





REPLY

Justice without millionaires

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The poor have (much) too little. Rich women have (much) too much, and rich men have even more. That the poor have too little is part of what establishes that what the rich have is too much. At least, this is what we suggested in our paper. As we wrote: ‘perhaps the most powerful and straightforward objection to large inequalities is that they represent a failed opportunity to rectify severe disadvantage . . . Given the crushing burdens endured by the world’s poorest people, the super-wealthy can have no just claim to the enormous wealth that they have amassed’ (Christensen *et al.* 2022: 338). Contrary to what is suggested by Barclay and McKenna, then, our paper has a non-ideal orientation from the outset. It argues that the rich are not entitled to what they have *given* that there are others who have so little. At the heart of our paper lies the powerful egalitarian idea that no one should be a multi-millionaire in our non-ideal world in which many live in abject poverty. Its argumentative thrust aims at reminding us of that and clarifying why claims by multi-millionaires to obtain additional millions are never justified under such circumstances – even if they are made in the name of gender justice. It also suggests that since the poor have a claim to some of what the rich have, and since there are no adequate tax-and-transfer mechanisms in place to enact the required redistribution, the rich should simply give away some of what they have to the poor.

Against this backdrop, we ask what should be made of the fact that rich men have even more than rich women. Since rich men often have more than rich women for morally arbitrary reasons, it is unfair that rich men have more. Does this mean that we should support calls to increase what rich women get so that they get as much as rich men? No. This would be to support giving the rich even more of what they’re not entitled to. Should we support calls to decrease what rich men get so that they get what rich women get? Again (bracketing expressive concerns), the answer is no. No one is entitled to be that rich while poverty is so widespread. Rich women are not entitled to what they get, and rich men are not entitled to get that, either. Rather, we should call for the fortunes of rich men and women to be taxed away, or for these individuals to voluntarily relinquish their fortunes.

But, Barclay and McKenna (2024) point out: ‘millionaires are *not* taxed so that their holdings do not exceed their fair share and they do *not* give away all of their

unjust holdings to poverty relief. In our actual world, many people, overwhelmingly men, do, as a matter of fact, continue to enjoy millionaire levels of wealth, and will continue to do so in our foreseeable future.’ Since this is so, and since we nevertheless deny that rich women ought, as a matter of fairness, to get what rich men get or that rich men ought to get what rich women get, Barclay and McKenna say that we ‘can be plausibly accused of holding women to higher standards of justice than men’.

It is not clear how we can plausibly be accused of this. Our standard expects millionaire women to relinquish their fortunes and it expects millionaire men to relinquish their fortunes. Since millionaire men are often paid more than millionaire women, an implication of our standard is that millionaire men will also have to relinquish more. Importantly, the fact that (many) rich men *will not* relinquish their fortunes does not show that others are being held to a higher standard any more than the fact that some people tell lies shows that others are being held to a higher standard by those who recommend honesty. It simply shows that some people fail to adhere to a standard that is applied uniformly to all.

References

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