

Money and the Web of Love

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It was only when I sat down to write this piece, some version of which has been brewing for some time, that I realized that it is, in some ways, a direct continuation of what I wrote about last week. It is a piece that's about how we came to make money so central to our lives that it masks the fundamental dependence we have on each other. It is also about how our interdependence likely was and can become again fueled by a web of love and care instead of fear and separation, as it is now.

I get an inkling of this, in my own life, from seeing that, in some small and yet significant ways, I have exited the money economy. Even though I clearly have more money than the vast majority of the human population, I don't have, and am unlikely to ever have, enough money to hire all the support I need in order to make my work possible. By necessity and by luck, I can only do my work because of the existence of people who, based purely on their love and the inspiration they get from my work, take on projects that would otherwise simply not get done.

Moving Beyond Relying on Money

The reality behind this privilege, namely my access to far more resources than the money I have could ever buy, is based only on love. In this way, I have joined the large web of sharing resources that, I believe, is the underlying truth of our humanity, where we started and where I want us to move toward (I will have more to say about sharing resources and about love in a moment).

While I rejoice, I also recognize that I am still quite limited in my ability to fully relax into this web and to make choices about what I do or don't do that are purely motivated by the intrinsic meaning of the action, without taking into consideration money. I am definitely part way there, just not all the way.

Some years ago, before my current path became the main focus of my life, I went through some years of doing computer consulting work motivated solely by money. I was in graduate school, and this was the best strategy I could come up with to sustain myself easily while in school. The experience was entirely different from earlier times, when I was doing computer programming because I loved it. I was so acutely aware of the singular focus on money, that I thought of it as high class prostitution, all the while knowing the clear difference about which parts of me were used for money. This was especially intense given that I was, for the most part, actively opposed to the goals of the organizations for which I was doing the work.

Even after shifting my focus entirely to the work of Nonviolent Communication, for some time I was still choosing to do certain projects mainly because of seeing the income they could generate. Over the years, this has diminished, and yet, when I say I am limited, it's because money is not entirely gone from my considerations. What I came to in the last few days, though not new, was even stronger: this limitation is rooted in a fundamental lack of trust in the web of life.

From Sufficiency to Abundance and Scarcity

I start with a caveat. None of us have lived in a time before civilization as we know it was born. By necessity, then, whatever we believe we know about those times is mediated by our current knowledge and perspective. When we find artifacts and believe they mean something or another, this interpretation of the artifacts is an expression of who we are, not simply an “objective” reading of what this artifact truly was, what it signified in the lives of people whose experience was so vastly and unimaginably different from our own, and of what that life truly was. I have studied enough about epistemology (the fancy name for the investigation of how we know anything) to be confident that our actual knowledge is very small compared to how much we fill in the gaps with what makes sense to us given our own universe of meaning. Even with this immense caveat, I want to venture to say some things that make sense to me based on my own readings and reflections, including my partial capacity to exit the money logic in my own thinking.

Many people today speak about a consciousness of abundance. I personally have some concerns about the term abundance, and vastly prefer to focus on sufficiency instead. It is the trust in sufficiency that I want to cultivate for myself. As I understand the times before separation came to inhabit our consciousness (and even saying this is already a particular perspective on how life unfolded), our ancestors experienced themselves as part of life, and implicitly trusted there would be enough. The advent of agriculture, about which I don't know enough, came about in conjunction with losing that trust. Also, with agriculture came a certain kind of abundance, in the precise sense of having more than is needed. Based on some studies I heard about, it is surplus, not scarcity, that results in divisions and fights, both for baboons and for humans. For as long as there is enough or less, sharing is what happens. When there is abundance, hoarding begins. Hoarding which subsequently creates scarcity which was not there before.

I am a product of thousands of years of civilization, and especially of the modern variety of this civilization, which paints us as and reinforces in us the idea that we are single, individual beings, and that we both can and must be self-sufficient. I have not managed, despite much work and focus, to fully recreate for myself that sense of trust that I believe so deeply was our fundamental way of life for so long. I am still afraid that if I don't do something or another, there won't be enough for me.

I also live in a world where the gap between abundance and scarcity is so enormous that I can't even fully grasp it. The reality of scarcity is now so ingrained in our social institutions that we accept it as a natural fact: that some people will have more than they need, and others will not have enough. This fundamental assumption about life is also part of what instills fear in us that there won't be enough, keeping those with more than they need still committed to more, still anxious, somehow, about having enough, along with those who truly don't have enough to eat. I am affected by this, too.

Love, Fear, and Money

In my belief, human beings are completely and irreducibly dependent, unable to individually supply for themselves all of their needs, material as well as relational. We must get some of what we put in and on and around our bodies from others. This core dependence, the root of our interdependence, is masked from us in the current world through money. Money gives us the illusion that we don't need other people.

In the last few days I had an aha moment about all this. Here's what I now see that I didn't name to myself before. Before agriculture, hoarding, and money, the sharing that happened was based primarily or largely on community and connection. (I am reminding myself and my readers, again, of the humility of not knowing this – it is only my belief and conjecture.) In that sense, then, it was based on love and choice. Once money enters the equation, it allows people access to sharing that is done, if you will, involuntarily. When any of us produces something because we are afraid we won't have enough money to pay for what we need otherwise, we are not *choosing* to share with others, certainly not with others that we don't know, sometimes others we despise and envy. Money gives us access to what was produced by others without necessarily caring about us.

I don't feel happy about imagining that I receive what I receive because I have the money to buy things. I cannot forget the people who toil to make my clothes, more often than not in conditions I couldn't possibly accept any human being to live in. They don't care about me or anyone else that buys the clothes. They are doing it because it's the only way they figure out to provide for themselves and their loved one.

This is part of why I want to find my way out of the money economy as much as I can. I want whatever is given to me to be given because of some relationship, even if only an abstract one, between the person who creates the product or service, and myself. This is, for me, a core way of explaining my persistent challenges with money. This is a big part of why I want, more than anything, to create a future reality in which money is no longer there, in which we find new and exciting ways to share globally. I have complete and total faith in this possibility, and will continue to develop it in as much detail as I can figure out within this world. This is a big part of the book I wrote – *Reweaving Our Human Fabric* – which is still being finalized and which I hope to self-publish within a few months. Please stay tuned!

Moving Toward Trust

As much as I have complete faith in the possibility of a global gift economy, I am still struggling to have sufficient trust in my own ability to create something satisfying in my own life. In part, this is because of knowing that I live in a world in which money *is* the way to gain access to material resources and other things that my life depends on, and I remain so unsettled with this.

My biggest success, which may be shocking to some, is that I have no interest in saving money for the future. I am relying, instead, on some combination of trusting that I will continue to make myself available to the world for as long as I live, and that there will continue to be sufficient love for me to nourish me through those years. My deep personal dream is to find a way to have all the money that I use – for my own living and for supporting the livelihood of those who support my work – arrive based on love and care, without exchange. I want everyone who wants to have access to what I have to offer to have it without any sense of obligation to give money, and for all those who are excited about my work to be able to support it whether or not they receive something directly and personally for their own benefit. I hope to approximate this lovely dream more and more with each passing year.