

CHAPTER 7

The Baptism of Money and the Secret of Capital

The Baptism of Money and the Birth of Capital

According to the belief in *el bautizo del billete* (baptism of the bill) in the southern Cauca Valley, the godparent-to-be conceals a peso note in his or her hand during the baptism of the child by the Catholic priest. The peso bill is thus believed to be baptized instead of the child. When this now baptized bill enters into general monetary circulation, it is believed that the bill will continually return to its owner, with interest, enriching the owner and impoverishing the other parties to the deals transacted by the owner of the bill. The owner is now the godparent of the peso bill. The child remains unbaptized, which if known to the parents or anybody else would be a cause of great concern since the child's soul is denied supernatural legitimacy and has no chance of escaping from limbo or purgatory, depending on when it dies. This practice is heavily penalized by the Church and the government.

The baptized bill receives the name—the “Christian name” as we say in English—that the baptismal ritual was meant to bestow on the child. The bill is now referred to as Marlene, Jorge, Tomás, and so forth—whatever name the parents had decided to call the child. To set the baptized bill to work, the godparent pays the bill over as part of a routine monetary transaction, such as when one pays for some goods in a store, and mutters a refrain like the following:

José
¿te vas o te quedas?

(José
Are you going or staying?)

¿te vas o te quedas? Are you going or staying?
¿te vas o te quedas? Are you going or staying?}

Referred to by its name, the bill is asked three times whether it is going to return to its godparent or not. If everything works as it should, the bill will soon return to its godparent, bringing a large amount of money with it. This transferral is accomplished invisibly.

A black middle-class family owned a corner store in the village. Halfway through the morning, when the wife was alone, she went out the back and then quickly returned because she thought she heard some noise in the till. Opening it, she found all the cash gone. She then remembered some peculiar behavior on the part of one of the customers earlier on in the morning and then realized that someone had passed her a baptized bill. As soon as she had turned her back, this bill had made off with all the money in the cash register.

In a busy supermarket in the nearby large city, a shop detective was startled to hear a woman standing near a cash register chanting under her breath: "Guillermo! ¿Te vas o te quedas? ¿Te vas o te quedas? ¿Te vas o te quedas?" He promptly surmised that she had passed a baptized bill and was waiting for it to return to her with the contents of the register, and he immediately arrested her. She was taken away and nobody knows what happened thereafter.

One of the few successful black store owners in the village was saved from a great loss only by a most unusual coincidence. Serving in his shop, he was startled to hear a strange noise in his cash register. Peering in, he saw two bills fighting with one another for possession of the contents, and he realized that two customers, each with their own baptized bills, must have just paid them over and were awaiting their return. This strange coincidence allowed him to prevent the spiriting away of his cash.

In precapitalist societies, commodity exchange and the market are absent. Animism, magic, and various forms of fetishism flourish. But is that fetishism the same as the fetishism of commodities that is found in a capitalist system of socioeconomic organization? Marx, for one, was clearly of the opinion that the two were very different and that in posing this question one was well on the way toward demystifying the illusions that the commodity form of exchange induced. "The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labor as long as they take the form of commodities," he wrote, "vanishes therefore as soon as we come to other forms of production" (1967:76). Yet we should add that when the commodity system encroaches on a pre-

capitalist social formation, the two forms of fetishism, the magic of reciprocity exchange and the magic of commodity exchange, impinge on one another and coalesce into a new form.

The belief in the baptism of money in the southern Cauca Valley is that through this illicit religious mechanism—illicit in that it deceives the parents, the child, and the priest and spiritually mutilates the child by annihilating its acceptance into the citizenry of God—money will breed money, that money will grow. This is merely an exotic expression of the standard Marxist formula for capitalist circulation, $M-C-M'$ (money–commodity–more money) or simply $M-M'$, as opposed to the circulation that is associated with use-value and the peasant mode of production, $C-M-C$ (commodity A–money–commodity B, or selling in order to buy). The problem that Marx set himself, the mystery of capitalist economic growth and accumulation of capital in which capital appeared to breed more of itself, is in this situation seen to occur by the aid of the supernatural forces that were invoked by the Christian baptism of the money bill. Once activated in this way, money becomes interest-bearing capital. An inert medium of exchange becomes a self-breeding quantity, and in this sense becomes a fetish—a thing with lifelike powers.

This is truly a bizarre belief. But one has to consider that the system against which it is leveled is surely no less bizarre. We who have been accustomed to the laws of capitalist economics for several centuries have grown to accept complacently the manifestations of these laws as utterly natural and commonplace. The early prophets and analysts of capitalism, such as Benjamin Franklin, already regarded the operations of the economy as completely natural; hence, they could casually refer to interest as an inherent property of capital itself (see chapter 2).

As expressed in their folklore concerning the baptism of money, however, the peasantry of the southern Cauca Valley regard this as utterly unreal and supernatural. Moreover, the baptism of the bill is done at a terrible cost to the child: it denies him a legitimate place in the rites of the life cycle and the cosmological order and hence bears the same stigma as does the wage workers' contract with the devil. This immorality of the process distinguishes the baptized bill from a "pure" or capitalist commodity fetish.

In addition the baptism of the bill is still seen as the outcome of a chain of events that is *initiated by man*. It is true that the relationship is still mystified, since supernatural power is seen as necessary for the money to bear interest, but on the other hand, it is clearly understood that the money would not do this on its own. The multiplication of money as capital is not seen as a power inherent in

money. Thus, it is not commodity fetishism, since these people do not consider it to be a *natural* property of money to reproduce. Indeed, it is seen as so unnatural that supernatural power has to be invoked by the most devious and destructive means. Although the true relationship of capital to labor is mystified, man is still seen as necessary to trigger off the magical cycles; this is in keeping with the fact that in a use-value economy the relations that persons enter into in their work appear to them as direct, reciprocal, personal relations and not as activities controlled by the relationships of their products. Indeed, the specific forms of precapitalist fetishism that here concern us arise precisely out of this consciousness of human interdependence and reciprocity, in which both persons and their products are seen as forming a unity. When people are confronted by the commodity market in its early stages of penetration, the warping and imbalancing of that interdependence cast the fetish into the realm of the unnatural and evil—the illicit baptism of money and the proletarians' devil contract.

Analogical Reason and the Philosophy of Use-Values

It is striking how similar the principles that underlie the belief in the baptized bill are to those of money and exchange in Aristotle's *Politics* and in the economic theory of the late Middle Ages. Basic to this outlook was the distinction Aristotle drew between what are today called use-value and exchange-value, a distinction that occupies a central place in Marxist theory as well. In book 1 of *The Politics* Aristotle writes:

Every article or property has a double use; both uses are uses of the thing itself, but they are not similar uses; for one is the proper use of the article in question, the other is not. For example, a shoe may be used either to put on your foot or to offer in exchange. Both are uses of the shoe; for even he that gives a shoe to someone who requires a shoe, and receives in exchange cash or food, is making use of the shoe as shoe, but not the use proper to it, for a shoe is not expressly made for exchange purposes. The same is the case with other articles of property (1962:41).

Although the exchange function of any article could be legitimately utilized within a householding or subsistence economy, it was from this exchange function that money making or capitalism arose to

the detriment of the householding or "natural economy." As Roll points out in *A History of Economic Thought*, this distinction between the two arts of money making "was not just an attempt to drive home an ethical distinction. It was also a true analysis of two different forms in which money acts in the economic process: as a medium of exchange whose function is completed by the acquisition of the good required for the satisfaction of a want; and in the shape of money capital leading men to the desire for limitless accumulation" (1973:33).

In his discussion of Aristotle, Roll emphasizes the idea that money as used in the circulation of use-values—Aristotle's householding, the natural economy—is barren. "Money is intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest; it is by nature barren; through usury it breeds, and this must be the most unnatural of all the ways of making money" (1973:33). This information can be organized in tabular form (see Table 2).

Several analogies emerge from the set of contrasts depicted in the table, for instance:

Use-Value of Money		Exchange-Value of Money
(money)		(capital)
<u>natural</u>	:	<u>unnatural</u>
barren		fertile

But in nature, in the biological world for example, things are naturally fertile. Aristotle writes: "Money was intended to be a means of exchange, interest represents an increase in the money itself. We speak of it as a yield, as of a crop or a litter; for each animal produces its like, and interest is money produced out of money. Hence of all ways of getting wealth this is the most contrary to nature" (1962:46).

Using the method propounded by Mary Hesse in her discussion of analogy, this can be expressed as a set of positive and negative analogies, in which there is explicit recognition of both similarity and difference between the paired terms that constitute the analogy (1963).

Biological Realm		Use-Value of Money		Exchange-Value of Money
(natural)		(natural)		(unnatural)
<u>animal</u>	:	<u>M</u>	:	<u>M</u>
litter		M		M'

TABLE 2:
Characteristics of Money

Type of Value	Use-Value	Exchange-Value
Aim of circulation	To satisfy natural wants	To gain money as an end in itself
Characteristics of money	Means of exchange	Means to make more money (means as ends; capital)
	C-M-C	M-C-M'
	Natural	Unnatural
	Barren	Fertile

Note: M = Money; M' = Money plus interest on that money, i.e., capital.

The analogy between animals and money as use-value expresses relationships both of similarity and of difference. They are similar in that both are part of the natural world and their properties function to ensure the original purpose of the ideal society: "to re-establish nature's own equilibrium of self-sufficiency," as Aristotle phrases the issue. They are different in that it is the natural property of animals to breed more of themselves, whereas money is by nature barren.

The analogies between animals and capital and between money and capital are also based on a set of similarities and differences. For instance, capital reproduces, just as animals do; but whereas one is natural, the other is unnatural. Likewise, money in the use-value paradigm is similar to money as capital, but whereas the former is barren, the latter is fertile.

Therefore, the task facing the inhabitants of the plantation zones in the southern Cauca Valley is how to explain, and in some cases actually effect, the transformation of properties of similarity into those of difference and those of difference into those of similarity. They must explain how characteristics that were once the exclusive property of animals are now ascribed to money, the natural property of which is to remain barren. They must explain the transformation of money into interest-bearing capital and the conversion of use-value into exchange-value.

This is done through the illicit rite of baptizing money. Unbap-

tized or natural money is not and should not be capital: it cannot and should not yield interest in the way capital or animals breed more of themselves. Money can achieve this unnatural property only if it is acted on ritually through baptism. Barren money can become unnaturally fertile when transferred to God's domain and stamped with his life-giving properties.

The efficacy and rationality of the magical act seem to be understood by means of a comparison between observed relationships of similarity and difference in separate spheres of existence, and the rite is utilized to manipulate and transmute relationships of difference into relationships of similarity:

Natural		Unnatural
<u>animal</u>	:	<u>M</u>
litter		M'

The litter is the natural yield of the animal, whereas the increase on capital (M') is unnatural.

The negative analogy (the comparison of difference) can be overcome and harnessed to the comparison of similarity (positive analogy) by means of the baptismal rite:

<u>baptism of child</u>		<u>illicit baptism of money</u>
legitimation and growth	:	delegitimation and growth

Nevertheless, that transferral is achieved by an illicit rite when applied to money, and that rite is a sacrilege, which deprives a human child from receiving the sanctification and endorsement that is necessary to the fulfillment of human potential. Thus, although money can be converted into interest-bearing capital, this is seen as both supernatural and antinatural. Money cannot do this on its own; for it is not an inherent property of money. It has to be supernaturally activated, and the only way of effecting such an activation is illegal and against the norms of the culture. Capital is thus explained in terms that reveal it to be unnatural and immoral. The analogical paradigms based on a use-value orientation can be restructured through supernatural means, but for all the restructuring, the original meaning of use-value economics is still upheld.

The Devil Contract and the Magic of Capitalist Production

In the case of the devil contract made by the plantation wage laborers in order to increase production, the money earned is understood to be barren. It can be spent only for luxury items, which must be consumed immediately. If the money is invested in land, the land will not bear fruit. If an animal is bought for fattening and future sale, that animal will die. Furthermore, the crop worked under a devil contract will also die: the ratoons of the sugarcane, for example, will cease to sprout and grow. Thus, in this case, although the proletarian's production may increase, the money is not fertile; in fact, it is redolent of infertility—the antithesis of baptized money.

What is the meaning of this? At one level this could be explained by the fact that the contract is made with God's antithesis—the devil. But one can dig deeper behind the symbols and explore Aristotle's and Marx's distinctions a little further. Aristotle makes the connection between production and the different forms of money in the following way: "Hence we seek to define wealth and money-making in different ways; and we are right in doing so, for they *are* different; on the one hand true wealth, in accordance with nature, belonging to household management, productive; on the other money-making, with no place in nature, belonging to trade and not productive of goods in the full sense" (1962:43). Here, the antithesis between money as a mere means of exchange and money as capital is paralleled by the contrast between productive and nonproductive goods and activities. Indeed, for Aristotle the contrast is even more stark than this since money making or capitalism is inherently *destructive* of the natural or householding economy: destructive of the reciprocal interplay of natural forces that are responsible for production and growth.

Thus, the initial reference to the barren and fertile characteristics of money as a medium of exchange is placed in the context of production and a more profound sense of fertility. The analogy between animals and their offspring on the one side and money breeding money on the other is a totally unnatural one in Aristotle's eyes: unnatural most especially in that the naturally barren form of money is grounded in productive activity—"in the full sense"—whereas the fertile form of money is not. Only in its naturally barren form does "money keep to its original purpose; to re-establish nature's own equilibrium of self-sufficiency." Hence, use-values, money as a neu-

tral mediator of exchange, nature's equilibrium of self-sufficiency, and productivity in the full sense are all intrinsically related and necessary to one another.

A basic set of positive and negative analogies that can be derived from this view is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{money}}{\text{capital}} \quad : \quad \frac{\text{productive capacity}}{\text{destructive}}$$

The problem facing the people in this culture is, therefore, how to explain and effect the inversion of these natural analogies, since the empirical fact of the matter is that production can be maintained and increased within the sphere of capitalist production. On inversion we have the following:

$$\frac{\text{money}}{\text{capital}} \quad : \quad \frac{\text{destructive}}{\text{productive}}$$

This inversion is effected and explained in the devil contract: through the agency of this evil and destructive force, production within capitalist relations on the sugar plantations can be increased. At the same time, as the analogy so neatly displays, the money wage gained is nonproductive: it kills whatever it buys except for luxury articles consumed immediately. The natural set of relationships that should obtain according to the use-value paradigm can be transformed into capitalist relationships that defy the use-value analogies. But these capitalist relationships are viewed neither as natural nor as good since they necessitate the agency of the devil.

Conclusion

The superstitions with which we are concerned in the Cauca Valley, namely, the devil contract and the baptism of money, are thus revealed to be beliefs that endorse systematically the logic of the contradiction between use-values and exchange-values. In so doing, these beliefs are identical with the basic tenets of Aristotelian economics, the dominant doctrine of economics as postulated by Aquinas and others in the late Middle Ages, and one of the basic premises of Marxism. These superstitions are not confused vestiges deriving from a prior era when peasant life or Church influence was more intact but are precise formulations that entail a systematic cri-

tique of the encroachment of the capitalist mode of production. As manifested by these beliefs, the sensitivity to the distinction between use-values and exchange-values is not the result of nostalgia or mummified ideals retained from the days when the peasant mode of production was flourishing. Nor can it be explained solely as a result of the coexistence of some peasant production with the developing capitalist mode of production. It is also due to the fact that the "slum economy" of the recently urbanized peasants is similarly one based to a major degree on use-value practices.

The paradigm of rationality entailed in these formulations is heavily dependent on analogical reason. Analogical explanations involve an account of the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, and the analogical mode of reasoning that is at issue here is inherently holistic and dependent on identifying things by their relationships to larger wholes. On the other hand, the causal paradigm that has so thoroughly permeated modern Western social science and the mainstream of what is loosely called Western thought since the seventeenth century is inherently atomistic and reductionist; it defines identity by the thing itself and not by the relation to the context of which the thing is a part.

The mode of analogical reason that is outlined above appears to be more prolific and consciously used in cultures that are guided by use-value economics, and as S. J. Tambiah has so elegantly displayed in his interpretation of Zande magic, an awareness of its logic and systematization dispels the pejorative confusions that are entailed when such beliefs are subjected to the canons of validity that are embodied in modern positivist methodology and utilitarian social philosophy (1973). Where Tambiah falls short, however, is in his failure to consider the underlying system of metaphysics from which the terms in such analogies draw their meaning. Although it is a great service to have demonstrated how apparently weird connections and influences between phenomena can be postulated and upheld in the purely formal properties of an analogical set, the indigenous ontology has to be considered as well. Placing the emphasis on the formal characteristics of analogical rationality gives us an understanding of the systematic precision that is entailed in modes of explanation that are not based on the cause and effect paradigm alone. But this takes us not much further than the nineteenth-century analyses of Tylor and Frazer, who exposed both the intellectual achievement of and also what they considered to be the fatal error entailed in the analogical formulas of magic: the error, that is, if these formulas were held to be instrumental means of achieving some concrete good. But if we do not subject these formulas to the

modern demand to explain such things by their utility, then not erroneous science but a statement about the meaning of the world confronts us in these magical expressions. Evans-Pritchard argued against the psychological reductionism and utilitarianism of Tylor and Frazer by saying that magical formulas are not psychological but social facts, the truth value of which lies in the language of social relationships and the inescapable legacy of culture (1933). To paraphrase Durkheim's famous aphorism regarding religion, magic is society casting spells on itself. Returning to the analogies that constitute magical beliefs, we have therefore to ask why certain properties and not others are considered to be analogically related in the first place anyway? Although we can point to the analogical relationship between money and capital, for instance, and demonstrate the problem and solution that such an analogy convey, we are still doing no more than pointing to a set of givens the meaning of which ultimately lies in a basis other than those given in the formal reasoning rules themselves. This basis is to be found in the metaphysics and the social philosophy of the group concerned, and in this specific case an important dimension of that philosophy is conveyed by the paradigm of use-value economics as that paradigm conveys the meaning of commoditization and reification.

The analogical mode of reasoning is compelling in use-value economies because things are seen not as their self-constituents but as the embodiments of relational networks. Things interact because of meanings they carry—sensuous, interactive, animate meanings of transitiveness—and not because of meanings of physical force locked in the privatized cell of self-enclosed thinghood.

The types of analogies that were considered in the examples taken from the Cauca Valley are interesting in that the relationship of cause and similarity between the separate terms that make up these analogies depend upon the total set and are not given in the terms themselves. The concept of "cause" herein entailed is not that of mechanical causation but that of pattern, association, and purpose. Nothing but immense confusion can result from subjecting this concept to the mechanical paradigm of interacting forces, which is akin to rebounding billiard balls or interlocking cog wheels; hence, when presented with such forms of reason, the reifying optic sees them as irrational. Describing the properties of the following type of analogy, which is the same type as those considered above, Hesse points out that the relations of similarity at the horizontal level are contingent upon the particular meaning established by the vertical relationships (1963).

<u>father</u>	:	<u>state</u>
child		citizens

Moreover, the vertical relationships themselves are not causal in any specific sense, and furthermore, if the individual terms are considered apart from the total analogical set, they each possess a *variety* of connotations. Thus, the specific meaning of any of the terms within the total structure is dependent on the total set of relationships. This is to say that the significance of the individual terms is *not* a result of their meaning as isolates, disconnected from other isolates. Rather, they are relational terms that embody the meaning established by the set of relationships of which any term is a part. Things are relationships, and these relationships are ontological rather than logical.

An analogy selects from a variety of possibilities in order to make one meaningful and persuasive. In the Cauca Valley examples, the meaning concerns the social preconditions of growth and exchange. This is not a science of things but a science of rhetoric, whose medium is social conditions and relations that are threatened with becoming things.

The individual terms are not viewed atomistically. They do not conform to the Newtonian corpuscular paradigm or what A. N. Whitehead calls a philosophy of external relations. Instead, they conform to an organic philosophy of internal relations, in which each of the separate terms embodies the total set of relationships of which it is a part (Whitehead, 1967: 111-18; Ollman, 1971: 27-42).

Put briefly, the metaphysical doctrine of external relations is the foundation of the analytic and reductive method; in this method, explanation analyzes any given phenomenon by its supposedly irreducible atomistic constituents and concludes by illustrating the mathematical laws of cause and effect that supposedly hold between these atoms, which in sum constitute the whole phenomenon. This doctrine is central to the Cartesian tradition and the view of nature with which Galileo, Descartes, and Newton propelled modern science and positivism on their successful course. Although discounted by theoretical physics since the early twentieth century, these ideas continue to provide the bases of modern social science and popular Western ideologies concerning society. Two properties concern us here. First, as Whitehead says: "The character of each of these ultimate things is thus conceived as its own private qualification. Such an existent is understandable in complete disconnection from any other such existent: the ultimate truth is that it requires

nothing but itself in order to exist" (1967: 113). In other words, the meaning or identity of a thing is given in itself alone, rather than in the context of which it is part. Second, as Whitehead also points out, by virtue of such decontextualization, relationships between things (and changes of things or their relationships) are conceived of as external to the things themselves. These concepts compel recourse to a type of deism and fetishism, which is how Newton himself conceptualized the cosmos of otherwise atomized things.

The fetishism that is inherent in the Cauca Valley beliefs arises from a quite contrary metaphysic and set of social preconditions. In the peasant and working-class epistemology individual terms or things are conceptualized as are Hegel's "moments": each expresses the totality of which it is the manifestation. Things contain the totality within themselves, so to speak, and can be seen causally, acting on and acted upon by other constituents. But they are of interest here primarily as ciphers and signs that echo the meaning of the system that society forms with them.

I, too, have chosen, and indeed felt forced, to interpret them in this sense, rather than see a world of atoms swimming mechanically in the ethereal vapors of time and space. Marxism itself rests on an acute appreciation of such a perspective (cf., Ollman, 1971), although this is commonly ignored because subsequent interpreters understood his notion of materialism to be the same as that of bourgeois science, mechanical and empirical.

In conclusion, it bears repeating that, although the analogical structures can be inverted and relationships can be transformed, in the examples drawn from the Cauca Valley, where one mode of production is displacing another, the ethics and reason of use-value are being maintained. The metaphysics that underlie the analogical mode have not been disowned even though the peasants now own little else than their abstract labor power. The analogies are not neutral, despite the neutralizing influence of the fact-value distinction that is intrinsic to modern science and economic theory, in which it is held that "economics is entirely neutral between ends; that in so far as the achievement of any end is dependent on scarce means, it is germane to the preoccupations of the economist. Economics is not concerned with ends as such" (Robbins, 1935: 24).

Nothing could be further from the economic theory and behavior of the peasants and field hands in the southern Cauca Valley, for whom economics is totally concerned with ends. Whether it is economic or whatever, reason is for them far more than the narrow concern with the maximal coordination of scarce means to alternate ends. Rather, reason is that which embodies the conditions of objec-

tive existence. Their understanding of capitalist reason and the praxis that it embodies leads them to conclude that that system is contrary to the laws of nature, evil, and ultimately destructive of the conditions of objective existence.

To subject their reason to the instrumentality of means and ends and to the empty formality of analogies considered apart from their contents and purposes is merely to hasten the demise of those conditions. A peasant society or community can be involved in commodity production, but this need not constitute it as a reified culture. A community can in many ways be affected and controlled by the wider capitalist world, but this in itself does not necessarily make such a community a replica of the larger society and the global economy. Attempts to interpret precapitalist social formations by means of what Polyani called our obsolete market mentality are misguided exercises in an ingenuous ethnocentrism, which, in fact, is not even applicable to the market society itself, but is merely a replication of its appearance.