

What is greed?

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



When Does Greed Become Too Much? In 2008, employees within a failing firm on Wall Street were given \$16 billion in bonuses. That seems outrageous, doesn't it? Anger was the response of the American people indefinitely. However, if they had done further research they would have realized that the \$16 billion in bonuses was merely half of what the company gave out in bonuses during good times. Many of the reporters telling the story discussed the issue of rewarding the greed of the employees with taxpayer money. Which brings us to the question, what exactly is greed?

If they would have earned more before, they are expecting the amount that is coming. It is not greed if every year before that the money had been guaranteed, is it? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines greed as, " a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed. "

The word greed dates back to the 1200-1300's, where in France it came from the word *avarus* meaning greedy which was a form of *avere* meaning to crave or long for.

Coming from the word *avarus* was *avaritia* which meant just greed and from that word came *avarice* which meant greed or covetousness (Harper, 1). Covetousness is defined as an envious eagerness to possess something (Merriam-Webster, 2). Greed from the 1600's to present is a back formation of the word *greedy* which has many routes and definitions. The West Saxon word *graedig* or the Anglican word *gredig* both meant voracious or covetous (Harper, 1). Voracious is defined as wanting to devour great quantities or having a very eager approach to an activity (Merriam Webster).

From the Proto-Germanic language were the words *graedagaz* and *graeduz* meaning greed and hunger; possibly from the Proto-Indo-European root *gher-* meaning to want or in Scotland *grdh-* to be greedy. The origin that the people against the Wall Street bonuses would appreciate the most would be the one from the Greek word *philargyros* meaning “ money-loving” and also the German word for greedy, *habsuchtig* coming from *haben* meaning “ to have” +*sucht* meaning “ sickness, disease” (Harper, 1). The last one is the most interesting because it is suggesting that greed is something than can come and go with the right or wrong stimulants, like a sickness does.

What then would one need to do to boost their immune system against this greed? Or is greed something impossible for people to avoid? From the etymology we have found that greed can be related to hunger and envy and the want to have more and more, were these definitions consistent in their use over time? In order to better understand what greed really is we need to take a moment to look back at the history of greed and how often it has occurred throughout the world. In 1527 A. D. the Spaniards had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and come across the empire of the Incas.

They were on their way to the New World and they came across a raft with a crew of approximately 20 men along with many treasures. After catching a glimpse of the treasure on the raft, the greed of the Spaniards welled up until they decided to conduct an expedition to conquer the Incas’ empire. After many years of getting a crew and resources for this expedition the Spaniards finally headed into the Incas Empire in 1532 A. D. ; fortunately the conquering of the empire was easier due to the civil war of the Incas.

The Spaniards took the Incas emperor hostage and in return were offered a room of silver and gold as his ransom. The Spaniards greed continued to get bigger and they took the contents of the room, but did not return the emperor, but instead killed him. The Incan people then revolted under the Spanish control (History World, 1). If the Spaniards had not been so greedy in their desire to take over the empire maybe they could have won over the people as their own; instead they were driven by greed and one man even named them thieves of the Incan people.

Mansio Serra Leguizamon, the last conquistador, said: “ I wish your Majesty to understand the motive that moves me to make this statement is the peace of my conscience and because of the guilt I share. For we have destroyed by our evil behavior such a government as was enjoyed by these natives. They were so free of crime and greed, both men and women, that they could leave gold or silver worth a hundred thousand pesos in their open house. So that when they discovered that we were thieves and men who sought to force their wives and daughters to commit sin with them, they despised us. Instances similar to that of the Spaniards and the Incas repeated themselves multiple times throughout history. From the land greed of the Europeans against the people of Africa to the land greed of the Americans against the Native Indians, those nations that progress seem to demonstrate an intense level of greed in order to get to the top. However, while this greed in particular led to the success of those nations demonstrating it there have also been examples where it led to the demise of a dictator or of a group as a whole.

For example, Adolf Hitler had already defeated the majority of his European enemies, the last being Great Britain. Hitler had signed a pact two years prior stating that he would not wage war on them, causing the nations to not have armed themselves. Hitler's decision to break this agreement could only be motivated by his greed to dominate all the other countries; even if Great Britain was ten times the size of his empire. While Nazi Germany had the most powerful military at the time they were not used to the cold weather and were soon overcome by the Soviet Union troops.

If Hitler had simply left the Soviet Union alone he might not have been defeated by the allies at all, it was his greed that led to not only his but his regimes fall. Other examples of the fall of entire nations due to greed include the fall of the Roman Empire and the fall of Ancient Greece. A large group of historians have come to the conclusion that the majority of progress in the world is a result of the greed of more powerful nations to become even more powerful. This system is good for those progressing and bad for the smaller, less developed nations who are being taken over.

Whether or not greed is moral in this aspect is another argument, but the definition of greed stated previously is most definitely applicable to these historical examples. In the example of the Spaniards and Incas it is greed because the Spaniards already had their own empire across the ocean, however they were driven by the want of more land and of the treasure of the Incas to continue on and take more than was necessary for the nation to survive. Again it seemed unnecessary for the Europeans and the Americans to take the land of the Africans and Native Indians when they already had land elsewhere, it was an unnecessary conquest.

In the example of Hitler attacking the Soviet Union, it was greed because he already had a pact with them to be at peace and he broke it because he wanted more. It was not necessary for him to attack the Soviet Union but he did due to greed and the consequence of this was the demise of his regime; the same fall similar to that of the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece. It seems that throughout history the people's perception of what greed is has remained in line to the definition from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and this definition is consistent to the past of the word greed, just more detailed than previous definitions. It looks as though there is no way for people to avoid being greedy in its completion, whether it be wanting more candy than you need at Halloween (which was all of us at some point, I'm sure) or wanting extreme amounts of money to be paid to you from work...everyone has demonstrated a greedy behavior at least once in their life. This brings about the question, is there a point to where greed becomes too overwhelming?

By this I simply mean that you are not likely to hate a three year old dressed in a cowboy costume for asking for more candy when they already have a full bag on Halloween, but you might hate someone who already makes \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year and is receiving a bonus on top of this pay...when their company is failing and is being paid by bail out consisting of your tax payers dollars. Is the three year old just as guilty as the Wall Street firm employee? Most people would say no, the three year old is too young to really understand what greed is.

Okay, so what about a six year old or an eight year old or a twelve year old... at what age does it become socially unacceptable to act in a greedy fashion?

Let's look at another comparison, but this time between people of an older age group. It's a bright, sunny day in the city and a married couple is walking down the street when they look down and find an a hundred dollar bill. Instantly the man jumps for joy because he can finally afford some football paraphernalia he had been saving up money on the side for. The husband didn't even think to ask the wife what she thought they should do with the money.

Most people would dismiss this and say, " Oh, it's just a hundred dollars for football stuff. Let the man be. " What if the same man worked for AIG and received a ridiculous paycheck and was asking for a bigger bonus at Christmas time to buy football paraphernalia? What's the difference? It's still the same man using extra or " bonus" money to buy the same football paraphernalia, but people tend to freak out when the money is coming from a company that already pays exorbitant amounts for the annual salary and then they give out a bonus in addition to this.

According to the definition of greed presented by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, " a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed," both men are acting greedy. Both men from the examples are definitely presenting a selfish desire because they are going to use the extra money for themselves and football paraphernalia isn't necessarily a necessity in everyday life. The issue of greed, similar to that of justice, seems to find its way back to jealousy and morals.

What people consider too much greed depends on their view of right and wrong, and how many possessions or how much money they personally have. We may not want to admit this because we think that we have the <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-greed/>

ability to separate ourselves and judge independently, but the reality is that the majority of people are not able to do this. Sure, they may be able to present a definition-correct response and say that the three year old has bad character and is too greedy, but most people would look over the actions of a mere three year old.

They may be able to say that the AIG employee is unable to determine the fate of the economy and has worked hard and deserves the bonus and should be able to do what he wants with it, but deep down they're jealous of their higher situation and wonder if the AIG employee really deserves such high amounts of money for what they do. As a result of jealousy people tend to claim that others demonstrate too much greed. However if they looked at their own life on a day to day basis would they see that they have been greedy on smaller but much more frequent scales in comparison to the one major instance of the AIG employee?

Who is anyone to judge who is too greedy when even the smallest acts of greed are still a greedy action? Maybe everyone is equally corrupt by greed but only large monetary instances are brought into the media in our society. Have we answered the initial question, when does greed become too much? Yes, we have. The common view of people today is that greed is not too much when it is a child asking for more candy on Halloween but it is too much when it is an employee receiving a \$16 billion bonus. This can be simplified or abstracted into greed becomes too much when it reaches a larger, noticeable scale.

In other words, greed is too much when someone is striving for something less than 10% of the population will attain. If the population had no lower

class it was simply middle and higher classes, there would be more people in the higher class and therefore fewer would find greed present because it would seem more attainable. Greed is determined on the basis of what is attainable to the majority of people. Works Cited Merriam-Webster Inc. Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n. d. Web. 15 Oct. 2012. . Harper, Douglas. " Online Etymology Dictionary. " Online Etymology Dictionary.

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