

Blockchain: Life on The Ledger

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Video Transcript

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We can make money off your life, the data of your life, even when you have no money of your own.

In coming years, millions of people will be issued digital identities whether they choose to or not.

These identities, also known as self-sovereign or decentralized identities, will capture information about a person's interactions with other people, the government, public services, and also with the built environment via "Internet of Things" sensors.

Examples of the Internet of Things or IoT include: smart phones; tablets and laptops; smart meters, trash cans, and street lights; sensors embedded in bikes, street furniture, playground equipment, and pavement; ez-pass transponders; bar and QR codes; and RFID chips embedded in ID or payment cards and even a person's body.

Life will be recorded as a series of transactions on Blockchain. Each digital identity becomes a shadow self comprised of data.

Some data points are significant, like a marriage certificate. However many other bits of data will be used to fill out the shadow self, bits most people aren't even conscious they're creating. These bits are simply metadata, exhaust thrown off as we live our routine, digitally-mediated lives.

Blockchain is a decentralized ledger created in computer code and shared across networks. It cryptographically manages coded data and digital assets using public and private keys.

Western interests, under the guise of philanthropy, are using Blockchain to continue a brutal legacy of colonial exploitation.

In July, the world's first Blockchain baby was born in Tanzania.

The baby's health care costs were recorded in a digital ledger, establishing its fundamental indebtedness.

Aid:Tech, an NGO, assigned the baby and mother digital identities.

Pharm:Access, another NGO, added the first round of data, logging their development-aid-provided prenatal care on Blockchain.

Global philanthropic interests are using Blockchain to undermine local control regarding aid distribution.

This “enforcement” mechanism of programmable money perpetuates the false notion that recipients of resources cannot be trusted to make independent decisions about their lives and what is best for their communities..

NGOs assert Blockchain is needed to secure the development aid supply chain against fraud.

Blockchain may be considered the newest paternalistic, control mechanism that ultimately serves to concentrate wealth, data, and human activity in the hands of financiers who attempt to mask the brutality of this social control and surveillance through strategic use of language around accountability, transparency, and "impact."

Authorities register transactions such as these in order to claim returns on investment in human capital.

Care is not offered as a fundamental human right, but conditionally.

The unspoken expectation is that recipients must produce positive responses to interventions, as quantified by narrow data-driven “success” metrics, in order for financial rewards to flow to service providers and social impact investors.

Within the context of free markets, the bodies of the poor, especially Black and Brown people, can be legally subjugated through these financial control systems.

Human relations of mutual aid are remade as transactions of technologized violence.

This Tanzanian baby is a harbinger of mass digital servitude.

It heralds a future where bodies could be managed as wards of the global corporate state, groomed for the data they produce, their personal agency stolen.

In an era of climate catastrophe, economic turmoil, and militarized violence, there is deep, deep poverty and millions of refugees are on the move.

Financiers will use Blockchain, biometric tracking, big data, risk prediction, and digital payments to manage the dispossessed, establish their group indebtedness, and profit from the misery of indentured populations.

Concentrated wealth and prolonged austerity have decimated the purchasing power of the masses. Money is out of reach.

People can no longer be compliant consumers.

Deprived of stable employment, food, and shelter, many communities can't buy enough products to keep capital moving. Therefore they are being pressured to become products themselves.

Blockchain will incorporate the poor, via their data, into global value chains.

Their lives reduced to raw material, processed by poverty management systems to fuel the machine of late-stage capitalism.

Financial backers of Universal Basic Income propose that digital currency (like Grantcoin or Mannabase) be distributed on Blockchain ledgers.

The free money can thus be distributed with strings attached.

Acceptance of life-sustaining funds or services will demand compliance with behavior management systems overseen by global monopoly capital.

Dissent will not be tolerated.

Dissent may result in your digital identity being flagged or erased altogether.

The masters of tech and finance are trying to convince the public that Blockchain will be a gift of empowerment, knowing that the only power it will actually give people is to sell their human capital at a loss.

We need a counter-narrative that explains how it will actually work.

Smart-phone apps built on Blockchain technology permit the exchange of data and currency.

Non-monetary digital assets are identified using colored tokens.

Access is often provided through a digital e-wallet secured using biometric authentication from fingerprints, retinal scans, facial recognition, vascular patterns or even one's heartbeat.

E-wallets store health records, education credentials, birth certificates, voting records, land ownership,

public benefits, rights and privileges, cryptocurrency, and any other debt or asset that can be represented by a virtual token.

Notice that E-wallets also record tokenized DEBT.

Impact investors need for us to adopt technologies, like these wallets, that create interoperable data exchanges.

Such platforms will allow them to track impacts across different aspects of a person's life.

Did the education intervention they invested in also yield benefits to a person's health or housing status? They want credit for that.

Did the health intervention for a child improve education and workforce outcomes? They want credit for that.

They need ALL of the data in one place to enhance data analysis and predictive analytics for future investments.

They want all the credit for conducting micro-surveillance of our lives, and they are using Blockchain to say that all of the data is private and thus we shouldn't mind.

Financial titans hope Blockchain can catalyze widespread adoption of "Pay for Success" government contracting, as an efficient platform for data capture and exchange of debt and profit.

But "success" must first be redefined in simple, data-driven terms that serve social impact investment markets.

In this game, "success" simply means moving numbers in the correct direction on a data dashboard.

Concepts like "growth," "value-added" and "impact" are not about helping people obtain a better quality of life, but simply a means by which to turn life into numbers. Numbers to serve the global financial gambling syndicate, not people in need.

Once metrics are set, human services, like healthcare and education, will be reverse engineered so that aggregated data will automatically trigger "impact payments" to global banking interests after verification on Blockchain.

A Few Examples:

A pregnant mother logs into a parenting webinar; log it on an app, token transfer

A baby hits a target weight goal; log it on an app, token transfer

A toddler attends a day of preschool; log it on an app, token transfer

A student checks in at a community makerspace, token transfer

An “opportunity youth,” a high school dropout who is currently unemployed, is awarded an industry credential, token transfer

A patient meets who is pre-diabetic hits their fitbit target for the month, token transfer

A person who is incarcerated completes an online behavioral therapy program, token transfer

A veteran participates in a Virtual Reality therapy session, token transfer

A person who lacks stable housing registers for a digital wallet, token transfer

Digital platforms (like the Electronic Health Record) will algorithmically monitor service providers and clients for compliance, nudging their actions towards the cheapest method of delivering agreed-upon “impacts.”

The process could be managed through “smart” contracts that are legal documents written in code that automatically transfer payments to and from e-wallets after assurances that agreements have been met are entered in the Blockchain ledger.

However Blockchain systems could be used to discipline those needing services.

For example:

An Internet of Things pill cap indicates a pregnant woman is not regularly taking pre-natal vitamins, she is logged as non-compliant and finds it nearly impossible to get a follow-up appointment.

A baby does not hit a developmental milestone, and the family is compelled to accept an in-home monitoring system.

Parents refuse to enroll their child in a subsidized franchise pre-school and are flagged by the department of human services as being at a heightened risk of neglect and subjected to a program of home visits.

Behavioral biometric algorithms send erroneous cheating alerts to parents of hundreds of cyber high school seniors whose transcripts are held pending outside review.

An apprentice at an advanced manufacturing plant falls ill, is unable to scan in for two weeks, and is subsequently barred from completing the program or enrolling in other comparable training.

A diabetic patient falls and twists her ankle. Unable to meet the activity level required by her fitness tracker, her insurance company denies her claim to cover replacement therapeutic shoes.

A person who is incarcerated completes assigned online education modules inconsistently. This triggers a problematic behavior code that results in them being denied parole.

A veteran finds that the virtual reality goggles prescribed to treat her chronic depression instead make her feel ill and disoriented. After discontinuing the assigned treatment protocol, she is refused access to other non-digital therapies.

An elderly man who lacks housing constantly misplaces his smartphone. Even when he has it, he gets anxious about using the benefits app. He often goes hungry, because he's nervous about being turned away at the community feeding centers.

Tokenizing human behavior so that it can be subjected to control by algorithms is a dehumanizing process grounded in digital surveillance and micro-oversight.

It pushes social and financial relations onto devices to ease collection of impact data for pay for success contracts.

Ruthless financiers oversee, at arms length, systems that have been structured to break people and then profit from "fixing" the victims on the cheap, awarding them sub-market pay for their labor, and supplying just enough income to keep them from dying.

Meanwhile complicit non-profits and benefit corporations, beholden to corporate philanthropy, provide "successful" services that push volumes of data onto Blockchain.

They will work hand in hand with government to outsource public services through Pay for Success contracts. Strive Together, a national partnership program, is one of those entities gearing up to coordinate wrap-around services for so-called community schools.

That is simply how the machine will work.

It will be carried out with innovative voucher programs like, digital Education Savings Accounts or Health Accounts. Digital wallets will serve as gatekeepers controlling access to public services and monitoring all of the data to determine “what works.”

As the grip of big data tightens, global finance enthusiastically pitches Blockchain as way for precarious workers to mine value from their souls.

They want to frame it as a choice.

Become an entrepreneur, curate your precarious life, and sell your personal brand to targeted marketing campaigns and philanthro-capitalists.

Meanwhile, the government and their private security consultants would monitor your digital footprint for evidence of disillusionment and dissent, adjusting your opportunity score accordingly.

Would the poor have a choice about how their Blockchain data is accessed?

Can the masses refuse to be reduced to an impact metric?

Will the wealthy be the only ones to be able to lock down their ownership data in perpetuity?

With Swiss bankers, venture capitalists, technology interests and foundations plotting out futures for the Blockchain babies, a counter narrative is required.

These are my musings on what it would mean to live life on the Blockchain ledger.

Picture a warehouse, one with an infinite storage capacity.

Everything in it is indexed, searchable, and ready for analysis.

A child’s first set of shelves populated with data from family members.

That data determines a baby’s initial human capital score.

Systems crunch the data to predict the amount of services that will be required to “fix” the child to serve the needs of the machine.

Therein lies the investment “opportunity.”

Days and years pass with digital dust filtering steadily into each child’s warehouse, off-gassed bits of

data from the life-monitoring technologies in their homes, classrooms, doctor's offices, libraries, cars, and playgrounds.

Layers of data build up, each bit insignificant on its own. The full value of the deposit realized only after it has become deep enough for mining.

Where a person goes
How they travel
What they buy
What level of education they attain
What skills they have
The nature of the work they do (or don't do)
The amount of debt they carry
The public services they consume
If they maintain their health
If they have problems with addiction
If their housing is insecure
Any entanglements they have with the law
The relationships they maintain
Their social network
Layer upon layer growing deeper and deeper

Access to that data is through a locked door, opened with a biometric key.

Each door features an individual avatar.

There are three numbers on it that change as new data is added.

The first number is a risk score, a prediction about how closely the person will conform to social norms. Larger door, larger head, risk score

The second number is an opportunity score, a prediction of how easily the person can be molded to meet those norms based on their response to past interventions.

The third number is an impact score, a number representing the cumulative return on public investments that have been made in that indentured individual to date.

The three numbers feed to a digital barcode.

Next, imagine there exists an uber warehouse that contains all the other warehouses, and it is patrolled

by automated AI investors with scanners looking to maximize profit on social impact investment portfolios.

These “capital for good” AI investors roam the warehouse scanning the variables on all the doors to determine whether or not an individual merits being added to a portfolio and if so, what level of investment is possible.

If you are a very wealthy person who has no need for public services, perhaps you turn off access to your numbers. This protects you from scrutiny, and your data never needs to be opened up to anyone.

If you are a person who is managing, but needs to access job opportunities or to upgrade your position, the curtain is open to field offers from the investors. If you obtain an attractive arrangement, you may be able to sign onto a smart impact contract and negotiate how much access to your impact data you will allow.

But say you are a desperately poor person. Or even worse, a poor person with a low Return on Investment. Perhaps someone deemed too risky. There is no profit in people who are labeled unfixable. In such cases the door is left wide open, in case an investor might wander in, look around, and offer some scraps of value in return.

Blockchain is not a tool of freedom, but rather one of discipline and domination.

As a mechanism of social control, it will be used to push lean production.

As a mechanism of innovative finance, it will intensify Artificial-Intelligence-mediated algorithmic trading.

As a mechanism of predictive profiling it will amplify structural racism and escalate the ongoing oppression of black and brown communities.

While Blockchain is presented as a perfect method by which to monetize the data of our lives, we must pause and consider if that is the type of life we actually want.

Do we want to be isolated from one another, competing for increasingly scarce resources, our only relations tied to currency transactions? We can still choose to reject it.

We can elect instead to build systems with open doors that unite us in community and care for the planet rather than isolating us in piles of our own dehumanized data.

We are more than the sum of our digital exhaust. Let’s start acting like it.