

You Were Born An Original - Don't Die A Copy



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**Today you are You,
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive
who is Youer than You.
--Dr. Seuss**

Money, Guilt, and the Machine
by Alan Watts

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Alan Watts - Money, Guilt and The Machine



So this goes very deep into us. It goes deep, deep, deep into a problem we have about guilt. I wonder often if there's any relationship between guilt and gold - that the love of money is the root of evil. It's a very true saying. Because you see I was saying yesterday that the difference between having a job and having a vocation is that a job is some unpleasant work you do in order to make money, with the sole purpose of making money. And there are plenty of jobs because there is still a certain amount of dirty work that nobody wants to do and that therefore they will pay someone to do it. There is essentially less and less of that, that kind of work because of mechanization. But if you do a job, if you do a job with the sole purpose of making money, you are absurd. Because if money becomes the goal, and it does when you work that way, you begin increasingly to confuse it with happiness - or with pleasure.

Yes, one can take a whole handful of crisp dollar bills and practically water your mouth over them. But this is a kind of person who is confused, like a Pavlov dog, who salivates on the wrong bell. It goes back you see to the ancient guilt that if you don't work you have no right to eat; that if there are others in the world who don't have enough to eat, you shouldn't enjoy your dinner even though you have no possible means of conveying the food to them. And while it is true that we are all one human family and that every individual involves every other individual... while it is true therefore we should do something about changing the situation.

The one way of not doing anything about a situation is feeling guilty about it, because when people feel guilty about a situation they most usually, instead of doing something practical to change it, they resort to all sorts of symbolic methods of expiation. They go to confession. They see an analyst. They do all kinds of things which will be ways of actually not doing anything about the problem, but feeling all right about it instead. And guilt invariably produces that sort of reaction. It is a destructive emotion. And instead we need to have a different attitude to our mistakes and to our misdeeds.

Walt Whitman always admired animals because they do not lie awake at night and weep for their sins. Animals are practical in the real sense as are children who haven't been taught this extraordinary hang-up of guilt. Because if you have done something wrong and you've made a mistake and somebody makes you ashamed of it and guilty, you run around licking the sores of your wounded ego because you feel your pride has been hurt. The first thing to understand is that it is not a serious failing in a human being to make mistakes. Everybody has to make mistakes. There is no way out of it. You can't learn anything unless you make mistakes.

We find for example in Japan the Japanese have a terrible hang-up about making mistakes. They therefore never have the courage to practice their English properly. They've had seven years of English in school, most it very, very, badly taught. And it's irrelevant English. They learn all about Shakespeare and Dickens and Thackeray and Thomas Hardy and so on, and therefore they can't carry on an everyday conversation. It's like the way the English study French - all about pens of gardeners' aunts and things like that. And so they are ashamed to try out their English unless drunk. So if you want to get into conversation with the Japanese in English you have to go to bars and then they say university students and so on there will loosen up and talk, because they no longer have the inhibition, the shame of saying the wrong thing.

So likewise I know a very great anthropologist who was taught music, playing the piano in the same way I was. When I was taught music the school mom who taught me used to put an India rubber, an eraser it's called in this country, on the top of each hand so that I would have my hands in good posture. And every time I'd play a wrong note she'd hit my fingers with a pencil. And this great anthropologist that had a similar thought about musical education, and when confronted with the piano in the presence of an absolutely marvelous teacher in San Francisco, she said she was amazed he was completely incapable of reading notes. He blocked out everything. So another great teacher of the piano I knew said simply:

?You must not be afraid of playing wrong notes. Just forget it. Play it wrong and then eventually go over it again and you'll

eventually get it right. But you must not block. Always keep the same rhythm going, even if you have to slow it down. But keep the proportionate rhythm of one note to another and if it's the wrong note, play the wrong note, as long as you play something, in the right rhythm.?

So you know this is a way of taking away peoples' blockage, peoples' guilt and shame about making mistakes. So you absolutely... freedom means basically the freedom to make mistakes, the freedom to be a damn fool. And then not to recriminate with yourself when you do finally realize that it was a mistake, but simply don't do it again. Or at least do it less often. So you know this is the puzzle when you go to confession in the Catholic Church, which is an enormous method of inculcating a sense of guilt, very subtle. One says of course that Catholics are on the whole less guilty than Protestants. They're more relaxed, and there's some truth in that, but only some. Protestants of course have chronic guilt, and you can work this out by a very simple little formula. That when the Protestants in England abandoned what is called auricular confession, to a priest, they inserted in their prayer book a general confession in which the congregation all made its confession together. Now what does a Catholic say when he makes his confession? The formula is:

"I confess to God Almighty, the Blessed Mary of a virgin, Blessed John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and all the Saints that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault. Wherefore I beg Blessed Mary etcetera and you Father to pray for me to the Lord our God."

And the priest says:

"Almighty God, have mercy upon you forgive you your sins and bring you to everlasting life by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ committed unto me I absolve thee from all thee sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Now instead of that, what they had to introduce into the Anglican formulary was instead of this very simple confession of sins and before the whole company of Heaven, an absolute grovel wherein they say that they have sinned so horribly and that the remembrance of these sins is grievous unto us. The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. And all this cringing and crying, breast-beating and wallowing in guilt, and then the priest instead of saying a simple formula of absolution, quotes all kinds of scriptural texts to prove from the Bible that those who DO truly and earnestly repent will be forgiven by God. (Cause they're very uncertain about it therefore they have to quote all of the authorities.) And this absolutely groveling form of confession replaces the old one because they were a little bit scared about abandoning direct confession of sins to the priest.

And now going back to the Catholic problem about guilt, you say when you have confessed after saying this formula about and to all the saints, you confess the specific sins you've committed and you know I stole something, committed adultery three times and so on whatever it was, and then you say at the end for these and all my sins (which I cannot now remember), I firmly purpose amendment and humbly ask pardon of God, and of you Father, absolution. Now I firmly purpose amendment? that is where the fly in the ointment consists because the doctrine is that you have made a true confession if at the same time you have a sincere intention of acting differently in the future.

Now no sensitive Catholic can say that without having grave doubts as to whether actually he isn't going to do some of these things again. So if you're a work-a-day Catholic, like a Mexican peasant or something like that, you know that the confession is just a safety valve. You're going to go on living just as lackadaisically as ever but you go to church every so often and you get rid of the guilt and the evil. It's like going to the bathroom. But when you get to get thoughtful about these things then you wonder whether you do really mean what you say, whether your motive is pure and your intention is right. You get into a frightful hang-up.

And one of the reasons that our technology is impeded and prevented from feeding the world properly is the failure of one of our networks. It's an information network and it's called money, about which we have the most unbelievable superstitions and psychological blocks which have been gone into at some length by Freud who equates our valuation of money with our attitude to excrement and a very complicated lot of complexes grow up around that. But money and our psychological attitude to money is a major obstacle to a proper development of technology enabling it to do what it is supposed to do - that is to save labor, and to

produce goods, services, and so on adequately. So I must introduce this with a story which is entirely legendary, indeed quite apocryphal.

The great banks of the world at one time got absolutely sick of the expense and security measures involved in shipping consignments of gold from one bank to another and so they decided that all the chief banks of the world would open offices on a certain island in the South Pacific which was balmy and comfortable and there they would store all the gold in the world. And they put it in great subterranean vaults reached by deep elevator shafts and then all they had to do when one bank, one country owed gold to another was to trundle it across the street. And this was very efficient. It went on beautifully for five or six years. And then the presidents of the world banks got together and said, "Let's have a convention out on this island and take our wives and families.?" So about seven years from the date of opening, all those presidents and their wives and families went out to this Pacific island and they inspected the books. And everything was beautifully in order. Then the children said, "Oh Daddy can't we see the gold?" They said, "Of course you may see the gold." And they said to the managers, "Let's take our children down to the vaults and show them the gold." And the manager said, "Well it's a... it's a little bit inconvenient at this time and perhaps the children would not really be very interested, after all it's just only old plain gold." And the president said, "Oh no, no, come now, they'd be thrilled. Let's go down and see." And there was further humming and hawing and delays and finally it came out that a few years before there had been a catastrophic subterranean earthquake and all the vaults had been swallowed up and all the gold had disappeared. But so far as the bookkeeping was concerned everything was in perfect order.

What this means then is that money is nothing but bookkeeping. It is figures. It is a way of measuring what you owe the community and what the community owes you. It is of course as you all know a substitute for barter. If you worked on a farm and the farmer paid you in terms of ears of corn, onions, cabbages, and other vegetables, and yet you wanted a pot and pan of some kind, then you took a few vegetables over to the man who so made pots and pans and you swapped. Some people used cowry shells to stand for money so that you wouldn't have to barter and carry around all these inconvenient loads of goods and then of course gold was used because gold was rare and because gold was supposed to have a constant value. You might ponder the question when a banker buys gold with what does he pay for it? The answer is a mystery called credit.

Credit is bookkeeping and as the economy of the Western world developed it was found that there was not enough gold around, if it were to remain constant in value, to exchange goods and services. You could of course have changed the picture by putting down the price of goods and services to keep pace with the amount of gold in circulation, but nobody will ever put down the price. There's something in our psychology whereby prices always tend to go up. But at the same time therefore because the amount of gold in the world did not provide an adequate channel for the circulation of goods and services, all great industrial nations went heavily into debt. They created a thing called the national debt which year by year gets bigger and bigger and bigger to the horror and consternation of old-fashioned Republicans who pay their bills. But the reason for the increase of the national debt is extremely obvious. It is that with an expanding gross national product there needs to be more and more money, that is to say tokens of exchange, in order to circulate the amount of goods produced, which is ever increasing.

Now I'm not an economist, and I can refer you to the work of those who really are, but any fool can see certain extremely fundamental principles about this whole situation. And I'm speaking of the thought today of a man called Robert Theobald who sort of ties in with the general picture of people like McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller in having very far-out thoughts and very adventurous thoughts about what we should do about money. But he is in the following of a man like Frederick Soddy, who was a Nobel Prize chemist, who was one of the first people to think really freshly about economics. Or people like Silvio Gesell in Austria and Major Douglas in England, he's in that following. And the proposition that he puts forward is very simple - that money is a circulation of information and in itself has no value. Gold of course has some value. It has some value for industry and some value for dentistry and some value for jewelry. But as a means of exchanging the goods and services of the world it is as primitive as post horses for carrying the mail. We must recognize then that money is a pure abstraction.

I was on a television show a little while ago with Ted Sorensen and Raymond Moley and they were having a long, long discussion which sounded like something that goes on in a smoke-filled backroom of party bosses, where they were talking about the prospects for Republican-Democratic parties in 1968. And then they got onto the question of automation and the problems of unemployment that it was making and the difficulties of transferring workers from this to that when they were only trained for this. Finally I said,

"The trouble with you gentlemen is you still think money is real.? And they looked at me and sort of said, "Oh ha ha ha, someone who doesn't think money is real. Cause everybody knows money is money and it's very important." But it just isn't real at all because it has the same relationship to real wealth, that is to say to actual goods and services, that words have to meaning - that words have to the physical world. And as words are not the physical world, money is not wealth. It only is an accounting of available energy - economic energy.

Now what happens then when you introduce technology into production? You produce enormous quantities of goods by technological methods but at the same time you put people out of work. You can say, "Oh but it always creates more jobs. There will always be more jobs." Yes, but lots of them will be futile jobs. They will be jobs making every kind of frippery and unnecessary contraption, and one will also at the same time have to beguile the public into feeling that they need and want these completely unnecessary things that aren't even beautiful. And therefore an enormous amount of nonsense employment and busy work, bureaucratic and otherwise, has to be created in order to keep people working, because we believe as good Protestants that the devil finds work for idle hands to do. But the basic principle of the whole thing has been completely overlooked, that the purpose of the machine is to make drudgery unnecessary. And if we don't allow it to achieve its purpose we live in a constant state of self-frustration.

So then if a given manufacturer automates his plant and dismisses his labor force and they have to operate on a very much diminished income, (say some sort of dole), the manufacturer suddenly finds that the public does not have the wherewithal to buy his products. And therefore he has invested in this expensive automative machinery to no purpose. And therefore obviously the public has to be provided with the means of purchasing what the machines produce.

People say, "That's not fair. Where's the money going to come from? Who's gonna pay for it?" The answer is the machine. The machine pays for it, because the machine works for the manufacturer and for the community. This is not saying you see that a...this is not the statist or communist idea that you expropriate the manufacture and say you can't own and run this factory anymore, it is owned by the government. It is only saying that the government or the people have to be responsible for issuing to themselves sufficient credit to circulate the goods they are producing and have to balance the measuring standard of money with the gross national product. That means that taxation is obsolete - completely obsolete. It ought to go the other way.

Theobald points out that every individual should be assured of a minimum income. Now you see that absolutely horrifies most people. ?Say all these wastrels, these people who are out of a job because they're really lazy see... ah giving them money?? Yeah, because otherwise the machines can't work. They come to a blockage.

This was the situation of the Great Depression when here we were still, in a material sense, a very rich country, with plenty of fields and farms and mines and factories...everything going. But suddenly because of a psychological hang-up, because of a mysterious mumbo-jumbo about the economy, about the banking, we were all miserable and poor - starving in the midst of plenty. Just because of a psychological hang-up. And that hang-up is that money is real, and that people ought to suffer in order to get it. But the whole point of the machine is to relieve you of that suffering. It is ingenuity. You see we are psychologically back in the 17th century and technically in the 20th. And here comes the problem.

So what we have to find out how to do is to change the psychological attitude to money and to wealth and further more to pleasure and further more to the nature of work. And this is a formidable problem. It requires the best brains in public relations, in propaganda, in all that kind of thing, in all the media: television, radio, newspapers, everything...to try to get across a message to the vast general public about what money is. You see the difficulty is this. When the public suspects that the money that is being issued, the dollar bills being issued by the government are only paper, and stand only for paper, they start putting up prices so you get an inflationary situation where the more paper money there is, the higher and higher and higher the prices go? which is a very stupid psychological maneuver. And people have to be persuaded.

The least effective way of persuading people is passing laws, but they have to be persuaded somehow not to put up the prices, but to play fair with each other and keep some sort of standard correspondence between how much is produced and how much credit is issued.