

It's not the ceiling

By [David Lewicki](#)

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It's not about the debt ceiling, right? I mean, we're talking about the debt ceiling, but it's not about the debt ceiling.

The issue beneath the issue is the proper relationship between government and wealth.

Conservatives are trying like hell to pry the government's hands off of people's money. After all, it's their money, right? To prove this point, some members of congress are willing to obstruct the whole machinery of government. That's powerful conviction.

But something has been smelling foul to me. Listen, I'm no huge fan of government programs (my experience with them as a nonprofit professional receiving government grants and as a parent of a child who receives public benefits has been that they are bloated and badly run). I also resonate with the general frustration that the way our government makes and spends its money is bloated and irresponsible.

But the "fix" here is not to starve the government. The way to address the problems with government money is to make the process of making money (taxation) more transparent, simpler, and more moral. Same with the process of spending the money: more transparent, simpler, and more moral.

Sounds idealistic and naive. But is it? Listen to David Cay Johnston, a journalist I have long admired for his work exposing the many ways that our government's methods of making and spending money have been corrupted.

In this interview on WNYC's Brian Lehrer, it was refreshing to hear someone speak about economics with clarity, common sense, and moral force. When's the last time you heard someone passionately defend the importance of "marginal utility," or make the case that all wealth grows from the foundation of "common wealth?"

I admit that what really struck me, apart from Johnston, was the first caller, Suzanne. She says (and I'm paraphrasing a bit), "I think we need a single progressive income tax..., capital gains should be taxed at the same level as the money you work for, now that the Supreme Court thinks that corporations are persons with equal free speech rights, they should be taxed at the same rate as persons, all political contributions from any non-constituent should be barred...."

Isn't she right? Aren't those the simple, moral "fixes" we need? Clear, fair taxation. An end to bizarre and wasteful business subsidies and tax loopholes. And above all, an election system that mitigates the influence of money in politics and puts power to make decisions in the hands of average citizens?

Our nation's big problems *are* financial. We are diseased financially. The debt ceiling is not the problem--fighting over it will not bring us closer to health. Not nearly.

Originally posted at [A Minister's Life](#)