

Money and Evil: Complexities Examined*

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Abstract: It has been argued that money is the root of all evil, yet also that evil is the root of all money. Which is right? Here, I show that it can be both, but only if we lift our discourse into a higher plane of reasoning.

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Philosophers have long held that money is the root of all evil, in times ancient [6] and modern [7]. Yet recent research has also shown that evil is actually the root of all money [4]. Since it is a truth universally acknowledged that an economic statement in plain English must be in want of a mathematical formalization, we express the two claims as follows:

$$m = \sqrt{e} \tag{1}$$

$$e = \sqrt{m} \tag{2}$$

where m stands for money and e stands for evil. Clearly, while the two claims may appear to be contradictory when stated in plain language, the mathematical form shows that this is not the case. Substituting Equation (1) into (2) (or vice versa), we learn that both m and e must be roots of the polynomial equation:

$$\boxed{z^4 - z = 0} \tag{3}$$

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Given its centrality to the argument presented here, it is no understatement to label Equation (3) the *Fundamental Equation of Money and Evil*. It has two trivial roots:

$$z_0 = 0$$

$$z_1 = 1$$

However, to stop here would be a regrettable case of linear thinking. Befitting the complexity of the topic under discussion, and the evidence that money and evil both owe much of their power to the imagination [5, 3], we must extend the analysis into the complex plane. There, the fundamental equation has two additional roots:

$$z_2 = \frac{-1 + \sqrt{3}i}{2}$$

$$z_3 = \frac{-1 - \sqrt{3}i}{2}$$

What can we say about these roots?

Null. If $m = e = 0$, then both money and evil are null: either they do not exist at all, or, if they do, they are of no consequence for our world. Since money and evil in fact both exist and have enormous influence on our world, this root can be disregarded.

One. If $m = e = 1$, then money and evil are one and the same. This is also contrary to the evidence: money can be used for non-evil purposes, and not all evil involves money. Thus, this root can be disregarded as well.

The conjugate roots. Roots z_2 and z_3 are more promising. As complex conjugates, they are two sides of the same coin. Their real parts are negative on balance, which tracks with the lived experience of money and evil. So does the fact that the imaginary parts are bigger than the real ones in absolute value.

The only difference lies in the sign of the imaginary part: evil is by definition negative in *every* dimension, and plausibly more so in the imaginary one [2], which identifies evil with the last root: $e = z_3$.

Money, on the other hand, is usually a positive thing when confined to the realm of the imagination [1], and only reveals its negative side when brought into reality. Therefore, $m = z_2$.

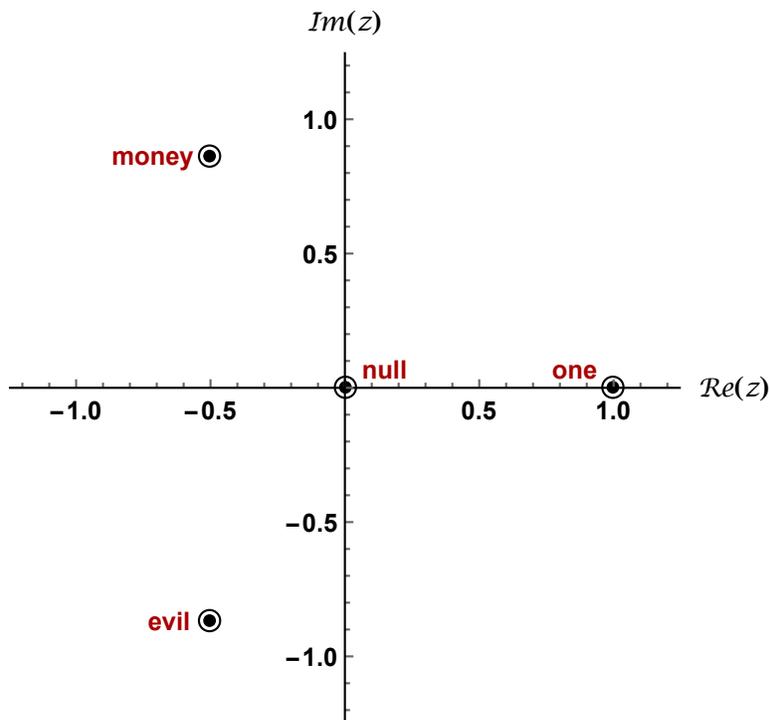


Figure 1: The roots of the *Fundamental Equation of Money and Evil*.

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion: both money and evil are undoubtedly complex, predominantly negative in reality, yet strongest in the imagination. Opposed, yet mirror images of each other. Added up, they are more negative than either is alone. Money and evil are complex conjugates.

References

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