

MTAP. AUTO-COMMENTARY

ONE COULD SAY THAT THE DISTINCTIVE CHOICES OF MTAP BOIL DOWN TO THESE: 1) THE idea of rendering prior results organic, in the form of a theory; 2) the generalization of the concept of real abstraction; 3) the theoretical acceptance of the technical system as a component, alongside capital, of a broader process; 4) the emphasis on the idea of earthly redemption; 5) the definition of Augustinian religions. ¶ Almost everything else was already, for the most part, present in the authors listed in the Preface and especially in Camatte: his is the idea of a species-wide illness, which he called *speciosis*, with its individual repercussion, *ontosis*, as is much of the conclusions of the Postilla — his the formula "Against all hope".

1) AN EXPLICIT THEORY.

MTAP saw as its task the selection, from a centuries-old mass of penetrating reflections on the human condition, of a series of evidences and theoretical proposals, composing them into a coherent framework. ¶ This framework is informed by the twentieth-century view of science, medicine, and engineering: disciplines that now take for granted operating and choosing in a field of reality largely obscure — on the basis of partial evidence, missing or approximate data, probabilistic knowledge and operational rules — building models rarely causal in the classical sense. ¶ The explicit theoretical form — and thus well exposed to criticism and amendments — is, yes, also an invitation to those who reflect on these themes to do likewise.

2) REAL ABSTRACTION.

It is extended from a characteristic proper to money (Sohn-Rethel) to a class that includes television (McLuhan), imperial roads (Mumford), smartphones, the State, up to Borgesian *brömr*: objects that are born from ideas and act upon the real.

3) THE TECHNICAL SYSTEM.

The emphasis on the autonomy of the technical system allows for the integration of evidence that has been effectively overlooked, not only within the Marxist sphere: the insights of Mumford, Heidegger, Ellul, and — on the organizational-bureaucratic front — of Bruno Rizzi. The theory thus attempts to harmonize these contributions with the Marxian idea of subsumption, while redefining its subjects. ¶ In Marx (perhaps not entirely free from unconscious religious schemas: a monotheism of capital and a messianism of the proletariat), capital is the only subsuming subject and subsumes everything. But this "everything" — that which is subsumed — remains conceptually indeterminate beyond industrial labor. ¶ In MTAP, two subsuming subjects operate in parallel: capital subsumes the *Gemeinwesen*: it transforms direct human relations into monetary mediations (from breastfeeding to formula, from friendship to networking, from family care to purchasable services); the technical system subsumes human, biological, and natural activity: it replaces faculties and processes with technical devices (from memory to the database, from orientation to GPS, from birth to assisted reproduction, from breath to respirators). ¶ Each is driven by its own intrinsic dream: unlimited valorization for capital, unlimited substitution of the natural given for technique. The two subjects operate in a conflictual interaction, mutually modifying each other, but without either having so far established a definitive hierarchy over the other.

4) EARTHLY REDEMPTION.

Voegelin read modernity as a rebirth of ancient gnosis: man who wants to remake the world, transform immanence into salvation, build paradise on earth and creates totalitarian hell. In his schema, Christianity opposes gnosis. This reading on one hand does not account for the contemplative and world-fleeing line present in gnosis (not only Simone Weil), on the other hand it ignores the gnostic-redemptive core already operative in Pauline-Johannine Christianity and especially in Augustine. ¶ MTAP, by redefining that driving idea — from gnosis to earthly redemption — achieves greater explanatory results with less factual reduction.

5) THE AUGUSTINIAN RELIGIONS.

MTAP identifies as Augustinian religions that family of Christianities — practical Catholicism (beyond Thomistic doctrinal oscillations), Lutheranism, Calvinism — which share: a fallen nature-creation to be redeemed; a pessimistic anthropology: corrupt human nature, impotent will; contempt for human naturalness: the body as a burden; emphasis on grace as an external power that redeems from within; liquidation of the anti-abstractive elements of the evangelical message: openness to the Simple, critique of activism ("Martha, Martha, you are worried..."); critique of value ("Freely you have received, freely give...") and of accumulation ("Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth..."), scandalous welcome of children ("unless you become like..."). Protestantism is not a break but a radicalization: Luther and Calvin expel evangelical residues (it is no coincidence that Lutherans expel children from churches) and carry Augustine to its extreme consequences. ¶ The definition of Augustinian religions allows the overcoming of some difficulties in the Weberian thesis on the relationship between the capitalist spirit and the Protestant ethic: work as a calling, worldly asceticism as an instrument of grace, rational order as an expression of faith. But this schema implied an artificial historical discontinuity, a cage of dates already questioned by the work of Sombart and Fanfani, who had shown how economic rationality, accounting, and accumulation were operative centuries before the Reformation (1517).

INTRIGUING LINES OF RESEARCH.

MTAP alludes to the existence of intuitions regarding the process of abstraction from its very beginnings. Those still detectable are formulated in the language of their respective cultures and identify—by personifying it—not death or illness, but precisely that dynamic as "evil". ¶ The Qur'an narrates the fall of Iblis with a detail absent from the canonical biblical tradition: when God orders the prostration before Adam, Iblis refuses, declaring, "I am better than him: You created me from fire, and You created him from clay" (7:12). The motif has precedents in the *Life of Adam and Eve* (Judeo-Christian apocryphon, 1st century): Samael/Satan refuses to bow to "a creature of mud". This figure, identified in the Christian tradition as the "father of lies" and "impostor", finds its modern counterpart in the process that systematically substitutes the real with simulacra. ¶ The substitutive mechanism was also intuited in literature. Edgar Allan Poe in *The Man That Was Used Up* (1839): the protagonist, a celebrated general, reveals himself to be an assemblage of prostheses, dependent on a servant to "reconstruct" himself every morning. An illusory copy of the human, he appears autonomous but is utterly dependent. ¶ Impressive for its precision and depth is the Borgesian proposal of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* (1940), a project conceived "in hatred of Christ"—and thus of the Incarnation—which aims to construct a Gnostic universe alternative to the material creation, constituted of pure ideas liberated from matter. ¶ On a lighter note—where the intuition concerns rather the modes of resistance—worth mentioning is also the Taoist figure of Lord Emsworth, who, by pretending to be more foolish than he is, always manages to enjoy the muddy companionship of his beloved sow, escaping the repetitive schemes of his sisters, boring and domineering domestic incarnations of abstraction.

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