

Anonymous - Cyber Robin Hood or Invisible Hand

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Let the market decide. Let the market regulate itself. Let the invisible hand deal with the free market. All these ideas, coming all the way from Adam Smith, Milton Friedman and many other supporters of a free, deregulated market are brought into question especially when governments and justice fail. However, despite the benefits of this doctrine for the free market, it seems to be much easier for companies or for other organizations to organize in the purpose of unethical (and sometimes illegal) activities, than the civil society or the consumer. Of course, due to the Internet, consumers have a much louder voice when it comes to sanctioning unethical behavior, with social media, viral videos, tweets and reviews. However, there is still a limited amount of pressure that can be generated against decisions from giant companies who are more or less close to a market monopoly position, such as TV cable companies. Even less power has the civil society against, for example, terrorist organizations.

In this context, the cyber-activism and hacking group Anonymous, brought into attention by the dreadful attacks in Paris, represents an interesting topic of study and reflection. Known more for attacks on governmental agencies around the world and their support for Wikileaks, they recently announced war on terrorism in support of Charlie Hebdo and freedom of speech, and an initiative of taking down websites supporting terrorist activities. It represents a major attempt of organized action of the civil society against terrorism, a cyber-activism strategy on responding with concrete actions to extremism.

There is, nevertheless, another side to Anonymous and its increasing role in letting the market decide. While less known, they also organized attacks on several major companies, such as PayPal, MasterCard and Visa. Can this organization represent a way for the civil society, for consumers, to participate in a more active way in regulating the market? Could Anonymous be a way for consumers to respond with efficient tools to businesses' unethical decisions? Is Anonymous a modern day, cyber Robin Hood, an online invisible hand not only for social, but also economic activism? Let the market decide.

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