

about money is its cultural dominance: it is taken up irresistibly by any human society that encounters it. Other equally functional social inventions are much less immediately attractive. In both developed and less-developed countries, governments have to engage in extensive and expensive promotional campaigns to get beneficial health, education, or birth control practices widely adopted, because those practices are not so readily compatible with human instincts and therefore with perceived immediate self-interest.

A prediction follows from this analysis. If, in the future, money is presented in forms that fit less well with the instinctual structure of the human brain, it may be a less effective tool. An obvious example is the representation of money by abstractions such as the totals in bank or credit card accounts, or the amounts in microchips on smart cards. Such abstractions would not stimulate humans' instincts towards object play, and therefore our management of them will not benefit from our early learning, through play, of how to manage objects effectively. It is consistent with this view that each new form of money seems to bring in horror stories of people who cannot control their spending with it (see Prelec & Simester 2001; Schor 1998). Our argument, therefore, is that if money had not been an effective drug, it might never have emerged as an efficient tool. It is because it is both tool and drug that it is such a strong incentive.

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Open Peer Commentary

The biology of the interest in money

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Abstract: Why are people interested in money? This question is too broad: there are many kinds of money, interest, and people. The biological approach of Lea & Webley (L&W) makes them seek the roots of this interest, and they contend that tool making and addiction qualify as the roots. Curiosity and the quest for power, however, qualify too. As L&W rightly admit, other approaches supplement their biological one.

Lea & Webley (L&W) ask "Why are people interested in money?" They expand on the concepts of "people," "interest," and "money," but these are too broad for their concern. They mention different kinds of money, from unfamiliar primitive kinds to plastic money, only to ignore the differences between them. In its diverse

manifestations, money reflects a variety of phenomena rooted in diverse aspects of diverse societies. These are of no interest to L&W. Looking for the universally human, biological roots of the interest in money (no matter what counts as roots and why), they deliberately overlook social diversity. They center only on consumers' attitudes towards money. And, when they refer to people, they exclude those who do not know what money is, or who live in small communities or communes, or who are other-worldly. Thus, L&W set the scene for discussion of their question sufficiently narrowly so as to lead to their biological, universalistic answer. Are leading questions permissible in research? It depends on how interesting the discussion is.

The program of L&W is acceptable, then, on the condition that we remember that their question is set towards a biological bias, leaving the sociological and psychological biases for another day. It is an error to claim more than that, in line with the "grand theory of everything," in what is known as intellectual imperialism (the claim that only one approach fits). L&W agree: they stress in the opening of their article that a "biological" approach (involving "selective advantage") "is not an alternative to social and cultural factors as a kind of explanation" (sect. 1.1; see Agassi [1977], pp. 184, 281, 320, and 326). So they merely sketch a few alternative theories – psychological, cultural, economic – that they legitimately put aside.

Let me go along with the attitude of L&W and follow the bias that leads them to seek the biological roots of the attraction of money. They take for granted that what comprises such biological roots is conduct, specifically the use of tools and of drugs. They view money, first, as a tool (for those who intend to use it) and, second, as a drug (for misers and for those who play with money in the widest sense that includes all sorts of social games). The tool that money is, however, is a means for the acquisition of other tools – all those goods and services that are on the market for sale. Hence, money always denotes sets of options that are available for sale on the market. It is these options, and not the money itself, that most people desire. This desire – for a range of options as wide as possible – has deeper biological roots than money. Nor is "interest" the same as attraction: people in the capacity of researchers, including L&W, have an interest in money different from what they have as consumers, as do entrepreneurs, politicians, economists, economic journalists, gossip columnists, and so forth. So we should include curiosity among our root biological drives. As to the idea of money as a drug, L&W use the word "drug" loosely, and include pornography as a drug though it usually functions otherwise. Some people use pornography – and any other item that stands for sex – as sex objects proper, in a kind of fixation on them, as a diversion of the sex drive from the normal sex object. These (and other fixations) are then often called (inadequately) fetishes. And fixation is nearer to biological roots than addiction. (Addiction is a fixation of sorts.) In addition, money helps in the acquisition of power and other abstract qualities that are not commodities on the market. And the desire for power or the wish to lead others is generally deemed as having deep biological roots. Perhaps.

What good are facts? The "drug" value of money as an exemplar of all non-instrumental value

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Abstract: An emotional value for money is clearly demonstrable beyond its value for getting goods, but this value need not be ascribed to human preparedness for altruism or play. Emotion is a motivated process, and our temptation to "overgraze" positive emotions selects for emotional patterns that are paced by adequately rare occasions. As a much-