

Essay on occupy wall street movement

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



The financial crisis that hit the global economy in the latter part of the past decade brought to question the soundness of financial practices particularly in the world's major economies. Many governments struggled to bring their respective economies back on course although the post-crisis initiatives to address the causes seem not to have been sufficient. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is a movement established in 2011 following the crisis and in response to continued suffrage of the ordinary American citizen at the hands of the few corporate elite in the financial sector and politicians. This was set out clear in the movement's slogan " We are the 99%" (Calhoun, 2013 p. 26). Calhoun noted that though the movement involved activists with multiple primary concerns, the macroeconomic problem of rising income inequality in the American society and the supposed unethical business practices in the corporate world underscored its original intent for mobilization. This paper examines OWS from a number of perspectives including the moral and economic implications, the underlying theories, income inequality in the U. S. and the movement's outcome and future.

Moral and economic implications of the movement

Moral and economic issues were top of OWS's agenda movements name and slogan present deep-sighted implications of their agenda. The movement observed that the financial system practices were to a large extent tailored towards benefiting a few people in the corporate world. According to Hardesty (2012), one of the projects put emphasis on rational decision-making, which the movement found lacking especially in the financial sector. Piven (2012) wrote that the movement was outraged by the fact that following the crisis, one percent that was partly responsible for its

occurrence “ demanded huge bailouts with taxpayer monies, insisted on more wage cuts and public budget cuts” and proceeded to proudly report surging profits in a short while (Piven, 2012). OWS perceived this as an unacceptable infection of ill practices in the corporate world that need to be addressed. The movement is set to align corporate practices with their perception of what ought to be done as far as ethics is concerned.

OWS involves a number of economic implications. The issue of rising income inequality is the most notable and arguably the principal economic concern driving the movement. The movement’s slogan indicates its stance on the issue. The 99% represented in the slogan actually refers to 99% of Americans, who constitute the ordinary citizen. The other one percent represents the most influential elite in the society with the highest financial power. OWS came into force to address this divide in economic status that is far from equity. Hardesty (2012) noted that the group outlined various other economic grievances addressing 99% of American including the long-term increase in poverty, persistent decline of the earnings the middle class and other cases including unemployment. Economic developments in the country have failed to address these problems. Accordingly, Americans are in search for a new approach to economic governance that will solve the worsening condition of most of the citizens, as opposed to the lucky few at the helm of corporate ownership and leadership. The failure of the country’s economic practices to address the issues stated above may have been directly attributed to underperforming leaders both politically and in the corporate world as regards moral practices. The movement signifies a new dawn of economic practices for the U. S.

Analysis of the implications

The implications above can be viewed differently from a utilitarian, Kantian or virtue ethics perspective. Basing on the fundamentals of utilitarian theory of ethics, the means to achieving the best results for the majority becomes the best alternative (Shafer-Landau, 2012). In this approach to ethics the outcome or consequences of an action are the basis upon which a judgment is made as to whether an action is morally justifiable or not. This theory best applies to the movement. The OWS movement is justified under this theory to disregard by all means the practices of the corporate elite and the political arena whose outcome continues to benefit 1% of the U. S. population. Since the movement seeks to address the concerns of the majority of Americans, particularly income inequity, it may justify its actions on that basis.

Based on another theory, Kantian ethics theory, the OWS may be viewed a bit differently. The theory asserts that reason is at the center of morality. People therefore use reasoning as a tool for determining what is morally acceptable as opposed to weighing consequences (Shafer-Landau, 2012). This view, applied to the OWS movement, implies that came into place to fight for what is right. Since fighting for the welfare of the ordinary American citizen is deemed right by the society, the movement may have taken that as a duty to affect. Generally, the society views equitable distribution of resources, in this case income, as desirable. To the movement, this may appear as a duty, and thus the right thing to do in accordance with the Kantian theory.

The virtue ethics perspective presents yet another different view on the movement. According to this theory, ethics is rooted in positive character

traits called virtues that a society needs in plenty in order to flourish (Shafer-Landau, 2012). On the contrary, vices are undesirable and the opposite of virtues. The movement was outraged by the prevalence of vices that characterize many leaders in the corporate and political arena. These include selfishness and greediness. The movement has called for dignity, integrity and humane practices among the 1%. With regard to economics, OWS is in support of positive traits among leaders that would be present in an ideal moral person. The executives and board directors, whose incomes came to focus for instance, should seek as many virtuous traits as possible in order to be acceptable to the movement. This would adjust the disparity in incomes besides addressing the issue of ethics in the various areas that have raised concern.

Income inequality in the U. S: Who is Responsible?

Income inequality is perhaps one of the biggest socioeconomic concerns in the U. S. today. The fact that the gap is rising poses major questions. There are a number of factors contributing to income inequality in the country that may be categorized into market-driven and those that are not affected through market forces (Belsie, 2008). On the one hand, income inequality resulting from market-driven factors can be observed in the disparity between the incomes of professionals like lawyers and investment bankers, and the majority in the blue-collar job category. This phenomenon has been built up overtime. The government has a share of the blame for failing to intervene. According to Keynes, government intervention is an essential component of sound economic practices even in a capitalistic society like the U. S (Belsie, 2008). Failure to do so implies that the distribution of resources

is impaired and with time, the situation may get out of hand.

On the other hand, the corporate elite have their role to play regarding income inequality in the country. Belsie (2008) argued that the executives, directors and other top personnel in the corporate world are able to control their pay either through board meetings or via some other means.

Consequently, they are able to increase their pay indirectly, in most cases. A study by Belsie found that the income of the top five corporate officers in 1993-95 equaled 5% of their firm's total profits during that period but by 2002, the ratio had doubled to 12.8%. They cited non-market forces as the principal causes for such a dramatic increase in income (2008 n. p). This trend indicates that the incomes of such individuals will continue to rise should they continue to effect increases in their incomes at the expense of lower level workers. This pattern resonates with the observation made above that income inequality in the U. S is built up over time.

The movement's outcome and future in perspective

Intervention by the government and market forces will facilitate a favorable outcome that will see the country's income inequality bridged to within desirable levels, a morally upright corporate and political arena and a sound, healthy society. Even in a capitalist society like the U. S, the government must play its role in ensuring that the economy is heading towards the right direction. Otherwise much of wealth will be owned by few individuals, which conflicts with economic principles of equitable distribution. Furthermore, allocation of resources and operation of the economy under such circumstances is likely to be suboptimal. The former outcome scenario is a better alternative.

The movement may have to take actions from time to time for quite a long time before it realizes goals, or even part of its goals. The socioeconomic problem of income inequality will remain a mainstay challenge at least for the foreseeable future. Similarly, instilling a culture of morality among the corporate elite and political leaders will take a while. Since these major problems are likely to persist in the future, the movement will also remain active though with varying degrees of intensity. Movements, Piven (2012) observed, unfold over a very long time. For the case of OWS, this might just be the start and it may take some time before it gains ground. There is also a possibility that the movement might readjust its focus and direct its effort towards the government instead of the 1%. Thus, it may become a valuable tool in reminding the U. S. government of its role in economic intervention and adjustments.

Occupy Wall Street took a unique approach to voice its concerns regarding the socioeconomic issue of income inequality in the US. At its inception in 2011, the movement found the ethics practices of the corporate and also some political elite in question following the economic crisis. It seeks to address the issues that have seen the divide between the 99% ordinary and the 1% elite Americans widen. The utilitarian theory best applies to this movement a head of Kantian and virtue ethics theories. The responsibility for the income inequality in the U. S. lies in the categories of market-driven forces and other factors including the government's failure to intervene and influence of the corporate elite. A favorable outcome for the movement would be the government's intervention and other actions in the market leading to a sound, healthy society with a fair income distribution.

References

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