

Interview with a Freeworlder

Clearly the world is at a crossroads, with many groups claiming we need a radical system shake-up. But is a money-free world really the answer? More to the point, is it even possible? I discussed my take on these issues and tackled the tough questions in a recent interview. Here's the full transcript...

First off, what is a ‘freeworlder’?

A freeworlder is someone who believes a better world is possible beyond money, trade, borders and government; who recognises that human liberties are now greatly hindered by these old ideas, and that a sufficiently enlightened population can achieve a much higher standard of living and freedom through sharing and cooperation, rather than competition and division.

Who are you? What do you do? Tell us a bit about yourself.

Well, I’m from Dublin, Ireland, where I enjoyed a reasonably middle-class upbringing with my three brothers. I started out as a musician and songwriter I guess, which – as I’m sure most musicians will agree – is not exactly a smart career choice these days! Music has already become such a free commodity that it’s almost impossible to make a living from it. For me, this gradual dawning of ‘how-am-I-ever-going-to-make-money-from-this?’ was enough to start me asking questions about this whole notion of ‘making a living’. And with music becoming so free, wouldn’t this ‘freeness’ ultimately translate to everything? Things began to unravel from that moment I guess, and I started seeing the world differently.

I still play and write music in my spare time – but mostly now I’m dedicated to ‘freeworldiness’ and trying to create a better world in any way I can.

In your opinion, what’s wrong with the way we live now and what is your solution?

Everything in our society revolves around a profit system to the extent that it’s now damaging our living and social systems. This thirst for profit generally overrides our sensitivity in other more important areas such as our personal well-being, relationships and environment. It’s a system that has evolved through trade in times of scarcity and toil which are no longer relevant today.

Our planetary community is now so large and our needs so complex, that these trading systems are creating much bigger problems than they solve. Damage to the environment through consumerism and growth is the most obvious example, but not so obvious is the damage to our social fabric in our increasing isolation from each other and the stuff that sustains us.

Capitalism essentially allows us to make slaves of anyone to do our bidding. But if, for example, you continually pay someone to provide food for you, then you gradually lose the ability of providing food for yourself. So, as you pay more and more people to do things for you, you inevitably become more and more isolated and system-dependent as a result.

As a social species, our nature is to work together as comparative equals, so this widening disconnection and stratification of our society creates a core conflict. Money insulates us from that social connection we subconsciously crave. This core conflict is possibly the root cause of most maladjusted behaviour you care to mention, including mistrust, crime, greed, disrespect, exaggerated egoism, etc. Our desire to feel socially included and valued is not sufficiently being met.

Another big problem with using money to enslave others is that it removes us from the consequences of our actions. For example, we pay people to fight wars without ever seeing a drop of blood being spilled or experiencing the raw horror of it. Or, we pay for shiny electronic goods without understanding the ecological or social side-effects of producing them. This disconnection from the results of our actions displaces our natural sense of responsibility and empathy.

The solution is to move towards an open economy. To re-prioritise group interest and work more as a team for everyone's benefit. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that nearly eight billion people acting entirely in self-interest is not going to work out well for everyone.

So what is an open economy? How does it work?

Well, our current method of trade is exclusive, as in, I do something for you and you do something for me of an agreed equal value. Since barter is generally impractical, we use money tokens instead. But because that system is predicated on scarcity, people naturally want to get their hands on as many of these tokens as possible. That's a natural response, but of course causes calamitous collateral damage as I mentioned earlier.

An open economy is a *non-exclusive* trading system where everyone gives and takes goods and services without any form of accounting, tokens or obligation. When enough people understand the benefits and participate, everyone gets everything they need, works much less than before and no-one gets left behind.

It's a pretty simple calculation to make if you take into account all the man-hours wasted today devoted to creating useless or inferior products, or in managing the money supply and all its ancillary off-shoots like insurance, accounting, lawyers, trading – and arguably the police and military, etc. Subtract all the unnecessary man-hours from our entire global human effort and you will be left with far, far less work required to do in order to get everyone the things they need.

Imagine instead of being forced to work 40 hours a week against the threat of starvation or homelessness, we each had to work say 40 hours per month doing some work in our communities? If everyone did that, we could provide an abundance for everyone, freeing ourselves to spend more time doing the things we enjoy, while also creating much stronger, connected communities.

Why is money/capitalism the problem? Many would say that capitalism is responsible for some of the greatest achievements of our time.

It's not so much capitalism as it is this perpetual notion of trading like-for-like that is the root problem – which is an idea our ancestors invented. It's important to remember that *there is no physical law that states we must exclusively exchange things of equal value*. No other species engages in this behaviour.

It's easy to see how trade came about, and, on paper, it seems like a good idea. But the theory always

assumes everyone has something useful to trade – which they clearly don’t – and it neatly omits our natural inclination to hoard when faced with uncertainty or scarcity.

So with trading, you breed self-interest, and invariably end up with winners and losers. And the winners are not the ones with the most valuable skills to trade – but the ones who either have the strongest trading position or who are simply better at making deals. The stock market is a fine example, where rich people get richer by trading complete abstractions like stocks and currency which provide nothing of physical value whatsoever. What once seemed like a neat way of organising resources has become a frenzied race to accrue numbers regardless of any cost to the physical realm. This is an insane way to operate on a finite, shared planet.

As to progress, many people seem to confuse capitalism with technology, but the fact is that technology is what has improved exponentially over the last few hundred years, irrespective of capitalism. Inventions got better, things got faster, bigger, stronger. Technology has been the engine of modern capitalism, driving it into what it is today – a resource-hungry monster that wants to grow and grow. It’s possible that we moved too fast, too quickly and we haven’t adapted well to the changes that technology presented. This is what we are learning now.

Isn’t what you’re suggesting just basically another form of communism or socialism?

Some elements are. In theory, the ideals of communism and socialism are, like an open economy, about working for the collective good, but different in that they always operated against the background of trade and scarcity, and were centrally controlled. Obviously this led to the many disasters we have seen under communism, as central planners and leaders were unable to resist taking advantage of their privileged position.

An open economy, as suggested in the [*Free World Charter*](#), would not require central planning, but the provision of an education commensurate to following its ideals – where people truly understand the benefits of certain behaviours and the detriment of others. Once that knowledge is in place, people should be free to act however they choose.

Isn’t what you’re describing a resource-based economy?

In many ways, but with some important differences. The main difference being that an open economy does not necessarily require infrastructure or technology to happen. It’s possible immediately. It just requires that we collectively shift our priorities more towards group outcomes than we do currently.

The other main difference is how we see sharing as the central pillar of such a society’s function. RBE groups like [*The Venus Project*](#) would maintain that technology can create such an abundance that the notion of sharing becomes irrelevant. That’s a naive view in my opinion because it fails to address our core behavioural problems, or to recognise our innate tendency to want to help each other.

Let’s use that built-in desire as our stepping stone to work on our behaviour first. Higher technology will follow naturally later. Once we have achieved a sufficient level of self-awareness and understanding of group efficiency, then there are no limits to our technological potential.

Another important difference is that many people simply have no wish to live in a highly technological society, preferring a simpler life. An open economy allows for many interpretations of a better social system – as long as certain basic guidelines for optimal behaviour are understood.

Isn't this just a utopian pipedream?

No more than the dream of flying was to the young Wright brothers. If we don't act on our dreams, then we will certainly never attain them. To dream is to progress – and what we focus on, we manifest.

We are not searching for the perfect world, but believe a much better one is possible. That's what we're shooting for.

Would a free world / open economy really stop war, reduce crime, end poverty, create happier people?

Inequality is the root cause of most social and political problems today. And that inequality is caused solely by our scarcity-based trading system which persists, even though we already have the technical capacity to provide a good standard of living for everyone. People are homeless while houses lie empty. People are obese while others starve. According to [Oxfam](#), half the world's wealth is owned by eight people.

We mutually consent to a system of competition and trade that begets some winners and billions of losers. This perpetual economic imbalance drives us to war, crime and all manner of second degree social problems. It's futile to think that we can all be winners under that system – yet that is the lie we tell ourselves, that some day we too will be rich and successful, or will win the lottery. We need to wake up and stop consenting to a system that precipitates war, poverty, crime, that rewards the rich and powerful while stamping on the poor and trashing the environment.

I would call on anyone who is even the least bit dissatisfied with their lot to start questioning everything they experience in our society today.

What steps would be needed to transition towards this free world now?

There's a bit of a chicken and egg thing going on here. Some people believe changing the environment will bring change in people. Others believe changing people's behaviour must happen first. Of course, both are right to a degree. We are shaped by our environment, but we also shape our environment with our actions.

I believe changing our behaviour is where we should begin. After all, our current environment of inequality and destruction of nature is, for better or worse, a direct result of our actions. With an intentional shift in behaviour among many people, we can change our environment and others' behaviour for the better just as we have done for the worse.

We recently started a free-sharing website for this purpose called [Freeworlder.com](#). It's a platform that facilitates unconditional sharing of goods and services among its members. It's kind of like a prototype open economy. We can begin there with small, easy acts of sharing and cooperation and build confidence towards larger acts among more people. As more free services and possibilities become available, people will become more and more liberated from the pay-to-live paradigm that causes so much hardship and stress in the world.

Sites like Freeworlder can be the vital bridge between this world and the one we are working towards,

as it provides a base platform for community organisation and getting resources and skills to the people that need them. Everything is map-based, so you can see who and what is available and where. In a fully free world, such a platform will be vital to help communities organise services, delegate tasks for volunteers, find consensus, etc. This is a future-proof project that we are very excited about.

It looks like job automation is in our near future, why is this a good thing? How will people earn a living without a job/money?

While most media are bemoaning technology encroaching on the jobs market, we freeworlders see these advances as our ultimate liberators. And in two ways – 1, these machines can help us dispense with the more arduous tasks of modern society, and 2, the erosion of the labour market brings ordinary people inexorably closer to the realisation that this whole ‘making a living’ thing is actually negotiable – and not a fact of life.

Of course, in a money-free world, people won’t earn money for work – they won’t have to. This type of society will have mutual care and support enshrined in its social contract. Just as we have manners and basic respect today, we will have mutual basic support in the future. When you live in a community that supports you unconditionally, contributing back into that community with whatever skills you have will be the obvious choice for most people. Not contributing would almost seem like bad manners.

Wouldn’t everyone just end up doing nothing if they didn’t have to work? Won’t society grind to a halt without the money incentive?

No, and that supposition is actually a product of our work-to-live culture. Because we have an obligation to work – against the threat of starvation and homelessness – we are resentful and feel that any excuse to down tools and do nothing is an act of rebellion. It’s a negative feedback loop that gives us this unhealthy onerous attitude to labour.

In a free world, you wouldn’t be obliged to do anything, but experiencing the possibilities of living the way you want and realising your full potential in a community that sustains you could not but inspire people to contribute and become actively involved in it.

Though it may not be obvious, most people’s behaviour today is not driven by money. We apply ourselves freely to the things we care about, to improve ourselves and to help those close to us as much as we can. The only problem is that work monopolises our *time*, so our more passionate endeavours always take a back seat. But if you had to quantify it, we probably spend the vast majority of our *energy* working on the things we love. Helping our families and friends, pursuing our hobbies and passions, etc. We just don’t see it as work.

Not all jobs can be automated. What about the jobs no-one wants to do?

In my book *Into The Open Economy*, I suggest the idea of community service as a way of organising those necessary jobs in your local area. There will always be vital services that require human intervention and skills. Organising rosters among volunteers in local areas would seem to be the most effective way to ensure these jobs get done while minimising demands on individuals.

Think of it this way: if you lived in a community that met all your basic needs and you didn't have to work, wouldn't you be happy to contribute a few hours a week to keep things running smoothly for everyone's benefit? I certainly would and I'm certain most others would too. And even if someone chooses not to, then so what? That's their choice, but they would at least be aware of how that choice places an extra burden onto others.

What about the things people have worked their entire lives for? Would you have to give up your home/car/stuff or give it to someone else in an open economy?

If we announced a money-free world tomorrow, the sanest and most common sense approach is that everyone stays where they are with what they have. If resources and land need to be re-organised, this can be done over time. If someone owns a mansion today, why should they leave it unless they choose to? Equally, why would someone else try to claim it when they could have their own or find an unoccupied one elsewhere?

Intuitively, our scarcity-based thinking tells us that there would be property grabs – but you have to remember there would no longer be any practical advantage in that kind of behaviour. We each guarantee the other everything they need for a fulfilling life. As long as we all partake in that social agreement, no-one goes without. I admit it may take some people time to get used to, but with correct management and informational campaigns, there's no reason why such a transition could not go smoothly.

What about unsavouries/non-contributors? Criminals, greedy people, sick, elderly?

In general, criminal and anti-social behaviour stems from impoverishment – whether financially, emotionally, or both. Children from well-heeled, nurturing backgrounds seldom, if ever, partake in crime or become career criminals. It just doesn't happen. Why would they? Their needs have been met emotionally and physically. In an open economy, everyone's needs are met physically, and – in families where parents do not have to be absent through work – it is reasonable to expect that children's needs will be better met emotionally.

That's not to say that people will never engage in anti-social or violent behaviour. Incidents will always happen, though far, far less than today. In the event of any such incident, common sense would dictate whatever appropriate action would be required. For example, if someone goes on a shooting rampage in your town, you don't simply allow it to continue if it's in your power to stop it. You deal with it using whatever means necessary.

As to non-contributors, well of course we would afford them every possible convenience without obligation. I don't think anyone would seriously consider that those unable to care for themselves or contribute in a money-free world would somehow be cast aside. Even our backwards society today does its best within its own confines to care for the elderly and incapacitated. Release those fiscal

confines and we can give them the best care that technology and people with more free time on their hands can offer.

What about large projects and deciding how, why and where they get built?

The Freeworlder prototype has been designed with these kinds of questions in mind. A central database of resources and skills will be essential for organisation in a free world. Rather than the usual painstaking procedures of bureaucracy and government and wangling budgets, decisions without budgetary concerns on an online community portal could take place instantaneously. A platform like this can be used to poll community members, make decisions, source labour and skills for projects and ultimately manage supply and demand.

For large projects that require a lot of manpower, like building hospitals or roads for example, we could source the required number of willing volunteers at the project outset using the platform, then ask them to commit to a project pledge to see the project through to completion. This would kind of emotionally bind them to the project. These volunteer workers would likely be seen as local heroes for their community.

How would education work?

We need to radically overhaul the education system. Our system of competition, grades and learning non-essential skills and facts needs to be relegated to the past. Today, children spend their entire childhood learning stuff that they will rarely use, while useful skills that can create better, more compassionate people are left entirely to chance.

A free world education system would consist more of life lessons, social skills, effective communication and cultivating traits like empathy, compassion, trust, respect and responsibility.

Reading, writing and science are obviously important, but I think life and social skills are even more so. Unless we know how to deal with ourselves, others and the environment in a responsible and compassionate way, then we are creating potentially destructive humans – no matter how high their grades.

What about healthcare?

Healthcare – and the whole area of well-being – is currently in crisis. Conflicted between scientists, doctors, care-givers and one of the most powerful profit machines in the world: pharmaceutical corporations, the tendency to override well-being with profit is overwhelming.

If a company can make a tidy profit by alleviating the symptoms of your ailment, then it is far less incentivised to work towards a total cure. Then there is the whole business of patents. Corporations privately own certain medical formulas, preventing cheap distribution of those products to the people who need them. In years to come, these financial obstacles to cures for sick people will seem absolutely monstrous and insane.

In a truly free and enlightened society, the highest priority in healthcare will be curing the patient – not just alleviating symptoms or profiting from people's suffering.

Who would be in charge?

No-one – and everyone!

The thing is to stop being dependent on outside agencies by becoming responsible and self-regulating. Once we assume ultimate responsibility for ourselves and others, we will always act in ways that serve each other in a positive way. Regulation is merely a blunt tool to stop people doing stupid or crazy things, but in a properly educated society, this is no longer necessary. We can cultivate appropriate behaviour through education, not brute force.

What about politicians?

I guess today, the people that become politicians are those that are genuinely interested in trying to make society better. The problem for today's politicians is that society is just too tangled up in the profit motive, and bringing effective change becomes next to impossible. Then, once those politicians find ways to take advantage of that system for their own ends, they can easily become corrupted. *It's important to remember that greed is a natural response to scarcity, so we should never be surprised that people act greedily in a scarcity-driven social system.*

In a free world, those who would desire to be politicians today would actually be able to apply themselves more effectively to social issues and inspire others in solving local problems.

What's your take on UBI? UBS?

Universal basic income, or UBI – giving everyone a living wage unconditionally – is capitalism's answer to the impending employment crisis. The game is up for the money-for-labour idea and many top business leaders have already recognised that fact. Their only view is through the monetary lens of course, so UBI is the obvious choice for them. But of course it doesn't really solve any of our basic problems like inequality, pollution, waste of resources, debt, inflation etc. In fact, to my mind these will only get worse as people have more disposable cash. It will also further widen the inequality gap between money-giver and money-getters, and even further indenture people to the whole idea that money is the only possible way that society can operate. Which it isn't.

Some have suggested a system of universal basic services (UBS) which sounds a lot more promising. Rather than handing people money, give them the things that they need like housing, food, electricity, internet, etc. This I see as a very positive step in the direction of a free world. We can get there service by service. Bring it on.

What's your take on The Venus Project, Zeitgeist Movement, similar movements?

There are quite a few movements out there proposing similar money-free ideas. My personal favourite is [Ubuntu](#) – as they are also proposing things we can do today. I'm particularly impressed with their '[One Small Town](#)' initiative where they want to create a money-free community within one prototype town with the hope that others will follow if successful.

Others like The Venus Project are also impressive but, for me, they are too ambitious in that they hope

to build an entire prototype cybernated city, which, even if they succeed, does not necessarily prove it can work everywhere or appeal to everyone.

What's your take on the recent increase in money-free political parties?

There's no doubt change is happening everywhere you look. Deep down, people know the game is up and are experimenting with different ideas. Money-free political parties are a great way to broach the subject and get people thinking. The [Money-Free Party in New Zealand](#) has made great strides in recent elections, promoting the money-free conversation. It's only a matter of time before some of these representatives win seats, though hard to imagine what they could achieve within a traditional government apart from acting as a watchdog of some sort.

Another interesting thing to watch is Bitcoin. Many people think that is the future and, to a degree it is, as it proposes decentralisation and bypasses traditional power centres. All these agents of change are good and we're heading in generally the same direction – towards a system that works better for all inhabitants of this world and not just a few.

What's the biggest objection you've come across when you broach the topic of a free world with people, and what is your response?

I think most people, when they give a money-free world due consideration, can see the logic of it, but their biggest question is 'how do we get there?' And my answer is always the same: we're already on the way. Change is happening everywhere and many are beginning to question our existing way of operating on this planet. The American inventor and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller famously said that to change something, just build something that makes the old system obsolete. And many, like me, are already working on that alternative.

[Freeworlder.com](#) is what I like to consider our little model money-free world, where members get to freely give and get goods and services. Though small in membership today, this idea – and other sites like it – are really beginning to catch on. Maybe today, you can get a free haircut from a neighbour through the site, but who knows in a few short years to come, we will see the likes of cars and houses being offered there. That's when we'll know we are getting close to rendering the old trade system obsolete and moving towards a future that works for everyone.

What would you say to those who claim a free world is a good idea, but that others would disagree?

Let's face it, most people in the world today will disagree immediately. Money has become synonymous with survival, so a world without money is just too counter-intuitive a concept for most busy people to grapple with. But, as I said earlier, with due consideration, the logic eventually becomes apparent. It's the kind of idea that quietly gnaws away at your belief centres when you're sleeping. The logic is ultimately overwhelming – especially in the face of our destructive, disconnected society.

But don't expect people to get it straight away. If you explain the idea and someone disagrees, just give them time. It's quite a mental odyssey to make, but everyone will eventually make it. The best way I find is to mainly discuss the ideas with people who you think would be receptive. We can grow faster that way. It's like spreading from the edges then, instead of dropping idea bombs!

What would you say to those who claim we're not slaves, that we're already free to do as we choose?

Well, there is certainly an element of Stockholm Syndrome going on – where people implicitly place their faith in the incumbent system, believing their choices to be free, when they are in fact confined within certain parameters. Our culture confines us to a particular way of thinking, and it's not always easy to step outside. We cherish core beliefs like: "my country is the best", or "my religion is the one true one", or "you can't get something for nothing", or "without government there would be chaos", etc. These ideas are merely passed down from parent to child, and sadly, reinforced in contemporary culture by a corporate-owned media. When we see those core beliefs reinforced by outside agencies, it makes them even stronger.

But as people begin to question more and experience injustice first-hand, their true predicament will become clear to them. It's a little like *Logan's Run*, the 70s movie, where the people living in Dome City come and see the outside world for the first time!

If you don't believe you are a slave to the system, just ask yourself, how much time do you spend working to service your financial freedom? What percentage of your life thus far has been dedicated to an abstraction that actually has no basis in nature? Is there something else you would rather have been doing with all that time?

Don't get me wrong, an open economy is not an absolute free-for-all, as there would always be some level of community commitment, responsibility and stuff to be done – just much, much less than what we believe today gives us the quality of life we crave.

Final words?

To anyone who has any doubts about how a world is possible without money, borders and government, I would say just this: you're right to be sceptical. Don't believe everything I say, but don't believe everything you see around you either. Question everything that you see in our society today.

Ask yourself if this is really the best we can do. Ask yourself if everyone living their finite lifespan really deserves to spend the majority of it toiling and stressing to meet these imaginary self-imposed conditions, or do we deserve to live happier, freer lives at the limits of our true potential?

Make your own judgement.

Ready to be part of this great change? [Join Freeworlder today](#) and help us create a truly free and better world for all.

