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## **Gramsci’s Marxism: The ‘Philosophy of Praxis’**

Peter D. Thomas

### **Introduction: a message in a bottle**

In the *Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci proposes the distinctive notion of a ‘philosophy of praxis.’ The interpretation of the significance of this suggestive formulation has constituted a fertile field of discussion both of Gramsci’s approach to philosophical questions in his prison writings and, more broadly, the nature of Marxist philosophy. Indeed, in the early years of the reception of the *Prison Notebooks*, the notion of a philosophy of praxis was sometimes understood as a merely formal device to evade prison censorship, or a ‘code word’ by means of which Gramsci disguised his true references.<sup>1</sup> This reading marked both the early years of the Italian debate (following the publication of a thematically organized edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in the late 1940s and early 1950s) and then the Anglophone and subsequently international debate in the wake of publication of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* in 1971. According to this interpretation, the notion of a philosophy of praxis could be ‘deciphered,’ or perhaps even effectively ‘replaced,’ by the term ‘Marxism’; in its turn, ‘Marxism’ was assumed to be a more or less stable body of doctrine in accord with the main lines of the version of Marxist orthodoxy that emerged in the later years of the Third International.<sup>2</sup> Gramsci’s proposal of a philosophy of praxis was thus argued to signal his fundamental allegiance, in however modulated a form, to the ‘actually existing’ Marxism that dominated the official communist parties throughout much of the 20th century.

For other interpretations, however, the philosophy of praxis was thought to indicate a distinctly ‘heretical’ dimension of Gramsci’s Marxism due, perhaps, to the excessive influence of Italian neo-idealism upon his intellectual development, either in the form of the liberal Benedetto Croce’s philosophical system or, more menacingly, in the activist dimensions of the fascist Giovanni Gentile’s ‘actualism.’<sup>3</sup> Some critics, both Marxist and non-Marxist alike, even went so far as to signal the notion of the philosophy of praxis as symptomatic of Gramsci’s effective departure from the Marxist tradition, with the elaboration

of a philosophical conception incompatible with the materialist conception of history that recalled more closely themes from the subjectivist tendency of classical German idealism, perhaps those of Fichte and Schelling even more than those of Hegel.<sup>4</sup> For these readings, then, the notion of a philosophy of praxis indicated a dimension of Gramsci's thought that, more or less implicitly or explicitly, in a more or less nascent or developed state, pointed beyond or outside of the Marxist traditions.

Another line of scholarship sought to draw attention to the specific, substantive elements within the Marxist traditions that Gramsci aimed to valorize and to elaborate further by means of the notion of a philosophy of praxis. There were some early significant attempts in this direction in the early years of Gramsci's reception, both in Italy and in other linguistic zones.<sup>5</sup> Above all, however, it was the publication (in Italian) of the critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in 1975, under the editorship of Valentino Gerratana, that provided scholars with more detailed knowledge of the development of Gramsci's carceral researches, thus allowing scholars to study the emergence and progressive development of Gramsci's central concepts. This was followed by the pioneering work of Gianni Francioni which emphasized the importance of studying the diachronic development of Gramsci's concepts throughout the different phases of the writing of the *Prison Notebooks*, from 1929 to 1935, situated firmly in their historical, cultural and political context.<sup>6</sup> Central to Francioni's study was the demonstration that the vocabulary of the *Prison Notebooks* is not fixed in definitive meanings, but displays significant developments – modifications and specifications as well as sometimes even revisions and radical transformations – across the articulated chain of concepts that Gramsci both appropriated from other thinkers and reworked and coined himself.<sup>7</sup> Francioni's approach has more recently given rise to a rich season of philological and contextualist studies, particularly in Italy.<sup>8</sup> This scholarship has argued that a diachronic reading of the *Prison Notebooks* reveals that Gramsci's proposal to develop a philosophy of praxis was an attempt to inherit critically central elements of Marx's critiques of philosophy, of ideology and political economy.

At the same time, these readings have also emphasized that the philosophy of praxis proposed in the *Prison Notebooks* should not be understood simply as Marxism as such, conceived as a finished system of thought without its own history of development and constitutive conflicts over its actual and potential meanings. Rather, the philosophy of praxis is better understood as Gramsci's own distinctive intervention into the debates of the 1920s and early 1930s regarding the nature of Marxist philosophy, and of Marxism as a

Weltanschauung or ‘conception of the world.’<sup>9</sup> The philosophy of praxis proposed in the *Prison Notebooks*, that is, can be regarded as an attempt to elaborate a distinctive form of inheritance of previous Marxist traditions, in a relation of both critical continuity and rupture, in order to elaborate a Marxism adequate to the challenges of Gramsci’s own time. Unknown at the time of its formulation beyond Gramsci’s closest circle of collaborators and interlocutors (his sister-in-law Tania, loyal friend Piero Sraffa and, at a distance, his comrade Palmiro Togliatti), subject to multiple interpretations in the early years of study of the *Prison Notebooks*, the proposal of a philosophy of praxis arrives to us today as a ‘message in a bottle,’ a neglected element of Marxism’s past that might play a role in the future revitalization and reformulation of Marxism in the 21st century.

## **Legacies of the Second International**

The notion of a philosophy of praxis cannot be found in Gramsci’s pre-prison writings, from his years as a young socialist activist and journalist in Turin, as a delegate to the Communist International in Moscow and Vienna in the early 1920s, to his assumption of leadership of the Italian Communist Party in the years immediately preceding his imprisonment in 1926. In texts from these periods Gramsci’s notion of philosophy in general (thus including that of Marxist philosophy as a specific instantiation of the genus) does not appear to display any distinctive or idiosyncratic features.<sup>10</sup> Philosophy is used to signify general systems of thought or conceptions of the world, more or less coherent, in a usage current in the philosophical debates of Italy in the early years of the 20th century, heavily influenced by Hegelian historicist perspectives and theories of the ethical state deriving from the Risorgimento.<sup>11</sup> Gramsci’s retrospective description in the *Prison Notebooks* of his youthful philosophical orientation as ‘tendentially somewhat Crocean’ (in the particular context of a discussion of the unity of theory and practice, written in April–May 1932) can here be misleading.<sup>12</sup> It has led some critics to suppose that Gramsci’s thought, in his early years and perhaps also in his ‘mature’ prison writings, is substantially reducible to the coordinates of Italian neo-idealism. In fact, however, the young Gramsci’s thinking was nourished by a wide range of the non-Marxist philosophical currents of the time, from Bergson’s vitalism, to Sorel’s anarcho-syndicalist notion of ‘myth,’ to elements of the Italian reception of pragmatism, elements of each of which he sought to harness for the interests of a revolutionary socialist politics. His concept of philosophy as such, however, does not exhibit

any particularly radical departure from a 'traditional' understanding of it as a sophisticated reflection on the constituent elements of the world and its relation to human thought.

Regarding Marxist philosophy, the young Gramsci appears not to have devoted significant energies to contesting the main lines of philosophical reflection current in the Marxism of the Second International, though the legacy of Labriola (the first significant Italian Marxist philosopher) and the 'post-Marxists' Croce and Gentile, with their emphasis upon the notion of praxis, were already a significant influence upon Gramsci's Marxism. The notion that a variant of materialism constituted the philosophical perspective most compatible with Marxism was an influential position in Second International Marxism, sometimes partially contested by strains of neo-Kantianism; in both cases, philosophy as such was effectively conceived in the sense of a 'first philosophy' (since Aristotle, often associated with the notion of 'metaphysics,' or an account of the causes and nature of reality). Philosophy, in this sense, was therefore a foundational discourse upon which science and other forms of human knowledge and practice could arise. Even during his period as leader of the Italian Communist Party in the mid 1920s, after returning from direct contact with the philosophical debates in the Soviet Union in 1922–3, Gramsci does not seem to have departed from the main lines of the 'orthodox' position regarding the nature of Marxist philosophy in the Comintern, which itself inherited many elements from the earlier discussions, including the emphasis upon materialism.<sup>13</sup> Gramsci used Bukharin's *Theory of Historical Materialism: a Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* as a textbook for the Party school he helped to coordinate in 1925, seemingly endorsing it as an exemplary account of the central themes of Marxist philosophy and science in a broad sense.<sup>14</sup> The great Marxist philosophical heresies of the 1920s – namely, Lukács's and Korsch's different versions of Hegelian Marxism, both condemned from the heights of the Comintern – do not appear to have had a significant impact upon Gramsci's thought in this period.

### **Toward a philosophy of praxis**

This situation fundamentally changes during the long period of gestation and composition of the *Prison Notebooks*, as the notion of philosophy is progressively re-evaluated and the philosophical nature of Marxism is fundamentally rethought. It is crucial to note that this development, like all elements of Gramsci's prison writings, was not a purely 'philosophical' development. Rather, Gramsci undertakes what is effectively a thoroughgoing critique of his

own former philosophical positions for fundamentally *political* reasons as he seeks to determine the reasons for the defeat of the Italian Communist Party by the Fascist regime, and to find resources for the re-emergence of a militant revolutionary opposition. The notion of a ‘philosophy of praxis’ is not present from the outset of the *Prison Notebooks* as a clearly defined position. Rather, it emerges slowly, in close relation to Gramsci’s many other historical, political and cultural interests, as a problem for future research and development. A decisive motivation for this line of research was the emphasis that Gramsci, from the outset of the *Prison Notebooks*, placed upon reconsidering the fertility of the thought of Antonio Labriola, ‘the only one,’ according to Gramsci, ‘who has sought to give historical materialism a scientific foundation.’ Labriola had insisted upon the philosophical autonomy of Marxism, arguing that ‘the philosophy of Marxism is contained in Marxism itself,’ and not in pre-Marxist philosophical systems, of which Marxism would be merely one possible application.<sup>15</sup> Crucially, Labriola had defined the ‘philosophy of praxis’ as ‘the heart and soul of historical materialism. *This philosophy is immanent to the things on which it philosophises.* From life to thought, and not from thought to life; this is the realistic process.’<sup>16</sup> While Gramsci does not use the term ‘philosophy of praxis’ itself at this stage, his engagement with Labriola in the early *Notebooks* undoubtedly played a decisive role in its eventual emergence as the central term organizing all of Gramsci’s philosophical reflections.<sup>17</sup>

The first appearance of the term ‘philosophy of praxis’ in a substantive sense occurs in relation to thinkers who, at the time, had traditionally been thought to lie outside the canon of Marxist authors or its legitimate immediate predecessors.<sup>18</sup> In a note entitled ‘Machiavelli,’ written in November–December 1930, Gramsci suggests that Machiavelli’s thought ‘could be called a “philosophy of praxis” or “neo-humanism,” in as much as it does not recognize transcendent or immanent (in the metaphysical sense) elements, but bases itself entirely on the concrete action of man, who, impelled by historical necessity, works and transforms reality.’<sup>19</sup> The placement of the philosophy of praxis in quotation marks, often used by Gramsci when first appropriating a concept from another thinker or to mark his own new coinage, indicates that we confront in this passage a tentative attempt to deploy a new concept whose meaning has not yet been precisely determined.<sup>20</sup> Both earlier and later *Notebooks* contain similar references to an elective genealogy for the philosophy of praxis, particularly in the immanentist thought of Giordano Bruno.<sup>21</sup>

The philosophy of praxis is first used in relation to Marxism in a note written between February and November 1931 entitled ‘Materialism and Historical Materialism’ (an explicit

linkage that confounds interpretations that have suggested that the philosophy of ‘praxis’ was merely a code word deployed to trick a Fascist censor). After criticizing vulgar forms of materialism, and reflecting on Hegel’s legacy, Gramsci then argues that ‘In this way we arrive also at the equality of, or equation between, “philosophy and politics,” thought and action, that is, at a philosophy of praxis. Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies . . . and the only “philosophy” is history in action, that is, life itself.’<sup>22</sup> Here the coordinates are established for a radical redefinition of philosophy as intrinsically political, or as a highly mediated form of political practice and reflection, a specific mode of organization of the conceptual and linguistic resources essential to any form of human sociality. It is therefore highly significant that Gramsci immediately draws attention to the integral relation between this way of conceiving philosophy and his preeminent political concept of hegemony. In particular, Gramsci argues that the ‘equation’ of politics and philosophy, or the recognition of the political constitution of philosophy and the philosophical constitution of politics, provides a lens with which to read both the significance of the social democratic movement in the 19th century, and the events leading up to and following the Russian Revolution:

It is in this sense that one can interpret the thesis of the German proletariat as the heir of classical German philosophy, and one can affirm that the theorisation and realisation of hegemony carried out by Ilich was also a great ‘metaphysical’ event.<sup>23</sup>

### **‘Revolutionary praxis’**

This first attempt to appropriate the notion of a philosophy of praxis to describe selected elements of the Marxist tradition occurs, as we have seen, in *Notebook 7*. In this same *Notebook*, in late 1930 or early 1931, Gramsci had produced a new Italian translation of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*.<sup>24</sup> Fragmentary notes unpublished by their author (they originally appeared in a version edited by Engels as an appendix to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*),<sup>25</sup> Marx’s *Theses* literally constitutes a touchstone to whose themes Gramsci incessantly returns throughout the *Prison Notebooks*.<sup>26</sup> The importance for Gramsci of the experience of translating Marx’s theses from German, carefully meditating upon different possible interpretations of their key concepts and hesitatingly rendering them in Italian, cannot be overestimated. The manuscript of Gramsci’s translation of the *Theses* in fact displays an uncharacteristically significant number of

corrections, cancellations and replacements, in comparison to the precise and sure handwriting of most of Gramsci's notes – undoubtedly in part due to the inherent difficulty of translation as an intellectual exercise, but in this case also due to the difficulty of Marx's novel philosophical vocabulary.<sup>27</sup> All of the philosophical discussions in the *Prison Notebooks* need to be read with these theses in mind; it would not be an exaggeration to regard Gramsci's entire carceral project, in all of its dimensions (that is, not only philosophical, but also political and cultural), as an extended meditation upon the significance and consequences of this, one of the shortest texts in the Western philosophical tradition.<sup>28</sup>

Following Engels, Gramsci regarded the *Theses on Feuerbach* as a document in which the 'germ' of a new world outlook was deposited.<sup>29</sup> What Gramsci found in his reading of Marx's brief jottings was a radical alternative to the dominant conception of a knowing subject standing over and against a known object, a philosophical 'grammar' that has strongly marked the modern philosophical tradition, in both its idealist and materialist versions. According to Gramsci, an alternative philosophical grammar could possibly be developed by thinking through the full consequences and implications of the dynamic and relational notion of 'praxis' that Marx announced already in his first thesis, and which the remaining ten theses extend through the fields of epistemology (2nd thesis), pedagogy (3rd), the critique of religion and theology (4th), practical philosophy (5th and 8th), philosophical anthropology (6th), social theory (7th), the history of philosophy (9th and 10th) and political action (11th). What was at stake in this movement for Gramsci was not simply the outlines of a new philosophy (that is, a series of propositions about the nature of the world and human thought, different from and in formal opposition to those of previous philosophies), but also a radical rethinking of the notion of philosophy itself. Philosophy in this sense is no longer conceived as a discourse of the general or universal, but as itself a specific and particular practice alongside other practices, not above politics, but integrally and immanently already a form of political struggle. The originality of the philosophy of praxis conceived in this sense, he argues, 'lies not only in its sublation of previous philosophies but also and above all in that it opens up a completely new road, renewing from head to toe the whole way of conceiving philosophy itself.'<sup>30</sup>

## **The philosophy of praxis as refoundation**

From 1931 in *Notebook 7* onward, therefore, the notion of a philosophy of praxis slowly but surely becomes the central organizing feature of both Gramsci's strictly philosophical reflections and his broader political, historical and cultural analysis, articulating these disparate fields of inquiry into an organic and coherent research project.<sup>31</sup> The term is henceforth used in two related, but yet distinct, senses.

On the one hand, the philosophy of praxis functions as a general label that subsumes the previous Marxist tradition, 'rewriting' or translating it into the historico-philosophical register that Gramsci develops by means of his reflections on the development of the tradition of 'historicism' throughout the long 19th century, from Hegel's emphasis upon historical development to Marx and Engel's formulation of the materialist conception of history and beyond. In this sense, Gramsci systematically substitutes the term 'philosophy of praxis' for 'Marxism' or 'historical materialism' as he transcribes and/or revises notes from earlier *Notebooks* into the later 'Special *Notebooks*' begun in 1932 and after. This 'translation,' however, does not simply repropose a 'canonical' (for much of Second and Third International Marxism) history of Marxism as emerging from the increasingly revolutionary commitments and theorizations of a one-time Rhineland liberal in exile, or even from the broader reverberations of German classical philosophy in its relation to the legacy of the French Revolution. It also aims to provide a more expansive historical perspective on the significance of the Marxist tradition as both thought-form and socio-political movement, situating it as an outgrowth of the entire historical sweep of political and philosophical modernity. This line of research gives rise to a wide range of novel formulations, including Gramsci's reflections on the Marxist tradition as (or as needing to become) a distinctive combination of the dynamics of the Renaissance (sophisticated intellectual movement without contact with the masses) and Reformation (a movement of popular moral and social reform, but initially lacking a correspondingly sophisticated intellectual instance), and his decisive emphasis upon the development of modern science as embodying the productive forms of knowledge that the philosophy of praxis will aim to valorize theoretically and practically.<sup>32</sup> 'Intellectually,' Gramsci argues, 'Marx initiates a whole historical epoch which will probably last centuries.'<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the philosophy of praxis also represents a distinctive philosophical current within the Marxist tradition, or its 'rational kernel,' which Gramsci's work aims to recover and to valorize. Unlike positions that sought to base a Marxist philosophy upon pre-existing philosophical systems, Gramsci insists upon the necessary *autonomy* of the



philosophy of praxis, reducible neither to materialism or idealism. Following Labriola, he argues that Marxism as a philosophy of praxis needs to be conceived as ‘sufficient unto itself,’ that it ‘contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world, a total philosophy and theory of natural science, and not only that but everything that is needed to give life to an integral practical organisation of society, that is, to become a total integral civilisation.’ A theory is genuinely ‘revolutionary,’ Gramsci declares, only to the extent that it constitutes a ‘peak inaccessible to the enemy camp.’<sup>34</sup> This autonomy of the philosophy of praxis is based upon its novel methodological presupposition of the practical constitution of all social forms, including thought-forms. Marx’s concept of praxis represents for Gramsci a genuinely new approach to the ‘perennial questions of philosophy,’ allowing them to be historicized and ‘deciphered’ as forms of highly mediated socio-political organization. Furthermore, such a concept of praxis necessitates the elaboration of new ‘technical instruments of thought’, which conceive knowledge not in terms of speculation (in the ultimately passive and static form of a subject’s contemplation of an object, utilizing metaphysical – that is, transhistorical – categories), but in the dialectical terms of historically situated, active relationality. In this sense the philosophy of praxis represents not so much a ‘new’ philosophy (that is, a variation on a given form of philosophy, though proposing different content), but rather a refoundation of philosophy in a new form, one capable of comprehending the practical nature not only of other socio-political phenomena, but also of itself as a distinctive type of organizational practice, firmly situated within the struggles of history, and not in a metaphysical beyond.

### **Against Croce and Bukharin**

These different lines of research are developed throughout *Notebooks 7* and *8*, and, above all, *Notebooks 10* and *11*, written contemporaneously between the spring of 1932 and early 1933. The latter two *Notebooks* are the most explicitly ‘philosophical’ among Gramsci’s so-called ‘Special *Notebooks*,’ in which he both transcribes notes from previous *Notebooks* (sometimes with extensive revisions) and writes new notes on related themes, extending, modifying or even radically transforming his previous perspectives. *Notebook 10* is largely dedicated to clarifying a previously elaborated critique of the philosophy of Benedetto Croce, while large sections of *Notebook 11* are taken up by an extension of Gramsci’s critique of Bukharin’s

Theory of *Historical Materialism: a Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* (referred to in the *Prison Notebooks* as the ‘popular essay’). Both engagements serve Gramsci to bring into starker relief, by way of the critique of rival philosophical proposals, the distinctive features of the philosophy of praxis.

On the one hand, a central component of Gramsci’s wide-ranging critique of Croce in *Notebook 10* takes aim at the great neo-idealist philosopher’s claim to have ‘overcome’ the limitations of Marxism, in particular its purported metaphysical dualism in which the *Basis* (base) would constitute a primary reality and the *Überbau* (superstructure) a mere ephemeral reflection or derivative of it. Gramsci responds that Croce is only able to regard the central metaphors of Marx’s 1859 *Preface* (which Gramsci had also translated in *Notebook 7*) as metaphysical concepts because Croce’s own thought itself, despite its claims to constitute a ‘post-metaphysical’ system, remained trapped in all too traditional a conception of the realm of conceptuality as distinct from the world of practice. Croce had attempted to maintain a strict distinction between philosophy, conceived as a pure realm of conceptuality unmodified by the historical events it alone could truly comprehend, and ideology, the confused ‘pseudo-concepts’ deployed in practical life in the pursuit of more or less base interests.

The philosophy of praxis, on the other hand, posits, according to Gramsci, an identity-distinction of philosophy and ideology, conceived not in terms of an opposition of truth versus non-truth (or opinion, in the classical Platonic sense), but in terms of different levels of practical organization within which the ‘historically true’ is practically constructed and ratified. Ideology therefore does not negate philosophy, but rather defines its practical and therefore non-speculative dimension.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, Gramsci argues that:

Ideologies, rather, will be the ‘true’ philosophy since they will turn out to be those philosophical ‘popularisations’ that lead the masses to concrete action, to the transformation of reality. In other words, they are the mass aspect of every philosophical conception, which in the ‘philosopher’ assumes the characteristics of an abstract universality, divorced from time and space, the characteristics peculiar to a literary and anti-historical origin.<sup>36</sup>

Gramsci’s critique of Bukharin, on the other hand, concentrates above all on what he perceives, not always fairly, to be Bukharin’s championing of an ‘orthodox’ position, according to which the philosophy of Marxism is both a form of materialism, positing matter as an ultimate and determining reality, and a form of objective realism, presupposing an irreducible objectivity of the external world that both precedes and exceeds any subjective

determination. Gramsci opposes Bukharin (and, in this sense, also the dominant currents in Second and Third International Marxism) on both counts, though not by arguing for their specular opposite, that is, subjective idealism. Rather, he argues that vulgar materialism and objective realism are both thought-forms beset by fundamental contradictions which ultimately transform them into variants of precisely the positions they ostensibly oppose: behind vulgar materialism lie ultimately idealist and theological presuppositions, just as appeals to objectivity often mask a radical subjectivism. Crucially, the reasons that motivate Gramsci's critique are pre-eminently political. He argues that both vulgar materialism and objectivism are ultimately expressions of a historical experience of subalternity in which the world appears to oppressed social groups as already given, which they then passively suffer, rather than constituted activity by their own social relations. Vulgar materialism is argued by Gramsci to posit an ahistorical and ultimately metaphysical conception of matter, rather than conceiving it in terms of a historical and practical relation between the human and the natural.<sup>37</sup> The notion of the objective reality of the external world is criticized as a similarly metaphysical notion, ultimately founded on theological presupposition of an omniscient 'standpoint of the cosmos in itself' that effaces the reality of knowledge as inherently a social relation.<sup>38</sup>

The decisive discovery made during Gramsci's critique of Bukharin, however, concerns not so much questions of ontology (materialism) or epistemology (realism). Rather, it is the proposition that philosophical practice must find its foundation in the contradictions of existing social relations, critically examining inherited beliefs and their function in the organization of forms of social domination and hierarchy. Central to this line of critique is Gramsci's reworking of the notions, derived from neo-idealism, of *senso comune* (common sense) and *buon senso* (good sense). The former is constituted by a wide range of pre- or non-critical beliefs and ideas operative in everyday life; the latter represents the critical overcoming of such prejudices, as its disparate impulses, subject to external and varied determinations, are comprehended in their historicity and thus gradually ordered into a form that permits them to be regulated. The philosophy of praxis represents simultaneously the valorization and sublation of *senso comune*, which is recognized as both the necessary starting point of critical philosophical activity (as the incoherent ensemble of conceptions of the world really operative among the subaltern social groups, expressing and confirming the experience of subalternity) and, for precisely that reason, as one of the obstacles that must be

overcome if the subaltern social groups are ever to build their own hegemonic project – that is, to exit from the condition of subalternity.

### **Philosophy *sive* ideology**

The combination of these two critiques leads Gramsci to two decisive discoveries whose implications are explored throughout the remainder of the *Prison Notebooks*, until failing health leads Gramsci to ‘incomplete’ his researches in 1935. First, the critiques of both Croce and Bukharin lead Gramsci to propose a novel understanding of the relationship between the ‘philosophical’ and the ‘non-philosophical.’ More precisely, for Gramsci, the philosophy of praxis becomes precisely that relationship itself, as philosophy finds its *raison d’être* no longer within itself, as a closed system of thought determined by its own immutable logical or metaphysical laws, but in its capacity to motivate, shape and relate to real movements of historical transformation. If philosophy, as neo-idealism suggested, following Hegel, is ultimately best comprehended not in a narrow technical sense (metaphysics, logic and so forth) but as a broader ‘conception of the world,’ the philosophy of praxis radicalizes this perspective, insisting that it is philosophy’s task to help to produce a more ‘coherent’ conception of the world.<sup>39</sup> No longer distinct from ideology but redefined as a moment internal to it, philosophy is here configured as a process of immanent critique that aims to provide resources for socio-political and even civilizational transformation.

### **Absolute historicism, absolute immanence, absolute humanism**

Second, this dual critique leads Gramsci to propose a succinct definition of the philosophy of praxis, conceived as a proposal for the future development of the Marxist tradition, in a note written in the summer of 1932. ‘The philosophy of praxis,’ he argues, ‘is the absolute “historicism,” the absolute secularization and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history. It is along this line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world.’<sup>40</sup> These three attributes both summarize key areas of Gramsci’s previous carceral researches and outline a program for the future development of the philosophy of praxis in the *Prison Notebooks* and beyond.

The notion of ‘absolute historicism’ (appropriated by Gramsci from Croce and radically transformed) highlights the way in which the philosophy of praxis inherits and

extends the previous historicist tradition. It historicizes not only other philosophical systems, ‘translating’ their speculative claims into the forms of political and ideological organization, but also provides an account of the historical emergence of the Marxist tradition itself, integrally linked to the rise of modern, mass democratic political action. Even more crucially, an ‘absolutely historicist’ philosophical practice historicizes even the realm of conceptuality, regarding thought not as located in an unalterable metaphysical structure, but as an always active attempt, in more or less highly mediated forms, to modify social activity in general.

The notion of absolute immanence, for its part, refers in the first instance to Gramsci’s exploration of modern philosophies of immanence, following Marx’s emphasis, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, on the *Diesseitigkeit*, the this-sidedness, of thought.<sup>41</sup> More generally, Gramsci’s notion of the new conception of immanence implicit in Marx’s thought poses the challenge of a complete secularization of thought, no longer constrained by theological residues (in either vulgar materialist, neo-idealist or positivist forms), but located integrally within history, as the progressive modifications of forms of human sociality. This leads Gramsci to argue for a new relationship between theory and practice, which are no longer conceived as external to each other, in a relationship of application or verification, but as two sides of the same coin. Theory is here understood as a determinate activity alongside other activities with its own specific tasks to fulfill, a theoretical ‘moment’ that can be immanent to the social practices it seeks to comprehend because those practices are already immanent to it.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, the notion of an absolute humanism highlights the radical way in which Marx attempted to rethink the foundational questions of philosophical anthropology, no longer conceiving the human according to an essentialist paradigm, but as an ensemble of social relations, historically variable and thus mutable.<sup>43</sup> Gramsci also insists that the philosophy of praxis is an ‘absolute’ form of humanism because it aims to resolve the central contradiction of the previous humanist tradition (particularly but not only that of the Italian Renaissance), namely, its inability to forge an integral connection between a sophisticated intellectual culture and broader social groups. As a philosophy that aims to help *senso comune* to develop a critique of its own limitations, liberating it from its incoherencies and transforming it into a *buon senso*, the philosophy of praxis ‘completes’ the promise of the humanist tradition while overcoming its class-based limitations. It is thus properly situated on the historical continuum of the movement of radical enlightenment that marked the emergence of philosophical and

political modernity, and which conceives its tasks as contributing to humanity's 'emergence from . . . self-incurred immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*],' in Kant's famous phrase.<sup>44</sup>

Gramsci's proposal to develop the 'rational kernel' of the Marxist tradition as a philosophy of praxis, however, ultimately finds its meaning as an integral element of his notion of a hegemonic project of the subaltern classes (conceived, in the broadest sense, as all those oppressed and exploited in the current organization of society).<sup>45</sup> It is precisely this project that Gramsci develops from 1933 onward, in a range of *Notebooks* that, at first sight, although the term 'philosophy of praxis' appears throughout them, may seem in their central concerns distant from explicitly philosophical questions: among them, Machiavelli (*Notebooks 13 and 18*), culture (*Notebooks, 16, 21 and 26*), literary criticism (*Notebook 23*), journalism (*Notebook 24*) and grammar (*Notebook 29*). These *Notebooks*, however, were Gramsci's attempt to extend and 'operationalize' the philosophy of praxis's equation of philosophy-politics-history across all the areas of political, social and cultural life with which the subaltern classes would need to come to terms if they were to build their own hegemonic alternative to the existing order. It is in this sense, as an empowerment of the oppressed and exploited, that Marxism conceived as a philosophy of praxis finds its integral historical meaning. Gramsci thus argues:

The philosophy of praxis does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and – even more – their own.<sup>46</sup>

## **Conclusion: the future of the philosophy of praxis**

Gramsci's proposal to inherit, to continue by means of transformation, the strengths and weaknesses of the prior Marxist tradition as a philosophy of praxis represents one of the great 'paths untaken' of both twentieth-century Marxism and philosophy. In the meantime, both the political and philosophical landscapes have changed radically. Many critics have argued over the last 30 years, for a variety of reasons, that Marxism as a tradition has lost its historic propulsive force, particularly following the downfall of the authoritarian regimes that

attempted to monopolize claims regarding its meaning for a long period in the 20th century. Contemporary ‘mainstream’ philosophy, particularly in the Anglophone world, seems to continue to be marked, particularly at an institutional level, by increasingly sterile intra-academic oppositions of self-styled ‘continental’ and ‘analytic’ approaches. Certainly the contemporary philosophical conjuncture displays very different features from those of Gramsci’s day, when the legacy of nineteenth-century debates between idealism and materialism still remained closely tied to questions of broader social and political relevance. Among those figures who have most strongly urged the need for a renewed form of politically engaged philosophical practice in recent years, the specificity of Gramsci’s philosophical proposals (as opposed to the general tenor of his politics) rarely seems a significant influence. For instance, it is noticeable that Gramsci’s philosophical work does not seem to have played an influential role for either Badiou or Rancière, though the former’s emphasis upon asserting the centrality of truth to philosophy might productively engage with Gramsci’s reflections on this theme, just as the latter’s concern with democratic pedagogy might seem the ideal interlocutor for Gramsci’s reflections on *senso comune* and educational processes. Žižek refers to Gramsci on a number of key occasions throughout his work, though usually in terms of political analysis and without any sustained reading of Gramsci’s philosophical thought, just as Negri’s brief comments on Gramsci in recent years engage with him more as a theorist of political modernity rather than as a philosopher.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, although Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* briefly valorized the notion of absolute historicism, the notion of the philosophy of praxis as such did not constitute a primary focus of their attention in that or subsequent works.<sup>48</sup> The notion of revitalizing the Marxist tradition as a philosophy of praxis might therefore appear to be one of those unrealized possibilities of the past which the historian of ideas might study with either a dispassionate or a regretful glance, but which nevertheless continues to become increasingly untimely with each passing year.

The first decades of the 21st century, however, alongside movements of protest and resistance against neoliberalism’s ‘new world order,’ have also witnessed an increasing interest in reassessing the strengths and weaknesses of previous moments of social and political contestation. For this perspective, ‘Marxism’ now appears less like the unified monolith of any particular orthodoxy and more like a field of sometimes contradictory alternatives, a kaleidoscope onto different interpretations and attempted actualizations not only of Marx’s thought, but also of the long arch of democratic struggles that characterize

political modernity as a constitutively ‘unfinishable’ project. As rich dimensions of the development and significance of the philosophy of praxis are brought to light by ongoing philological research on the *Prison Notebooks*, the capacity of Gramsci’s non-foundationalist and anti-essentialist approach to philosophy to interact productively and critically with more recent philosophical initiatives, such as those of certain elements of the legacy of post-structuralism and the contemporary ‘post-poststructuralist’ philosophical conjuncture, appears increasingly more evident. Above all, in a period in which it seems that ‘the old is dying’ and a new, different world, in however contradictory a fashion and however haltingly a form, is struggling to be born,<sup>49</sup> Gramsci’s proposal of a philosophy of praxis integrally linked to the struggles of the subalterns for a new and ‘integral civilization’ may be one of the most viable forms of a Marxism for and of our times.<sup>50</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of the reception of the *Prison Notebooks*, see Guido Liguori, *Gramsci conteso. Storia di un dibattito 1922–2012* (Rome: Editori Riuniti University Press, 1996). The ‘codeword thesis’ is based upon a confusion between the surveillance to which Gramsci’s correspondence was routinely subjected, and the very different forms of control exercised over his writing in the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci does seem to express concern at certain points about an increasing interest by the prison authorities in his intellectual activity, but a philological examination of the respective chronologies of these events and the emergence of many of his new concepts fails to demonstrate any causal relation (and is sometimes directly disproved). On this topic, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, ‘Gramsci’s Philosophy of Praxis: Camouflage or Refoundation of Marxist Thought?’ *Socialism and Democracy* 14 (Spring–Summer 2000), 1–19.

<sup>2</sup> This was the reading provided by Felice Platone in his editorial apparatus and commentary on the first post-war ‘thematic’ publication of the *Prison Notebooks*. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Felice Platone (Turin: Einaudi, 1948–51).

<sup>3</sup> For a representative example of the argument that Gramsci was unduly influenced by Croce, see Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970 [1965/1968]), 120–38. For the claim that Gramsci owed much to Gentile, see, Étienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin and Sandra Laugier, ‘Praxis,’ in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 827.

<sup>4</sup> This argument was most forcefully presented by Christian Riechers, *Antonio Gramsci – Marxismus in Italien* (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970), 132.



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- <sup>5</sup> For example, see Gerhard Roth, *Gramscis Philosophie der Praxis: Eine neue Deutung des Marxismus* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1972); Nicola Badaloni, *Il Marxismo di Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975); Thomas Nemeth, *Gramsci's Philosophy: A Critical Study* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980); Nicola Badaloni, 'Antonio Gramsci. La filosofia della prassi come previsione,' in *Storia del marxismo Vol. III – Il marxismo nell'eta' della terza*, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm, Georges Haupt, Franz Marek, Ernesto Ragionieri, Vittorio Strada, Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1981); Nicola Badaloni, *Il problema dell'immanenza nella filosofia politica di Antonio Gramsci* (Venice: Arsenale Editrice, 1988).
- <sup>6</sup> Gianni Francioni, *L'officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei 'Quaderni del carcere'* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1984). Francioni has since developed this approach in his ongoing work as editor of the new Italian edition of the *Prison Notebooks* being prepared for the *Edizione nazionale* of Gramsci's entire corpus. Additionally, he has published an edition in 18 volumes of photocopies of the original *Prison Notebooks*, including an extensive editorial apparatus. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere. Edizione anastatica dei manoscritti*, ed. Gianni Francioni (Cagliari: L'Unione sarda/Treccani, 2009). A survey of Francioni's work on Gramsci is presented in the collective volume *Gramsci tra filologica e storiografia*, ed. Giuseppe Cospito (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2010).
- <sup>7</sup> This approach served as inspiration for the fundamental reference work on Gramsci containing over 1,000 pages of lexical analysis of the central terms of the *Prison Notebooks* and *Prison Letters*. See Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza, eds., *Dizionario gramsciano 1926–1937* (Rome: Carocci, 2009).
- <sup>8</sup> Among the most significant studies with regard to the philosophy of praxis have been Giorgio Baratta, *Le rose e i quaderni. Il pensiero dialogico di Antonio Gramsci* (Rome: Carocci, 2003); Guido Liguori, *Sentieri gramsciani* (Rome: Carocci, 2006); Fabio Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia. Saggio sui 'Quaderni del carcere'* (Roma: Carocci, 2003); Fabio Frosini, *La religione dell'uomo moderno. Politica e verità nei 'Quaderni del carcere' di Antonio Gramsci* (Rome: Carocci, 2010); Fabio Frosini and Guido Liguori, eds., *Le parole di Gramsci: per un lessico dei 'Quaderni del carcere'* (Rome: Carocci, 2004); Giuseppe Cospito, *Il ritmo del pensiero. Per una lettura diacronica dei 'Quaderni del carcere' di Gramsci* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2011). An important collection of contextualist and historical work is Francesco Giasi, ed., *Gramsci nel suo tempo* (Carocci: Rome, 2008); while Giuseppe Vacca, *Vita e pensieri di Antonio Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), synthesizes and extends the most up-to-date research on Gramsci's thought while in prison.
- <sup>9</sup> See Wolfgang Fritz Haug, 'Introduction,' in *Die Gefängnishefte Vol. 6*, ed. Wolfgang Fritz Haug and Klaus Bochman (Hamburg-Berlin: Argument, 1999).
- <sup>10</sup> On Gramsci's early approach to philosophy, and particularly his estimation of classical German idealism and its 'continuation' by Italian neo-idealism, see Fabio Frosini, 'Filosofia,' in *Dizionario gramsciano 1926–1937*, 305. Among Gramsci's pre-prison writings, see in particular 'Socialism

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and Culture’ and ‘Socialism and Actualist Philosophy,’ in Antonio Gramsci, *Pre-Prison Writings*, ed. Richard Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8–12, 50.

<sup>11</sup> On the importance of Hegel in post-Risorgimento political thought in Italy, see Domenico Losurdo, *Dai fratelli Spaventa a Gramsci. Per una storia politico-sociale della fortuna di Hegel in Italia* (Naples: La città del sole, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, Vol. II*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), *Q10i*, §11, 1233 (May 1932) – Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 355. Dates of individual notes are given in parentheses according to the chronology established in Gianni Francioni, *L’officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei ‘Quaderni del carcere’* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1984). Additionally, where available, references have been provided (after the dash) to an existing English anthology.

<sup>13</sup> On the philosophical debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, see Yehoshua Yakhot, *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (the 1920s and 1930s)*, trans. Frederick Choate (Sheffield: Mehring Books, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Nikolay Ivanovich Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969 [1921]). For an analysis of the selected passage used by Gramsci in the party school in 1925, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980 [1975]), 201–2.

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, Vol. I*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), *Q3*, §31, 309 (June–July 1930).

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Labriola, *La concezione materialistica della storia*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 1965), 216.

<sup>17</sup> Reference to the importance of Labriola constitutes one of the touchstones of Gramsci’s reflections concerning the philosophical nature of Marxism throughout the *Prison Notebooks* project. See, for instance, Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. I, Q4*, §3, 421–5 (May 1930); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q8*, §168, 1041 (November 1931); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q8*, §200, 1060–1 (February–March 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q11*, §16, 1406–11 (July–August 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q11*, §70, 1507–9 (end of 1932–beginning of 1933) – Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 386–8); Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, Vol. III, Q16*, §9, 1854–64 (1934) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 388–99.

<sup>18</sup> The term appears in a previous note as the title of the Crocian Antonio Lovecchio’s *Philosophy of Praxis and Philosophy of Spirit*, a review of which is here noted by Gramsci. See, Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. I, Q4*, §28, 445 (August–September 1930).

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- <sup>19</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. I, Q5, §127, 657 (November–December 1930) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 248–9. For further reflections on the position of politics in a ‘coherent’ conception of the world, see Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §61, 977–8 (February 1932).
- <sup>20</sup> Dario Ragazzini calls this Gramsci’s ‘philology of quotation marks,’ present in many of the initial uses of terms appropriated by Gramsci from other thinkers. See Dario Ragazzini, *Leonardo nella società di massa. Teoria della personalità in Gramsci* (Bergamo: Moretti Honegger, 2002), 17.
- <sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. I, Q4, §17, 438 (May–August 1930) and Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §28, 1438–9 (July–August 1932).
- <sup>22</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q7, §35, 883–6 (February–November 1931) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 356–7.
- <sup>23</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q7, §35, 886 – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 357. ‘Illich’ is one of the monikers that Gramsci often adopts to refer to Lenin in the *Prison Notebooks*. The link of the philosophy of praxis to Lenin becomes stronger with the years, as does the link of both to the theory of hegemony. ‘The greatest modern theoretician of the philosophy of praxis, on the terrain of political struggle and organisation and with a political terminology, has re-assessed – in opposition to the various ‘economistic’ tendencies – the front of cultural struggle and constructed the doctrine of hegemony as a complement to the theory of the State-as-force.’ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q10i, §12, 1235 (April–May 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 56.
- <sup>24</sup> Gentile had translated the *Theses* into Italian in 1899, using a strongly idealist vocabulary, and their themes had since marked Italian discussions of Marxist philosophy to a much greater extent than in other national Marxist cultures of the time.
- <sup>25</sup> Engels’s version is reproduced in Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 5, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2005), 3. As many critics have noted, it exhibits some significant editorial interventions on Marx’s original text, in some cases radically changing the meaning.
- <sup>26</sup> For explicit references, see, for instance, Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. I, Q4, §3, 421–5 (May 1930); Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §198, 1060 (February 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q10ii, §31, 1269–76 (June–August 1932). The central themes of the *Theses*, however, are diffused throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, constituting a permanent implicit presence.
- <sup>27</sup> See Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere. Edizione anastatica dei manoscritti*, Vol. 10, 21–3.
- <sup>28</sup> Two of the most stimulating commentaries on Marx’s *Theses* are Georges Labica, *Karl Marx, Les Thèses sur Feuerbach* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987) and Pierre Macherey, *Marx 1845* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2008).

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- <sup>29</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 26 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2005), 520.
- <sup>30</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. I, Q4, §11, 433 (May–August 1930); transcribed in, and cited here according to, the ‘C-Text.’ See, Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §27, 1436 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 464.
- <sup>31</sup> The term appears with increasing frequency throughout *Notebook 8* in early 1932. See particularly Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §61, 977–8 (February 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §198, 1060 (February 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §220, 1080–1 (March 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §232, 1087 (April 1932); and Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q8, §235, 1088 (April 1932).
- <sup>32</sup> On Gramsci’s distinctive interpretation of the Renaissance and Reformation, see Fabio Frosini, ‘Riforma e Rinascimento,’ in *Le parole di Gramsci: per un lessico dei ‘Quaderni del carcere,’* ed. Fabio Frosini and Guido Liguori (Rome: Carocci, 2004), 170–88. For Gramsci’s appreciation of the experimental dimensions of modern scientific practice, see, Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §17, 1411–16 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 445–6.
- <sup>33</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q7, §33, 882 (February–November 1931).
- <sup>34</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §27, 1434–8 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 462.
- <sup>35</sup> In another note, Gramsci argues that ‘philosophy is the conception of the world that represents the intellectual and moral life (catharsis of a determinate practical life) of an entire social group conceived in movement and thus seen not only in its current and immediate interests, but also in its future and mediated interests; ideology is any particular conception of groups inside the class that propose to help in the resolution of immediate and circumscribed problems.’ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q10i, §10, 1231 (April–May 1932) – Gramsci, *Further Selections*, 353.
- <sup>36</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q10ii, §2, 1242 (early April 1932) – Gramsci, *Further Selections*, 383.
- <sup>37</sup> For this reason, Gramsci argues that historical materialism is best grasped as a dialectical couplet where the adjective is of more significance than the substantive, rather than secondary: ‘one should put the accent on the first term – “historical” – and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin.’ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §27, 1437 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 465.
- <sup>38</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §17, 1415–16 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 441.
- <sup>39</sup> On the importance of Gramsci’s historical and political concept of coherence in the *Prison Notebooks*, see, Peter D. Thomas, ‘Kohärenz,’ in *Das historisch-kritische Wörterbuch des Marxismus 7/II* (Berlin: InkriT/Das Argument, 2011).

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- <sup>40</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q11*, §27, 1437 (Summer 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 465. For an extended commentary on this formulation, see Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, particularly chapters 7–9.
- <sup>41</sup> The notion that Marx’s thought contains a new concept of immanence, related to but distinct from previous usages in the Western philosophical tradition, is a central theme of Gramsci’s philosophical research in the *Prison Notebooks*. See, among many other notes, particularly Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. I, Q4*, §17, 438 (May–August 1930); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. I, Q5*, §127, 656–62 (November–December 1930); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q8*, §128, 1018 (April 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q8*, §224, 1081–2 (April 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q10i*, §8, 1225–6 (April–May 1932); Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q10ii*, §9, 1246–9 (late May 1932).
- <sup>42</sup> The notion in particular undergoes very significant developments in the latter stages of Gramsci’s prison writings as he seeks to draw the consequences that follow from his research in many different fields and elaborate them in the form of a ‘method of political work.’ See, in particular, Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. III, Q15*, § 22, 1780 (May 1933) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 364–5. Here Gramsci argues, ‘If the problem of producing the identity of theory and praxis is posed, it is posed in this sense: to construct, on the basis of a determinate practice, a theory that, coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the same practice, may accelerate the historical process taking place, rendering practice more homogeneous, coherent, efficient in all of its elements, strengthening it to the maximum; or, given a certain theoretical position, to organize the indispensable practical element for setting it to work. The identity of theory and practice is a critical act, by means of which practice is demonstrated to be rational and necessary or theory to be realistic and rational.’ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 365.
- <sup>43</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. I, Q4*, §45, 471–2 (October–November 1930). Gramsci here draws upon the sixth of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*.
- <sup>44</sup> Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans S. Reiss and trans. Hugh B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.
- <sup>45</sup> Marcus Green has convincingly argued that Gramsci’s notion of ‘subaltern social groups’ represents an enrichment of the political vocabulary of the Marxist tradition. See Marcus Green, ‘Rethinking the subaltern and the question of censorship in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*,’ *Postcolonial Studies* 14 (2011), 387–404.
- <sup>46</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni, Vol. II, Q10ii*, §41xii, 1320 (August–December 1932) – Gramsci, *Further Selections*, 395–6.

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<sup>47</sup> See Toni Negri, ‘Ricominciamo a leggere Gramsci,’ *Il Manifesto*, February 19, 2011, 11; Toni Negri, ‘The Italian Difference,’ in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenza Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: Re-press, 2009), 13–23.

<sup>48</sup> See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 90.

<sup>49</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. I, Q3, §34, 311 (June–July 1930) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 275–6.

<sup>50</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. II, Q11, §27, 1434 (July–August 1932) – Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 464.