



It's Time To Occupy Capitol Hill And Fight Political Greed

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The Occupy Wall Street movement remains busy. On Friday OWS supporters staged "Occupy Black Friday" demonstrations targeting corporate greed. But why only corporate greed? It is time to fight political greed.

Many Americans are frustrated and angry with American politics. These sentiments helped spawn the Tea Party movement. Similar attitudes animate Occupy Wall Street protesters.

The latter activists are confused, but that doesn't make their movement illegitimate. Look at how the U.S. political and economic systems operate. The issue is not how much the top one percent own. The issue is whether they have acquired their wealth legitimately. In fact, as OWS activists recognize, many people have not.

The problem is politics rather than economics, however. A competitive market economy is the most effective system for generating wealth. It also is the fairest mechanism for distributing wealth once created. Those who generate the most value for others earn the most. In economics, open markets are fairness exemplified.

But this is not the only, or even most important, human responsibility. **Markets** reward economic productivity, not human value. So whatever the initial distribution of income, as people we all have additional and larger moral responsibilities to one another. To determine what these are we should turn to theology and philosophy rather than economics and politics.

Unfortunately, politics now malforms the economic system. The distribution of wealth sometimes is unfair, not because of the operation of markets, but because markets so often are not allowed to operate. Some members of the OWS-reviled "one percent" have unfairly acquired their wealth, but most of them have done so by using politics to manipulate economic system.

One can blame corporate greed, but how does corporate greed differ from any other form of greed? Companies are not greedy. Human beings are greedy. They may act as individuals, small businessmen, corporate officers, or political officials. The particular form taken by greed doesn't matter.

OWS protestors also go wrong in targeting financial institutions and, through their Black Friday events, major retailers. The latter make money because—hold the presses!—consumers, too, are greedy, and spend lots of money on items which they don't "need." However, there's nothing illegitimate in companies responding to such demands. The last time I looked, no one forced anyone to go shopping on Black Friday or any other day.

Worse, though, is the fact that OWS activists blame Wall Street and similar entities for their subsidies, bailouts, and other benefits. True, people shouldn't request handouts. But the economic system has become so pervaded by political privilege that asking politicians for help has become the

principal lobbying objective in [Washington](#). These days most everyone—not just bankers—seems to think they are entitled to a handout.

Thus, OWS should direct its ire at Capitol Hill. After all, nothing the protestors do will eliminate greed, corporate or other. That is a natural desire of sinful human beings. But OWS could discourage politicians from giving in to corporate (and other) greed. That is, Americans, whether OWS demonstrators, Tea Party activists, or average citizens, should target *political* greed.

A good place to start would be to occupy the offices of legislators who voted in 2008 to bail out anyone and everyone. Indeed, is there a worse form of greed than that of government officials, entrusted with the common good, stealing money from the public to give away to satisfy their own selfish (political) purposes?

This is what income redistribution is all about. Legislators follow political, not moral, norms in taking money from the productive and giving it to the influential. That's what the Wall Street bailout was all about. It's also what motivates the cornucopia of federal largesse distributed as benefits, grants, loans, and loan guarantees.

Of course, some money goes to people who are truly needy. But those transfers are but a small fraction of the cash passed out by Uncle Sam. Even Social Security and Medicare are political mining enterprises, extracting wealth from younger generations to pay the largely middle class elderly. In voting for these programs politicians seek votes, not justice.

Worst is when legislators seize private wealth to enrich favored interests in the name of "compassion." In fact, compassion is a private virtue, not a public policy. Compassion certainly cannot be imposed through coercion. Whatever one wants to call taking from one person to give to another ("stealing" comes to mind), it is the antithesis of real compassion.

Tea Party and OWS activists may disagree about the appropriate breadth of a government "safety net," but they should cooperate to oppose most of the special interest legislating that occurs in Washington. Even if OWS demonstrators generally see a bigger role for government to "correct" private markets, they should oppose government greed—market interventions for the purpose of enriching private interests. Unfortunately, this behavior is the normal business of Washington.

Worse than greed is envy. The greedy are with us always, but most greedy people satisfy their desire for more in socially useful ways—producing and earning more. The envious are harder to satisfy, since their anger is directed at some or all people with more. In today's society envy is most easily satisfied by taking from others. And there is no more effective way to take from others than to enlist the government. That is why Washington is filled with rhetoric complaining about wealth distribution without addressing the role of wealth creation. Government policies in response are both personally unjust and destructive of community.

It is easy to criticize OWS demonstrators. But they deserve neither expressions of derision nor doses of pepper spray. As [American Enterprise President Arthur Brooks observed](#), "Conservatives and free-enterprise advocates should seize the moment to show their own passion for the issues being debated—and where appropriate, even embrace the protesters' moral critique of America's distorted and depressed system."

For years America's politicized economic system has cheated the vast majority of Americans. OWS protesters (as well as Tea Party activists) understand this fact even if they don't understand exactly why and how. Only by drawing support from disparate reform currents across the U.S. are we likely to achieve real change in Washington.