




Things



**That Don't
Exist**



A Manifesto

Anonymous

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Acknowledgement

Sadly due to our self-imposed rules, we're unable to make any dedications or acknowledgements, except to say a thousand thanks to Frank Burton at Philistine Press, without whom you wouldn't be reading this.

The shorter introduction

Hello. We're Anonymous. As this is the shorter introduction, let's get straight down to business.

The world at it's currently run relies on the assumption that each and every member of the earth's population believe in three fundamental ideas: money, nationality and status. These three concepts have one thing in common: they only exist in our imaginations. Not everyone recognises these concepts as valid, but officially we all do.

As far as the media are concerned, the non-existence of these three works of fiction is the greatest taboo of our time. They're taken for granted in the same way volcanoes are taken for granted. They're part of our world, and out of our control.

Now is the time for questions. Where did these beliefs come from? Why are they here? And how do we get rid of them?

The longer introduction

This manifesto was composed by a group of individuals who wish to remain anonymous on the grounds that their ideas are more important than their identities.

Some of us are academics. One of us has no formal qualifications of any kind, and is happy to talk at length about how proud he is of the fact. One is a poet. One is a plumber.

The ideas within this short text were developed between the years 2006 to 2012 following a series of gatherings, which began as casual social occasions but by the year 2008 had developed into formal consultations, conducted mainly in the back room of a pub, somewhere in the United Kingdom. Some members left, others joined. In 2009, we began to write.

We began by calling it a thesis. Then we called it a book. The first draft of this document was 400 pages long. Much research was conducted. There were many footnotes.

At this point, we began to question our motives for writing our book in the first place. Who were our audience? Was it a stuffy academic text or a number one bestseller? It was clearly neither of those things. We wanted as many people to read it as possible, but it wasn't a money making venture.

With each draft, the document shrank considerably until it was (we hope) completely waffle-free.

So, with our waffling introductions out of the way, let's establish the purpose of this document – what it is, what it isn't, and what we'd like it to be.

We're interrogating belief. We're begging the question, why do such an overwhelming number of people believe in things that don't exist? Why do so many people have faith in artificial constructs that cause them to be poor and miserable, and cause other people to starve to death or be arbitrarily killed?

It may not sound like a barrel of laughs so far, but bear with us. This is important stuff.

Because of the manifesto's title (which we hope isn't too misleading), you could be forgiven for mistaking it for a Richard Dawkins-style anti-religious rant. It isn't. There's no way of conclusively proving the existence of God (although

numerous people who claim to have had conversations with Him would disagree). For that matter, there's no way to conclusively prove the existence of Richard Dawkins (and numerous people claim to have spoken to him too).

The manifesto is about things that can be proven not to exist – invented concepts that could easily be replaced by other invented concepts, or indeed, with nothing.

You could also be forgiven for assuming we're all extremely left wing. A lot of the ideas in this book will rarely be suggested by anyone other than Marxists. But that's not us. We're not left, right, diagonal or horizontal. In other words, we're not advocating any alternative system of government. This manifesto is for everyone, regardless of political or personal views. Read it to your kids at bedtime. Share it with your anarchist mates and your racist grandmother. As far as we're concerned, you're free to believe whatever you want, provided that you've thought about it first.

Identify your belief. Define it. Analyse it. Look it in the eye. Ask it where it came from, what it wants, and what purpose it serves.

Money is just an idea. Nationality is just an idea. Status ... You get the point.

It's our belief that these three ideas are extremely bad for your health. They're of great benefit to the rich and powerful, and are highly destructive to the rest of society. Over the course of history, these three beliefs have become deeply ingrained in the public imagination, and we continue to be manipulated by them today – perhaps now more than ever.

You may not agree with this contention. We're happy that you don't. What we're questioning, and what we're arguing against, is a society in which everyone believes in the same things.

We'll begin by separating fact from fiction. As someone much more important than us (although we don't know who) once said, 'You're entitled to your own opinions. You're not entitled to your own facts.'

Part 1

Things That Don't Exist

Money

Let's establish the fact that money doesn't exist. We use the word 'fact' because there's absolutely no doubt about it.

As Douglas Adams observes in the opening to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the problems facing the planet earth are 'largely concerned with the movements of small, green pieces of paper.' These small green pieces of paper are, of course, real physical things. But without the concept of money, the paper has no value. As technology moves on and the shiny metal discs in our wallets gradually reduce in favour of slim plastic rectangles, it's becoming ever more apparent that money was never a physical thing in the first place. It's a concept.

To put it another way: money only exists by mutual consent. If we stop believing in money it will cease to exist. Whether that sounds like a dream or a nightmare is, of course, open to debate. Either way, it's clear to us that Adams was right: money makes people miserable. The majority of the world's population live in poverty. The rest of us are in debt.

So, considering the above, why is the belief in money so widespread? Why do so very few people say, 'Hang on a minute. Aren't these just digits on a screen? Who decided that the number of zeros in my bank balance determines whether I get a meal or not? And why don't I get a say in the matter?' If money only exists by mutual consent, what's stopping us from withdrawing our consent? All we need to do is stop believing.

Of course, it's not as simple as that. Let's be honest – the question 'Why does money exist?' sounds completely ridiculous. Take note of how your mind interprets those words. Whoever you are, it's a hell of a question to answer.

'Why does money exist?' is a perfectly reasonable enquiry, but it's such an enormous taboo that it's been pushed to the far corners of our imaginations. In many people's minds, there's simply no alternative. Anyone who suggests otherwise is an extremist, hell bent on destroying the universe.

But the question we're asking isn't 'What's the alternative?' but 'Why do we believe in money without question?'

Paradoxically, everyone on the planet is fully aware that money's an invention. It's the most obvious statement in the world. It's like saying Buzz Lightyear's a fictional character (and even Buzz Lightyear figured that one out).

Yet, when we think about money – whether we’re worrying about how little we have, or deciding what to spend our fortune on – there’s nothing more real.

In a way, it’s hardly surprising. Money is as much a part of our lives as air or water. From the moment we’re born, financial decisions are being made on our behalf, and as soon as we’re able, we’re actively spending and earning too. We’ve got no choice in the matter, and neither does anyone else.

But why do we continue to believe in money when it ruins so many people’s lives? People who believe in God often wrestle with the question, ‘Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?’ Let’s ask that same question about money. Why does money allow people go to war to fill the pockets of the rich? Why does money allow people to starve because they’re too poor to feed themselves?

Our ancestors are responsible for creating these lies. There isn’t one living person we can blame for the institutions that continue to ensure that bad things happen to good people. On the other hand, there are plenty of people we can turn to and say, ‘You have the power to change all this. You’re keeping the lies alive. You’re responsible for the devastating effects they have on the world.’

But before we wag the finger at politicians and trillionaires, we need to look at ourselves. If we believe in money, we’re buying into everything that goes along with it.

You don’t have to stop believing if you don’t want to – but make sure that you recognise your belief for what it is. Money exists because we’ve created it. We can choose to destroy it or we can carry on as we are.

If you want to stop believing, greetings and welcome to our world. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Nationality

'...it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.'

(The closing words from George Orwell's 1984.)

We don't want to patronise anyone by making the point that countries are inventions, because it's obvious they're artificial. Luxembourg, for example, didn't spring from the earth when the planet was formed. Flags are designed and printed. National anthems are composed. Histories of nations are written and believed in regardless of bias.

Of course, it's not really the geographical boundaries that people believe in – it's what the borders, flags and anthems 'represent.' We can attach whatever meaning we want. The borders may signify a difference in religion, language or politics, but wherever you are in the world, each of these aspects of culture greatly overlap.

So, why do we have these boundaries? We have no choice as to whether they officially exist or not. They've been imposed on us by our ancestors and by our governments. Still, it seems that John Lennon's suggestion, 'Imagine there's no countries' is often heard but rarely listened to.

Some questions to consider:

You're free to love whoever and whatever you like, but if you claim to have national pride, you need to ask yourself, how can you be proud of decisions that have been made on your behalf? Your parents happened to have raised you in one particular country. Your government and your ancestors decided that the country existed in the first place.

For that matter, how can you be proud of your ancestors? Why are they better than anyone else's ancestors?

Some of the authors of this book are guilty of having said the opposite: that we're ashamed to be English because of our history of oppression and slavery. But the above questions can be posed in reverse. Why do we feel bad about the actions of long-dead people? Why are we ashamed of a history we didn't participate in?

Consider the above quotation from 1984. Winston Smith spends the course of the novel being increasingly disgusted by the brutal regime he's living under, but eventually the propaganda kicks in. He loves Big Brother. Likewise, the fact that so many

inhabitants of the planet are obsessively passionate about their nationality is a perfect demonstration of the power of propaganda. Maybe we're all unwitting participants in a colossal social experiment to test how compliant we all are.

Apologies to sports fans if you've not yet turned away in disgust. We're not saying you're wrong to support your country at football, athletics or whatever. What we're saying is, you need to acknowledge that the notion of pride or shame in the nation your team represent is a manipulative invention.

It's our opinion that here in the UK – specifically in England – international sport is by far the greatest enforcer of national pride. It has the power to make people who couldn't care less about being English suddenly transform into flag-waving, anthem-singing patriots. That includes one of the authors of this manifesto.

This particular author is well aware that he's supporting a myth. He's been indoctrinated with this myth since birth, and is happy to continue being indoctrinated because he's aware that this process is taking place. Why does he continue to fly the St George Cross during England games, despite being a passionate advocate of this manifesto's cause?

Because he enjoys it. We'd like to think the vast majority of football fans feel the same. We're intelligent beings. We're fully aware that we're being manipulated, and we're happy to be manipulated because we take pleasure and comfort in the affection we feel for our homeland. Why eradicate those feelings of belonging, of bonding with our friends and neighbours?

Again, we're not saying these things should be disposed of. We have no idea what would happen if countries disappeared overnight. Maybe it would do more harm than good. What needs to be eradicated is the lack of awareness and blind faith in the concept of nationality that we've all grown up with, and continue to be surrounded by.

Status

Let's first of all establish what we mean when we use the word 'status'. Status, in the context we're using it, means a person's position or 'standing' in society in relation to others. This could mean wider society (a doctor has higher social status than a burger-flipper) or within a smaller organisation (a burger-flipper has more gold stars than a trainee burger-flipper).

Overlooking everything are the people who make decisions on our behalf, either because they've been elected to do so, or because they own everything. Some would argue that status systems exist as a means of keeping society in order – whether it's class structure, patriarchy, the career ladder, or a system of government.

Whatever the circumstances, status is an invention. The fact that so many people disagree on who's more important than who is a case in point.

What a person does for a living is a case in point. What makes a Senior Executive more important than the lady who cleans the toilets? Arguably, in most cases, the cleaner is a greater asset to the company than any of its bosses. Try taking the cleaner away and see how long it takes before the staff get wiped out by legionnaire's disease.

It's not just about social or economic class. If you lived in the United Kingdom prior to the late 20th Century you'd've had a pretty grim time if you weren't white, male, heterosexual or non-disabled. Thankfully, here in the UK, society is far closer to being equal than it once was. Sexism, racism, homophobia, disablism and snobbery still exist, but generally speaking, the belief in the inferiority of minority groups has rapidly diminished.

Nonetheless many, many people, including the authors of this manifesto, remain instilled with the belief that there are certain people more or less important than them. Much, if not all of these beliefs are based on what we've been taught by our parents, our friends, our teachers, and – in no small part – the media.

One of our authors is from a moderately wealthy background, and despite being a passionate advocate of the assertion that status doesn't exist, finds it impossible to drive through a council estate without judging its inhabitants on the state of their gardens.

Another of our authors is a self-confessed inverted snob, who – perhaps through no fault of her own – considers anyone richer than her to be morally inferior.

This second example is perhaps the most potent. Status systems, whether it's caste, class or rank, aren't just about money and power – they're about the idea of moral superiority. It's the existence of status that makes the Queen of England morally superior to the Big Issue seller operating a stone's throw from the gates of Buckingham Palace.

You may believe the lady to be morally superior to the tramp, or you may believe otherwise. Morality is a flexible commodity. Believe whatever you want – but confront your beliefs first. Why is one person you've never met more important than another person you've never met?

Examine the facts. Whatever your beliefs, you need to acknowledge the fact your system of government – whether it's monarchy, democracy or dictatorship – is something that's been imposed upon you. This may seem like an obvious point, but the heart of the matter is, power structures need to be questioned – not just the people in power but the systems that make your leaders officially more important than you – whether it's the head of state or the owner of the company you work for.

If you're lucky enough to live in a country with a free press, you'll see people in power being criticised all the time. In the UK, the actions of the Prime Minister are constantly questioned and scrutinised in the media – and so they should be. But what's rarely called into question is the power structure itself.

It's the view of the authors of this manifesto that all status systems are created for the benefit of those at the top.

You may well believe status systems should continue to exist – and you're fully entitled to that view. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't recognise the concept as being a manipulative invention. Good or bad – status is imaginary. It could disappear in a heartbeat.

The rulers of the world will continue to rule if we remain in a state of mass denial. You may be happy for our rulers to continue but that's not the point. Our collective failure to separate fact from fiction makes fools of us all, regardless of personal opinion.

Part 2

How to stop believing

Make it, earn it, spend it, lose it, love it, hate it. Don't believe in it.

As we suggested in our introduction, this document is for everyone, regardless of personal views. You can stop believing in money and still support the free market. That is to say, even if you're a hardcore capitalist you should acknowledge the fact that money only exists by mutual consent – and remind yourself of this fact as often as you can.

‘But how will that make anyone happier?’ you may ask. ‘Money may only exist by mutual consent, but if one person stops believing in money, it isn't going to go away. So, why stop believing?’

The point is, no matter how rich or poor you are, it's important to take a step back. Do this as often as you can.

Take a coin from your pocket and place it in the palm of your hand. Examine its intricate artwork. Remind yourself that the coin has been manufactured and distributed on the understanding that it will be exchanged for goods and services, in the same way Monopoly notes are exchanged for green plastic houses. Remind yourself that the coin was manufactured in the first place because enough people agreed to participate in the game. So, because enough people believe money exists, you have no choice but to roll the dice and play along.

To an opponent of capitalism the idea that no one has the power to opt out could be considered a depressing one, particularly if – like the vast majority of the world's population – you're on the losing team.

But it shouldn't be a depressing thought. It's an enlightened thought. It would be depressing if you spent your life allowing money to make you miserable, without understanding why. You could spend your life getting upset about all the terrible things in the world without appreciating why these things happen, or seeing any solution. If you take a step back and appreciate the artificial nature of money, you'll have a better understanding of society and – in our view – a more well-adjusted mind.

Recognise cultures, not countries

We'd be foolish to suggest that cultures don't exist, because of course they do. Japan doesn't exist, but Japanese cultures do. God may or may not exist, but religions are real tangible things. There are more cultures and more religions than there are countries.

In many ways, it's difficult to draw a distinction between country and culture. How can we say Japan doesn't exist when Japanese cultures do?

Well, Japan has borders. Quite obvious borders, what with it being a collection of islands and everything. But Japanese cultures have spread throughout the world. The cultures have no borders. The cultures may develop over time, but they will never disappear.

On the other hand, if on a whim, the world's leaders got together and decided to abolish nationality, Japan and every other country would officially cease to exist. Governments have the power to do that. They don't have the power to abolish religions and cultures – although some have tried.

'But surely,' you may ask, 'cultures and religions are invented things too?'

Hmmm, yes, you're right. We're not saying these things aren't inventions. But religions and cultures are *useful* inventions. The same applies to morality. There's no doubt that aspects of religions and cultures (and indeed, certain versions of morality) are extremely damaging to society, but they also enrich people's lives – unlike geographical boundaries which, in our admittedly contentious view, do no good to anyone, other than those in power.

So, how do you go about distinguishing between country and culture?

Well, consider it this way: nationality has been imposed on you by your government and by your ancestors. It's something you have no say in, and have no escape from. If you want to physically escape from your country, you need a passport with your nationality printed on it, ensuring that wherever you go, your nationality will follow.

Culture is in many ways the opposite of nationality because it's completely unofficial. You don't have to carry a piece of paper around with you to prove you're a goth, for example, because if you're a goth, it's a decision you've made yourself.

You can decide to leave that particular subculture and join another at the drop of a hat, like many a goth before you.

Of course, it's not as simple as that. Culture gets imposed on people too, whether it's a child being brought up with his or her parents' religion, or an adult trapped in the culture of work.

Wherever and whoever you are, attempt to complete the following thought experiment:

Think about the country you live in. Make a list of all the aspects of that country's cultures you can think of. (You'll notice we're using the plural. However you look at it, there's more than one culture in any country you care to mention.) Bear in mind, your list will most likely be a different list to anyone else's. There are no right or wrong answers in this invisible quiz. Culture is whatever you want it to be.

Now take away the border. Imagine what would happen to the cultures of that geographical region if the border disappeared overnight.

Nothing, right?

Confront your prejudices head on

Like the myth of money and the myth of nationality, the myth of status helps the rich to stay rich and the poor to stay poor. It makes people miserable. It makes us hate each other for no good reason. It's a root cause of prejudice.

There are two kinds of prejudice: positive and negative. Negative prejudice can best be defined as: 'An irrational dislike or mistrust of people you've never met and know nothing about.' Positive prejudice is the reverse: 'An irrational respect or admiration of people you've never met and know nothing about.'

Our prejudices are influenced by our position on society's ladder. You may, like the vast majority of the earth's population, be on the bottom rung. Or you may be one of the privileged few at the top.

We, the authors of this manifesto, have positioned ourselves somewhere in the middle. For one thing, we live in the United Kingdom. In UK terms, we're moderately well-off. In global terms we're extremely wealthy. We're nowhere near the bottom. Nonetheless, we're nowhere near the top.

Richer, more 'famous' and 'successful' people are above us. This includes celebrities (no matter how minor) as well as Royalty and the Government. Poorer, less 'successful' and more marginalised members of society are below us.

The ladder is collapsible. As it's imaginary, its height can be decreased until only one rung remains. None of the authors of this manifesto can claim to be entirely without prejudice, but we're working on it. In theory our ladder should be easy to collapse, because (we hope), most of it has been shortened already.

Likewise, if you're reading this, we'd like to assume that you don't consider people of a different colour, sexuality, gender or level of wealth to be any better or worse than you. Even so, our (perhaps prejudicial) assumption is that your prejudices still exist. There remain people below you or above you that need to be collapsed into one.

Positive prejudices are often more difficult to combat. Some of the authors of this manifesto were brought up to believe that the rich and powerful are more deserving of our respect than those lower down the social scale. Some of us were taught to believe the opposite. In either case, there remains a part of us that feels admiration for particular social classes. In order to rid ourselves of prejudice, we

need to combat these positive tendencies too. If you love the poor and hate the rich, you may be able to claim the moral high ground as far as social inequality is concerned, but you remain guilty of passing judgement on people you've never met and know nothing about. In doing so, you're reinforcing your belief in the fictional concept of status.

'But hold on minute,' you might argue. 'I'm not acting irrationally. I haven't been indoctrinated. Yes, I have certain prejudices, but my views are based on my own experiences, and my thoughts on the world around me.'

That may well be the case, but in order to ensure that your thoughts are really your own, you need to take the time to interrogate yourself. Where do your beliefs come from? Is it possible you could be wrong?

Indulge us for a moment by conducting a further thought experiment:

Take note each time your mind forms a positive or negative impression of a particular group of people (whoever that group happens to be). This may be once in a while or it may be every five minutes.

Acknowledge that thought. Analyse it. Where did that particular prejudice arise from? It's up to you whether you choose to banish the thought or keep hold of it.

It's important to monitor your own reluctance to let go of a particular belief. Ask yourself why you're holding onto it. Do your prejudices make you happy?

If you're genuinely happy with your prejudices, good luck to you. Feel free to carry on believing in the concept of status.

Our assumption is that your prejudices makes a part of you feel deeply unsatisfied. Our conclusion is that you'd be better off without them.

Resist reinforcement

No doubt it's impossible to count the number of times you'll encounter a reinforcement of the belief in our three invented concepts in any one day, because these beliefs are ubiquitous. It could be TV, text or word of mouth. It could be subtle or it could be blatant propaganda.

But, as with your own thoughts, it's useful to take note of these instances and recognise them as falsehoods. Allow them to bounce off you rather than filter into your brain.

Taking note of the number of times you hear, see or read a reinforcement of one of our three beliefs will give you a fuller appreciation of exactly how deeply ingrained they are.

Spread the word

The ideas in this manifesto are meant to be discussed and debated, and we keenly encourage you to do so.

There are plenty of objections to our ideas. Some of them are reasonable and worthy of discussion. Others are deeply flawed. Either way, these objections need to be challenged.

It's interesting to hear the responses of people who've never considered the fact that money, nationality and status don't exist. There are many to whom the ideas in this manifesto are completely new, and completely alien. These are the people who really need to hear what we have to say.

We hope that at least some of the ideas in this manifesto have been useful – or at the very least, interesting. If that's the case, we urge you to discuss these ideas with as many people as you can. It's our belief that society – and individuals within society – would greatly benefit from the banishment of our invented beliefs.

Many people are of the opinion that the world's inequalities and injustices can be blamed solely on the rich and powerful. There's no doubt that governments and the super-rich are greatly responsible for the sorry state of the planet – but so are we. If we allow ourselves to believe their lies, we're opening ourselves up to manipulation and exploitation. Worse than that, it makes us complicit in the exploitation of others.

The authors of this manifesto have no idea what would happen if everyone in the world stopped believing in money, nationality and status, but there's no question in our minds that the world would be a happier and more peaceful place.

The world is changing rapidly and we'd like to think a positive revolution is on the way. The authors of this manifesto are firmly opposed to revolution by means of violence. Non-violent action has the potential to overthrow governments more effectively than physical force.

The non-violent revolution doesn't necessarily have to take the form of marches or sit-ins. The revolution we're advocating will take place in people's heads. It will be generated through discussion, debate, conversation and information-sharing.

Spread the word. Share this document with as many people as you can.
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Withdraw
Your
Consent.

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