

# **Abolishing Money**

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## Content

Prologue .....	4
1. Things are not going well with money .....	5
2. Two ways to improve the world “with” .....	8
3. The mind doesn’t think “without” .....	13
4. Value as energy .....	16
5. The unthinkable thought .....	22

## Prologue

When I realized, as a five-year-old, that like everyone else, I too would one day have to earn my own money, I was grimly certain, firstly, that I would fail and, secondly, that I really had to learn magic. Otherwise, it was painfully clear to me, that I would never manage to achieve all those things essential for life.

I could well imagine acquiring a profession and mastering various skills that I did not yet have. What I did find threatening however, was the fact that my profession would be invariably linked to the apportioning of that strange and alien material which seemed to come from an outside source and to which obviously, my parents and their professions were subject. Moreover the fact that my own very survival would depend on this substance left me no alternative but to resort to magic. Of course, I realized my prospects of learning magic were rather poor but since my intentions were only to secure the basics like food and shelter, if I would just limit myself to conjuring these necessities and not everything right away...

To this day, I have not learned any magic. And so I raised my hand when the question was finally asked, "... or would anyone want to abolish money?" It was during the closing session of a conference on the sociologist Alfred Sohn-Rethel. I was participating in a roundtable discussion on the podium and Jochen Hörisch was summing up: Despite sharply criticizing money and commerce, Sohn-Rethel was nonetheless an admirer of money. Thus, we should not conclude our conference by totally disparaging money but rather by recognizing its considerable achievements. After all, money facilitates society's supply and production mechanisms, and, according to Sohn-Rethel, ultimately created rational thought itself. Our very language itself has been enriched by the sheer inexhaustible resource of metaphors pertaining to money. Indeed money deserves our admiration, a fact we should acknowledge, "... or would anyone want to abolish money?"

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Well, I raised my hand: If it were up to me, I would. But wait a minute. I looked around the hall and saw no other hands in the air; mine was the only one. No one else, it seemed, cherished the wish or even the thought that one day things could work out without money. Astounded, I wondered then whether Sohn-Rethel's insights were less about encouraging the wish to abolish money and more about explaining why no one actually wants to do so.

## 1. Things are not going well with money

Are things really working out with money? No, things are not going well with it. The most that can be said in this respect, is in fact that money enables one very small part of humanity to become rich and prosperous, whereas the greater part by far is, as a result of this wealth, subjected to torment, deprivation and famine. Is money to blame? Yes it is money's fault, namely, in as far as money is the very first and most common foundation of exactly those social conditions that are in force today worldwide; money has caused this kind of division of humanity and exacerbated the plight of the ever-growing majority of the world's population.

This should not be interpreted as if, before the age of money, there was no poverty, suffering or violence. And there is yet another misconception to be avoided, one that Sohn-Rethel long cultivated, namely that with the minting of the first coins early in Greek antiquity, money already formed the *nexus rerum*—in other words, that money already then had the power to support society entirely and produce the effects I've referred to. That stage was not reached until Europe entered the post-medieval period. Indeed, the transition to a money-based economy emerged in the course of the so-called “long” 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it is this transition that truly marks the beginning of the modern era. Of course, money existed prior to 1500, but before that time—and much later outside

of Europe—goods were mainly produced for personal use. This meant the necessities of society were not, for the most part, produced as merchandise to be then sold for money. Rather, they were produced by those who also used them directly, or they were appropriated by those who, thanks to established lines of power and by decree, then distributed them to their dependents. As long as the entire life cycle of a society rested on these principles and that was until the feudal Middle Ages, it was not dominated by the production of merchandise and exchange values. And consequently, not by money. Only later, with Europe's transition to the so-defined modern era, did money begin to penetrate all of society, and to decisively make the sustenance of the people and their relations with one another dependent on *it*. This is the origin of the historically very specific social conditions that I am referring to and which are becoming obvious today. And despite wealth and unimaginable gains in productivity, all is not going well with money.

There is no doubt today we are living in a notably globalized, *money-mediated* society—even if there is growing doubt about how it *functions*. Even the most unsophisticated official voices—if I recall correctly, under the patronage of a president of the Federal Republic of Germany—felt the need not long ago to launch an advertising campaign advocating the “Volunteer Model.” This notion was not only directed at sports clubs. No, we would be *altogether* depending on volunteerism. Voluntary work has to become the new basis of “our” society. Away from calculated self-interest towards a willingness to show solidarity with their fellow man if they do not want their society to be defeated by its famous “challenges.” This idea of voluntary work i.e. without remuneration is to be developed into a new structural form of labor because payment for work that needs doing in every corner of society is causing insurmountable difficulties. Yes, there is much to be done, but who should pay for it? So, citizens, put an end to social coldness and warm-heartedly forego payment.

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Well, I'm still thinking along similar lines. Whatever I do to make money at present, I would gladly do voluntarily, without pay, provided that my food is given to me voluntarily, that I'm allowed to live in my apartment voluntarily, and that somebody voluntarily helps me to repair my bicycle.

That I currently insist on payment for my work doesn't mean I have any great appetite for money or that I have to first see the money ("*Money, Money, Money!*") before I then properly spend it. No, my pecuniary needs merely reflect the well-known necessity that I encounter everywhere, namely, I only receive the resources I need to conduct my life in the form of *money*, which everyone around me requires for payment, and so I too must have money available to acquire whatever I need. And why does everyone insist on using *money*? Because they must, since everyone, myself included, insists on money. And so it goes: an endless cycle around the globe.

It is clear then that the *coercive power* money has over everyone, whether one wants it or not, derives from its universality, it can only be abolished *universally*. Implicitly, this is what the Volunteer Model project, in all its innocence, proposed by wanting to make unpaid labor the basis of our society. But be careful, Mr. President, of this quintessentially Communist idea! If people were to perform their tasks or produce only the things they deemed essential or desirable for their lives, and simply because these things are essential and desirable and not because the universal coercion of money has intervened and wants to be served—and this is of course the idea—one could speak of a liberated humanity! But let's not get carried away: suffice it to say this is the good materialistic thought of a well-contented life.

But that was not your intention, Mr. President, I am sure, and you certainly didn't want to address the related issue of private property. Quite the opposite, you wanted to preserve society *as it is*. It's just that our money-based society has obviously run into so much trouble that it requires such an inherently self-contradicting remedy. Volunteerism bears a vision

you really wanted to shield us from. It implies a fundamentally *different* society, one that runs *without* money. Oddly, no one seems to reach this conclusion except, like Mr. President, inadvertently, without quite realizing it. Nobody can ignore the obvious, radical and widespread difficulties that money inflicts on *itself* and on others: from the unemployment that we now accept as matter of fact, all the way to the grand global financial crisis that required tremendous efforts from the world's mightiest countries to save our treasured financial system from imminent collapse. And there are certainly no taboos against sharply criticizing bankers and traders, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the locusts and *global players*, the feckless politicians and regulators, immoral and incompetent managers, fair versus free trade, good versus bad taxes, free versus managed markets, too much debt versus too little credit. But this criticism and the general dissatisfaction with the financial system stop short of questioning how it might work *without* money. Instead, they stubbornly and without exception insist on continuing *with* money, just—the devil only knows how—doing it *better*.

## **2. Two ways to improve the world “with”**

There are just two routes that offer any hope of doing this, the only question being which of them is the more hopeless. Powerful forces are gathering to do battle with one. The other has already been dismissed by history.

The latter was the attempt to teach *mores* to money. Money was supposed to make everything *right*. It was supposed to distribute wealth fairly. It was not supposed to divide humanity into two classes. It was supposed to be channeled to where it is needed to sustain lives, to be where worthy objectives were met. To this end, half of the world invoked Marx, the only result being a gross misunderstanding and complete distortion of his *criticism* of the political economy. The laws

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of value that Marx saw at work in capitalist system, that in all their loveliness he made responsible for this system, were in fact *not* criticized by state socialism, which, in a complete reversal of his intent, brazenly took them as laws of nature that must be applied, merely in his sense, in order to do *good* economically. The countries that considered themselves communist had absolutely no intention of dispensing with the logic of money; the idea was rather to *use* it to the best of their knowledge. They did not abolish what Marx criticized but rather made it their business. They merely constrained it to fit the perceived moral standards and to do this, occasionally a sort of curb was put on money.

Planning did not replace money with its laws or abstract worth as such, but rather only the *competition* for money. It was planned where money should be generated and what amount should be produced and the price the products should be sold for. What in a purely capitalistic environment is steered by market competition, as participants must react to competitors' prices, and by the same measure produce only when profitable returns can be expected, was taken into the hands of the state socialist planners along with control of money. Thus, they did indeed create quite different conditions from those of the capitalist system and, to a degree, freed people from the logic of money. Those who, like me, after the fall of the Berlin Wall left West Germany and moved to the East and have been living there for some years, could clearly notice the differences in attitudes between the people in the two regions only to observe those differences quickly vanish.

Nonetheless, the logic of money remained in place, undisturbed, and did its work against the good intentions of the planners. As long as the real results of the planning were not in the foreground—for example, houses built to certain quality specifications—but instead only the *amount of money* to be spent or potentially realized from these houses, then the priorities of the builders were wrongly redirected. The amount of money allotted, for instance, to purchase a certain

amount of construction materials, and the amount of steel required was all the builders considered. They would fill a building's shell to the brim with steel in order to meet the plan's targets, instead of merely installing the amount appropriate to the building's needs. And in this way even here abstract value damages the *material* value of the goods by being, in a totally anti-capitalistic way, recklessly uneconomical with the costs. And the fact that the *abstract* value itself in this way never produced enough of the intended added value is only too well known.

Having failed its trial, this approach had to exit history's stage. Nonetheless, even if very distanced from the original camp, successors still appear. Whether tentatively or self-confidently, they are all unwilling to go as far as the socialists. They do not want to change anything in the basic capitalist mathematics of added-value generation—Tobin tax here, or maybe the taxing of machines instead of people there, more market opportunities for poorer countries here or a market deceleration there, aiming to give a more human face to it all. Wherever the brakes would be applied, the growth imperative, implemented through society's universal agent, money, and already reacting poorly to merely modest growth, tolerates any form of constraint even less. Money only then functions as capital—that is, it only then produces *something*—if it generates *more* money. If a business brings in less returns than it lays out, it is no business, and any use of money that doesn't generate more money has to be stopped. This clear logic applies to the smallest of businesses, and even more so, because of the vast amounts of capital coursing throughout the world demanding growth, to the entire global market. To further inhibit the global market, which already finds its returns too small to reasonably maintain itself, would mean only aggravating the crisis. Nor would it be more humane—worse still more catastrophic. Today's already widespread collapses, which are responsible for rack and ruin in many countries, would become far-reaching and the cozy, normal

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conditions of capitalistic life would gain decisively in dimension and stridency. Money cannot be persuaded to function as money and *at the same time* not to function as money; namely, to please be nice to everybody.

The other conviction as to how it could function better with money is rock solid. Money only needs to be freed of all brakes, without looking to the left and the right, driven only towards its *own* success—“neoliberal,” “global brutal,” “pure capitalism”—and subsequently, everything else would turn out fine. If the world finally overflowed with capital, then this would yield an abundance of wealth, charity and well-being for everything and everyone. If this is *not yet* the case today, then it’s not because of “pure capitalism” but because capitalism hasn’t been pure enough to have really taken off. To date, the centuries of capitalistic economies have created great riches, but because they have not yet done so for everybody, we have to *continue* in this direction and simply create *even more*. Yes, only that which money takes into its hands has actually the guarantee of turning out for the best. If, at present, the air is polluted and the waters and other things are horribly contaminated—namely according to good capitalistic cost calculations—then air and water simply would have to be “monetized,” that is, to be assigned a value in money, to be bought and paid for, available only as merchandise to those who can afford them. Only then, when everything is valued in terms of money, would everything be appraised in the right measure and protected as being both precious and costly. This is a conviction with which Hörisch identified on the podium: The world would be good because it would be really expensive.

So, we only have to somehow ensure that a lot, but please *not too much*, money would be available everywhere in the *proper* amounts. Every private person and businessperson should have *enough* money to pay for every necessity—only in this way could hardship be prevented—but under no circumstances should they have *more* money than necessary—only in

this way could someone be prevented from paying for something like polluting the air. The entire world as one big collection of goods—from droplets of water to high-end products, from labor to the right to live somewhere—must confront the precisely balanced amount of available monetary wealth, and not only the total sum of all the goods against the total amount of money, but everyone, *each* and *every* person, would have to continuously take in the exact amount of money needed to spend to balance out his or her exact amount of goods. Oh holy *harmonia praestabilita*, which divine providence should plan *that!* But no, even that would be too simple. There is one more decisive requirement: All this wonderful harmony between the amount of worldly goods and the abstract value they amount to when consumed, should be created only through the invisible hand of the market, the blind rivalry of everyone against everyone, through the pure *logic of abstract value*. Although opponents of globalization earnestly demonstrate in front of politicians, they should in fact *demand* the harmonious distribution of money, to govern us into this state through a robust stance towards “the economy.” But that would only mean again to attempt to teach money those *mores* that, being money, it cannot follow, and therefore hasn’t followed for centuries. Accordingly, the politicians who should ultimately steer the thing with money in the right direction don’t do anything like that and could not even if they wanted to. They are so preoccupied with establishing favorable conditions for their national economies to create the foundations upon which every national economy is based, namely the highest possible capacity utilization, following the only possible logic of high utilization, which is the logic of money itself.

How that functions is no secret: It creates and imposes the exact contrary of the hoped-for and desired harmony; not the equilibrium of wealth but the absurd polarization of society into rich and poor, islands of profits made possible by the impoverishment of many, capital rendered victorious through

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the devastation of entire countries. *And that cannot be prevented.* Because money celebrates successes by denying them and avoids failures by creating them. The competition that everyone has to win is won *against* others and the money that is gained comes from others. If, as prophesized, everyone can be a winner with money, oh, then the gods of money would have long since made that happen! Even the most brutal exploiter would prefer not to ruthlessly steal his workers' modest salaries, if only because then they would have more money to buy more from him. And even the most pigheaded superpower lobbyist would rather not see his market-correct IMF measures continue to ruin the states in his care. He would rather watch them transform into flourishing landscapes full of happy people, and lots and lots of money: what attractive markets they would make!

### 3. The mind doesn't think "without"

But this is not how it is, and how it is today—I don't have to paint the picture that everybody knows—that's how it *has* to be when money rules. Contemporary life is a valid proof. The ridiculous model of idealism won't thus become extinct: Because there are successful people, everybody could succeed *if they would only do as those do*; it is clear that if one person wins a 100-meter race, everybody could win if they, by definition, did just *as he did*—only, unfortunately, by also defeating all the others. No, the variants to avoid defeats have all long been played out: more market, more state, another interest rate, even more in private hands. And if it were really in the hands of managers, politicians or international institutions to govern the worldwide success of everyone, or at least, of one's own nation, they would have gladly done it. Nothing would have consolidated their position better. Lehman Brothers or Worldcom—does anyone still remember—would not have gone bankrupt, Africa would pay its way instead

of starving, and the oceans would still be teeming with fish. The harshness of the market and the harshness towards this world, these are the *success* of money. And wherever you turn to escape these harsh conditions, you run into *its* logic, which is a hindrance every time.

Why then is the thought missing: *without money*?

No, not because it is difficult, not because the problems would have been incalculable and because careful consideration would have therefore ruled it out with deep regret. The thought simply does not *exist*. It is missing in the first place. Despite all the usual moaning, despair and wailing over money, nowhere is it dared to even come close to the thought of eliminating the cause or the circumstances of the complaints and the moans. Even the most utopian ideas of how it could be possible to work with money, against its logic, never get to the extent of reaching *this* utopia. Philosophers have no problem in claiming that the world possibly does not exist. For physicists on the other hand there is an infinite number of worlds. Only a world *without money* is an alien concept.

Sohn-Rethel recognized: Money also forms *thinking*. The character of the merchandise forms the character of thinking—money as a form that molds our thinking—thought itself is not conceivable without money. Thus, the thought that it could be possible “without” would be taken from us. No thought escapes money, because it is already firmly implanted in every thought.

*Can such things be?*

How is money embedded in our thinking? Its effects are such that we, as it were, look at the world through it. We carry it already in our eyes and so lay it on everything we see, a kind of tint of the vitreous body which therefore seems to cover things, a polarizing through the cornea that does not let us

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see the world any other way than polarized. That is why it is so infinitely difficult for us to look *away* from money. Not only that it calls out to us from every corner of our reality, “I am here”; wherever we look and whatever part of the world we encounter, observe, touch, try to acquire, it is always already connected to money. But this objective ubiquity has its consequences and sets its terms *in* us, within the subject. It forces everybody everywhere to *co-reflect* money, to “*see it*” in everything. For each of the innumerable transactions that we must make day after day, we have to know, anticipate and actively prove *that the things of this world are connected with money*. To ensure that even such a simple transaction as shopping at the bakery succeeds, we have to additionally see the monetary value of the merchandise, and beforehand manage to establish its relation to money as an abstract value, merely based on itself.

The relationship of goods to money that we have to establish in the exchange of equivalents, popularly known as buying and selling, where the one is given for the other and thereby equated with value, requires us to conceptualize this *value*. And this value is a *purely imaginary* substance, no, a *non-substance*, immaterial, without qualities, empty, insubstantial and atom-free, a purely quantified *nothing*. Yet this nothing, again, is always related to merchandise, connected thus to all imaginable things and circumstances that we can buy and pay for with it. And with that, at the same time, the embodiment of *something*, the embodiment of all possible substances, qualities and contents—accordingly, at the same time, the embodiment of *everything*. In its existence, the exchange value of money is *pure form*: namely the form *that* and *in which* money forces us to think—without our realizing it—the form of that non-substance devoid of content; a form that only money produces in our thinking. In its function, this value attaches itself—no, *we* attach it, we *believe* it to be connected to all and everything that might become merchandise at one or other point in time.

And this process does not first start when we're standing in the bakery. We do it long before and incessantly. For us it is a basic, fundamental to all our thinking; just as we are born into circumstances that require just this. It is only in the way our thinking accomplishes this, and only *if* it is done faithfully, that this nothing, this abstract value, *exists*: by the fact that people *acknowledge* its function and therefore *assume* its existence. An assumption however, that is not just plucked out of thin air. It derives its compelling reason from the fact that the function of abstract value—however it may be conceived—is objectively enforced. Should anybody refute this assumption and consider the value of money nonexistent, the worldly powers would immediately provide re-education and forcefully teach the confused soul the correct belief. The laws are very sensitive regarding money and provide the police and other powers with a lot to do in this respect. There are the hard facts and steely realities. And still the fact remains: that money functions as money and altogether *is* money is based on the precondition that people *think* it, that they connect things with this abstract value, which would otherwise not exist and consists of nothing, synthetically forming it in their thought—yes, one could even say, *imagining* it. The value of money is *also* an intellectual achievement.

#### **4. Value as energy**

Thus, *this* question finds its almost tautologically simple answer: We can't imagine the world without money, because we think everything *with* it. Involuntarily and inevitably, our thinking has to synthesize this chimerical being, "value," and to cover the whole world with it. This belongs to value like the global ubiquity to money, and at the same time, contains its negative cause: the qualitative emptiness and *non*-definitiveness of money. Since it is equated with *everything* virtually, it carries no intrinsic definition whatsoever. It possesses

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no defined boundaries that exclude anything from being exchanged for money and thus has an abstract value attached to it. Paradoxically, it is exactly this non-definitiveness that defines how we conceive value and whereon we transfer its form. The less we draw a line at money i.e. defining the things that cannot be bought with it and therefore not related to it, the less we can draw a line at our thinking which determines what we should not be allowed to regard as valuable. The universal spread of the thing is imaged in the form devoid of content and conversely, the thing devoid of content is imaged in the fact that its form is universally *transferable* to everything, to every cognition. Nothing can ever put an end to the thought, “I am of no value.” This is why, in our money-mediated world, our thinking considers everything in this world as being of value too.

I still remember well the indignation of a construction worker from the German East who saw a Western colleague drop a whole box of nails from a scaffolding and, instead of picking them up, reached for the next box without further ado. In the GDR, no wooden board was cast aside without first removing the old nails, which were then hammered out to be re-used. Now, the new ones are dropped and the calculation is different. Someone makes the calculation entirely in money and says to himself that the time needed to climb down and collect the nails one by one would cost more than new nails. This may be true or not. In any event, for him it was not nails that fell from the scaffolding, but money—which “is” time. It is inherent in this as well as in that, and the nails may be from iron and the time from whatever, their actual substance is always money: it’s all about *its* conservation, about *its* reality. With it we double the world into itself and its astral body, which we “see” in it. The imaginary, however, seems more real to us than the world itself, appearing to be its true body, the body that counts. In *Faust II*, the Emperor’s Steward complains—“Now I’m to pay, give each his wages”—the dependence on a creditor:

“He’ll make advances which for ages  
Will put our revenues to rout.  
The swine are no more fatten fed,  
Pawned is the pillow on the bed,  
At table we eat bread hitherto eaten.”

Because its *value* has been used up “for ages,” *it* is “hitherto eaten” and is the actual bread, which is merely followed by the baked bread on the table that is like a witch’s trick or a ghostly mirage. But Mephisto knows how the Emperor can avoid the ravages the advances will have on revenues, namely by counteracting them with a similar pre-emption: promissory notes based on buried treasures. Goethe plays with these notes as if they were only play money and yet they are veritable bills—similar pledges were made on ours for a long time:

“To all whom it concerns, let it be known:  
Who hath this note, a thousand crowns doth own.  
As certain pledge thereof shall stand  
Vast buried treasure in the Emperor’s land.  
Provision has been made that ample treasure,  
Raised straightway, shall redeem the notes at pleasure.”

We may as well leave the gold, the imaginary basis for the value of the notes, buried in the ground. For, whether with gold or without, whether kept on paper, in metal or as electronic data, none of these will make its value more or less substantial. The reference to *gold* that the devil and the authorities attach to it only shows how solid and real the value seems to us, while it offers no proof of value other than to *refer* to goods, no matter to which. It *is* this attribution: the *reference* to goods, to what it buys, and wherein it exists. And that’s why it suffices simply, somewhere and somehow, to seize and attach itself to a number—especially when, at the same time, worldly powers assure that this number *functions* as money, as an amount of *acquisition*, namely the power of access to *goods* by purchase. If this number on the account were no longer used in this way, and if nothing could be bought with it, then it would be the pure nothingness of its form. For it

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to become the significant something that we know it to be, it has to have exactly this one function and thus, only goods that recognize this reference to themselves are to exist, no matter whether they are gold or jelly beans, a massage or a fresh loaf of bread. This is why the nations that have finally understood, are gradually dissolving their gold reserves and the monetary value of a bill has not been paid in gold by the state for a long time. But this only means that the value itself now functions as gold, which means that function and pure reference get a solid, independent existence—that we *think* them in this way. This is crazy enough and horribly wrong.

It is the involuntary misbelief that money and value are an absolute substance, or, better still, a kind of energy that could be generated and has to be produced like kilocalories or electricity. It's a commonly held notion: one only needs to direct money somewhere, pump it into something, invest, and where there used to be stagnation, things would soon start rolling. "Where in this world does not some lack appear? Here this, there that, but money's lacking here." And it is lacking everywhere, it is needed everywhere where *something* is missing. Here, there is starvation, for money is nourishment; there, a building remains unfinished because money is the mortar. And there, the supply collapses for money is the enabler of everything. And there, food in fact is lacking, but it flows when funds flow. Here, a project is on hold even though people and materials are available but it kicks off as soon as the fuel arrives: money. On the other hand, in the poor countries there would be enough capable hands, but firstly money has to come from outside, giving them the power to become workers.

Kurd Lasswitz has put the attendant notion into its purest form. In his novel *Two Planets* the inhabitants of Mars, vastly superior to earthlings, cannot do without money either, but they instead use *energy* directly as money. Like a cash card with a memory chip, everyone carries a portion of it, charged by the sun, as a means of exchange transferrable

to others and in any event a form of value that, as energy, works *immediately*. The charged battery, yes, this is how we imagine money: output that collects and thus enables output. From the energy the rich nations would have accrued, some would be given to the poor. And because the latter are lacking in strength, the strong would transfer some of theirs. From where else might the power to act come other than from—power? However, this we believe, would be money itself: the potential energy of a stone that has been lifted to a certain height with the same amount of energy, that, rolling downhill, it emits again, as “output.” This is why one says one can only achieve what one has achieved! One can only consume what has been generated! Such axioms make sense to us, and yet they are, if they concern money, pure lies: as if money were food itself, only then to be eaten if cultivated earlier, and as if it were work itself which can only be executed when someone has collected enough strength to do it.

Indeed, if that were the case, as our own money-formed thinking would lead us to believe, *then it would never work without money*. Then money would have always been predestined in this world and those times that did not yet know it would simply not yet have discovered that the labor someone performs constitutes immediate value and everything otherwise is also money. When people finally issued coins, wrote on paper and traded on stock markets, they would only have given this natural state a visible form.

Yet money *demands* output but *is* not output; it *disposes* over the production of things but does not *produce* them. *Its* becoming produced is consummated only via a change of hands, by buying and selling; this means by the sheer opposite of production, by its *consumption*. It is immaterial what is produced then it does not become money as this product, but only when consumed by someone other than the producer. As a matter of course, it is clear to us that, above all, one thing is needed, consumption, for the “economy” to work

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well. Where nothing is consumed, no money accrues, and in this respect, thus, money *is* consumption, and in fact, preposterously, for that which has already taken place, the past; money is always bread which has been “hitherto eaten.” It is absurd, then, that what the one person consumes, collects as substance with another; what has been already used functions as material on which the next has to exist; money and credit are passed on as nourishment or fuel already digested and burnt by others!

A harmless illogicality, one might say, but—only as an example—a deadly disaster where not enough consumption in exactly this manner of abstract negation could be exchanged, thus where too little consumption became money and therefore at the same time with this missing money food that would have to be bought is lacking. The same illogicality becomes a global disaster, no, has long since become one, to wit: imagine an apple tree heavy with fruit and now the logic of harvesting which dictate that the more apples that have already been picked, the more that can still be harvested; if nothing had been harvested, the tree would therefore bear no apples; it would be better if as many apples as possible were already taken and eaten, because then, there would be even more apples to take from the tree. It would be best if the tree were plundered because, then, yes, then, the pillaged, stripped tree that carried nothing would yield the most. This image is still far too harmless but everyone will be able to add appropriate and more detailed images of the effects and realities of our way of dealing with the world, from the earth, air and water to the ethereal inner lives of people, that thoughtlessly, thoughtfully complies with this logic.

## 5. The unthinkable thought

Now, and what if things did work without money? No, not just its replacement with bits of information, cowrie shells or work vouchers, no saving of money and perpetuating of its logic, but its abolition. If things worked without money: it would be missing—and thus *nothing* would be missing.

The world would no longer be doubled. Things and people would merely be themselves, not bound to any duality, not subjected to this *un*-thing, whose compulsion to multiply *itself* makes everything count for nothing. All food would be produced because it is food, not under the precondition that it, at the same time, above all, has to have value, that *un*-being, which everything has to become if it is to serve somebody for consumption. People would only need to worry about these resources but not because they should be made the resources of an *un*-value, which is not concerned about anything else at all.

Nothing would be too expensive anymore. No hunger would hence go unallayed because money is lacking. No help would therefore go unrendered because nobody can afford it. No enterprise would fall flat only because, somewhere else, consumption was not sufficiently transformed into this state-guaranteed chimera.

Nothing would depend on having to be profitable anymore. No deed and no good would come into being only then when the calculation alongside works out: money invested for it has to become more money in return. Manufacturing facilities would be run for their products and would not collapse because of the insufficient money they make. Nobody would lose his livelihood for the reason that paying him would mean that another person would not get sufficient profit.

One could produce according to the demands and needs of the business, not dictated by costs and profitability. No house would have to be built or refurbished to a lower standard than the technical possibilities permit—for the simple reason

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that it is cheaper. Livestock would not have to be reared for sale with dirt, chemicals and feed containing other animals—because it is the only way to survive in the market. And people, at least those who are lucky enough today to grapple for the good fortune of a paid job, would not have to work under a pressure that increasingly ruins their lives—because the competition doesn't countenance anything else.

That's all well and good but these are papery, utopian conditions and a list that could be continued endlessly, from wars for a world order that suits the leading economies to the brand pressure among the young, or, on the other hand, from a good-tasting tomato to providing for all men without the notion of conquerors and conquered. But, the first objection is as follows: Who then is to pay for all the beautiful things? No one should pay for them because no one would have anything more to pay for. Who covers the costs? No one; money would not have to be procured for anything anymore. But who will produce what everybody needs? Who will perform the necessary services? Whoever—let's say, for the time being: volunteers.

Of course, the objection is compelling: if there is no money, where is everything to come from? But that only presumes again exactly what must not anymore be a precondition, namely, money as the fuel for all activity and production. Because today everything happens under its constraint, because nothing is done today without money being involved, this is why it is unimaginable that, without money, anything could come to be achieved at all. However, it would be correct to say that whenever people resolve to do something which is within the realm of their possibilities, it usually works because they resolve to do it and are agreed on it.

Another objection: How should it be then that one gives and takes and in doing so does not want to get *as much* as one has given? Should one let oneself be overcharged, without batting an eyelash? Should it be allowed, without right of appeal, that one gets in return something *less* valuable than

that which has been given? No, because it would not be *less* valuable, because it would not be *value*. And this is not a trick but shows once again how difficult it is for us to not see the world as value. For this objection also presupposes something that wouldn't make sense anymore without money: the exchange of equivalents between the two owners of values A and B. This also would be dropped and be replaced by the right thing: the collective, agreed production and distribution of goods.

“But then, everybody can take what he wants!” A good objection, indeed and finally a word of truth about money. Otherwise it is a widely held conviction that money solely exists so that everyone gets his stuff, because he undoubtedly gets it *for money*. And yet things are such that he gets it *exclusively* for money, and in this way money is obversely the means whereby *not* everyone can take what he wants, in fact that he can take *nothing*, that he is *excluded* from everything—from everything for which he cannot offer *money*. This exclusion would indeed have to be dropped. Not in the sense that the world would remain a supermarket and the individual would go there, clear out the shelves and open his own shop—and why would he, since nobody would buy anything from him. Rather, in the sense that the distribution, as well as the production would be agreed upon, no longer a matter for private customers but a kind of commons.

How should that work? That, I don't know. But I have a proposal.

All the people who are still full-time or otherwise a large part of their professional lives engaged in considering, calculating and figuring out how money is to be handled, thus, for instance, from the regular civil servants in finance departments up to the ministries, economic experts from the IMF down to the tax consultant, banking professionals from the ugly branch office here on the corner again up to the European

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Central Bank and the World Bank, the people from the insurance industry, from the advertising agencies and corporate consultants, the concentrated *intelligentsia* of business and economics, business journalists, brokers all the way up to Nobel Prize-winning high-flyers who, with their formulas the year after the award, are a complete failure, the developers of cash machines, anti-theft devices and transportation tickets, employees at check-out lines, in bookkeeping, in marketing, a plethora of lawyers, watchmen and prison guards, bank robbers and speculators, programmers and packaging designers, unionists and lottery queens, all of them, these millions and millions of people who, without money would have nothing, or at least significantly less, to do, and thus would be free for a new occupation, but also including all the other people who still have enough worries with money, they could all get together at an enormous brainstorming session, a kind of Silicon Valley of the new social theory, to the critical mass of a qualitatively freed innovation discourse—oh well, thus, they might orient their collective intellect which until now has served the high levels of productivity *plus* the stressful administration of financial affairs, to focus only on the former. And then they might consider how the essentials will be produced and distributed.

Production will certainly change, goods will not have to travel three times around the world only to have consumed in the end less money but all the more energy. Not every little childrens' yogurt will stand in its own little plastic cup with its own lid on open, refrigerated shelves so that its purchase does not, for heaven's sake, have to overcome any unnecessary resistance. On the one hand, production capacity will decrease since money, as the grand coercive power over people, will be gone and with this there will be no incentive for growth anymore; on the other hand, however, it will increase, for money will no longer exclude millions and millions of people and condemn them to inactivity; and because lots and lots of unnecessary labor, otherwise concerned with the dif-

ficulties with money and guessing the vagaries of the always blind, impenetrable market, will be freed up for more useful purposes.

And distribution? Doesn't it have to be *planned*? Yes, it does. I know this sounds abhorrent to the ears of people who in the market economy were all so free and never had to plan anything, weren't they? Is it not true that such people have planned neither any elements or processes of production nor the circumvention, outbidding, or thwarting of competitors? No, the stock market's course *cannot* be planned at all, never in their entire lives have those people wasted a thought on planning this course, have they? Well, now unfortunately and surprisingly all of a sudden it would have to be planned, yes, although not like in Socialism, the "sales" of "goods," the "generation" of "surplus value" and similar gibberish. Instead, what is needed would have to be planned, how many "hands" are required and for how long to be able to produce in a certain way—things like that. Programs could be implemented which have been in use for a long time in businesses, programs that determine when and which component of production has to be delivered to which location for all to be well in the end. In the meantime, establishing needs would make use of the wonderfully interactive planning capabilities of the Internet. And people, who in any case want to prevent someone from getting more than he is entitled to, would no doubt achieve results with a minimum of the effort used today to solve this problem. It would suffice me: I have food, shelter, no competition; if anyone wants to fight over a yacht, then let him do so.

Is everybody agreed? Can anybody imagine it? Would—now—any of you want to abolish money?

No arm twitches, no finger moves. I remain alone. What can be wrong, what has happened, what did I overlook? But, of course, one very small trifle: the fact that it doesn't work.

Because money *exists*—and correspondingly its *compulsive* power. Every single cent that someone owns, exists in this world as the *claim* to be redeemed in merchandise, a powerfully protected, heavily monitored claim that everybody has to insist upon and which, hence, is passed along as always itself and always the same. We don't want to give up the one big thing that we, here on this earth, own, that forms us, that determines our place—or makes that place threateningly precarious—: this would be like giving up *ourselves*. And we *cannot* give it up. There are mighty overseers who do not like it when states themselves allow *too little* entitlement in their own sovereign areas of monetary logic. They don't like it and therefore don't let it happen. To that end they extort, murder, scheme and not least also wage real war. Nowadays war no longer needs to be cold. The thing with abolishing money, one can, as they say, forget about it.

So let's just put it out of our thoughts forever.

*Eske Bockelmann, author of Im Takt des Geldes. Zur Genese modernen Denkens, Zu Klampen, Springe, 2004, works in Chemnitz as a lecturer in Latin and Greek.*

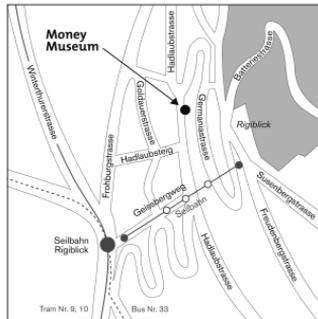
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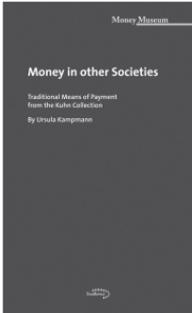
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