



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on September 6, 2011

Two Different Worlds

A small but revealing example was a recent *New York Times* criticism of former Apple CEO Steve Jobs for not contributing to charity as much as the *New York Times* writer thought he should. The media in general are full of praise for business people and their companies for giving away substantial amounts of their wealth. Indeed, that is one of the few things for which many in the media praise businesses and the wealthy.



Americans in general — whether rich, poor or in between — have one of the most remarkable records for donating not only money but time to all sorts of charitable endeavors. Privately financed hospitals, colleges and innumerable other institutions abound in the United States, while they are rare to non-existent in many other countries, where such things are usually left to government or to religious organizations.

However, with charity as with everything else, it cannot simply be assumed that more is always better. A “safety net” can easily become a hammock. “Social justice” can easily become class warfare that polarizes a nation, while leading those at the bottom into the blind alley of resentments, no matter how many broad avenues of achievement may be available to them.

Judging businesses or their owners by how much wealth they give away — rather than by how much wealth they create — is putting the cart before the horse. Wealth is ultimately the only thing that can reduce poverty. The most dramatic reductions in poverty, in countries around the world, have come from increasing the amount of wealth, rather than from a redistribution of existing wealth.

What kind of world do we want — one in which everyone works to increase wealth to whatever extent they can, or a world in which everyone will be supported by either government handouts or private philanthropy, whether they work or don’t work?

It is not an abstract question. We can already see the consequences on both sides of the Atlantic. Those who have grown used to having others provide their food, shelter and other basics as “rights” are by no means grateful.

On the contrary, they are more angry, lawless and violent than in years past, whether they are lower-class whites rioting in Britain or black “flash mobs” in America. Their histories are very different, but what they have in common is being supplied with a steady drumbeat of resentments against those who are better off.

Politicians, intellectuals and whole armies of caretaker bureaucrats are among those who benefit, in



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one way or another, from picturing parasites as victims, and their lags behind the rest of society as reasons for anger rather than achievement.

Leading people into the blind alley of dependency and grievances may be counterproductive for them but it can produce votes, money, power, fame and a sense of exaltation to others who portray themselves as friends of the downtrodden.

Both private philanthropy and the taxpayers' money support this whole edifice of a make-believe world, where largesse replaces achievement and "rights" replace work. Trying to rope Steve Jobs into this world ignores how many other famous businessmen, whose achievements in business have benefited society, have created philanthropies whose harm has offset those benefits.

Henry Ford benefited millions of other people by creating mass production methods that cut the cost of automobiles to a fraction of what they had been before — bringing cars for the first time within the budgets of people who were not rich. But the Ford Foundation has become a plaything of social experimenters who pay no price for creating programs that have been counterproductive or even socially disastrous.

Nor was this the only foundation created by business philanthropy with a similar history and similar social results.

Let business pioneers do what they do best. And let the rest of us exercise more judgment as to how much charity is beneficial and how much more simply perpetuates dependency, grievances and the polarization of society.

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