CHAPTER 4

"What is ynogh to mene"
Measuring Debt in Langland's Piers Plowman

> Heuene haeth euene nombre and helle is withoute nombre.
> William Langland, *Piers Plowman*[1]

> Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
> In one self place; for where we are is hell,
> And where hell is, there must we ever be.
> Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*[2]

> Me miserable! which way shall I fly
> Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is hell; myself am Hell.
> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*[3]

Near the end of *Piers Plowman*, the Four Daughters of God are debating the relation of justice and mercy in the redemption of humankind. Righteousness, who stands for justice, insists that the sin of Adam and Eve condemns their progeny to hell without exception, "For hit is boteles bale, the bite that they eten" (C.XX 206). Peace, taking up the cause of mercy, counters the univocal Old Law with an interpretation of sin as the means to the higher end of knowing the good – that is, happiness, joy, and the love of Christ. The Old Law, represented by Righteousness and Truth, is perfectly consistent and mathematically precise in its principles and application; the New Dispensation, which frees humankind from the punishment that is rightfully theirs, works in ways more mysterious and must be learned, not merely obeyed, through the experience of contraries. As human beings can only know the light of day because they have experienced the dark of night, so can they know love and eternal joy because they have lived in folly and sin. Truth and Righteousness must be convinced of the reasonableness of forgiveness in terms they recognize and accept, for their initial reactions to news of the Redemption are vehement and categorical. Truth declares, "That thou tellest [. . .] is bote a tale of walterot!" (C.XX 144); and Righteousness concludes that Peace and

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Mercy must be either mad or drunk ("Rauest thow? [. . .] or thow art riht dronke!" [C.XX 192]). The terms that convince are those that accord with the law, and with a vision of heaven and earth as rationally ordered and governed by rules of proportionality, balance, and consistency. What Peace and Mercy succeed in showing is that the salvation of humankind does not break the rules of logic and law but conforms to them and fulfills them.[4]

Langland makes an intriguing change from the B to the C text, however, in the concluding lines of Peace's illustrative catalogue of contraries.[5] In the earlier version, Peace adds, "For til *modicum* mete with vs, I may it wel auowe, / Woot no wight, as I wene, what is yno3 to mene" (B.XVIII 215–216). In C, the "modicum," or paltry amount, that was deemed the opposite of "enough" is changed to "moreyne," a catastrophic loss or lack (C.XX 224). In the B text, we can only know what enough means when we have experienced scarcity; in the C text, we can only know enough if we have known utter deprivation. This small change has significant implications for our understanding, and the Dreamer's, of the meaning of "enough" in the poem, for it illustrates a deeper and inherent indeterminacy in the concept of enough itself. "Enough" is Langland's word for sufficiency, the mean between excess and deficiency that not only serves here as an illustrative analogy for salvation but more generally as the definition of virtue. Indeed, determining fair and sufficient quantities is, for Langland, a central part of the workings of justice in the world. For much of the poem, the task of determining "what is yno3 to mene" is accomplished through debtor–creditor relations. Debt serves to measure political, social, and spiritual obligations: it calibrates wages, restitution, and the individual's responsibilities to the community. Likewise, for Langland, the principles of justice and mercy are reconciled in the salvation of humankind because the Redemption is a payment that satisfies the debt of sin. The fact that the debate between the Four Daughters takes place immediately after the Dreamer descends to hell and just before the dramatic harrowing scene underscores the traditional association between the limitlessness of hell and the insatiability of *cupiditas*: for Marlowe and Milton as for Langland, the spatial limitlessness of hell is precisely what renders it a spiritual condition as well as a cosmic region. Because hell has no limits, attests Mephistopheles, you can never escape it. Heaven, by contrast, is a realm of mathematical order and regularity, just as God the creator has "ordered all things in measure and number and weight."[6] All good things embody and reflect these divine calculations; beyond the limits of measure, number, and weight, there is only chaos. Fittingly, the

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setting of the debate between the Four Daughters, the antechamber to hell, serves as a vivid reminder of the stakes of determining "what is ynogh to mene." Without the knowing the limit of enough, the Dreamer cannot know how much he owes and cannot, therefore, know how he may save his soul.[7]

According to David Graeber, debts and the language of debt have political and coercive force precisely because a debt is a moral obligation that has been quantified. The quantification of obligation in money, in particular, "allows debts to become simple, cold, and impersonal," and such cold and impersonal debts can then be turned into instruments of political violence of all kinds, including "war, conquest, and slavery."[8] Debt "turns human relations into mathematics," and as soon as the question is one of numbers instead of human beings, abuses and atrocities become imaginable and justifiable. For Langland, the creditor and source of all credit is not a human tyrant but God, and the quantification of sin as a debt is not an act of violence but, rather, a source of solace, for it suggests that there is an end and a limit to sin and that the sinner's debt can be discharged. The poem's ultimate failure to measure the debt of sin expresses Langland's anxiety about salvation, but it also creates an open-ended search for a limit that is never found, a search that is paradoxically profitable in economic terms. The debt that cannot be repaid correlates to needs that cannot be measured, and thus to desires that cannot be checked and boundaries that cannot be known.

The Justice of Debt

Legislation regulating the late medieval English economy was haunted by the figure of the debtor. A series of statutes issued over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries placed increasing pressure on debtors to repay their creditors on time, but the statutory evolution also reveals the inherent difficulties of enforcing debt payment by legal and punitive means. The preamble to Acton Burnell (1283) states its purpose as the protection of foreign merchants so that they will continue to lend goods and money in England, and will not "refrain to come into this realm with their merchandises, to the damage as well of the merchants, as of the whole realm."[9] With the 1285 revision, the scope of the provision was expanded to apply to all creditors, merchant and non-merchant, foreign and local alike.[10] It seems that many non-merchant creditors took advantage of this broadened scope, requiring their debtors to enrol even petty debts, some as small as halfpennies and farthings. Within a few decades, the system was so

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well used that debtors raised a clamour and the provision had to be walked back to apply only to merchant debts once again.[11] The aim of these early statutes is to enforce repayment but not, of course, to abolish debt; on the contrary, the aim was to encourage more credit and thus *more* indebtedness – carefully managed and measured indebtedness following the principles and practices of sound accounting. They entitled merchants to seize defaulting debtors' land and chattel, and debtors could be imprisoned until the debt and its costs were repaid. In practice, however, it seems that sheriffs and other local officials were often bribed not to enforce the debts they recorded.[12] The cost to creditors of bribing sheriffs to act on their behalf meant that creditors typically exercised "patience with their debtors before they proceeded against them."[13] Indeed, another purpose of the 1285 revision was to give the law sharper teeth and to close the loopholes that were regularly exploited by delinquent debtors. Still, the problem of debtors defaulting or absconding seems to have remained significant and troublesome enough to warrant further legislation a century later, when Edward III doubled down on foreign absconders, specifically the Lombards, and also introduced imprisonment for non-merchant debts. The crown and parliament were here reacting in large part to the catastrophic effects of the plague: what the statutes of 1351 and 1353 do not say is that in the wake of the Black Death, debtor default became a greater problem than ever, not because debtors were deliberately evading their creditors but because they and their families simply had not the means to pay or had died before they could settle their accounts. In either case, the penalty of imprisonment, the stiffest measure the law could offer, would be utterly ineffective at achieving the aim of repayment and the continued flow of credit.

The provision on debt recovery and imprisonment in the statute of 1351 appears in a long list of economic regulations, statutory items that are considerably less dramatic in tone than the famous "Treason Act" also included in the legislation.[14] Indeed, the bulk of the statute is written using the precise but passionless terms of the account book: it abolishes auncel weights in favour of balance weights, prohibits coin-clipping and debasement, and above all insists on standard weights and measures in a range of trades, from wool to grain to wine.[15] This collation of items suggests the close conceptual and historical relation between money and debt as forms of measure or units of account. It also suggests that the mandate of imprisonment for non-merchant debts was intended to be coercive rather than punitive; that is, imprisonment is listed here as yet another accounting measure to aid in the management of royal assets and

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the economy in general, as a means of ensuring debt repayment and deterring would-be defaulters, rather than as a punishment for a broken promise or breach of faith. The moral and spiritual force of these regulations lies not primarily in conceiving of debt as a contract, and the failure to pay as a breach of faith with the creditor, but as an economic tool such that failure to repay causes damage to the material well-being of the entire realm. Thus "great damage and deceit is done to the People" by the use of diverse weights in the trading of wool; likewise, the use of faulty measures by purveyors is punished as a type of trespass, and faulty accounting in matters of sheep-shearing and wine trading as a type of theft.[16]

In Passūs II–IV of *Piers Plowman*, debt repayment is likewise depicted as an essential accounting tool for the flourishing of the realm and its economy; the "mesure" of careful accounting, in the precise calculation of "dewe dettes," is here the remedy for the political and moral corruption epitomized in the figure of Mede. Andrew Galloway has shown that *Piers Plowman* evinces a "poetics of accounting" – that Langland shares with London's mercantile and political communities "the idea of perfect transparency of needs and profits in commerce [and] an ideal of final and wholly balanced books."[17] The growing emphasis on enforcing debt and encouraging credit by statutory law constitutes one significant factor contributing to the mercantile ethos in which Galloway places Langland and the "textual form of the mercantile account book" evoked by *Piers Plowman*.[18] And yet, most scholars have agreed with Derek Pearsall that Langland was "appalled" by the operations of money and commerce, and was nostalgic for an idealized agricultural community "in which roles are figured on the basis of feudal and manorial relationships."[19] The perception that Langland is opposed to money and commerce has led to a tendency to conflate Mede, as the personification of the type of exchange banished from the ideal kingdom, with money and the money economy. John A. Yunck's classic and still-influential study *The Lineage of Lady Meed* argued that the poem in general and the meed episode in particular express "the perplexity of Langland's whole era [. . .] about the morality of money and a money economy. The new economy was an inescapable fact, but it was confusing, often apparently immoral, and almost always terrifying."[20] David Aers has written extensively about Langland's discomfort with "developments whereby money, economy, and market relations were becoming powerful enough to dissolve traditional personal and ethical ties."[21] Jill Mann asserts that meed "represents unjust profit, bribery, cash payments rather than the reciprocal fulfillment of obligations – in short, money, pure and simple, which has the power to unbalance the just social

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relationships established by the life of honest labor and the practice of Christian duty."[22] More recently, Roger Ladd has argued that Langland's rejection of mercantilism focuses on the problematic exchange of spiritual good for material goods, evincing a "discomfort with money" and the conviction that "sin [is] inherent to involvement in the profit economy."[23] And, likewise, William Rhodes reasserts that Mede "personifies 'the power of money,'" which is a source of anxiety in the poem because of the way it "spurs individuals to do things according to obscure or potentially corrupt causes."[24] Galloway's insights on Langland's poetics of accounting notwithstanding, therefore, the view that Langland was suspicious of money and commerce remains deeply entrenched.

Against this view, I argue here that the Mede episode of Passūs II–IV condemns not money and commercial exchange but, rather, gift exchange. This episode depicts maintenance as a practice of exchanging "mesureless" gifts, gifts that are not calibrated precisely to the acts they reward, gifts that foster abuses of power and the subversion of justice. In this, the Mede episode serves as a model for complaints like that of the fifteenth-century alliterative poem *Richard the Redeless*, which charges the advisers of Richard II and the king himself with grave errors of mismanagement.[25] According to the *Richard* poet, maintenance under Richard II resulted in lawlessness and injustice because it elevated unworthy people to positions of power, thereby subverting the rightful hierarchy. Maintenance perverted the course of justice, too, because it constituted a system in which caprice and self-interest held sway over objective rules and the common good, in which circuit judges dealt harshly with the poor who had no money for bribery, and ignored legal accusations unless they were accompanied by payment. Following Langland, the *Richard* poet makes clear the nature of the exchanges that comprise the institution of maintenance: the payments made to judges, as well as the rewards given to servants and liegeman, are not wages but gifts. Such gifts are not strictly calculated or standardized, and they are given in exchange not, or not only, for the performance of specific services, but for loyalty. Gifts of maintenance, in other words, create and support social bonds of reciprocity, but they also make power personal and self-serving.

The Mede episode shows that, for Langland, the virtue of justice is itself a kind of measure, Mede's opposite, and it is realized in relations of equality and proportionality: as Conrad van Dyke has shown, for Langland, justice is a matter of "giving each his due."[26] According to one dominant and Aristotelian definition, money is also a measure; for this reason, just relations are embodied in the payment of wages, or what the

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B text calls "mesurable hire" and the C text, "mercede," a word that Langland derives from the Latin *merces* and that, the Middle English Dictionary attests, is used only by Langland: "Ac there is 'mede' and 'mercede' – and both men demen / A desert for som doynge, derne oþer elles" (C.III 290–291). In the C text, meed is a reward given before the action is performed, so that it is an inducement to act in a certain way, rather than a payment for a task completed (C.III 292). It also includes, as the example of the friars illustrates, a reward for actions that should be performed without expectation or promise of reward, as well as excessive rewards – payments that exceed the value of the good or service sold. Mede might be given in the form of money, but more often than money Mede gives precious objects like jewels or furs, or non-material preferments and positions. The important point is that, in all of these transactions, there is an imbalance between the reward and the act it rewards: a gift of meed is a failure to calculate precisely and correctly, a failure of measure. This hierarchy of worldly power, in which personal relations of rank are maintained by gifts of meed, extends down to servants and even beggars, who rely on the generosity of the rich rather than on fair wages. In contrast to rewards given in advance, before any labour or deed meriting reward has been performed, "mercede" is defined as wages paid after work has been completed, a payment of a "dewe dette" (C.III 304). Conscience approves of such debt payment because its mathematical exactness bespeaks, and perhaps produces, a moral correctness, in contrast with meed, which cannot be equated in a clear and precise way to merit.

The changes Langland made to the Mede episode in the C text intensify the poem's concern with "measurelessness" and emphasize the language of debt as a way of distinguishing measureless gifts, extortion, and theft on the one hand, from fair and precisely calculated payment on the other. By adding nearly one hundred lines and changing the terms in which material reward and payment are described, Langland's revision of B.III is "as radical as any he made as he reworked B to create the C text."[27] Beginning at line 290 in the C text, Conscience responds to Mede's highly persuasive defense of the political indispensability of meed by introducing the concept of "mercede." This new term leads into an extended grammatical metaphor that culminates in a millennialist vision of a future in which meed will be banished and mercede and Reason will reign together forever.[28] Following this vision, Mede's role in the poem ends in ignominy when she tries to help Wrong in his trial but is unsuccessful because the King sides with Conscience and Reason. The last word on Mede echoes the first: Holy Church denounced Mede for being inimical to the

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Church's "leautee" and laws, and here the King explicitly rejects Mede *so that* he may have "leutee for [his] law" (C.IV 174). Divine grace and the courteous gifts given by kings to their loyal subjects are exempted from Conscience's condemnation only to the extent that these gifts are bound by conditions, and to the extent that the debt incurred by the recipient is made explicit: the fact that divine grace and feudal largesse, too, are economic exchanges must be kept squarely in view in order to avoid the imbalances and moral murkiness of unmeasured gifts: "So god gyueth nothing that *si* ne is the glose / And ryhte so sothly may [cesar] and pope / Bothe gyue and graunte there his grace lyketh / And efte haue hit a3eyne of hem þat don ylle" (C.III 328–331). As in the B text, it is the principle of measure here that most distinguishes deserved payment from bribery, a debt owed from extortion; it is the principle of measure that holds the social and the cosmic order of indebtedness together. In both financial and spiritual terms, mede is defined by imprecision, inconsistency, and caprice, at the same time as it is closely associated with the exercise and demonstration of political power – indeed, the lack of precision is what makes it possible for mede to be used for self-interested gain. Mercede, by contrast, is a mode of exactness, objectivity, equivalence, and clarity. It is fair *because* it is impersonal.

Langland grounds his economic vision on the ideal of fair wages and fair prices, an ideal in which each receives precisely *enough* in exchange for his labour. Far from expressing anxiety about the corrosive effects of money, this in fact suggests the spiritual dangers of the open-ended, non-calculating logic of the gift, as compared to the calculating logic of a market economy. In the allegory of the communal ploughing in Passus VIII, the model is not that of feudal service but of wage payment: after the "dikares and deluares digged vp the balkes," Piers is "apayed and payede hem wel here huyre" (C.VIII 114–115). This system of payment is, like the just price on the market, characterized by commensurability and equality: "Hit is a permutacioun apertly—on peneworth for another" (C.III 313). The rejection of Mede in Passūs II–IV follows seamlessly from the preoccupation with "wastours" in the Prologue, where the primary – at times it seems the only – social and moral problems besetting the "fair field of folk" are the problems caused by people who consume but do not produce, who beg when they should be working, or who win money by avoiding the labour their office requires. Each of these economic offenses involves a kind of measurelessness and creates unbalanced relationships in which what is given does not equal what is taken, thereby foreshadowing the Mede episode. As in Passus IV, where Langland links the mutual love

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shared by husband and wife, God and creation, to the fair and precisely calculated payment of a debt, so does his discussion of charity and the Plant of Peace in Passus I conclude with a reminder to the rich and powerful that their treatment of the poor will determine God's treatment of them according to the principle of measure: "For þe same mesure þat 3e meteth [. . .] yoghe shal be weye þer-with whenne 3e wende hennes: *Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis, remecietur vobis*" (C.I 172–173a).

Langland, Anselm, and the Poetics of Fungibility

The rejection of Mede also leads seamlessly into the poem's sustained emphasis on the necessity of restitution. If, in the political economy, the monetized measures of wages and commercial exchange epitomize justice, in the penitential economy, justice is served by the monetized measure of restitution. In both economies, the closing refrain of *Redde quod debes* expresses the poem's central imperative: pay what you owe, whether it is a matter of duties and obligations or financial debts. Critical studies of the poem by Wendy Scase, Robert Worth Frank Jr., John Alford, and Traugott Lawler, among others, have established the importance of restitution for Langland, the part of penance in which the sinner pays a "debt to another person," an act related to but distinct from *satisfactio*, which is payment of "one's debt to God."[29] The truly contrite are moved to repay ill-gotten gains and to repair any damage they have done to others through sin; as such, restitution, along with confession and satisfaction, is a visible manifestation of contrition.[30] It is also a juncture where the spiritual and material meanings of debt merge. One major thrust of the anti-fraternal position was that friars interfered with this penitential process of restoration by offering to absolve sins of theft and extortion while claiming that almsgiving could replace restitution. Instead of repaying the victim of the theft, the sinner could give a portion of his winnings to the friar as a donation in exchange for absolution. This is the "system" that, according to Traugott Lawler, is the object of Langland's most urgent complaint. [31] Indeed, Langland nowhere allows such a substitution of one monetary payment for another, most of all because such an absolution, granted to someone who is not truly contrite, is sacramentally invalid, but he does allow the possibility of substituting spiritual for monetary payment when the Good Samaritan explains that "sorwe of herte, is satisfaccioun for suche þat may nat paye" (C.XIX 299–300).[32] The mechanism underlying restitution and satisfaction is structurally similar to the mechanism underlying the Redemption itself: it is a

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mechanism of substitution or exchange of equivalents. One thing is made equivalent to another through a common measure so that those two things may be exchanged or substituted one for the other. This is the essential structure of all payments. Precisely because the misappropriation of alms in exchange for empty absolution looks so much like other kinds of substitutions, substitutions that *do* constitute valid payments – monetary repayment to restore stolen or extorted goods, real sorrow or contrition to compensate for monetary repayment, the death of Christ on the cross instead of the damnation of humankind – Langland takes such pains to identify and decry the practice.

Langland's profound and abiding concern with debt payment and exchange corresponds to the understanding of the Redemption associated most directly with Anselm of Canterbury in his late eleventh-century work *Cur Deus homo?*[33] In this work, Anselm sets out to defend the logic and necessity of the Redemption not only to Christians, whose doubts and questions are here expressed in the voice of Anselm's student Boso, but also to non-Christians, who, Anselm reports, consider the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Redemption to be "absurd." Anselm's argument rests on the premise that humankind's fundamental relationship with God is one of debtor and creditor. The debt of sin, in his view, is properly understood as a secondary debt, or as a kind of interest accruing on the universal and original debt that all humankind owes to God for their existence. The key point is that the debt of sin is owed to God, not to the devil, as earlier theologians asserted in readings of the "chirographum" in Colossians 2:13–15, a passage which, as we have seen, evokes the Roman practice of debt slavery. For Augustine, as for Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Peter Lombard, the Redemption was a "buying back" of human souls from the devil, whose possession of them was justified because they had sinned through free will. As Augustine writes in his commentary on the Psalms, "Pouring out innocent blood, which is our price, [Christ] redeemed the guilty from the captivity in which we were held by the devil, forgiving us our sins. With his blood, he erased the chirographum by which the debtors were bound."[34] The idea that the chirographum of Colossians 2 was a diabolical record of original sin, a receipt of our debt to the devil, was repeated often by later medieval commentators; it also found its way into such widely influential texts as the *Fasciculus morum*, where, as we saw in Chapter 1, it became associated with the charter lyric tradition, and the *Legenda aurea*, where we read that "Eve borrowed sin from the devil and wrote a bond and provided a surety, and the interest on the debt was heaped upon posterity."[35]

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Anselm directly opposes this interpretive tradition, stating at the outset, "that writing [*chirographum*] is not diabolic [. . .] but of God. For by the just judgment of God it was decreed, and, as it were, confirmed by writing, that, since man had sinned, he could not have the power to avoid sin or the punishment of sin."[36] Anselm defines sin as a failure to pay our debt to God, and the debt we owe in the first place is the subjection of our wills to God's will in all things.[37] Each human being is born into an original, or what we might call an ontological, debt – the debt that every created being owes to God simply by virtue of the gift of existence. "This is the debt which an angel, and likewise a man, owes to God," writes Anselm. "No one sins through paying it, and everyone who does not pay it, sins. This is righteousness or uprightness of the will. [. . .] This is the sole honour, the complete honour, which we owe to God and which God demands from us."[38] Adam and Eve's disobedience and humanity's consequent sinful fallenness merely compound this original debt of existence. For Anselm, in failing to render God the honour due to Him, human beings are doubly indebted. In our initial, created state, we owe a debt of obedience to God to fulfill our own righteousness and to satisfy God's honour. Our default on this initial debt plunges us further into debt, so that sin may be thought of not merely as a debt owing but as interest compounded over the course of human history.[39]

The genre of the penitential handbook that was so instrumental in teaching the sacrament of penance and the language of sin in the later Middle Ages is arguably influenced by Anselm's debt theory of the Redemption, insofar as the systematic categorizing and weighing of sins and their remedies suggests a picture of salvation as an economic exchange of fungible goods. Historians of penance have observed that the penitential handbooks and *summae* produced after 1215 developed out of earlier *Libri penitentiales* which assigned gradated "tariffs" to sins of various degrees of gravity.[40] This same quantification of the quality of sins lies at the root of the development of indulgences. But the calculating tendency encouraged by the conception of sin as a debt is evident in more elaborate ways as well. For instance, in the penitential meditation that serves as Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*, drawn from the *summae* of Raymond of Pennaforte and William Peraldus, one of the six causes of contrition is the "sorweful remembraunce" of the good that the sinner loses through sin: credit earned through good works is subsequently lost by mortal sin, whereas good works performed in a state of sin will fail to earn salvific credit. Knowledge of this formula, in which sin acts as a zero product to nullify

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works, will act as a spur to contrition, without which confession and satisfaction are ineffective:

> Wel may he be sory thanne, that oweth al his lif to God as long as he hath lyved, and eek as longe as he shal lyve, that no goodnesse ne hath to paye with his dette to God to whom he oweth al his lyf. For trust wel, "He shal yeven acountes," as seith Seint Bernard, "of alle the goodes that he han be yeven hym in this present lyf, and how he hath hem despended, [in] so much that ther shal nat perisse an heer of his heed, ne a moment of an houre ne shal nat perisse of his tyme, that he ne shal yeve of it a rekenyng." (X.251–254)

In this passage, which in fact seems to be Chaucer's own addition to Pennaforte, the Anselmian doctrines of the original debt of life and the credit-destroying effects of sin are joined to the familiar image of the Judgment Day as a financial audit. Although the Parson attributes the image to Bernard, the source has not been identified, and he seems rather to be quoting the *Prick of Conscience* or Wimbledon's sermon. Even more likely is the possibility that an understanding of the workings of the economy of salvation, an economy produced by the debt of sin, in all their mathematical precision, had simply become commonplace by the end of the fourteenth century.

For Anselm, the necessity of satisfaction consists not in God's need to pay off the devil, nor for vengeance, but in the fittingness of restoring balance and order through compensation: the words Anselm uses here are *decens* and *conveniens*, that is, suitable, appropriate, proper, with distinctly aesthetic connotations. Indeed, one part of Anselm's stated aim is show the aesthetic integrity of the Redemption; thus he praises the "ineffable" beauty ("ineffabilem [. . .] pulchritudinem") of the Biblical story, as it answers Eve with Mary, tree with cross, Satan with Christ.[41] In light of this integrity, which inheres in the principles of order that encompass both heaven and earth, if God were to leave the created universe in a condition of asymmetry, imbalance, and disorder – that is, to leave the massive and ever-growing debt of sin unpaid – it would be so alien to God's nature, to the nature of reason and truth, that it could only mean that God is not God.

The idea of divine honour is central to understanding the mechanisms and effects of sin and redemption in this vision of balance and order. Some scholars have interpreted this idea as evidence that Anselm's theory reflects his medieval, feudal context. As Jasper Hopkins contends, the divine honour that is diminished when human beings sin, and that must be

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restored through Christ's sacrifice, expresses the feudal idea of the social hierarchy, in which "honor is due to an individual in proportion to his rank or social position or ontological degree of perfection."[42] This sense of Anselm's theory as essentially "medieval" in this way seems also to suggest an anthropomorphic image of God as vengeful in his insistence on satisfaction, even petty in demanding satisfaction for what amounts to an insult. And yet, for Anselm, the idea of divine honour encompasses wholeness, integrity, and harmony; it is as much an aesthetic ideal as a legal ideal, and it conveys no sense whatsoever of the touchy defense of reputation associated with feudal or chivalric honour. The offense of sin does not actually take anything away from God's honour; rather, it dishonours God only *as far as the sinner is concerned* ("quantum ad illam pertinet"). God does not require satisfaction in order to restore any loss or diminishment of the divine nature; the loss is rather to the value or quality of human nature, as well as to the quantity of the ranks of angels depleted in the fall of Lucifer. The Redemption is accordingly a mathematical restoration of equilibrium, of a "certain reasonable and perfect number" ("quodam rationabili et perfecto numero"), making human beings the spiritual equals of angels so that these perfected human beings can be added to the celestial ranks to make up for the ones who fell. Accordingly, the satisfaction required and paid by Christ's death is not vengeance or punishment, because God is merciful, but payment, because God is also just: "Si homo dicitur injustus, qui homini non reddit, quod debet, multo magis injustus est qui Deo, quod debet, non reddit."[43] This feature of debt payment, as a means of reconciling justice and mercy, can be seen, similarly, in the development of monetary commutation and "amercements" in direct response to the early penitentials' assignment of impossibly severe penances.[44]

We can hear distinctly Anselmian notes in the Harrowing of Hell scene in Passus XX of *Piers Plowman*, which begins by casting the Redemption in the terms of feudal honour and combat when Faith introduces the retelling of the Crucifixion story by announcing that Jesus will joust with "the fende" (C.XX 27) wearing the armour of Piers the Plowman. Instead of martial combat, however, the confrontation that actually takes place between Jesus and Lucifer is a verbal debate about the theological and legal terms of human salvation. Ultimately, for Langland, as for Anselm, the Redemption is not a payment made to the devil in exchange for human souls nor an instance of divine vengeance-taking, but it is a payment to God that remits punishment and in which the demands of justice and of

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mercy are reconciled. It is Satan, whom Langland distinguishes from Lucifer, who clarifies the legal point: Lucifer insists that Jesus cannot take the souls that are Lucifer's "bi riht and by resoun" (C.XX 300), but Satan reminds him that since he took them "with gyle [. . .], with treson and tricherie" (C.XX 319), he has no legal right to keep them. As Jesus's stirring speech makes clear, the crucifixion saves humankind from the punishment they deserve, even as it fulfills the requirements of the Old Law – "*Dentum pro dente, et oculum pro oculo*. / So lyf shal lyf lete ther lyf hath lyf anyentised" (C.XX 385a–386). The lines that follow this invocation of the Old Law are marked by chiasmus, antithesis, and parallelism, even as the New Law completes but does not dissolve the Old, as death is defeated by death and the "beguiler" is beguiled:

> Ergo, soule shal soule quyte and synne to synne wende
> And al þat man mysdede, Y man to amenden hit;
> And þat Deth fordede my deth to releue,
> And bothe quykie and quyte that queynte was thorw synne
> And gyle be bigyl thorw grace at þe laste:
> *Ars ut artem falleret*
> [. . .]
> And as Adam and alle thorwe a tre deyede,
> Adam and alle thorwe a tre shal turne to lyue.
> (C.XX 388–398)

In these lines, the idea that the mercy shown to humankind does not leave justice unfulfilled is conveyed by poetic terms of balance and equivalence. The same poetics shape Anselm's defense of the Incarnation and Redemption as both fitting and beautiful:

> As death came to humankind because of a man's disobedience, so is it necessary that life be restored to humankind through a man's obedience. And because sin, the cause of our damnation, had its origin in a woman, so was the author of our justice and salvation born of a woman. And, likewise, the devil who persuaded humankind to sin by tasting of the tree was conquered by man's suffering on the tree. These and other things, if we consider them carefully, show the ineffable beauty of our redemption.[45]

The beauty of proportion and order here expressed in the series of finely balanced antitheses – disobedience to obedience, sin to salvation, the tree of knowledge to the tree of crucifixion, Lucifer to Christ – invokes the exegetical scheme of typology. Langland's typological vision in Passus XX also looks back to the rejection of Mede in Passūs II–IV and echoes the insistence on restitution expressed throughout the poem. James Simpson

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has suggested that Langland follows thirteenth-century theologians in distinguishing two different kinds of merit, one which is earned and one which issues "from the generosity of the giver."[46] The former, which Langland calls "mesurable hire" or "mercede," "represents the strictly just reward of *meritum de condigno*, for which both the theologians and Langland use the image of wages," but the latter, which is God's "mede," "represents *meritum de congruo*, for which both the theologians and Langland use the image of a gift beyond desert."[47] The idea here is that divine reward, as in the Harrowing, is more like Mede than it is like wages because human beings can never earn salvation through their own efforts and because divine love is itself limitlessness and measureless. The perfect orthodoxy of such an idea makes it all the more remarkable that Langland does not, it seems to me, echo it here. There is nothing measureless about the salvation offered by Christ in the Harrowing; on the contrary, Christ's reclamation of souls is precisely and strictly lawful and measured, even as the payment made by Christ's sacrifice, in which "soule shal soule quyte," exemplifies the principles of monetary exchange and wage payment, where the exchange is made between values that "[accord] in kynde in cas and in numbre."

In this light, the problem with the friars is not the fact that they corrupt the sacrament of penance by turning it into a monetary transaction. Rather, the critique of the friars that runs throughout the poem in all its versions is also rooted in the principle of measure that opposes meed, as Langland makes explicit in the closing passus of the C text. Here, he suggests that the avarice and the duplicity to which the friars are prone derives from the measurelessness of their orders.[48] "And yf ye coueiteth cure," Conscience tells the friars,

> [. . .] Kynde wol 3ow telle
> That in mesure God made alle manere thynges
> And sette hit at a certein and at a siker nombre
> And nempnede hem names newe, and noumbrede þe sterres:
> *Qui numerat multitudinem stellarum, &c.*
> (C.XXII 253–256a)

In these lines, Conscience alludes to Augustine's comments in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, on Wisdom 11:20: "Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight." Augustine asks whether measure, number, and weight existed before creation, and whether they exist outside of the creatures whose being they order. His answer is that they do because they exist in God:

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> [I]n the sense that measure places a limit on everything, number gives everything a form, and weight draws each thing to a state of repose and stability, God is identified with these three in a fundamental, true, and unique sense. He limits everything, forms everything, and orders everything. Hence, insofar as this matter can be grasped by the heart of man and expressed by his tongue, we must understand that the words, *Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight*, mean nothing else than "Thou hast ordered all things in Thyself."[49]

Augustine goes on to assert that these principles of measure and calculation also inhere in immaterial or spiritual entities. They are found in "stones and wood and other such bodies [. . .] having mass or quantity," but also in activity, which is measured so that it does not go on "without control or beyond bounds"; likewise, the affections of the soul and the virtues are numbered, and both the will and love have weight, "wherein appears the worth of everything to be sought."[50] The principles of measure and calculation are not inventions of the human mind but are coextensive with God's creating and governing of the world. Insofar as we ourselves have limit, form, and mass, we reflect our divine maker.[51] In *De ordine*, moreover, Augustine explains how the ordering activity of God is mirrored in the order of human knowledge and pursuits, such as the liberal arts.[52] Measure and number determine even the structure and character of grammar, which measures the lengths of sounds and syllables and establishes numerical patterns in the accents of words, and of poetry, which is given shape and form by metre.[53]

In *Piers Plowman*, Conscience, too, insists on a mathematically ordered *oikonomia*. Officers who serve under kings and knights are numbered in muster-rolls; the rules that govern monasteries and convents specify the number of monks and nuns in each community; heaven itself is home to an "euene nombre" (C.XXII 270). Only "helle is withoute nombre" – only hell, that is, and friars are measureless by design (270, 267). William of Saint-Amour set the context for this complaint in his *De periculis*, in his charge that the friars are false prophets because they operate outside the bureaucratic ranks of the episcopy.[54] For William, as for Langland, the numbered priesthood instantiates an economic harmony that reflects the heavenly harmony; this numbered *ordo* operates *ad perpetuam* and cannot be changed.[55] The friars who "wexeth out of nombre" corrupt the sacrament of penance by making it measureless, that is, unbounded by the requirements of true soul-searching and, above all, restitution and satisfaction.

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Impossible Calculations, Limitless Debts

> The root of all evils is *avaritia*, that is, wanting more than is enough. For avarice [. . .] should not be thought to consist in silver or or in coins alone, [. . .] but in all things which are desired immoderately, whenever someone wants absolutely more than is enough.
>
> Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*[56]

Langland's ideal visions of debtor–creditor relations consist, first, of the social economy ordered by debt and wage payment, and, second, of the penitential economy in which the conception of sin as a debt means both that sin can be redeemed and that Christ can stand in for the sinner who is unable to pay. The reassuringly precise measurements of debt, however, are made uncertain at other points in the poem by the capacity of sin and contrition to exceed the limits of human knowledge. For example, in Passus VI, Langland juxtaposes two defaulting debtors, one of whom is unable to pay, while the other, Couetyse, stubbornly refuses. The essence of Couetyse is "wanting more than is enough": Langland follows Augustine in locating the sin primarily in the desire for more, in the double sense of *want*, rather than in the fact of accumulation. This insatiability is dramatically illustrated in Couetyse's portrait, which uses *occupatio*, a device of negation, to describe an image of profound lack and deprivation:

> Thenne cam Couetyse – Y can hym nat descreue,
> So hungrily and holow sire Heruy hym lokede.
> He was bitelbrowed and baburlippid, with two blered eyes,
> And as a letherne pors lollede his chekes—
> Wel syddore then his chyn, ycheueled for elde;
> And as a bondemannes bacoun his berd was yshaue;
> With his hood on his heued and his hat bothe,
> In a tore tabard of twelue wynter age;
> But yf a lous couthe lepe, Y leue and Y trowe,
> He ne sholde nat wandre vppon that Walch, so was hit thredbare!
>
> (C.VI 196–205)

This image, though it is not totally without analogue, is strikingly unusual in the context of traditional iconography, which typically figured Avaritia as a woman in a luxuriously flowing robe, hands and pockets laden with gold, her key physiognomical feature a wide and gaping mouth.[57] Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, one of the most influential Latin allegories in medieval literature, depicts Avaritia as figure of splendour but also as

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possessing a curved, hook-like hand for seizing goods and wealth.[58] Langland's figure, by contrast, and counter-intuitively, shows no outward sign of the wealth he has presumably amassed through his marketplace scams and accounting tricks. His rough-shaven face and tattered, threadbare coat suggest poverty rather than miserly accumulation. In place of pockets crammed with gold, the "purses" of his cheeks sag, empty.[59] Couetyse looks "hungrily" because such excessive desire is constitutively voracious, and yet such an appearance could be easily mistaken for one of true need.

The sins of Couetyse consist of precisely those acts prohibited by statutory law: dishonest retailing and trading, mis-weighing and mis-measuring, stretching cloth, diluting ale, clipping coins, and usury. All of these result in profits unfairly won, and if one repents of the dishonesty but continues to enjoy the profits of it, repentance is not true. Repentance declares to Couetyse, "Y can the nat assoile / Til thow haue ymad by thy myhte to alle men restitucioun"; indeed, Repentance reminds us, and the friars, that anyone else who has benefited indirectly from such practices is also responsible for making repayment to the extent that he is able (*by thy myhte*) (C.VI 294–300). Significantly, not only is the confession of Couetyse the longest of the seven, but it is the only sin that Langland associates with a failure of restitution, and thus it is the only sin that Repentance cannot absolve. It is also the only one of the sins with whom Repentance resorts to name-calling: "Thow art an unkynde creature" (294). In Langland's usage, unkindness combines both senses of unnaturalness and cruelty: to be "unkynde," as in the Good Samaritan's sermon on charity, is to be monstrously indifferent to the sufferings of others, to be inhuman in one's lack of compassion and fellow feeling.

"Robert the ruyflare," by contrast, looks "on *reddite*" and weeps because he has "nat" with which to pay back his debt. The robber who would pay restitution if he had the means to do so appeals directly to Christ in hopes that divine mercy will "mitigate" the strict demands of justice:

> "Crist, that on Caluarie on the crosse deyedest
> Tho Dysmas my brother bisouhte the of grace
> And haddest mercy vppon that man for *Memento* sake,
> So rewe on So rewe on me, Robert, þat *reddere* ne haue,
> Ne neuere wene to wynne with craft that Y knowe.
> For thy mochel mercy mitigacioun Y biseche;
> Dampne me nat at Domesday for þat Y dede so ylle!"
> (C.VI 318–324)

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As John Alford has suggested, Robert's tears and his identification with the good thief on the cross suggest the possibility of salvation through contrition alone, but they also raise the question of whether the robber's contrition is sufficient to merit such an exception.[60] Clearly, not all failures to pay have the same moral meaning: Couetyse does not make restitution because he is "unkynde," the antithesis of charity, whereas Robert elicits the Dreamer's pity because it seems that he would pay if he could. Repentance seems to think that Robert is likely to make it to heaven ("thow romest toward heuene"), and yet his salvation is not certain: "What byful of this feloun Y can nat fayre shewe" (C.VI 330, 325). The problem is an epistemological one. When a penitent sinner makes restitution, the monetary quantification of the debt means that there is no ambiguity about whether and when it has been paid. When contrition must substitute for a precise repayment, it is impossible to know how much contrition is enough to equal the unpaid debt. In other words, it is much easier to convert sorrow into dollars than it is to convert dollars into sorrow.

A similar epistemological uncertainty characterizes the Dreamer's attempt to quantify his future spiritual profits in the important "Author's Apologia" passage in Passus V of the C text. Here, Reason's charge against the Dreamer is that he is idle; it is the same charge made by various speakers in the poem against the friars and false beggars, and it constitutes a moral failure in literal and in allegorical terms. On a literal level, an able-bodied but idle man upsets the balance of production and consumption because he takes from the economy's total stock of resources without contributing to it. The point here is not about the spiritual value of labour for its own sake, as an intrinsically beneficial or purgative exercise, but rather about the actual amount of goods produced and materials available to sustain a community, "þat to þe comune nedeth" (C.V 20). Reason asks him to justify his inactivity, and in so doing catalogues various ways in which a man "In hele and in inwitt" might contribute to the common good – by piling hay, binding straw, guarding fields, making shoes, or keeping cattle (C.V 12–21). Querying the source of the Dreamer's daily bread – if the Dreamer does not labour, and has not "londes to lyue by," that is, family wealth – Reason concludes he must be a "spille-tyme" and a beggar (C.V 26–27). Reason then states that the "lollarne life" is worthless ("lytel is preysed") because the vagabond is in debt not only to the community but to God, who is a strict and scrupulous accountant. As Reason declares, "ryhtfulnesse rewardeth ryht as men deserueth. / *Reddet vnicuique iuxta opera sua*" (C.V 32–32a). Reason thus shifts the terms of signification from the literal to the allegorical, insofar as,

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here, the socio-political and the soteriological meaning of labour and payment intersect. What a person produces materially (hay, shoes, cows, "Or eny other kynes craft þat to þe comune nedeth" [20]) will be rewarded by God in exact spiritual wages ("rewardeth *ryht*"). The shifting terms of the allegory result in the moral imperative of productivity: material lack is conflated with spiritual lack, economic mismanagement is not merely, or even primarily, a symbol of sin but both its cause and its result. The parables alluded to in the apologia passage suggest that the Dreamer's failures are indeed failures of economic management, a failure to produce in equal measure to his consumption, and even a failure to generate a profit over and above his basic needs.[61]

The entire passage concludes with the Dreamer's comparison of the spiritual profit he seeks to the material profit sought by a merchant. More specifically, he likens the affective and professional orientation of the poet to that of a merchant: both are driven by a mixture of hope and love of risk; both are, in a word, gamblers. The Dreamer confesses that he has wasted time and therefore has taken without giving, as Conscience and Reason charge, but he lives in hope

> as he þat ofte hath ychaffared
> And ay loste and loste and at þe laste hym happed
> A bouhte suche a bargayne he was þe bet euere,
> And sette al his lost at a leef at the laste ende,
> Such a wynnyng hym warth thorw wyrdes of grace:
> *Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in agro.*
> *Mulier que inuenit dragmam.*
> So hope Y to haue of hym þat is almighty
> A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
> That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne.
>
> (C.V 94–101)

Since the Dreamer's failures are essentially economic failures of idleness and wastefulness, it is difficult to disentangle here the metaphorical merchant's material losses from the literal Dreamer's spiritual losses. Just as the spiritual pilgrimage in Passus VIII becomes the daily labour of spinning and ploughing, so here does material lack become equated with spiritual lack, financial debt with the debt of sin. But this passage also expresses profound faith in the mysterious workings of "chaffar," of trade and exchange, endeavours that, unlike the manual labour to which Long Will feels himself unsuited, rely on the "wyrdes of grace."

The "grace" that Langland hopes for in this passage is not, as Anne Middleton has suggested, the kind of "divine courtesy or favor [. . .]

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imagined in the poem in the form of royal and magnate gift – a kind of sublimely generous divine largesse or patronage – which nevertheless resembles too closely various forms of morally problematic and extravagant metropolitan enterprise, as in the meed episode in the first vision."[62] The poet's hope for a portion of grace from God himself strikes a very different note, and operates with a very different logic, from the typical plea for patronage, as his use of the word "wyrdes" conveys. The plural "wyrdes" might be *personified* in some contexts as the three sisters, but it is not *personal* in the sense of royal patronage or gift. By contrast with a begging poem, such as Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* or "The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse," there is no flattery here, and there is no humility topos, just as there is no clever or oblique request for financial support; implicitly, these lines do not imagine a possible patron as their auditor, even a divine patron. In other words, Langland is expressly *not* hoping for a gift in the sense of those offered by Mede, one based on loyalty and favouritism, or as a *quid pro quo*. Rather, the "profit" for which he hopes is one that, if it comes, will come like the scriptural treasure buried in a field or the found coin, seemingly by chance but actually by means of the power of faith. This is the mercantile faith that shares its etymological and conceptual roots with *credere* and *credit*, or what Chaucer called *creaunce,* and, as we have seen, it expresses belief in the collective values and behaviour that constitute the economy itself. The Dreamer here resembles the spendthrift knight of romance, whose meticulous accounting of debts is joined paradoxically to a non-rational and unstinting faith that is manifest as a willingness to take risks and to extend credit beyond all measure. And just as the rule of debt payment is called in to make a clear distinction between proper and improper types of exchange, so is the mercantile wager of credit called in to distinguish between the poet's risky venture and the waster's lazy begging. In both cases, the one looks a lot like the other – the payment of mede and the payment of mercede, the wandering poet and the wandering vagrant; they are distinguishable only by the principles of debt and credit.

At the same time, the difficulty of measuring contrition or spiritual profit without any clear material instantiation, in the absence of restitution or monetary gains, means that the dangerous similarity between the faithful merchant and the wasteful beggar remains, casting a dark shadow of doubt over the Dreamer's quest for "kynde knowyng" of salvation, to the very end of the poem. The two forms of "lyflode" are closely related because neither one involves tangible labour, the fruits of which can be easily measured and recompensed. And just as the faithful merchant hopes

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for grace without asking for meed, so is the beggar's only hope for salvation to be found in venturing and waiting, but not actually begging. In Truth's Pardon, merchants are included "in the margine," while those who beg without need are resolutely excluded. Indeed, the finely detailed and poignant description of the sufferings of the poor that Langland added to the C text serve to bolster a point that is, in reality, less about alleviating that suffering and more about detecting false or dishonest claims of need. The poem's insistence that the "boek banneth beggarie" means the rich are obligated to give only to the truly needy, and, as a corollary, the truly needy must not *ask* for alms. In both the B and the C text, the difficulty of discerning who is deserving of alms places intense scrutiny and responsibility on the poor themselves: the only virtue in poverty is enduring it with patience, that is, not attempting to ameliorate it on your own behalf. Those who do beg and ask for alms are indistinguishable from the friars and the other "wastours" condemned in the Prologue.[63]

In the B text, Langland's remarkable mistrust of material poverty is expressed in the equation of begging with spiritual debt, a debt that the beggar owes to God *with interest*:

> For he þat biddeþ, borweþ, and bringeþ hymself in dette.
> For beggeres borwen eueremo, and hir borgh is God Almy3ty –
> To yelden hem þat yeueþ hem, and yet vsure moore:
> *Quare non dedisti pecuniam meam ad mensam, vt*
> *ego veniens cum vsuris exigissem vtique illam?*
> (B.VII 79–81b)

The reference to Luke 19 and the parable of the ten minas, in the context of a passage banning beggary and excluding beggars from Truth's Pardon, implies not only that the undeserving poor are in debt to God but also that they are poor because of their own failures to work hard and to manage money wisely. In a characteristic Langlandian move, the allegory works both ways: material poverty results in spiritual debts, even as spiritual failings are manifest in material debts. The theme of economic mismanagement prompts, in turn, the final salvo in the passus, against the bishops who are the ultimate cause of society's moral decay because they "soffre suche sottes and oþere synnes regne" (C.IX 256). The ten minas wasted by the unproductive steward morph into the sheep whose sores fester under the careless watch of the bad shepherd: he, too, will have to make his reckonings before his master on Judgment Day and will be judged for failing to turn a profit (C.iX 269–272). At that time, the shepherd-bishop will not have earned enough "huyre," or wages, to cover his own debt, and

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so he will receive neither "mede ne mercy" (274). The scene of pardon that began so reassuringly has concluded with stark and unforgiving calculations. Alluding to Wimbledon's sermon, the pardon says, in effect, pay what you owe or you will face "Purgatorye for thy paie or perpetuel helle" (279). And indeed, when the priest reads aloud the actual words inscribed on the document, the message of Truth simply distills the foregoing drama of sorting souls: "Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum" (285a–b). There is, ultimately, no pardon here; there is only the message of debt payment repeated again: pay what you owe or face damnation.

The indeterminacy of "enough" is closely linked to the problem of defining need in the poem, for what is "enough" is defined by what is necessary for survival. It is no mere coincidence, then, that the C text's final passus opens with the Dreamer's encounter with allegorical Nede. "Heuy chered" and "elyng in herte" because he does not know where to find food (C.XXII 2), the Dreamer is wandering aimlessly when he is confronted by Nede, who calls him a "faytour," or imposter, a false beggar. Nede then chides the Dreamer for failing to take the food and clothing he needs for his survival, invoking the *ius necessitatis,* reminding him that "nede ne hath no lawe, ne neuere shal falle in dette" (C.XXII 10). Nede may take what is required for survival, that is, as long as he takes *only* what is necessary; to do so, need must be guided by *Spiritus temperancie.* Nede's speech here echoes the lesson given by Holy Church in the poem's opening passus, which counsels "mesure" in food, drink, and clothing:

> Aren non nidefole but tho thre, and nemne hem I thenke.
> And rekene hem by rewe – reherse hem wher þe liketh.
> The first is fode, and vesture þe seconde,
> And drynke þat doth the good – ac drynke nat out of tyme.
> [. . .]
> Mesure is medecyne, thogh þow muche 3erne;
> Al is nat good to þe gost þat þe gott ascuth
> Ne liflode to þe lycame that lef is to the soule.
>
> (C.I 21–35)

It is clear in these lines what things are needful; less clear is the precise amount of these three things that is sufficient yet does not cross the threshold of excess. Nede's appeal to temperance merely applies a different name to the same undefinable measure. Tellingly, Truth's declaration in the B text that "He haþ ynou3 þat haþ breed ynou3" (B.VII 85) is replaced in the C text with an expression of unknowability: "Woet no man, as Y wene, who is worthy to haue [alms]" (C.IX 70). The problem with

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relying on need to determine what is "enough" is that both terms are defined only in relation to each other and to a series of other near-synonyms. We seem, in other words, to be locked into a tautology, in which *need* determines *enough* and *enough* determines *need*. Temperance involves eating and drinking only what is needful; what is needful is what is dictated by temperance. As Mann puts it, "Need's moral role in establishing 'mesure' is a disciplinary, policing role; it sets limits, it balances and regulates, producing physical and spiritual health"[64]; but, of course, the inverse is also true, that such limits are defined by need. For Langland, as Andrew Galloway writes, need is "finally beyond human reckoning: 'God woot who hath nede,' the narrator sums up. This is both a literal statement and a cry of despair, since in the poem, no human being can assess the value of this basic term."[65] With this cry of despair, the Dreamer also expresses the poem's ultimate failure to measure what we owe, for each term of measurement is essentially and tightly linked with the others: if we cannot know how much we need, we cannot know if we have taken too much, and so whether we are in arrears and accruing interest to God, and ultimately what we must repay in order to balance the ledger. In this way, Langlandian salvation anxiety shares key features in common with later Protestant anxiety as Weber diagnosed it, insofar as both are responses to epistemological uncertainty. But the difference, as we will see in the next chapter, is that the nature of debt for Langland leads to an emphasis on repayment rather than on grace or election, an emphasis expressed in a dual imperative to labour and to perform good works.

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