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Making Sense of “Fuck-You Money”
and Beyond

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to explore the role money plays in our lives. First, I will touch on the symbolic role of money, especially as it relates to developmental forces such as rivalry, competitiveness, envy, greed, and love. Then I will contend that the mindless pursuit of money contributes to a mortgaged life. In this context I will explore the relationship between money and health, and money and happiness. Finally, I will discuss ways that the money conundrum can be made more manageable. What can be done about managing our needs? And if wealth has been acquired, what is the most appropriate way to deal with it?

Key words: money; wealth; need systems; happiness; symbolism; envy; self-worth; love; oniomania; competitiveness; idealizing transference; narcissism; greed; rivalry; health.

And again I say unto you, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”
—New Testament, Matthew

Money, it turned out, was exactly like sex, you thought of nothing else if you didn't have it and thought of other things if you did.
—James Baldwin

All I ask is the chance to prove that money can't make me happy.
—Spike Milligan

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, a 1948 classic film made by director John Huston and adapted from the best-selling novel by the mystery writer B. Traven, is a story of psychological disintegration under the influence of greed and money. The film starts with drifter Fred Dobbs (played by Humphrey Bogart) impulsively spending the last money that he possesses on a lottery ticket. The time is 1925; the place, Tampico, Mexico, where Bogart's bitter, out-of-work character panhandles money from anyone he happens to run into while at the same time cursing his bad luck. Dobbs joins up with fellow drifter Curtin (Tim Holt) to work for an unscrupulous contractor, well known to the locals for his habit of “cheating foreigners and half-baked Americans”—one of several early glimpses into the darker, greedy side of human nature. Another such glimpse is revealed at a cheap boarding house “full of rats, scorpions, and cockroaches” where Dobbs and Curtin meet a lively old gold prospector named Howard (Walter Huston), who offers disturbing warnings about the evil things that happen to the mind of human beings who succumb to the lure of money. Though Dobbs swears that he would never become corrupted by greed, movie viewers can tell that Howard, with his decades of observing human nature in action, remains unconvinced.

Forcibly collecting their pay from their unreliable boss, Dobbs and Curtin combine this money with Dobbs's unexpected windfall from his lottery ticket. Then, together with Howard, they pool their resources and mount a gold-mining expedition into the mountains, complete with donkeys, tools, and guns. Dobbs pledges that anything they

find will be split three ways, but Howard, who has heard that story before, has his doubts. It doesn't take long before the trio finds a promising place to mine, and after a few days of digging, the gold starts pouring out of the mountain. Within a short time, they have become very rich men.

Suspicion, greed, and paranoia come on the scene hard on the tail of wealth, overcoming Dobbs, who suspects his fellow miners of every form of treachery. After the gold bonanza, the men split their treasure three ways, as promised, but Dobbs's irrational behavior threatens to destroy everything they have worked so hard for. His character tragically highlights the darker side of human nature when it comes to money and wealth. As the gold continues to come in, the men gradually—following Dobbs's example—turn against each other, making for a tragic, ironic conclusion.

As the movie unfolds, we see Curtin as an idealistic young man unwilling to compromise his values for the sake of money. His inherent naïveté is a contrast to the greedy, money-obsessed Dobbs. Gold enslaves Dobbs to the point that he is prepared to steal the gold from his partners, assuming that they would do the same. The plot highlights the growing antagonism between Dobbs, on the one hand, and Curtin and Howard on the other.

Dobbs, after an attempted murder of Curtin, makes off with all the gold dust, only to encounter Mexican bandits who murder him for his loaded saddlebags, which they assume hold animal hides. When they rip the bags open and find only what they think is dirt, they scatter the gold to the winds. Paradoxically, the gold dust blowing in the wind—the final scene—creates a sense of deliverance for Curtin and Howard when they arrive to witness the dénouement. They laugh, as if relieved that they survived the ordeal and can start anew, free from the miserable spell that gold had cast upon them.

The story about these three men who start out as partners only to find themselves at odds once gold is in their hands is as compelling as it is frightening. In many ways, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* can be interpreted as a morality play, demonstrating the degree to which money can corrupt a person's soul. Like a doomed hero, Dobbs

can't escape his destiny. In the end, the main figures of the drama are back where they started, having to explain to themselves the dark forces that got the better of them.

This film, one of the best movie treatments of the corrosiveness of greed and the dangers inherent in the pursuit of wealth, highlights the extent to which money can dominate our lives. For many of us, money touches the very core of our being, and thoughts about money are constant companions. Though there are certainly some people genuinely disinterested in money, we often suspect people who high-handedly remonstrate that money “costs too much” of protesting excessively. We suspect, when they say they despise riches, that they are telling only a half-truth: what they despise is the riches of others. In other words, they're trying to manage their envy.

It's easy to say that money isn't everything as long as we have enough of it. Unfortunately, though, the typical scenario is that the more money we have, the more we want. As the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once pointedly said, “Wealth is like seawater; the more we drink the thirstier we become.” That's exactly how it was for Dobbs in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*: there was never enough gold. And yet the true wealth we have in life is life itself. Having a lot of money doesn't mean much to a corpse, since you can't buy heaven with money and you can't take riches with you beyond the grave. Does anyone really care to be known as the richest person in the cemetery?

So we're left with a conundrum: while poverty is not to be recommended, it takes more than money to feel rich, to be satisfied with what life has to offer. Having met a great many very wealthy individuals, I have come to realize that being wealthy has its own problems. Far too often, money comes to possess the person as opposed to the person possessing the money. Ironically, instead of gaining greater satisfaction through wealth, many people find that the acquisition and possession of money creates an even greater state of dissatisfaction.

Ambivalent though we may be about money, it plays an important role in our lives. In our individualistic, competitive world, it is hard to survive without having a good deal of it. All of us need at least a minimal amount of money simply to stay alive; all of us have specific needs that require money for satisfaction. But, so that we can be true to

ourselves and maintain our mental health, we need to find ways to acquire money that are congruent with our subjective feelings of well-being and with our values and beliefs.

The objective of this article is to explore the role money plays in our lives. First, I will touch on the symbolic role of money, especially as it relates to developmental forces such as rivalry, competitiveness, envy, greed, and love. Then I will contend that the mindless pursuit of money contributes to a mortgaged life. In this context I will explore the relationship between money and health, and money and happiness. Finally, I will discuss ways that the money conundrum can be made more manageable. What is the best way to manage our needs? What can we do to live more harmoniously with ourselves? And what should we do after having acquired wealth?

The Symbolic Role of Money

The script of each person's "inner theater" is drafted in response to imprinted motivational need systems which have an important influence on individual behavior. These need systems become operational in infancy and continue to play a role throughout the human life-cycle (though they are altered by the forces of age, learning, and maturation). Motivational need systems are the driving forces that make us behave the way we do; they are the fuel that keeps us going.

The human species has certain basic motivational needs—physical, sensual, attachment, and exploratory needs. According to developmental psychologists, the pursuit of money is not one of these early, predetermined motivators. Not being part of this archaic need set doesn't mean, however, that money doesn't affect our lives. Although the possible imprint of money as a motivating force takes place later along a child's developmental timeline, money can turn into a major motivator. For many of us, as time passes, it comes to play a huge symbolic role.

Money as a symbol becomes progressively more important as children mature. The quickest and most pervasive way for children to learn about money is to be exposed to a lack of it. Poor children learn, by listening to their parents, how a lack of money

influences family dynamics. Talk to people who are preoccupied by money matters, and chances are you'll find that they experienced a serious financial lack (be it real or perceived) while growing up. When there is no money—perhaps because of serious economic hardship due to the illness or death of a parent, or to parents' separation or divorce—that lack can have a significant and lasting impact. The imprint of such events can haunt people throughout their lives.

Because of the many different roles money can play in a person's internal world, it can take on various meanings. Depending on a child's developmental history, money can come to symbolize a deliverance from misery, an escape from a gray existence, freedom from familial constraints, a pathway to independence and security, a triumph over helplessness, an embodiment of power, an opportunity to escape hard work, an expression of leisure, or those long-sought goals of self-worth and love.

Having had many in-depth conversations with well-to-do executives, I have learned that a significant number of them are preoccupied with the idea of obtaining what they rather vulgarly call “fuck-you money”—that is, money for which they are not beholden to anybody. Woven throughout the narratives of many of these executives are childhood experiences centered on a lack of money. Such experiences were driven by forces over which they had no control, and thus these youngsters felt—and indeed were—powerless to do anything about their dire family circumstances. Watching how their parent(s) struggled to keep things going, to pay the bills and put food on the table, they realized the influence money had on their standard of living. As these early experiences were internalized, they became significant inner-theater themes that would dominate future behavior.

For some people, improving their financial situation can turn into a lifelong obsession. Children exposed to the financial strain their parents found themselves under often vow not to let money troubles happen to them. Driven by their commitment to stay on top of their financial situation, they feel a deeply cherished desire to get their parents to smile again, to lessen their strain, to return to a state of “oceanic bliss,” a sense of togetherness with a caring parent. In contrast to the financial helplessness they experienced when they were growing up, they want to reach a financial status that allows them to tell other people to “fuck off.” They want to acquire so much money

that they're invincible; they're in control; they can get out of any situation they don't like. Never again do they want to be the victims of uncontrollable forces. To these people, money represents independence, power, and control. It holds the power, they believe, to expel the ghosts of childhood.

In-your-face money

In addition to being a symbol of control, money also symbolizes winning in the game of life; it is an indicator of a person's achievements. Especially if we feel a lack of self-worth, wealth is a way of showing others that we are now a force to be reckoned with. As evidence that we have triumphed over adversity and adversaries, money gives us the recognition we crave from others, helping us to shore up a shaky sense of self-esteem. It's not just winning that counts, however. It's much deeper than that. For many people, flaunting wealth is a kind of one-upmanship.

In talking with many money-driven executives over the years, I've come to realize the degree to which people can be propelled by dark, competitive forces. One such executive said to me, in all seriousness, "What good is money if it can't inspire envy and terror in your fellow man?" People with that orientation use money to take revenge, to get even. Flaunting money becomes a vehicle to deal with the hurts—imagined or real—of childhood. For such people, making lots of money isn't only a symbol of success; it's also a deliberate attempt to make others envious, to show them that we are *more* successful. Of course, such behavior often serves as a matador's red flag, bringing out the worst in those who are being taunted. Those people—enraged by a display of wealth—may respond with their own form of competitive aggression. In such circumstances, money easily costs too much. The flaunting of money to inspire envy reinforces a Darwinian outlook on life and makes peaceful coexistence impossible. As the singer Bob Dylan said, "Money doesn't talk, it swears."

Some people see money as the ideal instrument for keeping score in the competitive game of life. Letting others know how much money we have sets the stage for comparisons. To quote the well-known moneymaker (and TV "star") Donald Trump, "Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game." And certainly, as Trump points out, money lends itself to score-keeping. If the annual Forbes list of the richest people in the world is

anything to go by, large figures are a great way to impress others. Gaining a spot on that list—the destination of many a narcissistic journey—is a highly effective, but not very sophisticated, way of gaining the admiration (and/or envy) of others.

Certainly far more of us read the Forbes list with envy than achieve its lofty ranking. And as we read it, chances are we feel twinges (if not outright pangs) of envy. That emotion—the feeling of discontent and resentment, the desire for the possessions or qualities that somebody else has—is one of the darker responses that come to the fore in money matters. While envy is not an emotion that we readily acknowledge, it does play a key role in our inner lives. We quickly learn how insidious it can be. As the playwright Aeschylus once said, “It is in the character of a very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered.”

Perhaps that is especially true when it comes to money. When money plays a central role in our inner lives, we not only desire to be rich, but we find it imperative to be richer than others. The writer H. L. Mencken nailed that aspect of human character in his definition of wealth as “any income that is at least one hundred dollars more a year than the income of one’s wife’s sister’s husband.” The writer Gore Vidal was likewise a keen observer of human nature: “Whenever a friend succeeds,” he said, “a little something in me dies.” Something in us may die, yes—but it may also give us the energy to prove once more to the world that we are not yet a has-been; that we are still in the race.

For many of the super-rich, to peruse the Forbes list of the richest people in the world and not find oneself named is a personal catastrophe. But it is also the ultimate challenge. They go out into the marketplace to do battle once again, prepared to do anything to be part of that elite group. But unfortunately, even those who make it onto the Forbes list most likely are still not satisfied. Having attained the lofty heights, they torture themselves by wondering whether their ranking is high enough. After all, for all but one person in the world, there is always someone somewhat higher up. The new challenge becomes, How to better that person just above you? What can be done to move ever higher in the ranking? And no matter how many upward steps you take, envy keeps on twisting its knife in your heart.

Consider the snide remark by Larry Ellison, one of the super-rich, about the world's richest person: "Bill Gates wants people to think he's Edison, when he's really Rockefeller. Referring to Gates as the smartest man in America isn't right...[W]ealth isn't the same thing as intelligence." It sounds like Ellison is working to get his venom out. Unfortunately, the journey of bettering Bill Gates can become a never-ending obsession. The result is a stunted life. The quest for wealth doesn't make for the kind of security and peace of mind that most people imagine money will bring them.

"Money can't buy me love"

Though most of us cheerfully sing along with the Beatles song which claims that "money can't buy me love," some of us try to make that purchase anyway. For some of us, money represents love. Some people associate the two things consciously; others do so unconsciously. They think that money can buy anything, including a beautiful woman or a handsome man. But while money can trigger a relationship, it truly can't buy love. The whole enterprise is counterproductive: if money is used as a relational tool, how much does the "purchaser" really care about the person he or she is "buying"? If a woman is "acquired" to be shown off, that's just another form of one-upmanship.

Money can't buy youth, either, though men and women concerned about a decline in physical attractiveness often use their wealth to hook up with a youthful partner who makes them feel younger themselves. In other words, they use money to compensate for aging. For people such as this, "buying" a partner is just a stop-gap measure to fight off depressive feelings.

Whether seeking love or youth, some people are prepared to engage in highly destructive and self-destructive activities, as well as spend a fortune, to "buy" the right person. They are willing to do all kinds of things to "possess" that perfectly attractive woman or man—things they wouldn't consider doing otherwise. This process is not a one-way street, however. There are generally women willing to oblige, attracted to powerful, rich men; and though they're not as common, many men are likewise attracted to powerful, wealthy women.

But can such a collusion ever be the basis for a meaningful relationship? Only very, very occasionally. The late shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis must have struggled with the inner demon of women and love, for he said, “If women didn't exist, all the money in the world would have no meaning.” He must have known what he was talking about, having “acquired” Maria Callas and Jackie Kennedy as trophy women. Thus while money can't buy happiness, it certainly allows you to choose your own form of misery. And although money can't buy love, it improves your bargaining position in the pitilessly competitive sexual race.

So what are the origins of the destructive competitiveness that leads to using money as a score card, and as a way to gain recognition? We find some answers to this puzzling behavior in the roots of sibling rivalry. A close look at the background of money-scorers reveals that, in many instances, parents were unable early on to sufficiently dampen the competitive feelings between siblings. Unchecked sibling rivalry may have created the pervasive (and sometimes accurate) idea that “the other” was favored by one or even both of the parents. Because love was not shared equally (either in perception or in reality), it became a precious commodity. The feeling of being insufficiently appreciated caused what psychologists call a narcissistic injury—that is, an injury to a person’s self-esteem—which expressed itself in symptoms such as depressive feelings and feelings of rage, anger, resentment, revenge, and vindication.

Unfortunately, when money is seen as a solution to every problem—especially relational problems—money itself can become the problem. Frequently, the price we have to pay for our need for power, security, love, and victory over others through money is our liberty. Although wealth is often seen as the road to freedom, obtaining it can turn out to be the road to slavery. Instead of finding freedom through money, we become the prisoners of money, because it cannot bring us the control or the vindication or the peace of mind we seek. Like the Holy Grail, it remains compelling but elusive.

Having too much money

While growing up with no money can be a problem, there can also be too much of a good thing. In fact, as an English proverb states, “An abundance of money ruins

youth”—in other words, having lots of money can be detrimental to the healthy development of a child. Often this happens because parents, busy with the acquisition and management of their wealth, alleviate their guilt at not being psychologically available by giving presents and money. In essence, they offer money as a substitute for love.

But can genuine care and love be replaced by money? Not with any hope of healthy development. Money is a poor substitute for love and care. Children raised on this model are generally left with ambivalent feelings toward their caretakers: they are unsure whether their caretakers really care about them; whether they themselves are viewed as lovable. The result is depressive feelings and a great sense of insecurity, beginning in childhood and lasting into adulthood. Furthermore, these individuals may come to suffer from *oniomania* (literally, a mania for making purchases), meaning that they ward off lingering feelings of depression by seeking out the temporary “highs” they feel when spending money. Buying things for themselves makes them feel better. Unfortunately, these good feelings don’t last. They are nothing more than temporary Band-Aids. Because these people, as children, felt temporary, artificial highs when their parents gave them money or gifts, as adults they repeat that pattern. They spend money to feel better, creating an endless cycle of depression and temporary highs.

Money simply cannot give children the inner security and stable sense of self-esteem needed in adulthood. Instead, ironically, it impoverishes them. When money flows too freely, the probability increases that important developmental challenges will not be handled in an age-appropriate manner by either the child or the parent. The complex psychological work that a child has to tackle to grow into a healthy, responsible adult may be lacking. Just as power corrupts, money corrupts. And, to further paraphrase Lord Acton, a lot of money corrupts a lot. It impedes the establishment of deep, meaningful relationships that are the cornerstones of mature, healthy functioning and results in lifelong self-esteem problems and depressive reactions.

Furthermore, when youngsters possess too much money, other people find it difficult to deal with them in a natural manner. What’s more, wealthy kids given a privileged upbringing may have no sense of how the rest of the world lives. Their developmental

experiences are too different from those of others. These two factors—their own lack of real-world knowledge and the discomfort other people feel in interacting with them—exacerbate the struggle to establish deep, meaningful relationships. Moreover, the confusion privileged youngsters experience in how they see themselves and how others treat them may impair their reality-testing (that is, make them less able to accurately read their circumstances and the reactions of others) and make them suspicious about human nature.

In addition, the possession of too much money early in life frequently comes at the cost of achievement motivation. Youngsters who do not learn the value of money because it is always available to them do not realize the energy needed to obtain it. If they never learn what earning money takes in terms of their own efforts, they may never appreciate the value of hard work. And the effects go beyond mere finances: many youngsters who have too much money lose the urge to strive, to experiment, to reach out, and to try out new things.

Your Money or Your Life

I noted earlier the paradoxical nature of money: instead of providing freedom, it imprisons those who covet it; instead of being a possession, it possesses those who hoard it; the only wealth that really matters involves things that money can't buy.

Forfeiting time

One of those crucial non-money items is time. So here's another paradox: being rich is having money, while being wealthy is having time. If we waste our money, we may end up out of money, but if we waste our time, we forfeit—irretrievably—a significant part of our life. Lost money can be replaced through new endeavors, but lost time is lost forever. Thus while we are busily pursuing money and material success, we are in effect mortgaging our life. And the payments are onerous: we give up hours and days and months and years of our life to sustain our “mortgage.” And we give up our energy as well. Many people, by the time they have money to burn, discover that their fire has burned out. Their sense of playfulness and imagination is no longer what it used to be, and they are dull even to themselves.

The very busy-ness of business obscures for us the fact that, in life, it is the journey that counts, not the destination. Unfortunately, many of us only come to this realization only when it is too late. We don't understand, or we forget how important it is to be present at critical moments in our family or friends' lives—moments that, if participated in, will fuel our memories in the future. And those particular moments will never come again, no matter how rich we are. Money can buy a lot, but one thing it can't buy is the chance to live a particular moment again. Thus the well-known threat “Your money or your life” is true in more than one way. Like the characters in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, far too many of us see dollar bills and life as interchangeable entities. But if we would stop periodically and take a hard look at ourselves and our circumstances, we would soon realize that dollar bills don't represent what really matters in life. Thus while it's good to have money and the things that money can buy, it's also good to evaluate our priorities once in a while to make sure that we haven't lost out on things that money *can't* buy.

One crucial financial fact that even many shrewd money-managers fail to grasp is that life is a bank account that permits only withdrawals, no deposits. While we religiously pursue Mammon—the demon of avarice and richness—we make withdrawal after withdrawal with no thought to the consequences. As Ambrose Bierce said in his *Devil's Dictionary*, “Mammon is the god of the world's leading religion.” The philosopher Voltaire shared that same opinion, saying, “When it is a question of money, everybody is of the same religion.” Unfortunately, as in the story of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, in this wild dance around Mammon we may sacrifice everything that is essential to life: generosity, compassion, empathy, kindness, fairness, honor, justice, ethics and esthetics. Moreover, while busily dancing around Mammon, we may forget that while ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. We all possess infinitely precious things that cannot easily be taken away from us. If we ignore that reality and focus on material wealth over precious intangibles such as time, we will reap what we sow—in other words, if we make money our god, chances are it will plague us like the devil!

Forfeiting integrity

The philosopher Desiderius Erasmus once said, “Great eagerness in the pursuit of wealth, pleasure, or honor cannot exist without sin.” The novelist Honoré de Balzac concurred, saying, “Behind every great fortune lies a great crime.” Those who believe that everything can be done through money are frequently ready to do anything for money. In opting for money over life, they not only give up their time, but they give up their integrity as well.

Do honesty and material wealth need to be a contradiction in terms? Can great fortunes be acquired only in dishonorable ways? A review of the careers of many of the world’s super-rich suggests that Erasmus and Balzac may have been correct. Commerce is rife with immoral, villainous acts. The writer Dorothy Parker expressed this behavior pattern well when she pronounced, “If you want to know what God thinks of money, just look at the people he gave it to.” Or to quote a Spanish proverb, “A rich man is either a scoundrel or the heir of a scoundrel.” No, experience tells us that conscience and wealth are rarely neighbors. We tend to be much more careful of our money than of our principles.

Is there such a thing as a sufficient amount of money? One would think so, but about the time we’re able to make ends meet, somebody moves the ends! Just when we begin to master our money, it gains the upper hand and we become its servants. One tragedy of human existence is our ability to quickly accommodate ourselves to something we set out to accomplish, and then we become accustomed to and bored with it. In other words, we quickly grow restless with what we have.

Evolutionary psychologists have argued that natural selection has conditioned us to quickly adapt to new situations and then strive for a little bit more. According to these theorists, enduring satisfaction with a particular stable state would not be conducive to our survival as a species. We need to be kept on our toes. Following this line of reasoning, some of us end up on a hedonistic treadmill, endlessly motivated by the desire for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. And that treadmill never stops, because human desire is insatiable.

And yet couldn’t we accept these findings from evolutionary psychology and still concede that at some point enough is enough? Why is the concept of “enough” so

hard to understand? When are we rich enough? When are we successful enough? When are we good enough? Why is it that we can't pick a moment of comfortable satisfaction and announce to ourselves and the world that we're stepping off the treadmill? The needs of the wealthy often undergo a visible shift: first the ladder-climbing executive wants the sports car, then comes the house on the Riviera, and then the private plane. Whatever people in the clutches of Mammon have, it is never enough. They can't get off the treadmill, and they don't even want to try, for fear they will get depressed. And yet this preoccupation with possessions keeps them from truly living. It prevents them from asking what they are doing with their lives.

If we really believe that the journey is more important than the destination—a conclusion with which most people concur in principle but ignore in practice—then we need to focus on our “travels” rather than on our finances. We need to do things that we enjoy doing and concentrate on the small pleasures of the day. If we focus on finite material achievements, we will experience only a very temporary sense of fulfillment. As we have seen with people who suffer from oniomania, acquiring and spending is only a very short-term antidepressant, one that needs to be constantly replenished. Thus we become like Sisyphus, pushing boulders up the hill, over and over again. Instead of reveling in a gorgeous sunset or enjoying a family dinner, we stay late at the office doing things we dislike, to be able to buy things we don't need, to impress people we don't care about. How's that for irony!

Forfeiting health

In the “Your money or your life” equation, money not only fails to make up for lost time and lost integrity; it also can't offset lost health. Money can help us get medicines but not actual good health. It can help us acquire a nice place to sleep but not ensure sleep itself. It can help us get material comforts but not true feelings of well-being. It can help us buy beautiful clothes and jewelry, but not beauty (or only that created by plastic surgeons). Ironically, far too many people spend their health gaining wealth, just to then spend their wealth trying to regain their health! It is only when those people are ill that they fully experience the impotence of wealth.

That is not to say that amassed money can't have an ameliorating effect as we get older. In our postmodern society where the nuclear family predominates, having

money becomes more important as we age. When our energy is no longer what it used to be, and our health becomes more precarious, it is good to have some money set aside. That money not only lets us enjoy our leisure and retirement time, it also helps bolster our sense of self-worth and power. The writer William Thackeray recognized that particular virtue of money when he said, “What a dignity it gives an old lady, that balance at the bankers! How tenderly we look at her faults if she is a relative; what a kind, good-natured old creature we find her!” The playwright Tennessee Williams was of a similar mindset, saying, “You can be young without money but you can't be old without it.” Whatever age we are, however, we need to be cautious about the danger that money will overrule all the other facets of our lives.

Wealth versus Intimacy

Some of us may be confused by now about what really brings happiness, since both poverty and wealth seem to fail at it. Paradoxically, though, the former often does a better job than the latter. While contentment can make poor people rich, discontent can make rich people poor. There is a Turkish proverb that says, “A fool dreams of wealth; a wise man, of happiness.” Anybody who imagines that money will make him or her happy has never been rich! The business tycoon John D. Rockefeller, a rich man by any standard, concurred, saying, “It is wrong to assume that men of immense wealth are always happy.”

People of great wealth are often the ones who suffer most from boredom, depression, and other psychological ailments. Most satisfaction studies have shown that once the minimum necessities have been met, money doesn't really bring happiness. As the Greek playwright Euripides eloquently put it, “When a man's stomach is full, it makes no difference whether he is rich or poor.”

What is this elusive happiness that we struggle to buy our way to? Sigmund Freud argued that it is the belated fulfillment of an early childhood wish. Anecdotal evidence seems to support that claim: listen to people's stories and dreams, and you'll often hear happiness spoken of in terms of childhood simplicity and togetherness with early caretakers. As our discussion of early need systems has indicated, money isn't

something that very young children crave. They want to be cuddled; they want their parents and other loved ones to be with them; they want to play and explore; they want to be listened to. Given that from a developmental point of view the pursuit of money is an acquired rather than an inherent need, we shouldn't be surprised that suddenly coming into a lot of money doesn't do much for one's happiness, beyond an incidental, exhilarated mood state. Studies on happiness have shown, for example, that lottery winners, after a temporary high, return very quickly to "normal."

The things that induce a more lasting happiness are far less tangible. People talk about feeling the joy of achievement, the excitement of creative efforts in working with others, the sublimity of religious celebrations, the rightness of a sense of unity with nature. They talk about enjoying their daily work routine and feeling useful and fulfilled on the job (and yes, as a bonus, sometimes making a great deal of money). And finally—perhaps most importantly—they talk about the warmth and closeness of intimate moments with family and friends.

As one wit once said, money may buy you a nice dog, but only love will make it wag its tail. Our true wealth lies in family and friends who care about us, and about whom we care. Having intimate, deep relations is what life is all about. The actress Judy Garland once said, "I can live without money, but I cannot live without love." She knew what she was talking about, attachment behavior being one of humankind's most basic needs. Love (in its various forms) is the only wealth that we absolutely *need*. I remember seeing a cartoon that portrayed a balding executive sitting behind a desk, saying, "Okay, I've made it. Now I need love." This realization may have come too late for him, unfortunately. As we observe far too often, the senseless pursuit of money hardens the human heart. Perhaps that is why a Scottish proverb asserts, "Don't marry for money. You can borrow it much cheaper."

In the context of intimate relationships, when money speaks, the truth is often silent. If we let money speak for us, it may drown out anything else we meant to say. As I have noted before, money and intimate relationships aren't easy companions. The very rich are always subject to the danger that people who interact with them will tell them only what they think they want to hear. Psychologists would attribute this to *idealizing transference*—that is, the universal human tendency to admire powerful

people. Money and candor don't do well together. When people bearing big smiles or gifts approach the very wealthy, the recipients always wonder, Are these people true friends, or are they trying to take advantage of our wealth or power? As the TV personality Oprah Winfrey said, "Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down." A Chinese proverb conveys the same essential message: "The day your horse dies and your money is lost, your relatives become strangers."

Worse yet, the rich sometimes buy into the idealizing transference themselves. If enough of those sycophants waiting to ride in the limo tell a wealthy man he is the epitome of wisdom or beauty or skill, he may start believing them, all evidence to the contrary. This impaired reality-testing can negatively influence the quality of any interpersonal relationships that remain. The actor Marlon Brando commented on this issue very succinctly when he said, "Never confuse the size of your paycheck with the size of your talent." Likewise, a Yiddish proverb says, "With money in your pocket, you are wise and you are handsome and you sing well too." And finally, to quote Miguel de Cervantes, "The foolish sayings of the rich will pass for wise saws in society."

The Zen of Money

Since it's highly unlikely that concerns about money will go away, we need to learn how to live with the quest for money without losing ourselves to it. We need to realize that in money matters, it's all a question of balance. If too much money can be as demoralizing as too little, how can we juggle our need for it and our fear of it?

The simplest way of dealing with money matters is to change our need system—that is, to modify our desires. After all, wealth is a relative thing. People who want less may be far richer than people who forever want more. Interestingly, an emphasis on wanting little, on having a simple life, is found in many of the world's religions. Real freedom, these religions say, consists in having no material desires; people are much freer—and indeed wealthier!—when they don't have a penny to their name.

Many well-known philosophers concur that wealth is defined not by a plenitude of possessions but by a paucity of needs. Socrates once said, “He is richest who is content with the least.” His pupil Plato confirmed that observation, stating, “The greatest wealth is to live content with little.” Epicurus chimed in too: “Wealth consists not in having great possessions but in having few wants.” And Plutarch concurred: “A shortcut to riches is to subtract from our desires.” These great minds agree: we are the wealthiest when the mind is satisfied.

Yes, the greatest single source of wealth we have is between our ears. We are rich according to what we are, not according to what we have. It is the capabilities we have that make us rich. It is the wisdom we possess that makes us rich. According to Socrates, the best way for people to live is to focus on self-development, on the acquisition of wisdom and truth. According to him, material production and consumption are not serious ends in themselves, but at best a mere means to achieve something of far greater magnitude. He argued that the challenge of a fulfilled life is to concentrate on building friendships, on establishing intimate relationships, on creating a sense of true community, and on searching for meaningful pursuits.

The truth of Socrates’ assertions is easy to see: if you were told that you had only six months to live, would your reaction be, “I have to make more money” or “I have to spend this time with my loved ones”? I’ve heard it said that the best thing that can happen to a person is to have a mild coronary in middle age. That sort of medical emergency offers—indeed, compels—an opportunity to take a serious look at one’s life. Most people respond to that opportunity by concluding that the greatest wealth is being content with life as it visits us, appreciating the small pleasures as they come along.

Another question that has preoccupied philosophers is, What should we do with wealth after we possess it? The answer is, Put it to work and let it do good in the world. Rich is not the person who has much, but the person who gives much. To quote the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius, “The only wealth which you will keep forever is the wealth you have given away.”

The highest use of wealth, then, is not to make more money but to make money do more for the betterment of life. The billionaire J. Paul Getty observed, “Money is like manure. You have to spread it around or it smells.” Another business tycoon, Andrew Carnegie, came to a similar conclusion: “Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community.”

Perhaps these observations sound high-handed coming from two people known for their ruthlessness in business matters. You might wonder whether these men wore an altruistic mask to disguise less lofty motivations such as narcissistic self-aggrandizement. It’s certainly true that giving money to worthwhile social causes gets more recognition than buying expensive cars, lavish yachts, private airplanes, or opulent villas. But even if a desire for recognition is the underlying cause, it is a motivator that shouldn’t be discouraged since altruism is the result.

Unfortunately, very few people know how to give money away wisely. Strange as it may seem, philanthropy can be difficult. As the billionaire Ted Turner stated, “As I started getting rich, I started thinking, ‘What the hell am I going to do with all this money?’... ‘You have to learn to give’.... Over a three year period, I gave away half of what I had. To be honest, my hands shook as I signed it away. I knew I was taking myself out of the race to be the richest man in the world.”

In the end, however, all of us want to be judged by the way we live, not by our standard of living; by our measure of helping others, not by our measure of wealth; by the simple things we enjoy, not by our extravagances. As I have mentioned repeatedly, wealth is a state of mind. Anyone can acquire a wealthy state of mind by thinking rich thoughts. If we see ourselves as prosperous, we will be. If we see ourselves as continually hard up, that’s exactly what we will be.

We can only hope that we are able to get beyond material things. Until we are happy with who we are, we will never be happy with what we have. Our thoughts and imagination are a great source of wealth, as are our meaningful friendships and familial ties, and our ability to take pleasure in the small things of life. I truly believe that those who are spiritually wealthy are the wealthiest of all—far richer than the

richest billionaire. It is our *Weltanschauung*, our outlook on life, that counts, as the following Zen-like story illustrates:

One day a wealthy businessman took his daughter on a trip to Africa. The purpose of the trip was to have her experience how poor people lived and thus gain an appreciation for her own wealth. They spent a couple of days and nights traveling in the countryside, staying with a poor family in one of the villages. When they returned to Europe, the father asked his daughter what she thought of the experience. She responded that it had been a fantastic trip.

“Do you now understand how poor people live?” he quizzed.

“Certainly,” said the daughter.

“So what did you learn from the trip?” the father asked.

The daughter replied, “I realized that we have only one dog, while the family we stayed with had four—and cats and donkeys to boot. We have a large swimming pool but the children who lived in the house where we stayed had a lake that never seemed to end. Behind our house we have a garden where I can play, but these children could play in a whole forest. We buy our food in the shopping center, but they were able to grow their own food. We have a car that seats all four of us, but they had a large bus that had room for the whole village.” The father’s surprised look turned to dismay when his daughter added, “Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are.”

This story reminds us that what is worthless to one person can be the prized possession to someone else. That confirms what I have said repeatedly in this article: being wealthy is merely a state of mind. We are truly rich if we are happy with what we have. Infinitely more important than money is sharing our inherent human wealth—our time, our energy, our passions, and our intimacy. Those intangibles are the only true security we have in this insecure world. They are our essentials on the journey of life. They will keep us off the treadmill so that we can enjoy every moment of that journey.

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