

Wealth and Money

When we talk about unearned wealth, what we're really talking about is unearned money. Real wealth is always earned by constructive endeavor. Money is not wealth. Money is a tool for measuring wealth for the purpose of fairly exchanging the goods and services that sustain and entertain us. Unfortunately, it's easy to lie and steal with money.

When I hear it said that our financial institutions have lost half of their wealth, I find the concept dangerously deceptive. The wealth that we have lost was never in the banks. It was in the overall financial system, now so corrupted and broken. It was in the infrastructure of our communities, no longer being maintained. It was in the fossil fuels that we wasted in thoughtless gluttony. It was in the raw materials that we traded to China and the rest of the developing world that came back as the billions of tons of cheap and shoddy stuff that we threw in the dump. It was in the energy and enthusiasm of our children, wasted in trivial pursuits. It was in the wisdom of the community no longer being passed through the generations as our children become virtual orphans, left to electronic entertainment as their parents and grandparents are swept away into the rat race, or watching from the sidelines, or mired in depression, or addicted to drugs or pleasure, or a thousand miles away, or caught up in the prison system, or gone off to war, or dying of AIDS, or any of the many other reasons that children no longer spend time with their elders.

Money doesn't keep. If it's not invested in productive endeavors, it produces no new wealth. Meanwhile, entropy steadily consumes our old wealth. Our current global financial system has allowed almost all of our available investment money to be controlled by a very small percentage of the community, most of whom are unable or unwilling to invest it wisely, and our money is rapidly becoming worthless as we have more and more uninvested money and less and less wealth.

When money is borrowed, how it is spent determines the eventual outcome of wealth or poverty. If it is spent on the talent, tools, and materials to produce high quality, efficient, long lasting stuff, then we become wealthy. If it's spent on lots of poor quality, inefficient, disposable stuff, then we end up with little to show for what we owe and we become poor. If it's stolen and squandered by financial pirates, we've been screwed.

We've just borrowed a lot of money. Total debt in the United States is around fifty trillion, an amount equivalent to sixty-eight million dollars a day every day since the birth of Christ. To repay the total global debt would take around a billion dollars a day for two thousand years. This debt represents the energy and resources we've taken from our children with some vague promise to pay it back. Most of this debt has already been committed to maintaining the status quo when the laws of physics clearly show that the status quo is not sustainable.