would most likely not use it to leverage themselves in society. In today’s world, Carnegie’s ideas might look generous on paper, but there are other direct issues that need to be dealt with harshly. Many millionaires have pledged or have already spent billions in trying to provide basic needs to poor people of almost every country by building schools and providing medical assistance. Other charities have given the resources needed to help poor people. These charities allow open doors for individuals and communities who are struggling to get their foot in the door to help themselves. Charity is a just a small lending hand that gives poor people leverage as well as creating new opportunities that contribute to the common good.