

Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth" (1889)

Andrew Carnegie was a poor Scottish immigrant turned millionaire who came to symbolize the opportunity for social mobility that some call the American Dream. He formed the Carnegie Steel Corporation and his profits from the steel industry made him one of the wealthiest men in the United States. Also a noted philanthropist, Carnegie gave away some \$350 million mostly to build public libraries and endow universities. In "Wealth" how does Carnegie depict the wealthy and the responsibilities of being wealthy? How does he depict the poor, and charity for the poor? Why?

This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: first, to set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance;... and after doing so to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is... strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community 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....

Those who would administer wisely, must, indeed, be wise, for one of the serious obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity. It were better for mankind that the millions of the rich were thrown into the sea than so spent as to encourage the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy. Of every thousand dollars spent in so-called charity today, it is probable that \$950 is unwisely spent; so spent, indeed, as to produce the very evils which it proposes to mitigate or cure....

A well-known writer... admitted the other day that he had given a quarter of a dollar to a man who approached him.... He knew nothing of the habits of this beggar; knew not the use that would be made of this money, although he had every reason to suspect that it would be spent improperly.... The quarter-dollar given that night will probably [injure more than it will help].... [The donor] only gratified his own feelings, saved himself from annoyance and this was probably one of the most selfish and very worst actions of his life....

In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist.... Neither the individual nor the race is improved by almsgiving. Those worthy of assistance... seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do.... He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy... in almsgiving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue....

The best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise parks... by which men are helped in body and mind; works of art, certain to give pleasure and improve the public taste... in this manner returning their surplus wealth to the mass of their fellows in the form best calculated to do them lasting good....

The man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored and unsung".... Of such of these the public verdict will then be: "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."

Such in my opinion is the true Gospel concerning Wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the Rich and the Poor, and to bring "Peace on earth, among men good will."