

## THE SACRED MEANINGS OF MONEY

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Contemporary money retains sacred meanings, as suggested in expressions such as 'the almighty dollar' and 'the filthy lucre'. Drawing on ethnographic data, the authors find that the interpretation of money as either sacred or profane depends on its sources and uses and that traversing the boundaries between the sacred and the profane is possible only with attention to proper context and ritual. In order to better understand people's use of money, it is necessary to consider the non-economic sacred functions that money may well have originally served and often continues to serve in modern economies. The thesis that modern money can be sacred and that it is sacralized by certain processes offers insight into some of the more puzzling ways in which people behave toward money.

### 1. Introduction

One scholar has noted that, 'Everyone except an economist knows what "money means", and even an economist can describe it in the course of a chapter or so' (Quiggen 1949: 1). We would add that even then the economist is likely to miss much of the significance of money. In the conventional economic view, money is a utilitarian commodity that acts as a medium of exchange, a unit of account, a store of value, and a standard of deferred payment (Furnham and Lewis 1986). According to this economic perspective, money arose as a convenience to facilitate trade and has become increasingly abstract and devoid of meaning, except in its capacity for facilitating exchange. The economic

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view then, is that money is ordinary, mundane, and profane; it acts as a convenient means to other ends. It has only quantitative meaning. This view may be pragmatic and rigorous, but it fails to offer an understanding of the more emotional, qualitative meanings of money. Like the cognitive view of humans as rational decision-makers attempting to maximize their individual well-being, it fails to provide an adequate account of the dominance of affect, norms, and values in our dealing with money (Etzioni 1988a).

In contrast to this view, contemporary consumer society has been characterized as one that often venerates money and imbues it with meaning. Money is revered, feared, worshipped, and treated with the highest respect. Money is, in sociological parlance, considered sacred (Durkheim 1915). There may be some things that money cannot buy, but even their non-purchasability is cast in doubt when life (e.g., children, surrogate motherhood), death (e.g., contract murder, abortion), 'love' (e.g., bridesprice, prostitution), prestige (e.g., publicity, political campaigns), and even immortality (e.g., religious contributions, philanthropy) are all bought and sold with money.

Desmonde (1962: 3–5) captures some of the parallels between contemporary views of money and those of traditional religion:

'...to many of us, money is a mystery, a symbol handled mainly by the priests of high finance, and regarded by us with much of the same reverence and awe as the primitive feels toward the sacred relics providing magical potency in a tribal ritual. As if in a higher plane of reality, the symbol seems to operate in an incomprehensible, mystical way, understood and controllable only by the magic of brokers, accountants, lawyers, and financiers. ...Like spellbound savages in the presence of the holy, we watch in wonder the solemn proceedings, feeling in a vague, somewhat fearful way that our lives and the happiness of our children are at the mercy of mysterious forces beyond our control. ... Apart from the esoteric rites of high finance, money seems to function in everyday life much like a miraculous talisman, bringing to us the gratification of almost every conceivable desire. Wherever we go, if we have money, people hasten to do our bidding, as if placed under a magical charm by the presence of these worn-down coins and soiled pieces of green paper. ... Like a magical charm, money brings power, which can be used either for good or bad purposes.' [See also Crump 1981; DeMause 1988; and Neal and Youngelson 1988.]

This paper builds an explanation of the sacred meanings of money. Although money has long-standing ties to religion, this is not the foundation for our interpretation of money as operating in the realm of the sacred. Instead, we find evidence for the sacredness of modern money in its opposition to the profane, sacrifices made for money, its contaminating character, and in the myth, mystery, and ritual often

involved in the acquisition and use of money. It is these characteristics rather than ties to religion or religious institutions that define sacredness (Eliade 1959). This interpretation allows us to understand the position of money in contemporary society by moving beyond a purely quantitative understanding of the meaning of money. Instead, we distinguish between the sacred or profane nature of (1) money itself, (2) the sources from which money is obtained, and (3) the uses to which money is applied. The analysis also indicates that as an object with sacred power, money can be either good (e.g., religious donations, the 'nest egg') or evil (e.g., blood money, ransom money). Contrasts between vernacular expressions such as the almighty dollar and the filthy lucre express this positive and negative antithesis, called *kratophany*, within the realm of the sacred.

The data on which this paper is based are drawn from fieldwork from the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, a broad-scale team project investigating the meanings of consumption in contemporary U.S. society. The fieldwork was conducted in a variety of U.S. consumption contexts, with foci including gift-giving, collecting, home decorating, inheritance, museum creation, small-scale selling, artistic creation, and hoarding (see Belk 1987; Belk et al. 1988; Holbrook 1987; Kassarian 1987; Sherry 1987; Wallendorf 1987; Wallendorf and Belk 1987). Over 1,000 pages of fieldnotes, 3,000 photographs, and several dozen hours of videotape footage record the data from this project; these data materials are stored in an archive available for use by other scholars at the Marketing Science Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.

In this paper, we use these data to examine the processes involved in the interchange between the sacred and profane realms as money and consumer objects are exchanged. The general conceptualization of the sacred and profane realms in consumer behavior and their emergence from these data is discussed in Belk et al. (1989). In focusing here on processes involved in sacred and profane transformations involving money, we seek to resolve puzzles posed by contemporary regard for money in consumer societies. For instance, during the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, we wondered why, when we ran out of gasoline, the people who gave us rides insisted that we not pay them the money we offered. We wondered why a sculptor showing his work at a sidewalk art show would just as soon give his work away to those who showed an interest, while his sister insisted on achieving the best possible price for each piece. And we wondered why it seemed inappropriate that a

Catholic chapel had electric votive candles that 'burned' for a certain number of minutes depending on the denomination of coins inserted in their coin-operated switches. We believe that an interpretation of modern money as sacred provides answers to such puzzles.

## **2. The sacred and the profane**

The sociology of religion suggests that we regard as sacred that which we define as extraordinary and set aside from everyday experience. In the realm of religion, particular persons, social groups of castes, things, places, and times are collectively defined as sacred. Collectively shared definitions of the sacred serve to bind the society together in a celebration of that which has been separated from the profane realm of everyday life.

Durkheim (1915) and Eliade (1959) stress that the sacredness found in religion derives from a desire to believe in a self-transcendent power greater than oneself. The sacred is extraordinary, totally unique, and set apart from and opposed to the ordinary profane world. It is imbued with mystery and produces individual feelings variously labeled as ecstasy (Colpe 1987), peak experience (Maslow 1964), or flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Turner (1977) suggests that these feelings are found in the social experience of liminality and *communitas* often found in collective religious events and rites of passage (Van Gennep 1908). What is seen as sacred inspires extreme commitment and sacrifice; belief in its sacred status is sustained by myth and ritual. Because of its power, the sacred is believed to be able to contaminate (in a positive sense; that is, spread its power to) the people, places, and things it touches. However, the sacred may be destroyed by contact with the everyday world of the profane unless proper purification and preparatory rituals are first performed.

The sacred is extremely powerful, but this power may become manifest in two very different ways. Beneficent sacred powers are those associated with gods, protectors, and holy places, while evil sacred powers are found in corpses, sickness, and impure objects (Pickering 1984). The simultaneous potential of the sacred to express itself as either beneficent or evil power produces, in the reverent, ambivalent feelings of fascination and repulsion termed *kratophany*. Evil aspects

have been known to produce trembling fear, even while beneficent aspects of the sacred promise eternal ecstasy in the extreme.

In contemporary Western society, collective definitions of what is sacred are not limited to religious contexts. With the increasing secularization of contemporary Western society (Berger 1967), sacredness may be experienced through foci as diverse as nations (Bellah 1967; Demerath 1974), royalty (Shils and Young 1953; Hayden 1987), science (Berman 1981), sex (Laski 1962), nature (Highwater 1981), music (Goodman 1960; Berger 1967), art (Becker 1982), museums (Clifford 1985), drugs (Mol 1976), sports (Callois 1961; Gmelch 1971; Huizinger 1941), shopping malls (Kowinski 1985; Zepp 1986), and such consumer objects as automobiles and foods (Mol 1983; Farb and Armelagos 1980). More broadly, it also appears that gifts, vacation travel, souvenirs, family photographs, pets, collections, heirlooms, homes, art, antiques, and objects associated with famous people are regarded as existing in the realm of the sacred by many consumers (Belk et al. 1989).

We begin the present examination of money by considering the sacred non-commodity status that certain objects may have, and the commodity status of other objects. We then expand the analysis to include money, since money is itself a particular type of object (Polanyi 1957).

### *2.1. Gifts, collectibles, and heirlooms*

In contemporary industrialized societies, the consumption objects that have come to be regarded as sacred have special meanings for consumers. It is these meanings that differentiate these objects from mere ordinary objects. Such objects are removed from the profane world of everyday functional use, and treated with reverence. Gifts, for instance, are ceremoniously wrapped and received according to culturally-specified rules (Caplow 1984; Cheal 1988; Sherry 1983). Some objects which may not please the owner in and of themselves are nevertheless kept and even treasured because they were given to the recipient as a gift. Gifts connect people to other people via objects rather than just connecting people to objects.

Collections incorporate possessions that are revered for more than just the objects themselves; their value in completing a set raises them above their ordinary status as disparate objects. Once endowed with such meaning, they are typically removed from the profane world of

functional use. For instance, it would be unthinkable for a stamp collector to use a stamp from the collection for postage. Similarly, for avid art collectors, Moulin ([1967] 1987: 84) notes that 'Economic calculation does not figure in collectors' descriptions of what they are about'. Through amassing a collection, the collector is positively regarded in a consumer culture (Belk et al. 1987). Collections aid in symbolic self-completion and foster feelings of control and mastery in the marketplace. Through these cultural meanings, collections become sacred personal icons in much the same way that museum objects become sacred collective icons.

Heirlooms are preserved across time in order to symbolically preserve fragile connections to those who are now deceased. Their owners often indicate that heirlooms contain and represent special, extraordinary meanings. Heirlooms, too, are largely excused from purely functional service, although they may be incorporated into family rituals, as with one informant's use of her grandmother's lace tablecloth to set the table for the family's Christmas dinner. Some people harbor fears that a neglected or damaged heirloom may unleash evil retaliation for these violations against ancestors. Because of such fears, their owners give special care and greater protection to heirlooms than they give to similarly fragile items not acquired through inheritance. In such fears and reverence, we see evidence for the kratophanous potential of the sacred to be either good or evil. That is, there is a power that adheres in objects defined as sacred that can be released in either good or evil ways depending on the reverence given them. Whether good or evil, the experience that surrounds sacred objects is never merely ordinary. These objects involve the self-transcendence, myth, mystery, and power of the sacred.

## *2.2. Profane commodities*

Sacred objects are perhaps best understood in contrast to mere profane commodities. When commodities are acquired outside of the bonding ritual of gift-giving, when they lack sacred contamination from loved ones or other people, or when they are not sacralized by inclusion in a collection or by other means, they are profane commodities (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). A profane commodity is not valued beyond its economic worth and is usually fungible; it is easily and acceptably replaceable with a similar object. For example, one box of

breakfast cereal is interchangeable with another box, even though the particular brand chosen may sometimes have sacred meaning for a particular consumer (see Belk et al. (1989) on quintessence). On the other hand, a pet dog or cat may be reasonably fungible when first acquired, but quickly becomes non-fungible as the owners and pet are influenced by and become accustomed to one another. Similarly, while a miser's money is a fungible commodity (Michaels 1985), such is not the case with a coin collector's money.

Appadurai (1986: 8) notes that such profane 'commodities become intricately tied to *money*, an impersonal market, and exchange value' (emphasis in original). Kopytoff (1986: 69) notes that 'we usually take salability to be the unmistakable indicator of commodity status', although he also notes that profane commodities can exist in moneyless economies as well. But we contend that the linkage of an object to money does not automatically make it profane. Rather, a profane commodity is distinguished from sacred objects by being valued primarily for its mundane *use* value. A sacred object may have potential use value, but that is not the primary reason it is valued. In fact, it is the relative lack of functional utility of certain objects such as some antiques, souvenirs, and heirlooms that separates them from the profane world of commodities. Furthermore, because of their symbolic value, it is considered unacceptable to convert sacred objects into profane ones through exchange (e.g., an heirloom for a new motorcycle – Frank 1985).

Where money has only quantitative meaning, its exchange for useful commodities is legitimate because it is confined to the realm of the profane, whereas the exchange of sacred objects for money violates their sacred status because it brings them into inappropriate contact with the profane realm. However, if money is itself sometimes considered sacred rather than utilitarian, its presence may not necessarily profane the objects and people it touches. A further demonstration of the sacredness of money occurs when it is found to be non-fungible (Crump 1981: 19). As Zelizer (1989: 352) argues:

'A \$1,000 paycheck is not the same money as \$1,000 stolen from a bank or \$1,000 borrowed from a friend. And certain monies remain indivisible – an inheritance, for instance, or a wedding gift of money intended for the purchase of a particular type of object. The latter is a qualitative unit that should not be spent partly for a gift and partly for groceries.' [See also Kiernan 1988.]

Mary Douglas (1966: 69) connects money to the realm of the sacred by pointing out its ritual nature:

'The metaphor of money admirably sums up what we want to assert of ritual. Money provides a fixed external recognizable sign for what would be confused contradictable operations; ritual makes visible external signs and states. Money mediates transactions; ritual mediates experience, including social experience. Money provides a standard for measuring worth; ritual standardizes situations, and so helps to evaluate them. Money makes a link between the present and the future, so does ritual. The more we reflect on the richness of the metaphor, the more it becomes clear that this is no metaphor. Money is only an extreme and specialized type of ritual. ... Money can only perform the role of intensifying economic interaction if the public has faith in it. If faith is shaken, the currency is useless. So too with ritual.'

In some cases, the acquisition of money is hoped for because it is seen to promise a ritual transformation of the individual. The *Cinderella* tale is a story of such hopes in which the individual sees money (acquired in this case through the acquisition of a wealthy prince for a husband) as promising not only riches, but a new self who 'would be stronger, less fearful, more charming, wiser, less vulnerable, and so on. Money is endowed with magical powers' (Wiseman 1974: 10).

However, other interpretations have linked money and market exchange with the realm of the profane. Hyde makes a distinction between sacred gifts and profane commodities based on the implicit norm which requires that 'gift exchange predominates within the group (particularly in the case of needy members), while allowing that strangers may deal in commodities (money let out at interest being commodity-money or stranger-money)' (1983: 61). In this scheme, sacred items are held to be above considerations of profit and usury, and therefore can circulate only within the boundaries of a community of friends, as with gifts and heirlooms, while commodities are bought and sold in perfunctory trade with strangers. As Gregory (1982) notes, gifts are inalienable and establish a qualitative relationship of mutual dependency, while commodities are alienable and establish only a quantitative relationship between independent parties who need never see one another again after profane commodity exchange. Simmel ([1990] 1978) charges that money, too, tends to replace qualitative relationships with quantitative measurements. It links people as strangers. It 'homogenizes value' (Slater 1980). These distinctions fit well on Malinowski's (1922) continuum with pure gift at one end and 'trade pure and simple' at the other.



To place certain human exchanges at the trade end of this continuum risks the homogenizing and quantifying threat of making them profane. Titmus (1970: 158) saw this as a threat to the altruism of blood and organ donation:

'Short of examining humankind itself and the institution of slavery – of men and women as market commodities – blood as a living tissue may now constitute in Western societies one of the ultimate tests of where the “social” begins and the “economic” ends. If blood is considered in theory, in law, and is treated in practice as a trading commodity, ultimately human hearts, kidneys, eyes and other organs of the body may also come to be treated as commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace.'

This fear of profane trade of human body parts recently surfaced in London when newspapers reported that Turkish peasants are being paid to have a kidney removed for needed transplant operations for British citizens (Kinsley 1989). British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher pronounced the practice 'utterly repugnant' and moved for emergency legislation to bar such sales. While laws have now largely assured that organs cannot be bought and sold in the marketplace and can only be gifts, Laquer (1983) notes that the 1832 Anatomy Act in England made the bodies and organs of paupers available to the medical community for dissection and research. Subsequent fears of the evil of commercial harvesting of corpses from graves, as illustrated in stories by Charles Dickens and Mary Shelley, indicate the sense of violation that this law evoked.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of objects in the world can be considered to be profane. Were this not so, we would have to reverse the definitions of sacred and profane so that the former was ordinary and mundane, while the latter was extraordinary and transcendent. But the sacred or profane nature of an object is not inherent. Instead, it is socially and individually defined (Wernimont and Fitzpatrick 1972). Just as only true believers will consider a religious icon to be sacred, only some will invest a consumer object with transcendent meaning and consider it sacred. It is often the use to which an object is put (e.g., gift, collectible, consumable) that is relied upon in determining its sacred or profane status. The same is true of money, as we will begin to explore in the next section.

### 3. Sacred and profane money

Inasmuch as money is a particular type of object, it should not be surprising that money too can be invested with sacred meaning. A more specific reason that money is capable of being regarded as sacred is because it possesses transformative power; such extreme power is never merely ordinary. As noted by Karl Marx, in capitalist society money can transform good into evil or evil into good, a characteristic granting it sacred status (Macfarlane 1985) as well as the ambivalent feelings brought about by kratophany.

Money exists in various forms which have different meanings. Krueger (1986) suggests that the use of credit cards, checks, and charge accounts may serve to keep the potentially evil power of money at a distance. But some people regard credit cards as more threatening than cash because the credit card may give almost unlimited license to the evil acquisitiveness of the person (Faber and O'Guinn 1988). In this regard, a credit card is more threatening than cash which is finitely limited by its denomination.

Just as the transformative power of money reflects its good side, its potential destructive power reflects the evil side. However, because money can commoditize, homogenize, and quantify, and because its fungible, it can also be profane and ordinary. As a form, contemporary money is essentially profane in that one piece of money is exchangeable for another. That is, unlike the decorated coppers used in potlatch by the Haida and Kwakiutl, each of which acquired a name and magical history (Mauss [1925] 1967), contemporary currency (for the most part) has not been singularized (Kopytoff 1986). So although each bill is equivalent to another of equal denomination, money as an entity can be either good or evil in a situation. The critical question, then, is what determines the character of money in specific circumstances,

#### 3.1. *Prior treatments of money*

While some mention has been made in the literature of the possibility that money might have sacred status in contemporary consumer society (e.g., Mol 1976: 165), there has been no systematic investigation of this possibility. However, money has been conceptually discussed in several diverse intellectual disciplines. In the interest of enlightening our perspective on the sacred status of money, four of these traditions

will be briefly reviewed here. These four perspectives on money come from economics, psychoanalysis, religion, and cultural anthropology.

As with other objects, a major determinant of whether money is considered to be sacred or profane is the use to which it is put. According to economic perspectives, the uses of money are largely, if not entirely, profane. Furnham and Lewis (1986: 46–47) summarize the economic functions that money serves:

- '(a) A medium of exchange, to avoid the necessity of finding the double coincidence of wants.
- (b) A unit of account: a way of simplifying and summarizing the worth of goods that are exchanged.
- (c) A standard of deferred payment, to be used to separate in time the exchange of a good or service and the payment for goods or services.
- (d) A store of value: to be able to receive payment at one moment and postpone purchase until a later date.'

All of these refer to profane uses of money for ordinary purposes relying only on its quantitative meaning. Other scholars hint at the motives that may underlie these uses of money. For example, Smelt (1980) suggests that consumption, savings, investment, speculation, and manipulation of economic conditions are motivations involved in the use of money. With the partial exception of consumption, these additional uses of money are typically discussed by economists as sharing a motivation of quantitative personal gain (however, for an exception, see Etzioni 1988b). It is this desire for gain that Neale (1971) has termed 'commercialization', reflecting participation in the realm of the profane rather than the world of the sacred.

In commercialization, individuals attempt to maximize money or money flows. It is tied to a profit-based measure of success and status (cf., Walsh 1979) in which the goal is the maximization of the difference between the inflow and outflow of money. If commercialization, thus defined, seems to preclude hedonic consumption-based uses of money, another economic principle that potentially justifies the use of funds for consumption is utility maximization. The utility maximization perspective does not regard profits and savings per se as being sources of utility. Rather, acquisition of products and services is viewed as providing a viable source of satisfaction that diverts the delayed gratifications promised from using money to make more money. However, utilitarianism is still a largely pragmatic view that is not hospitable to the view of money as sacred.

The economic view of money as essentially profane in nature contrasts sharply with a psychoanalytic perspective, as exemplified Krueger's (1986: 3) conclusion that:

'Money is probably the most emotionally meaningful object in contemporary life; only food and sex are its close competitors as common carriers of such strong and diverse feelings, significances, and strivings.'

Krueger's observations are found in a book entitled *The Last Taboo*, referring to the fact that people in contemporary Western societies are more open and revealing in discussing their sex lives than in discussing their finances (Wiseman 1974; Goldberg and Lewis 1978; Yamauchi and Templer 1982). Money is considered a private matter that is threatening to discuss since it is aligned with notions of self-worth (Neville 1980). The power, emotionality, and mystery referred to in the psychoanalytic perspective suggest a view of money as sacred rather than profane. Freudian psychoanalysis regards money as symbolic feces (see Freud 1908), partially owing to embarrassment about it (Atkinson 1988). Given this interpretation, money would seem to be given the lowliest possible status. However, rather than indicating that money is a profane, everyday commodity, this interpretation casts money on the evil side of sacredness which evokes powerful emotions of revulsion and disgust. It is in this perspective that we begin to understand the kratophanous tension between views of money as the filthy lucre (evil sacred) as contrasted with references to it as the almighty dollar (beneficent sacred).

The tension of kratophany is further evident in religious perspectives on money. Some have suggested connections between money and the functions traditionally served by religion. For example, Brown (1959) and Becker (1975) suggest that money is seen as a means to immortality. As Becker explains:

'Sacred power ... means power to increase oneself, to change one's natural situation from one of smallness, helplessness, finitude, to one of bigness, control, durability, importance. In its power to manipulate physical and social reality, money in some ways secures one against contingency and accident; it buys bodyguards, bullet-proof glass, and better medical care. Most of all, it can be accumulated and passed on, and so radiates its powers even after one's death, giving one a semblance of immortality as he [sic] lives in the vicarious enjoyments of his heirs that this money continues to buy, or in the magnificence of the art works that he commissioned, or in the statues of himself and the majesty of his own mausoleum.' (1975: 81-82.)

This is especially interesting in light of the contention that money had its origins in religion (Desmonde 1962; Hodges 1988; Knight 1968; Shell 1982). That this contention is not fully accepted (Ahonen 1989; Lea et al. 1987) only adds to the myths and mysteries surrounding the origin of money. Religious-based rituals for funerals in many cultures, including contemporary Western ones, often involve large expenditures and gifts of money (e.g., Duncan 1962). One interpretation is that these funerary practices show that the sanctity of life is above profane calculation and restraint in spending (Zelizer 1978). But another tempting explanation is that money itself sacralizes and buys at least some measure of lasting fame (see Laquer 1983).

World religions themselves have generally regarded money as an evil threat of the worship of God and the sanctity of society (Belk 1983). Rather than viewing money as merely profane, these religions are much more apt to regard it as an evil temptation (Neale 1971; Macfarlane 1985; Tiger 1987), thereby placing it in the realm of the sacred. An extreme form of this evil temptation is shown by Taussig (1980) in his description of *el bautizo del billete*, or the baptism of the bill, as practiced in the Cauca Valley of Columbia. In this practice a child's godparent holds a concealed peso note while the Catholic priest performs the ritual to baptize the child. Under these circumstances, the bill is unknowingly baptized so that with further secret rituals, it will multiply and come back to the godparent who passes it into circulation. But what is even more sinister is the belief that this practice condemns the fraudulently baptized child to limbo or purgatory.

One reaction of religions to the problematic status of money is to glorify impoverishment and asceticism which remove the temptations of money and what it may buy (Lang 1988), as with contemporary monks and mystics (Sinetar 1986). But it is more common today for religions to try to reconcile having money and being religious (e.g., Haughey 1986; O'Guinn and Belk 1989; Tamari 1987). For instance, Hoffman (1984) in a pamphlet for the Lutheran Laymen's League attempts to destroy the myth that money is the root of evil. Instead, he emphasizes the biblical notion that *love* of money is the problem rather than money per se. Such statements may be an adaptive strategy to fit religion to an increasingly secular world, but they also suggest that money is being repositioned in the religious view as no longer being inherently evil.

Unlike the other perspectives, the anthropological treatment of mo-

ney focuses on distinctions between so-called primitive, limited purpose money, or special money and modern or universal money. Rather than referring to the culture using it, the term primitive money refers to a form of money that can be used in a limited number of ceremonial or social purposes, such as bride purchase, gifts, or restitution for crimes, but not for other purposes such as purchase of food, clothing, or shelter. In societies with limited purpose money, treasures or prestige objects are normally purchased by limited purpose money, while staples are generally obtained by communal obligation rather than money (Polanyi 1977; Loeb 1936). For instance, such limited purpose money exists in the raffia cloth of the Lele in what is now Zaire (Douglas 1958). Raffia cloth, woven from palm fibres by men, is a form of money usable for rituals and ceremonies such as brideswealth, to compensate wrongdoing such as a penalty for discovered adultery, or to pay diviners of their healing cult. It cannot be used to buy food or construct houses which are acquired through social ties. Houses are put up communally and if a family has no food, relatives will provide it. Raffia cloth then, as a limited purpose money, is used to smooth social relations rather than to acquire and accumulate commodities.

Contemporary Western money is typically regarded as all-purpose money that can buy both ordinary objects as well as prestige, ceremonial, and religious objects regardless of one's status (Dalton 1965; Hodges 1988). However, Melitz (1970) challenges this interpretation and suggests that the use of contemporary money is also limited in a number of ways. For example, different forms of currency (e.g., coins, paper money, checks) are used for different types of purchases. We don't accept checks from some people, and certain transactions (e.g., garage sales, illegal drug sales, and allowances given from parents to children) are usually conducted on a cash-only basis. We can't use money to buy certain things that some limited purpose money can buy, such as slaves and brides. For example, a man in our culture can't directly use money to entice a woman to become his bride, but may use candy, flowers, cards, jewelry, and other gifts. Contemporary money can't be used to openly buy some things (e.g., political office, children). It can't buy things that exist in a barter system (e.g., car pools, cups of sugar from the neighbors). These examples make us realize that limited purpose money is not a category but a quality which may be present to different degrees in different cultures. Codere (1968) suggests that only in evil societies can money purchase friendship, prestige, and political

power. In contemporary Western society, we cannot discharge a social debt by offering money (Graves 1965). Love, trust, and friendship can only be repaid in kind (Rochberg-Halton 1986; Foa and Foa 1974). In fact, while economic debts require cancellation as soon as possible, to offer a return dinner party immediately would be seen as rude, because it suggests an unwillingness to be socially indebted (Haas and Deseran 1981). But to offer money to cancel the debt would be even more unthinkable.

Just as more universal Western monies cannot purchase some things available with limited purpose monies (e.g., brides, expiation from crimes), wealth in limited purpose monies cannot purchase all that Western monies can, as Neale (1976: 37) explains:

'It does not ... lead to the acquisition of an increasing variety of goods and services for one's private use. There are no "big houses on the hill," no lawns, no tennis-club memberships, no trips to Monte Carlo, or no collections of seventeen tweed sports coats. When necklaces of money shells and beads are bought, they are often lent to others to wear.'

In such contexts, materialistic purchases are foregone not just in order to accrue prestige, but also to avoid provoking envy. The uses of special purpose money are essentially social and integrative, rather than individualistic and differentiating.

In addition to the restricted uses of special purpose monies in contemporary cultures, such monies may also arise from particular sources. Zelizer (1989) suggests that lottery winnings, accident compensation, windfall income, inheritances, honoraria, bonuses, and tips are among the sources that provide non-fungible special monies. These monies are, in turn, considered usable for some purposes, but not for others. Most often such money is used to acquire an extraordinary or special object or experience that will, in effect, memorialize the money from these special sources and transform it into an icon.

Many of the forces that keep modern money from being truly universal involve the tension between the assumptions underlying an economic perspective on money as rationalized and functional, and an anthropological perspective on money as performing tasks rooted in ancient sacred practices. For instance, Webley et al. (1983; see also Hussein 1985) found that most people consider it quite inappropriate to give one's mother money for her birthday. Money is too sterile and ordinary; it doesn't reflect sufficient attention to the social nature of the gift (Cheal 1987, 1989). While Cameron (1989) argues quantita-

tively that more money is needed for such a gift in order to compensate for its weaker demonstration of affection, he fails to recognize that money is qualitatively different than other gifts and that for most people no amount of money can bridge this gap in meaning. Too much distance is placed between the giver and the recipient of a money gift and the gift is then alienable (Simmel [1900] 1978). While there is some evidence that an exception is granted to the rule of not giving money as gifts in the case of close relatives (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Haas and Deseran 1981; Webley and Wilson 1989), the flow in such cases (e.g., as a wedding gift from parents to children) is generally downward in age and status, rather than upward. Even then, there is an effort to make the money special by giving checks or crisp new bills encased in a card, but not well-worn bills taken from one's pocket. As a way to perhaps expiate the sacrilege of accepting money for surrogate motherhood, the \$10,000 fee in the Baby M case was earmarked by the surrogate mother for the education of her two other children and was not to be spent on more trivial or personal items (Zelizer 1987; see also Zelizer 1985). From the perspective of the law however, this was purely an economic transaction, governed by contract law like any other transaction (Williams 1988).

Thus, social science perspectives on the meaning of money are not in agreement with each other. Reflecting the disparate foundational assumptions characteristic of different research traditions (Anderson 1983), these perspectives are sufficiently different that they do not build on each other. Law and economics see money as merely a profane commodity. However, like those who claim there is no universal money, we see the survival of sacred meanings of money in contemporary Western society. What is maximized in many consumer interactions is not profit or utility, but power, prestige, or equality of exchange (Burling 1962; Cancian 1968). While the former goals involve money as an element of the profane realm, the latter goals involve contact with the sacred.

This distinction between different perspectives on the uses of money potentially sheds light on a number of paradoxes summarized by Krueger (1986):

'Complicating factors include contradictory ethics regarding money. At a social level, a major polarity is the altruistic, selfless, humanistic sacrificing ethic of Judeo-Christianity versus acquisitional, individualistic capitalism. Money is esteemed, yet it is condemned. One who has a great deal of money is viewed as superior, yet the frank desire for money is considered poor taste or worse.'



Krueger joins Albee (1977) and Campbell (1987) in pointing out the 'paradox of the Protestant ethic' which encourages hard work, thrift, and earning money as a sign of God's blessing, but proscribes the enjoyment of the money earned by these traits. We believe these seeming paradoxes can be understood by further consideration of the sacred and profane nature of money, particularly its sources and uses.

Gender differences in the meanings and uses of money are also illuminated by the conceptual distinction between money as sacred or profane. The power derived from money has historically been restricted to men. Although no longer structurally or legally blocked from the power granted by money, nonetheless women do not think of money as power as frequently as do men; instead, women think of money in terms of the things into which it can be converted, while men think of it in terms of the power its possession implies (Rudmin 1989). Just as women's labor in and out of the household is regarded differently than is that of men (Bielby and Bielby 1988), so is the meaning of the money which they earn. Staves (1985) and Zelizer (1989) find that the domestic earnings of women (such as from selling eggs or taking in boarders) have historically been regarded as trivial and appropriate only for personal pleasures, when in fact such monies were often used to partially support the daily profane commodity needs of the household. The use of money to provide food and shelter has generally been regarded as more serious and therefore appropriately accomplished through monies associated with men. Within households, money allocation strategies have historically reflected sacred and profane distinctions. US working class households at the turn of the century often upheld a pattern of turning a man's paycheck over to the wife for management of profane household needs; a portion was given back to the man as an allowance to serve his individual personal pleasures. In upper middle class households, however, husbands often gave their wives an allowance to be used for collective household expenses. Domestic arguments in such households often centered on the wife's purported siphoning of household monies for her own pleasures (Zelizer 1989). These arguments could be re-interpreted as reflecting the conversion of money designated for profane uses into money for evil sacred uses.

In addition to gender differences in the sources and uses of money, there may also be class differences. Reddy (1987) illustrates these differences by contrasting the perspectives of a rich and poor man

contemplating buying a plot of land. The rich man is likely to take utilitarian perspective based on calculating average yield per acre, while the poor man is more likely to contemplate more social and personal factors such as neighbors, house sites, and what it would feel like to work the land:

'The poor man's interest was not profit as such; it was in the pain he personally would feel when the blade of the plow struck a hidden boulder, the sleep he personally would lose when extra hoeing was necessary or when manure just spread was washed away by a sudden rain. The poor man's use of the commodity was immediate, life-encompassing, a question of smells and flavors, muscle aches and broken angles; it would shape the character of his connection to wife and children.' (Reddy 1987: 65.)

It is in order to better understand differences such as these that we turn to a consideration of the effects of sources and uses on our interpretations of the meaning of money.

### *3.2. Sources of money*

Since the focus of this paper is primarily on consumption rather than production behavior, the sacred nature of different sources of money is not of primary interest here. However since, arguably, sources and uses of money are inextricably woven together so that certain sources hypothecate certain uses (Zelizer 1989), we will briefly address the sacred or profane nature of various sources of money.

The preceding literature review reveals that the focus of almost all prior work has been on the uses of money. This accurately reflects the greater influence of money uses (versus money sources) in establishing its sacred or profane nature, but it overlooks the still-important effect of the sources of money. For instance, Coblentz asks:

'Should we not encourage young men and women to pick the work that they love, the work they are best qualified for, the work in which they can do the greatest service? Is there anything crasser than the spectacle of the man or woman who selects a field of supposed human and humane service, not because he is interested or cares to be of use, but because he hopes to profit?' (1965: 243.)

Money obtained from work that is not a source of delight is profane, while money obtained from enacting one's passion, while often less when evaluated from a quantitative economic perspective, is nonetheless sacred. One artist we interviewed paints horses and deer, but also does reproductions on t-shirts to keep food on the table. Both the

paintings and the t-shirts are offered for sale. The t-shirts are explicitly made to exchange for money, whereas the paintings, which are created as an expression of his love of nature, produce other rewards, and money is secondary. Profane transactions are those in which money is primary and serves as a medium of exchange and a unit of account. The profane nature of the transaction is masked, for example, when a physician has a receptionist handle the financial end of the exchange, or a photographer's assistant handles payment for photos taken with a shopping mall Easter bunny (Hickey et al. 1988). Similarly, the temporary art curators at Sotheby's auction house are careful to avoid any mention of money or association with the sale of these works (Benthall 1987). The separation of the service from the money transaction preserves the altruistic, aesthetic, or sacred interpretation of the service-giver's actions.

Mullen (1978) finds that American stories of lost treasure carry warnings that great penalties await those who find them, ostensibly because of curses or traps, but more subtly as warnings that ill-gotten gains carry evil with them. That is, the sacred evil power of money may be unleashed if its source is an inappropriate one, a frequent theme in literature (Atkinson 1988). In a culture where hard work is revered (Weber 1948), money obtained without labor is seen as evil. This notion underlies the comment of one of our informants regarding the wealth accumulated by American industrialists at the turn of the century. As a tour guide in one of their mansions, she reminded a male tourist that this wealth was deadly for the males who earned it. Similarly, in a speech as a US senator, Harry Truman disparaged the supposedly-charitable contributions of such industrialists based on the source of the money, when he said, 'We seem to forget that the Carnegie libraries are steeped in the blood of the Homestead steel workers. ... And we do not remember that the Rockefeller Foundation was founded on the bodies of the dead miners of the Colorado Iron and Fuel Company.' (Truman 1937, quoted in Gallu 1975: 13.)

Wiseman (1974) distinguishes between good or legitimate sources of wealth such as royalties to an inventor, versus bad or unearned sources of wealth such as payments to a landlord. There has long been religious and social criticism of the evils of earning money through usury or loaning money at interest (e.g., Hyde 1983; Heilbroner 1956; Taussig 1980). Marx interpreted usury as the exchange of money for more money, a practice that, according to Aristotle, goes against nature and

according to Marx, cannot be explained if money is merely a commodity (Marx 1867). In ancient Greece and Rome, the business of making money was tainted; it was far more honorable to win riches in war or to acquire them through political office (Heilbroner 1956).

Even in contemporary society, we find that our informants speak of volunteer work (work for which they are not paid in money) as a sacred gift-giving activity, while they describe paying jobs using terms that indicate this is in the realm of the profane. A woman who was an elementary school French teacher prior to being married spoke much more proudly of her current volunteer work as a retail store clerk in a not-for-profit crafts collective for elderly people. This distinction is also evident in contemporary understanding of motherhood as an unpaid labor of love, rather than what Gilman ([1898] 1966) described as the 'revolting' idea that it is a business activity in which the woman trades her labor looking after children for her husband's provision of clothing and food. Similarly, the labor of a prostitute and the money given to compensate the prostitute transform a sacred exchange into a profane business transaction – a violation that is reflected in historic sumptuary regulations concerning dress that served to set prostitutes apart from other women (Karras 1989).

But work-for-money is not universally profane. Many craftspeople who sell their wares at flea markets, particularly those who are retired from other jobs, describe doing this job 'for the fun of it', and recognize that if money were their primary goal, they could seek a minimum wage job in which they could earn at least as much (see Belk et al. 1988). Similarly one swap meet seller interviewed believes that being his own boss is most important to him. The owners of an antique store and a roadside popcorn stand did not want to make 'too much money' and denied any desire for their businesses to grow. A fieldnote excerpt concerning a flea market dealer who sells toys and also owns a pet store and a toy store, indicates the emic basis of this finding.

RB: 'In one way or another, those all sound associated with childhood. Are you a big kid?'

Wally: 'Yes, I am. ... If it wasn't fun, I wouldn't do it, because we'll spend sometimes as much as we make.'

He wants to break into this circuit on the one hand, but wants to avoid getting too big on the other (this would take the fun out of it; he wants to have fun and agrees that in this sense too his businesses correctly reflect that he is an overgrown kid).

Many such sellers indicated that they preferred to sell their wares at a 'fair price' rather than trying to make as much as they could on each item. A nurse and pharmacist couple sell bean sprouts at a farmer's market on weekends, an activity which they enjoy as a way to promote healthful eating. Rather than wealth accumulation, their desire is to make a modest income and not become burdened with their work.

Even within the world of profane jobs, many are not solely directed by the goal of wealth maximization. Often the sacred or profane nature of the money derived from an activity is rooted not only in the meaning of the activity to the actor; it may also be rooted in the meaning of the activity to the society at large. For many, it appears that the negative image of American physicians as business people derives from such physicians' over-concern with profane money matters, and their lack of focus on sacred service to humanity. This was especially apparent in a homeless informant who, with good reason, felt abused in having to contribute to physicians' wealth accumulation at the cost of his own job, home, and family.

Nevertheless within contemporary US culture, there is still reverence for money earned through hard labor, even when devoid of personal meaning. Another homeless man who had found a job and was about to move out of the shelter where he had been staying and into a rented room on his own was described with pride by the staff at the shelter. He was a success story in their eyes. He conforms to a cultural dream of individualistic self-sufficiency and self-determination. An enactment of this dream was also apparent in a young man who was traveling on a vacation with his family, but was using money earned doing jobs for neighbors to buy gifts for extended family members who did not come along on the trip. In each case, the money earned is in a sense sacred by virtue of its source in honest labor, particularly by one with few chances for greedily amassing great wealth.

Thus, money obtained from enacting a passion, particularly if it is not a large amount, is sacred, as is money obtained through hard labor by one who will not amass great wealth. Money obtained without labor is regarded as evil and threatens to unleash that power on its owner, even as he or she tries to apply it to sacred uses. Work for profane money may be sacralized to a degree if the worker avoids extremes of greed and acquisitiveness.

But sources and uses of money are inseparably connected in determining the sacred or profane nature of this money. The source of

money may also shape the way it is used as a means of affecting its sacred or profane status. Watts (1982) finds ample evidence in literature of the *nouveau riche* businessman who attempts to buy his way to legitimacy by acquiring art, even as the artist finds this to be a contaminating encroachment of evil or profane wealth into his or her sacred world, where artists may be expected to live in 'arrogant poverty' (Bellony-Rewald and Peppiatt 1982). At a societal level, Japanese culture supports the idea that money is in itself evil, but can be sacralized by reinvesting it in a business or donating it to cultural activities (Moeran 1985). Thus, across societies those who acquire money through what are regarded as evil sources may try to culturally 'launder' it by putting it to sacred uses. This leads us to our discussion of the sacred and profane nature of various uses of money.

### 3.3. *Sacred uses of money*

Money is put to a number of different kinds of uses in contemporary society. As indicated earlier, the economic literature explains the mechanisms and rationale which govern its use for profane exchange. In such instances, a person is concerned with getting good value, and thus with price. In other more sacred uses of money, price is not such a factor. For instance, the social gift of taking someone to dinner at a restaurant is desacralized if the host is overly attentive to prices or argues about the amount of the bill. Similarly, one informant who collects bronze statues and also sells antiques is very attentive to prices and bargains in her negotiations regarding objects she buys for resale. But when she buys pieces for her own collection, money is no object. In describing her recent purchase of a bronze hunting dog for her collection, she said, 'I never even asked if she could do better. It had to be mine!'

Besides buying items for inclusion in a collection, money may also be transformed through its use in other ways to facilitate experience of the sacred. Our fieldwork suggests that these sacralizing mechanisms include the purchase of gifts and souvenirs, donations to charity, and the purchase of a previously sacralized object. The way people described such purchases leads us to interpret these uses of money as sacred (Belk et al. 1989). They spoke with reverence and awe of the importance of the objects of these expenditures. In retelling such stories, people remind themselves of money sacrifices made to protect

themselves and those to whom they are connected from the forces of evil. Such evil might be unleashed when they neglect family and friends while vacationing, neglect the poor while enjoying the luxuries of wealth, or forget their connection to previous generations while pondering the fate of family furnishings. Through the alternate processes of presentation of gifts to those at home, donations to charity, and preservation of antiques, people often feel they are participating in a personal mission or quest. Each of these consumer activities reflects the tendency in Western culture to tangibilize and objectify elements of sacred experience. A collector, even when addictively pursuing acquisition, is admired and positively regarded by others for assembling a collection. He or she has transformed money into a collection that is comprehensive if not complete within the esoteric boundaries defined by the collector. One collector interviewed had even gone so far as to open a museum for his elephant replicas, hoping that 'history will stand in awe of what I have done.' If so, the immortality that such fame engenders represents the ultimate transformative use of money.

In gift-giving, love and connection to others are expressed by transforming some of one's own money into a gift object. One informant bought a handmade quilt to give as a gift to her daughter. Through this action, not only was the hand labor of the quilter conveyed, but also the giver's money was transformed into a gift of love. Leaving on the price tag or failing to wrap a gift are other faux pas that preclude the successful sacralization of formerly profane market commodities.

Souvenir purchases also serve as a transformative use of money. Touring families were found to often provide their children with some money to use for buying souvenirs from the trip. The children were encouraged to buy something that would last as a reminder of the trip, rather than buying objects like candy that would serve only as immediate gratifiers. Through this practice, the values of tangibilizing experience and delaying gratification (Mischel 1974) were celebrated in a socialization ritual. So although in one respect the use of money in such instances involves profane trade, there is a simultaneous transformation of the money into an object with greater meaning.

Another realm in which this transformation occurs is in charity. Money-as-sacrifice has less sacralizing potential than money-as-gift, but both are more sacred than money-as-commodity (Kiernan 1988). Charity can be accomplished either by giving money to a particular cause, person, or group or by expending one's labor without monetary

compensation. In either case money is sacrificed for the well-being of others. Such an act is considered sacred, and is further encouraged by US income tax laws which allow a taxpayer to avoid income taxes on money given to charitable organizations. However, to do so when it is clear that the only motivation is to receive the tax deduction is utilitarian and is therefore not socially admired. Similarly, participation in so-called charity balls requiring lavish expenditure on clothing and jewelry as well as the charitable contribution for admission are viewed less positively than more selfless donations. Rather than privately making a contribution, such behavior may be viewed as serving to publicize one's achieved social standing and concern for the collective good to others of similar or higher standing who may attend and to receive visibility through news media for making such contributions. This is not unlike the almost-pervasive practice of naming a foundation which gives grants for scientific or artistic endeavors after the entrepreneurial family from whom the monies came (Theroux 1985). Charity is a sacred gift when it involves personal sacrifice of money (making the social action a selfless one that is 'above money'), but not when the motivation stems from concerns with personal gain.

A third realm in which informants transformed money into sacred objects was in redeeming objects which had once been regarded as sacred but which had now fallen into neglect. Using money to acquire such items with the intention of restoring them saves or rescues them. One informant described purchasing an antique hutch which had fallen into disrepair and was being used as a file cabinet. Through the money he used to purchase it and the labor he used to refinish it, the object was transformed into an attractive piece which was proudly displayed in his dining room. Similarly, an antique dealer explained the current public fascination with antique pie safes, many of which were once treasured pieces of furniture, but then were moved into basements, garages, and even chicken coops as storage cabinets used to hold dirty utensils and tools. McCracken (1988) discusses the desacralization ritual that allows the symbolic meanings of such items to 'cool off' through storage rather than discarding them. Dealers search for such pieces in order to return them to the realm of treasured furnishings for their customers, much as adoption agencies and animal rescue leagues return persons and animals to the sacred realm of the family. In such cases, the use of money to buy the objects does not profane them. Rather, the money is used to bring salvation to that which has left the



realm of the sacred. For this interpretation to be shared, money must not be regarded as the foremost reason for engaging in the rescue mission. One couple interviewed, who are collectors of a number of different kinds of antique decorative objects, reported that they feel good about the things they buy because these are really objects that are being discarded by a family that does not want them. Rather than seeing these objects as a good bargain, they see themselves as giving a good home to these treasures. Money then is used to redeem and restore these objects to the realm of the sacred. It is no accident that redemption is a religious metaphor, just as purification (through gifts, collecting, souvenirs, and art acquisition) and sacrifice (through charity) are religious metaphors. Whether religious or secular, such actions sacralize.

Paradoxically, money may sometimes also serve to enhance the sacredness of an object, sometimes even without actual exchange taking place. An extremely high price for something, as with a recent price of \$59.3 million for Van Gogh's 'Irises', can enhance its sacredness by placing the object in the category of being priceless, since so few can afford to pay such a price. Such a high price grants mystery to the piece of art (Berger 1972). In a more everyday setting, the mystery of pricelessness may also be transmitted through an owner's rejection of offers from potential buyers even when the offers are for sums that exceed the original purchase price. Many informants described purchased objects for which they were later offered a much higher price that they refused because they now considered the object to be priceless. One collector bought a piece for \$35 in Brazil and was later offered \$350 for it. The higher money price (coupled with the sacrifice of its rejection) served to further sacralize a piece that was already part of a collection, and thus was above the threat of actual sale for *any* amount of money.

To retain all of one's money for personal use and not participate in gift-giving or charity is viewed as greedy and selfish – an evil use of sacred money. This points out the clear finding that the opposite of a good-sacred use of money is not a profane use of money; rather it is the evil-sacred use of money. To not give gifts is considered antisocial, selfish, miserly, and evil. To transform a gift into money by selling it (the opposite of transforming money into a gift) is considered especially evil. Many informants mentioned that particular objects, especially gifts, were ones they would not sell. This rigid unwillingness to

transform the object into money was one signal that the object exists in the realm of the sacred and is above the commoditization that would make it possible to transform it into money. To violate that sacredness with money is considered evil. It is more than a transformation from sacred to profane; it is a transformation from good-sacred to evil-sacred, almost like selling one's family into bondage.

Such instances are instructive because they force consumers to make choices which result in a net loss of potential or actual financial worth. This was clearly evident among several pet breeders and antique dealers who reportedly refused to sell their ferrets, dogs, birds, and antiques to 'bad homes' (i.e., to people they feared would not care for the animals adequately or properly appreciate the antiques). Similarly, one couple, in anticipation of a residential move, was selling some of their household furnishings. However, they were very upset by a young woman who attempted to bargain too hard on the price of some tables which the couple had custom-made several years earlier. When the price offered was very low, they decided to give the tables away rather than sell them so cheaply to someone who was obviously more interested in money than the tables. Likewise, an elderly man who talked about selling his things at yard sales said that when the price offered by someone was ridiculously low, he would rather give the things away than sell them. What are these consumers saying with their actions? They are saying that in these instances they were selling personal possessions at fair and low prices in the hope that someone else could use them. However, when the transaction began to appear too much like a profane business transaction in which the potential buyer was trying to gain financially from the exchange, they preferred to make a charity gift of the object to someone else. At too low a price, the implied concern for profit dominated senses of community and fairness and corrupted the transaction. Rather than take money, they chose to keep the object in the realm of the sacred by giving it away. Clearly these were regarded as something more than merely economic transactions.

This is the same sort of transaction that people often find themselves in when they receive unsolicited assistance from a stranger, as with getting a ride when one has run out of gasoline, or in getting help with a flat tire from another motorist. The recipient, thankful and used to paying for services, often offers to pay the helper as an indication that the assistance has been valued. However, the helper typically declines

the offer, thereby assigning the assistance to the arena of gift-giving rather than profane trade. In such cases, money represents the profane world which is not allowed to mix with this transaction. A gift of help may, however, be compensated by a counter gift, such as reciprocal help or buying the benefactor a token consumable gift, such as a drink. But to move out of the realm of the sacred by transforming the help into money is asocial and profane. Similarly, the sculptor mentioned earlier was able to avoid becoming involved in the profane world of commerce by letting his sister handle sales considerations. And the coin-operated votive candles were seen as inappropriate because they failed to allow sufficient distance and ceremony to sacralize the exchange. Rather than connoting a sacrifice, putting coins in a machine evokes the commercial vending machine.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In contemporary society, money represents a tension, a co-existing inconsistency between sacred and profane, and between good-sacred and evil-sacred. What then is the nature of money? What does it represent?

Rather than having an inherent meaning, money has a translucent character. It takes on much of its character by reflecting the sacred or profane meaning of the processes in which it participates. These processes themselves are not inherently sacred or profane, good-sacred or evil-sacred, but rather are socially and contextually defined as such (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Money, too, is a projectible field (Lakoff 1987), but a secondary projectible field onto which meanings are transferred by consumers as they attempt to use and make sense of their object world. Contemporary money is not just the profane exchange medium that economists have described; but neither is it always the symbolic feces described by psychoanalysts, the root of all evil described in religious doctrine, or the universal-purpose currency that some anthropologists have described. Rather, like national flags that need repair from time to time, religious vestments which, although holy and pure, still must be laundered, and souvenirs that sit on a retail shelf before becoming meaningful for the ultimate purchaser, money has a profane life as well as a sacred life. As our discussion has indicated, at times in its sacred life, money serves good and at times it serves evil.

The fact that it is so variable in character only serves to heighten our interest in its multivocal role in contemporary consumers' lives.

Prior treatments of money have concentrated almost entirely on its profane meanings. This utilitarian view encourages the fiction that contemporary market transactions are impersonal and without deeper sacred meanings. We are just beginning to realize the extent to which the modern market is still imbedded in personal and social meanings (e.g., Granovetter 1985). Far from being an irrational vestigial remnant of prior times, we believe that the sacred character of much modern money is a hopeful sign of the human and essentially humane character that is a part of every social interaction, even in a postmodern society. While the copresent good and evil sides of sacred money entail certain risks, we believe this risk is justified in light of the alternative of a purely profane society.

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