WHY SOCRATES DIDN'T CHARGE: PLATO AND THE METAPHYSICS OF MONEY

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"Money has the whole of its truth in being
a symbol of the soul's adherence to the good.
It is meant, above all, to be a 'reminder'
to those who are wealthy in a true sense."

"[M]oney as such is the most terrible destroyer of form."
—Georg Simmel

1. Socrates' defense

After laying out the charges entailed in the old rumors about him, which had been circulating in Athens and which he took to be the most fundamental reason he found himself in court, the first claim Socrates makes in response is that he has never undertaken to teach anyone anything for a fee. The exchange of money was not mentioned in the charges, and yet Socrates took it to be the most directly pertinent fact in his defense. To say that he has never received money is to distinguish himself from a fairly novel group of men in Greek history about whom the Athenians were rather ambivalent: the sophists.[1] At the same time, the claim required

[1]The word "sophist"—in Greek, σοφιστής, from σοφός, "wise"—literally means "wise man," or "expert," "master in one's craft." The word was used as a

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Socrates to provide an alternative account of the reasons for his actions. As is well-known, Socrates explains that the Oracle at Delphi had revealed to an acquaintance of his that Socrates was the wisest man of all, and he took the revelation as a divine injunction to spend the rest of his life bearing witness to this wisdom precisely by constantly *testing* it, and thereby deflating the false claims to wisdom of others.[2]

There are two points to note here that in fact converge into one, which will be the primary point explored in the present essay. In the first place, Socrates' claim about his own motivation implies that there is a connection between sophistry and money-making. While this implication may not strike one as a great revelation, given that it is a regular and well-known theme in Plato's dialogues,[3] we intend to argue that the connection is more essential than typically realized, and that understanding the connection reveals something in turn about the nature of both sophistry and money. Secondly, and perhaps less obviously, Socrates' approach to the charges suggests an intriguing either-or: money *would* have been sufficient to explain his activity, so that its removal as a cause requires something else, in this case a reference to "the god at Delphi." To put it over-simply, money and God appear as competitors for the role of the good that is adequate to explain human behavior. When St. Paul says that the love of money is the root of all evil, it would seem that he is echoing a Platonic insight. Our aim in the following is to understand what it is about the *nature*, the *inner logic*, of money that inclines it to usurp

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name for those who began the practice of traveling around Greece as teachers, which began in the fifth century. These men would charge students for courses, or at greater cost, for a period of time to spend in their company as "associates." The prices were generally very high—a standard rate for a course seems to have been about 30 minae: a mina was worth 100 drachmas and a drachma was a standard daily wage in fifth-century Athens—and the sophists subsequently became exceedingly wealthy. They were generally known by name throughout Greece, though they had an ambiguous reputation more or less from the start. To capture the ambiguity, we might translate the Greek term as "wise guy."

[2]*Apology* (=*Ap.*), 20c–21a. All quotations of Plato's dialogues in translation are taken from *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Bloomington: Hackett, 1997), except for *The Republic* (=*Rep.*). Quotations from this work are taken from *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[3]Plato mentions the connection, for example, in the following places: *Laches* 186c; *Meno* 91b; *Protagoras* 310d, 313c, 349a; *Gorgias*, 519c–d; *Greater Hippias*, 281b–283b; *Sophist* 223a, 224c, 226a.

the divine throne, to see precisely how the question concerning the ultimate end of action serves to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist, and then to consider what a *healthy* love of money would be. As we will see, Plato's interpretation of the significance of money concerns not just teaching, but in fact all human activities.

2. The ontological meaning of money

The danger of the love of money is a common theme in ancient Greek literature;[4] when Plato identifies it as a problem in his discussion of justice and the nature of the city and the soul in the *Republic*, he is thus giving expression to a familiar concern. The question, however, is: precisely what sort of problem does the love of money pose? We would normally think that this is basically a moral issue: we assume the problem has little to do with the nature of money, but only with the way we relate to it. In other words, we take for granted that, while money in itself is good, or at least neutral, and a necessity for life in community of a certain size, people need to learn to moderate their desire for it so that it does not lead to a willingness to do unlawful or unethical things for profit. But the question of money has a different profile in Plato's philosophy. Moral questions, for him, always turn out to be epistemological questions, which in turn are determined by ontological or metaphysical realities.[5] In Plato's understanding, the way one acts (virtue) is inevitably a function of what one takes to be real (knowledge), which depends on the various ways reality can present itself—and vice versa. Before we ask how money ought to be used, it is necessary to ask the more fundamental question what it *is*. We would suggest that what Plato contributes to the ancient moral

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[4]See Malcolm Schofield's discussion of this theme in *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 251–53.

[5]In his classic study, *A History of Greek Economic Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), Albert Trever writes: "Plato was the first great economic thinker of Greece. Plato, however, was primarily interested in neither economics nor politics, but in moral idealism. . . . All his economic thought is a direct outgrowth of it, and is shot through with its influence" (22). This judgment requires qualification, however: it would be truer to say that "moral idealism," too, was not Plato's primary interest, but rather an implication of his most basic interest, namely, metaphysics.

tradition regarding money is to reveal that the question at stake here lies deeper than the attitudes of particular individuals: it is first a question of order, and thus a metaphysical question. To show this, we need to explore what Plato says about money within the context of his broader philosophy.

As the Greek thinkers generally affirmed, human beings are naturally social creatures, and, for Plato, money is one of the institutions that makes complex co-existence possible. When Plato has Socrates lay out the most basic social form theoretically conceivable, the initial sketch of the ideal city in *Republic* II, money makes an early appearance. There are several things that human beings need by nature, and people tend to differ naturally in their aptitude to provide for one or another of those needs. Rather than each person providing individually for all of his own needs—which would eliminate the necessity of society altogether—each does what he does best, and exchanges with the others. The manner of exchange, he says, is "buying and selling," and the means that enables the transaction is money, or as he puts it here (371b), a νόμισμα ξύμβολον τῆς ἀλλαγῆς ἕνεκα, which Allan Bloom translates as "an established currency as a token for exchange," but which might be more directly rendered as a "conventional symbol for the sake of exchange."[6] The existence of this currency, plus the fact that those who produce what is bought and sold do not have the time to wait in the market for the demand for their wares, gives rise to a class of people who do not produce, but rather who work directly with money themselves: the tradesmen (if they buy and sell within their own city) and merchants (if they travel from city to city) (371c–d). According to Socrates, in a "rightly governed city," these will be people unable to produce normally because they are physically weak or useless. In addition to these people who work directly with money, there will be people of strong bodies but weak minds, and so unable to be either producers or tradesmen themselves, who sell their labor. Socrates calls this class of people the "wage-earners."

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[6]This passage is the *locus classicus* for Plato's theory of money, because of which he is taken to be the father of "conventionalist" theories of money. Aristotle adds (*Politics* 1257a36) that money ought itself to possess some value in itself (and not be a mere "symbol"), which has made him the father of "realist" theories of money.

Now, Socrates refers to this simple social form—constituted mainly by producers, but secondarily by tradesmen and wage-earners—as the "true" city (372e), and appears to be satisfied with it, but Socrates' main dialogue partner in the *Republic*, Glaucon, raises an objection. According to Glaucon, this city of "utmost necessity" is fit more for pigs than for human beings, that is, it represents a city for purely natural beings that lack the adornments of culture. Socrates is thus prompted to expand what he had initially sketched as the basic form of human community, and the expansion introduces ambiguities. If he calls the first the "true" city, the second is a "feverish" (φλεγμαίνουσα) city, one that is inflamed precisely because it is no longer based on natural necessities, but, as Socrates puts it, on luxuries, that is, on objects of non-necessary desire. Many of the things Socrates lists, here, as filling up the feverish city are embellishments of necessary things: not food, but relishes and cakes; not physical health, but beautiful appearance. The rest amount to cultivated objects of sense: perfume, painting, music, and other arts. Directly after his description of these cultural contents, Socrates observes that such a city will necessarily grow in size, and lead to conflict with other cities, especially if they too "let themselves go to the unlimited acquisition of money" (373d).

There are two interesting things to note about this initial description: first, Plato is claiming that needs based on nature have a limit, which serves to define them, and thus make them intelligible. As we will see shortly, having a *boundary* is for Plato an essential feature of reality. It is precisely the determination by natural limits that makes the first city "true." By contrast, desires that are not determined by nature are essentially "boundless" or "infinite" (ἄπειρος, literally, lacking a limit or end [πέρας]). The reason for this difference should be clear: if a desire is determined by nature, it has a purpose, which means there is a point at which it reaches completion. This is why the natural desires have a limit. There is only so much bread a person can eat precisely because bread fulfills a particular function in sustaining a person's life. But there is no such intrinsic limit to the amount of music, for example, one can consume, no clear limit (regrettably) to the quantity of external adornment. Thus, a direct relation obtains between a thing's having a *measure* and its having a natural purpose. Now, whether the distinction between necessary and non-necessary desires is the *same* as that between good and bad desires is a question to which we will

have to return.[7] In any event, Plato is suggesting that a city that lacks the internal order of nature will necessarily end up going to war precisely because it has no measure. In an off-hand way, Socrates remarks that, with the distinction between necessary and non-necessary desires, we have in fact discovered "the origin of war."[8]

The second thing to note is that Socrates appears, here, to sum up the whole of this order of life in a single phrase, namely, being handed over to "the unlimited acquisition of money." In other words, the love of money appears as the paradigm of a non-necessary and therefore boundless desire. This appearance gets substantialized toward the end of the *Republic* when Socrates proceeds to compare the pleasure enjoyed in different orders of life, that is, in lives founded on different objects of desire or kinds of love. There are three basic orders, based on the three main "parts" of the soul in Plato's standard anthropology: the highest is the "reasoning" part that loves wisdom, and the second is the "spirited" part (θυμός) that loves honor and victory. But when it comes to the lowest part of the soul, Socrates runs into some difficulty coming up with the proper name:

> as for the third, because of its many forms, we had no peculiar name to call it by, but we named it by what was biggest and strongest in it. For we called it the desiring part on account of the intensity of the desires, concerned with eating, drinking, sex, and all their followers; and so, we also called it the money-loving part, because such desires are most fulfilled by means of money. (580e–581a)

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[7]It bears remarking that this city of "utmost necessity" is not the same as the city ordered by philosophy that Plato goes on to develop in the central part of the *Republic*, and also that there does not appear to be any "natural" limit to philosophy.

[8]Cf. *Phaedo* (=*Phd*.), 66c: "Only the body and its desires cause war, civil discord and battles, for all wars are due to the desire to acquire wealth." Just a few pages earlier in the *Republic*, Glaucon, in presenting the conventional opinion of these matters for the sake of argument, had posited a "state of war" as the natural condition of human beings, and a "contract theory" of the state as a way to overcome this condition. This is, of course, a precursor to Hobbes' theory. The reason for the difference in their starting points is that Socrates assumes a difference between being and appearance, while Glaucon proceeds on the assumption that everything is essentially appearance: if war arises from the disorder of detaching appearance from being, to deny any reality beyond appearance will mean positing the state of war as the "natural" condition.

This lowest level, significantly, is difficult to name because, unlike the higher parts, it represents a relatively indeterminate multiplicity. One might have expected Socrates to reduce all of these appetites to the love of *pleasure*,[9] but this option is not available since the point of his distinguishing the parts of the soul and their corresponding loves is to compare the pleasure that each affords. Instead, he calls it the "desiring" part, not because desire is exclusive to this part—indeed, each part has its particular love—but because it is the "biggest and strongest" feature of this lowest part. This implies that desire, though present, is *not as such* the most significant thing, for example, in the love of wisdom, but rather, at that level, the object, wisdom, takes precedence over and so determines the desire. In this lowest part of the soul, then, conversely, it is not the object that stands out most, but the soul's own desirous relation to it. This is why Socrates can present "money-loving part" (φιλοχρήματον) as a synonym for "desiring part" (ἐπιθυμετικὸν): money, too, is not the object itself, but the *means* of attaining the object; it represents, in other words, a way of relating to actual objects of desire.

This interpretation is reinforced by the way Socrates goes on in the very next passage to specify the precise character of the object of this desire: "Then if we say that its pleasure and love is of gain (τοῦ κέρδους), [we would] most satisfactorily fix it in one general form for the argument" (581a). This allows him to describe the love that characterizes this third part of the soul as *either* "love of money" (φιλοχρήματον) *or* "love of gain" (φιλοκερδὲς). The word for "gain" here, *kerdos*, is essentially comparative: it means going beyond what is given, exceeding a certain measure, whether it be by outwitting another, outdoing him in possessions, or simply multiplying what one already has. The word can be translated as profit or advantage in addition to gain. It is interesting that Socrates does not mention this term directly in relation to the appetites designated by this third part of the soul, but only *after* he has introduced the notion of money. It would not make sense to talk about "profit" or "advantage," strictly speaking, *immediately* in relation to the desire for food, drink, and sex, precisely because these are natural desires and

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[9]Indeed, as Paul Shorey points out, a contemporary of Socrates, Isocrates, lists three classes of basic motives for human action: pleasure, gain, and honor: *Antid.* 217. See Shorey's commentary on his translation of the *Republic*: Loeb edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), vol. 2, 372–73, fn. e.

so have a natural limit. If we think of these appetites, however, not immediately, and so in their natural sense, but rather through the mediation of money, the perspective changes: while the *actual* enjoyment of such things is limited, there is no limit at all to the *potential*, to the *power*, to enjoy them, at least insofar as we separate this potential from any concrete possibility of realization. To understand the point we are making, it might help to compare it to the distinction Rousseau draws in the *Émile* between the healthy *amour de soi*, which represents the simple appetites and desire for self-preservation that each person possesses by nature, and the *amour propre* that is so to speak a bloated form of self-love, stretched beyond its natural condition: *amour propre* is the same regard for ourselves, but now mediated by what Rousseau takes to be the self-alienating regard of others. In an analogous way, the desire for food, drink, and sex, which is simple in itself, becomes boundless when the desire passes through money. Thus, the nature of these desires changes when they are determined, no longer by nature, but now by the unlimited power to pursue them. Aristotle demonstrated that there is no such thing as an *actual* infinity;[10] the desire for material gratification can be *boundless* only because it is not actual, but sheer potential. While the two other parts of the soul are set on something *actual* and therefore *real*—though of course they possess reality to different degrees—the desiring part of the soul is set on money, which is an instrument to its fulfillment. In other words, a soul characterized above all by love of money makes the means into its end.

Once we see that the love of money entails an inversion of means and ends, we can illuminate its significance by connecting it with one of the main recurrent themes in Plato's dialogues, namely, the theme of rhetoric. While we cannot enter into a discussion of Plato's view of rhetoric in any depth here, we wish to point out that the issue surrounding rhetoric concerns the confusion about being and seeming that arises from the tendency to reify or absolutize means, a tendency that the art of rhetoric encourages. A person who learns to speak well can give the impression of having wisdom without in fact having it in reality. To the suggestion that speaking well is a neutral instrument that can then be used to express either wisdom or ignorance, and that it can be learned in isolation from

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[10]Aristotle, *Physics*, 3.5.204a20.

content—i.e., it can be separated as a means from any particular end, and then made, as means, into an object of desire itself—Plato invariably shows that one cannot in fact learn to speak well *unless* one has genuine knowledge, and so rhetoric, even to be properly itself, *has* to be subordinated to the end it pursues, the form has to be determined in some basic way by content.[11] There is an essential order here: one cannot start first with the appearance, and *then* proceed to the reality, because appearance is by definition *of* reality. If one does attempt to proceed thus, one makes the appearance a reality in itself, regardless of what one's intentions might be, and as such it can only ever be juxtaposed to the "real reality," which is thus transformed into something of the same order, i.e., another mere appearance.

How does this problem illuminate Plato's view of the nature of money? Money is not wealth; it is the *appearance* of wealth. As we pointed out above, money is essentially an instrument or means. It is not humanly possible to *enjoy* money in itself (though of course one can live in an inhuman way, as we will see shortly). But if wealth refers to the actual possession of goods, the enjoyment of goods, then money ought to be defined as a *means* to wealth. Note that, the moment we think of it in these terms, we subordinate it to actuality, we measure wealth by the limits of actuality, or in other words, by the real shape of natural desires. Even more, we are led by the logic of the matter itself to judge, not just the potential to use or consume things, but the concrete way things are used and consumed, that is, the quality of the life as a whole to which the material goods belong. Does one's possession or use of a thing *in fact* improve or deteriorate the quality of one's life?[12] As this question suggests, it is not possible in the strict sense to judge one's wealth without making a basic moral judgment regarding the person's relation to his possessions. John Ruskin, a great admirer of Plato, and of his *Republic*

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[11]In the *Phaedrus*, in response to Lysias' bad speech about bad love, so to speak, Socrates first gives a *good* speech about bad love, and then finally a good speech about good love. In the *Lesser Hippias*, Socrates argues, with obvious irony, that only the wise person is strictly speaking able to lie. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates criticizes rhetoric for not being an *art* in the strict sense, because it does not contain "knowledge" about anything other than itself.

[12]See especially *Euthydemus*, 280b–e, 281b–d, 288e–289a; *Meno*, 88d–e. Cf. *Rep.*, 505a, where Socrates refers to this as an argument he makes regularly, with which his listeners would be familiar.

and *Laws* in particular, defines wealth in just this sense: wealth, he writes, is "the possession of the valuable by the valiant."[13] We recall that, when Socrates introduced money in the ideal city, it was precisely as a token, as a "symbol" of exchange, and thus as something that has its reality in allowing the transition from one real good to another. When this means is elevated above the actual goods it is meant to enable, it becomes a pseudo-good, a thing in itself that now *substitutes* for real wealth.

While Plato presents a number of things in his dialogues that encourage the mistaking of appearance for reality—which is how Plato defines ignorance[14]—money is arguably the paradigmatic case. Most obviously, if the deception becomes possible as soon as appearance gets "detached" from the reality that is given in nature, then money provides the perfect occasion for this deception: its *essence* lies in its being so detached; it is (in principle) pure artifice.[15] In a sense, anything at all can function as money as long as everyone agrees on it.[16] The word Plato uses when he first introduces the notion in the ideal city is *nomisma*, which comes from *nomos*, the word for convention—and which, incidentally, the sophists infamously affirmed as the polar opposite of *physis*, nature.[17] This complete separation from nature, as we saw above, is what allows the appetite for it to be essentially boundless.

Moreover, we ought now to consider that the same separation gives it a kind of pseudo-divinity, insofar as it makes money both universal and a-temporal. On the one hand, money is utterly indifferent, in itself, as to its use; it is a potential for anything, which

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[13]Ruskin paraphrased this definition from Xenophon's *Economist*. See Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 211. Ruskin argues that "[t]he real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life: and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction" (209). Ruskin suggests the name "illth" for the apparent goods that lead to destruction (211).

[14]See *Protagoras*, 357d–e.

[15]Even something like a precious metal, which has what we might call a natural goodness, nevertheless becomes *money* in the strict sense only by convention.

[16]See *Laws*, 742a.

[17]See *The Greek Sophists*, trans. and ed. John Dillon and Tania Gergel (New York: Penguin, 2003), xv–xvii.

is another way of saying that money is "omnipotent." Socrates suggests in book I of the *Republic* that money, as generally understood, is not so much a particular good as it is something that transcends any particular activity and makes one willing to do it, i.e., makes that activity a kind of good, if only in an instrumental sense (more on this later).[18] In this respect, it is universal goodness in an abstract sense. On the other hand, its abstraction also makes it timeless in a certain respect. As we saw above, Socrates introduces the *nomisma* precisely as a solution to the problem of time: producers do not have the time to wait for appropriate demand, and so need money, which allows them to make exchanges, as it were, instantaneously, freed from the constraints of the particularity of time. And, of course, money—for all intents and purposes—does not perish, as all natural goods tend to do. It can be kept for as long as needed, and used at will. It is interesting to note that Plato often talks about the need for patience, and the natural rhythms of seasons, when he describes a life that is based on the real.[19] But money has no seasons. There is no doubt a connection between the hoarding of "immortal" money—as opposed to the hoarding of food, clothing, etc., which is much more obviously foolish—and the fear of death; and it is just this fear that Socrates identifies as the supreme presumption, i.e., the highest form of ignorance, because it groundlessly assumes knowledge about what is ultimate, which means it treats an appearance as the ultimate reality.[20]

Let us explore the universality of money further. As we just pointed out, money represents a universal kind of goodness *precisely because* it has no connection with reality, i.e., because it is a purely conventional symbol. But this makes it the perfect opposite of what Plato presents as the truly divine, namely, "the idea of the good." Like money, the idea of the good transcends all particularity, so that it, too, is universal. Everything that is good in any way at all, according to Plato, is good by virtue of goodness itself. But unlike money, this universality is not due to its *separation* from reality; quite the contrary, it is the source of reality, which makes it at the same

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[18]*Rep.*, 346e–347a.

[19]In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Plato describes the serious person as being like a farmer, who follows the seasons, takes care with his work, and does not expect immediate results: *Phdr.*, 276b–c.

[20]See *Ap.*, 29a.

time the cause of all truth and knowledge.[21] This difference has endless implications. In the famous allegory of the cave, in book VII of the *Republic*, Plato depicts the prisoners shackled to a seat from childhood, unable to move about or see anything but shadows cast from a flame behind them, before which puppeteers manipulate fabricated images of realities that exist outside of the cave, illumined by the real light of the sun. The allegory is meant, in the first place, to depict in a vivid way the existential significance of the difference between being and appearance, one of the most striking aspects of which is what we might call the social implication. The prisoners are isolated from one another to the very same extent that they are cut off from reality; their connection to everything that is not themselves is mediated by a screen, which means that there is nothing to transcend beyond themselves to, but they are trapped, as it were, in their immediate experience, in pure phenomenality or appearance. If we were to ask, What is the scope of their experience?, the answer would be ambiguous. On the one hand, there is *in principle* nothing that cannot be projected onto the cave wall. In this respect, the prisoners have immediate access to everything without having to leave their seat, that is, without having to change, to grow, to conform to anything greater than themselves; the world, instead, shrinks to their measure. But on the other hand, for that very reason one can say that they have no experience whatsoever, insofar as experience implies an encounter with what is *other* than oneself.[22]

Now, the point in reflecting on the allegory of the cave in the present context is the following: in possessing money, there is a certain sense in which one has everything, but there is another sense in which one has nothing at all, because money is nothing but a means. Plato says that the prisoners, who have never experienced anything beyond experience itself—i.e., never experienced anything *real*—"would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (515c). There has always been debate about what exactly in the reality of fourth-century Athens Plato had in mind when he wrote "shadows of artificial things." While the evidence points perhaps most directly to art objects, and most particularly to

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[21] *Rep.*, 508e–509a.

[22] See Robert Spaemann's reflections on the meaning of experience in "Ende der Modernität?" in *Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 240–42.

the tales of the poets,[23] an argument can be made that his characterization of money fits the description perfectly: if the non-necessary desires aim at luxuries, which may fairly be called "artificial things" since they exceed what is necessary by nature, money is not one of those artificial things but rather *represents* them as the means by which they are attained, even if this representation, through disorder, thereby becomes itself the direct object of desire. Money is thus, not real, but an image twice removed from reality. We have seen that Plato characterizes the soul given to the lowest level, the most facile experiences, as a "lover of money," which means that this sort of soul would be located indeed at the bottom of the cave. To love money above all other things is to be wedded to appearance, and money encourages a disordered love of this sort precisely because it presents itself, not as something opposed to all other things, so that one's love would be divided, but rather as the most immediate *means* to all other things. Without such a deception, the bonds holding the prisoners would be much more painfully felt.

3. Paying for education

It is significant that, when introducing the allegory of the cave, Socrates refers to it explicitly as an image of education.[24] The most familiar form of education at this time in Athens, at least for the well-to-do, was the institution of sophistry, from which, we recall, Socrates distinguished himself in his apology by pointing out that he does not charge any fee. What difference does money in fact make in the act of education? In one of the best known scenes in Plato's dialogues, at the beginning of the *Protagoras*, a wealthy young man, Hippocrates, arrives at Socrates' house before the crack of dawn—apparently after a night of drunken revelry[25]—scarcely able to

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[23]See Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun* (New York: Viking, 1991).

[24]*Rep*., 514a.

[25]Hippocrates' nocturnal adventure is not made explicit in the text, but Alexander Aichele makes a convincing argument that Plato intends to suggest this by planting a number of clues: "Verdient Protagoras sein Geld? Was der junge Hippokrates lernen könnte, aber nicht darf," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 27, no. 2 (2002): 131–47, here: 132–34. After similarly characterizing this opening scene, David Roochnik says of Hippocrates: "The boy is in need. He is lazy; he wishes simply to pay a fee and be made wise, rather than engage in any difficult

contain himself: the famous sophist Protagoras has arrived in Athens, and Hippocrates wishes to enroll as his student. He is willing to pay any price for this privilege: "I'd bankrupt myself and my friends too" (310e). But to become Protagoras' student he needs to be introduced by someone older than he—hence, his coming to Socrates. In short order, Socrates reveals through a few well-placed questions that Hippocrates in fact has no idea what he is looking for from Protagoras, which leads Socrates to offer a grave word of caution:

> And watch, or the sophist might deceive us in advertising what he sells, the way merchants who market food for the body do. In general, those who market provisions don't know what is good or bad for the body—they just recommend everything they sell—nor do those who buy (unless one happens to be a trainer or a doctor). In the same way, those who take their teachings from town to town and sell them wholesale or retail to anybody who wants them recommend all their products, but I wouldn't be surprised, my friend, if some of these people did not know which of their products are beneficial and which detrimental to the soul.[26] Likewise those who buy from them, unless one happens to be a physician of the soul. So if you are a knowledgeable consumer, you can buy teachings safely from Protagoras or anyone else. But if you're not, please don't risk what is most dear to you on a roll of the dice, for there is a far greater risk in buying teachings than in buying food. When you buy food and drink from the merchant you can take each item back home from the store in its own container and before you ingest it into your body you can lay it all out and call in an expert for consultation as to what should be eaten or drunk and what not, and how much and when. So there's not much risk in your purchase. But you cannot carry teachings away in a separate container. You put down your money and take the teaching away in your soul by having learned it, and off you go, either helped or injured. (313d–314b)

With this warning, he takes Hippocrates to Protagoras in order to ask the sophist to explain precisely what it is he is selling. He answers: "What I teach is sound deliberation, both in domestic matters—how best to manage one's household, and in public affairs—how to realize one's maximum potential for success in

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course of study himself (310d6)," *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1996), 230.

[26]Cf. *Gorgias* (=*Grg.*), 464b–466a.

political debate and action" (318e–319a). Socrates sums all of this up in the word "*arētē*," i.e., "virtue" or "excellence," and proceeds to introduce the discussion that occupies the body of the dialogue, namely, whether virtue can be taught (and therefore sold!).

While it would be interesting for our theme to enter into the details of that discussion, we already have enough in Protagoras' initial response to raise several basic points. In the first place, we note a striking difference between this opening scene of the *Protagoras*, and Socrates' depiction of the liberation of the prisoners from the cave: in the latter, the liberation is resisted, and the liberator is mocked and so utterly rejected that, as Socrates suggests, if the prisoners could get their hands on him they would kill him.[27] In the *Protagoras*, by contrast, the sophist's potential student is so desirous to learn he is willing to pay any price. Note: we say "pay any price" rather than "to give whatever is necessary" because, as Plato suggests elsewhere, and other anecdotes about Socrates echo, what Socrates asks is a willingness to give, not what one *has*, but what one *is*, to give *oneself*, and that one thereby receives Socrates' *self* in return—which is precisely what is resisted. A willingness to pay that is detached from an involvement of one's being is the exact expression of a particular kind of desire, namely, that embodied by those in the cave who want everything they can reach . . . from their seats. In other words, it is a desire for pure appearance rather than for reality itself—or, more precisely, it is the ignorance that believes appearance will satisfy what is in fact inescapably a desire for reality.

To pay for knowledge, moreover, is to give the student-teacher relation the form of a contract, which indeed has implications for the content of that relationship.[28] A glance at the *Phaedrus*

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[27]See *Rep.*, 517a.

[28]David Corey considers this point in his article defending the practice of sophistry, "The Case Against Teaching Virtue for Pay: Socrates and the Sophists," *History of Political Thought* 23, no. 2 (2002): 189–210. He argues that the "business deal" model is rejected essentially because it *binds* the teacher to the student and thus makes him a sort of slave. Corey objects to this argument, pointing out that there is no evidence anywhere that the sophists ever complained about being a slave (197). He misses the point, of course, on two counts: one, the most genuine slavery, for Plato, is the one that the prisoner chooses himself, i.e., in which it is his own desires that bind him (see *Phd.*, 82e–83a). Second, the problem of the business-deal model, as we are arguing here, is not that it binds teacher and student together, but that it *doesn't*, because it lacks a true common good that would hold them together.

is helpful here: one of the questions Plato explores in the first half of this dialogue is what becomes of *eros*, what shape does it acquire, when it is conceived essentially as a business deal. He shows that what it most directly loses in this case is its self-transcending character, its ecstatic movement toward the beautiful. The reason this element necessarily disappears[29] is that one enters into a contract by setting the *terms* of one's relation beforehand, i.e., prior to the actual relation. Granted that all action is "interested," in the sense that it is always the pursuit of what one takes to be good,[30] a contractual relation is essentially "self-interested," in the sense that the measure of the interest that governs the act is determined by the self in abstraction from its relation to the other to the extent that the act is rational at all. While the contract may present itself as offering a "common good,"[31] the deal cannot in fact logically be anything other than an accidental convergence of private goods, which means it is the reciprocal reduction of the other to the terms of the self. The only thing that can be exchanged in this case is what each *possesses* rather than what each *is*; there is no exchange, that is, of *selves*, but only of appearance. But this means that there is no eros: eros, as self-transcendence and therefore as genuine intimacy, cannot result from terms set by individuals beforehand, but only from an epiphany of beauty, which exists a priori.

The cave allegory depicts an analogous relationship in the matter of education: as we observed above, pure "phenomenality" is complete isolation, wherein each remains in his own world. The condition of possibility for union with another is the existence of a common reality that transcends each, and thus "sets the terms" of the relation beyond what each individual would be able to set for himself. Considered essentially as a business deal, education would consist of the student as passive spectator and the sophist as the puppeteer, casting the shadow, as he wills, of figurines essentially of his own making. By contrast, the liberator seeks to bring the student

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[29]Note the phrasing: it *disappears*, that is, it becomes hidden, which is different from becoming absent. Significantly, Socrates begins his speech by saying that the one offering the "deal" is actually in love, i.e., he is moved by what he takes to be the good, but that he *disguises* this fact: *Phdr.*, 237b.

[30]*Rep.*, 505d–e; cf. *Grg.*, 468b.

[31]Lysias presents the offer as a "ὠφελίαν . . . ἀμφοῖν," a gain for both parties: *Phdr.*, 234c.

into a relation with a reality to which the liberator himself is subordinate: he attempts to lead him to the world outside. We might call him, in this case, not so much a teacher as a *midwife*.[32] Because the reality lies beyond the educator, too, it is not something he can in fact sell. Instead, he can only lead, approaching the reality *with* the student. This common subordination to a common reality is thus what makes genuine education an intimate act. The fact that the student will at least in some sense resist follows of necessity: the education is real only if the student is brought beyond what he thinks he wants prior to his relation to reality. For this reason, it cannot have the form of a contract by definition. We will return to this point in a moment.

It is not an accident, then, that Protagoras characterizes his "wares" the way he does: what catches our eye first, no doubt, is the word "success," because we see it so often on university brochures and hear it regularly at commencement addresses. But the more interesting feature is its decisively pragmatic or "instrumentalist" character. Protagoras claims to provide the capacity for "sound deliberation." He does not offer success, in fact, but "how to realize one's potential for success" (or as we would put it "how to acquire the tools to be successful"); he does not teach what a proper household is, but "how best to manage one's household." In other words, what Protagoras is selling is not an actual education, but rather the means to, the *potential* for, education, in much the same way that money represents the *potential* for wealth. As nothing but "skills," it is an image, or appearance, rather than the real thing itself. It is just for this reason that Hippocrates takes for granted, when Socrates first questions him, that "a sophist is expert at . . . making people clever speakers" (312d).[33] But in fact, strictly speaking, he ought to have said "expert at making people *appear* to be clever speakers," which, according to Plato, is a radically different thing, insofar as to have the *potential* or power to speak well in reality requires that one first have the *actuality* of knowledge concerning that about which one speaks. It is for this reason that the question most famously associated with the person of Socrates as Plato presents him is not πῶς; "How?," but rather τί ἔστιν; "What is . . . ?," for his aim is in the first place coming to understand things, an aim that

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[32]See *Theaetetus*, 149aff.

[33]Cf. *Grg.*, 449a–b.

takes its measure principally by the *good* that makes reality what it is.[34] It is precisely because this is a *theoretical*, rather than practical, question that it always arrives as a troublesome interruption of one's projects.[35] If one is going to pay, in this case, one would most immediately rather pay for the removal of this nuisance, which is another way of saying for the "power" to be free from the claims that reality makes on us: the sophist, Gorgias, in Plato's dialogue of the same name, points to just this sort of freedom as the aim of sophistry.[36] Education, as a claim on one's being, costs too much, as it were. You cannot buy an education; but you *can* buy the appearance of an education.

There is a logical connection between the fact that the institution of sophistry proceeds by way of a *contract* between student and teacher—which reduces each to the other, rather than elevating them both to something higher—and the fact that there is no truth here. Money, as an image, has value sufficient only for the purchase of other images. The observation that Plato makes regarding the Egyptians and Phoenicians in this regard is significant. On the one hand, he remarks that they are the most notorious lovers of money.[37] On the other hand, he says in the *Laws* that just this love of money causes their education to aim, not at wisdom, but at πανουργία.[38] Etymologically, the Greek word means the ability to do anything (*pan-ourgos*)—and, note, this once again concerns the *potential* rather than *actuality*—but in fact the word is correctly translated as "knavery" or "roguery." Hypostasizing means is not neutral, in spite of appearances.

We may sum up Plato's view of money and education in a metaphor he presents in the *Phaedo*. Here, Socrates has just argued that a person who exhibits courage in battle only because he fears the

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[34]On the good as the most perfect measure: *Rep.*, 504b–505a.

[35]In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates meets the young man after whom the dialogue is named, who is in a great hurry to the law courts to carry out his plan of prosecuting his father. Socrates raises questions about the *meaning* of what he is doing, which stops him, for a time, in his tracks. In order to continue with his project, he has to shrug the questions off in the end unresolved. See *Euthyphro*, 15e.

[36]*Grg.*, 452d.

[37]*Rep.*, 435c.

[38]*Laws*, 747c.

harm that will come to him if his army loses does not in truth possess virtue. He then concludes:

> My good Simmias, I fear this is not the right exchange to attain virtue, to exchange pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains and fears for fears, the greater for the less like coins (ὥσπερ νομίσματα), but that the only valid currency for which all these things should be exchanged is wisdom. With this we have real courage and moderation and justice and, in a word, true virtue, with wisdom, whether pleasures and fears and all such things are added or taken away. Exchanged for one another without wisdom such virtue is only an illusory appearance of virtue. (69a–b, translation modified)[39]

Coins have a fixed value, which means they can be exchanged in fact only for what is of equal or lesser value than they. An image, thus, cannot be exchanged for a reality on the model of a business deal. There is irony, then, in Socrates' going on to call genuine virtue the "true currency": he suggests that lesser things ought to be exchanged for *it*, but this is no longer a business deal. It is much more like a renunciation, or perhaps a conversion, in which one lets go of what one had formerly taken to be real in order to take hold of what is truly real. Far from putting this "true currency" on a par with that for which it is exchanged, Socrates lifts it up above all these things: the possessor of virtue is thus indifferent to the addition or subtraction of pleasures and pains, which is another way of saying that true virtue is non-negotiable. As a genuine end in itself, education has no exchange value.

4. Money and work

But the question of how money transforms one's relationship to reality extends beyond the institution of education into every instance of human work, even if Plato's view of education remains a paradigm for all of these. In Socrates' altercation with Thrasymachus in book I of the *Republic*, Thrasymachus offers the argument that a ruler performs the function of his office for his own advantage, just like every other practitioner of an art. Socrates points

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[39]Cf. *Symposium*, 218e, wherein Socrates chides Alcibiades for trying to acquire true beauty (of being) in exchange for the mere surface appearance of beauty.

out that, strictly speaking, every art is logically directed to the advantage, not of itself, but of the reality to which it is directed: medicine does not heal *itself*, it heals the body; and so on with all of the arts (341c–342c). If a doctor earns a wage, he does not do so *qua* doctor, but *qua* wage-earner; wage-earning is a distinct art that is not *essentially* connected with the art of medicine (346b–c). This leads Socrates to an observation that is especially interesting if we consider it ontologically and in light of our discussion of the cave: the reason people demand wages for the practice of their art is that the art itself aims at a good that is not in an immediate sense their own (346e–347a). In other words, the practice of an art, according to its inner logic, draws a person *out* of himself and *to* reality, that is, to an objective good that lies beyond his own. In this sense, there is an analogy between the practice of an art and the liberation from the prison of self-absorbed phenomenality that Socrates describes in the allegory of the cave. To involve oneself in a reality through the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, an acquisition that is laborious precisely because it is *objective*, that is, because it requires the soul to conform to something outside of itself in its simple immediacy, is an act of self-transcendence. *Artful* work is ecstatic.[40] But if this is the case, and if it is also true that it is impossible to act in a non-interested way, then work in itself would lack the means sufficient to draw the soul to it; hence, Socrates says, it is necessary to provide wages, which thus *adds* the worker's good to the good of the reality to which work is directed, thus making the ecstatic act *also* self-referential. Money, as we said before, has a universality that can give a self-referential value to all things that do not possess such value in themselves. There is a natural resistence to work, because it is not immediately our good, but we are happy to do it for a fee.

By observing that the practitioners of any art require wages for their work by the very nature of that work, Plato appears to be giving money a certain importance in human affairs. But there are

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[40]We specify "artful" work, here, with Plato's notion of art, τεχνή in mind, a word that may also be translated as "craft." Plato distinguishes this from a kind of activity that is done without the objectivity, or reality-directedness, that he calls ἐμπειρία, which may be translated in this context as "knack," but—significantly—more generally means "experience": see *Grg.*, 462b–c. It is not at all accidental that this pseudo-craft tends to "benefit" its practitioner, or those who "own" the labor, above all.

several reasons why this impression is false, or at the very least only half-true. In the first place, he does not say in this context specifically that *money* is necessary, but only, more generally, some kind of wage, and in fact lists several possibilities in relation specifically to the art of ruling: money, honor, or a penalty for not ruling (347a). Second, he then goes on to explain that "the good aren't willing to rule for the sake of money or honor," but instead must be attracted to the office primarily as a way to avoid the punishment of being ruled by a bad man. We will come back to this point shortly. Third, Socrates criticizes Thrasymachus for violating the integrity of human activity by *replacing* the intrinsic good of the act, the good of the object to which the art is directed, with an extrinsic benefit:

> As it is, Thrasymachus, you see that—still considering what went before—after you had first defined the true doctor, you later thought it no longer necessary to keep a precise guard over the true shepherd. Rather you think that he, insofar as he is a shepherd, fattens the sheep, not looking to what is best for the sheep, but, like a guest who is going to be feasted, to good cheer, or in turn, to the sale, like a money-maker and not a shepherd. The shepherd's art surely cares for nothing but providing the best for what it has been set over. For that the art's own affairs be in the best possible way is surely adequately provided for so long as it lacks nothing of being the shepherd's art. And, similarly, I for my part thought just now that it is necessary for us to agree that every kind of rule, insofar as it is rule, considers what is best for nothing other than for what is ruled and cared for, both in political and private rule. (345b–e)

To engage in an act primarily for its extrinsic benefits is to deprive the act of its truth, to pervert the act, which, using our earlier language, is tantamount to enclosing oneself in the prison of phenomenality, cut off from reality.[41] Finally, when Socrates introduces the concept of money himself in describing the true city in book II, he establishes as its primary purpose, *not* to be an end for the sake of which one works, but to be a *means* that enables one to facilitate the exchange of one's surplus for things that one needs, though he allows money *in a secondary sense* to play a more basic role specifically for those otherwise unable to engage in productive work, the tradesmen and wage-earners. In short, Socrates rejects the idea

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[41]See the passage cited above, *Phd.*, 82e–83a.

that money ought to be the "prime mover" of any human activity as a rule. The only good, in fact, that he permits in book I for the engagement in work, it seems, is the negative one, avoidance of punishment. Can he be serious? He is certainly painting a picture that would be horrifying, no doubt, to all but the most "other-worldly" of people.

But a broader reading of the *Republic* shows that Plato has more to offer on this question than Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus would seem to indicate. Later in the dialogue, Socrates lists the three possible ends that motivate activity once again, beginning with money, and honor, but instead of "avoidance of punishment" he now says "wisdom."[42] What accounts for the difference in the two lists is that he has in the meantime introduced the idea of the good. What Plato calls the *essential* end of everything anyone does he does not reveal until the dramatic center of the dialogue: it is for the sake of the good, he says, that we do all that we do.[43] Before the revelation of this reality, Socrates can describe the highest end only in negative terms, only in relation to the shadow it casts, as it were,[44] as a desire *not* to have what is *not* good. But once he introduces the notion of the good, by contrast, he can say that the one who ought to rule in the city is the one whose desire is set once and for all on the good[45]; such a one, who would prefer a life of contemplation, is nonetheless willing to return to the cave of practical life, so to speak, because it is good to do so, and it is precisely the good that he wants above all other things.[46] He thus brings contemplation

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[42]See *Rep.*, 581a–c.

[43]*Rep.*, 505d–e.

[44]It appears that Plato intended to present the discussion in book I, which forms a "prelude" to the rest (357a), as taking place in the cave: the only time the notion that a reality beyond appearance is mentioned is in Socrates' conversation with Polemarchus (see 334c–336a), but it is precisely at this moment that Thrasymachus violently interrupts and moves the conversation back in the direction of the play of appearances. Socrates is clearly portrayed as the philosopher who "goes down" into the cave. The first word of the dialogue, κατέβειν, "I went down," is the same word used to describe the philosophers who descend back into the cave after seeing the light of the good: 520c.

[45]*Rep.*, 519c. Cf. *Grg.*, 499e–500a.

[46]*Rep.*, 520b–521a.

into praxis, he makes the ultimate good, for the sake of which he rules, evident in the practice of this office.

In order to understand Plato properly, we have to realize that this "motivation" is not simply the highest of the possible "wages" for actions, above money or honor, but is in fact the reality of which any other motivation is simply an image. This means that what looks unrealistic—to eyes, we must add, accustomed only to darkness—is in fact the reality that shows the images for what they are.[47] What we ought to see in this context is that what Plato says here about ruling can be applied to all other arts: the only motivation in reality for the doing of any work, no matter what appearances may suggest, is simply the good. We want money, for example, not because it is money, but ultimately because we take it to be *good*.[48] Socrates had said that there must be a "common" good that transcends the particular good embodied in any art, for the sake of which a person would practice it, since the particular good of the art is specifically *not* the good of the practitioner, and in the initial context he points to wages as the example. But, as we have seen, money is nothing more than an image of the true universality of goodness itself, and in fact it is a deceptive image insofar as it is essentially private rather than common—we cannot all have the same money, while we cannot but have the same goodness; money makes work valuable essentially by adding self-referentiality in an extrinsic way to what is good only in itself *and not* for the self involved in it. But Plato distinguishes three possible ways of being good as the first point made after the "prelude" of book I (357b–358a): something can be merely good in itself, good both in itself and in its consequences, or good merely in its consequences. While he, significantly, suggests that all money-making activities belong in the third category—i.e., these are things we do not do for their own sake but rather for the wages we receive from them—he says that the *highest* sort of good is the second category.

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[47]This point gets worked out more fully in D. C. Schindler, "On Being Invisible: Socratic Asceticism and the Philosophical Life," in *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* 4 (2007).

[48]In *Symposium* 205e–206a, Diotima "corrects" Aristophanes' famous myth explaining eros as a desire to be reunited to our "other half," by pointing out that we would want such a reunion *only* if the "other half" is good, and concludes that this qualification can be applied in every case. Cf. *Grg.*, 467e–468b.

This means that ideal goodness is good *both* in itself *and* in what it brings forth.

If we cast the light this characterization of types of goodness sheds on our present theme, we may infer that the love of money leads us *away* from the objective reality of our work, while love of goodness itself requires that we *also* love the particular realities themselves that are good. Money, we suggested above, is universal precisely in an abstract sense, because it is purely conventional, which means it has no connection to nature, and it is this detachment from all things that allows it to be, in principle, exchanged for any of them. Our suggestion now is that this detachment from reality is also what makes money universal specifically in a wholly self-referential sense, i.e., as non-transcendent. The good, by contrast, is universal as the source of reality; it is, as it were, present in all things as their essentially transcendent cause. Because of this "non-abstract" transcendence, the good is, so to speak, a "wage" that exceeds the particularity of any art, but in contrast to money, which is *essentially* extrinsic to the art, it is *also* the goodness that belongs to the art. But the very same good is that which we pursue in every end we seek. This means that the very ecstasis in the practice of an art, the kind of selflessness involved in the careful attentiveness to the good of the reality to which the art is logically ordered, is not contrary to one's interest but is in fact the highest fulfillment of that interest. A business deal, which benefits both parties, is nonetheless *not* a common good, that is, a single good that transcends both and therefore serves to unite them; instead, it is one thing that provides two private goods, which isolates the two from one another even as it creates a mutual dependence (and so mutual use).[49]

The difference between the two types of relation is immense: as extrinsic to the art, money presents a good that *competes with* the logical end of the art, and so while the good of the object of the art may happen to coincide with the profit pursued as an end, it may just as well not happen to coincide, so that even if it does, it does so only in an accidental manner: there is an ontological reason why it is an insult to call a person a mercenary, and why one who works

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[49]See the insightful observations Lewis Hyde makes regarding the difference that exists between "commodity exchange" and "gift exchange" specifically in the effects each has on community: *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 56–73.

primarily for money rarely takes a deep interest in his work. In this case, love of money is indeed corrosive of all human activity, since it withdraws one from the transcendence of goodness to the extent it is made the end of the soul's desire, or to put it in more classical language, it is the root of all evil. Love of the good, however, is not at all exclusive of the love of one's particular work, but in fact demands it, as we suggested above. Indeed, the more truly one loves the good, the more truly one will love the work itself insofar as the work is good, and will take care to bring that work as close as possible to perfection.

While the love of money by its very inner logic binds one to appearance, the love of goodness is a liberation from appearance, and brings one ever more deeply in relation to reality:[50] if one is working for money, what matters above all is that one's work *appear* to others to be well done. Plato points to the "competition" between money and the good in his description of the progressive decomposition of social order in the *Republic*: ". . . from there they progress in money-making and the more honorable they consider it, the less honorable they consider virtue. Or isn't virtue in tension with wealth, as though each were lying in the scale of a balance, always inclining in opposite directions?"[51] When Socrates protests in the *Apology* that he does not charge, he is therefore saying much more than is immediately apparent: he is giving witness to a particular way of relating to God and to reality as a whole. It is precisely money that marks the difference between the sophist and the philosopher, and, as we have been suggesting, this is not simply a difference between two ways of teaching or educating, but is a difference that runs through all human activities whatsoever. Whatever one does, one can do it *sophistically*, which means one literally takes only a superficial interest in it, or one can do it *philosophically*, which means one loves the reality itself. It is the difference between being and merely seeming.

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[50]"Isn't it clear that many men would choose to do, possess, and enjoy the reputation for things that are opined to be just and fair, even if they aren't, while, when it comes to good things, no one is satisfied with what is opined to be so but each seeks the things that *are*, and from here on out everyone despises the opinion?" (*Rep.*, 505d).

[51]*Rep.*, 550e.

5. A truly free market

It may appear that Plato is offering a root and branch critique of money, and those who would like to dismiss his theory as wholly irrelevant, if not to the world as such then at least to the world we in fact live in, would no doubt wish to think he is; but in fact his understanding of money in its relation to reality is much more sophisticated. His position toward money is like his position toward images in general: they are not bad as such, but only become bad when they substitute for reality. Or to put it more precisely, an image *as image*, that is, *as an expression* of what is true, is essentially good; it becomes bad only insofar as it ceases to be image, and presumes to be a reality *juxtaposed* to the higher reality apparent to the soul. In this sense, Plato is not at all the gnostic dualist he is often claimed to be; his philosophy is, rather, a fundamental critique of such dualism.[52] With respect to our present theme, we have to keep in mind that money played for him an indispensable role in what he called the *true* city. But a true city is one the order of which is determined in the first place by the nature of reality; in such a city, the role of money is essentially limited, because it has its meaning in subordination to the determinate form of nature. As an indirect result of these determinate realities, we may say that money is not only necessary, but also *good*.[53] It is only when it is abstracted from this subordinate place that it becomes destructive of the limit and therefore of reality or form. We recall that the highest mode of being good, for Plato, is a thing's being good *both* in itself *and* in its consequences, so that affirming the good requires an affirmation of

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[52]For arguments against a "dualistic" interpretation of Plato, see Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Plato's Two-Level Model* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1999), C. J. de Vogel, *Rethinking Plato and Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), and Eric Perl, "The Presence of the Paradigm: Immanence and Transcendence in Plato's Theory of Forms," *Review of Metaphysics* 53 (1999): 339–62. Note, this is not to say that Plato's philosophy is wholly adequate, so that there is no need for any other. It is just to relieve him of the particular charge of dualism.

[53]"For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your money in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul, as I say to you: 'Money does not come from excellence, but from excellence comes money and *all other good things* to man, both to the individual and to the people collectively'" (*Apology* 30a–b). Translation modified, emphasis added.

those consequences as well. In the case at hand, loving the good demands not only loving one's particular work, as we said above; it would also require loving the money that comes from one's particular work. But the order is crucial. When Socrates seeks in the *Republic* to discover whether justice is good in itself, he first brackets out wages and "all seeming" in order to be able to distinguish justice from a money-making activity.[54] But after he discloses its intrinsic goodness, he then insists at the end of the dialogue that all wages be restored and that the just man receive his due rewards.[55] (Indeed, anything else, he says, would be unjust!) Moreover, although Socrates shows an indifference to money in the *Apology*, when asked to propose a punishment once he was found guilty, he claims that it would be just for him to be paid for his work, and so suggests that, like the Olympic victors, yet more deserving than they, he be given free meals at the Prytaneum.[56] It is essential, though, to see that he is going to continue to do his "work" regardless of whether he receives any extrinsic benefit, simply because he knows it to be good. The point, in the end, is that, like the child in marriage,[57] money, properly understood, ought not to be the object of an act, but rather the indirect fruit of a true relation—which, it must be emphasized, does not mean it cannot be intended or desired. Quite the contrary. But it must be intended and desired as the "spontaneous" fruit of what is real. What is at issue, here, is not subjective intention in the first place, but ontological order.

To the extent that money is, as it were, an indirect object, an *incidental* part of a genuine economic pursuit, one is never bound to it, measured by the terms that money sets. Instead, one is free with respect to money and bound only to limits that are in fact true, that is, bound to *actual goods*. In this case, money serves reality, rather than the reverse. Plato describes a properly free relation to money thus:

> the citizens' wealth should be limited to the products of farming, and even here a man should not be able to make so much that he

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[54]See *Rep.*, 361b.

[55]*Rep.*, 612b–e.

[56]*Ap.*, 36d–e.

[57]The word τοκός, indeed, can mean either "child" or, in relation to money, "interest." Plato puns on this ambiguity in *Rep.*, 506e–507a.

> can't help forgetting the real reason why money was invented (I mean for the care of the soul and body, which without physical and cultural education respectively will never develop into anything worth mentioning). That's what has made us say more than once that the pursuit of money should come last in the scale of value. Every man directs his efforts to three things in all, and if his efforts are directed with a correct sense of priorities, he will give money the third and lowest place, and his soul the highest, with his body coming somewhere between the two.[58]

To glance, for a moment, at the contemporary world, we might suggest that a proper indifference to money, which is a love of money only as a kind of natural fruit of more fundamental loves and one that helps those loves thrive, would be the true meaning of the expression "free market economy." Although we cannot pursue the question here, it may well be asked whether capitalism as an economic system is compatible with a free market economy so conceived, i.e., as interpreted from the perspective of Plato's critique of money. If capitalism means that capital, i.e., *stored* money, or money that has been, so to speak, removed from circulation and thereby abstracted from the actuality of concrete exchange, is the *principle*, the ἀρχή, of the economy, then the answer would appear to be "no."[59] Whether Plato's critique of money requires the complete prohibition of the "storing" of wealth is debatable. He seems to prohibit the storing and multiplying of capital, at least in excess amounts, in the *Laws*,[60] and points to the collecting of gold and silver in secret treasuries in the *Republic* as a primary indicator of the emergence of disorder in the city.[61] On the other hand, as we saw above, he does not *exclude* tradesmen, whose business is, indeed, money itself, from the true city, which would make one think his

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[58]*Laws*, 743d–e.

[59]See Hyde, *The Gift*, 3–24, on the "life-denying" quality of an economic system in which what is valuable is taken out of circulation for the private benefit of a single individual.

[60]*Laws*, 743d. See also 741e–742a: "no private person shall be allowed to possess any gold or silver, but only coinage for day-to-day dealings which one can hardly avoid having with workmen and all other indispensable people of that kind (we have to pay wages to slaves and foreigners who work for money). For these purposes, we agree, they must possess coinage, legal tender among themselves, but valueless to the rest of mankind."

[61]*Rep.*, 548a.

exclusion of capital is not absolute. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out, the city remains true only insofar as this use of capital is *secondary*. By extrapolation, we may educe that Plato would reject capitalism as the base economic system, and therefore as setting the terms for all of the exchanges that take place within the economy so defined, but would allow the saving of money *within limits*—i.e., specifically the limits set by reality. In other words, given Plato's principles, it seems that the saving of money ought to be affirmed to the extent that it actually promotes proper use and enjoyment, as subordinate to these, and rejected to the extent that saving is given priority over these. The decisive question is whether the *primary* meaning of money is capital, or, rather, it is taken in truth as a "symbol of exchange."[62]

To make money primarily a principle is to make it a cause rather than an effect, a reality rather than an image, and it will be inevitable, in such a system, that real goods—whether they be intellectual or spiritual goods, human goods that have their proper place in human life, or the work that produces those goods—come to receive their measure from that which is, by nature, an *appearance*. This is the very definition of disorder, or, to use a more Platonic term, of ignorance (ἄγνοια). An economic system is genuinely free to the extent that money bears some real relation to *actual* goods, which means goods actualized by proper (i.e., virtuous) use and consumption. It is disordered, by contrast, to the extent that money is made a basis or an object of economic activity: because, as Plato points out, money can be exchanged only for what is of less value, a strictly money-based economy can grow only in a purely "horizontal" sense, which means in terms of geographical expansion or the multiplication of non-necessary desires. To use money to

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[62]It is illuminating, in this regard, to consider the general conclusions Trever draws from his study of Greek economics, the most significant in relation to our theme we quote here: "that the final goal of economics is not property but human welfare; . . . that money originated in necessary exchange; that it serves as a medium of exchange, a standard of value, and a ticket of deferred payments; . . . that it should not be confused with wealth, but should be understood in its true function as representative wealth; . . . that the primary purpose of exchange should not be profit, but satisfaction of economic need; that commerce merely for its own sake does not necessarily increase the national store, but may produce only inequalities; . . . that the goal of economics is consumption rather than production, and that foolish consumption results in great economic waste; that all economic problems are moral problems," and so forth (*A History of Greek Economic Thought*, 146–47).

produce money, in abstraction from the limits determined by real goods, is necessarily at some level to betray the order of the good, which is why Plato, like Aristotle and the classical Christian tradition, was disdainful of the practice of usury in principle.[63] This disdain finds expression in his description of the disordered city in a late stage of its decomposition. When money has been elevated to a governing principle, those who rule in fact encourage licentiousness among the youth, since this serves to generate wealth, going so far as to allow a person to sell all that he has (which Plato calls the greatest of all political evils[64]) and to take extravagant loans that they cannot reasonably be expected to pay:

> And these money-makers, with heads bent down, not seeming to see these men [i.e., those who have been stripped of their property and dignity through bad loans], wound with injections of silver any man among the remainder who yields; and carrying off from the father a multiple offspring in interest, they make the drone and the beggar great in the city. (555e–556a)[65]

That the contemporary economic system bears many of the features of what Plato characterizes as disorder is impossible to deny. Moral recommendations to individuals do not provide an adequate response to this problem: as an instance of *disorder*, it can be redressed properly only by the restoration of order, which means the problem calls for more fundamental thinking regarding the very structural principles of economics.[66] Whatever the specific details of a healthy

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[63]See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258b, and Hyde's chapter, "Usury: A History of Gift Exchange," *The Gift*, 109–40. Although it cannot be explored here, there is a fascinating analogy between this use of money and the deformation of agriculture into a food industry, as presented, for example, by Michael Pollan in his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2007). As Pollan points out, all growth is ultimately caused by the energy of the sun. This energy is "commodified," as it were, into fossil fuels in a manner analogous to the way the good is "commodified" as money, and it is fossil fuels that have allowed the praxis of agriculture to be "liberated" from the rhythms of nature and turned into a "big business."

[64]*Rep*., 552a.

[65]In the *Laws*, 743d, Plato outlaws the practice of loaning money, except among friends. Cf. *Laws* 742c: "There must be no lending at interest, because it will be quite in order for the borrower to refuse absolutely to return both interest and principal."

[66]One of the reasons Ruskin's essay, *Unto This Last*, is so seminal is precisely

economic order might be—and we obviously cannot explore this in the present context—the indispensable principle would be that the actuality of goods, the genuine celebration of goodness, be the foundation that determines everything else, including the logic of financial transactions. We might consider as an example of such an order the fundamental economic role that monastic life—formed by the vows of chastity, obedience, and *poverty*, and thus by a free relation to the highest goods—had in the middle ages.[67] Socrates, after all, claimed to be essential to Athens precisely because he was the means by which truth entered the city, and he pointed precisely to his *poverty* as a witness to that truth.[68] Truth specifically in the economic order means a primacy of real enjoyment over the abstraction of money.

We mentioned above that, for Plato, money has the status that images in general have. To capture the essence of Plato's essentially ambivalent stance toward money we may, in conclusion, compare it to his ambivalence toward the particular image called *writing*, as he famously expresses that ambivalence in the *Phaedrus*. The analogy is quite direct.[69] Writing is a symbol, an external token, which is meant to represent knowledge, i.e., the soul's adherence to the truth of being. Properly understood, writing has the whole of its reality in being a "reminder" to those who already know,[70] that is, not being the *cause* or principle of knowledge but rather an effect of it, its external image as it were. If writing is made into the thing

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because it casts the light of inquiry on the founding presuppositions of the science of economics such as it was being developed in the nineteenth century.

[67]Corresponding to this role of monastic life, traditional Western culture ordered the yearly calendar around festivals, i.e., public celebrations of a transcendent good, and economic activity had a center in these. It thus possessed a kind of natural form. This may be contrasted to the "workaday" world that Josef Pieper famously describes in *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), in which "free" goods, and the leisure they imply, become subordinated to the boundless production of work. Understanding "economics" as the science of wealth rather than the science of money, one can say that closing shops on Sundays makes good economic sense.

[68]*Ap.*, 31c.

[69]See the sections entitled "The trade of the sophists" and "Writing as capital" in Catherine Pickstock's *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 6–10.

[70]*Phaedrus* 275d, 278a.

itself—as it would be, for example, in the counting up of publications as a way of determining the quality of a scholar—we have an absolutizing of the image. This sort of disorder, the elevating of appearance to the status of reality itself, breeds ontological confusion in other realms as well. We may say a similar thing about money: it has the whole of its truth in being a symbol of the soul's adherence to the good. It is meant, above all, to be a "reminder" to those who are wealthy in a true sense. If it is made into the thing itself—as it would be, for example, in the measurement of a nation's wealth by the gross domestic product, which is not an assessment of actual goods but *rather* of their monetary equivalent, i.e., their "market value"—we have an institutionalizing of sophistry, an official establishment of the same disorder. Money is not neutral; it is, in Plato's words, a *symbol*, which is to say it is a meaning, a bearer of a particular logic: namely, the logic of mediation between the just soul and genuine goods. A symbol "brings together" (*sym-bol*). When, in the logic of a system, it ceases to be subordinated to real goods and their true enjoyment, it no longer "brings together" but now "keeps apart" (*dia-bol*). Money cannot mean nothing; it will either serve truth as symbol or it will become diabolical. The status it has depends in the *first* place on the economic system and its institutions—or as Plato would say, the city's laws—and only secondarily on any particular individual's intentions.

Plato, an incomparable author himself, does not *reject* writing; instead, he insists that the serious person will treat writing as a sort of afterthought, a plaything or amusement (παιδία). And note, such an attitude is perfectly compatible with taking great care: Plato's writing is exquisite and, as history tells us, it is something he spent an extraordinary amount of time and energy bringing to perfection.[71] But this care, for him, was always the *fruit* of philosophy. The inexhaustible wealth of meaning that everyone recognizes in Plato's dialogues is no doubt a function of the subordinate place writing has: it says more than it says, as it were, because it bears witness to a reality that lies beyond it, the reality of Plato's genuinely philosophical life. Similarly, in the hands of one who loves money properly, because he loves it as nothing more than an image of the good, money may become infinitely more valuable than it would be in a

[71]According to a well-known anecdote, Plato rewrote the beginning part of the *Republic* six or seven times.

miser's coffers. A true money-lover treats money as a plaything, and so remains free, precisely because he knows what money means: he spends "liberally." This is not to say that he is careless with it, but that he communicates much more in his concrete economic exchanges than what is printed on the currency, because it represents an image of real goodness. The ideal of a "free" market ought to express just such a liberality, a playful seriousness regarding one's work, and a joy in one's love of money. It is significant that Plato ends the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue about eros and logos, love and writing, with a prayer, not about either of these, but specifically about *wealth*[72]:

> O dear Pan and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside. Let all my external possessions be in friendly harmony with what is within. May I consider the wise man rich. As for gold, let me have as much as a moderate man could bear and carry with him. (279b–c)

"As much as a moderate man could bear and carry with him": Socrates does not think of money primarily as something to be stored, that is, as a *destination* of the soul's love, but rather as something ever available to be spent, that is, always a means that brings to realization true, concrete goods. And so he does not call gold itself *wealth*. Instead, it is a token that enables him to recollect the true wealth that is wisdom, the soul's free and rightful order under the sun, the light of the good. □

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[72]Indeed, the dialogue also *begins* with a dramatic presentation of the difference between business and leisure (σχολή vs. ἀσχολία, or otium vs. negotium) as a prelude to its discussion of eros and writing: see 227a–b.