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Jean-Pierre Voyer
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My Goal in Life

Jean-Pierre Voyer

Even though in a way I always knew it, I have only now become fully aware that my only goal in life, as soon as I read *Capital* in 1962, was to disqualify the reductionism of Marx. The term reductionism did not awake a response in me until now. I understood it, but didn't suspect its importance. Your letter revealed it to me.

Clearly justified in the sciences of nature, reductionism has no justification when it is a question of studying humanity itself. Without reductionism, these sciences wouldn't exist, there would be none of the applications of these sciences, no electricity, no atomic bomb, no genetically modified organisms, etc. One could say that reductionism is the principle of these sciences. The reply of Laplace to Napoleon (God is a useless hypothesis) effectively proves it. But one cannot dismiss God when one pretends to study humanity itself, and not only celestial mechanics. Marx's error is to dismiss thought in order to study humanity. Marx wanted to reduce the study of humanity to a kind of celestial mechanics despite all his claims to dialecticism. Sartre would say, "Materialism is a reductionism." He said it in his heroic (whisky and amphetamines) anti-reductionist attempt *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

The set of men being, of all the possible sets, *the only one that is a thing and not only a thought, cannot be dealt with by reductionism*, while if it is a thing-unlike other sets-it is because it contains thought. *The set of animals is only a thought* and cannot exist before the existence of thought. Unlike the genre of animals, the human genre is a thing. Animality or equinity are thoughts and only thoughts, humanity is a thing. Before the existence of thought, there were animals, perhaps, but certainly not multiplicities. Perhaps there were horses but not the horse genre. Multiplicities didn't exist until thought existed. They are only thoughts. The only multiplicity that is not only a thought is precisely humanity itself, and that because it contains thought. This collective being is the only one that doesn't depend on external thought **to exist** precisely because it contains thought. One shouldn't confuse the existence of horses with the existence of multiplicities. We might as well say that numbers existed before they were invented. One shouldn't confuse the existence of horses with their number, unless horses can count. Swift pretended that they could in his celebrated travels. The Platonists pretend that numbers existed before they were invented, but according to them, numbers exist in the sky of ideas, in which case we have no direct contact with them.

I don't have the **impression** that thought is the foundation of everything. I have only the **certitude** that one cannot study humanity by making an abstraction of the role of thought as Marx meant to do.

Likewise, my goal does not consist in conceiving things as they are before thought existed, but only in not considering humanity through reductionism. My program is much more limited than the one you propose at the end of your letter. Before asking myself if logic exists before thought exists, I ask myself what logic is at work within humanity if you don't dismiss thought as Marx did. For the moment this logic is totally unknown. In humanity, one so rarely encounters thought and the movement of thought that everyone is completely oblivious to it, the entire world thinks like Locke. And

Marx didn't improve things. He is more an heir of Locke than of Hegel. One could think that he *overdosed* on thought with Hegel, and, in a violent reaction, he took the opposite position. More seriously, Marx lived in an era of furious reductionism, which is generally known as scientism. Reductionism in physics is beneficial, it doesn't become scientism until the point that one tries to draw conclusions outside of physics. Everyone thinks it's noon according to their own watch, the cobblers want to explain the world through shoemaking. This is reductionism-scientism. Everything reduced to shoemaking. The world contains physics, physics doesn't contain the world.

Note: Reductionism failed in metamathematics. Hilbert's project was to guarantee the consistency of arithmetic by the supposedly simple-to-establish consistency of a simplified "little arithmetic," that is to say to guarantee the complicated through the simple. It is this project that Godel's 1931 demonstration annihilated. God is not simple. J.Y Girard in *Le théorème de Godel*, Seuil.

Reductionism: Tendency that consists in deriving the higher (the conscious, the vital) from the lower (physio-chemical) by attributing reality only to the simplest constituents and in considering them as more fundamental. *Encyclopédie Hachette*.