

Ousia Aphanes: Justice and the Market in light of Plato’s Republic, I and II

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Scholars often distinguish book I of the *Republic* from the rest of Plato’s dialogue. Without arguing against this view, I suggest that books I and II can be read together fruitfully, as a preliminary discussion of the relationship between money and political authority. Indeed, the first book offers a window into a socio-political “crisis of reciprocity,” concomitant with the rise of coinage in the Greek world, that formed part of the social context of Platonic political philosophy. Along with the emergence of the polis (city-state), the rise of coinage displaced the pre-political order of gift-exchange. Gift-exchange provided a symbolic mediation for social order, but the polis displaced this function, effectively “privatizing” gift-exchanges. Meanwhile, the spread of coinage brought the realm of individualistic, utilitarian exchange – formerly marginalized – into the heart of the city. Seen in this context, establishing a new mediation between the market and the polis is a central challenge of the *Republic*.

Book II introduces the abstract idea of “the market” into Western thought. However, we should not read Plato’s theorization of this, “civic,” market alone, but against the “revolutionary” face of money on display in book I’s quarrel about justice – which is also a quarrel about money and its relationship to human and divine debts, friendship, and individual gain. As I argue, a crucial goal of Plato’s *Republic* is to persuade Athenians to adopt a new understanding of money as an instrument of positive or constructive reciprocity, and thus, as a part – but not the whole – of political justice.¹ This goal requires Plato to formulate a theory of the market and to circumscribe the market and its logic within the boundaries of the *Republic*’s paradigm of justice, the *kallipolis*. Underpinning this theoretical move is the analogical relationship Plato posits between the soul and the city. Just as the healthy soul comprises three hierarchically ordered parts – reason, “spiritedness,” and appetite – the city is composed of three classes – philosopher-rulers, guardians, and “moneymakers.”²

The *Republic* calls for a subordination of market norms to the imperatives of justice in the polis. Accordingly, Plato advocates a philosophical renovation in Athenians’ understanding of money³ as an instrument of both distributive and corrective justice. But in the first place, in order to subordinate the logic of markets to that of political justice, Plato had to separate the two spheres – market and polis – analytically. Thus, Plato should be recognized as the first significant *theorist* of the market in Western political thought, not only as its first great critic. In other words, the radical, Platonic distinction between the market sphere and the political sphere is a presupposition of *what counts as* “market logic” in Western discourse. If nothing else, then, to return to Platonic origins on this point is to remind ourselves of the inherited and contingent aspects of notions such as “market logic.” Returning to the origins of concepts is both an occasion to break the spell of reification and an opportunity to understand better the intentions of

the theorists who bequeathed them. In our age of “market triumphalism,” revisiting the seminal distinction between the market and political community is as relevant a task as ever.⁴

A Crisis of Reciprocity in Classical Greece

Like most of his political thought, Plato's theorization of the market was a reply to the crisis of Athenian society. Among other things, this crisis was related to the rise and rapid spread of coined money in the Greek world. Following Richard Seaford (2004), I shall refer to this as a “crisis of reciprocity.”⁵ This crisis has a twofold aspect. First, the ascendance of the polis implied a new notion of justice (*dike*) centered on public institutions exercising a monopoly on arbitration in the name of the whole community. This represented a departure from the old forms of reciprocity centered on ritualized exchanges of gifts (or vendettas) between prominent persons or clans. Second, the rise of a monetized, “market” economy portended a shift from the “communalistic” practices of generalized exchange, characteristic of palatial economies – and in Greece, of the communal practice of temple sacrifice – toward the individualistic and impersonal norms of commodity-exchange. The new public authority manifested by the polis and maintained through the ritual practice of sacrifice was both a foundation for the generalized acceptance of market institutions and a condition of the spread of coinage (Seaford 2004). Ideally, the polis' institutional monopoly on arbitral justice could also serve as a counterbalance against the utilitarian and impersonal, competitive and “individuating” tendency of monetization. But a persistent theme of epic and tragedy is that money often perverted the relationship between public and private order, veiling tyrannical power in the garb of public authority.⁶

Plato's heuristic vision of the just polis entailed an emphatic distinction between the market order, governed by individual desire, and the orders of honor and justice, governed by the imperatives of political community. In brief, the benevolent tyranny of reason in Plato's *kallipolis* necessitated that money and commerce in the city be defined as the social analogs of desire and appetite in the soul. Like the appetitive soul, Platonic money is the manifestation of need and desire in the city. As such, Platonic money represents protean and indiscriminate urges with an inherent tendency to outstrip the judicious, boundary-setting authority of Platonic moral reasoning. Accordingly Socrates and his interlocutors prescribe strict limits on the circulation of money in the *Republic*'s city-in-speech.

In the concrete context of Athenian society, money (coinage) constituted *ousia aphanes*, or “invisible substance.” By using the medium of coinage, one could not only satisfy virtually any desire, but one could do so “invisibly,” just as the tyrant Gyges satisfies his lust and usurps rule by exploiting the power of invisibility granted by Deioces' ring. Like appetite or desire, money represented a visionless potency for generation and growth, but one always in danger of corruption through excess. Just as appetite must be disciplined on behalf of higher imperatives of just honor and right reason, the “invisible substance” represented by money, and the boundless

desire it manifests, had to be made visible – or unavailable – insofar as it threatened to corrupt the just polis.⁷

Thus, in terms of distributive justice, Plato allows broad freedom for commercial activity among the appetitive “moneymaking” class; and in this context, Plato’s Socrates formulates, for the first time, the idea of the “market” as an autonomous realm of human activity capable of providing for both needs and desires in the city. However, Socrates strictly denies participation in this realm to the auxiliaries and guardians, whose lifestyles will be communalistic in every imaginable way. Just as with poetry, then, Socrates does not abolish money from the city. Rather, as philosopher-legislator, he dictates exacting terms according to which commerce and money may enter the polis.

Also, with regard to corrective justice, Plato likens punishment (often assessed by fines) to the horticultural technique of *kolasis*, which resembles pruning: cutting the limbs of a tree in order to improve its growth. The metaphor of *kolasis* is apt, since Plato identifies money and “moneymaking” with the appetitive faculty of the soul. In contrast to irrational appetite, the thumotic, or “spirited,” part of the soul is passively rational, making it amenable to education and discipline. Accordingly, the spirited part of the soul is in a position to constrain the overgrowth of the appetitive part by the dictates of philosophic reason. In the city, *kolasis* plays a parallel role by deploying the thumotic forces of public approbation in service of the rehabilitative project of philosophical justice.⁸ In this context, Plato emphasizes that the use of money (fines) as a means of punishment communicates a rational and rehabilitative relationship between the city and the criminal, rather than a passionate and antagonistic relationship (of “compensation”) between victim and offender.

Again, Plato’s theoretic account of money and markets is preliminary to these characterizations of money as an instrument of justice. Two portrayals of money appear in the *Republic*. I begin with book II because it is the site of Plato’s effort to construct an idea of “civic” money as an instrument of positive reciprocity, radically subordinate to the ideal of public justice as institutionalized in the polis.⁹ Yet the *Republic* begins by portraying another, “revolutionary” face of money. This revolutionary aspect would have been the more familiar to Athenian readers. Plato’s deduction of civic money in book II is set up against book I’s portrait of revolutionary money. The close relation between revolutionary money and tyrannical power is drawn by Socrates’ interlocutors in book I and culminates with the story of Gyges’ ring at the beginning of book II.

What follows is an elaboration on this reading of Platonic money. I focus on the alternative accounts of money in the first two books, with an eye to their overall place in Plato’s philosophical project. I conclude with a brief discussion of the limits of Platonic money. Throughout, I adopt anthropological, sociological and textual approaches alternately, in an effort to draw as thorough an account as is possible in this brief space.

Distributive Justice: “From Communalism to the Market”

Plato was grappling with the consequences of new modes of reciprocity manifested institutionally by the polis, on the one hand, and the “retail” market on the other. These changes must be understood in relation to practices that preceded them. The most significant of these earlier forms of reciprocity were sacrifice and gift-exchange (Henaff 2010).¹⁰ Sacrifice and gift-exchange are both like and unlike their counterparts – political justice and commercial exchange. The former are *ritualized* practices of reciprocity, while the latter *institutionalize* reciprocity. Also, in pre-political society, both ritualized gift-exchange and sacrifice manifested the long-term social and cosmological order of the community by governing the relationships among men, and between men and gods, respectively. Through the process of institutionalization, the functions of these rituals were assumed by codified law and doctrine.

Both gift-exchange and sacrifice aimed to maintain the long-term transactional order of the community, but the “invisibility” of coined money¹¹ soon implicated it in the short-term order of commercial exchange. Short-term exchanges do not presuppose any bond (either of amity or enmity) between the participants, and aim at individual satisfaction rather than long-term maintenance of the social bond or the cosmic order. Sacrifice, by contrast, sustained the cosmic order through “communalistic” ritual offerings to the god, performed in the temple, and affirmed the isonomic order of the polis through the division of sacrificial meat into equal shares.¹² Like coinage, sacrifice could manifest the whole community's identity, and authority, but unlike retail trade, the distribution of sacrificial shares affirmed the unity of the polis as a community and its citizens' equality. With regard to the specific phenomenon of monetization, then, the shift from ritualized to institutionalized reciprocity corresponded with a process of individuation, an ideology that stressed formal, rather than substantive equality, and greater autonomy for the short-term transactional order. By analyzing this process, Plato radicalizes the terms of this shift. Insofar as this was the case, Plato's theoretical association of markets with short-term self-interest is not arbitrary, though it may be overdrawn owing to his heuristic purpose.

Unlike sacrifice, gift-exchange mediated long-term relationships among aristocratic families. Coinage was the material condition for the spread of markets and thus for the rise of a commercial class. The ascendancy of commerce posed a threat to the presumptive authority of aristocratic families, but it also depended on the emerging, political, order in which both new and old classes had a stake. For, the authority of the polis ultimately guaranteed the (future) value of coins: While the Greeks certainly did not have “fiat” money, they were unique in accepting that coins of the same denomination carried a uniform value in spite of minor differences in the quantity or purity of bullion. This is what makes Greek coinage “fiduciary money” (Seaford 2004, 136–146; Kurke 1999, 300).¹³ In terms of modern monetary theory, “fiduciarity” represents a mixture of the “chartalist” view that money is the creature of the state and thus that the value of money is “token” value, and the “metallist” view that the value of money derives from the intrinsic value of precious metals, or “commodity” value.¹⁴

Money did not arise for the first time in the ancient Mediterranean, as regimes of debt and credit maintained through various systems of accounting dependent on literacy and numeracy already were functioning much earlier in places like Sumer. What makes the Greek experience unique is the rapidity of the spread of coinage and the peculiar association between Greek money and Greek civic religion. “The Greeks were the first people to use coinage on a large scale, and throughout the Archaic and classical periods such use remained largely confined to the Greeks [...] *Fiduciarity* (even the relatively limited amount achieved) was in this period even more exclusively Greek” (Seaford 2004, 146).

Though the evidence necessarily is circumstantial, there are good reasons to consider seriously the claim that Greek monetization depended on the distributive practices of polis and temple institutions. In the first place, it offers a persuasive explanation for the historical genesis of fiduciary money, which is significant because it is quite clear by now that money did not arise from barter to facilitate more efficient trade. After all, the very language of money derived from sacrificial practice: the word *obol* referred to a sacrificial spit; a *drachma* was a bundle of *obeloi* (typically, six (Seaford 2004, 126–127)).¹⁵ Second, the practice of symbolic substitution in sacrificial offerings, where for example a gold or silver ox might be substituted for a live ox, gave rise to mass production, which was an important precondition of the rise of coinage. Third, there is evidence that money payments were made by the polis to purchase sacrificial victims, suggesting that the principle that unlike things may be rendered equivalent by means of quantitative comparison was in practice before the spread of coinage (Seaford 2004, 80–81; Semenova 2011, 377).¹⁶ Finally, there are strongly suggestive continuities between the titles of sacrificial offices and the titles of offices in the polis. For example, “the regular word for treasurer in the classical period, *tamias*, originally meant carver. The name *kolakretai* of early Athenian financial officials seems to derive from the gathering of sacrificed thigh-bones. The word *danos*, ‘loan,’ might originally have meant the part of the sacrifice given to the priest. The meaning of *eranos* passes from communal meal to cash loan” (Seaford 2004, 79).

To claim that monetization emerged historically from polis and temple practices does not imply that this was a frictionless development: communal practices of reciprocity can have radically different purposes from the institutionalized reciprocity of market exchange, and coinage facilitated market autonomy in an unprecedented manner. As extant texts indicate, social changes wrought by the expansion of commerce and the rapid spread of coinage throughout the Greek world beginning around the eighth century gave rise to a new discourse regarding the moral status of money and its relation to political justice. The combination of these two developments – political centralization and widespread monetization – was a unique convergence, which helps to account for Plato’s unique concern with the place of money in the order of justice.

The Market in Book II: Civic Money and Plato's Deduction of the Market

The value of money depends in some degree on a social relation (generalized trust) and money may even serve as an instrument of positive reciprocity. Yet at the same time, the anonymous and impersonal – “individuating” – character of market exchange threatens to undermine the ideals of transparency and accountability to which public justice aspires. In the *Republic* Plato faced, and attempted to resolve this paradox, by circumscribing the jurisdiction of money in such a way that it could only serve public justice. Plato's theorization of “civic money”¹⁷ occurs in *Republic*, book II. There, Socrates¹⁸ offers a “likely story” in which money comes into being for purely functional reasons, as a universally accepted measure to facilitate the exchange of diverse goods in a complex marketplace.

In telling this, now familiar story, Socrates was not trying to demonstrate the impersonal determinism of market forces. Rather, the story serves Plato's heuristic, normative effort to locate justice in the city by giving a philosophical account of the polis' development based on Plato's analysis of the tripartite soul. Thus, while Socrates assumes the principle of individual specialization as the origin of his deduction of the market, the principle of specialization itself depends on a prior anthropological assumption that humans are communal by nature insofar as they lack self-sufficiency. Socrates' spare, utilitarian account of the genesis of cities invites his interlocutors to consider the possibility that justice is “located” in the need each citizen has for (the service provided by) others. In this way, the two apparently contradictory principles of justice – the individualistic principle of “minding one's business” and the communalistic principle of “harmony of the parts” in the city as a whole – are reconciled on the plane of abstraction. But more significantly, Socrates' account of the emergence of the polis points, ironically, to the shortcomings of a strictly utilitarian view of *political* community as merely a function of appetitive interdependence.

The irony of book II becomes clear when seen in the broader context of Greek literature and in the crisis of reciprocity described above. To begin, Socrates uses the language of *citizenship* to describe his hypothetical “economy.” Both sophisticated and unsophisticated readers would have been struck by the philosopher's failure to mention temple rituals, military fortifications, and governmental institutions in his hypothetical history of the *polis* (Schofield 1999, 61–71). In Greek experience, every polis included these features. It is likely that readers took it as “common sense” that market institutions depended upon such arrangements, rather than the reverse. Readers probably were also familiar with stories of legendary tyrants that warned of how the infinite convertibility of money enables tyrannical men to subvert piety and usurp public authority.¹⁹ These stories carry more disturbing implications of money's potential to undermine the very institutions on which it depends. If anything, then, popular wisdom presented money as a simultaneously liberating and subversive, “revolutionary,” force. Revolutionary money belongs at the margins of “political” life proper, not as the foundation of the community of interests on which the polis depends.

In Socrates' hypothetical history of cities, the aspiration to autarky and the anonymity of market transactors are the logical presuppositions of money's genesis. In this utilitarian perspective, money solves the problem of "double coincidence of wants" which is insurmountable in a barter system. Although Socrates does not speak in such modern terms, this section of the *Republic* does seem to constitute the first theoretical articulation of the "myth" that barter is the origin of markets. For, according to Socrates' hypothesis, coinage and the market arise for purely functional reasons, facilitating a logically and pragmatically frictionless transition from a small and simple community of interests to a large and complex "political economy." Most significantly, there is no crisis of reciprocity in book II. The revolutionary face of money has been erased; only its civic face remains in view.

Price and Value

Strictly speaking, Socrates' deduction of the market hangs on the necessity of merchants (or the merchant's *techne*), not of money.²⁰ Yet the implicit need for the merchant's art depends more deeply on an epistemic "need that is unnamed in the text but seems implicitly understood: a lack, not merely of goods but of what may be termed knowledge" (Weinstein 2009, 449). The market solves the problem of the double coincidence of *knowledge*. In other words, knowledge of others' needs and desires is necessary to bridge the gap between autarky and anonymity in a community of specialized producers. The merchant's role is to supply this knowledge-gap, and market institutions are required if the merchant is to perform this function effectively.²¹ But what sort of knowledge is the proper province of the merchant?

The answer implied in book II is that the merchant's art involves knowledge of *price*, not value. According to modern economic thought, the function of price is to adjust supply and demand. Properly understood, this is just what the merchant's art achieves. Markets and currency provide the institutional context and the means for this adjustment. The knowledge-adjusting function of the market as Plato conceives it allows for greater flexibility and "a more realistic approach to quantities" than the "communalistic" pre-market economy (Weinstein 2009, 453).

Plato's effort to subordinate the logic of commerce to that of political justice turns on this distinction between price and value. It is this distinction that makes the merchant's art both a permissible and legitimate one in the polis, but also a restricted one. For, unlike other arts which depend upon specialized knowledge of particular things, commerce depends on a kind of knowing that is both general and arbitrary with respect to the value of what is exchanged.

This logic of price severed from value has corrosive consequences when applied to matters of civic virtue or philosophical wisdom. Plato is at pains to extricate such inestimable "things" from the jurisdiction of commerce. This includes, for example, both honor (*time*: "value") and wisdom (*sophia*) – in the *kallipolis*, the guardian-auxiliaries and philosopher kings will be enjoined from participating in commercial life. Also, Plato's theory of the market establishes a legitimate place for merchants in the city, but it disqualifies the practice of Sophistry. The reason is that Sophists

trade in virtue and wisdom, which is “priceless” in the sense that its value is inestimable (Henaff 2010, 10–11).

Revolutionary Money

Socrates' deduction of the market is a just-so story. It seems likely that money emerged historically from something other than barter. Candidates for the historical antecedents of money include official tokens of credit, publicly fixed penalties, prizes awarded in athletic competitions, royal seals, and – in the Greek case especially – religious (sacrificial) paraphernalia. In most cases these antecedents belonged to economies of generalized exchange, not proto-market economies that simply lacked currency. The myth of barter envisions synchronous exchange between two individuals as the pre-history of market exchange. But generalized exchange is asynchronous and communalistic. Accordingly, the historical phenomenon of monetization seems to involve a renegotiation of social relations, marked by crises, that is veiled over by the familiar story that money solved the epistemic problem of double coincidence of wants that made barter exchange inefficient.

Socrates' story is quite similar to the myth of barter. The chief similarities involve the functionalism of Socrates' account and the absence of a crisis of reciprocity, the latter of which is directly related to the point that book II theorizes the *autonomy* of market relations from other spheres of human activity. In light of the whole dialogue, however, book II's hypothesis clearly serves Plato's broader heuristic and normative aims. First, as we have seen, Socrates' deduction is explicitly a *hypothetical* history of market exchange. Second, Socrates' characterization of the art and knowledge appropriate to markets depends on a crucial epistemic distinction between price and value. Third, it becomes clear as the *Republic* unfolds that Plato's erasure of the question of value from the idealized jurisdiction of market relationships establishes a foundation for his separation of the “moneymaking” classes from the guardians and rulers, whose provinces – *time* and *sophia* – are the priceless things. So, while it can be said that Plato drives a wedge between the “two sides of the coin,” this gesture is inseparable from the process of (analytically) decomposing the parts of the city/soul, in order to reconfigure them in terms of the *Republic's* philosophical paradigm of justice.

Republic II indicates, by conspicuous absences, Plato's sensitivity to the moral context of market relationships. Conversely, book I portrays a different side of money – one much closer to Athenians' experience of its revolutionary influence. Book II's barter-hypothesis serves the heuristic purposes of the *kallipolis* rather than subtending an empirical account of the genesis of cities.²² This becomes clear once we realize that the various discussions of justice in book I, along with the story of Gyges' ring in book II, are preoccupied with distinguishing justice and the art of rule from commerce and the art of gain. These earlier passages imply a genealogy of money that differs from the hypothetical history Socrates goes on to tell. In short, book I is marked by the crisis of reciprocity that the theory of exchange in book II erases.

Book I presupposes a history of money that is far less familiar to modern readers than it would have been to Plato's original audience. That audience would have been aware of relatively recent transformations in the social bases of power and related challenges to conventional understandings of justice and reciprocity, brought about by the rapid spread of coinage and commerce.²³ Well before Plato, Greek culture was grappling with these changes; indeed, this theme is already evident in the complaint of Achilles, the Homeric hero who serves as a foil for Socrates' own claim to heroism. At stake in Achilles' complaint is the question of (priceless) honor: "For the Homeric Achilles, the *time* [...] that should bind the warrior to the community no longer means anything because it goes equally to good and bad fighters" (Seaford 2004, 301–302). Achilles' complaint signals a crisis in the heroic order of reciprocity which is staked on personal honor and communal recognition of worth. But, as Socrates remarks, the enraged Achilles is "so full of confusion as to contain within himself two diseases that are opposite to one another – illiberality accompanying love of money, on the one hand, and arrogant disdain for gods and human beings, on the other" (*Rep.* 391c). Is Achilles' *time* priced disproportionately, or is it intrinsically inestimable? The Homeric Achilles claims that his worth lies beyond the realm of commercial exchange, but the gist of his complaint is that his reward was below market price. By implying "that there should be impersonal equivalence between worth (in battle) and material reward," and withdrawing from the community on account of his sense that he has been inadequately rewarded, Achilles' complaint "[combines] the logic of money with aristocratic superiority to it" (Seaford 2004, 301–302).²⁴

Achilles' dissonance illustrates how the spread of coined money contributed to a crisis in the heroic order of value. The pricelessness of heroic *time* depends in part on the warrior's willingness to pledge his honor with his life, which is why heroic *time* transcends the realm of mere desire (appetite). No amount of money can adequately represent heroic *time* because the value of life itself is inestimable. The market embodies precisely the opposite principle. Monetary tokens give concrete form to abstract desire, but only as long as they merely *represent* desire. Paradoxically, then, money is a lifeless, and deathless, thing that serves as a pledge for the fleeting and multifarious desires of the living.

The classic figure of this paradox is not the Homeric Achilles, but the legendary Phrygian tyrant Midas. Midas' misguided identification of moneyed wealth and satiety issues in a wish that "he subsequently [regrets] on finding even his food as gold. We may add a psychological dimension [to Midas' error]: all things are seen in terms of money; absorption in happiness in the abstract (money) is incapacity for happiness in the concrete" (Seaford 2004, 305). Midas' mistake illustrates the paradoxical relationship between money and mortality. This paradox gives a clue to Midas' seduction: "What makes money attractive [to Midas] is not so much the yearning to accumulate as it is the idea that it could be converted into all sorts of things, depending on desire or need, occasion or urgency" (Henaff 2010, 13).

Money – coinage – thus appears as the material manifestation of the idea of satiety. Its efficacy as such depends on at least two conditions, each of which involves a paradox. The first condition is that money must be useless in itself. Midas' wish reflects a psychological confusion

arising from this first condition, that in order to be an effective medium of exchange, money (gold) ideally should lack any intrinsic usefulness. The second condition, answering to the requirement of universality, is that money must be generally accepted by and in the community for innumerable types of commercial exchange. This paradox, the political face of the coin, illuminates the classical association between money and tyranny: As common currency (*nomisma*), money facilitates distributive justice within a community, but as “invisible substance,” money is capable of subverting public authority with private wealth. This subversive relation was essential to classical tyranny.

Tyranny was a relatively novel form of rule that depended, like “political” rule, on the centralization of public authority and administrative institutions. Herodotus tells us of Deioeces the Mede, an exemplary tyrant who

began his political career as an ordinary judge. By seeming to judge well, he made himself respected among the Medes. When he refused to judge any longer, the people, who had become dependent on his judgments, begged him to be king. Once king, Deioeces wished to conceal his unjust motives from the people, and accordingly he built the seven-walled city of Ecbatana. The walls were concentric circles, the innermost of which was made of gold, the medium of exchange (Hdt. 1.98). Inside this wall, Deioeces lived and reigned. (Shell 1978, 18)²⁵

In tyranny there is a paradoxical reversal in the order of public and private realms, with the visible, public authority of the polis dependent on the invisible, private power of the (oligarchical) *oikos*, or the capricious whims of the tyrant. In brief, invisible power infiltrates and finally, eclipses, visible authority. On the one hand, the early Deioeces – the judge – resembles heroic leaders we encounter in Homer, whose authority is linked to their highly visible status in the community and dependent on their good counsel. On the other hand, the latter, tyrannical, Deioeces prefigures the legendary tyrant Gyges, whose power depends on being able to see his subjects but remaining invisible to them.

Revolutionary Money in Book I

Book I's debate over justice enacts a literary “crisis of reciprocity,” instigated by Cephalus' confusion over the relationship between money and debt. The discussion of the various definitions of justice opens with Cephalus' boast that, by rehabilitating his father's fortune, he has acquired enough money to repay his debts both to gods and to men. It is Socrates, of course, who transforms Cephalus' boast into the universal and abstract proposition that justice is “telling the truth and paying one's debts.” And Socrates goes on to debunk this categorical “definition” of justice with a hypothetical example, that of returning a weapon to a madman. Regardless of Socrates' tactics, Cephalus does open the way to Socrates' proposition because he posits, implicitly, that the commercial order represented by money comprehends both the cosmological

order represented by the temple and the communal order represented by the polis. For Cephalus, justice is, and only is, fair dealing in the market; without hesitation, he characterizes relations with both gods and men in commercial terms.

Cephalus' clarity is the opposite of Achilles' confusion, yet it is still a form of error. What is harmful about Cephalus' error is not its anachronism, but its moral obtuseness:

The possession of money [says Cephalus] contributes a great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one's will, and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a God or money to a human being. It also has many other uses. But, still, one thing reckoned against another, I wouldn't count this as the least thing, Socrates, for which wealth is very useful to an intelligent man. (331a-c)

Cephalus asserts that no debt, divine or human, is too great to be repaid – so long as one possesses the money to repay it. For Cephalus, debt is finite, but the potency of money is infinite. Money not only is infinitely potent; it also possesses boundless authority. It is inconsequential whether one owes a debt to the gods or to a man. Equally inconsequential are the circumstances under which any given debt is contracted, since money can make all debts commensurable.²⁶ Finally, Cephalus' putting money before debt reveals the power of money to de-personalize the relationship of reciprocity with the gods and with other men. This last point is reinforced in the dramatic action of the dialogue when Cephalus abruptly abandons the argument to his son Polemarchus, its "inheritor," and exits "to look after the sacrifices."

Polemarchus' effort to rehabilitate the argument involves a significant modification: for Polemarchus, justice means "paying back" one's friends by helping them, and likewise one's enemies, by harming them. Insofar as he admits that personal ties of loyalty and enmity seem to be at stake in relations of justice (and injustice), Polemarchus' introduction of the friend-enemy distinction is an improvement on Cephalus' impersonal notion of justice. However, it founders on two obstacles. The first is that this factionalized notion of justice appears to be useful only in conditions of war; in peacetime it is little more than the virtue of a good banker, business associate, or thief.²⁷ The second obstacle turns on the distinction between seeming and being: the true friend is one "who seems to be, and is, good" (335a). But our judgment of others' moral character is liable to error or to deception.

Polemarchus' definition of justice as personal reciprocity hearkens back to ritualized forms of reciprocity such as guest-friendship (*xenia*) and gift-exchange, which are central to maintaining the bonds of community in societies that lack a centralized political authority. In such rituals, relations of both alliance and enmity are governed by a similar logic of reciprocity. The difficulty with Polemarchus' revision of the argument arises from the fact that the functions formerly served by these ritualized relationships have been subsumed by polis-institutions. Under the new circumstances of political life, Polemarchean justice elevates matters of *private* loyalty and *private* vengeance above those of public, "political" justice.

In the absence of centralized political institutions ritualized relationships of reciprocity serve “to create or restore bonds of recognition between groups or individuals” (Henaff 2010, 309). Gift-exchanges are “decisive moments of the collective life of traditional societies, which is to say [societies] in which the essence of social relationships and statutory positions is determined by kinship systems” (Henaff 2010, 108). Market exchanges, by contrast, presuppose centralized political institutions with authority over both statutory positions within the polis and inter-polis relations. It is significant, then, that Socrates disarms Polemarchus by drawing attention to perverse consequences of interpolating Simonides’ dictum in a commercial idiom. Considering the two sides of the coin – revolutionary and civic – it seems fitting that Socrates reduces Polemarchean justice to a schizophrenic hybrid of warrior-virtue and banker-virtue.

Socrates’ second objection, turning on the difficulty of distinguishing true friends from merely apparent friends, is more closely related to the specific problem of coinage as “invisible substance.” The abstract and impersonal agency of coinage is closely linked with both centralized bureaucratic administration²⁸ and “invisible” tyrannical power. Accordingly, Socrates’ second objection to Polemarchus anticipates the connection between money as *ousia aphanes* and “invisible” tyrannical power. According to Socrates,

[true] justice [...] must [...] inform us about who are friends and who (if any) are enemies and about what is the meaning of benefiting friends. Socrates’ argument focuses not only on (the friendliness of) the transactors but also on the nature of what is owed. He suggests throughout that Simonides “meant that the owed is the fitting” [...] and that the deposition itself is finally unimportant.

Polemarchus, however, maintains his definition of justice as loyalty to friends and taking advantage of enemies. In order to show his mistake, or at least mock his position, Socrates takes this definition to an extreme by extending Polemarchus’ argument to the individual who believes that he has no friends and is loyal only to himself. Such an individual is or would be a tyrant. (Shell 1978, 23)

Polemarchus’ definition of justice paves the way for Thrasymachus’ more explicit identification of justice with tyrannical power. Still, Thrasymachus’ claim that justice is the “advantage of the stronger” remains one step short of tyranny. Thrasymachus’ position is that of the sophist, not the tyrant. For the sophist, even virtue can be assimilated to the logic of commerce, and so be bought and sold in the marketplace, but the tyrant stands outside of the marketplace; as we have seen, his power depends on reversing the order of public and private realms. For the philosopher, of course, the sophistic position implies the unacceptable conclusion that wisdom and virtue are as arbitrary as market price. The sophist, like the philosopher, is ostensibly “wise.” Only, fully embracing the idiom of the marketplace, the sophist equates virtue with what sells, just as the merchant’s *techné* identifies the value of a thing with its price.

To equate justice with profit in Thrasymachus' sophistic manner entails the confusion of public and private spheres, just as Polemarchus' definition confused private loyalty with public authority. Yet, where Polemarchus' confusion represents a threat to the new order, Thrasymachus "conservatively" registers anger at Socrates for bringing into question aspects of the new order that the sophist celebrates and from which he benefits. As the discussion unfolds, Thrasymachus compares the relationship between rulers and subjects to that between shepherd and sheep. Thrasymachus' claim that the final aim of shepherding is to slaughter and reap a profit from the sheep reflects the commercial logic of the profiteer, treating the good of the sheep as an arbitrary matter. To the contrary, Socrates insists on the particular nature of the shepherd's *techné* which involves knowing and doing what is good for the sheep. Ultimately, this exchange conforms to Socrates' ubiquitous indictment of the sophist as a mere *psychemporos*, a retailer in spiritual things (Henaff 2010, 32).

The road to tyranny ends with Gyges. Again, the symbolic negotiation of the relationship between the long-term order of the polis and the short term order of commerce is central. Gyges is an archetypal tyrant. Gyges' ring resembles a royal seal as well as a coin, and the ring's power of invisibility signifies the potential of money to subvert the relation between public and private orders. "The story" of Gyges' ring "expresses features [...] of the [royal] seal in the near East – its embodiment of the identity of its owner (when it is invisible so is Gyges), its consignment to the tomb, its magical power and its importance in the transmission of royal power" (Seaford 2004, 118). Glaucon's story of Gyges' usurping power with his invisibility-granting signet ring (modified by Plato from earlier sources) reflects the transferal of authority from the personal seal-mark to the impersonal coin-mark. "Whereas seal-marks seem to embody the power of the owner of the seal, coin-marks create no imagined attachment between the coins and their source" (Seaford 2004, 119). Gyges' power depends in no way on personal value or virtue; it is an invisible power, in the manner of Deioces' tyranny, described above.

The story of Gyges stands at the intersection of books I and II. Gyges' tyranny marks the terminus of the various definitions of justice discussed in book I, but it itself is not another definition. Glaucon introduces the story of Gyges after Socrates has announced the interlocutors' failure to find a definition of justice, but before Socrates introduces the city/soul analogy which forms the basis of the Platonic paradigms that follow.²⁹ The reason for this, I suggest, is that as a figure of tyranny Gyges stands outside the visible realm of public space. Even Thrasymachus was compelled to offer a definition of justice. But, like Cephalus, Gyges marks the boundary of philosophical discourse about justice. Just as it is invisible, Gyges' "justice" is speechless.

Plato uses the story of Gyges to introduce Socrates' challenge in the *Republic*: Socrates must show that it is more profitable to be a just person with a reputation for injustice than to be an unjust person with a reputation for justice. This challenge marks the beginning of Socrates' tyranny over the discussion and the instauration of the *Republic's* project of philosophical tyranny. As we have seen, one of Socrates' first tyrannical gestures will be to put commerce in its place.

Corrective Justice: The Order of Honor (*Time*) and Market Order

So far this discussion has focused on distributive justice, but the rise of the polis and the market also affected notions of corrective justice. To understand Plato's revision of corrective justice in context requires a preliminary account of the "pre-political" order of gift and vendetta, which can only be sketched here. To wit, one finds a close parallelism between the logic of ceremonial gift exchange, which builds relationships among kinship groups, and vindictory justice (vendetta), which aims to restore "equilibrium" in response to acts that destabilize those relationships. However, Plato introduces a categorical distinction between relationships defined by gift-exchange (and vendetta) and market relationships. Market relationships presuppose a private intention to possess goods or satisfy desires, whereas the function of gift-exchange is social and its goal is to create or maintain interpersonal bonds. "Ceremonial gift exchange is not a relationship between humans mediated by things (this defines the economy) but a relationship among humans mediated by symbols, which may be [valuable] physical goods [symbolic of persons] [...] but also persons (as in matrimonial alliance), gestures, words, dances, music, celebration, songs or feasts" (Henaff 2010, 153).

Market exchange is utilitarian and presupposes the equality and independence of the transactors. This equality is formal, not substantive, while the independence of the transactors, a substantive notion, is merely aspirational (otherwise no exchange would be necessary). The *telos* of utilitarian exchange is *autarkia*, or self-sufficiency. To be sure, utilitarian exchange may occur in (pre-political) kinship-based societies, but in these societies the public space is made manifest by the constant circulation of gifts, material and immaterial, chiefly among persons of notable status.³⁰ "The sphere of public recognition – ensured through ceremonial gift exchange – relativizes and prevails on the sphere of subsistence ensured by the production and exchange of consumer goods" (Henaff 2010, 153). Moreover, there is no relationship between the two spheres of gift exchange and commerce, such that the former might be said to yield to the latter. "The two spheres are different and must be so; their functions are radically alien to one another" (Henaff 2010, 153).

What transforms the meaning and function of gift exchange, and its relationship to utilitarian exchange, is the introduction of "political" rule. The eclipse of ceremonial gift exchange by formal political rule has the twofold consequence of loosening commercial relationships from their subordinate position relative to the public sphere (manifested by the activity of gift exchange), and relegating gift exchange to the private sphere, where it might appear as an alternative to commercial exchange or even as a rival paradigm of the social bond.³¹

Societies with centralized political institutions do not eradicate gift/countergift relationships, but they do subsume the "total" social function of such relationships. Commercial or utilitarian exchanges may occur in "pre-political" societies but they are assigned to a distinct sphere, one that is peripheral to the interpersonal bonds of the community.³² By the same token, gift-exchange relationships persist in societies with centralized institutions, only they are "privatized." More importantly, with respect to corrective justice, the kinship-based practice of

vendetta is eclipsed by the paradigm of public arbitrational justice. A political society “institute[s] an authority situated above the kinship system.” Hence, what was a “trinomial – constituted by (1) solidarity within one’s own group, (2) alliance or antagonism with the partner group, and (3) war or peace with the enemy group – is [...] reduced to a binomial: solidarity inside and antagonism outside” (Henaff 2010, 221).

In the Athenian context, Cleisthenes’ reforms offer striking examples of the construction of political society. The transformations wrought by Cleisthenes included eradicating kinship-based clans and replacing them with territory-based demes as the basic constituent of the polis, substituting *deme*-names for family-names³³ and instituting the selection of officials by lot. Each of these reforms was intended to further Solon’s project of pacifying and unifying Athens vis-à-vis its rival *poleis* (and the Persians, barbarians, etc.). While he is often called the “father of democracy,” it is significant that Cleisthenes expressed his aims in the language of *isonomia*, or equality under law. Cleisthenes’ broader aim, then, was to secure a “political” form of rule – publicly recognized institutions representing an authority that stands above the kinship structure – with democracy being a means to this end. Most significantly, Cleisthenes reckoned that Solon’s political reform was incomplete because he failed to put an end to the autonomy of the clans.

Inter-clan antagonisms (and alliances) persisted through the classical age, but the rise of the polis wrought a fundamental change in their status with regard to justice. In particular, the reconfiguration of the social structure and accompanying transition toward institutionalized public arbitration opens up a new problematic of punitive or corrective justice. Once the “binomial” structure of political authority has eclipsed the “trinomial” of kinship affiliations, “vengeance is no longer the application of justice. It becomes the pursuit of personal compensation [...] It releases individual violence instead of expressing the action of the group vis-à-vis another group. It becomes the greatest threat within the community” (Henaff 2010, 221). From this point on, then, the central public power is compelled to assume responsibility for rectifying injuries that transpire within its orbit.

As forms of corrective justice, the goal of both ceremonial vendetta and institutionalized public arbitration is to erase the debt engendered by an act of injustice. However, each procedure reflects a different logic of recompense. The historical record is replete with examples of the persistence of vindicatory norms in fifth- and sixth-century Athenian political practice. At the same time, tragedy and philosophy reflect a robust cultural renegotiation of the meaning of corrective justice as “compensation.” The development of Athenian political culture is based upon a shift from “revenge” to “punishment.” “Punishment is about [public] authority in the first instance and about law, dispassion, and disinterestedness only in certain contexts.” On the other hand, “acts of revenge [...] are carried out by actors *without final authority*” (Allen 2003, 24). For this reason, revenge is destabilizing of the polis’ institutionalized order.

The establishment of arbitrational justice is, in the first place, “‘a practice of constructing authority’ and not [...] ‘the practice of applying laws disinterestedly’” (Allen 2003, 24). Philosophers only subsequently identified the exercise of public authority with the disinterested

application of reasonable norms.³⁴ Thus, it is important to emphasize that the *practice* of arbitrational justice in democratic Athens was dominated by appeals to emotions – anger and pity – not reason. Also, rather than seeking public sanction, the act of prosecution more commonly intended “the pursuit of private compensation.” Athenian legal conventions reflected these norms. In the first place, all prosecution was undertaken privately in Athens; while arbitration was a public process, there was nothing resembling a public prosecutor. Second, in many cases there was no legally established penalty for an offense, with the result that in such cases “penalties had to be assessed by the jurors in a procedure called *timesis* [...] In [...] *timesis* both the prosecutor and the defendant would, after the vote of conviction, make new speeches proposing alternative penalties,” after which the jury would vote on the penalties (Allen 2003, 47).³⁵ Third, often there was no distinction between legislators and judges in Athens’ democracy, so that the act of judgment in a particular instance was not separate from the deliberative process of crafting general laws.

In practice, Athenian arbitrational justice combined the new public authority of the *demos*, institutionalized by the polis, with the old and now “private” norms of vindictory justice. Athenian courtroom rhetoric offers striking illustrations of the pursuit of private vengeance through public arbitration. It was typical to speak of punishment in personal rather than public or institutional terms; also, the language of private compensation informed the discourse of (public) arbitrational justice. Today, to the extent that we use the language of compensation at all, the *object* of compensation (in criminal cases) is not a person but an institution or “society.” But much of the language used to describe punishment in classical Athens “did not focus on institutional distinctions and instead had to do with what was happening to the *people* (punished, punisher, and *polis* community) involved in any given situation of punishment” (Allen, 2003, 69).³⁶

The language of *timoria*, which emphasizes personal relationships of status, bears an especially strong association with the logic of vendetta. “[*Timoria*] and its verbal cognates [...] stress the reassessment of honor and status in punishment: the phrases *didonai* and *lambanein dikein* [...] highlight the exchange of justice between the punisher and the punished [...] All of these words stress the importance of social relationships and relationality to the process of punishing” (Allen 2003, 69). Yet there is also another word for punishment, *zemia*, which indicates the close fit between the logics of debt and punishment (Allen 2003, 69). Also, unlike *timesis*, *zemia* seems closer to the impersonal logic of *isonomia* in the polis than the personal logic of status. Yet, like *timesis*, *zemia* allows speakers to conceive of punishment as the pursuit of *private* compensation through the public institutions and processes of arbitrational justice.

As Allen emphasizes, Plato can be thought to have wrought the greatest transformation in the language of punishment. Plato consistently speaks of punishment in the language of *kolasis*. *Kolasis* emphasizes the relationship between the wrongdoer and the polis and attaches a reformative signification to punishment rather than a retributive one. *Zemia* occupies an intermediate position between the principle of private (or personal) compensation and that of

public (or political) justice. But the logic of arbitrational justice demands a radical erasure of personal reciprocity from the public sphere.

The *Republic* is the central site of Plato's revision of the language of punishment. Plato's political-philosophical project reflects his ambition "to turn the whole process of punishment into a matter of educating the wrongdoer." In service to this aim, Plato wholly "rejected the language that described punishment as a reassessment of honor, chose instead to focus on punishment as education, and developed the first comprehensive theory of reformative punishment" (Allen 2003, 71).

To achieve his reform it was imperative that Plato redirect the focus of punishment, away from the personal relationship between the prosecutor and wrongdoer – motivated by reciprocal anger and characterized by competitive assessments of honor or status – toward an exclusive focus on the (unhealthy) soul of the wrongdoer, which may be remedied by the removal of ignorance, the ultimate cause of offense.³⁷ With Plato, corrective justice becomes a matter of restoring equilibrium *within* the soul, and *inside* the polis, but not *between* the persons directly involved in the offense. Accordingly, it was necessary for Plato to isolate the wrongdoer as the *exclusive* subject of punishment, and to insist that receiving punishment, or "suffering justice," is in fact therapeutic. In this connection, Plato counter-intuitively "redefines 'giving justice' [*to dikein didonai*] in such a way as to do away with a key Athenian idea – the idea that being punished is the reciprocal act of 'suffering badly' at the hands of someone whom one has treated badly" (Allen 2003, 249). In accordance with the new logic of arbitrational justice, Plato suggests that punishments administered by the *polis* must restore equilibrium by erasing the (cause of) offense, putting an end to the "unending back-and-forth movement" which was appropriate to ceremonial gift-exchange and vindictory justice, but disruptive to the order of the *polis*. In terms of the ends of justice, Plato's reform can be summarized as substituting the twofold principle of limit (or measure) without, and harmony within both the soul and the polis, for the threefold principle of domestic peace, reciprocity among kin (or potential allies) and bellicosity toward enemies.³⁸

Fines as an Instrument of Justice

The Athenian court was also a site where the invisible substance of moneyed wealth could be made publicly visible. Public spectacle was an essential means of punishment. Manifesting public authority through spectacular punishments was an essential tool for constructing that authority. "References to the public display and public memorialization of the condemned, to the abuse of the body, and to the problem of burial appear regularly in Athenian descriptions of punishment" (Allen 2003, 199).³⁹

As Allen suggests, money could serve as an instrument of spectacular punishment. "Money was the most tangible marker of exchange, and payment was the easiest way to show that the wrongdoer was giving up something or losing. Moreover, money and writing were linked to one another." Like visible punishments, publicly inscribed verdicts, or the imprisonment of

criminals' bodies in the *agora*, money penalties "served as a tool for assessing value and desert and [money] was a suitable language with which to inscribe stories of punishment into social memory" (Allen 2003, 225).⁴⁰

However, the *Republic's* revision of the goals of corrective justice entails a revision of the meaning of punishment as "compensation." The predominant motive for prosecution in classical Athens was personal anger indistinguishable from the desire to enjoy the offender's suffering. As Allen emphasizes, fifth-century Athenians considered anger and desire as two facets of the same emotional faculty: *orge*. *Orge* – the word most commonly used to express anger in Athens' courts – "referred not just to anger but also to sexual passions. Thus *orge* was characterized both by [what Allen calls] its *iretic* aspect – and by an *erotic* aspect. The iretic and erotic aspects of *orge* [combined] to generate a passion that informed the Athenian understandings of self and body in the context of both the family and the *polis*" (Allen 2003, 52).

Strikingly, the two sides of *orge* are associated with two functions of justice as reciprocity – rectifying offenses and generating the bonds of community. "As anger, *orge* concerned penal prosecution and the breakdown of human relationships; in its relation to fertility, *orge* concerned the creation of human relationships" (Allen 2003, 59). Ultimately, this popular understanding of *orge* as a *single* emotion confirms that vindictory justice and ceremonial gift exchange obey a singular logic.

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato deploys the tripartite model of the soul in order to break the link in the popular mind between anger and desire (Allen 2003, 251–257). By doing so, Plato transforms the emotion of anger (but not desire) into a serviceable instrument of public justice. Plato-Socrates takes pains to demonstrate that the desiring (or appetitive) part of the soul and the (thumotic) capacity for anger actually are separate emotional faculties. What is more, the appetitive-erotic and thumotic-iretic faculties stand in a hierarchical relationship to one another. Accordingly, anger may be deployed in the service of reason to chastise unruly appetites. In terms of the city-soul analogy, this censure of the appetites by the "spirited" faculty of *thumos* defines the process of *kolasis*. Again, this process involves the city as agent and the offender as patient; and the end of *kolasis* is to erase the root cause of offense for the good of the city and the offender. As far as this is so, fines should be understood as signifying a debt to the public, rather than compensation for the victim.

Kolasis

Before we conclude it is worth pausing briefly to consider the etymology of *kolasis*. The reason is that *kolasis* and its cognates confirm the close relations among the practice of sacrifice, the idea of debt (and punishment), the arbitrational institutions of the Athenian *polis*, and Plato's idea of reformatory justice. Plato borrowed the word *kolasis* from sacrificial practices and polis-offices: *kola* means "limbs." The *Kolakretai* were financial officers whose responsibilities involved *domestic* taxation in the Athenian polis. The word for this office originally "seems to derive from the gathering of sacrificed thigh-bones" (Seaford 2004, 79).⁴¹ Allen also mentions a

class of officials named *Kolastai*. “Public fines were inscribed and posted in public view by the *kolastai*, and these inscriptions were, like contracts, markers of the realignment of status in the community” (Allen 2003, 225).⁴²

The Platonic sense of *kolasis*, as a therapeutic process of punishment resembling “pruning,” also bears a striking onto-theological significance. A tree undergoing *kolasis* “was being cured of *hubris* [...] It is *because* the horticulturalist needs to improve a tree that is out of order or hubristic that the process can be described as *kolasis* or a form of punishment” (Allen 2003, 70).⁴³ This theological sense of *kolasis* recurs in the New Testament as “divine punishment.” The New Testament variously refers to “chastisement” and “divine retribution,” as well as “pruning,” as *kolasis*. Since *kolasis*, as “punishment,” involved the constraint of hubris, and, as “debt,” referred to sacral duties owed to the goddess,⁴⁴ it seems likely that this theological sense long precedes New Testament usage. However, *kolasis* in the New Testament often refers to “eternal punishment,” which seems to remove the process of therapeutic suffering from the jurisdiction of worldly politics. In any case, it seems reasonable to conclude that Plato consciously chose the language of *kolasis* to represent a notion of punishment that implied at once a debt to the god, the good of the city and rehabilitation of the offender’s soul.⁴⁵

Conclusion: The Boundaries of Platonic Money – (In)visibility and (In)commensurability

The first limit of Platonic money can be described in terms of invisibility or transparency. Whether the extreme political reforms that Socrates proposes in the *Republic* are serious proposals is a question we need not address. What matters is that Plato could solve the problem posed by the “invisible” power of wealth only by ensuring the radical visibility of the ruling guardian classes. Socrates’ proposals effect this visibility or transparency in at least three ways. First, Socrates denies the auxiliaries and rulers access to money, defusing potential harms arising from the invisible power of money by keeping it strictly circumscribed within the “moneymaking” class, and rendering the guardian class dependent upon this “lower” class for subsistence. Second, Socrates insists on communism of the family and property among guardians. The connection between communism and transparency is typified by the image of guardians exercising together naked.⁴⁶ Finally, Socrates makes clear that it will be necessary to educate the citizens by telling lies such as the “myth of the metals.” This “noble lie” reverses the order of visibility by proffering a fabricated image (*pseudos*) as the representative of an invisible truth (the truth of philosophy, the truth of the tripartite soul), couched in the “language of metals” that had already developed alongside the rise of coinage (Shell, 42–45; Kurke 1999).⁴⁷ Moreover, the imagery obviously reverses the logic of tyranny by which the imprimatur of public authority – the seal, the coin – is exploited for private gain. “Indeed, it is no exaggeration to see the whole Guardian apparatus – military auxiliaries, philosopher Kings, and their education – as guarding, more than anything else, against the excesses that arise from the unbounded quest for money possessions and the pleasures they can buy” (Weinstein 2009, 456).

The myth of metals also points to the second limit of Platonic money, which we may describe in terms of the logical problem of incommensurability. The incommensurable value of unique persons (or things) raises the issue of “pricelessness.” This idea of “pricelessness” was fundamental to the old logic of reciprocity; and in a different way, it is also central to the logic of Socrates’ philosophical tyranny. In both schemes, this problem of incommensurability is deeply implicated in the problem of justice and resistant to being assimilated to the logic of commensurability at the heart of both commercial and legal-rational order. Achilles’ complaint that his honor (*time*) is beyond (market) price highlights the problem of incommensurability but so does Socrates’ farcical performance in the *timesis* phase of Plato’s *Apology*.⁴⁸

Both gift-exchange and vindictory justice seem to depend on a notion that life is priceless. Honor, too, is priceless insofar as one stakes one’s life on it. A priceless debt can never be repaid, which is why punishment aims to “erase” offense rather than remove, or correct it, once and for all. As we saw above, in pre-political society the procedure of erasure “is an unending back-and-forth movement in which something is sent out and returned. It is a return to equilibrium through this very movement.” But the new authority of the polis is figured by the (ideal) judge as representative of “the community as a whole and as a global entity in charge of assessing, deciding, and sanctioning” (Henaff 2010, 225). The myth of the metals reconciles the superior office of the judge with the global authority of the whole community.

The myth of metals exemplifies Plato’s effort to reconcile the old status-based practices of reciprocity with the new principles of public arbitrational justice and Athenian *isonomia*. One purpose of the myth is to justify the hierarchical division of the various classes in the *kallipolis*; but its other, more innovative purpose is to square those differences in status with the isonomic logic of legal-political justice and market equality. Thus, according to the myth, those who lack gold and silver souls are compensated by the possession of earthly gold and silver. Finally, the myth embodies the idea that justice has the *whole polis* for its object. Thus, Socrates answers Glaucon’s objection that communism makes for unhappy guardians by reminding him that what is at stake is the happiness of the whole city, not a single class.

Again, the procedure of erasure that comprised “punishment” in pre-political society was “an unending back-and-forth movement.” In contrast, the Platonic procedure of *kolasis* focuses exclusively on reforming the wrongdoer, achieving erasure and restoring equilibrium through removing the cause of offense from the wrongdoer’s soul. In this way, the principle of *kolasis* identifies punishment with intervention, under the authority of the *polis*, in the “back-and-forth movement” between persons characteristic of pre-political reciprocity. As “private” vengeance, the back-and-forth movement of interpersonal reciprocity threatens to disrupt, not heal, the body politic. The goal of *kolasis* as corrective justice remains the same – “erasure,” not compensation – but the procedure of erasure involves the city as agent and the offender as patient, displacing justice from the “back and forth” of interpersonal reciprocity.

Sometimes it is said that Plato believed money was the root of all evil. If Plato invented the notion of “civic” money, then this is quite false. But it is equally important to recognize that civic money is the fruit of Platonic moral theorizing, and the operation of abstraction in which it

arises effaces the “revolutionary” consequences of the rise of coinage in the Greek world. I hope to have shown that a crucial part of Plato’s project in the *Republic* is to re-signify money and its place in the *polis* in such a way as to isolate its *positive* potentialities as an instrument of distributive justice (money facilitates the community of interest) and corrective justice (as “a tool for assessing value and desert and [a] suitable language with which to inscribe stories of punishment into social memory” (Allen 2003, 225)).

Platonized money only introduces evil into the polis when it is abused (e.g., by the stinging drones in book VIII who practice predatory lending); with the result that it is not money itself, but corrupt uses of its generative potential which that introduce injustices into the city. To be sure, the apparently intrinsic power of money to translate “all things” makes such abuses particularly tempting, and this is precisely why Socrates imposed such strict boundaries on its circulation in the *kallipolis*. However, the key point is that Plato-Socrates does not suggest that such unjust abuses can be avoided merely by abolishing money; rather, he tries to establish the proper terms according to which money may be admitted into the city.

Endnotes

1. I assume that reciprocity is central to the theory and practice of justice, though, importantly, reciprocity can take different forms.
2. Plato’s first critic, Aristotle, was also the first to expose the deficiencies of Plato’s theoretical solution by striking at the weak points of the city-soul analogy upon which it rests. Nevertheless, Plato’s “utopian” vision of the market, tamed for civic purposes, is preserved in Aristotle’s discussion of money as an instrument of justice (*N. Ethics* V). As a result of Aristotle’s domestication of it, this platonized conception of money continues to exert an (often unrecognized) influence over western social thought. Indeed, even in our disillusioned age there is a residual utopianism in the notion that economic globalization, seemingly inevitable, might be tamed to serve the purposes of social justice through the rational agency of a global civil society.
3. For the present, I follow the standard definition of money as a unit of account, medium of exchange, and store of value. I will discuss the distinction between money and debt-credit, and some specific features of coinage, as a form of money, below.
4. For a provocative and learned discussion of contemporary “market triumphalism” see Sandel (2012). As Bloch and Parry (1989) observe: “Western ideology has so emphasized the distinctiveness of the two cycles [of exchange]” – the short-term, individualistic and impersonal cycle of the market and the long-term, social and personal cycle of political community – “that it is then unable to imagine the mechanisms by which they are linked.” Far from being a universal logic, they suggest, it is conceivable that western capitalism (and its dialectical counterpart, communism) is the result of “a remarkable conceptual revolution [in which] the values of the short-term order have become elaborated into a theory of long-term reproduction.” As the ostensibly anti-utopian logic of global markets sweeps the planet, we would do well to revisit the historical social crisis, and the utopian philosophical context, in which market logic received its first, shadowy, articulation.

5. I borrow this phrase from Seaford (2004).
6. Although Plato was the first philosopher to introduce a strict distinction between the market and the polis, many poets and thinkers before him had been preoccupied with the effects of monetization on Greek society. See Seaford (2004) on Homer, the Tragedians and pre-Socratic philosophers.
7. To understand Plato's motivation in this way is to gain a uniquely pragmatic perspective on the other, more famous "invisible substances" that appear in the *Republic*: the Platonic Forms.
8. *Kolasis* bears other significations; strikingly, these other meanings are related to sacrificial offices, and domestic offices in the polis. *Kolasis* also refers to the theological concept of divine recompense. I shall return to the various meanings of *kolasis* near the conclusion of this essay.
9. One might call this the "Platonic idea" of money, in a narrow sense.
10. Sacrifice, being an activity undertaken on behalf of the whole community, may be regarded as proto-political, while gift-exchange is more typical of pre-political, kinship-based society. Henaff (2010, 156–201) discusses at length the relationship between gift-exchange and sacrifice.
11. Perhaps the contemporary term, "liquidity," captures something of the sense of "invisibility" in *ousia aphanes*.
12. Something like sacrifice survives in the Christian ritual of communion. See Henaff (2010, 156–161, 198).
13. Seaford (2004, 136–146 esp.). Cf. Kurke (1999, 300): "what a strange sort of thing a Greek coin is—both material and symbol, both matter and trope. This is true to some extent of all coinage, but we should remember that the Greeks never invented paper money and only very reluctantly and occasionally resorted to the expedient of [wholly] fiduciary coinage. That is to say, in classical Greece the dominant idea of coinage is the merging of precious metal and civic stamp."
14. Chartalism supports the view that markets are creatures of the state, while metallism suggests that state intervention can only confound the normal functioning of markets. If it is true that the fiduciary authority of Greek coinage depended on the communal institutions and practices of polis and temple, but that the spread of coinage also facilitated an autonomous, anonymous, order of short-term relations that could subvert communalistic norms; and if it is also true that Plato's philosophy of money is at once a normative effort to circumscribe the place of money in the just polis, and a critical effort to contain the subversive potential of "revolutionary" money; then, in spite of the vast differences between ancient and modern economies, the present inquiry can help to dissolve the "Manichean medieval impulse...deeply embedded in modern economic thought," pitting chartalism against metallism (Hart 1986). For, in the *practical* experience of the Greeks coined money was both a creature of the state and a commodity with intrinsic value. It is in the *philosophy* of Plato that we first encounter a radical division between the two sides of the coin, and this division serves the philosopher's moral and political aims.
15. The mna was a cereal measure that originated in Mesopotamia. Such quantitative measures were the norm in Near Eastern palatial economies but the mna is a borrowed measure in the Greek context: "Greeks derived their large weights (mnas and talents) from the Semites, and used them also as units of account. But their words for *coins*, which were of relatively low value and had no Near-Eastern equivalent, are mainly *Greek* words for *things*. With the equivalence of a hundred drachmas

to one mna, the two systems – Greek coinage and Semetic weights – coalesce” (Seaford 2004, 126–127).

16. Semenova argues that the “ox-unit” of value and account “by specifying the precise quality, type and quantity of oxen to be sacrificed [...] provided the first instance of a unit of value established and guaranteed by the ‘state.’” In turn, “the ox-unit [...] gave rise to the first form of money embodied in sacrificial bull’s flesh that was centrally (re)distributed among the ritual participants. Next [...] temple-issued coinage emerged as a symbolic representation of roasted bull’s flesh, thus making the latter ‘currency’ obsolete.” In contrast to “the traditional Chartalist perspective” according to which the state introduced money to “[extinguish] a population’s debt to the state,” Semenova advances a “‘state’-religious approach [that ...] views money as a token via which the *state* extinguishes its ‘debt’ to the underlying population” (377).
17. The phrase “civic money” is borrowed from Henaff (2010, 326–331).
18. Throughout this essay, “Socrates” refers to Plato’s literary rendition of Socrates.
19. For example, the stories of Midas and Gyges, discussed below.
20. As Keynes once pointed out, money is never neutral, though in principle, the market may be so.
21. “By contrast, the minimal city of four specialists devotes the same amount of man-hours to each of its four tasks without regard to which need is greater or more difficult to fulfill. This means that, depending on circumstances, the city could suffer from a shortage of food and an overabundance of shoes, or vice versa; in either case, self-sufficiency is impossible, even if all the relevant crafts are represented. The problem is one of quantity and proportion, which somehow must be addressed. But in a city of natural specialists, who is there to specialize in the art of accurately trading off against one another the difficulty of the various tasks and their degree of urgency?” (Weinstein 2009, 452).
22. Among other things this heuristic aim is evident from Plato’s analogy between money and appetite, the restricted role ultimately allowed for money and “moneymakers” in the city-in-speech, and the symbolic role of money in Plato’s “noble lies” (the myth of metals in Book III, and the fable of the usurious stinging-drones in Book VIII).
23. Godbout and Caille (2000, 115) offer a succinct, if hyperbolic, account: “Modern money only made its appearance once the value of things broke free from that of individuals: when Greek tyrants, brought to power by the first failures of democracy, had the possessions of aristocratic families melted down to make stamped coins whose value, guaranteed by the city, was unaffected by the status of the former owners. Before it embodied freedom, modern money represented equality, which derived from the state. In the beginning it guaranteed that in principle one equaled one and that everyone, whatever their social standing, had the right of equal access to goods, even if many concrete inequalities eventually arose from this abstract egalitarian principle enshrined by the invention of money.”
24. Achilles’ complaint also expresses the notion that the *soul* is beyond price: “Not even the wealth of Troy or Delphi, says Achilles’ is equal in value to my *psuche* [...] There is an implicit contrast here between the heroic modes of appropriation (plunder, tripods as gifts) and the kind of ‘exchange’ that by virtue of meaning total and irrevocable alienation (death) resembles trade [...] Here too Achilles seems to react against the encroachment of trade. The idea of death as commercial exchange

reappears, notably, in Aeschylus' image of Ares as a gold-exchanger and holder of the scales in battle. In the monetized society of fifth-century Athens this hideous exchange of incommensurables – living bodies for (gold) dust that is 'heavy' (as gold, as grief) – brings monetary gain for the Atreidae" (Seaford 2004, 303).

25. Kurke's (1999) chief focus is on the symbolism of money in Herodotus.
26. It is probably significant in this connection that Cephalus was a retailer, allegedly an arms-dealer.
27. As Shell (1978, 22) observes, Socrates' tactic here is the opposite of the one he uses to puncture Cephalus' argument. "In disagreeing with Cephalus, Socrates had used the example of the deposit of a weapon. Disagreeing with Polemarchus, he uses the more abstract example of monetary deposits."
28. As opposed to personal rule.
29. Beginning with Socrates' deduction of the market.
30. As Mauss (2000, 39–43) notes, ceremonial gift exchange is characterized by a threefold obligation "to give, to receive, to reciprocate."
31. But the complete privatization of gift exchange also portends a loss. In Henaff's words, this loss remains with us as "a symbolic deficit that constitutes the major problem for modern democracies [which] rely on the law for ensuring mutual public recognition, on the market for organizing subsistence, and on private gift relationships for generating a social bond." For, there can be no community in the absence of "this [...] founding relationship [...] in which everyone ventures something that is part of oneself into the space of the other" (2010, 154). As this passage suggests, Henaff (2010, 135–136) is critical of the Hobbesian appeal to fear as the foundation of the civic bond; in this way he joins in an anthropological critique of contract theory that dates to Rousseau. Also, Henaff emphasizes the difference between the agonistic generosity of ceremonial gift exchange and Hegel's famous dialectic of "lordship and bondage" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. To offer a gift is at the same time to challenge the recipient to accept and reciprocate what is given. "Ceremonial generosity is not moral (or it is only so as a supplement); it is the proof that while venturing into the alien space, one is prepared to establish an alliance [...] There is pleasure to be found in bonding with others and in experiencing what lies elsewhere, there is also the danger of being rejected or attacked. Gift-giving solves this dilemma. As a challenge it makes it possible to risk making a move toward the other while obligating the other to risk making a move in return [...] To achieve this purpose, it is important for the act of giving to be known and seen by all and to be spectacular if possible. This makes it easier to understand that what is at stake is not charitable generosity but public liberality. To offer this challenge and uphold it in front of all is what brings prestige and glory in the *relationship of recognition* (which is clearly something entirely different from the struggle for recognition as Hegel presents it)."
32. Cf. Godbout and Caille (2000, 208): "The market enables us to pursue exchange under conditions where the gift is neither possible nor desirable, and where the alternative is violence or the complete absence of a relationship."
33. As in "Socrates of Alopeke," rather than "Socrates, son of Sophroniscus."
34. Such norms are exemplified by figures like the philosopher-king, the ideal judge, or the rule of law.

35. As Allen points out, this was the procedure used in Socrates' trial.
36. The present discussion relies heavily on Allen (2003), pages 68–72.
37. “The famous Socratic paradox that no one knowingly or voluntarily does wrong is at the heart of Plato’s argument for reformative punishment. All acts of wrongdoing are the result of ignorance” (Allen 2003, 247).
38. “The Athenian ‘principle of the public’ [...] according to which political life was organized was the communal commitment to the spectacle of angry honor-sensitive citizens competing with one another on a regular basis (and within the bounds set by standards of public utility), with women excluded from the realm of anger (speaking ideally) so that the family unit would be free of angry conflicts. Athenian political life to this degree valorized anger and granted it a place in politics, But anger also had to be constrained with a view to its close connection with *eros*. *When Socrates redefines the role of anger in human action, he revises not only the place of anger in the political order but also the nature of the political order in general. Socrates argues for a politics that keeps anger outside the walls of the city* [emphasis mine]. The entirety of the *Republic* is largely structured around a rejection and replacement of the political concepts that were connected to the valorization of anger in Athenian politics.” At the same time, the *Republic* “provides the context within which Socrates makes a whole slew of arguments about justice that are meant to apply to Athens but also to other cities” (Allen 2003, 257–258).
39. Allen (2003) discusses Plato’s critique of spectacular punishment on pages 245–246.
40. Allen (2003, 225) rejects the thesis that “monetary penalties originated in the practice of demanding blood money, or *poine* for murder. [...] If fines did originate in blood money [...] one would expect to see murder punished by fine. But murder was punishable by death from the seventh century to the end of the democracy.” This question touches on the broader thesis that money itself (not only fines) emerged from gift-exchange/vendetta, and sacrifice. If the rise of arbitrational justice demanded the marginalization of vendetta, then it is possible that the discontinuity between the demand for *poine* and the polis’ practice of punishing murder by death conforms to the transition from vindicatory to arbitrational justice.
41. See also, Allen (2003, 69). Another class of officials, the *Hellenotamiai*, was responsible for managing tribute from other poleis, though under the Athenian empire they seemed to displace the *Kolakretai*. See Samons (2000, 241): “Now, in fact, we do not know precisely when the *Hellenotamiai* took over the public treasury and the *Kolakretai* disappeared. The latter make their last certain appearance in a document of 418/17.”
42. In this connection Allen (2003) remarks on the mixed quality of fines as a means of punishment: “Financial penalties were useful in that they confirmed the valorization of reciprocity in the city. They were, however, a danger insofar as they threatened equality.” This is because the strict equality with which Athenians assessed fines resulted in financial penalties that “did not fall with the same weight on the rich and the poor.”
43. Allen (2003, 70) adds: “Similarly, the word for pruning, *diakatharsis*, comes from a word that connotes cleansing (*katharsis*) in the context of wrongdoing and pollution.”

44. E.g., the *Kolakretai* collected what was due to Athena, while the *Hellenotamiai* collected tribute from the other cities' gods.
45. While this essay focuses on the *Republic*, there is a similar discussion of punishment in the *Gorgias*. See Allen (2003, 249).
46. For a discussion of the political significance of nakedness in relation to the Gyges story, see Shell (1978, 26–27).
47. Shell (1978, 42–45) offers a rich discussion Plato's reversal of the order of visibility in the context of the cave and divided line. The phrase "language of metals" is from Kurke (1999).
48. It is ironic that Socrates' proposes to accept a fine as punishment in spite of his protestations of innocence. This raises the question of whether there are limits to the suitability of fines as punishment. That Socrates proposes a small fine, only as much as he can afford, also points to the gap between citizens' formal equality (*isonomia*) and the inequalities among citizens with regard to "substance" (*ousia*).

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