The Morality of Money?

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

The question of the morality of writers making a living from their writing has landed in my in-box and in other locations I've frequented a few times in the past, and it will no doubt come up again in the future.

I got an angry, nasty email from one writer clearly against writers being compensated for their work, though, and this particular foaming-at-the-mouth weasel-in-a-blender tirade got me thinking about writers who want to be paid for what they create—and the shit they take for admitting it. The writer of **this** e-mail ignored my clearly and publicly stated policy of NEVER reading anything submitted to me by anyone but my agent. He sent me something he had written, requesting my comment, and following my stated policy, I deleted his work unread.

To which he sent the following missive (in my response to my **I Have A [Writing] Dream** e-mail and post):

> *You need MY help? But your the great genius Holly Lisle, why would u need little 'ole me's help? Oh, i see, it isn't a writing dream you have anymore, it's a money-making dream. So you need all the little idiots to help u with that. I needed help too, Holly Lisle… "I send u little letter, needing one maybe two line of response but there was no response, i get sad and think holly lisle not friend any more, that holly lisle like all other American capitalist, she want only my credit card number and no care about my own dream. holly lisle bad, holly lisle corrupted, like robber baron in my own country who steal from poor and make peasant go hungry…" I get this kind of blather all the time here, you people trying to make money off the idiots; speaking good words, but having no intention of backing any of them up unless a credit card*

> *number is forthcoming. shame, shame, holly lisle, you corrupt American businesswoman. you go, girl; you've come a long way. i did read one of your little essays, about not changing the world. are u serious?* * *if u got the time to think up all that crap, u got too much time. don't bother replying, there's nothing more to say.*

Now, understand that the person writing this is a competent native English speaker and someone who actually aspires to be a professional writer (I have to guess he's American from the lack of British spelling anywhere in his email.).

Why he chose to present himself in such a stupid way eludes me, but there you have it.

Look past the fact that my e-mail was not about me making money—I've been supporting my family with my writing for the last eighteen years—but about me getting to a point in my life where I want to help other writers make a full-time living from THEIR writing. He was pissed because I didn't respond to his manuscript, or whatever it was, and he decided he was going to flame me. It happens. Fairly frequently. It wouldn't happen if people read the goddamn FAQs, but **that** would assume most people were willing to work for their knowledge, rather than demanding someone who did work for it hand it to **them** on a silver platter.

That's not why we're here. We're here because my frothing correspondent reveals a nasty (if prevalent) resentment of people who make money by creating things.

Capitalists.

Of which I am one, and fervently so.

So I am going to talk about money, and the making of money, and why, if you are someone who creates, you have every right to work toward being compensated—and compensated well—for the

products of your mind.

What Is Money?

Most people are surprisingly foggy about this. People currently running the US government are VERY foggy about this, to the detriment of the country.

Money is not a thing. It is an idea. Money is the amazingly brilliant and civilized idea that if two human beings agree on a standard unit of measure that can represent the value of unlike items, people can trade with each other freely for **anything**, without the use of force.

Prior to the creation of money, people who wanted something had the following options for getting it:

- Take it by force, with a club, a gun, or the claim of divine right.
- Steal it by subterfuge, deceit, or misrepresentation.
- Trade for it with items the owner of the coveted item would accept as having equal value.

Money is the means of exchange for men and women of integrity and good will—because of its standard and broadly accepted value, you do not have to come up with a dozen live chickens of egg-laying age and three bushels of wheat to purchase a table and two chairs made by your neighbor, who needs only chickens and wheat.

You can work at whatever trade you choose, receive your compensation in standard currency, and go out to buy a table and two chairs from someone who can then use your currency to buy a dozen live chickens and three bushels of wheat. Or an X-Box. The two of you don’t have to dicker back and forth about whether the wheat is good or kind of old and so not as valuable as you say it is, and you don’t have to figure out how to walk around with twelve live chickens in your pocket.

Money is moral, and the most civilizing element created by humankind.

And is it made (invented, summoned from nothingness) by people who create things that other people value.

If you have an idea, and you sit down to write a story—and your story doesn't suck (VERY important point)—you have created something good and worthwhile that did not exist before. You have created something of value, you have added to the wealth of the world, and by doing so, you have invented money from nothing.

This is how the Gross National Product (or Gross Domestic Product) of any nation grows. Not by government action, but by the efforts of individuals.

Governments do not add to the wealth of the world. They create nothing. Rather, they take—either by the consent of the governed, or by force—wealth that others have created. Moral governments use the wealth taken to carry out the will of the people, and nothing more. Immoral governments expand the reach and scope of the government, and decrease the rights of the people governed.

Governments who deal with debt by printing more money (while not creating more wealth) dilute the value of existing money. This causes inflation—and it's what's coming next in the current US economy.

Only the act of creation brings forth new wealth.

You can judge the basic morality or immorality of any philosophy by how it deals with money.

Money gives people the power to live their own lives, to choose their own paths, to be independent individuals. Money

promotes good will by allowing value to be exchanged for value—for allowing both parties to “win” in the trade. Money releases people from lives bound to scratching out a meager existence growing their own food, building their own homes, and weaving their own clothing, and allows them to work in whatever fashion they desire, and to trade easily for those goods and services they do not create themselves.

Philosophies either promote freedom and independence, which are made possible by money; or they promote dependence and force, and revile money as a tool of evil or the possession of wicked men and “robber barons” because it moves people away from whatever form of force the philosophy is pushing.

Here are examples of philosophies of force.

“Don’t struggle to think your own thoughts—we’ll tell you what to think and save you from all that messy confusion.”

“Don’t act for your own benefit—serve our demands under our direction and we will take care of you as we see fit.”

“Don’t create. Consume.”

“Don’t value your own life—value everyone else’s lives and sacrifice your own for the greater good, as defined by us.”

“Don’t be an individual. Be a collective—because we can force collectives to do what we want, and individuals are pains in the ass.”

“Don’t expect value returned in exchange for value given. Give us everything you have that is worth anything while you’re alive, and you’ll be rewarded once you’re dead.”

“Take by force from those who create, give without interest in merit to those who don’t create to bribe their loyalty.”

The philosophy of money—the philosophy of capitalism—is simple.

“Stand on your own two feet, choose your own path, earn your own way, create value and trade honorably with value given for value received.”

So yes. **I’m a capitalist.** Fervently, ardently so. I believe in the value of the individual, in the beauty of human creativity, in the right of human beings to hold their own lives as worthy of living to their highest potential and to pursue their own dreams.

Because this matters to me, I put some of the money I have earned from my own work (I invest some of my profits, in other words) into creating ways to help people who also value independence and creation make their dreams into their reality, the way I have done for myself.

My ability to help others is dependent upon my making a profit—if I don’t have enough to feed my family, I don’t have enough to invest in anyone else. This is true for ALL capitalists, and it’s the reason jobs are disappearing right now. Not because capitalism is evil, but because a program of taxing those who create into poverty kills the creation of wealth for everyone.

Are there corrupt capitalists? Of course. Human beings don’t always live up to their highest ideals, and some resort to theft, trickery, manipulation, and force because these are easier than honorable exchange. Those who do these things do not represent the spirit or philosophy of capitalism when they do, though, any more than a murderer is a legitimate representation of what it means to be human.

Are there corrupt socialists, corrupt communists, corrupt anti-business governments? Considerably more than there are corrupt capitalists. The use of force breeds corruption.

If you want to live your life on your terms and pursue your own dreams and create something wonderful, if you want to stand on your own two feet and earn your own way in the world, don’t snarl at the businessmen who make profits and invest them in jobs and the creation of opportunities that benefit everyone.

Money is not evil. It’s the best and most liberating idea human beings ever had.

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*“Saving The World Through Typing” is a funny essay, but I’m dead serious.

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