

Preliminary version 9/17/23

Title of the Course: “Money Matters: Between Antiquity and the Enlightenment (ca. 600-1600),”
(English 246)

Quarter: Fall 2023, Monday 3-6

Course Description:

For most of us today money – whether as coin, credit or even bitcoin – makes the world go round. Go back a few centuries and we encounter a world in which, for all its allure, money appeared as filthy lucre and the love of it, as Chaucer’s Pardoner memorably puts it, is the root of all evil.

This course is about premodern economies in which money in its various forms – ranging from bullion to bills – did circulate locally and globally but also one in which owing money might lead to sexual exploitation, incarceration or even mutilation. We need only think of the conjugal debt central to medieval institution of marriage and, if usually paid in the bedroom, also discharged when Margery Kempe settles her husband’s financial debts; or of Shylock’s attempt to exact a pound of flesh when Antonio defaults on the loan. This is a world in which sins were conceptualized as debts and Christ himself was a Redeemer who quite literally bought back (*redimit*) humans from the marketplace of death and damnation. This is also a world in which merely lending money was questionable and, if there was the slightest expectation of gain, punishable. At the same time, this was a world in which merchants and usurers formed alliances by necessity (as in Bacon’s “Of Usury”), popes and parsons sold spiritual goods such as indulgences, and Robin Hood was a lender to creditworthy yeomen rather than a giver to the poor.

In domains as diverse and divergent as philosophy and economics, literature and law, theology and politics, money was both the conceptual and material basis upon which ideas of goodness, trustworthiness, loyalty, equity, proportionality and justice were formulated and debated. As an interdisciplinary course, our readings will come from philosophy, political economy, art history, theology, literature, law and rhetoric as well as account books, travel diaries, land charters, papal registers, lists of *taxe* (fees paid to officials at the Apostolic Court of Penance) and *bottomry* loans (ships pledged as securities for the loans taken out by shipowners). By reading a diverse range of premodern texts through the lens of money we will witness the emergence or rather expansion of economic thought/practices and their socio-political, literary, religious, and aesthetic implications around the world.

Assignments (provisional): short weekly paper on the readings; class attendance and participation

Week 1 (October 2), Royce 306

Classical Foundations

Speakers: Giulia Sissa (Classics and Political Science, UCLA) and Debora Shuger (English, UCLA)

Week 2 (October 9), Royce 306

The Early Value of Things and Money: From the Franciscans to Jean Bodin

Guest speaker: Jacob Soll, USC

Week 3 (October 16), Kaplan 193

Western Clergy & Money-Making, 1200-1500 CE

Guest speaker: W.P. Mueller (Rome, Italy)

Week 4 (October 23), Royce 306

Locating Langland (and others) between Poetics, Art, and Economic Theory

Guest speaker via Zoom, Andrew Galloway (Cornell)

Week 5 (October 30), Royce 306

Speakers: Chris Chism (English, UCLA) and Barbara Fuchs (English and Spanish & Portuguese, UCLA)

Week 6 (November 6), Kaplan 193

Economic Context and Intellectual Content

Guest speaker via Zoom, Professor Joel Kaye (Columbia University & Barnard College)

Week 7 (November 13), Kaplan 193

Guest speaker in person, Craig Muldrew (Cambridge, UK)

Week 8 (November 20), Royce 306

Medieval Merchants and Mythologies: four stereotypes

Speaker: Jessica Goldberg (History, UCLA)

Week 9 (November 27), Royce 306

Early Modern Conversion Machines: Making a Mountain, the Medici, and Global Trade

Speaker: Bronwen Wilson (Art History, UCLA)

Week 10 (December 4), Royce 306

Speakers: Muriel C. McClendon (History, UCLA) and Arvind Thomas (English, UCLA)