

Celebrities and their opportunities according to malcolm gladwell



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We see it on television, online, and through the proverbial grape-vine on a daily basis; the rich elites of our country are asking their audiences to reach under their chairs to find the keys to a new car or inviting strangers on stage to trade a trivia answer for a new living room entertainment system. These celebrities, such as Oprah, Ellen, and numerous others, represent the disparity between the rich and the poor in the US and the ease with which many can manage to give away much of their wealth at the drop of a hat while hundreds of thousands of other Americans can hardly make ends meet in paying their bills and feeding their families. These celebrities as well as their peers in stardom have the ability to give much of their wealth away at no cost to themselves, but what is often seen is a lack of charitable output compared to monetary input; is this a problem? Peter Singer's opinion that wealth, apart from the money allotted to necessities, should be given to the less fortunate is admirable and should certainly be followed by today's elite. America is certainly well-to-do in comparison to other countries globally, but alongside this wealth, a disparity between the haves and the have-nots is seen on a larger scale than many worldwide economies. Therefore the wealthiest of the wealthy, the best of the best should have no hesitations to giving away a great deal of money to those less fortunate. But according to Peter Singer, this money should be given to overseas charities and recipients. It is there that a qualification must be made; there are millions in America that are living at or near poverty, just as there are in other countries. While the conditions of other countries' inhabitants may be different in practicality from those of Americans, there is an equal need for financial support in the US as there is in Africa, for example. As such,

Singer's claim that "overseas" should be the destination of the funds donated by America's elite is misdirected. Additionally, it is fair to argue that celebrities' earnings are their own money, to do with as they choose. I have heard many stories of celebrities working extraordinarily hard to get to where they are in stardom, as is the case with Harry Connick Jr., a current celebrity who attested to countless failed auditions and rejections before the "big break" came through. In this way, expecting celebrities to contribute to others' lives may be an infringement on their enjoyment of their well-deserved spoils of perseverance.

Yet many of today's celebrities owe much of their success to opportunities unavailable to most. This is yet another reason that charitable donations should be made by the wealthy, for, as Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book *Outliers*, success is a direct result of a string of opportunities, which he describes using cases such as the Beatles and even Bill Gates. Speaking of the wildly fortunate computer genius, Bill Gates, he owes much of the approximate 28,000 per minute that he earns constantly to opportunities, such as his hometown and upbringing. Shouldn't he have to reciprocate the opportunities granted to him by granting opportunities to millions of others through substantial charitable donations? In response, he has—but his contributions, according to Peter Singer's *How Much Should Millionaires Give?* totals only about 35% of his earnings, while other, less wealthy individuals such as Kravinsky have managed to donate 99.99% of their wealth while still retaining a comfortable lifestyle and a substantial inheritance to pass on to his children.

Therefore, while Singer's wording may be too specific in identifying overseas as a location to which all charitable donations by the top earners of our society should be made, his ideals that philanthropy should be expected of the wealthy is true. Personally, I am not quick to dole out the money I have earned; I am generally hesitant to buy a friend's Starbucks without confirmation that I will be repaid. But I earn minimum wage, working one to two days a week. So there is a definite contrast between what I earn and should donate and what Bill Gates earns and should donate. But even I, who earned less than \$3000 working all of the previous year, tithe the 10% called for in the Bible, the most sold and most sought after book in the entire world.

In Singer's *How Much Should a Millionaire Give*, he analyzes what this tithe-identical 10% giving would look like if everyone from the top 10% of American earners gave. The numbers were staggering, easily meeting the standards requested by a globally determined financial goal to substantially combat hunger and poverty worldwide. These numbers also revealed that, after a donation such as this, there was plenty left on which to live comfortably.

When we look at how the top earning individuals can easily, easily contribute and make a difference without endangering their own well-being, we see that there is no reason that they should not be doing so. Peter Singer was right in his claim that those who can give should give. As Gladwell's *Outliers* professes, success stems from opportunities given, opportunities that the elite are well within their power to give.