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Money in the making of world society

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Description :

Au lieu de voir dans la monnaie un simple moyen d'échange, contribuant à la dépersonnalisation de nos rapports sociaux et à la désagrégation de notre société-monde, Keith Hart nous invite à la voir comme le symbole d'une «mémoire collective» qui fait société.

Revue du Mauss permanente

“Je dois d’abord rappeler que la France ne vit ni en vase clos ni dans un monde immobile. Nous devons prendre conscience que nous vivons une communauté de destin planétaire, face aux menaces globales qu’apportent la prolifération des armes nucléaires, le déchaînement des conflits ethno-religieux, la dégradation de la biosphère, le cours ambivalent d’une économie mondiale incontrôlée, la tyrannie de l’argent, l’union d’une barbarie venue du fond des âges et de la barbarie glacée du calcul technique et économique. Le système planétaire est condamné à la mort ou à la transformation. Notre époque de changement est devenue un changement d’époque.” (Edgar Morin, Si j’avais été candidat, *Le Monde*, 24th April 2007)

I explore here the formation of world society in our time and the relationship of money to this process. Clearly, as capitalism, money is both a creative and an oppressive force driving globalization [1]. I believe that money and markets are indispensable to the extension of society, even if their contemporary form often conflicts with humanity’s common interests. My main predecessors are Kant, Durkheim and Mauss, from whom I draw what might be understood as an anthropology. After an Introduction, I first consider the rupture between self and society that resulted from modern society’s reliance on impersonal institutions and the conditions for restoring a measure of unity to that relationship to live as a whole person in harmony with society. Then I examine why ours is a special moment in the history of world society. As the first generation for whom world society is a fact; we are equipped with the means to study it and are indeed obliged to do so, if we can overcome the myopia of nationalism. Next, I present my principal conclusions on money. Money was a human universal long before its current apotheosis as the money markets. Although capitalism generates economic inequality and injustice worldwide, its historical mission to produce cheap commodities and to break down the insularity of traditional communities still has a long way to go. We must nevertheless explore the possibilities for economic democracy today; and I conclude with some brief reflections on method inspired by Mauss.

Introduction

A lot hinges on where in the long process of human evolution we imagine the world is today. The Victorians believed that they stood at the pinnacle of civilization. I think of us as being like the first digging-stick operators, primitives stumbling into the invention of agriculture, but with no way of imagining its culmination in Chinese civilization. The second half of the twentieth century was a distinctive phase in the process of bringing the peoples of the world closer together. When, in the late 1990s, I asked what it is about us that future generations will be interested in, I fixed on the rapid advances being made at the time in forming a single interactive network linking all humanity. This has two striking features: first, the network is a highly unequal market of buyers and sellers fuelled by a money circuit that has become progressively detached from production and politics; and second, it is driven by a digital revolution in communications (the convergence of computers, television and telephones into a single technology) whose symbol is the internet, the network of networks. So my research over the last decade has been concerned with how the forms of money and exchange are changing in the context of this communications revolution (Hart 2000).

The evidence for global integration is contested. My case rests on three developments of the last two decades: 1. The collapse of the Soviet Union, opening up the world to transnational capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies. 2. The entry of China’s and India’s two billion people, a third of humanity, into the world market as powers in their own right and the globalization of capital accumulation, for the first time loosening the grip of America and Europe on the global economy. 3. The shortening of time and distance brought about by the communications revolution, linked to a restlessly mobile population, but not to resettlement on the scale seen in the decades leading up to the First World War.

The corollary of this revolution is a counter-revolution, the reassertion of state power since September 11th and the

imperialist war for oil in the Middle East. As Kant (1784) said, conflict is the catalyst for seeking a lawful basis of world society. Certainly humanity has regressed significantly from the hopes for equality released by the Second World War and the anti-colonial revolution that followed it. On the other hand, growing awareness of the consequences of our collective actions for life on this planet might be another stimulus to take world society seriously. If society is currently caught between national and global versions, the limited economic freedoms of neo-liberalism have opened up a range of new political possibilities, from transnational association via the internet and regional trading blocs to innovative patterns of enterprise and co-operation at the local and national levels.

What this adds up to is the possible formation of a new human universal. By this I mean making a world where all people can live together, not the imposition of principles that suit some powerful interests at the expense of the rest. The next universal will be unlike its predecessors, the Christian and bourgeois versions through which the West has sought to dominate or replace the cultural particulars that organize people's lives everywhere. The main precedent for such an approach to discovering our common humanity is great literature which achieves universality through going deeply into particular personalities, relations and places. The new universal will not just tolerate cultural particulars, but will be founded on knowing true human community can only be realized through them.

The title of this essay echoes that of a book I edited posthumously for a friend Roy Rappaport's *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999) which I consider to be the most important text on the anthropology of religion since Émile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). Here I point to the parallels between money and religion in modern society. Human beings need to stabilize relations between self and society, between the everyday lives they know so well and the mysteries of belonging together that extend far beyond our ability to grasp them. Religion once did this for most people and still does for many. I study money because it is central to the formation of world society and it shares some of the features of religion, being at once an abstract expression of our most inclusive associations and the concrete means of fulfilling our immediate desires and obligations.

Anthropology is indispensable to the making of world society: not the current academic discipline as such, but rather in Kant's (1798) original sense of what we need to know about humanity as a whole if we want to build a world fit for everyone. I hope that this use of anthropology could be embraced by students of history, sociology, political economy, philosophy and literature, as well as by members of my own profession. It is the intellectual arm of a collective project to which many disciplines might contribute without being exclusively devoted to it. The idea of development has played a similar role in the last half-century. Ethnography was a revolutionary move a century ago of which anthropologists can be justly proud. For the first time, professionals left academic seclusion to join people where they live in order to find out what they do and think. But it will not do as the sole framework for the kind of anthropology of world society I envisage now.

I trace this vision of anthropology to spending an afternoon on a Jamaican beach two decades ago with a book of C.L.R. James's occasional writings on cricket (James 1986, Hart 2003). It occurred to me that we had lived in the same places — the Caribbean, Britain, America, Africa — in a different sequence, at different times and with very different trajectories. Jamaica helped me to make sense of my journey through Atlantic history until then. The contrast between America and Europe, the new world vs. the old, is often remarked upon. There had been nothing surprising about West Africa for me. It seemed to be an old society, like Britain. America was new, for sure, but I had not yet digested its significance. The Caribbean was all of the other three combined. Like the United States, it had been created from scratch by adventurers, the aboriginal population destroyed. But Africa and Europe remained a conservative force in the Caribbean that the Americans had broken with decisively. Jamaica helped me to synthesize experiences that had been disparate until then. In shadowing the African diaspora, I had absorbed something of their outlook on history as dispersion and movement. I came to think of this as cubist. Whereas agrarian civilization taught people to see the world while rooted to one spot, the Middle Passage had, as James insisted, spawned the first truly modern people, a people formed by dislocation and dreams of emancipation who could place themselves at several points of the picture. I too learned to imagine myself in the different places I had been and, sure enough, my perspective on the world changed as I did so.

Later Anna Grimshaw and I edited for publication James's long forgotten manuscript on *American Civilization*, written in

New York shortly before his eviction from the USA in 1953, a book we had wanted to name *The Struggle for Happiness* :

“[James] held happiness to be as essential to the human experience as the desire for freedom and equality. It was the desire of the modern age, what people want, expressive of complex and deeply rooted needs of human beings for integration, to become whole, to live in harmony with society. For him, happiness had two facets, the freedom to be a fully developed, creative, individual personality and to be part of a community based on principles conducive to that aim. This was the unity of private interest and public spirit which de Tocqueville had found in the early American democracy” (Introduction to James 1993).

James (1963) also once wrote :

“Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place&before I discovered that it is not the quality of goods and utility that matter, but movement; not where you are or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there.”

The unity of self and society

There are two prerequisites for being human: we must each learn to be self-reliant to a high degree and to belong to others, merging our identities in a bewildering variety of social relationships. Much of modern ideology emphasizes how problematic it is to be both self-interested and mutual, to be economic as well as social, we might say. When culture is set up to expect a conflict between the two, it is hard to be both. Yet the two sides are often inseparable in practice and some societies, by encouraging private and public interests to coincide, have managed to integrate them more effectively than ours.

Integration is made more difficult in capitalist societies where the individual self-interest of the market is opposed to the pure gift and presumptive altruism of the family and primitive communes. Mauss (1925) held that the attempt to create a free market for private contracts is utopian and just as unrealizable as its antithesis, a collective based solely on altruism. Human institutions everywhere are founded on the unity of individual and society, freedom and obligation, self-interest and concern for others. Modern capitalism thus rests on an unsustainable attachment to one of these poles and it will take a social revolution to restore a humane balance. Seen in this light, the pure types of selfish and generous economic action obscure the complex interplay between our individuality and belonging in subtle ways to others. If learning to be two-sided is the means of becoming human, then the lesson is hard to learn.

Émile Durkheim (1912), in the most neo-Kantian and last of his major works, insisted that we are at once collective and individual. What we know empirically is our own everyday life, the mundane features of our personal routines. But we are also subject to forces whose origins we *do not know* natural disasters, social revolutions and death. Durkheim held that what is ultimately unknown to us is our collective being in society. Religion is the organized attempt to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, between the world of ordinary experience and an extraordinary world that lies beyond it. So we worship society and call it God. Religion binds (Latin: *religare*) something inside each of us to an outside force, lending stability to our meaningful interaction with the world and providing an anchor for our volatility. The chaos of everyday life thus attains a measure of order to the degree that it is informed by ideas representing the social facts of a shared existence. We internalize these beliefs most effectively through the heightened consciousness fostered by ritual.

Each of us embarks on a journey outward into the world and inward into the self. Society is mysterious to us because we have lived in it and it now dwells inside us at a level that is not ordinarily visible from the perspective of everyday life. Writing is one way of trying to bring the two into some mutual understanding that we can share with others. All the places we have lived in are sources of introspection concerning our relationship to society; and one method for understanding the world is to make an ongoing practice of trying to synthesize these varied experiences. If a person would have an identity — would be one thing, one self — this requires trying to make out of fragmented social experience a more coherent whole, a world in other words as singular as the self.

Kant is the source for the notion that society may be as much an expression of individual subjectivity as a collective force out there. Copernicus solved the problem of the movement of the heavenly bodies by having the spectator revolve while they were at rest, instead of them revolve around the spectator. Kant extended this achievement for physics into metaphysics (Cassirer 1981: 148-149). In his preface to *The Critique of Pure Reason* he writes, Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects... but what if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge? In order to understand the world, we must begin not with the empirical existence of objects, but with the reasoning embedded in our experience itself and in all the judgments we have made. This is to say that the world is inside each of us as much as it is out there. Our task is to unite the two poles as subjective individuals who share the object world with the rest of humanity.

Kant's achievement was soon overthrown by a counter-revolution that identified society with the state. This was launched by Hegel (1821) and it was only truly consummated after the First World War. As a result, the personal was separated from the impersonal, the subject from the object, humanism from science. Twentieth-century society was conceived of as an impersonal mechanism defined by international division of labour, national bureaucracy and scientific laws understood only by experts. Not surprisingly, most people felt ignorant and impotent in the face of such a society. Yet, we have never been more conscious of ourselves as unique personalities who make a difference. Moreover, even if the rules are impersonal, actual social organization consists of real people doing things with each other.

Division of the economy into impersonal and personal spheres is capitalism's modern project for us all. A flood of migrants into industrial employment established wage labour as the norm in nineteenth-century Europe (Thompson 1968). This led to an attempt to separate the spheres in which paid and unpaid work predominated. One of these is ideally objective and impersonal, specialized and calculated; the other is subjective and personal, diffuse, based on long-term interdependence. The first is a zone of infinite scope where things, and increasingly human creativity, are bought and sold for money, *the market*. The second is a protected sphere of domestic life, where intimate personal relations hold sway, home. The market is unbounded and, in a sense, unknowable, whereas the bounds of domestic life are known only too well. The normal link between the two is that some adults, traditionally men more than women, go out to work, to make the money on which the household subsists. The economy of the home rests on spending this money and performing services without payment. The result is a heightened sense of division between an outside world where our humanity feels swamped and a precarious zone of protected personality at home. This duality is the moral and practical foundation of capitalist society.

The attempt to construct a market where commodities are exchanged instantly and impersonally as alienable private property is unrealizable. All the efforts of economists to insist on the autonomy of market logic cannot disguise the fact that market relations have a personal and social component, particularly when the commodity being bought and sold is human creativity. Where does the social pressure come from to make business impersonal? Weber (1981) had one answer: rational calculation of profit in enterprises depends on the capitalist's ability to control product and factor markets, especially that for labour. But human work is not an object separable from the person performing it, so people must be taught to submit to the impersonal disciplines of the workplace. To some extent, this insistence on impersonal rules is just an ideology. As everyone knows, businesses consist of relations between persons. But the forms of bureaucracy also shape economic life in reality. The war to impose these rules has never been completely won. So, just as money is intrinsic to the home economy, personality remains intrinsic to the workplace, which means that the cultural effort required to keep the two spheres separate, if only at the conceptual level, is huge. Those who have submitted to this confusing

paradigm of division often accuse others of backwardness for refusing to acknowledge its force.

Money in capitalist societies stands for alienation, detachment, impersonal society, the outside; its origins lie beyond our control. Relations marked by the absence of money are the model of personal integration and free association, of what we take to be familiar, the inside. Commodities are goods because we consume them in person, but we find it difficult to embrace money, the means of their exchange, as good because it belongs to an impersonal sphere that is indifferent to morality and, in some sense, stays there. The good life, instead of uniting work and home, is restricted to what takes place in the latter. This institutional dualism, forcing individuals to divide themselves, asks too much of us. People want to integrate division, to make some meaningful connection between themselves as subjects and society as an object. It helps that money, as well as being the means of separating public and domestic life, was always the main bridge between the two. That is why money must be central to any attempt to humanize society and why its role in society evokes religion. Today money is both the principal source of our vulnerability in society and the main practical symbol allowing each of us to make an impersonal world meaningful. If Durkheim said we worship society and call it God, then money is the God of capitalist society.

How can we repair this rupture between self and society? Mohandas K. Gandhi's critique of the modern identification of society with the state was devastating (Parekh 1989). He believed that it disabled citizens, subjecting mind and body to the control of professional experts when the purpose of a civilization should be to enhance its members' sense of their own self-reliance. He proposed instead that every human being is a unique personality and participates with the rest of humanity in an encompassing whole. Between these extremes lie proliferating associations of great variety. Gandhi settled on the village as the most appropriate social vehicle for Indian development. If the world of society and nature is devoid of meaning, each of us is left feeling small, isolated and vulnerable. How do we bridge the gap between a puny self and a vast, unknowable world? The answer is to scale down the world, to scale up the self or a combination of both, so that a meaningful relationship might be established between the two. Gandhi chose the village as the site of India's renaissance because it was where most Indians lived, but also because it had a social scale appropriate to self-respecting members of an agrarian civilization. He devoted a large part of his philosophy to building up the personal resources of individuals. Our task is to bring this project up to date.

The popularity of novels and movies lies in their ability to span actual and possible worlds. They bring history down in scale to a familiar frame (the paperback, the screen) and audiences enter into that history subjectively on any terms their imagination permits. Men and women once prayed to God with similar results. What human beings need is to feel at *home in the world*. The sources of our alienation are commonplace. What interests me is resistance to alienation, whatever form it takes, religious or otherwise. How can we feel at home out there, in the restless turbulence of the modern world? The digital revolution in communications is in part a response to this universal human problem. We feel at home in intimate, face-to-face relations; but we must engage in remote, often impersonal exchanges at distance. Improvements in telecommunications cannot stop until we replicate at distance the experience of face-to-face interaction. For the drive to overcome alienation is even more powerful than alienation itself. Social evolution has reached the point of establishing near-universal communications; now we must make world society in the image of our own humanity.

The making of world society

The world has seen three periods when globalization — increasing awareness of the world as a framework for shared social life — has been palpable. Kant lived through the first, at the end of the eighteenth century, when the American and French revolutions, British industrial capitalism and the international movement to abolish slavery evoked the accelerated integration of world society. The second consisted of the three decades leading up to the First World War, when international migration took place on a scale that has not been seen before or since and the world economy was instituted as a racial order (Lewis 1978). The third phase is now, the second decade of the communications revolution. Only in this last case are we justified in speaking of world society as a realized fact, although the process of global

integration is far from finished. Each of the previous periods threw up visions of world society and we have much to learn from studying them.

In *Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant held that Cosmopolitan Right, the basic right of all world citizens, should rest on conditions of universal hospitality, that is, the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory. We should be free to go wherever we like in the world, since it belongs to us all equally. He goes on :

The peoples of the earth have entered in varying degree into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity.

This confident sense of an emergent world order, written over two centuries ago by the man who gave currency to the word anthropology (Kant 2006), can now be seen to be the high point of the liberal revolution, before it was overwhelmed by its twin offspring, industrial capitalism and the nation state.

Earlier Kant wrote an essay, *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose* (1784) which included the following propositions:

1. In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural faculties which aim at the use of reason shall be fully developed in the species, not in the individual.
2. The means that nature employs to accomplish the development of all faculties is the antagonism of men in society, since this antagonism becomes, in the end, the cause of a lawful order of this society.
3. The latest problem for mankind, the solution of which nature forces us to seek, is the achievement of a civil universe we inhabit do seem to be indispensable to the construction of institutions capable of administering justice worldwide. The idea that humanity is that part of the world through which the world as a whole can think about itself (Rappaport 1999:461) is the central theme of Kant's prescient essay. The task for the next century of building a global civil society, perhaps a world state, is an urgent one and anthropological visions can play their part in that.
4. This problem is both the most difficult and the last to be solved by mankind.
5. A philosophical attempt to write a universal world history according to a plan of nature which aims at perfect civic association of mankind must be considered to be possible and even as capable of furthering nature's purpose."

The half-century from the Second World War to the millennium was an extraordinary period, when humanity formed a society — a single interactive social network — for the first time. This was the cosmopolitan society that Kant envisaged earlier, but did not witness. It is massively unequal and riddled with conflict, but now at last there is a universe of communications to give concrete expression to universal ideas. In future historians will want to study this emerging human society and they will look to us for clues. They will mostly be disappointed by the fragmented narrowness of our anthropological vision.

As late as 1950, some New Guinea Highlanders thought that they were the only people in the world. Mutual ignorance is still commonplace, but social isolation of this kind has been ended. Human society and demography were irreversibly transformed in the half century following the war. World population doubled between 1960 and 2000 (from 3 to 6 billions). Countries like France, Japan and Italy were still half peasant in 1945, but by the millennium agriculture accounted for less than 10% of the workforce in all the leading capitalist countries. Food production was fully mechanized for the first time and most of the world now ate the produce of a few heavily subsidized western farmers. The proportion living in cities rose from 2-3% in 1800 to around 50% in 2000, most of the increase after 1945 taking place in the poor countries. Since the 1970s, the world economy has been more integrated as a circuit of capital, increasingly polarized between rich and poor and in broad terms stagnant. By 2000, half of the hundred largest economic units on the planet were business corporations, 35 of whom had an annual turnover (\$30-50 billions) greater than the GNP of all but eight countries. If the world became a single interactive network in this period, it was mainly as a network of markets on which everyone's livelihood now depended in some degree.

The gross discrepancy between economic opportunities in the rich and poor countries has led to a new, more cosmopolitan mixture of peoples in the main cities. A transport revolution was built on the car and the airplane. Even more striking was a communications revolution culminating during the 1990s in the digital convergence of three technologies — telephones, television and computers. This revolution's great symbol is the rise of the internet, but equally important for shared human consciousness is the size of global TV audiences, over two billions for some major sporting events (more people watching the same thing than were alive in 1945!). Above all, space travel allowed us to see the earth from the outside for the first time. Notions of community, largely limited to residence or work before, have been hugely expanded in the process.

While we all participate in these developments, disparities of life experience on the planet remain vast. The rich countries, the OECD club that includes North America, Western Europe and Japan, account for about 15% of the world's population. The rest must reconcile their relative poverty with an unfinished history of racism, a hangover from nineteenth-century imperialism when westerners used their new machines to take over the planet. One third of humanity still works in the fields with their hands; many of them have never made a phone call in their life. Africa stands out as both the symbol and reality of this contrast. Today up to half of its people live in cities and African migrants overcome routine obstacles to move around the world; but production there is weakly mechanized and the continent's share of global purchasing power is only 2%.

Identification of modern capitalism with the West has been undermined by the rise of the Asian economies in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1980s and since, American and European dominance has been challenged by Japan, followed by the Southeast Asian tigers, with China and India lumbering into high gear behind. Asia has long been where the majority of human beings live and now much of manufacturing production is being relocated there. Here, only two centuries after the first stirrings of the machine revolution, is a profound test of the assumption that the world's future lies with capitalism's western pioneers.

It is possible to minimize the epoch-making significance of these changes, to claim that globalization is centuries old, nothing new. Perhaps judgment is inevitably subjective in these matters. I do not claim that the formation of world society has been completed now or that it lacked antecedents; but consider what the human condition was like before the second world war and what it is now. Something tremendous has happened in between. Humanity has been brought closer together in dramatic ways and, if anything, society has become more unequal. We have difficulty imagining the processes involved, not least because of a national consciousness fed by our own country's media every day. We may not be able to grasp the significance of our first tentative steps towards the unification of world society, but future historians will recognize the significance of our clumsy efforts. By then, the fundamental choices affecting the prospects for life on earth may well have been already made.

The age of money

“In the beginning all the world was *America* and more so than that is now; for no such thing as Money was any where known. Find out something that hath the *use and value of money* amongst his neighbours, you shall see the same man will begin presently to *enlarge his possessions*.” (Locke, 1960:301, original italics)

Ours is an age of money. Half the world worships money and the other half thinks of it as the root of all evil. In either case, money makes the world go round. If human society has any unity at this time it is as a world market. There is nothing wrong with people exchanging goods and services as equals. The problem is that markets use money: some people have lots of it and most people have much less than enough. The unequal face of the age of money is called capitalism; and the principal source of that inequality has been a machine revolution whose uneven development is only two centuries old. The combination of money and machines is the engine pushing humanity from the village to the city and ultimately to the world as our normal habitat. Although we think of ourselves as a modern people, our institutions still look backwards to the previous phase of agrarian civilization (Hart 2000). The economic forms we live by are archaic. Indeed capitalism could be said to be a sort of feudal economy matched to a machine revolution whose potential we barely understand. The lethal result is a polarized world society that resembles nothing so much as the Old Regime, with an isolated elite controlling the destiny of powerless human masses to whose fate they are largely indifferent.

Several writers have depicted history as a sequence in which the human past was dominated by nature or the land and the future is imagined as a just and reasonable society expressing the interests of all. The present, conceived of as transitional between these two states, is simultaneously a dissolvent of the past and the bridge to a better future. Its main feature is money and the buying and selling that go with it. Whether we call it the market or capitalism, money is variously taken to be indispensable to the just society or anathema to it. John Locke (1690) and Karl Marx (1867), somewhat inaccurately, have been taken to epitomize each strand. Just as Locke has been credited with the theory underpinning the bourgeois revolution of property-owning democracy and hence of capitalism (Macpherson 1964), Marx too has been claimed as the author of many twentieth century experiments in socialism that were hostile to money and markets. They share a vision of the contradictory part played by money in human history as an engine of inequality: in disrupting old society, it paves the way for utopia.

Money is often portrayed as a lifeless object separated from persons, whereas it is a creation of human beings, imbued with the collective spirit of the living and the dead. Money, as a token of society, must be impersonal in order to connect each individual to the universe of relations to which they belong. The economists capture this aspect in their abstract models of exchange. But people make everything personal, including their relations with society. Anthropologists and sociologists are sensitive to the meaning of money in people's everyday lives (Parry and Bloch 1989, Zelizer 1994). This two-sided relationship is universal, but its incidence is highly variable, providing a thread for the study of human history as a whole and in all its diversity.

What then is money? All the textbooks give the same definitions: it is a means of payment; a unit of account; a standard of value; a store of wealth (Bannock *et al* 1984). These conventions do not capture money's most important feature, its evolution as a means of human interaction in society. Money is *made* by us, but for most people it has long been something scarce that we *take* passively, without any sense of its being our collective creation. From having been an object produced by remote authorities, it is becoming more obviously a subjective expression of our own will; and this development is mirrored in the shift from real to virtual money. In the last three centuries, the money form has evolved from metallic coins and ledger entries through paper notes to electronic digits. In the process, money is becoming dematerialized, losing any shred of a claim that it is founded on the natural scarcity of precious metals.

Money is purchasing power, a means of buying and selling in markets. It counts wealth and status. It is a store of memory linking individuals to their various communities, a kind of memory bank (Hart 2000) and thus a source of identity. As a symbolic medium, it conveys information through a system of signs that relies more on numbers than words. A lot more circulates with money than the goods and services it buys. Money's significance lies in the synthesis it promotes of impersonal abstraction and personal meaning, objectification and subjectivity, analytical reason and synthetic narrative. Its social power comes from the fluency of its mediation between infinite potential and finite determination.

In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler (1918) emphasized the part played by money and number in the history of Western civilization. Rather than adopt a timeless form of words, he constructed the present through a dialectic of becoming and become, that is the movement of life or time as direction (history) and its finitude as what has stopped evolving, the past (nature). Number (and by extension money) is the chief sign of completed demarcation, of all things that have become

themselves. Spengler identified a break between classical antiquity and the modern West. For the Greeks, number was *magnitude*, the essence of all things perceptible to the senses. Mathematics for them was thus concerned with measurement in the here and now, visible and tangible. All this changed with Descartes whose new number-idea was *function* a world of relations between points in abstract space. Whereas the Greeks sought perfection within the concrete limits of nature and society as they experienced them, now a passionate Faustian tendency towards the infinite took hold, married to abstract mathematical forms that increasingly freed themselves from concrete reality in order better to control it. The new mathematics culminated in victory over the popular and sensuous number-feeling in us all (Ibid: 56).

Spengler returns to this theme when considering the form-world of economic life. There has been a shift, parallel to that in mathematics, from thinking in terms of goods to thinking in terms of money. Tangible property has been replaced by fortune, a purely numerical quantum that is mobile and undefined. With the rise of double-entry book-keeping, economic function became not even the ledger entry, but the act of writing it. When a businessman signs a piece of paper to mobilize remote forces, this gesture stands in an abstract relationship to the power of labour and machinery which only takes the form of money numbers in a retrospective accountancy process. Modern money is the result of creative thinking, mentally devised as an instrument of Faustian life. Thinking in money generates money. It turns the world into subjects and objects, consisting of a few executives and those who follow their orders. Each individual is either a part of the money force or just a mass. The payment of money, like words and numbers, fixes the transience of life and makes it final, certain. But, in the historical form of modern capitalism, money also makes a break with the object-world and becomes the aspiration to infinite growth. Spengler's argument that magnitude was replaced by function in Western history would be better conceived of as a continuing dialectical relationship.

In order for us to do things for each other in society, the services we perform have to be detached as commodities from what we do for ourselves within the confines of the small groups we live in. This process of social abstraction, commoditization (Hart 1982), draws us into ever-widening circles of interdependence, the most inclusive of which are calculated in terms of money. The classical political economists, from Smith to Marx, distinguished between a commodity's concrete value in use (quality) and its higher-order ability to enter into abstract relations of exchange with other commodities through money (quantity). They concentrated on the latter function, but the commodity remains something useful and in that use lies its concrete realization. The reality of commoditization is thus not just universal abstraction, but this mutual determination of the abstract and the concrete. We now rely on the products of abstraction, machines, to engage with others at distance in highly concrete ways; and any discussion of money today has to address that development (Hart 2000).

The word *money* comes from *Moneta*, a name by which the Roman queen of the gods, Juno, was known (Silver 1992). It was in her temple that coins were struck. Most European languages retain the word *money* for coinage, using another word for money in general. *Moneta* was a translation of the Greek *Mnemosyne*, the goddess of memory and mother of the Muses, each of whom presided over one of the nine arts and sciences. It was derived from the Latin verb *monere*, whose first meaning is to remind, put in mind of, bring to one's recollection. For the Romans then, money was an instrument of collective memory that needed divine protection, like the arts. As such, it was both a memento of the past and a sign of the future.

Money conveys meanings and the meaning of money itself tells us a lot about the way we make the communities we live in. In *Frozen Desire* (1997), James Buchan suggests that money is principally a vehicle for the expression of human wishes. In order to realize our limitless desires, they are trapped for a moment, frozen in money transactions that allow us to meet others in society who are capable of satisfying them.

Money is one of those human creations which make concrete a sensation, in this case a sensation of wanting. Quite early in its history, money passed from being a mere conveyance of desire to the object of all desire. For money is incarnate desire. Money takes wishes and broadcasts them to the world. [It] offers a reward that is not in any sense fixed or finite but that every person is free to imagine in the realm of his own desires. That process of wish and imagination, launched or completed a million times every second, is the engine of our civilization. (1997: 269)

Like the economists of our day, Buchan emphasizes the subjective wants of individuals and the way these are made temporarily objective in acts of buying and selling. Money also expresses something social, about the way we belong to each other in communities. We need to understand better how we build the infrastructures of collective existence, money among them. How do meanings come to be shared and memory to transcend the minutiae of personal experience ?

Memory played an important part in Locke's philosophy of money (Caffentzis 1989). When market transactions take place over time, as through the extension of credit, the abstract models of economics take on greater personal and social complexity. Locke's theory of property rested on the idea of a *person* who, by performing labour on the things given to us in common by nature, made them his own. But, in order to sustain a claim on his property through time, that person has to remain the same; and personal identity depends on consciousness. Property must endure in order to be property and that depends on memory.

“The great enemy of property is oblivion, since the loss of conscious mastery over time and succession leads inevitably to the breakdown of property. Thus the forces of oblivion are antagonistic to the self and property, while all the techniques of mnemonics are their essential allies.” (Ibid: 53-54)

What drove society from the state of nature towards the social contract and civil government was the invention of money :

“Scarcity, for Locke, is not natural. It was only with the invention of money that wealth stopped being defined and bounded by use. With money a man could own more land and produce more than he needed for his own necessities. While still abiding by the natural law, he could accumulate wealth in a quasi-eternal form which he need not share with others. Money trains its possessor, whether legal or illegal, in abstractness as well as in the potential infinity of satisfaction. The accumulation of money is thus the exercise of our power to suspend our determination, which is for Locke the highest expression of our liberty, before an infinity of choices.” (Ibid:65-66)

Money thus expands the capacity of individuals to stabilize their own personal identity by holding something durable that embodies the desires and wealth of all the other members of society. Money is a *memory bank* (Hart 2000), a store allowing individuals to keep track of those exchanges they wish to calculate and, beyond that, a source of economic memory for the community. Memory banks are found in computers, of course, but the idea of a *bank* is the relatively stable deposit of fast-moving flows, whether of water, money or information. The modern system of money provides individuals with a wide repertoire of instruments to keep track of their exchanges with the world and to calculate the current balance of their worth in the community. In this sense, one of money's chief functions is *remembering*.

Money is intimately linked to democracy as a political principle. This is because its impersonality dissolves differences between people: anyone can use it for their own purposes in the same way. So we vote with our money whenever we buy a cinema ticket or a loaf of bread. But this system of voting is vastly unequal, since some have so much more of it. As a result, money not only binds individuals together; it separates them from each other. It has therefore often been thought to disrupt community. Money breeds and enhances social differentiation; and that is why utopian communities of all sorts (but not Marx) have sought to ban it. The *Americanization* of the planet is substantially the universal projection of their way of money, to the point of undermining national forms of state and culture elsewhere. While this has generated unheard of disparities of wealth within and between communities, it may also contain the seeds of a democratization of money, since powers, hitherto exercised only by a wealthy few, are being diffused by degrees into the population at large. Ever since Keynes (1936), it has been acknowledged that modern economies are driven by the *purchasing power* of people in the mass. The extension of personal credit in the digital age may allow for this power to be realized by individuals to an ever greater degree (Hart 2000).

The world economy is once more being transformed by radical reductions in the cost of producing a basic commodity, the transfer of information. Commodities traded internationally were at first things extracted from the ground and services were performed locally in person. Now your business call could be answered anywhere in the world and a growing number of service jobs are exposed to global competition. Vast profits are made in entertainment, education, the media, finance, software and the other information services. But the digital revolution poses specific problems for accumulation. Information wants to be free and there is downward pressure on prices in this sector arising from the ease of copying proprietary products (Hart 2005).

The cheapening of the cost of information transfers has considerable consequence for long-distance market relations. The era of mass production and consumption may be ending as a result. It is now possible to attach a lot of information about individuals to transactions at distance. For example, Amazon keeps a record of every book bought from them and they make recommendations for new purchases on this basis. This is similar to the small bookseller who reserves a book for a favorite customer, but now it all takes place anonymously. Some firms are moving towards a system known as Customer Relations Maintenance (CRM). This enables them to target buyers who generate above average revenues, a process that has gone furthest in the market for personal credit. Now the number and variety of financial instruments on offer is growing exponentially and these are often customized to individual needs. The trend is to restore personal identity to what were not long ago impersonal contracts. Of course, powerful organizations have access to huge processors with which to manipulate an often unknowing public; and rich individuals have always enjoyed a personal relationship to markets and money. But, for many people, these developments have introduced new conditions of engagement with the impersonal economy. The line between personal and impersonal society is shifting, with significant implications for individual and collective agency.

Twentieth-century society, as we have seen, was based on impersonal economic institutions that made most people feel powerless. Kant's idea is now slowly taking root that society is less an oppressive structure out there and more a subjective capacity that allows each of us to learn how to manage our relations with others. Money is an apt symbol of this shift. It first took the form of scarce objects outside ourselves (coins); but it has increasingly been manifested as personal credit, in the form of digitalized transfers mediated by plastic cards and telephone wires, thereby making it easier for people to think of money more as their own creation. If modern society has always been supposed to be individualistic, only now is the individual emerging as a social force to be reckoned with. This claim rests on a single overwhelming fact, that large amounts of information can now be processed cheaply concerning economic transactions at any distance, thereby making possible the repersonalization of complex economic life. In the process the assumptions that supported mass society for a century are being undermined.

To speak of repersonalization may be misleading, since society and the individual, the impersonal and the personal, are equally necessary to human existence; and working out specific ways of combining them is durably problematic. What is going on is less a shift from the impersonal to the personal, more a change affecting the relationship between the two. If economy in the twentieth century became more impersonal, in response to the increased scale and complexity of exchange, the personal basis of economic relations was not entirely displaced then. Economic history is dialectical. Most people are made quite anxious by being economically dependent on impersonal and anonymous institutions. This is an immense force for reversing the historical pattern of alienation on which the modern economy has been built. Consequently, any renewed emphasis on human personality and concrete social relations in economic life must go hand in hand with the search for forms of impersonal society appropriate to such a goal.

In my main writings on money (Hart 1986, 2000), I sketched a scenario of financial history that leads from state-made money to greater reliance on personal credit. If this could be seen as a step towards greater humanism in economy, we should recognize too that it entails increased dependence on impersonal governments and corporations, on impersonal abstraction of the sort associated with computing operations and on impersonal standards and social guarantees for contractual exchange. If persons are to make a comeback in the post-modern economy, it will not be on a face-to-face basis, but as bits on a screen who sometimes materialize as living people in the present. We may become less weighed down by money as an objective force, more open to the idea that it is a way of keeping track of complex social networks that we each generate. Then money could take a variety of forms compatible with both personal agency and human interdependence at every level from the local

to the global.

We cannot afford to turn our backs on markets and money in the name of collective as opposed to individual interests. This is just to reproduce bourgeois separation of self and society by negation. Moreover, it is not enough for sociologists, anthropologists and institutional economists to emphasize the controls that people already impose on money and exchange as part of their personal practice (Zelizer 1994). That is the everyday world as most of us know it. We also need ways of reaching the parts we don't know, if we wish to avert the ruin they could bring down on us all. Edgar Morin, in the quote at the beginning, listed some of these, including the tyranny of money and the barbarism of economic and technical systems of calculation. But this is to demonize the principal means we have for engaging with society abstractly at the most inclusive level. Mauss did not endorse such a vision of markets and money.

Malinowski (1923) says, of Trobriand *kula* valuables, *Currency* as a rule means a medium of exchange and standard of value, and none of the Massim valuables fulfill these functions. But Mauss replies,

“On this reasoning...there has only been money when precious things...have been really made into currency namely have been inscribed and impersonalized, and detached from any relationship with any legal entity, whether collective or individual, other than the state that mints them... One only defines in this way a second type of money — our own.” (1990:100-102n)

He argues rather that primitive valuables like those used in *kula* are like money in that they ...have purchasing power, and this power has a figure set on it (ibid.). He also takes Malinowski (1922) to task for reproducing in his classification of the forms of Trobriand exchange the bourgeois ideological opposition between self-interested markets and the pure gift. Mauss (1925) was far-sighted when he sought to trace the modern economy to its origin in the archaic gift, rather than in primitive barter as the liberal myth holds (Smith 1776). The idea of money as personal credit, linked less to the history of state coinage than to the acknowledgement of private debts, is consistent with Mauss's emphasis and with my argument here.

If the meaning of money lies in the myriad acts of remembering that link individuals to their communities (Hart 2000), this is facilitated by money's role as the principal instrument of collective memory. People can already enter circuits of exchange based on voluntary association and using special currencies of the sort pioneered in LETS schemes (Hart 2000, 2006). At the other extreme, we participate as individuals in global markets of infinite scope, using international moneys-of-account, such as the dollar and euro, in electronic payment systems of various sorts. It is a world whose plurality of association, even fragmentation, resembles feudalism more than anything else. So we urgently need to harness the current economic trends to develop more effective impersonal institutions (the state) at the global level as well as below. Money's potential to sustain universal connection offers one indispensable means to that end.

Searching for the meaning of money is like asking why anyone would believe in God. Of course we made them both up. But we believe because we have to: faith is the glue sticking past and future together in the present. Because our ephemeral economic transactions depend on using money, it seems to be more stable than the relations it expresses. Money, as a symbol of each person's relationship to society, may be conceived of as durable ground on which to stand, anchoring identity in a collective memory whose concrete symbol is money; or it may be viewed as the outcome of a more creative process where we each generate the personal credit linking us to society (Simmel 1900). The latter view asks us to abandon the idea that society rests on abstract grounds more solid than the transient exchanges we participate in. Few people are prepared to take that step. When the meaning of money is seen to be what each of us makes of it, we may be ready at last to embrace Kant's Copernican revolution in metaphysics and Money will be dethroned as the archaic God of capitalism that it has become.

Conclusions

Marcel Mauss is the chief inspiration for this essay (Mauss 1925, Hart 2007). In *The Gift*, he summarily eliminates the two utilitarian ideologies that purport to account for the evolution of contracts: natural economy, the idea that individual barter was aboriginal (Smith 1776); and the notion that primitive communities were altruistic, giving way eventually to our own regrettably selfish, but more efficient individualism. The human condition rests rather on the complex interplay between individual freedom and social obligation; and markets and money are universal, if not in their current impersonal form. Mauss was an active socialist and prolific political journalist whose focus after the war was on the nationalization of socialism (Mauss 1997, Fournier 2004). His position on the Russian revolution was critical of the Bolsheviks' coercive resort to violence, especially their destruction of the market economy along with all the confidence and good faith it represented. He advocated an economic movement from below, in the form of syndicalism, cooperation, and mutual insurance; and hoped for a consumer democracy driven by the cooperative movement. This engagement underwrote all his work, as he makes explicit in the last chapter of *The Gift* when drawing out the ethical and political implications of his analysis.

Mauss proposes there that, in order to embrace both individuality and group membership, we should adopt a more thoroughgoing humanist approach. He claims that he has studied archaic societies in their dynamic integrity, not as congealed states to be decomposed into analytical instances of rules pertaining to law, myth or value and price :

“By considering the whole together, we have been able to perceive the essential, the movement of everything, the live dimension, the fleeting moment when society or rather men become aware of the common feelings they have for themselves and others. This concrete observation of social life gives us the means of discovering new facts that we are just beginning to glimpse. Nothing, in our opinion, is more urgent and fruitful than this study of social facts.”
(1950: 275-76, my translation)

We should follow the example of the historians and observe what is given, rather than split up social phenomena into separate abstractions. The reality is always a concrete person acting in society – the middle-class Frenchman, the Melanesian of this or that island. Then sociologists will furnish psychologists with material they can use, while maintaining their distinctive pursuit of the social whole and of group behavior as a whole. This is Mauss's manifesto for how he would carry forward his uncle's academic legacy. His methodology entails the inversion of Durkheim's early reductionist programme for social science; and it serves admirably as a charter for my own.

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