Money Museum

Money:critical

An orientation map to money

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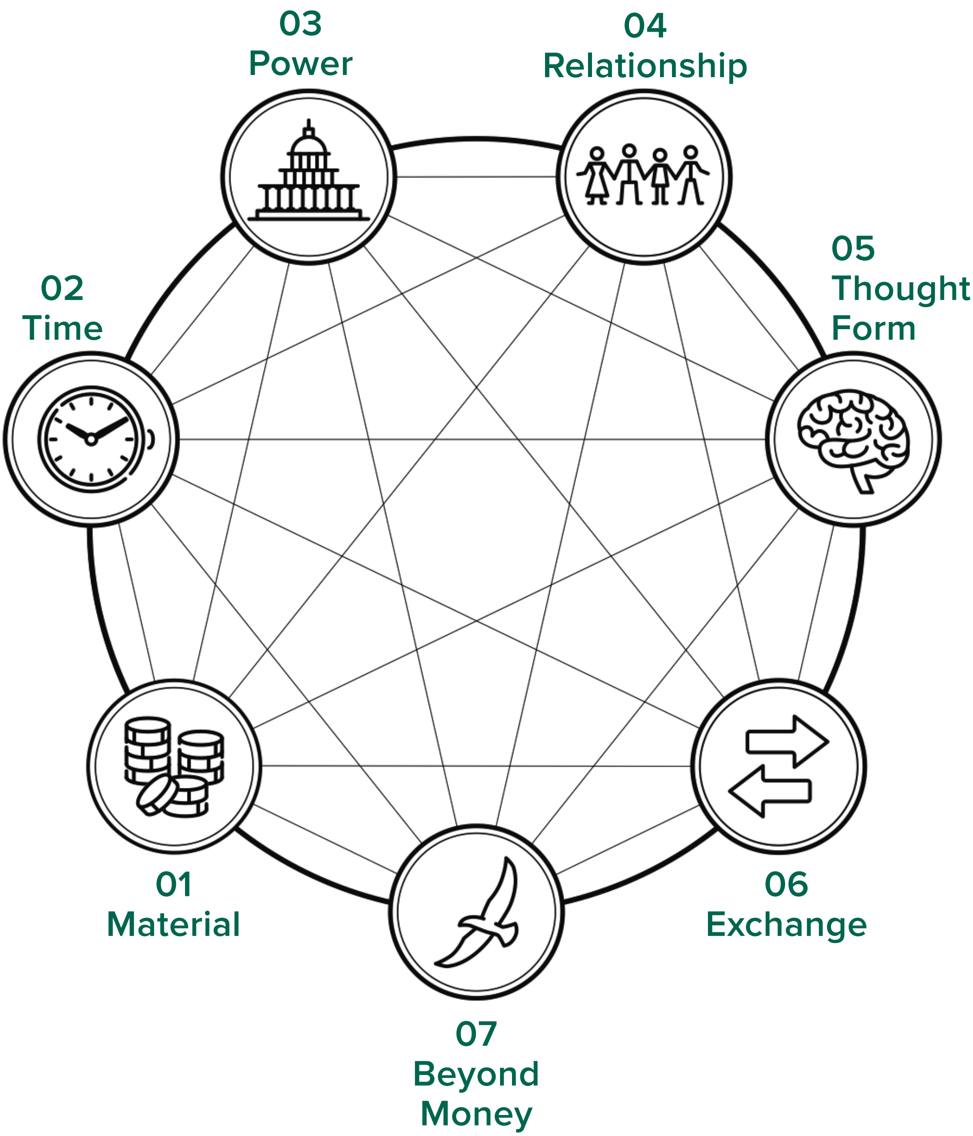

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Text: based on Eske Bockelmann

The texts are available as videos on our homepage.

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Today to an almost unimaginable extent the world depends on money. Living and surviving are contingent globally on having money at hand, on how much money you have and on how much money is made globally, everywhere throughout the world. Money reigns over society as a universal institution, in the meantime a global one.

That's what makes the dangers arising from money's crises so far-reaching. That's why even the world's most powerful governments are compelled to undertake every conceivable measure to contain the latest crisis as quickly as possible and forestall the onset of the next probable crisis as long as possible. Preserving money as a system is the goal here.

Accordingly, most discussions about money as such today focus on its dangers. They aim almost without exception to purge money of its crises or at least mitigate them. Their approach assumes with each threat to money that money can also repel every threat. That is an assumption far removed, however, from the reality of money.

For ten years, the MoneyMuseum organized the Sunflower roundtable on money. The working title was **Doing business with and without money**. Members were academics and people from the fields of commons and complementary currencies. This booklet is the essence of those conversations.

At the beginning there was the question: what is money? Who knows what? Different approaches were in the room. We needed a map. An orientation map with areas to organize our knowledge. But what kind of areas?

Foreword

Money and material was an obvious start: the objects people needed for exchange were of all kinds: salt, precious ostrich eggs, coins, banknotes, loans, etc. and bitcoins. **Money and time** are also related. Is time money, as Benjamin Franklin pointed out? **Power** is related to money, that made sense to everyone. So the first three areas were labeled material, time and power.

The other areas were far more elaborate and difficult to pinpoint: our relationships, our whole society depends on money or is influenced by it, money even influences our thinking. Thus, the landscapes of **social relations** and **thought form** emerged. They are the two most difficult areas to describe and perceive.

Two more areas have been added, they have been demanded by those who have been dealing with exchange for years. Thus, **exchange** describes gift, purchase and the market. This question also came up: is there an area without money? We came to **Beyond Money**. So there were seven chapters in total.

We discussed intensively, and after each meeting we asked the linguist among us to summarize the thoughts on a single page. He wrote a three-section text for each area. This resulted in 21 pages. From these texts we produced 21 videos.

This booklet is the result of our ten-year Sunflower conversation, which has served us enormously in understanding money. I would like to thank Eske Bockelmann for these texts and the production of the videos, which have createe a panorama of money.

01

Money and Material

For thousands of years, material objects were used for payments, including purchases. It was only with the beginning of the modern era that the media of exchange used for payments became money, which is a medium of exchange only. As a result, money became separate from every kind of material and took the form of "pure," immaterial numbers — in other words, value.

Archaic Means of Payment

Money originally was not what we think of today as money. In archaic times payments were made to satisfy an obligation, whether a debt or a wrong-doing. Many things could be used for payments. Archaic payments are indeed the origin of our money but they are far from being the same as our money.

Not everything that can be used to buy something is also money. Or to be more precise: Money has not always been the only thing used in purchases. *Things* were also exchanged for other things; and even if these things consisted in minted metal, this did not automatically make them money.

To this day, very few people have wondered about, much less researched, this historical fact that deeply contradicts our beliefs. Almost all of us today assume that all purchases and all trade have always been conducted with *money*, no matter the era. Or we at least assume that everything has always been exchanged and traded based on a *value* that people assigned to things, and that at one point it became more ideal to measure this value in money rather than in the things themselves—and hence money evolved as a form of value. Indeed, money cannot be separated from value, which means we must realize it was not money that was used to buy things in all historical periods up to and including the Middle Ages in Europe. Instead, it can be proven that there was no concept of value or exchange value during these times.

Up until after the Middle Ages, payments were part of the archaic way of life. Before money evolved, this way of life was based on the obligations between the members living within a community. All payments, even those for purchasing commodities, acted as compensation for a debt or obligation. If the debt was a crime—for example, if a man from one clan killed a man from another clan—then a blood feud was regarded as compensation and payment in the archaic sense. This means that if the victim's clan killed a man from the perpetrator's clan, the debt was considered paid. However, compensation could also mean giving the aggrieved clan appropriate gifts as a kind of payment. Therefore, this debt was ultimately paid either through the ritualistic presentation of gifts, or through deadly revenge.

Obligations did not have to be burdens of debt or guilt, however. They could also be positive. For example, you might owe something to someone as payment for the help they gave you or for the help you hope to receive, or you might pay something for a bride, or for countless other things. The kind of things that had to be handed over as payment was precisely defined for each occasion. That is how things like cowrie shells, tukula paste, the feathers of the honeyeater bird, or pigs and sheep became archaic means of payment. However, this did not mean that they became money as a result.

Money and Material II

Coins

Before coins were minted, lumps and bars of precious metals, among many other things, were used as objects of payment. With coins, all these objects of payment acquired a standard. Only then did they also become a medium of exchange.

Coins were originally pieces of precious metal with a defined weight. Before people began minting coins, they simply used lumps or bars of metal for payments, like when atoning for a debt or guilt, or as a way of honoring someone, as a reward, as dues, or in a purchase. However, even after they emerged, payments were not made *exclusively* in coins. Rather, payments could still be made with a huge variety of things.

Coins were special because they were not only a means of payment, they could also be used as a standard for all other things used as payment. How many coins were owed as payment in each case could be easily estimated and measured according to a standardized amount of metal. Because early communities relied on countless obligations between their members, payments played an important role, and because payments occurred often, communities regularly depended on such standardized means of payment. However, coins were not the only things that served as a standard: Cows were also used, as well as barley, and many other things. Coins simply became especially dominant as a standardized means of payment.

It was not the *value* of the things used for payment that was measured in coins, however, and the coins were not seen as having *value* in themselves. Instead, the things used for payments were measured against the things for which they had to be paid. This occurred directly, without people mentally calculating the value on each side. When a certain payment was measured in coins, perhaps as dictated by law, then the things actually paid were estimated in direct relation to the coins owed—namely, based on the amount of precious metal everyone knew was in the coins. For example, if a lord in the Middle Ages were to demand dues of 500 solidi, it would have been paid to him in the following manner: twelve pieces of furniture, a woman slave, a man slave, a decorative pin, two horses, and two vases. Each of these things would not have been quantified with a certain value that was then added up; instead, the people involved in the transaction would estimate that this payment was appropriate for the gold amount of which the 500 solidi consisted.

Coins are not simply money; in fact, for a long time they were not money at all. It was only when money emerged in the course of the 16th century that coins went from being seen as neither money nor value to *becoming* money and *counting* as value. Only then did they become the vehicles of a nominal value. When this happened, their material also acquired a value, but in order for their material value not to interfere with their nominal value, states eventually issued them only as token coins, which meant they no longer had any relevant material value.


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Money and Material III

Money

From the moment a society bases its economy on money, the value of money no longer needs its substance. Money's value comes from the fact that it can be exchanged to purchase goods of the same value. Monetary value consists solely in this function.

Today, we almost exclusively believe one thing, and that is that money was originally material things, like gold, strings of cowrie shells, cows, or grain, and that because these things naturally had to have a tangible *value*, the money that consisted in them also had to have this tangible value. We also believe that people later began to replace this kind of money more and more with paper money that no longer had a value in itself but was only *backed* by things of value, like gold. As the amount of paper money increased, it was backed less and less in this way. And thus, as money continues to become more virtual—something many of us never tire of complaining about—money's growth beyond the amount of which it tangibly consists has finally led to digital money like Bitcoins. This kind of money is an ultimately baseless, exclusively virtual money that supposedly threatens the continuation of our economy.

This interpretation, as convincing as it may sound, completely misses the reality of how money should be understood and even turns it upside down: Money is *always* and *has always been* virtual.

Money has only ever existed virtually from the beginning. It actually does *not* consist in any kind of thing, and it has *never* done so. There is no material of which money consists. Instead, it only acquires a material form in the commodities that can bought with it. That it can be exchanged for these is what characterizes money in the first place. This kind of materiality is enough for money to continue to exist: It is the power given to money to be *exchanged* for anything existing in some kind of material form. Money itself is nothing but a *means* that can be exchanged for commodities, be these objects or services—in other words, it can be exchanged for *things*, while it is *none* of these things itself. The proof of this is that money is primarily recorded in the form of pure numbers in bank accounts. These numbers record it as a *value*: as a quantity of the power to acquire commodities.

But what about the gold and all the other valuable things we have taken to be money? They were not money because they did not have a value. This is a historical fact that continues to be ignored to this day. Before money evolved in the course of the 16th century, something like a value that people could ascribe to a thing did not exist, although they may have appreciated this thing and longed to have it. Money, on the other hand, cannot exist without value. This means two things: That there was no money when or wherever people did not know and work with value; and that when or wherever they did know and work with value, it was money that compelled them to do so.

02

Money and Time

Money as we know it is a late historical phenomenon. Where it takes hold, a society's total life processes depend on it and time as a whole is devoted to serving one blank purpose: money must continue to function like money, and it must always increase.

The genesis of modern money

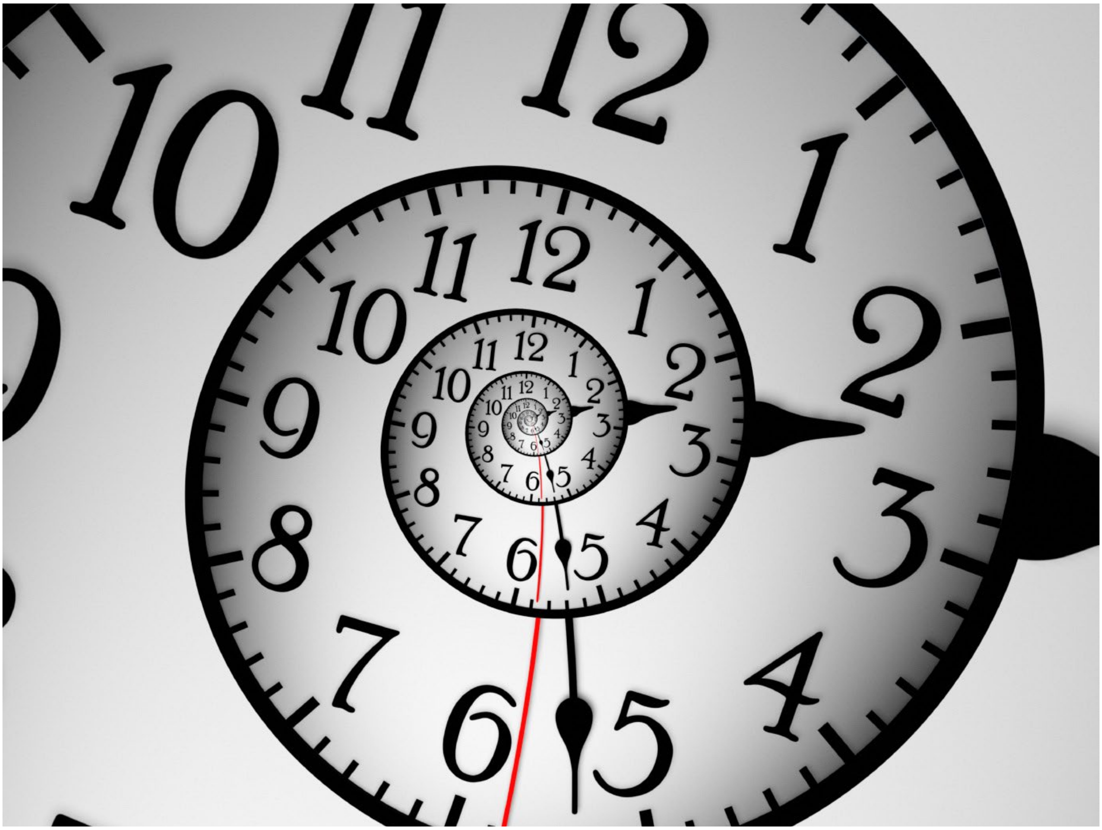
For centuries, the early forms of money remained secondary as the provisioning of life’s necessities was based on self-sufficiency, or by the distribution of goods by the powerful. That changed in the course of the 16th century with the emergence of the capitalist economy. In this system, the entire provisioning of society depends on money.

Money doesn’t arrive in the world as the money we deal with today; rather, it has become that. And indeed it is not as if this is a necessary, quasi-natural development, not as if it would have steadily unfolded from simple beginnings until it eventually became as complex as our present money. The early forms of money – and that means payments and purchases with coins always used in parallel to other things – are a completely stable phenomenon. They have no need to develop further; they see no need for change, being basically only a part of economic activity that’s based on things other than money, buying and business. They were always a subordinate part of provisioning that otherwise mainly ran via self-sufficiency, via sharing or via accumulation and redistribution of goods by the powers that be.

And so it remained for centuries. Only a specific historic constellation in Western Europe ends this arrangement in the course of 16th century – and initially only there. It drives the earlier use of money beyond itself, into a state of affairs that is now “the economy,” as we call it today, to make it its own area of social activity. It is in the capitalist economy that provisioning in fact proceeds chiefly through money. And this is a kind of economy that, in every country where it’s arisen, it then compels them to carry it forth into the world with a lot of violence – with corresponding success: today’s capitalistic global economy.

This kind of economy is for the first time a blindly selfperforming system: everything it touches is mediated over a market in terms of its money value. That means the main things that people do and how they live, depend on that money value. The people don’t determine this on their own but rather are determined by it: a systematic imperative set by money. This dependence, as it relates to all economic activities and ways of provisioning, is widely extended.

It is precisely that which drives people to glorify it and the system on which they depend, and to attribute positive rationality to it: as if they themselves had opted with reason for it – instead of actually following a



historically blindly arisen dependence. Indeed, precisely because it is a blind system lacking such reason, it is transfigured into a promise. Tirelessly it is claimed that, as a market with an invisible hand, the system will achieve a balance between the most contradictory tendencies and interests. Thus what has long since become ever clearer is overlaid: that this system that promises to compensate the conflicts not only doesn't compensate, but in fact in the first place creates them.

Growth

In a society where people depend primarily on money for their livelihoods, they have to get more money for what they do than they expend on doing it. This necessity alone drives the inexorable compulsion of money to become more money.

It's not people's greed that drives the economy to grow. It's not because people always want to have more goods that "the economy" sees itself compelled to produce ever more. And even if people were satisfied with less, the economy would still not cease insisting on growth. Far more, it is driven to make more *money* out of *money*. And that is what forces the economy, among other things, to produce more goods and persuade people to want ever more goods, namely, to buy.

The capitalistic economy that emerges in the course of the European 16th century is forced into this kind of growth: according to the logic of modern money, which has become the main intermediary of all provisioning arrangements. When an entire society is forced to acquire life's essentials *with money*, its members must consistently *make money*. And that means that businesses must yield *more money* than they spend. This purely mathematical and completely stubborn, blind and irrefutable goal – enforced across a society – creates the pressure that money necessarily must become more money.

If this fails to transpire in a single transaction, it results in a loss. When a company continues to make losses over time, it goes bankrupt. When an entire society similarly fails, its monetary system collapses – and with it all provisioning that is dependent on that system. Therefore in this system there must be this excess: even a percent *too little growth* brings on a crisis. Money must function as capital – in order to remain money: it must become more money.

This growth is, as in the meantime no less than four capitalistic centuries attest, possible for a long time. And almost from the first instant, people have seen in this promise that growth would *always* be possible, that a mere necessity could be reinterpreted to be the prevailing reality. Likewise, from the outset, phases of growth have been broken by crises, and the latest ones have deeply shaken the belief in the ultimate durability of growth – and with it, rightly, faith in money, too. And yet no crisis is able to counter the compulsion that we *must* go on with money and growth if our supply arrangement based on money is not to collapse. As much as this compulsion is damaging our providing – for example, in the form of contaminated food or the increasingly devastated natural world – money forces people to pin all their hopes on it: regarding it alone as on big promise.

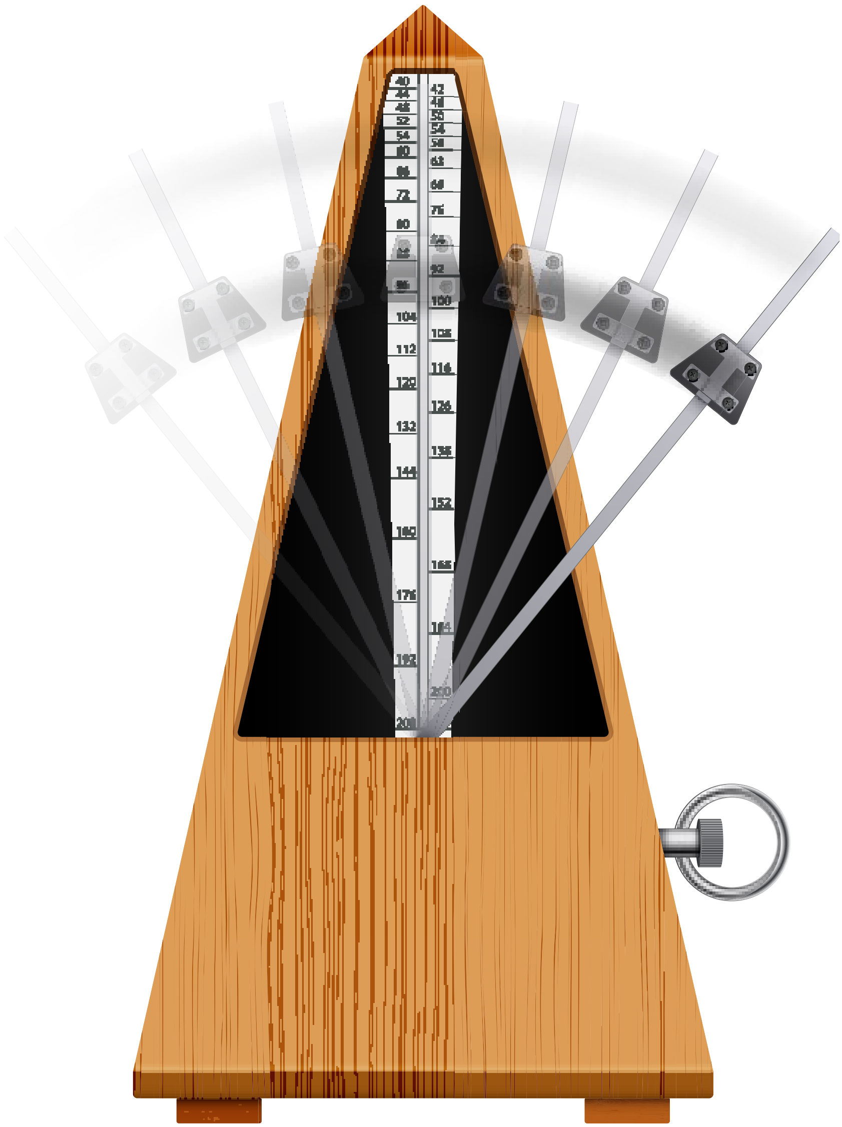
Rich and Poor

More money, more prosperity for all: This promise, seemingly inherent in money, is not being fulfilled. Even if an occasional pauper strikes it rich, overall, as time goes by, the poor grow poorer and the rich richer. Money's continuing usage is based on its function as capital: the more money that's invested, the more it can yield.

The compulsion arising from money that demands everyone needs to get money has given people a colossal wealth of goods and an almost overwhelming dominion over nature. The states that adopt this compulsion try to implement it in every last corner of the world, thus easily making the promise that money, if it can just operate capitalistically and can always multiply, ultimately guaranteeing prosperity for all. A billion starving people, rapidly expanding impoverishment and a systematic destruction of nature that in the meantime threatens to ruin the whole planet condemn these promises most horribly as lies.

The survival of the capitalist system is based on its continued success at using money as capital: as money that yields more money. Thus this indispensable growth is only demanded from money itself: so that *money* is used to yield *more money*. And that means necessarily: the *more* money that's in use, the *more* it can yield. Under the terms of capitalistic competition, therefore, also even this excess of money must be competed for, that an enterprise has to employ in order to make a profit. Thus the obvious consequences of a capitalistic economy further reinforce themselves: that only money leads to money and more money leads to still more money.

Every attempt to evade this mechanism and, for example, establish "social justice" through appropriate taxes, is destined to fail. Even when, here and there, a "slum dog" makes it to millionaire, in general the poor do grow poorer and the rich richer. Taxing the latter means making the rich poorer and the rich would doubtless survive that but it would weaken their assets and thus their decisive ability to win profit. And this is in the interest not only of the respective capital owners but of everyone who is dependent on this economic system, even the poorest. Above all, however the capability of making a capitalistic profit must be in the interest of the states, exactly those who would have to impose such a weakening of capital owners' assets – and who *cannot* do that. Because states in turn compete with one another over how much



capitalistic business succeeds within their jurisdictions. States also therefore have the keenest interest that this amount is not trimmed. Consequently, this law of the multiplication of money remains inescapable.


DOLLARS
AMERICA

03

Money and Power

Money is power, the power to control the work of others. But behind that power – recognized in every bank note, every coin and every entry in a bank account – stands yet another power: states with their monopoly on force guaranteeing the money.

Property

Property doesn’t fundamentally mean the exclusion of others. There are inclusive and exclusive forms of ownership, with very different consequences for people’s interactions with each other and with nature. Our money imposes a private ownership that rigorously excludes everyone from everything they haven’t paid money for.

A toothbrush is something one would preferably have all for oneself and not give to others. That's one type of property. Land that can support more than self-sufficiency is *another* kind of property. Or it should be at least.

Caesar reports the following from the Teutons:
"Nor has any one a fixed quantity of land or his own individual limits; but the magistrates and the leading men each year apportion to the tribes and families, who have united together, as much land as, and in the place in which, they think proper, and the year after compel them to remove elsewhere. For this enactment they advance many reasons - lest they may be anxious to acquire extensive estates, and the more powerful drive the weaker from their possessions."

John Steinbeck reports from his time:
"The people came for miles to take the fruit, but this could not be. How would they buy oranges [...] if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit—and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains. And the smell of rot fills the country. Burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes a hot fire. Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. Slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth."

Question:
One of these two types of property results from today's money – which?

Command

All over the world people are compelled to sell something in order to get money that they need for living. Basically what most people have to sell is their labour and this is put to use to produce merchandise. Where things are produced in this way, those who buy with money appropriate control over the work of the others.

We buy the things we need to live or what we want in our lives with money. They cost money, so we have to pay money for them. They are worth the money that we pay for them, and we pay this money for them because they are worth it, because it is their value. Money is thus the value of the things and therefore we must pay money for them. So it seems. But it is not.

The thing never demands its value that we must pay for it. Nothing that we must pay for itself requires the payment. Rather, people require it unfailingly and invariably, only people. We pay people for something that we get from them; we never pay this something itself. People ask for money for something – and in our money-mediated society they must claim it. They are forced to get money in order to acquire those things that they need to live or want in their lives.

Because for all this, in turn, others are forced to need money in the same way. So everyone – as a matter of life and death – is himself forced to sell something in order to be able to ask money for it. Only accordingly can he get the money he needs to live. He himself, like everyone else, only gets money from *other people*, from those others who pay him for what they may buy from him. He must be happy if they do buy something from him, but only because for better or worse he depends on it.

Money's dominance forces every individual worldwide to sell something in order to buy something. Those who have at their command enough possessions can live out their lives selling them piece by piece. But that's the rarest of cases under the rule of money. There are more or less two possibilities here. The first and most frequent is the person sells her- or himself, not as a person – that would be slavery – but instead sells what he can *do*. That means he works for the money that others pay him. He grants them the command over what he does and achieves, and after all he has to grant them this control in order to get what he needs to live.

The other option is to pay just such people for their work, to command them and gain authority over what they do, in order to be able in turn to sell what they produce.

When sold, however, the payments made and worked for are once again transformed into money, to again gain command over things or services that others have achieved. Money is and remains the power over the work of others.

Money and Power III

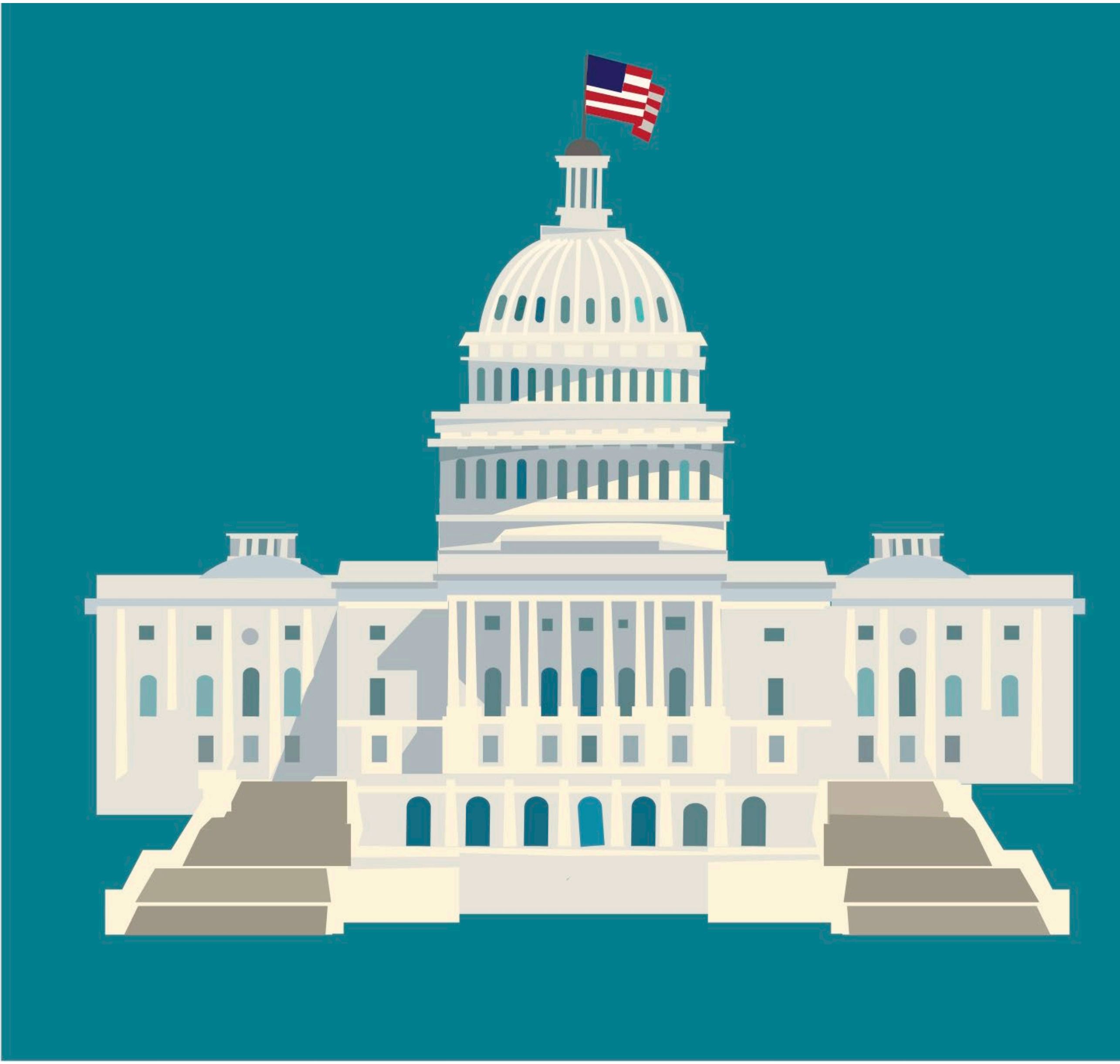
The State

No coin, no bill, no number on an account can force anyone to use them as money. It is governments that impose and maintain this compulsion. The states themselves depend on money, and want as much of it as possible to be generated in their own currency.

The normality that dealing with money assumes for us obscures the forced nature of the activity. It forces us to live from money, and that means a lot. It compels us among other things to vie with others and to compete with others for money, from which they and we must live. It forces us into inevitable conflicts of interest between those who cannot help but want to pay as little as possible and those who cannot help but want to be paid as much as possible. It forces some to starve who haven't the money to survive, and some into misery if they haven't the money for something better. And it forces everyone to engage in the world in ways that yield as much money as possible: contaminating the land, cutting down the rain forests, overfishing the oceans, exploiting people, destroying living conditions …

Money dictates the logic of these coercions but it can't enforce them, not even on itself. No coin, no bank note, no number on an account can itself force us to use it as money and in using it follow money's logic. It's from states that this compulsion issues, modern nation-states which emerged in this form in the first place with the advent of the modern-money economy, and for this purpose: because this kind economy requires precisely this kind of state. In their constitutions they have enshrined their commitment to the market economy and to plutocracy. States are the ones who issue money in the form of national currencies and reinforce it with violence, over which the states possess a monopoly versus their citizens. Where an individual does not comply with the constraints of buying, the state will have its police show how compelling they are. And where another state's financial and economic interests don't mesh, military and other robust services are on hand to install a government that does.

States do that in their own interest, because the state's interests in this regard are identical to those of the economy. No capitalistic state stands in opposition to its own economy as a counterforce and marches against its economy. A state intervenes in economic affairs chiefly when trying to stimulate the economy. Where the state, on the contrary, tries to curb the economy, it is always only for its most essential needs that are required to contain the conflicts and destruction that this type of economy enforces, to restrain it from ultimately choking itself. Because the modern state must and will perpetuate this kind of economy: it sustains itself by money – money that “its” economy yields. The state is its chief lobbyist. States are the agencies of money.



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Money and Relation-ship

Money establishes a relationship between people as buyers and sellers of goods. While everything economic is determined by money, this abstract relationship with money does more than shape people’s social context; it also affects personal relationships to their very core.

Money and Relationship I

Individual

Money benchmarks everyone as an individual owner of money, and at the same time it positions the individual within the anonymous universe of all other people as money owners. This abstract reference forms a distinct instance of the “I” in everyone as a conceptually pure form of self. Accordingly the “I” as a psychological entity arose only in the modern era, under the reign of money.

The I, *our self*, is a basic fact for us. But for the vast majority of its history, humanity knew no such I. It belongs to the modern era, the age of the money-mediated society. That is what creates this I and what necessitates it.

Because it counts within such a society – and *only* there: Money necessarily refers to everyone individually, since every single one acts as an owner of money. Money there exists solely as something for which *someone* has *ownership*. And everyone *must* own it to survive. The relation of every individual to money – that he has and has access to – constitutes a center of his life. At the same time it is exactly this individual relation to money that connects every individual to *all other people*, as an owner of money to the other owners of money: Because it is only from them he can get *money* and only from them can he get something *for his money*.

This totality, this "all others" is, therefore, while very real, also vague, empty and utterly abstract. This total arises not from individuals actually knowing all these other people concretely, rather it comes through the abstract, namely, in the relationship every money owner has with virtually all other money owners. This oppositional setting of each individual and the abstract whole is the necessary and inevitable result of money – of the money of a money-mediated society. And so it requires this sort of conception of each one himself as an abstract individual in relation to an abstract totality.

For this reason, however, no one *is* simply and originally this individual. Rather, he sees himself only as like this individual – that for himself he *is* not. For this reason, the embodiment of this singulation, the *I*, at the same time always remains strange for each one: It attaches only abstractly to what everyone simply is. Notably, as a consequence this *I* thus first has to be discovered. It is not at hand, rather the objective of an ongoing *I-discovery*.

The question, Who am I, does not lead as we believe to the core of


ICH

one's self, rather it testifies to the separation of Who and I that cannot be closed because it arises from that split: the *I* as a perpetual, uncatchable project. And as a deeply burdensome project. A project that does not only affect people psychologically - Freud designates the I as function – but it exposes them constantly and strenuously to what is causing it: They have to assert themselves on the market, themselves and as self, namely in competition with that abstract whole. They paradoxically elevate what they have to do to themselves for that to an ideal: their identity.

Money and Relationship II

Society

Every person must make or do something so that others will give him money. But he doesn't exert himself for them because he knows them, and they don't pay him money because they want to contribute to his livelihood; rather everyone seeks his own ways of coming into money. A group so formed is not a community but an interrelation determined by money.

Politics and society are lightly set in opposition to each other with society understood as the totality of all of its citizens *as citizens*, namely insofar as they are not involved in politics, and not with the steering and management of themselves as the citizenry. A money-mediated society however is no longer just the community of its members beyond such mediation. The mediation through money puts each individual in abstract connection with a totality that is not tangible as such: the totality of money as a totality of the owners of money. Society is not community, rather – in all reality, as abstract as that sounds – a system of mediations.

The money-mediated society abets the connection between its members through mutual dependence that is very real but highly abstract in form: dependence on money. The life of each is dependent on getting money – on that he consequently does or produces something for which *others* give him money. And he is also inversely dependent on what the others do and produce that he needs to live and for which he therefore needs money so he can buy from them. But he doesn't know those for whom he does something, or he doesn't do it for them because he knows them. And they also do theirs for him not because they know him and want to contribute to his livelihood; rather, as must he, they themselves must look to come to money. In the pursuit of this money-formed interest each for himself in isolation, a relationship among the isolated arises – among those who are isolated by and in this very relationship.

But it doesn't just separate, it brings them into opposing positions. Testifying to the countless conflicts when all the individual interests of the isolated compete with those of all the others are the countless highly paid lawyers who contend these conflicts. However diverse the conflicts may be, they have at their core the principle of exclusion, which is established with our money. Because this money requires that with it something is to buy that *only* the one who buys it gets. All others are excluded from that which is to be purchased. They are excluded from it, so that it goes solely against money to the person who raised the money for it. In a society where people virtually everything they need can have only with money, they are therefore first of all excluded from virtually everything: they must pay for it and – above all – also be able to pay. Those who cannot can starve.

Money and Relationship III

The world as environment

With the advent of modern capitalistic money, the world becomes an environment. The self-referential monetized individual sees itself as a singular interior element surrounded by an all-encompassing exterior. And so it is that monetized individuals regards the world as a mere externality, as if they themselves would not belong to it.

The opposition and confliction of each individual with an abstract totality is the inevitable outcome of a money-mediated society. As an outcome of everyone having to contest for money to live, each person already carries this confliction in himself, on the one hand. He finds himself a subject in a world of objects, sees himself as a lone internality surrounded by an exterior totality. With the money-mediated society comes the onset of solipsistic views, views emanating from an I enclosed in itself, that only refers to itself, surrounded by the infinity of all the other such units – as the zero point of a coordinate system is surrounded by all the other points of that system. It is an I that regards the rest of the entire world merely as not-I, an abstract negation of his self, a self that ultimately only knows itself and really nothing about what – in this idea of it – solely and exclusively surrounds him.

But each of us does not only hold within himself this opposition of inside and outside, but also acts accordingly: he must bring it forth. The money-related confliction indeed plays out primarily and originally in this external world, as it obligates everyone to muddle through with money and thus to get money. But you get money only by having something that can be sold in exchange for money; and so our world as externality must be transformed piece-by-piece into sellable somethings, into merchandise. In search of more and more things that can be made into merchandise the world turns into one mere economic zone. And this constraint is as relentless, as the hunt is pitiless and careless: ultimately totally self-centered.

Umwelt: It's the German word for "the environment," since the world is endangered by this hunt for more things to sell. Indeed, as *Umwelt* it is handled by money's subjects, who grab it as if they themselves were not part of this world, as if they would not live in it, they destroy, poison and barren this world - we just have to look around. Environmental awareness holds to the same mistaken view that it would have to fight: to treat the world as *Umwelt*, as an externality –

only that care is to be taken with this externality. But the world remains the *Umwelt* as long as the capitalist view prevails, and a more considerate way of dealing with it is impossible as long as money's power persists. Stay the course and ultimately the environment will become the unvironment.

05

Money as Thought Form

Money forms people's thinking by forcing them in various ways to be steered by money. Yet it also imposes certain ways of unconsciously thinking on people. In the modern age, money influences a lot in this way, no less than the natural sciences and philosophy.

Money as Thought Form I

Function and progress

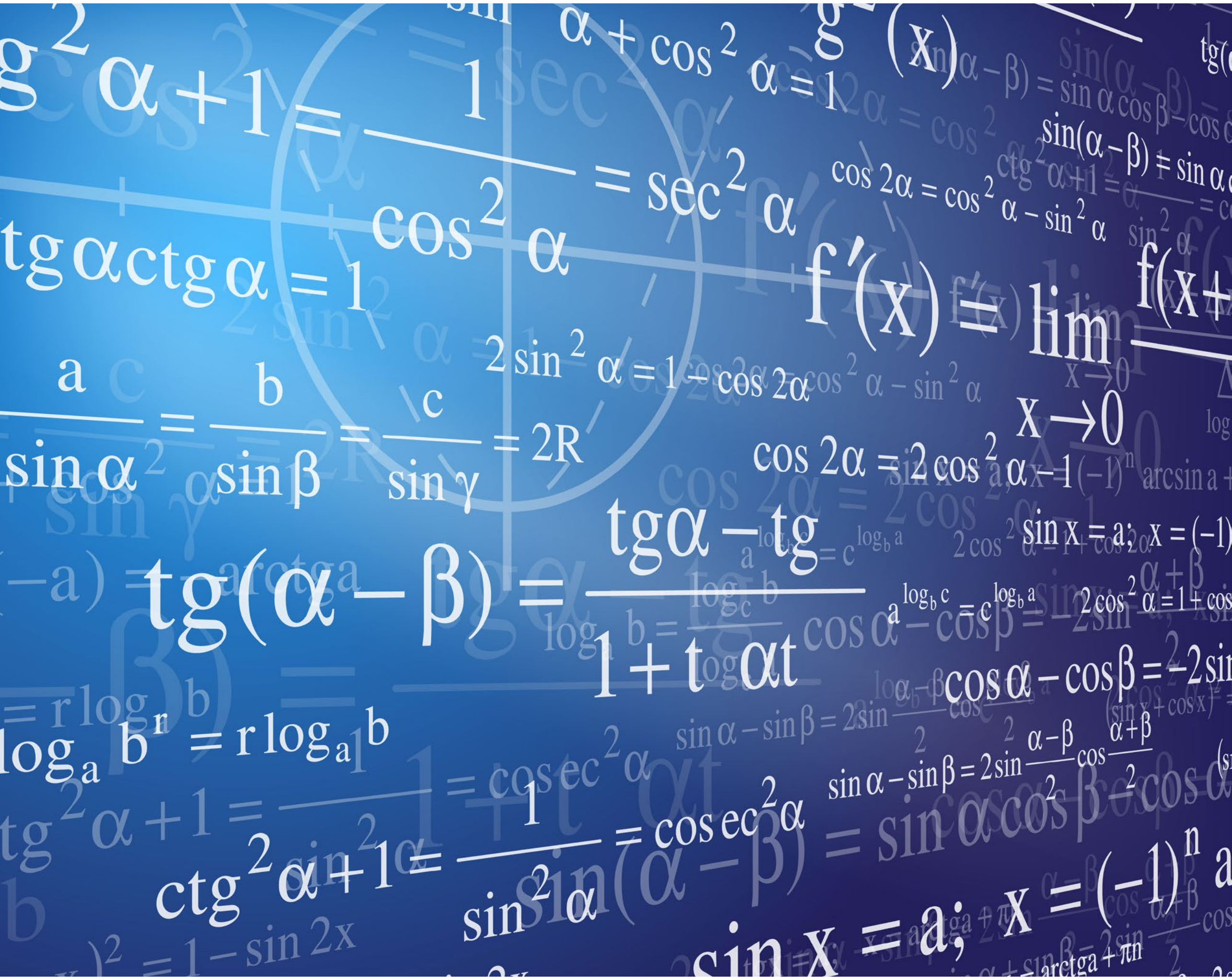
Money requires everyone to think of goods as both the respective thing itself and its monetary value, that is, purely quantitatively. This results in a way of thinking which also induces a new way of calculating. Unlike all earlier forms of mathematics, this new form deals with pure numbers, calculating mathematical function.

That money shapes people's thinking is obvious. The necessity to get money demands ideas from everyone without pause on how he has to behave to get it, what he can turn into money, what he can be paid for, what he can afford and what he wants to afford with this money, and how he generally has to conform to a necessity that his life depends on. But the influence on thinking exerted by the necessities of money goes far, far deeper.

Because money requires everyone to think about the things and nearly everything in this world in the form of *value*, in the form of exchange value and monetary value.

Just for the simple act of buying, we have to see all that we buy, yes, all that we would ever be able to buy, at the same time as the value that it costs in the form of money and monetary value. And that is a very special form. It is, for one, naturally a number, a quantum. The value of a commodity, since it represents a monetary value, inherently allows itself be quantified and expressed as a number. But what's special about this number is that it does not count *anything*, not apples, not pears, not any other thing. Precisely because monetary value theoretically is inherent in everything, not just in apples or pears but virtually in every conceivable thing, this number is not an amount of any one *thing* in particular; rather, it's just a digit, a pure number. And it is in this form, as pure numbers, that we are compelled by money to think about everything possible in this world: we think of it purely quantitatively, in a pure quantitative *form*.

That people actually do this once they live in a money-mediated society is apparent in the historical emergence of a mathematics that, unlike all earlier arithmetics, deals with these *pure* numbers: in infinitesimal methods, number lines or coordinate axes, in the mathematical function. This mathematics appeared in 17th century Europe, as it turns into a society and an economy based primarily on money. And this mathematics shows only more pointedly in which form we also have to



comprehend everyday things, so that every trait, every characteristic and all content, no matter what, is conceived as mere numerical value.

The world and things are thus made calculable, for one thing: This forms the foundation of the modern natural sciences. But they become calculable in that everything is thought of as a quantifiable amount of equally empty value: as indifferent. This money requires, and this is how the things of this world are then treated: minor to the fact that they must pay off – as we say not for nothing.

Money as Thought Form II

Subject / Object

Prompted by the money-mediated society, the notion arises of a world split into subject and object. Descartes was the first to formulate this then-new notion at the beginning of the 17th century. It implies the world is split into the determining, money, as subject and that which it determines, the commodity, as object.

Compelled by the money-mediated society, also the notion – more precisely: the thought form – of subject and object arises . At the beginning of the 17th century Descartes as the first is compelled to assert that the entire world consists only of subject and object. He called them something else but soon these elements were denoted as they in the meantime entered everyday vocabulary. The entirety of modern philosophy will work and labour with them, even if it later tries to get away from them. But as concepts subject and object do not make sense to exalted philosophers or to everyday thinkers just because Descartes prescribed them. The money of modern times prescribes them to everyone.

Money and merchandise veil themselves in subject and object: the conceptual pair subject and object forms itself from them. They are the two units of exchange value we confront in any purchase, the exchange value in the money and the exchange value in the merchandise: With the one we pay for the other. Both values consist as such in nothing tangible, rather to handle them properly when buying we must regard them and *think about* them as these values – the state and its laws insist. As these notional values they consist in fact of nothing, nothing other than that they correlate with each other in transactions. Money only has value insofar as it can buy goods of value; that is, in that it correlates value to value, one unit relating to another corresponding unit. In money and goods, we routinely think in terms of two separate, purely correlating elements.

Philosophy construes subject and object in exactly these terms: both only exist as themselves in relationship to their respective disconnected other. Subject is only subject in that it refers to an object external to itself; and object is only object in that an external subject relates to it. Indeed, everyday thinking enriches both abstract concepts with content: With subject we think of something human-like, with a body, psychology and the rest. But reversed, that only means we see all these

people likewise *as subjects, as separate from a world of objects.* The subject-object schism, as has long been lamented, splits the world in two – with one determinant, money as subject, and what it determines, the world, as object.

Money as Thought Form III

Thought reflexes

Just as we can buy anything and everything with money, we also view and judge anything and everything in the form it acquires through money: as a value among values. We think in terms of purely quantitative value even when we're not involved with money-related things. This way of thinking is effective in many possible applications.

Just as we can buy every single thing with money, we also look at and interpret every single thing in the form it takes through money: as value among values, as quantum of uniform worth, the same one worth of which everthing else is also a quantum of. We don't have to think for a second about the highly abstract and very specific form of this interpretation; we really don't need anything about it clarified at all. Nevertheless, simply because we routinely look at things as merchandise, and thus as *monetary value*, that form becomes one of everyday thinking – and that shows itself in many ways.

One example is the by now almost compulsory exercise of applying the same scale to thoroughly different things. Thus, quite dissimilar things are presumed to be manifestations of the *same thing*, differing merely quantitatively. Pain, for example, is experienced quite differently than is pleasure. But psychologists manage to apply the same scale to both of them assuming they were just different values of the same kind of sensation just at the opposite ends of the measuring scale. Better known and very widespread is the classification of every shade of political conviction on a scale between right and left: There is a midpoint and whatever deviates from it does so as a value moving to the right or to the left along this scale only. An insight in political issues that someone advocates – however sharply it might diverge from left or right positions – constitutes, at most, an extreme, is extremism, and belongs to the same given spectrum. Accordingly it cannot and may not perceive anything other than what is forseen for this spectrum.

Thus content, as specific as it may be, will be indifferent – conceived to be indifferent. And this indifference makes sense to everyone: It appears to us immediately justified, and to correspond to reality in precisely how it quantifies and thus ignores the specifics of any given thing or being. In the same way, as a consequence of money's indifference to the content for which it can be freely exchanged, content yields to the way in which it is mediated. Communication as such becomes more important than what is being communicated. Or the method – that is, *in which way,* we get certain content – takes precedence over the content that is to be determined in this way.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06

Money and Exchange

The acts of exchange that people practice, and upon which their societies are originally based, are only turned into barter in the form of buying and selling through money. Thus, in the end, the market dominates every exchange. Besides the market, methods of exchange persist in the form of offerings.

Gifts

Because money functions as exchange medium today, it is generally thought to have originated in barter transactions – mistakenly. In communities that have no money in the modern sense, the presentation of gifts is crucially important. The gifts are not swaps; rather, along with other customs, they confirm and reaffirm a basic bond people have with one another.

Money is today's medium of exchange – the one universal medium of exchange that all production, all provisioning and all manner of social interactions in this world depends on and is determined by. That led to the ill-considered assumption, still made today, that the exchange formed the basis of money, that money arose from that same exchange which it still mediates today. Because money is such a fundamental fact of life today, we also think of exchange as a selfsame fact, namely, as the same fundamental fact as money, but just *in its original form*. This assumption is fundamentally wrong.

In societies not yet using money in the modern sense, not yet dependent on *one* market where they can get everything only through money, in such societies we find universally disseminated practices for handing things over. But this handover never has the character of a purchase, where you transfer something to someone in order to get something else from that person. It has more the character of a gift: People give these things in the context of a shared sense of obligation that they feel for each other and that they actively express in this way. They give things to reaffirm this commitment – for harmonious relations. It is not about someone getting something particular because he needs something. Rather, it is only about this harmony between the people itself. And only *amongst other things and acts* do such gifts reaffirm that. Along with them, there is a certain way of coming together, in specific rites of understanding, certain words, gestures, etc. This obligation between the people is also never redeemed in full through the gifts: it is strengthened and renewed through such gifts, perpetuated by them. It must be reciprocated, but that also does not mean, as it does with money in a purchase, that a gift will be fully redeemed by a reciprocal gift. That's because it's not an issue that someone comes into possession of this gift; rather it's that someone *gives*, *receives*, *returns*, and *passes the gift on*. So there is much to say and tell about gifts that circulate 'round and 'round forever, from identical gifts where the same

things are passed back and forth, and many more such tales. Only there are no stories of “the” exchange.

It is decisive to recognize that such relationships of commitment not only do not correspond to the exchange as we know it from money, but through it are turned into their opposite or even destroyed: Because what we buy and pay for with money creates no commitment to the one who sells it to us, but redeems it and dissolves it. To every further obligation this exchange puts an – extremely dangerous – end.

Purchasing

Buying changes ownership of money and goods from one person to another. If the trade is completed, every obligation between the participants is fulfilled and, so, the interaction ends. Buying replaces the all-encompassing social bond with one single obligation: to pay something to some-one. Thus buying is both obligatory liquidation and the liquidation of the obligation.

The original bond of an obligation among people was based on needing to rely on one another directly, and it entailed being *bound to each other* in the literal sense. This obligation required them to exchange gifts. The gifts had nothing to do with an exchange as we know it from money, and yet there are historical lines of connection along which they also finally led to our money. The purchase, indeed, the form of the exchange that is characteristic for our money, knows nothing of that original obligation. The purchase replaces it – and thus destroys it.

The exchange for money, the purchase, replaces people's all-embracing sense of obligation with just one single obligation: paying someone money for something. This one obligation is exclusively between the two parties, between buyer and seller. And it relates only and exclusively to the change in ownership between these two: Money and merchandise respectively change from being the possession of one to being the possession of the other. Once this exchange and interchange are completed, any obligation between them is dissolved and ended. The purchase is thus both obligatory liquidation and liquidation of any obligation in one: it changes the purchased goods, as obliged, into liquidity, transforming it into *that* liquid medium, the universal medium of exchange, money; and precisely in doing that, it terminates the obligation which *only* existed in this transformation. The purchase dissolves the obligation at the very moment that it is redeemed. Once paid, the obligation between the seller and the buyer is over: The exchange for money liquidated it.

The kind of obligation that binds people through money – and today that means the obligation of people *for* money – is thus highly abstract. The consequences, however, are anything but abstract, *precisely*, because they negate any further obligation: who hires others has to look out for his own profits. Who sells weapons, profits from it. Who pays for it can poison the world.

Money and Exchange III

Market

Long before "the market" became a byword, there were only local markets, strictly limited in terms of time and in their range of goods. A coherent market with a common pricing structure only emerges towards the end of the 16th century in Europe. This development gave the market economy its name and coincided with the transformation of money into the universal medium of exchange.

Historically, it must first emerge that people buy something, that is, that they can and must buy and sell each other things. In all early communal groups, the supply system initially proceeds over people's personal connections and hierarchical dependencies, that is, totally without the mediation of anything like money. And this kind of supply system initially endures, even if money emerges, if certain things – most obviously but not only, coins – are used as a means of exchange. The occasions and above all the added necessity to use things in this way, for purchasing, were quite restricted for a very long time. Once such occasions become institutionalized, they are *local* markets: an event with a few stalls for a strictly limited time with a strictly limited range of merchandise. And at these local markets a regulation could require that payment must be made with a very specific means of exchange, but usually other things could also serve as payment.

Only towards the end of the so-called long 16th century in Western Europe, through supraregional trade fairs, an ever denser trading network, and above all through the strictly money-mediated movement of goods between cities and their surrounding regions, does it come

to a transition from such local markets to a common market. This institution that lends its name to the market economy, didn't grow with natural necessity from the use of a means of exchange, that is, from using money. Quite the reverse: it is the institution of the market that gives rise to the use of money as *universal* medium of exchange, the transformation of an until-then quite limited use of money into the money that from then on rules the world.

The *market*, unlike the market stands of the past, no longer mediates tangible goods against tangible payment only; rather it mediates as far as it reaches basically everything in the form of money and goods. Today: worldwide. What someone has to sell here competes with everything that anyone anywhere else wants to sell. The possibility of making a profit here depends on corresponding powers that exist somewhere else. The poverty or prosperity of peoples depends on how the dealings they carry out under the aegis of their states turn out compared with the dealings undertaken in every other conceivable state. The value of its national money can depend on how robustly the issuing nation can assert appropriate conditions for itself in all other parts of the world. *And so on.*

Mediating of all this and mediation of this kind is the market.


McDonald's
claire's
NetWork

07

Beyond Money

Economies without money – how should that work? We also don't know. But we do want to think about it. People do things, give each other gifts, share what they have, help each other and contribute to the success of enterprises large and small – without money. They did it earlier and they do it today. And what does the future look like?

“Good” Money

Most considerations about the difficulties that money provokes are directed to the money itself: money should be crisis-free. Accordingly, in their thoughts they construct a kind of money that ignores certain disadvantages and limits itself to its benefits. Other approaches use alternative forms of money circulation, underneath the reign of world money, that deviate in tangible ways from its logic.

Every wish and attempt to think "beyond money" runs into one immense difficulty: that all of our thoughts are already *calibrated in money*. We know the world so much shaped only through money, the forms it forces on everything are so infinitely familiar to us, they are so powerful and from a young age we were all pushed so emphatically to make them our own, that it is almost as impossible for our thinking to imagine a world beyond money as it is a world beyond space and time. Any intellectual game with X parallel universes is apparently childs' play compared with what's needed to think about the concept of just one world existing without money.

From the outset, that leads thereto that thoughts about how it could go otherwise in most cases don't go further than to money itself: most people worry *about* money. The triggers are the crises that money regularly gets into and which are currently more severe and have longer lasting effect than usual. Criticism of monetary conditions stemming from crises at most dare to wish that money would function *properly*, crisis-*free*. Everything would already be fine if only the banks were better controlled, the right financial transactions taxed, or the appropriate people fired. Or alternatively: if the people would buy less or buy the right things in the right stores from the right countries and at the right prices.

Others try to overcome the fact that things are not working so well with money by depicting a money according to their wishes, a money that sheds certain bad characteristics and retains only the good ones. There the appropriate tax should do the job, a proclaimed abolition of interest rates or the cunningly ingenious disruption of speculative gains. However, they commonly miss that this money, which they thus optimize intellectually, is part of a system whose validity they advance intact. And this system can by no means work with – for example – decelerating gains.

The multiple already-realized attempts to create "another" money

reach a bit further. In regional currencies money actually functions differently than the money in force. Barter exchanges use something like working hours as a currency, and starting thus, even though they don't give up thinking in equivalencies, they do eliminate profit interests. And to free people from necessity to battle for the money they need to survive, there is this idea for a while now of an unconditional basic income – albeit in money. And that would mean further dependence on the monetary system and its ways of functioning.

07

Commoning

The commons movement counters money-mediated provisioning with collective participation in the activities and basic concerns of provisioning such as ownership. The movement's core conviction is that, to avoid money's built-in constraints, only the community can decide on its common endeavours.

That money as a *system* leads to the harm, hardships and atrocities that a TV documentary parades before our eyes almost nightly now has been recognized by those who want to counter money with a change of the most fundamental kind. The *Commons* movement takes as its model the "Allmende", shared land, not cultivated by an individual as his private property separate from others but belonging to everyone, cultivated by everyone, and sustaining everyone with its fruits. That means that something is set in place to counter money here that involves shared participation in even the most fundamental conditions, activities and forms of provisioning.

That all those who strive for such *Commons* are still trying hard cannot be surprising and cannot be otherwise. They not only face the difficulty of determining in positive terms what in which way and with whom can be shared, and that in the middle of a world where the dominant money logic obediently excludes any such communality fundamentally from the outset and accordingly scrutinizes it suspiciously. They also have to battle with the other difficulty that they don't want to instantly proclaim a new *ism*. For one, that would necessarily draw such scrutiny to them. Secondly and above all however it would impose its program on a community that *as such*, after all, as community, is the program. Over what is wanted and desired collectively the community alone would decide – and *as* community, not following a program that would otherwise be written and adopted only by one camp within the community. Thus this movement needs to be kept open as far as possible, outlining the thoughts, the possibilities and here and there the achievements already reached, thus to encourage others to try something similar.

Beyond Money III

oikos, modern

What the people live from and how they distribute it ought to be organised fundamentally differently than it is with money. And if highly segmented divisions of labour shall persist, a return to older forms of subsistence can be excluded. The extremely elevated capacity of people pressured by money to produce more with less effort and to distribute their products more precisely than ever would doubtless be useful – just organized differently than it is with money.

The suffering and destruction that money logic exposes the world to and that it forces the people to bring upon the world, they can only come to an end when money logic itself comes to an end. Only then, when things no longer have to be produced to yield money, when people no longer have to work in order to be paid by others, when everything that people live from and live with must no longer be examined and then handled so that it yields money, and as much money as *possible*, only then is an end even possible to the rampant suffering and the ever-widening doom. That calls for more than just ceasing to think according to money logic; it calls for an end to money itself.

What people live from and how they distribute it would then basically have to be accomplished differently than when mediated through money and through the systemically established compulsion to get money. This for one thing would be far easier than when everything people do had to be first aligned with money before – maybe yes, but maybe no – it can then be good for something. Everything that people do would then without money simply *only* apply to what they do and what they thereby want to achieve, nothing else. But this has among others the one insurmountable obstacle that today almost everything is organized through money: All provisioning that wouldn't run on money are as good as destroyed; yes, all prerequisites for organizing things differently than with money have been methodically stamped out over the last centuries. This is the bitter reason why in countries that don't do as well at capitalistic profit-making as do the global market winners, the populace can only starve or run away.

A return to any older forms of subsistence is thus impossible, even in the case that it were somehow desirable. Instead of a return it would only be a re*lapse*: far back, behind possibilities achieved earlier. It cannot be otherwise: the modern methods of production and distribution that money drove people to develop would not be abandoned, rather they would be maintained – but applied in new ways. Because the capacity of these methods to produce better and with less effort and also by sharing the work in a more complex way and then to distribute products more precisely and reliably than ever, this capacity, when it no longer bows to the dictates of profitability, could then be used in other ways. It is a very welcome capacity: a gift for which money really could, posthumously, be paid thanks.


Payment Successful

The methodology presented here divides the question *What is money?* into seven categories. In seven categories, we move step by step from familiar things to less familiar things: from coins and other manifestations in which money appears, to the relationships it establishes between people and things, to money as a form of thought.

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