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Money as a Currency of Justice

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Is money a "currency of justice"? That is, insofar as justice requires us to distribute something among people, is money one of those things, fundamentally speaking?

It isn't according to many philosophers in the "currency debate," who either assign money no fundamental importance, or at least do not unequivocally affirm its non-instrumental significance, as I'll explain. Theory, in this respect, stands apart from ordinary opinion. Not only does money matter greatly to most of us, who has it, and who should have more or less of it—whether in dollars, euros, or renminbi—is ordinarily one of the main ways we evaluate socio-economic justice, in both policy arguments and larger political discourse. To the theorist, this may show how little our (perhaps corrupt) political culture cares about *fundamental* distributive justice, which is not about who has what money. In this discussion

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I reprise the currency debate on the side of ordinary opinion, in view of a topic political philosophy has somehow largely neglected: what money is.

On the view of money I will assume and develop, a money is not, at bottom, a convenient "medium of exchange," as is often assumed in economics. It is, rather, a creature of credit and debt accounting: money is a way we keep track of and resolve shifting credits and debts, deficits and surpluses, or, in short, what we owe one another.[1] As I'll explain, once elaborated, a credit/debt view of money helps us see how money could be, and arguably is, of fundamental moral importance. In particular, the view I'll develop not only helps us plausibly elaborate claims about money and freedom made by G.A. Cohen, it also points us to a position in the currency debate that Cohen rejected in his own influential intervention: that money is indeed a currency of justice (one of them, at any rate).[2]

I. THE INSTRUMENTAL VIEW

The standard if rarely examined view of money in Anglo-American political philosophy is *instrumentalism*:

> Money is simply a social instrument for the advancement of preferred social outcomes, or a proxy for benefits or burdens, rights or opportunities, which are themselves of intrinsic moral significance. Money itself, as such, is of no intrinsic moral significance.

Political philosophy's assumption of this view comports with its genuflection to neo-classical economics, which also sees money in instrumental terms. (Just add that welfare or preference-satisfaction is what's of intrinsic moral significance.) According to Adam Smith and economics textbooks to this day, money is, at bottom, a useful transaction technology, a "means of exchange." Whatever secondary functions a money may acquire as "store of value," "unit of account," "means of payment," and so forth, its essential function or fundamental purpose is to relieve us of the inconvenience of bartered exchange. As a convenient transaction technology, it makes no difference to what people are willing to trade, and so is said to be a mere "neutral veil" for the "real" economy, where the real trading, production, and consumption is. Financial markets ostensibly have much to do with money and banking, to be sure. But in the orthodox vision even they are but an "allocative" overlay to the "real" economy that provides the enjoyments of life.

1. *See* ROBERT HOCKETT & AARON JAMES, MONEY FROM NOTHING: WHY WE SHOULD LEARN TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT DEBT AND LOVE THE FEDERAL RESERVE 17–34; 121–38 (Melville Press 2020).

2. *See* G.A. Cohen, *Freedom and Money*, *in* ON THE CURRENCY OF EGALITARIAN JUSTICE 166, 166–92 (2011).

If instrumentalism is correct, one can see why money would not be relevant in justice assessment, except instrumentally. In commenting on Amartya Sen's inauguration of the currency debate in his criticisms of John Rawls, G.A. Cohen put the matter this way:

> In his Tanner Lecture of 1979 called "Equality of What?" Amartya Sen asked what metric egalitarians should use to establish the extent to which their ideal is realised in a given society. What aspect(s) of a person's condition should count in a fundamental way for egalitarians, and not merely as cause of or evidence of or proxy for what they regard as fundamental?[3]

On the instrumental view, who has what money is indeed *simply* a cause of or evidence of proxy for something else, and not what egalitarians should "count in a fundamental way."

This squares with Sen's famous criticism of Rawls, which Cohen seconds and develops into his own welfarist/opportunity version (justice being "equal access to advantage").[4] For Sen, Rawls's focus on what goods people have, including "income and wealth," ignores morally important differences in what those goods do for them, especially how or whether they convert into capabilities for valuable functioning.[5] Accordingly, money, one such good, is but a tool whose instrumental value varies among those more or less capable of using it.

Rawls, for his part, rarely if ever mentions money explicitly, and may himself have assumed instrumentalism. When he put "income and wealth" in the bundle of "primary social goods" by which we are to assess a person's relative life prospects, he surely assumed "income" would come to people by money payments (e.g., from an employer or an investment, say). "Wealth" was surely meant to include assets denominated in a money, presumably a sovereign's chosen unit of account, as saved in and spent

3. G. A. Cohen, *Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods and Capabilities*, 56 RECHERCHES ECONOMIQUES DE LOUVAIN ECONOMIC REVIEW 357 (1990); *see also* G.A. COHEN, ON THE CURRENCY OF EGALITARIAN JUSTICE, AND OTHER ESSAYS ON POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY 44, 44–60 (Michael Otsuka ed., 2011).

4. *See* G. A. Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice*, 99 ETHICS 906, 906–44 (1989); *see also* Richard Arneson, *Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare*, 56 PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES 77–93 (1989); reprinted in EQUALITY: SELECTED READINGS 229, 229–41 (Louis Pojman and Robert Westmoreland eds., 1997); *see also Welfare Should Be the Currency of Justice*, 30 CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY 477, 477–524 (2000); *see also* Richard Arneson, *Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended*, 32 PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS 1, 1–20 (2004).

5. Amartya Sen, *Equality of What?*, 1 TANNER LECTURES ON HUMAN VALUES 198–220 (1980).

from bank accounts, in cash, checks, and bank transfers. Rawls says that monetary and banking systems are part of modern society's major institutions, the "basic structure" to which his principles are supposed to apply and guide.[6] Yet in part due to the abstract and cursory nature of his discussion of these points, along with his arguable neglect of the importance of money and banking,[7] Rawls leaves it unclear whether or how a monetary economy has any essential, fundamental role in his story. One can have both income and wealth in a moneyless society, in principle. Are his principles of justice meant to equally apply for the "fruit of social cooperation" in a society that runs on a very different sort of monetary system, or on barter instead of money, or informal credit and debt relations, without our modern institutions of money and banking? Or does the monetary nature of the system somehow make a difference?

We find a similar lacuna in Ronald Dworkin's resourcism. Dworkin defines "resources" loosely to include "whatever resources are owned privately by individuals."[8] That surely includes legally defined private property rights over cash and other monetary assets, including private holdings of public money—though Dworkin never quite says so, expressly. His deeper story does mention money, but, like Rawls, he never quite clarifies its explanatory role, beyond adding interesting color. In the hypothetical auction that motivates his account, survivors of a shipwreck are to divide the "resources" (food, plots of land, et cetera) found on an uninhabited island. The allocation proceeds by a Walrasian auction, with bids measured in "clamshells," which serve as sort of proto-money *numeraire*. Here any arbitrary selected unit of account would do the job; everyone could be declared to have a some number of abstract "points," which measure out auction bids; no physical clamshells needed (no need to despoil the beach). In a footnote, Dworkin explains that he means to follow Debreau and exclude "complete formal contingent claims contracts;" what he doesn't mention is that Debreau's models are of a *barter economy*, to the exclusion of money and banking.[9]

Dworkin nevertheless hopes his hypothetical exercise will guide management of an economy in the real world, which he surely takes to include publicly issued and allocated money. But here again he seems to at least partly follow orthodox economics, which from Walras to Arrow/Debreau to most general equilibrium models today assumes that the efficient allocation of

6. JOHN RAWLS, 1 A THEORY OF JUSTICE 7, 273, 276 (1971).

7. *See* Aaron James, *Rawls, Lerner, and the Tax-and-Spend Booby Trap*, *in* A THEORY OF JUSTICE, at 50 (2021).

8. Ronald Dworkin, *What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources*, *in* 10 PHILOSOPHY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS 283, 283 (1981).

9. *See* Cohen, *supra* note 2.

resources can be adequately modeled on a barter economy.[10] Dworkin expressly denies that we can justly let the market run free. We can't simply facilitate "ambition-sensitivity" through free exchange; we must also take constant steps to address and preclude the influence of "brute bad luck" by insurance or tax and transfer institutions. Those institutions might indeed demand or make money payments, which may be the most useful mechanism of distribution. Yet at least on a fair reading of Dworkin, money payments wouldn't be required except as a mechanism: money is an important "resource" simply because it is an efficient *instrument* for the distribution of *other* resources. If money has a different, more intrinsic importance as a "resource," what that is needs to be explained.

II. THE CURRENCY THESIS

A basic alternative to instrumentalism, which I will defend in what follows, might be put this way:

> *money as currency thesis*: whether a society treats people justly fundamentally depends on the distribution of money, among other factors.

If this is correct, instrumentalism is false: even if money isn't all that matters, or all that justice requires, justice depends on how money, itself, is distributed. To put the thesis in Cohen's terms, money "counts in a fundamental way," and even for egalitarians it is "not merely as cause of or evidence of or proxy for what they regard as fundamental."

This is not to deny Sen's point about any "good" such as money, namely, that it will do different things for different people. The claim is not that that money holdings are a *complete* basis for evaluating how distributively just a society is. Indeed justice surely requires far more than money (for example, the disabled also require physical accommodation). Even so, on the present thesis, the money a person commands is one fundamentally relevant factor in justice assessment of their treatment by society.

Nor would the present thesis entail that money matters as much as people think. It may well be that most of us are too preoccupied with money, this being a cause of personal vice, needless discontentment, and societal ill. For to say we *over-value* money, or value it in inappropriate areas of life, or even fetishize it, is not to say that it lacks a basic form importance for

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10. *See* Geoffrey Ingham, *Money as a Social Relation*, 54 REVIEW OF SOCIAL ECONOMY 507, 507–29 (1966) (discussing how classical and neo-classical economics ignores money).

our place in society and the way society treats each of us. One can "fetishize" something of real importance by over-valuing it in the extreme.

Should we accept the money as currency thesis? I won't try to refute the instrumental view in any decisive way. I will seek to show that it should not be taken for granted, by developing the money as currency alternative in positive terms. Provided a better account of money's nature, as a credit and debt relationship, we can see how the money as currency thesis could be true, plausible, and defensible.

III. MONEY AND FREEDOM

One of the very few political philosophers who has not neglected the topic of money is G. A. Cohen. Cohen developed Karl Marx's views of money during his Marxian period,[11] and later argued in his own voice that money and freedom go hand in hand.[12] His later argument is as follows: When we lack money, we are "liable to interference" (whether or not actually interfered with); but freedom is compromised by liability to inference; so lacking money compromises freedom. The poor are not free but merely lacking in means; they are less free for their poverty.

The core of Cohen's case is the following set of examples:

> Suppose that an able-bodied woman is too poor to visit her sister Glasgow. She cannot save enough, from week to week, to buy her way there. If she attempts to board the train, she is consequently without the means to overcome the conductor's prospective interference. . . . She is indeed entirely capable of boarding the underground and of traversing the space that she must cross to reach the train. But she will be physically ejected from the train. Or consider a moneyless woman who wants to pick up, and take home, a sweater on the counter at Selfridge's. If she contrives to do so, she will be physically stopped outside Selfridge's and the sweater will be removed. The only way you won't be prevent from getting and using things that cost money in our society—which is to say: most thing—is by offering money for them.[13]

In the either case the poor woman has a liability to interference, which she could "remove" or "overcome" by handing over money. Her lack of money leaves her unable to do so, and, in a plausible sense, less free to ride the train or use the sweater. As Cohen explains, "*because* they are poor, poor people are not free to do things that nonpoor people *are*, by contrast, indeed free to do."[14] Specifically, the issues of money and freedom are tied not instrumentally, but, if you will, constitutively. (For Cohen having

11. *See* G.A. COHEN, KARL MARX'S THEORY OF HISTORY: A DEFENCE 298–302 (1978).
12. *See* G.A. Cohen, *Freedom and Money, in* ON THE CURRENCY OF EGALITARIAN JUSTICE 166, 166–92 (2011).
13. *Id.* at 176.
14. *Id.* at 167.

money is an "*inus* condition" of freedom to do a particular thing, which is to say, an insufficient but necessary part of an unnecessary but sufficient condition.)

Cohen suggests that this thesis exposes an important "illusion" about freedom:

> in a society like ours, where freedom is to a massive extent granted and withheld through the distribution of money, that fact, that money structures freedom, is often not appreciated in its full significance, and an illusion develops that freedom in a society like ours is not restricted by the distribution of money.[15]

The illusion, Cohen explains, animates the familiar conservative position that government has no duty to relive poverty. To the conservative, the poor are free and merely lack means, and since government should simply protect freedom, it therefore has no duty to give them money. But the illusion grips the left as well. Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls concede that the poor are free but simply lack means. For them, the lack of money does not itself entail a lack of freedom, as such; it merely limits the conditions of its exercise. But unlike the conservatives, the "worth of liberty" in its exercise is as if not more important than freedom, enough so even to justify freedom's limitation.[16] According to Cohen, this left reply is too concessive. For even if conservatives are right about the nature of freedom—as freedom from interference—they are wrong to think lack of money does not leave one less free. A liberal capitalist society too unequal in money is not a free society.

Here Cohen grants the conception of freedom as lacking liability to interference *arguendo*, in the sense that he does not defend it. He does, however, mean to suggest its plausibility. His examples invite the conclusion that the distribution of money does, in fact, change how relatively free people are. Likewise, he makes no official normative claims, including claims about justice. But we are invited to see the relative depravation of freedom, for a relative lack of money, as itself an injustice.

We might elaborate Cohen's suggestion as follows. Suppose people are moral equals, and suppose that justice accordingly requires the establishment of equal liberty. Even with no further normative assumptions, money's distribution is in that case a matter of justice; its maldistribution itself creates inequalities in freedom, which are unjust, or at least raise an important question of moral justification. For contrary to instrumentalism, possession of money

15. *Id.* at 175.
16. *Id.* at 172.

is not *simply* a "means" to each person's just freedom, but, if you will, constitutive of it. Nor is the distribution of money amongst persons simply a social instrument for the achievement of just freedom all around. Rather, in a society run by money, its proper distribution and society's respect for each person's freedom are, generally speaking, related not instrumentally but constitutively.

Cohen's conception of freedom—lacking liability to interference— sounds in the republican tradition on liberty. We might elaborate by drawing on republican rights or claims to non-arbitrary treatment or non-domination.[17] We might also or instead frame those or other relevant claims within a contractualist moral theory.[18] Perhaps people can reasonably reject certain unequal distributions of money, given the powerful personal claim each has to freedom, which, we may add, just *is* a claim to money. People might have forceful personal objections, not only to being afforded less money than some decent minimum, but also to having less money, less freedom, than others, at least when the inequality lacks a relevant justification. For contractualism, that sort of reasoning (of which more later) is all it takes to justify a principle of justice, seen as part of the domain of "what we owe to each other." In that case money would be a currency of justice: to know whether people are treated justly, one thing you'd have to note is money's distribution among them, among other factors. Instrumentalism would be mistaken.

IV. MONEY AS CREDIT AND DEBT

Cohen develops his argument about money and freedom by way of a comparison with an imagined non-monetary society in which government issued "entry tickets" have much the same functional role as money. In the imagined society, the government stipulates what one may or may not do, short of being liable to interference, by inscribing freedoms upon "state tickets" that people then use and trade in accessing goods and services. Back in a moneyed society, then, Cohen suggests by comparison that "a sum of money is, *in effect*, a highly generalized form of such a ticket . . . [It is] a license to perform a disjunction of conjunctions of actions, actions like, for example, visiting one's sister in Glasgow, or taking home, and wearing, the sweater on the counter at Selfridge's."[19] Crucially, he maintains, the limitation on freedom comes to the nearly same thing:

17. *See* PHILIP PETTIT, REPUBLICANISM: A THEORY OF FREEDOM AND GOVERNMENT (1998).
18. *See* T.M. SCANLON, WHAT WE OWE TO EACH OTHER (1998).
19. *Id.* at 182.

> The feature of capitalism that makes money partly different from state tickets is the separation, in capitalist civilization, between the state and civil society. Freedom of access to goods in a market society is not, indeed, decided by the state, but by asset-holders whose decisions the state supports. But a market society is nevertheless one in which freedom of access to goods is substantially a function of money . . .[20]

As for what money is generally, Cohen does not say exactly. He does cite Marx's comment that money is "social power in the form of a thing," agreeing money is a sort of "social power," albeit not one that must take the form of a thing. He disagrees with John Searle's claim that "money must come in some physical form or other," since, in principle, we could keep track by memory alone, without tangible monetary tokens.[21] As he explains, "If people all had wonderful memories and were all law-abiding, and information flowed rapidly from person to person, money could take the form of nothing more than common knowledge of people's entitlements." Money is nevertheless a sort of "social power," in the sense of being what removes or overcomes liability to interference. "The *raison d'etre* of money," as he puts it, "is to overcome the interference in access to goods that prevails when money is not forthcoming."[22]

Whether or not Cohen is right about money's *raison d'etre*, one can see why obviating would-be interference is one of money's basic functions, here as a *means of payment*, which is to say, as a credit understood in a community to *settle a debt*. When you are purchasing rather than stealing a good or a service for sale, and you ask "what do I owe ya?," you're asking about your *debt* to acquire title, which comes with certain rights not to be interfered with. What you offer to settle that debt is, and can only be, an offsetting *credit*, i.e., money.

At this point we might readily appreciate what economists tend obscure in focusing the "means of exchange" function of money, supposing it can be basic relative to all other functions. In a market "exchange," in contrast with mere barter or theft, a purchase or sale of a good or a service occurs only because payment is rendered for debts incurred. Which is to say, a general "means of exchange" must itself *be* a means of payment, or debt-settlement. It is not then a basic function of money relative to which a "means of payment" function is secondary.

20. *Id.* at 184.
21. *Id.* at 185 n.39.
22. *Id.* at 185.

As Robert Hockett and I suggest in our book *Money from Nothing*, we do better, in that case, to think of money as just that which is understood to settle debts—"that which pays." A money is what's understood as to be counted, whatever that happens to be, in the credit and debt accounting that governs the purchase and sale of goods and services in a community, along with any debts to the public. More specifically, we can define a *basic, bona fide money* as follows: a transferable promissory claim, credit, or IOU that a large portion of a community will accept as settling accounts in fulfillment of a large share of market obligations, debts, or other liabilities. A token item (a coin, bill, or authorized marking in a paper or electronic ledger) thus qualifies as money in virtue of four jointly necessary and sufficient features: (i) It's a promissory claim, credit, or IOU; (ii) it's transferable (e.g., what lawyers call a "negotiable promissory note"); (iii) it's widely accepted in the community for settling accounts, (iv) in the fulfillment of a large share of market obligations, debts, or other liabilities.[23]

So, for example, although items such as bitcoins, crypto-kitties, gift cards, store coupons, or vouchers serve as a "means of exchange" on occasion, they would not thereby qualify as fully fledged, basic money. Not when they fail to be generally understood means of payment, which is to say, debt settlement. What they may be (and arguably are in fact) is more or less *money-like*, depending on how widely they are accepted among people (their "domain"), and what range of obligations they are accepted for (their degree of "fungibility").[24]

On this view, Cohen is quite right that money needn't be a tangible thing. While people have often "settled accounts" amongst them by presenting and accepting physical tokens, coins, bills, notes, checks and the like as payment, in settlement of a debt, we in principle need "nothing more than common knowledge of people's entitlements." We can't just know who owes what to whom at a given time; we'll each have to adjust where things stand as credits and debts are added and subtracted, which is just what settlement of a debt, in a particular instance, amounts to (assets and liabilities cancel or offset). We'll have to together *keep track* of emerging deficits and surpluses and outstanding balances. And we'll have to readily agree about such matters as we go, taking a debt or debts to have been extinguished, in full or in part, unless either the creditor or debtor objects, offering some good faith reason to review the accounting. And lacking in reliable memory and common knowledge as we are, being prone to mistakes, confusion, failures of good faith, and the disputes that result, one can see why we do in fact need some intersubjectively agreeable basis to facilitate regular

23. HOCKETT & JAMES, *supra* note 1, at 27–28.
24. *Id.* at 31.

settlement, by at least narrowing potential differences. But as Cohen might well agree, the natural first solution, where workable, is not physical tokens of credit and debt information, but simply keeping accounts in a more public fashion, for example, on a ledger. A banker, as scorekeeper, might keep and update the ledger, making suitable credit and debt adjustments, allowing us "all to stay on the same page." And of course what began on cave walls and later paper books can nowadays be done virtually on a computer (e.g., on secure spreadsheets or newer digital ledger technology).

I take the foregoing to be not only consistent with Cohen's main claims about money and freedom, but an improvement in identifying money's nature as a credit and debt relationship. It clarifies what's at stake in what Cohen refers to as "overcoming" or "removing" liability to interference. To return to Cohen's examples, suppose his woman in the store purchases the sweater, but security attempts to interfere with her exit from the premises anyway. The upshot is not just that the hoped-for "overcoming" of liability to interference didn't happen to work.[25] To say she's *paid*, in good money, is to say that she's settled her debt, in this case, the debt required for her to acquire title over the sweater, in which case she now has *a right* not to be interfered with as regards its personal use. For that reason, when she pays, she can do more than just reasonably *predict* that security guards will let her escape with it. It isn't just that she might have noticed that they do tend to wave people with sales receipts through, often by sheer habit. She can also *demand* unimpeded passage, *claiming* her right to it. And others (e.g., the police) can rightly interfere with the security guards' interference if they refuse to acquiesce.

Likewise when Cohen's poor woman presents money to buy a train ticket, which she in turn presents to the train conductor, she hasn't just "overcome" the man's potential interference, in the sense that she can *predict* that he'll let her board. That may well be so; if he's law abiding and respectful of her rights, he will let her pass. But the crucial change in her *paying* for the service is rather that, in having paid, she's *gained the right* to pass, gained an *entitlement* to his non-interference. Should he block her anyway, *she* how has standing to forcefully object, waving the ticket purchased, now on the grounds that she has settled the debt owed for the train service. That was what tendering the money in payment accomplished —not simple *appeasement* or *pacification* of someone who happened to

25. *But see* Cohen, *supra* note 12, at 174 (obscuring this point by stipulating that everyone is law-abiding).

hold power over her, but her acquisition of a right—a right to the service, which is now *owed to her* when her ticket is presented for redemption.

In comparison with Cohen's abstract mention of "entitlements," the present account makes better sense of sale and purchase, as payment or debt-settlement, as any story of money should. It also better allows us to appreciate the "social power" exercised over us, not just in commerce, but in monetary systems and nearly all forms of government, as I explain presently.

V. MONEY AND STATE LEGITIMACY

Money, I assume, is not the sort of credit and debt relationship that necessarily requires a state. A suitable credit cooperative will suffice, for instance, in a household division of labor, or in cigarettes circulating among prisoners.[26] Money nevertheless is, I take it, part and parcel of the state's modern emergence, and essential for any state's basic functioning. Cohen is right to say that money exercises power in a liberal capitalist society, despite its division of state and civil society. What he doesn't seem to notice, or at least never notes, is that, even in a capitalist society, or at least every existing capitalist society, money is the central credit and debt relationship by which by the state runs our "free" lives.

To elaborate: money, when issued (or otherwise authorized) by a state, is not just for the settlement of "horizontal" commercial or personal debts, Cohen's *raison d'etre* for money. It is equally for the settlement of "vertical" debt to the state itself, much as the dollar note says: "for all debts, *public* and private." In issuing a money, a state imposes "vertical" legal debts upon its subjects, in the form of fees, fines, and taxes payable only in the chosen unit of account, that is, a unit of credit and debt accounting. And since debts to the state or public can be settled only in its own acknowledged means of settlement, procuring the state's chosen money, held as a credit, is normally one's *only* means of settling that debt and securing one's freedom. Taxes, like death, are not just inevitable, as the saying goes; they are one's yearly "ticket to freedom." Without "buying" that freedom every year, with money somehow acquired, by work or borrowing or hustle (until death frees us), there's no occasion to have or lack the freedom to travel or buy things afforded by money, since of course one can't travel or buy many things while sitting in jail. Settling one's public debt with

26. HOCKETT & JAMES, *supra* note 1, at 17–34, 121–38; *see also* Aaron James, *Money in the Social Contract*, in THE PHILOSOPHY OF MONEY AND FINANCE (Joakim Sandburg & Lisa Warenski, eds., forthcoming); *see also* Aaron James, Money, Recognition, and the Outer Limits of Our Obliviousness (unpublished).

procured money credits, year after year, is thus prior to nearly all other money-afforded freedoms.

And this is just the start of state money's significance. At least in modern times, its "vertical" dimension arguably holds functional priority. A state's chosen money will normally gain wide currency precisely because the state threatens prison when debts owed to it are not settled in timely manner.[27] People will go to considerable trouble to avoid wage garnishment or prison. And once procured amongst tax debtors, the inconvenience of conducting business in a great many currencies will tend to cause people to use widely it in "horizontal" payment between members of society as well. That may implicate all manner of credit and debt relationships, including commercial payment for goods and services, borrowing and lending, business and social networking, or even (alas) marriage. Along with a government's extraordinary ability to shape who has its money in property and labor law, court rulings and administrative practice, the design of its monetary, banking and credit-checking system, and especially fiscal and monetary policy, money thus becomes the central credit and debt relationship around which modern society is run.

So money confers continued freedom, but not just because our society puts up a lot of obstacles that, as it happens, are obviated by money, because people are readily pacified, placated, or appeased by it. The connection between money and freedom isn't just causal; it's normative. Cohen suggested as much as regards the rights that money secures over sweaters and train service, in "horizontal" payment for goods and services. But the relation is equally normative, and not simply causal, in its "vertical" dimension as well. It isn't just that money happens to settle debts to the state; a state's money itself, qua money, comes with a promise of and basic right to redemption against the state. This, as much as any purpose, is state money's *raison d'etre*.[28]

To see this, just suppose you're trying to settle your legal debt to the public at the tax office and officials are not obliging. You've presented enough of the government's money, but due to his indigestion, or his lunch break, or his plan to pocket your cash, the guy behind the counter refuses

27. HOCKETT & JAMES, *supra* note 1, at 27–18. Though this point is emphasized in the chartalist tradition, again I take it that state-less informal credit cooperatives can have bona fide money.

28. *See* Aaron James, *Money in the Social Contract*, in THE PHILOSOPHY OF MONEY AND FINANCE (Joakim Sandburg & Lisa Warenski ed., forthcoming) (detailing this right to a sort of "debt swap," which I take to have both "natural" and "artificial" elements).

to mark you down as having rendered payment. And as long has your debt has not been settled in the official reckoning, you remain liable for tax evasion and could face a judge garnishing your wages or ordering your incarceration. If your request for settlement is refused, your right to redemption—to having your money credits accepted in settlement of your tax debt—is violated in an act of administrative tyranny.

Here we can add that, when a state's own money credits are presented in payment of a tax debt to it, its officials *must* accept it, as a condition of the state's very *legitimacy*. Why so? Because, short of enslaving his subjects, if a ruler legally imposes any debt upon people, the ruler and his minions must also provide for some means of settling that debt. Money is precisely what allows us to settle our debts, rather than being continually subject to a ruler's will, whose potentially arbitrary commands ever further indebt us without recourse. While other recognized means of payment may be theoretically possible, few are feasible, especially in large modern states. Establishment of a money, along with its reliable acceptance by the sovereign's taxmen, is thus a basic pre-requisite of state legitimacy and republican liberty.

VI. LEGITIMACY IN MONEY'S DISTRIBUTION

For John Rawls, political legitimacy, understood as a basic requirement of justice, is in part a test of confidence—that is, of whether people who are prone to revolt or disaffection and alienation can, if reasonable, be brought to comply in good faith with some promising terms of cooperation over time.[29] Here we might add that, if a state does not secure confidence in the promise of money's redemption, it imperils its own legitimacy.

Read narrowly, a right of redemption would be violated only in the moment a state money credit is presented for settlement and refused. Such refusal rarely happens in modern republics amidst the flood of daily payments, both commercial and public. But a state can also lack full legitimacy, being unjust in a certain sense, for failing to secure the general conditions needed for confidence that a right of redemption will indeed be observed. In general, for a state to keep its legitimacy, its money must be plentiful enough, well-enough distributed, and neither overvalued nor undervalued so as to secure everyone's hopeful participation in an economy over time.

So, for example, suppose a spell of hyper-inflation brings round condemnation of a government's having "debased" its currency. The value of its money is undercut precisely because of collapsing expectations about it future

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29. JOHN RAWLS, POLITICAL LIBERALISM (1993); *see also* JOHN RAWLS, JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS: A RESTATEMENT (Erin Kelly ed., 2001).

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redeemability, if not in payment of taxes (which may remain the same nominal "price"), then in payment for the basic goods of life. No less delegitimating are deflationary spells, such as those caused by the late nineteenth century gold standard. Unsurprisingly in hindsight, tying total money issuance to the amount of certain yellow rocks extracted from the ground brought repeated economic crises, which in turn upended politics.

Unlike mere "acts of God," these events delegitimate a *government* precisely because a government's money can only come from that very government or its authorized bank distributors. If people are to themselves be in a position to tender a money in settlement of debts owed to a government, that government must itself have first issued enough of it into circulation. Where else would they get it? Counterfeiting is nearly always illegal and punished harshly.

Government money is issued into circulation either by government spending or authorized bank lending. In the simplest case of illegitimacy, then, a government simply spends too little in frugal austerity without arranging additional lending (e.g., by lowering interest rates or reserve requirements). For then there may not be enough money to go around, even in the aggregate. Perhaps only a select few can in fact pay their public debts as a consequence. The rest are exposed without recourse in legal liability to arrest and incarceration.

Even when there is a great deal of money in the aggregate, much or nearly all of it may be held in very few private bank accounts. This is not simply inequitable, other things being equal, but delegitimating. For every last debtor is under threat of prison if he or she cannot him or herself get ahold of the necessary money. And it won't help if there is plenty of money in a few bank accounts but no way to personally procure it. For a government to be legitimate, every last person in debt to it must have a reasonable opportunity to procure enough of its money via exchange, work, loans, grants, or some other method, in a legitimating set of cooperative expectations, that is, a "social contract."

In fact, most state money is created by chartered private banks as loans, the money being lent into existence. A far smaller portion of it is created via public spending, which the government spends into existence. But suppose banks lent much less and nearly all money was created via public spending, but then handed over in sweetheart "partnership" deals to a small class of elites. And maybe the crony capitalist class then orders everyone else around, offering the carrot of money against the implicit threat of state incarceration for failure to pay taxes (not to mention the treat of starvation for lack of money needed to eat). Perhaps most people are forced to work at subsistence wages, at least those lucky enough to find work. The rest will be hungry for revolt.

VII. EQUITY IN MONEY'S DISTRIBUTION

The foregoing examples so far impinge upon state legitimacy. But nothing turns, for present purposes, on how to mark the difference between legitimacy and justice proper. For the same reasons, money should seem to immediately raise significant question of distributive justice, of an at least partly comparative nature. In order to further suggest how significant questions of monetary distributive justice are, this time without suggesting any upshot for the state's very legitimacy, note some further examples from the credit economy.

Money—what many call "credit money"—is already itself a promissory credit and debt relationship. In contracts and promises, this is the heart and soul of financial markets. But as we currently run financial markets there's no clear line between judging credit-worthiness, extending credit, and the creation of money itself. For at the heart of most modern financial systems stands large, nominally private, chartered banks. While they do perform traditional "safe keeping," "deposit taking" and "intermediation" services, wherein money is received from savers and passed on to borrowers for a fee, they also assume public functions of creating and allocation sovereign money. Again, in the U.S. and similar systems, most state money is lent into existence ("loans make deposits") by chartered banks, with the central bank's blessing (and "accommodation"), as an extension of the public's "full faith and credit."[30]

The banks are not only creating money; they're creating it as they allocate it, to some and not others, or to different people on very different terms, based on a borrower's credibility in promising to repay, given their track record, employment, or collateral. In that case suppose the banks were to dispense money only to those with most sterling credit scores to the exclusion of much of the vast population, which is deemed a "credit risk." Perhaps "good credit" requires collateral in major prior possessions such as a home, or a rather expensive home, which few own. Or perhaps only those with a favored skin color can be assumed to have sound income prospects, as everyone else is deemed "too risky."[31] Whether or not this is delegitimating (it arguably is that too), it is patently inequitable.

30. *See* Robert Hockett & Saule Omorova, *The Finance Franchise*, 102 CORNELL L. REV. 1143 (2017).

31. MEHRSA BARADARAM, THE COLOR OF MONEY: BLACK BANKS AND THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP (2019).

The issue here is not simply inequitable exclusion from access to money lent, to which the remedy might be fairer opportunity. Differential treatment in a banking system, or a financial system more generally, can create (and has created) large disparities in money holdings over time. Financial lawyers have detailed how the law's creation of asset classes and creditor prerogatives have steadily created the yawning inequality in money we see today.[32] Drawing upon Cohen's view that money confers freedom, philosopher and economist Peter Dietsch enumerates several ways our current system of money creation is systematically biased in favor of those with collateral—giving contemporary meaning to Marx's comment that ". . . credit is given only to him who already has, and is a new opportunity of accumulation for the rich man."[33] As Dietsch explains, this bias is found, with public authorization, in commercial bank lending to individuals and corporations, lending between banks, lending from central banks to, and selective bailouts of, commercial banks.

Lest this seem the inevitable way of financial markets, note at least one way money and credit policy might be systematically conducted in a more efficient and more equitable fashion. As Robert Hockett and I explain in *Money from Nothing*, it is entirely feasible to for the central bank of the U.S., say, to automatically open account for every citizen and make regular credit-money deposits (e.g., of $1,000-2,000 per month), without condition. By attaching a rate of interest, which can be raised or lowered to influence

32. *See* KATHARINA PISTOR, THE CODE OF CAPITAL: HOW THE LAW CREATES WEALTH AND INEQUALITY (2019) (detailing what lies behind the large quantitative trends discussed by Thomas Piketty, when returns to capital are larger than the growth rate "r>g", along with Picketty's subsequent history of large trends in political economy and property); *see* THOMAS PIKETTY, CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY (2014); *see also* THOMAS PIKETTY, CAPITAL AND IDEOLOGY (Arthur Goldhammer, trans., 2020). *Cf.* MARTIN O'NEILL & THAD WILLIAMSON, THE PROMISE OF PREDISTRIBUTION (2012) (urging the importance of "predistribution" rather than "redistribution," including in connection with what Rawls calls a "property-owning democracy," and in some cases with reference to the role of banking and financial markets); *see also* Martin O'Neill, *Piketty, Meade and Predistribution* (Henry Farrell ed., Crooked Timber Seminar on Thomas Piketty's Capital in the 21st Century 2016); *see also* Martin O'Neill, *Philosophy and Public Policy after Piketty*, *in* 25 JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY 343–75 (2017); Martin O'Neill, *Power, Predistribution, and Social Justice*, 94 PHILOSOPHY (2020); *see also* ALAN THOMAS, REPUBLIC OF EQUALS: PREDISTRIBUTION AND PROPERTY-OWNING DEMOCRACY (2017); *see also* T.M. SCANLON, WHY DOES INEQUALITY MATTER? 102 (2018).

33. Peter Dietsch, *Money Creation, Debt, and Justice*, *in* 20 POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, AND ECONOMICS 151, 151–79 (2021) (quoting *Comments on James Mill* 1844).

saving and spending decisions, it can, along with other measures, ensure price stability.[34]

At present, only large, chartered banks hold "reserve accounts" at the Federal Reserve. "The Fed" lends to them banks via those accounts, paying interest directly on reserve balances, in order to influence the rates they lend to each other and to individuals and companies. Like inefficiently "pushing on a string," Fed interest on reserve payments have only a very indirect and unreliable influence on private bank lending decisions, which must promise private profits, and won't in an unpromising downturn. But since people—especially those with less money, who have a higher marginal propensity to spend—are more likely to respond to interest rate changes in their personal accounts (going ahead with, or postponing, purchase of durable goods, for example), they are a far more responsive partner in monetary policy.

The arrangement is also far more inclusive, since every citizen would enjoy the free, sure, no-strings attached money automatically, with no need of credit qualification for the basic payment. And, over time, it would reduce inequality in money, shifting the distribution of purchasing power in an equitable direction. To be sure, if a slightly higher rate of inflation were allowed (e.g., 2–4%), the affluent may see a reduction in purchasing power over time (unless they change their investment decisions). But there is no need to tax the rich for "redistribution," as such (as useful as that may still be for other purposes, such as inflation management or reducing unproductive speculation). The money can simply be credited and created "from nothing."

VIII. THE VALUE OF MONEY

Building upon Cohen's account, I've now offered a prima facie case that money, itself, is morally crucial in various respects: for personal freedom generally, equal freedom among moral equals, state legitimacy, and distributive equity broadly construed. It is not simply a social instrument for the advancement of preferred social outcomes, and not simply a proxy for benefits or burdens, rights or opportunities, which are themselves of intrinsic moral significance. Rather, I have in effect suggested, a society's just treatment of people fundamentally depends on how it distributes money, among other factors, as the money as currency thesis says.

Why "fundamentally"? As noted, this comes easily enough provided a moral theory such as contractualism (though certain rights theories might do the job as well). Principles that govern how we are treated in society need only make essential reference to money's distribution (e.g., a principle that

34. HOCKETT & JAMES, *supra* note 1, at 174–85.

requires equal money holdings, or at least a prioritarian skew; or Rawls's difference principle, and so on). Those principles will themselves be justified in the light of pairwise comparisons of the personal reasons amongst different parties affected. Those personal reasons might include instrumental reasons for having money, or cite money directly. As long as the principles justified (as those no one can reasonably complain of) make essential reference to money, they are fundamental principles of "what we owe to each other." They aren't derived from any further principles, resulting only from contractualist reasoning.[35]

Here one might object that, even within a contractualist framework, our relevant personal reasons that concern money are never essentially about money. Instead, one might press, they are about our personal welfare, or the control we have over our lives, or our relative influence, or our felt status in the eyes of others, and so forth.

This is one possible normative position about what reasons we have or don't have. But notice that, even if true, it would not follow that a basic principle of what we owe to each other cannot or should not mention money, and instead abstract away from it. For instance, a principle could expressly require us to divide a sum of money equally, even if we can each reasonably reject an unequal division for personal reasons that are not essentially concerned with money. Perhaps we'd each simply be terribly upset for the unequal split. If we'd each be similarly upset, and neither could offer a further reason for having a greater share of the money, either of us could reasonably object to an unequal division.

On the other hand, is the stated view about our reasons so obvious? Our reasons can be, and are, pluralistic and complex. Why shouldn't relevant personal reasons, among those suggested, also refer essentially to money? If you and I are given $5,000 on condition that we can agree about how to divide it between us, a principle neither of us could reasonably reject might call for an equal division. On what grounds? Perhaps we each need the money, say, to pay the month's rent. If it is said that what we *really*

35. *See* G.A. COHEN, RESCUING JUSTICE AND EQUALITY (2008) (rejecting such "principles for the general regulation of behavior" as so much social technology, and not as fundamental principles of justice, for being "fact-sensitive"). I take it, however, that such "fact-insensitivity" is trivially attained by conditionalization of any principle justified for a set of facts. A principle P justified for some facts F presupposes the fact-insensitive conditionalization, "If F, then P." Such conditionalized principles are true whether or not facts F actually obtain—especially if they are regarded as necessary truths. Cohen fails to rule out this trivializing version of his argument, leaving it inconsequential.

have reason to want here is *keeping a roof over our heads*, where paying money for rent is simply a means to that end, that well may be so. But even so it may also be true that a person wishes to have money in order to pay rent, in order to *have title to stay put*, where only money secures that right. Or even if the person doesn't mind moving end of month, with no plans to pay rent in any case, they'd still have reason to have *the money*. Why isn't that itself a good reason?

It is true that tokens or representations of money—including coins, bills, and so forth—lack intrinsic value (except where coins or bills become intrinsically valued as collector's items or time pieces and so forth). The tokens or representations are meant to token or represent something else, certain credits and debts. Its also true that credits or debts will have value as money only in relation to non-financial, "real" goods and services. Yet that is not to say they simply have instrumental value in relation to goods and services. Their value as money simply is relational: their consists precisely in *the relation* they bear to "real" stuff, as "purchasing power," as credits that can be expected to command settlement of certain debts, both private and public. Thus one can have money, never spend it, and still have something of value.

Many people do in fact value the *having* of money, quite aside from any specific stuff money might buy. This can be taken to irrational extremes, of course, in wishing to die as rich as possible, or in hoarding money needlessly. But the fact that money can be valued inappropriately does not show that its possession cannot be valued properly, even for its own sake. That needn't amount to wanting ever more of it, no matter how much of it one already has, not any more than valuing friendship for its own sake implies having ever more friends, no matter how many friends on already has. Nearly everyone takes some interest in money, and plausibly *has* an interest in having a certain amount of it, in the sense of having good reason to go to trouble in procuring it.

Here, again, one might explain this in terms of "further" ends, of security, power, freedom, or status, which money is said to be a mere "means" to. Yet it is not clear that most people who value money for security, power, freedom, or status have an *independent* conception of those things, which money could be seen as a relatively effective means to, in comparison with other available means. Rather, people seem to value *the security money brings*, or *the buying power money is*, or *the freedom from interference money entails*, or *the status in having money*. People may also care about versions of these values that aren't realized by money. But, for many, their very sense of these values and money is arguably fused, or not really independent, and perhaps not unreasonably so. This may reflect our cultural obsession with money, of course. It may also reflect that fact that we live in a society run on money, a basic fact everyone must cope with, in one way or another.

One can presumably care about security, power, status, and freedom even in a moneyless society. But that may simply mean those values themselves come to something different. *In a monetary societ*y, money is not simply a circumstantial or incidental "means" to security, power, or status, but constitutive of those very values, themselves, much as Cohen explains with respect to freedom.

Here we might take a cue from Cohen's account of Marx on money. Cohen defines a "capitalist mentality" as a merchant's quest for money ("exchange value") without limit, or at least beyond his consumption demands. He quotes Marx on the merchant's motives of power or domination: "to accumulate is to conquer the world of social wealth, to increase the mass of human being exploited by him, and thus to extend . . . [his] . . . direct and . . . indirect sway."[36] He also describes, by contrast, both a fundraiser for an orphanage who drives harder bargains than a capitalist trader (using money to get money but lacking the capitalist mentality), and a modern worker who likes his furniture because it costs a lot, and not just because he enjoys its comforts (he has the mentality but may not use money to get money). But even of those who care about money in order to get more money (operating with the mentality), Cohen concedes that "Such a person is not necessarily crazed. Exchange value is purchasing power, but it can be agreeable and rewarding to have a great deal of purchasing power even when there is nothing one wants to purchase (except as a means to increasing one's purchasing power)."

Setting aside the evil in domination, and the spiritual temptations of superficiality and acquisitiveness, are there not then at least some reasons to value having money "intrinsically," at very least, because having it is agreeable and rewarding? Not as a mere "means" to enjoyment or reward, that is, but in the distinctive form of those values that only money can bring. The agreeableness or rewards of pie baking or artistic creation or frisbee throwing or mountain climbing do not all come to the same thing, such that those varying activities are all but means to the same end—Agreeableness or Enjoyment.[37] Just so, money may not be yet another route to the same end of the agreeableness or enjoyment of skiing or flowing conversation or scientific achievement. Money reward, or money enjoyments, can be their own sort of valued ends, without obvious perversity.

36. G.A COHEN, *supra* note 11, at 301.
37. *See* DEREK PARFIT, REASONS AND PERSONS 493–502 (1984).

Likewise, one can value power, where buying power is a sort of social power, for its own sake, without being a megalomanic. Certainly everyone has reason to value "being empowered" to action, including being free from liability to inference, in the way only money affords in a monetary society, as Cohen says. Or perhaps people value money for the status it brings. Again, we humans do get rather easily carried away and care too much or in the wrong ways about money or status, as Rousseau warned. Yet everyone has some good reason to care about status, at least to be regarded as a moral equal, or equal citizen, including in the ways only having money, enough of it, affords, in a monetary society.

IX. Constitutive Value

This is suggestive, but perhaps not quite adequate. Money is often closely *associated* with things worth valuing intrinsically, such as security or power or freedom or status. But if the relation to those intrinsically valued goods is nevertheless circumstantial or contingent—or indeed the product of a perversely money-obsessed culture—it may seem that money is nevertheless rightly called a mere "means" to those intrinsically valued goods. That sense may be reinforced by the intuitive appeal, and perhaps the familiarity, of seeing money's very nature in purely instrumental terms. In the orthodox economics picture noted at the outset, all of its functions are ultimately *for* ease of consumption. And aside from its convenience as an institution, it might be added that the true value of money to a person surely lies in what money buys, which is to say, possibilities of consumption it affords, which is itself of value for the welfare, or opportunity for welfare, it brings. And if that is why money and monetary systems *ultimately* matter, then even as it is counted in our various business transactions, it would not "count in a fundamental way," as Cohen put it, for justice or otherwise.

This view flatly rejects the picture I've been developing. Insofar as it retains appeal and force, it should be answered by a rival picture of money's nature, which makes it seem less inevitable, and less plausible than it otherwise appears. I've begun to do that already, I take it, in explaining how money is, at bottom, an understood means of payment, or debt-settlement, in a unit of account, which is to say, in a unit for counting what we owe each other. I've also emphasized how important credit and debt accounting is for giving each their due as distributive justice in larger society.

Now I add a further thought: money so understood is of apiece with the scorekeeping we do in many human relationships, from friendship to marriage to community life. It's different in important respects—it's a *quantitative* means of counting, for starters. Yet money nevertheless is, at certain level of abstraction, another form of social accounting, a way we keep track of shifting credits and debts, deficits and surpluses, or, in short, what we owe each other on balance. And seen as part and parcel of how we run intrinsically valuable relationships—how we keep track of, argue about, and respond to what we owe each other—we can see why the sort of social accounting that money is has a kind of non-instrumental, "constitutive" value.

To see this, consider that we do credit and debt accounting, of a non-monetary sort, in even the most mundane exchange of favors—the "reciprocity" upon which nearly all human relations are founded. When I do you a favor or two—helping you move your couch, and walking your dog, perhaps also giving you a ride to the airport—you'll be in debt to me for like favors. You'll be my debtor, and I your creditor. I'm sure you'll "repay" me naturally as a matter of course. But if I decide to "call in a favor," because "you owe me one," it will be because you do owe me. I have standing to "spend" from my "surplus," which is your "favor deficit," if you're amenable, after which we'll keep track of where things then stand, perhaps from there "calling it even."

To be sure, many relationships obscure the details of such "social accounting," and indeed make a point of doing so. Intimate relationships such as friendship or marriage may pride themselves on not keeping close tabs in a less definite "diffuse reciprocity." But we *are* keeping loose track nonetheless (to different degrees in different relationships). Friends won't track a debt too meticulously; no problem if one forgot one's wallet yet again. But faithful friends will also take care not to let things get too out of balance, one way or the other, to preserve a firm sense of their equality. Imagine, by contrast, a friend who *keeps* forgetting his wallet with chronic negligence or indifference, becoming too indebted to be counted a proper friend.

Even in a *monetary* relationship, we could do this sort of accounting without tangible media by memory alone, provided what Cohen called "common knowledge of our entitlements." The difference between monetary and less formal relationships is *not* that, in the case of money, we are doing accounting, recalling and tracking credits and debts, shifting surpluses and deficits, since we do a basic sort of accounting in non-monetary relationships as well. The difference, rather, is that we count in a specific, quantitative manner—not in *qualitatively* described and weighed favors, but in some understood calculable *unit* of account. The unit needn't be dollars or euros or any government money; a unit of account could just be countable "favors," or "favor points," which we tally up, as credits and debts and accumulated surpluses and deficits. This quantitative scorekeeping can be done in small groups. Imagine a few roommates who'd like to keep a clearer reckoning of household chores performed, in order to smooth disputes and preserve a steady, peaceful reciprocity. They might value their money as part and parcel of their peaceable, equitable common life together.[38]

A small credit cooperative can be seen as a microcosm, in effect, of what we do in larger society. Except that we appoint bankers, including central bankers, to keep track of our flowing credit and debt balances, in a payment system run on some publicly declared unit of account, such as a dollar or a peso.[39] Indeed it is difficult to conceive of modern, large liberal democracy, with the intersecting "vertical" and "horizontal" credit and debt relationships described earlier, except as a money society. The very question of whether a state can be legitimate is, as we've seen, a question of how monetary debts and credits are imposed, resolved, managed and distributed.

For all I've argued, it may be that no state can be legitimate, all things considered, as anarchists believe. I won't take up that large issue here. For now it suffices to say that, *if* a state can be legitimate, it will be due to the fact that it realizes a peaceable enough, equitable enough common life together, along with the arts, science, and industry it makes possible. And if money must be part and parcel of that sort of valuable relationship, as just claimed, then money, itself, is not simply a "means" to avoiding the evils of a state of nature; it is also part and parcel of the very secure, peaceable cooperation that's lacking in a war of all against all. And if that sort of orderly relationship is indeed to be valued, both instrumentally and intrinsically, then then money thereby itself has a kind of non-instrumental, "constitutive value."

To elaborate the point, return to our general question: What value does money have, if any, aside from its use in buying stuff? This is a question, I take it, about the reasons we have to value money, meaning, to seek it out, work for it, pay attention to opportunities to have more of it, and so on. In that case, money can be said to have "intrinsic value" if there are at least some *reasons for us to value it intrinsically, for its own sake*. A beautiful seascape, for example, might have intrinsic value because we have reason to value it intrinsically, meaning to appreciate it for what it is, protect it as it is, or, if degraded, restore it for what it once was.

One good reason we might have to value something intrinsically is as follows: its constitutive role in making something the intrinsically valuable thing that it is. We can value the rock formations or the sand flows or the flora and fauna on a seascape precisely because they constitute the seascape as the thing worth valuing intrinsically that it manifestly is.

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38. HOCKETT & JAMES, *supra* note 1, at 121–39.
39. *See id.* at 186–98.

In general, we can say that something has *constitutive value* just in case it generally constitutes, or is a general constituent of, something of value. (It has *constitutive disvalue* just in case it generally constitutes, or is a general constituent of, something of disvalue.) Accordingly, we can value (or disvalue) it intrinsically if what's constituted is valued intrinsically, or instrumentally if what's constituted is valued instrumentally.

Returning to relationships, then, we do intrinsically value friendship or other relationships that constitutively run, implicitly, on reciprocity of credits and debts, and have good reason to do so. Given our ongoing counting and mutual recognition of where "things stand" over time, we accordingly value just this sort of social accounting—a sort of mutual "accountability." It is useful, indeed, for keeping friendship balanced and sweet, but not *simply* of instrumental value. It is a general constituent of any friendship worthy of the name, and so not a mere circumstantial and contingent "means" to an end. Not any more than counting balls and strikes is merely a means to playing baseball as opposed to being part to parcel of the game. Thus the debt/credit scorekeeping we do in friendship, as part of friendly reciprocity, itself has constitutive value, because of its constitutive role in an intrinsically valuable relationship.

Money, in much the same way, generally constitutes, or is a general constituent of, relationships we have reason to value intrinsically— including the grand orchestra that is liberal democratic society. Whatever its downsides or potential to corrupt us, money is to be valued intrinsically, other things being equal, for its role in making relationships that we have reason to value for their own sake what they are. Money, as thing of constitutive value, is not then simply of instrumental value. It will not *simply* bear a circumstantial or continent or merely cultural relationships to something else of intrinsic value, as a mere means to an end.

Money may well be prone to corrupt us, and bad in that respect. Perhaps the "seductions of clarity" in money's specifically quantitative form of counting, in contrast with friendship's more qualitative counting, leave us prone to "value capture," much as Thi Ngyuen has explained in the case of games and "gamification."[40] Still, for having constitutive value, money would not be inherently and irredeemably corrupting, as early Christians, Goethe, and perhaps Marx maintained. Nor must that amount to celebrating money as useful and fine, and not especially prone to corrupt us, as orthodox economics would have us believe. Perhaps money is useful and fine, in

40. C. THI NGYUEN, GAMES: AGENCY AS ART 189–215 (2020).

principle, but prone to corrupt us without proper safeguards, as recent philosophers have said.[41]

X. An Ecumenical Conclusion

I've now offered something of a defense of the money as currency thesis. Returning to the currency debate, I should emphasize the modestly of my conclusion. It's consistent with Rawls's position if money is counted among the "primary social goods." It's consistent with Dworkin's position if money is counted as a "resource." It's also consistent with a hybrid view that counts money as fundamentally relevant to justice alongside other "currencies" such as capacities, welfare or opportunity for welfare. Perhaps Sen might admit a new "capability" defined by what money does in a credit/debt economy, whether modern or traditional, as Richard Arneson suggested.[42] For all I've argued, justice is in this way fundamentally pluralistic, served in a basket of different currencies.

We can imagine further ecumenism if there is more than one *concept* of distributive justice, as I have suggested elsewhere.[43] If each concept has its own corresponding principles and relevant currencies, it may be, for instance, that money is relevant to just *treatment* under monetary and other social institutions, and so count as a relevant currency for one concept of justice—what might be called "social justice," or "institutional justice." At the same time, it may not count as a relevant currency for another concept of justice—perhaps called "natural justice" or "cosmic fairness" —which concerns impersonally assessed states of distributive states of affairs, taken as such, whether or not they come about by just or unjust treatment. So one might coherently be a luck egalitarian about natural justice, and accordingly deny the fundamental relevance of money to *that* concept of justice, but nevertheless accept the fundamental relevance of money to social or institutional justice. And there need be no further "real issue" about *the* currency of justice, not without further clarification of what concept is being referred to. The real question is what each concept requires and which is properly central rather than peripheral in political life.

41. *See* Michael Walzer, Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality (1983); *see also* Michael Sandel, What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets (2012) (suggesting the proper boundaries are defined by both fairness and the meaning in relationships in which money is allowed a role). *But see* Debra Satz, Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets (2010) (setting boundaries only by fairness and other liberal-democratic values "meaning" aside).

42. Personal communication.

43. Aaron James, *Constructivism, Intuitionism, Ecumenism*, in Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice (Serena Olsaretti ed., 2018); *see also* Aaron James, *The Significance of Distribution*, in Reasons And Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon (Jay Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samual Freeman eds., 2011).

This olive branch will presumably be refused by some proponents of welfarist or opportunity views, including, presumably, the later Cohen himself. Cohen perhaps would not grant that money is *fundamentally* relevant to distributive justice in *any* sense, denying the money as currency thesis for any concept. In that case, however, the earlier Cohen's insight about money and freedom, developed as suggested, might be taken as evidence against his later position.

Of course, one might press further objections to my extension of the earlier Cohen's argument. Perhaps a hybrid view is thought to be too awkward, or unlovely, or ad hoc. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown a deeper sense, which may not have been obvious before, in which money is what we owe each other.[44]

44. For discussion, I am grateful to the participants in the 2021 conference on equality at the University of San Diego, and to Robert Hockett, my co-author of MONEY FROM NOTHING (2020).