

Thelemic Economics

Gerald del Campo · 1 June 2026

What Might a Thelemic Economy Look Like?

Yea! deem not of change: ye shall be as ye are, & not other. Therefore the kings of the earth shall be Kings for ever: the slaves shall serve. There is none that shall be cast down or lifted up: all is ever as it was. Yet there are masked ones my servants: it may be that yonder beggar is a King. A King may choose his garment as he will: there is no certain test: but a beggar cannot hide his poverty. (AL 2:50)

The idea for this article began with a deep dive into the 1930s, the Dust Bowl, and other not-so-pleasant historical events in which established economic policies failed them. What do you do when there is no money, and your money isn't worth anything? I suppose you could do what most of the elite do, which is invest in gold and silver, but when push comes to shove, most hungry people aren't going to care about how many inedible items you might have socked away for a rainy day.

All Hell Breaks Loose—Like a Slow-Moving Locomotive

The Great Depression in the 1930s was more than an economic crisis—it changed daily life for everyone. Banks closed, factories shut down, farms failed, and millions of Americans suddenly lost their jobs, savings, and that false sense of security institutions invest in to keep the masses in line, disappeared almost overnight. Across the country, soup kitchens were formed, and lines stretched for blocks. Families looked for food, work, and shelter. What stands out to me is how

communities found ways to survive by working together and trading what they had. When money no longer worked, people relied on each other. That idea is almost impossible to fathom today.

Families built shelters from whatever materials they could find, like scrap wood, tar paper, cardboard, and old metal. Many neighborhoods had no electricity, plumbing, or proper heat. At the same time as the 1929 market crash, rural areas faced the Dust Bowl. Years of drought and poor farming ruined the land, turning it to dust. Winds blew away the topsoil, creating sand-like storms that usually occur only in deserts. Those sandstorms killed animals and ruined crops. Once-productive fields became useless. Many people left their farms, loaded their few belongings into old trucks, and headed west to California in search of work.

With little cash available, people survived by trading and helping each other. Instead of money, they exchanged goods, work, and skills. Utility became valuable. For example, a mechanic might fix a tractor for potatoes or eggs. Doctors chickens, flour, or smoked meat as payment. Women with sewing machines mended clothes in return for canned food, soap, or firewood. Farmers traded milk, butter, and produce for tools, fuel, or medicine. Many local economies relied on these informal deals, built on need and trust. For many families, bartering was part of daily life. A farmer might bring apples, preserves, or eggs to town and return with fixed equipment or needed supplies, all without spending money. Blacksmiths sharpened tools for meat. Carpenters repaired porches for coffee and flour. Teachers sometimes received food from parents who couldn't pay taxes or school fees. Even churches got in on the game, accepting vegetables or labor instead of money for tithes.

People made sure nothing useful was wasted. Children wore patched clothes passed down from siblings and neighbors. Women made dresses and shirts from flour sacks. Shoes were fixed again and again until they were nearly worn out. Families swapped coats, blankets, fabric scraps, and sewing supplies whenever possible. Skills like mending, quilting, knitting, or sewing became very important.

Communities made it through tough times by depending on each other. Whole neighborhoods set up informal ways to help. One family might bake bread for

others, while another watched the children. Someone with a truck brought water or firewood in exchange for meals. Hunters shared meat from rabbits or deer. Men who couldn't find regular work chopped wood, fixed fences, or helped with harvests in return for food. These deals were rarely written down. People remembered what was owed, and help given in winter was often repaid at harvest time.

Despite all the hardship, many people remembered the Depression for the sense of togetherness it brought. Pride mattered. Families often chose to trade instead of accepting charity because it helped them maintain their dignity. Getting food for work felt different from asking for a handout. By depending on each other, they built strong connections across different groups. Farmers, workers, widows, migrants, and shopkeepers all struggled to survive together.

The Great Depression showed how quickly modern economies can fall apart, but it also revealed the strength of ordinary people. When banks closed and money was gone, communities found new kinds of wealth in hard work, skills, trust, generosity, and working together. Barter became more than just a way to trade; it became a lifeline that helped millions survive one of America's hardest times.

We've all seen footage of soup lines and photos of women with four or five children sitting on the doorsteps of once-thriving farmhouses. What you seldom hear about is what saved them: There were also quieter moments of kindness, neighbors sharing seeds, women trading quilts for coal, families pooling food for shared meals, and strangers helping each other get by. To me, this kind of commitment to one another based *solely on shared humanity* seems like part of our evolutionary past. Could we, as a community of Thelemites, do any better?

Thelemic Values Matter in Every Aspect of Our Communities

This article explores what an economic system inspired by Thelema might look like, focusing on the concepts embedded in the *Book of the Law* and elsewhere.

If you see Thelema only as a religious or magical idea, this topic gives you a lot to think about. The argument loses strength if it turns into vague mysticism. A Thelemic economic system is only convincing when it leads to real, workable structures. If we want to *know* whether Thelema is more than just a spiritual system, we need to translate its broader principles into practical institutions. The only way we get this done is by sharing ideas. This one is mine. Admittedly, it is flawed, as are most ideas that come from only one mind, but at least I'm thinking about it. Maybe if enough of us think about it and share ideas, we could get closer to something ideal.

Rather than promoting an agenda, I try to examine how economics connects to deeper ideas. Any system should fit both the individual's purpose and society's needs. By examining labor, value, hierarchy, and exchange through a Thelemic lens, this article proposes an alternative to systems based on coercion. It explores how having enough, finding your calling, and using hierarchy for function could work together without exploitation or forced conformity. This approach is a risk, but not an unreasonable one. It's based on a different view of human nature. That's the key question, and if I don't address it clearly, critics might see this as interesting but disconnected. To them, I say: *Thelema doesn't ignore economics; it changes how value is created and shared*. This is just a starting point for a bigger discussion.

For example, *Liber 194* shows that Aleister Crowley was not just talking in abstract terms. He tried, even if imperfectly, to outline real institutions based on Thelemic ideas. I think this is what makes these explorations possible. We're not making up a system from nothing; we're building on one that's already partly described.

To be clear from the start, there isn't one perfect way to fund everything I'm about to describe. As I said before, this is just an idea. What I'm suggesting is a mixed model: part basic guarantee, part decentralized production, and part stewardship.

Let's Get Started

Imagine for a moment that this is your reality, wherever you are. Don't worry, it's just a thought experiment. You might not agree with this vision, but at worst, it could inspire you to develop your own idea of how Thelema could help everyone. When you do, I hope you'll share it.

Modern economic systems all share a quiet, unexamined assumption: that human beings must be coerced by fear, incentive, ideology, or scarcity, into usefulness. Capitalism motivates through competition and deprivation; socialism through obligation and moral duty; communism through collective necessity. Each presumes that without external pressure, the individual drifts toward entropy.

Thelema completely rejects these ideas.

Can we agree that going against your own nature is not noble or harmless? Or that stopping someone from contributing in the manner for which nature has equipped them harms them and the cultural model they participate in?

So, our economy should have three main goals:

1. To help individuals discover their True Will
2. To support the execution of that Will
3. To exchange the fruits of that execution efficiently and justly

Profit, equality, and growth come second. These goals only matter if they help people align with their purpose.

Thelema suggests something different: Everyone has a True Will, a natural path that brings order, contribution, and meaning when followed, instead of chaos or just getting by. From this angle, the main economic problem isn't distribution or growth, but misalignment. You'll see this word often in this discussion.

A Thelemic economy isn't a political program. It's a practical way to let Will become real in everyday life.

Thelema rejects both forced equality and inherited power. It's not about charity or making everyone the same. It's a practical approach. Constant insecurity makes it hard to think clearly, turns Will into a struggle, and creates false needs. Someone struggling to survive can't find their own path. Even in Crowley's day, only the wealthy could afford to seek their True Will. Still, he challenged us to make this Law accessible to everyone.

Having enough doesn't mean being comfortable, and just surviving isn't a reward. Luxury, status, and influence should come from excellence and contribution, not just from collecting or hoarding things. People are supported because they exist, not because they obey.

Toward a Thelemic Economics: Will, Welfare, and the Structure of a Free Society

It's worth repeating: Most modern economic systems, whether capitalist or socialist, are built on the idea that people must be organized around basic needs. Survival, such as obtaining food, shelter, and care, depends on participating in work, trade, or government programs. Thelema, as Crowley described in the *Book of the Law* and *Liber 194*, offers a very different idea. It suggests society should be organized around Will, not just necessity.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" is often misunderstood as a license for individualism without constraint. If that is where you begin and end with Thelema, this essay will piss you off. Properly interpreted, this axiom asserts that each individual has a unique function or trajectory, or, as Crowley called it, the True Will, and that the health of a society depends on the discovery and expression of that function. Thelemic economics, therefore, would not be concerned primarily with production or distribution in the abstract, but with the conditions that allow individuals to discover and enact their Will.

The demystification of money: It's important to see money for what it is: just a tool. Money helps people trade and shows what is needed, but it doesn't give anyone virtue, identity, or authority. Respect comes from excellence, reliability,

creativity, and following one's Will. One of my biggest problems with Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* is that money is supposed to indicate how hard one works. If that were true, every immigrant breaking their backs picking strawberries under the blazing California sun would be rich.

Ideally, a person who is poor but true to themselves is respected. Someone who is rich but exploits others is ignored. Success is measured more by cultural value than by money alone.

From Survival to Function

In conventional economies, labor is typically coerced by necessity. Individuals must work in order to secure the means of survival, regardless of whether that work reflects their deeper capacities or inclinations. A Thelemic system would turn that model on its head. The basic requirements of life, food, housing, and healthcare, would be treated as unconditional foundations rather than rewards for participation. This is not merely a humanitarian gesture; it is a structural necessity. A person burdened by survival anxiety cannot meaningfully pursue or even discern their True Will.

The first step in a Thelemic economy would be to provide basic needs for everyone, no strings attached. People would take part in the economy not just to survive, but because it fits who they are.

An engineer builds, a healer tends, and a poet preserves the soul of the culture. If someone ends up in the wrong role, it is seen as a problem with the system, not the individual. In a Thelemic view, work is not a punishment or a virtue. It is simply a function of how someone acts naturally when nothing stands in their way. Imagine a system where employment is replaced by vocation.

Funding the Material Foundation

Such a guarantee immediately raises the practical question: how is it funded? A Thelemic system does not abolish economics; it reorders the sources and

purposes of revenue.

At its base would be a form of social dividend derived from collectively inherited value. Natural resources, such as land, water, minerals, and energy, are not the product of individual Will, and thus cannot be justified as objects of absolute private dominion. Their value may instead be treated as a common inheritance, with revenues directed toward the universal provision of basic needs. A similar logic applies to highly automated industries, where productivity increasingly exceeds the labor input of any individual. Rather than allowing such surplus to accumulate indefinitely, a portion may be recirculated as a dividend that underwrites the material security of all.

Markets would still exist in a Thelemic economy, but they'd be guided by their purpose. Money would be used to create things, not just to make more money. Speculation that doesn't add real value would be limited or prohibited entirely. The system, not just moral rules, would discourage people from owning large amounts of others' work without contributing to it.

The investment would be more about supporting someone's work than taking big risks. Risk and reward would stay balanced and close to home. No company or group would get so large that its failure would harm everyone. Value would always be linked to real contributions.

A particularly compatible mechanism is the taxation of land value rather than labor. By taxing the unimproved value of land, the system discourages hoarding while preserving the incentive to cultivate, build, and create. In this way, revenue is generated not by penalizing work but by reclaiming value arising from shared conditions.

Beyond these structural sources, a Thelemic economy depends upon a subtler foundation: that once survival is secured, individuals will, in the main, choose to contribute. This is not an appeal to naive optimism, but to a different anthropology. If Will is real, if individuals possess an intrinsic drive toward expression, then the removal of coercion does not produce stagnation, but

redirection. Production continues, but its motive shifts from necessity to purpose. This has already proven successful in small-scale experiments.

The Problem of Homelessness Reframed

In this system, homelessness isn't just about lacking a home or a personal failure. It's a sign that the system hasn't helped someone find their place. So, the answer can't just be temporary shelter or help with strings attached.

A Thelemic approach would begin with the immediate provision of dignified housing, without moral preconditions. Beyond this, it would involve a process of reintegration: psychological assessment, mentorship, and exposure to a range of disciplines and crafts. The aim would not merely be stabilization, but orientation, to help the individual rediscover a trajectory aligned with their Will.

This way, social welfare shifts from just keeping people afloat to actually helping them rebuild their lives.

The Sick and the Elderly: Beyond Instrumental Value.

Modern economies often measure human worth by productivity. Those who cannot contribute economically, like the sick, the disabled, and the elderly, are thus positioned as burdens. A Thelemic system rejects this premise outright.

If everyone is an expression of a unique Will, then value comes from within, not just from what someone can do. Older people, for example, are keepers of experience and memory, and can serve as advisors, teachers, or symbols in the community. In the same way, being sick doesn't erase someone's Will. It just changes how it shows up.

In practice, this means having universal, service-based healthcare and social systems that help people of all abilities find meaningful roles. Care isn't charity; it's about keeping the conditions where Will can continue and, when possible, thrive.

Healthcare as Alignment

In a Thelemic society, healthcare would go beyond just treating illness. It would focus on keeping people aligned in body, mind, and spirit, seeing these parts as connected rather than separate.

Preventive care would come first, before reacting to problems. People would get help creating personal health routines, using both proven medicine and broader ideas of well-being. Doctors wouldn't just fix bodies; they'd help create the right conditions for people to express their Will, bringing a sense of soul into medicine.

A unique aspect of a Thelemic economy is its valuation of time. Rest, quiet, and even doing nothing are seen as important for insight and creativity. Burnout isn't seen as a personal flaw, but as a sign that the system isn't working right. If someone is exhausted, it means the system hasn't respected their needs. Failure isn't punished; it's studied and used as a chance to learn. Trying again and getting better matters more than being perfect. This change alone could greatly improve health.

Property, Wealth, and Stewardship

This system doesn't eliminate private property, but it does question the idea of accumulating wealth without purpose. In Thelema, wealth only makes sense if it helps someone express their Will.

This means moving from ownership to stewardship. Big or important resources would likely be managed by groups such as guilds, orders, or trusts that focus on specific activities. Keeping resources unused wouldn't just be wasteful; it would go against the system's ethics.

To make this work, there could be progressive taxes on unused wealth or rules that limit how long someone can control major assets. The goal isn't to get rid of wealth, but to keep it moving and always part of the living economy of Will. Money doesn't grow on trees: It is a finite source, and printing more when society runs

out devalues the currency and causes prices to rise. Currency must keep moving to benefit society.

If someone isn't taking part, it's seen as a sign they're in the wrong place, need more training, or have something blocking them inside. The answer isn't punishment, but helping them find the right fit, learn, or adjust. Only if someone keeps refusing to contribute and won't realign do they lose some community privileges. There are no debt prisons, forced work, or fake shows of effort. Choosing not to take part is its own consequence, just like it is today.

Work as Vocation: The Guild Model

Instead of regular jobs, work would probably be organized through guilds or similar groups. People would join areas that match their interests and skills, such as craft, science, art, government, and healing.

These guilds and groups would be the main way things get made and done. They'd produce goods and services, get public funding when needed (especially for things like healthcare), and trade for non-essential items. This keeps the economy active without forcing people to take part.

Training would be continuous and adaptive, enabling Will to evolve over time. Movement between domains would be permitted and, in some cases, encouraged. The emphasis would be on mastery and contribution, rather than on static roles or hierarchical advancement.

Liber 194 gestures toward such differentiated yet unified structures, offering a model, however embryonic, of how specialized functions might coexist within a coherent whole.

Governance and the Problem of Conflict

Any serious proposal for a Thelemic economics must address a central tension: what happens when the Will of one individual conflicts with that of another?

Thelema doesn't pretend conflict doesn't exist, but it looks at it differently. In theory, True Wills shouldn't clash, since each has its own role in a bigger picture. But in real life, mistakes and misunderstandings will still happen.

So, there would still need to be some form of government, probably decentralized and based on skill. Councils composed of people known for their alignment and expertise could help resolve disputes, mediate conflicts, and keep the system running smoothly. The aim wouldn't be to silence anyone, but to help different paths work together.

A Demanding Ideal

This vision of a Thelemic economic system isn't a perfect dream or a finished plan. It's just an idea. It's a challenging ideal that asks us to turn spiritual ideas into real institutions. It sees people not just as workers or consumers, but as centers of purpose who need the right conditions to thrive, something modern systems offer only in part.

Taking this vision seriously means facing a tough challenge: building systems that provide for people's needs while helping them discover and express their Will. It also means realizing that this can only work in a culture that values alignment, contribution, and purpose more than just getting by.

A Thelemic economy isn't a factory or a commune. It's not about making everyone the same, comfortable, or obedient. Its goal is to help people find alignment. It's a living system that puts each person where their joy, skills, and needs meet, while ensuring no one goes without and no one gets ahead by taking from others.

In mythic terms, it's like a temple filled with gears. Each gear turns because it's meant to, and each one matters because it fits its place. Each star moves on its own, and together they create a clear, ordered universe.

Even if this kind of economy can't be fully achieved, trying for it shows the limits of systems based only on need. It points to the chance for a society built on something deeper: the disciplined freedom of Will.

Notes and Sources

1. *Liber AL vel Legis*, the *Book of the Law* – Aleister Crowley.

The foundational text of Thelema, particularly 1:3 (“Every man and every woman is a star”) and 1:40–41, articulates the principles of True Will, non-interference, and individual orbit as the basis of cosmic and social order.

2. “Duty” – Aleister Crowley.

An explicit ethical exposition of Thelemic responsibility, emphasizing the obligation to discover and perform one’s True Will as a service both to the individual and to the whole, without recourse to guilt, coercion, or moral universalism.

3. *Liber II: The Message of the Master Therion* – Aleister Crowley.

Clarifies common misunderstandings of Do what thou wilt, distinguishing True Will from impulse or libertinism and framing disciplined self-knowledge as the prerequisite for authentic freedom.

4. *Liber CXCIV (Liber 194)*, or *An Intimation with Reference to the Constitution of the Order*, is an official document written by Aleister Crowley that outlines the structure, governance, and grades of *Ordo Templi Orientis* (O.T.O.). It details the three true grades (Hermit, Lover, Man of Earth) and the administrative duties of the Order. While written specifically for O.T.O., some perspectives within the Thelemic community suggest that the current leadership has not strictly adhered to its provisions or has interpreted them differently, leading to internal criticism.

Additional Notes:

- Vancouver Experiment (2020): A randomized study found that a one-time unconditional transfer of CAD\$7,500 to 115 participants enabled them to secure stable housing within 96 days on average, while saving over 99 days in shelters.

- Oregon Youth Pilot: A program providing \$1,000 per month for 2 years to homeless youth resulted in 91% of participants reporting stable housing at the end of the project.
- Denver Basic Income Project: Research indicates that cash, especially when combined with social support, helps individuals move into secure housing more quickly and manage expenses, even if it does not eliminate all homelessness.
- Spending Habits: Studies consistently show that recipients do not increase spending on temptation goods like alcohol or drugs, but rather invest in necessities.
- Long-Term Impact: While \$750 monthly might not cover a full month's rent in high-cost areas, it has been shown to stabilize lives, allowing people to pay off debt and purchase essential durable goods, as reported by the Nonprofit Quarterly.

These studies suggest that direct cash, often referred to as “cash plus” or guaranteed income, is a viable and effective tool for combating homelessness by addressing the immediate financial needs of people experiencing homelessness.