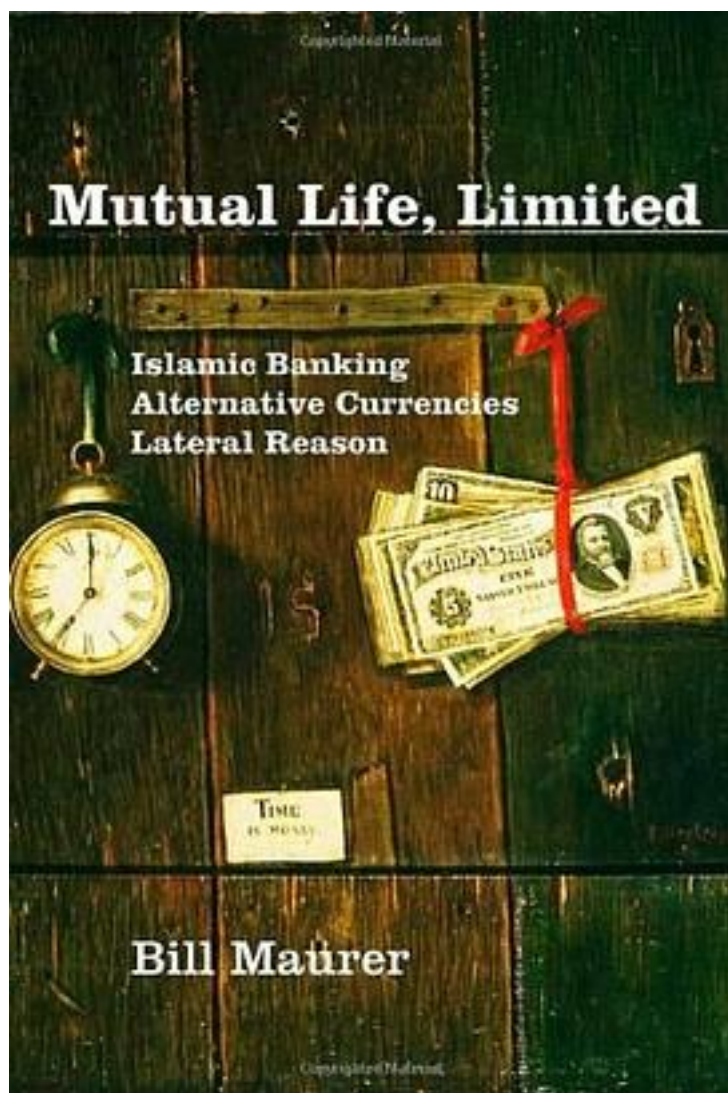


Mutual Life, Limited



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著者:Maurer, Bill

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Why are people continually surprised to discover that money is "just" meaning? "Mutual Life, Limited" spends time among those who, in acknowledging the fictions of finance, are making money anew. It documents ongoing efforts to remake money and finance by Islamic bankers who seek to avoid interest and local currency proponents who would stand outside of national economies. It asks how alternative moneys both escape and reenact dominant forms of money and finance, and reflects critically on their broader implications for scholarship. Based on fieldwork among participants in a local currency system in Ithaca, New York, and among Islamic banking practitioners in the United States, Indonesia, and elsewhere, this book exploits the convergence between the reflexivity of monetary alternatives and social inquiry by questioning the equivalence between money and ethnography. Can money ever be adequate to the value backing it? Can social description ever be adequate to messy and contingent realities? Bill Maurer's ethnographic discovery is that ethnography as such - the holistic description of a way of life - cannot be sustained when faced with a set of practices that anticipates and incorporates it in advance. His fluently written book represents an unprecedented critique of social scientific approaches to money through an ethnographic description of specific monetary alternatives, while also speaking broadly to the very problem of anthropological knowledge in the twenty-first century.

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