

Definition of Terms

CrimethInc.

November 1, 2001

Contents

Abundance: All of us can be rich...	3
Scarcity: ... not all of us can be wealthy.	4
Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness	4
Survival, Safety, and the Pursuit of Property	5
Play: Head for horizons...	5
Work ... not destinations.	6
Gift Economics: We know everything is priceless.	6
Exchange Economies: They say everything has a price.	6
Relationships of Love: Cooperation...	8
Relationships of Force ... or Coercion?	8
Faith: Invest in the future...	9
Fear ... or protect yourself to death.	10

In a totalitarian regime (whether it be political, like the Stalinist government of the Soviet Union, or socio-economic, like the corporate capitalism of our day), in which the whole of human relations is regulated, fragmentary resistance to any one aspect of that regime — environmental destruction, police brutality, child abuse, racism, employee ennui — can only fail. The totality itself must be contested, the basic paradigms as well as their specific manifestations... not in order to impose another totalitarian order, but to open new horizons for everyone.

For this, a resistance is needed which does not standardize those who participate in it, in which individuals can help each other to break free in the process of creating and exploring themselves. This sketch of six oppositions is not meant as a complete map of the world of human relations, but rather as a selection of tools for the woman or man engaged in her own analysis.

— *Nadia C.*

We move in spiral paths, imploding or expanding, relinquishing the world to become what we hate, or finding the faith to discover new worlds and loves. Alchemy is the process by which one moves from the vicious inner circle outwards...

Abundance: All of us can be rich...

Abundance and scarcity are not just measurements of the resources which exist to meet one's needs — they are different ways of regarding both the resources and the needs themselves... which become reflected in the world.

Abundant resources exceed the need for them; they may even multiply when utilized. Most of the things which set life apart from survival — love, friendship, confidence, imagination, courage, adventure, experience — are available in abundance: the more you partake of them, the more they are available to you and everyone else as well.

Scarce resources, on the other hand, exist in limited supply, and there may simply not be enough to go around. A scarcity economy is driven by the considerations necessitated by those conditions: in it, the “laws” of supply and demand are imposed first of all by a shortage, real or perceived, of needed goods.

It might seem that scarcity is simply an inescapable fact of life, but it's not that simple. Not all scarcities are imposed by circumstances — often, we impose them upon ourselves by the ways we assess and apply our assets. In our technologically advanced, post-industrial civilization, tools and amenities which were unheard of before are plentiful, yet most of us distinctly feel there to be a shortage of the things we need. This should not be surprising, for our social and economic systems depend on there not being enough for everybody. Everyone can have a full life — but not everyone can have a full wallet. Our society institutes scarcity and deprivation, by framing life as a desperate rush for limited material wealth and status.

They say the only free men are the hobo and the king. They are indeed the only ones who can claim to be lords of all they survey — though for utterly different reasons: the former possesses the entire world by releasing it, while the latter still owns only what he can conquer. Here we can see the paradigms of abundance and scarcity in action as philosophies of life. Likewise, the scavenger who thrives off the excess of his society sees opportunity and adventure where the

executive sees only hunger and destitution; the non-monogamous lover sees love as something that only increases in richness and depth by being shared freely, while the possessive husband regards it as a precarious prize obtained by sacrifice and hard labor, which must be hoarded and caged; the would-be rock idol or movie star needs a million anonymous fans watching his actions to validate them (thus selfhood itself is subject to scarcity in a spectator society), while the woman in a supportive, egalitarian community generally attains self-confidence and happiness to the extent that she helps others around her do the same.

Once upon a time, humans lived in a relationship of trust with the earth, seeing it as a wellspring of abundance¹: we ate fruit, which grew freely around us, naturally wrapped in a biodegradable peel and containing seeds from which more fruit trees would grow after the fruit was eaten. Today we eat candy bars, for which we must exchange our labor, of which supplies are strictly limited – and when we throw away the wrappers, manufactured from plastics and chemicals foreign to nature, we can be sure that we are adding to the slow accumulation of garbage that makes fruit trees more and more scarce. Ancient human beings lived in conditions of feast or famine, celebrating when their cups overflowed and whistling through leaner times, never having to diminish their faith in their resources by measuring them; for us, everything is a transaction, an occasion for computation and calculation.

Abundance and scarcity are above all the manifestations of opposing approaches to life: ingenuity or inertia, faith or fear. If we restructure our values and assumptions about what the cosmos has to offer us, we can enter a new world of plenty.

13. The more you can recognize the opportunities of your life, the more you can take advantage of them.

24. The more you recognize the treasures life has to offer, the more you have faith in it to offer them.

Scarcity: ... not all of us can be wealthy.

1. The less you trust the world, the less you recognize what it has to offer.

12. The less you recognize what the world has to offer, the less you trust it.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Life is existence when it feels worth waking up for in the morning. Life is written about in epic poetry, love songs, Shakespeare's plays and sonnets; survival is treated in medical textbooks, urban planning reports, and ergonomics presentations. Life is glorious, heartbreaking, extravagant. Survival, without life, is ridiculous, burdensome, absurd.

14. The more your life is in your own hands, the more it is an experience of liberty and pleasure.

¹ Paleolithic man [sic], a hunter/gatherer who understood the value of sharing and mutual assistance, had nothing, why hoard things when the whole world is yours? Later, Neolithic man, who toiled in the fields, sometimes produced a surplus, which he bartered with others, and thus for him a shift occurred from being in the world to having things, mere parts of the world. The hunters and gatherers never curbed their materialistic impulses – but they never made institutions out of them. Economic Man is a bourgeois construction, the result of ten thousand years of subjugation: that is to say, etymologically speaking, living under the yoke.-Finnegan Bell's *Hunters and Gatherers Through the Ages*

19. *The more full and free life is, the easier it becomes to recognize all the opportunities and treasures it has to offer.*

Survival, Safety, and the Pursuit of Property

Survival is life reduced to imperatives, whether they be biological (get air to breathe! get food to eat! get laid!) or cultural (get air conditioning, to be comfortable! get a television, to keep up with what's going on! get a sports car, to attract a mate!). It's often ambiguous which class a given mandate falls into, as in the case of the computer programmer who cannot feed himself without a can opener; but the essential character of these needs is that they appear non-negotiable.

Survival resources tend to be seen as scarce — there's only so much food, water, housing, medicine in the world; but as the famous tramp once responded to the predictable query of a bourgeois man (“you've got to eat, haven't you?”): “yeah, but not as often as you eat.”

Our era is characterized by ever-increasing standards of survival. The minimum “standard of living” to participate in society is always mounting, and it's a full time job keeping up: getting the new format for video-viewing, learning how to use the new computer program, treating yourself with the new antidepressant... This constant technological and subsequently cultural acceleration is the consequence of an economic system based on contention, in which constant innovation is necessary both to sell new products and to keep up with everyone who uses them.

All indications suggest that people spend more time working to meet their “basic needs” today than ever before: prehistoric human beings spent the greater part of their days in creative leisure, while with all our labor-saving devices we waste most of our lives earning the money to pay for them, using them to mow the lawn, waiting in traffic to buy more batteries for them. And of course, the more time we spend providing for mere survival, the less time we have to live.

2. *The more you think you need to survive, the harder you have to work.*

7. *The less you live, the less you can recognize what the world has to offer.*

Play: Head for horizons...

Play is what takes place when all the problems of survival have been solved and there is energy left over. Play is not constrained by external demands — the player establishes her own values and meanings in the course of acting. Play takes place in a condition of freedom — rather, it is the condition of freedom. In play, the individual interacts with the forces around her rather than reacting to them, creates the context for her actions as she acts rather than being shaped by the situation: it is thus that self-determination is possible. You can see play today in the collages on teenagers' walls, in the eccentric furnishing of squatted buildings, in the break between skirmishes with the police when the insurgents dance, in the movements of lovers' bodies together.

The resources for play are available in abundance. As a general rule, the more one plays, the more others are enabled and encouraged to play; true playfulness is infectious. One can't play at the expense of others for long — being “free” at such a price ends up taking a lot of work, as in the case of the “successful” executive, and doesn't lend itself to much real, spontaneous play, as the ennui typical of the trust-fund playboy demonstrates.

It's ambiguous whether many of the things currently called "play" actually are: Is it play when a businessman goes golfing with his boss? When a group of young men play basketball together according to a strict set of rules, with a struggle for dominance as an ever-present subtext? How about when a young man comes home from work so exhausted that he doesn't have enough energy to do anything besides "play" video games?

Children, on the other hand, come into this world knowing all about play — at least until they've spent a few years cooped up in small rooms with the television on. We can recapture that lost innocence, for them and for ourselves, by approaching everything we do as a game rather than a struggle or responsibility — by creating environments in which we can run wild. For the best-kept secret of capitalism is that play activities can also provide for our survival needs: except in extremities, work is unnecessary.

15. The more pleasure you take in your activities, the more willing you are to share the fruits.

20. The more you approach life as a game, the more full and free it becomes.

Work ... not destinations.

Work provides for survival, nothing more. It always appears as a response to necessity, whether it be the need for food and shelter and life insurance, the establishment of social status, or the obligation of the Protestant work ethic. Work answers to imperatives; play creates its own rules.

3. The more you work, the more you feel the need to be compensated for your sacrifice.

8. The more you work, the less you live.

Gift Economics: We know everything is priceless.

In stark contrast to exchange trading, gift-giving is its own reward. In a gift economy, which exists whenever anything is freely shared and no score is kept, the participants receive more the more they bestow. Everyone who has shared a real friendship or a morning of incredible lovemaking knows intuitively that when the option opens, human beings return to this natural relationship.

This is a challenge to find and share the trust and responsibility it will take to reinstate this as the basis of all human affairs, as it was before the cancer of avarice took hold.

My liberation, my delight, my world itself begins where yours begins. Nobody can command my services because I have, of my own, pledged to give all — and gratuitously, for that is the only way to give.

16. The more able you are to share freely with others, the more they share with you, and the more you are thankful for their existence and open to their beauty.

21. The more freely you give and receive, the more your life can be a game rather than a struggle.

Exchange Economies: They say everything has a price.

Liberty ends where economics begins. Get your money's worth — earn your keep — there's no such thing as a free lunch²: exchange economics posits life as a zero-sum sport between bargain-

² Editors note — Ha!

ers who maneuver to outbid and outwit each other in order to gain control of more fragments of the world. Free trade, the free market — these are oxymorons: where systematized competition is free to bend all humanity to its prerogatives, ultimately no one is free to focus on anything else.

Exchange-economics thinking presupposes a one-dimensional scale of value, according to which everything can be appraised: if an avocado costs a dollar, and a new sports car costs \$20,000, then a sports car must be worth exactly twenty thousand avocados. But such equations are absurd. Can you calculate the financial value of a friendship, the exchange rate of a clever joke for a meal tenderly prepared, the comparative worth of the sound of birds singing in the trees against the current market value of lumber? Those who would measure such things miss everything that is beautiful and unrepeatable about them; once one recognizes this, it becomes clear how pathological such calculations are in any context. As if one could “deserve” life in all its complexity and magnanimity in the first place — let alone good or bad fortune, the moment of stillness at sunrise, the flavor of avocados, the sensation of riding in a speeding car! This is simply not the way the world works — anyone who has lived and paid attention knows the best and worst things life has to offer are things no one could ever earn. To assess the commercial value of experiences and sensations, let alone trade in the very lives of the human beings around you with an eye for your own advantage, is to flatten the world for yourself and everyone you touch.

The machinery of exchange eats quality and shits out quantity, enslaves process to despicable product, teaches that practical necessities and moments of joy and spiritual redemption alike must be earned. There is something of the old Christian theology of guilt and salvation in the ways those who hold stock in the values of exchange speak of hard work and entitlement. For these people, anything free is suspect at best — nothing obtained without sacrifice, without an exchange can be worth anything — and the act of paying for things, with the compensation they have received for abdicating their lives, is itself more important than anything they could buy: it is the way one buys oneself out of the hell of “valuelessness” to which the tramp and the adventurer are assigned, not without a little jealous spite. For them, human beings do not “deserve” happiness, comfort, even existence itself, unless they pay for it with suffering³. It should come as no surprise that many workers see things this way: if they didn’t, they would have to face the possibility that they have been wasting their lives.

Likewise, those who would refuse this system of exchange are confronted with the same accusations of valuelessness by their own bodies, when they find that they cannot get food to eat or a soft place to sleep unless they give up some part of themselves for it.

For once some people in a society begin hoarding and trading for their own benefit, all who interact with them must adopt the same miserliness and self-interest to survive — and the most ruthless ones inevitably end with the most power, just as magnanimity and largesse find themselves disenfranchised. The world now waits for a new generosity which can defend itself.

4. Force is always present where exchange must be negotiated, where giving is not practiced for its own sake.

9. The less freely you give and receive, the harder you have to work to provide for yourself.

³ We, on the other hand, don’t think much about deserve anymore; we ask, instead, what would be best for everyone, and leave it at that. Revenge doesn’t interest us, being, as it is, just another form of exchange.

Relationships of Love: Cooperation...

Love is secure, fearless, generous. Love does not make demands or judge according to standards — love celebrates, consecrates the unique, makes beauty and beautiful. To feel love is to be grateful for the whole of the past, present, and future, to feel for a moment that there is a sense to one's existence. To be in love is not to be deluded or destitute, but to gain a sixth sense with which to perceive the real splendor of the universe. To experience love is to be connected directly to the tragedy of existence — which is not that there is not enough beauty in this life, but that none of us has the breadth or depth of self, or the time on this planet, to fully savor the magnificence the world lavishes upon us.

Love makes war upon any peace which in fact is war systematized and concealed, for love is a ruthless enemy of senseless conflict and waste. It is love, of liberty when not of one's fellow beings, that makes it possible for us to coexist in pursuit of our own desires rather than languishing in thrall to that fat old god Discord. Those in love come to identify each other's needs with their own, ultimately making no distinction, and overcoming the self/other dichotomy that is at the root of Western alienation: thus in love we find a way to surpass ourselves, to exalt each other and ourselves in the course of living.

Beauty must be defined as what we are, or else the concept itself is our enemy. Why languish in the shadow of a standard we cannot personify, an ideal we cannot live?

To see beauty is simply to learn the private language of meaning that is another's life: to recognize and relish what is.

17. The more you feel love and gratitude, the more you trust.

22. The more you feel love and gratitude, the more you can give freely.

Relationships of Force ... or Coercion?

When you live in fear, the only way to approach the world that makes sense is with a gun in your hand. Just as the ones who see scarcity everywhere they look create a world of shortages, those who depend on force to relate to others create a necessity for it; and those born into this world of coercion inherit the cycle.

Coercion comes in more subtle forms than rape, "peace-keeping" bombings, economic sanctions. It comes camouflaged as body image standards (which even masquerade as "health" standards), psychological pressures that influence people to repress their desires, laws enforced by public opinion as well as thugs in uniform. It may be disguised as a seemingly trivial argument between friends (for anyone who seeks to establish rank, even in knowledge of trifling things, seeks a lever with which to exert force on his fellows), or that quiet self-mutilation which lovers and relatives sometimes use to manipulate each other — the inverse and identical twin of macho aggression.

Some call this a democracy — did you get to vote on what the billboards you pass every morning say, what they go on repeating inside your head all day, the trees they cut down by your house to make room for the new gas station? How about the preservatives they put in the food you eat, or the conditions in the factories that produce them? Your wages at work, or how much money the I.R.S. takes from you? These aren't just inevitable "facts of life" — they are the manifestations of conflict as the system of human relations, every man for himself and force against

us all. The leagues of intimidating red tape and the battering of women, the biased news coverage and the inhumanity of factory farms, the jockeying for ascendance between colleagues and countries, all these are simultaneously expressions of the strife at the heart of our civilization and weapons which, used by factions fighting for survival on its terms, perpetuate it.

Living under the reign of coercion strips you of your faith, leaves you ready to use force on others, to treat them as the world has treated you. It is well known that the playground bully acts out of feelings of worthlessness, that the teenage hoodlum is moved to vandalism by insecurity and neglect; how much self-loathing and desperation must then be in the hearts of the moguls and power-brokers, whose machinations it is that keep the global market running? Whether dishwashers or directors, all who cannot feel safe enough to create and pursue their own dreams seek compensation in wealth, status, or more overt forms of power over others.

Thus a mindset develops in which all human relations are seen as a conflict between mutually exclusive interests. It's no wonder many people have a hard time imagining how human beings could live without the coercion of [what they have been taught to see as] "beneficial" forces. But competition, combat, struggles of all kinds are barriers to freedom, for they impose their demands upon all who are subject to them, distracting and simplifying without quarter. The terror-mongers insist that hierarchy is necessary to protect us from the violence inherent in our species — but hierarchy is simply the expression of the violence intrinsic to this system. The fact that hierarchy can be absent — between friends, in moments of mass teamwork, in other societies — is proof that we can live without such violence, too.

Ultimately, any conflict comes down to relations of force — even those known, up to this point, as revolutions. Our dream is not to win another war, but to stage a total revolution, a war against the condition of war, on behalf of those beautiful moments when people can be thankful for each other's existence.

5. The more you depend on force, the more you have to fear.

10. The more you depend on force, the less you can give and receive freely.

Faith: Invest in the future...

One either invests oneself in the present, or the future: either reacts to existing circumstances and their demands, or acts to change them. You can spend all your energies surviving according to the terms set by the market economy, the expectations of parents and peers, the force of your own inertia — or risk everything to make those considerations obsolete.

Faith is the opposite of superstition. Faith means believing in the boundless possibilities of the universe — and setting out to explore them. It means knowing that if you leap off a cliff, you're bound to land somewhere. Faith means trusting that the world is wider and richer than you could possibly see from this point, and therefore not feeling pressure to plan out the rest of your life from here. Better to sketch a route to the horizon: from there, you'll be able to make out new vistas, and make new plans accordingly. Heaven help the people who make long term plans today and stick to them, whose lives will never be greater than what they can imagine right now!

Faith enables you to rely on your intuition when you need to: instead of being trapped by what you know, you do what you need to do. Faith gives you power over your fear. Whether

you are confronting a police line or giving birth to a child or a song, faith is indispensable for capital-L living.

18. The more you trust the world, the more wonderful things you recognize in it.

23. The more you trust, the more you can feel love and gratitude.

Fear ... or protect yourself to death.

The one who lives in fear moves only to consolidate the present. He is not capable of free action — he is too busy reacting in advance to things that haven't even happened yet. He can only conceive of the future — any future — as a threat. He trusts nothing to chance, and thus chance cannot entrust him with more than he already has.

It is fear which lies at the bottom of all violence and struggle. When one trusts her companions and the world around to provide, if not what she thinks she needs, at least something equally weird and wonderful, she too can be gentle and generous. If she feels threatened by them, she grows defensive and aggressive, strikes out blindly, becomes possessed by resentment and cruelty. Vengeance becomes her greatest motivation, more powerful than any other desire: anything to take revenge upon this world which has made her feel so unwelcome and worthless. Acting on these impulses, she spreads them to others like a plague. Fear, like faith, is self-perpetuating — until something breaks the cycle.

Ask yourself — are you living deliberately? Do you approach risk willfully, or do you deny yourself because of fear? What are you afraid of? What are you saving yourself for? Do you own your body? Do you own your experience? Don't save yourself. Don't spare yourself. Preservation of the body or the tender sensibilities is futile — we all die someday. The question is what happens first.

There are two possible responses to fear. One is to cower. The other is to follow your fear, to use it as a guide, to track it out past the limits of the world you know. Some things can't be written or told. Go search.

6. The more you fear the world, the less you recognize what it offers you.

11. The less you trust, the more you depend on force.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



CrimethInc.
Definition of Terms
November 1, 2001

Retrieved on 7th November 2020 from crimethinc.com

usa.anarchistlibraries.net