

Things We Take for Granted

Description

One of the existential strategies I like to use is to try to differentiate between what is actually real and necessary to the human experience versus what's a cultural or societal overlay.

(Huh? What does that sentence even *mean*? I'll try to illustrate.)

We all know what life is like, right? Wake up early, shower, coffee, eat, dress for work. Get in the car, drive to work. Work, eat lunch, work, mid-afternoon doldrums, coffee, work. Get in the car, drive home. Eat, maybe some entertainment or hobbies, go to bed late, sleep. Repeat. Repeat again. Do laundry, clean the house, buy groceries, maybe see a movie. Get your paycheck, pay rent, pay bills, set some aside for next month's groceries, put some away for a rainy day. Repeat. Repeat again. Maybe take a vacation once a year, blow through some of that rainy-day money.

I mean, that's life, isn't it?

Or is it? One of the benefits of working in the field of international development is the constant opportunity to be reminded that life is *not at all* like this for many people around the world.

This Is How We Do It

I exchange my time and web-design expertise for money, which I in turn exchange for housing, food, transportation, clothing, and (all too often) "leisure activities." And many of you probably do something very similar. But that's by no means *the* be-all-and-end-all way for a human being to meet their basic human needs.

To eat, I buy "groceries," foodstuffs prepared and packaged by a massive multinational industry that relies on "factory farming" techniques to turn a maximum profit on delivering minimally-nutritious products. (I'm certainly getting enough calories, my midsection attests.) In the places my colleagues work, people eat by harvesting their chickens' eggs, growing grains and pulses, growing vegetable gardens, occasionally harvesting their chickens or other livestock for meat... and trading in a local marketplace for things that they themselves don't produce.

To drink fresh water, I've paid for a well, and for plumbing to pump that water into the faucets of my house. (I didn't have the money on-hand to pay for that, so I had to use *banks*. That could be a post in itself.) Turn a dial, and *voilà!* Water, water everywhere, and more than enough to drink (and take long showers in, and sprinkle on my lawn). There's no hour-long walk to the nearest well in my daily routine. There's no brown sediment in my water, raising concern that it might poison me.

I have a sturdy shelter where I'm protected from the elements, and where I can sleep safe from predators and other threats. Somebody built it for me, on a piece of land that I've "bought." It has hurricane-proof supports, insulation in the walls, a water-impervious envelope, an air-conditioning

system that I can adjust to within a degree at whim, and a big comfy bed. (Again, I didn't have the money up-front to pay for land and home, so the *banks* own my home and land, and I am slowly paying them back for it.) I have little fear that a local warlord or a team of bandits is going to take my land or possessions. I have little fear of dying from animal attacks, or exposure to the elements.

Everybody's Working For The Weekend

I haven't nearly finished listing examples, but my point is belabored already. There's so much we take for granted. Food security, land security, personal safety, and the chance to pursue a living (and a life) that's meaningful to us. On the flip side, there so much we take for granted about *how we go about* having those things. Just another Manic Monday. Thank Goodness It's Friday.

What's real, and what's foisted on us by our culture? The people we work with, in cultures that are starkly different than mine, help me consider that question clearly.

Check out [This is Water](#), and let's discuss (in the Comments) what *you* do to feed, clothe, and shelter yourself and your family.

Category

1. Republished from Compass at OIRED

Date Created

June 3, 2013

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